

Food For Thought:
Social & Historic Value of the Mid-century Supermarket

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Abstract

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The modern supermarket emerged in the mid-20th century, responding to the evolving needs of the rapidly changing social and urban landscape in post-war America. Now ingrained in our culture and community, the phenomenon is emerging as potential addition to our historic fabric. This thesis looks at the evolution of the supermarket through the lens of community value, cultural significance, and changing technologies—and investigates the reuse potential of a typology often overlooked in preservation.

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1. Introduction

The grocery store is a core component of our modern way of living, one often taken for granted as a routine convenience of day to day life. We give little consideration to the bounty of food laid out on display, let alone how it came to arrive there; it is simply a given. Whether one pictures a corner bodega or a big-box store, it is difficult to imagine a healthy community without this critical piece of infrastructure.

The system of food distribution, however, is the result of complex web of political, economic, and historical events that defined how, and what, we eat. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this system evolved from disparate, provincial enterprises to a national, vertically-integrated industry over a few decades. By the middle of the 20th century, the supermarket, a distinctly new type of food store, emerged as the culmination of this process, and is the archetype from which today's myriad grocery store formats trace their lineage to.

As the supermarket evolved, retailers anticipated the whims and tastes of the consumer, tracking the economic growth and social changes in the nation. Simultaneously, the industry's business and architectural innovations shaped the future trajectories of retailing and America's nascent suburban landscape, respectively. Though far from high style, supermarkets are worthy of further investigation as an important driver of postwar vernacular architecture and a representative of American consumer culture.

To most Americans, the supermarket is an intensely familiar space: a frequent destination where we spend much of our time, and money; a place we grew up visiting as children and now return to with our own families. We visit at least weekly,¹ and spend about seven percent of our budgets,² stocking up on staple ingredients or prepared foods, and increasingly, clothing, appliances, and other household goods. We may have an affinity for one

¹ Food Marketing Institute, "Food Retail Implications for U.S Grocery Shopper Trends," US Grocery Shopper Trends, July 18, 2017, 10, <https://www.fmi.org/docs/default-source/webinars/trends-2017-webinar-7-18-2017.pdf>.

² Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Consumer Expenditures—2017," accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cesan.nro.htm>.

particular store or chain that feels at home, but recognize they are all, at the core, interchangeable.

Everyone needs to eat to sustain themselves. The act of grocery shopping therefore transcends class, cultural, and more recently, gender divides: eating is the most fundamental shared human experience. While supermarkets may vary in their offerings tailored to the cultural tastes and purchasing power of their immediate clientele, they share more similarities than differences. A tomato is a tomato, after all, and still sold from a refrigerated bin in a brightly-lit building with a parking lot out front, be it Walmart or Wegman's. The proliferation of national branding and packaged goods has further democratized food for the masses. Andy Warhol, whose art critiqued the emerging consumerism of the midcentury, noted:

What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.³

While the supermarket seems timeless and universal, it is a relatively recent invention, emerging during the interwar years of the Great Depression. A century or more ago, the grocery shopping experience would be unrecognizable to today's consumer: a shopping list may be split up among half a dozen shops across the neighborhood, purchasing mostly goods from bulk through small, local grocers. In the 1930s, this new way of retailing united fresh and packaged foods, meat and dairy, under one roof, sold on shelves rather than behind counters. The image of the market as a warehouse of cheap foods appealed to shoppers as one of the few affordable pleasures of the era. In the intervening years, the development of the typology has both paralleled and influenced the lifestyle and economics of the American consumer. Meanwhile in Los Angeles, real estate developers and architects embraced the proliferation of the automobile, creating a new formal language of drive-in shopping centers that came to identify the growing metropolis.

³ Warhol, Andy (1975). *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B & Back Again)*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 101.

By the close of the Second World War, these two trajectories collided, and the typology Americans recognize today took shape. Supermarkets became a vertically integrated, corporate affair, with national reach and similarly national distribution networks. Armed with consumer studies data and new technologies, these chains provided a streamlined and controlled “modern” shopping experience for prosperous postwar America. Their efficiency and abundance of product was just as much a signifier of winning the Cold War as the nation’s nuclear arsenal. Yet it was a conscious illusion of choice, imposed by the industry itself. On the home front, supermarkets reshaped the role of kitchens and reinforced the place of the housewife within them. The supermarket became the pantry, and the kitchen the family gathering place.

As the nation’s demographics and food tastes shifted, the supermarket industry stratified in the 1970s and beyond, from spartan discount stores to gourmet specialty markets. They were joined by another new evolutionary typology: the “supercenter,” exemplified by Walmart and Costco. By the close of the 20th century, once well-defined retail sectors converged, blurring the lines between convenience, drug, grocery, and department stores, responding to the omnipresent demand of convenience and thrift. Over the years, supermarkets gradually added non-food departments, beginning with household staples like cleaning and first aid supplies; now, at some supercenters, shoppers can pick up automobile tires or a new wardrobe in the same shopping trip.

Today, online retail offers complete dematerialization and depersonalization of shopping. What was once a highly sensory and social event—arriving at the store, physically handling and choosing produce, checking out with the clerk—is obviated with a mouse click or smartphone tap, goods delivered to one’s doorstep without ever stepping outside. Eliminating overhead and labor costs, as well as encouraging impulse spending, imperatives long sought by the industry, are finally realized.

The trajectory of the supermarket both traces and facilitates the rise of American consumerism. The industry pioneered retail techniques universal today—self-service, shopping carts, product displays—to which modern chain and big-box stores owe their existence. Many



Fig. 1: Cleveland's West Side Market, pictured in 1971. Public markets have a long history, particularly in eastern cities. Privately-developed markets emerged in the early 20th century, designed with an emphasis on hygiene and cleanliness. (Cleveland Public Library)

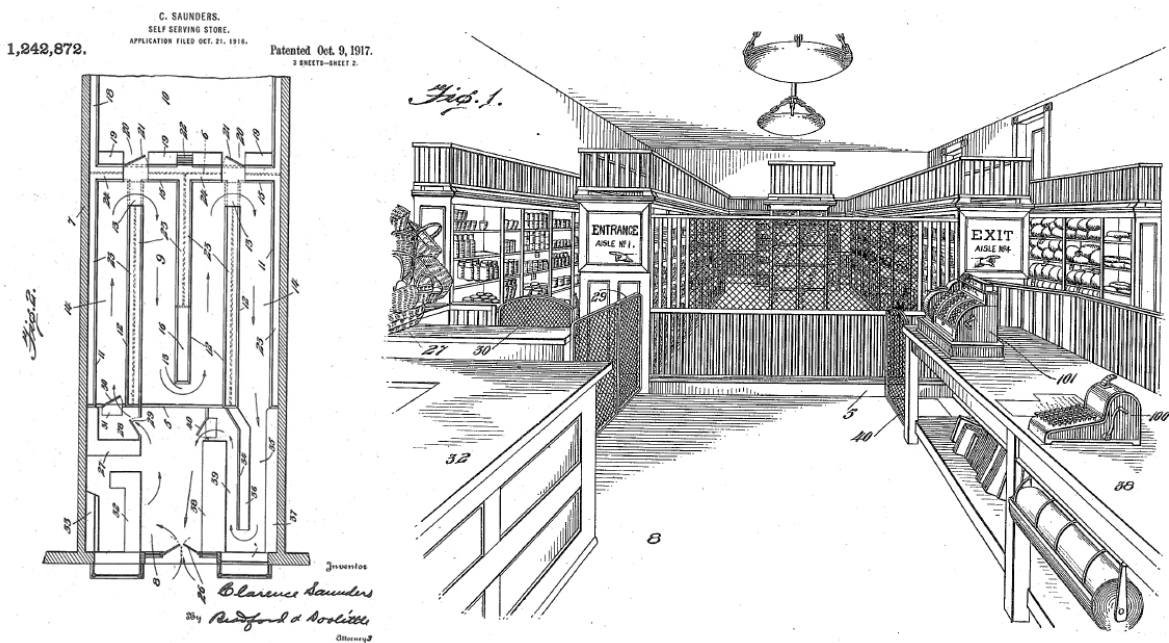


Fig. 2: Clarence Saunders' patented store layout, where customers proceeded through a one-way, serpentine maze of shelves before arriving at a checkstand. Piggly Wiggly was one of the first stores where shoppers were free to pick their own goods rather than interfacing with a clerk. (US Patent Office)

supermarkets of the postwar era continue to serve their communities, adapting through decades of changes in architectural and cultural tastes. Others, obsolesced, serve as repurposed homes for different businesses, cultural venues, or religious organizations. The supermarket, both as a business and architectural typology, is an enduring component of the urban fabric, and worthy of closer examination of its historical role.

Preserving the Vernacular

Mass-produced, corporate architecture may seem at first glance an unlikely candidate for historic preservation. Within the field, increased attention is paid to vernacular architecture, fostering cross-disciplinary study with archaeology and ethnography. However, to date, comparatively little work focuses on the vernacular of the recent past, the bulk of which falls into the former category. While the cultural role of chain architecture markedly differs from predecessors, it is important nonetheless: Paul Groth, in his article “Making New Connections in Vernacular Architecture,” redefines the study of the vernacular as assuming “an interest in the meanings of the everyday lives of ordinary people. It can and does include professionally designed buildings, particularly when they are commonly accepted building types”.⁴ “Vernacular” need not be solely limited to the traditional and pre-industrial. The supermarket is emblematic of this definition. While the origin of the typology differs wildly from the folk roots of earlier subjects, its social significance, and cross-disciplinary methods of study, remain equally valid.

Historically, a 50-year threshold for formal landmarking exists for not only the National Register of Historic Places but many of the local registers modeled upon it, to provide “the time needed to develop historical perspective and to evaluate significance.”⁵ As postwar buildings age

⁴ Paul Groth, “Making New Connections in Vernacular Architecture,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58, no. 3 (September 1999): 444, <https://doi.org/10.2307/991538>.

⁵ Elaine Stiles, “50 Years Reconsidered,” *Forum Journal* 24, no. 4 (Summer 2010), <https://forum.savingplaces.org/viewdocument/50-years-reconsidered>.

into eligibility, recognition of their historic value is increasing. In 2003, Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) introduced the *Nifty From the Last 50* initiative with the intent of formally recognizing newly eligible properties of the recent past. Fifteen years later, however, DAHP admits this era is “woefully under-represented” on state and local registers.⁶ To date, the inventories and studies cited by DAHP represent a breadth of styles and typologies, ranging from postwar tract housing to Washington’s two World’s Fair sites, and include a range of works by noted Northwest architects. Conspicuously absent, however, are more mundane automobile-oriented, commercial typologies like supermarkets. In Seattle and its adjacent suburbs, several supermarket structures of this period possess unique stylistic and cultural significance emblematic of the era, and remain relatively architecturally intact, holding promise for formal recognition in the future.

However, in spite of increased historical interest, the supermarket is rapidly disappearing before inventory and recognition can be completed. While this threat is omnipresent in the field of preservation, several factors particularly endanger this typology. Broadly, the grocery industry is again in flux as online shopping and delivery grows in popularity, and established chains pioneer smaller brick-and-mortar stores in urban business districts. This trend leaves the traditional supermarket format increasingly obsolete. While the architectural aftermath of this emerging shift remain to be seen, there is little doubt it will change, or even obsolesce, the spatial experience of how we shop for food.

Locally, skyrocketing land values and neighborhood up-zoning make supermarkets and related retail typologies, with their low density and large parcels, attractive redevelopment targets. As Seattle seeks to strengthen walkability and densify its core neighborhoods, the surfeit of parking at these sites increasingly seems out of place. In the past decade, numerous high-density housing and mixed-use development projects were built on former supermarket sites;

⁶ Michael Houser, “Nifty from the Last 50 Initiative,” Washington State Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation (DAHP), accessed March 26, 2019, <https://dahp.wa.gov/historic-preservation/historic-buildings/historic-building-survey-and-inventory/nifty-from-the-last-50-initiative>.

following Seattle's sweeping zoning changes in 2019 targeting arterial roads and transportation corridors,⁷ this pattern will likely accelerate.

In practice, preserving the legacy supermarket affords opportunities beyond merely recognizing historical significance. At minimum, it may address disparities in food access and culturally appropriate choices; in several instances in Seattle, where large chains have left for larger, more modern structures, specialty and ethnic grocers have appropriated older buildings as community cornerstones. In others, midcentury markets are adapted into museums, performance venues, and various other community resources. As exemplified by the recent fight over the redevelopment of downtown Seattle's Showbox Theatre, large, affordable spaces for cultural purposes are endangered, and these otherwise obsolete buildings may fill that void.

⁷ Daniel Beekman, "Seattle Upzones 27 Neighborhood Hubs, Passes Affordable-Housing Requirements," *The Seattle Times*, March 18, 2019, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-upzones-27-neighborhood-hubs-passes-affordable-housing-requirements/>.



Fig. 3: A typical turn-of-the-century dry-goods grocer. Goods were stacked behind a counter or in a storeroom, only to be handled by the shopkeeper. Pictured is a store in East St. Louis, Ill. in 1914. (Shorpy Historic Photo Archive)



Fig. 4: A Kroger self-service “combination store” in Lexington, Ky. circa 1940. These types of stores emerged around WWI, when labor shortages forced grocers to streamline operations. Overhead costs dropped, and sales soared as customers could be moved much more quickly. (Lafayette Studio collection, Univ. of Kentucky)



Fig. 5: The drive-in market evolved from the form of Los Angeles’ ubiquitous corner gas stations. Though their heyday was brief, the drive-in set the precedent for the familiar automobile-oriented business strip, emphasizing parking in front and ease of car access. Pictured is one such market at Wilshire Blvd. & Hamilton Dr. in Los Angeles, circa 1932. (Los Angeles Historical Society)

2. A Brief History of the Supermarket

The Supermarket's Predecessors

To understand precisely how much the supermarket has evolved and influenced the retail landscape in postwar America, we must look at its immediate antecedents over a century ago. At the turn of the 20th century, the American urbanite's food shopping routine was a fairly local and utilitarian one. Neighborhood retailers specialized in one category of product, such as produce or dry goods, usually procured from farmers and growers in the surrounding region. These shops averaged around 600 square feet,⁸ usually a long, corridor-like space in a leased commercial storefront.⁹ Butchers, bakeries, and druggists rounded out the selection of household sundries in a neighborhood, benefitting from close proximity to one another—particularly advantageous prior to automobile transport.¹⁰ Dairy products were usually delivered to the home daily; once telephone service became widespread, grocers could deliver orders taken by phone.

Clerks fulfilled orders taken at the counter from shelves or a stockroom to the rear, separated from clients by a counter. Shoppers repeated this ritual at any number of shops, resulting in a tedious day of errands. Grocery shopping was a highly personal experience: with frequent contact with customers, grocers came to know their clientele and frequently extended credit to regular shoppers. Consequently, goods in stock were limited to what was in season, and what proprietors knew were in demand. Rather than choose their own product for purchase, shoppers relented to shopkeepers to hand over their take for the day.

⁸ Emanuel B. Halper, "Supermarket Use and Exclusive Clauses, Part Three—Horrendous World War Remolds the American Supermarket," *Real Property, Probate and Trust Journal* 40, no. 3 (2005): 409.

⁹ Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), 117.

¹⁰ Richard W Longstreth, *The Drive-in, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 117.

The ritual of purchasing groceries was one predicated on social status rather than monetary transaction, with the shopkeeper and counter acting as a physical and metaphorical gatekeeper. Male clerks held authority over what could be purchased, and at what price, as haggling was still the norm in this retail sector. As Shane Hamilton describes, “retail food shopping before the self-service system thus could be understood as a form of “moral economy,” with social norms, communal obligations, and unequal power relations of race, gender, and class embedded in every act of exchange.”¹¹

In larger cities, an alternative model of shopping emerged in the form of the public market, a development that arose out of the mass urbanization of the mid-19th century. The early public markets, concentrated primarily along eastern seaboard cities, were municipally owned amenities, created to alleviate downtown crowding by street vendors.¹² The intensely contentious politics surrounding their governance led to the construction of new ‘public’ markets by private developers, with individual vendors sub-leasing stalls. One such example is Philadelphia’s Reading Terminal Market, built strategically within the Reading Railroad’s Center City station,¹³ with a captive customer base and convenient transportation corridor.

Centrally located in downtown business districts, public markets captured a broader clientele than the parochial neighborhood grocers and advertised product diversity and competitive “downtown prices”.¹⁴ Centers such as Pike Place Market in Seattle and Cleveland’s West Side Market, to name just two still in operation today, united disparate food sellers within a single site, eliminating middleman shopkeepers and allowing consumers to purchase directly from growers. Operators constructed these second-generation marketplaces to convey

¹¹ Shane Hamilton, *Supermarket USA: Food and Power in the Cold War Farms Race*, Food and Power in the Cold War Farms Race (Yale University Press, 2018).

¹² James M. Mayo, *The American Grocery Store: The Business Evolution of an Architectural Space*, Contributions in American History; No. 150 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 21-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴ Longstreth, *The Drive-in*, 12.

cleanliness and modernity; The porcelain-tiled West Side Market is reminiscent of a railroad terminal, while Pike Place's numerous market buildings allowed continuous renovations and technological upgrades.¹⁵ The breadth of vendors afforded consumers vastly greater choice in product; the nature of open-air selling offered shoppers the opportunity to pick their own goods, albeit under watchful eyes.

Wartime Shortages

Around the time of the First World War, grocers began experimenting with new marketing techniques and labor-saving operation methods, at first out of necessity. With thousands of men drafted, grocery clerks and butchers, traditionally male occupations, were in short supply, and stores sought to get by with a skeleton crew. Los Angeles' Alpha Beta grocery was the earliest to advertise 'self-service' in 1912; the store's internal slogans included "Pile the goods high and sell them cheap. Let the buyer do the work,"¹⁶ prescient mantras that would reshape retail.

Across the country, Piggly Wiggly opened in Memphis to greater notability. Despite being located in a narrow storefront, the shop maximized the use of floor space, where shoppers "wiggled" about the aisles of packaged goods, to separate check stand lanes in a pre-arranged route. Stores could do away with a staff of trained clerks by only selling 'pre-advertised' packaged goods—customers entered the store knowing what they wanted, recognizing name brands, and picked their own products from a shelf, without help from a clerk. The move to self-service drastically increased productivity of store personnel while raking in greater revenue.

The success of self-service stores allowed them to flourish into regional and national chains following the war: by 1923, Piggly Wiggly had grown to over 2,500 stores nationally.¹⁷

¹⁵ Mayo, *American Grocery Store*, 30.

¹⁶ Rachel Bowlby, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 140.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 141

Cincinnati's Kroger and New York City's Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company ("The A&P"), both long-standing grocers in their respective cities, swelled to similar sizes in the 1920s. To combat the insurgent chains, local grocers formed the Independent Grocers Alliance (IGA), a marketing and distribution cooperative, effectively forming their own chain.¹⁸ As chains grew their national footprints, so too did their selection of products and services, expanding into the meat and produce businesses, departments once solely served by independent specialists. Termed "combination stores" in the industry,¹⁹ these stores adopted Piggly Wiggly's self-service model, but did away with the one-way, maze-like circulation pattern. Shoppers were free to amble about as they pleased, picking from shelves and produce "gondolas" that lined the perimeter or bins in the center. Only the bulk-selling meat and dairy sections, and checkout counters, required staff intervention.

Architecturally, combination stores did not depart wildly from their predecessors in form, but rather in size. Rather than constructing purpose-built freestanding stores, combination markets took root in taxpayer blocks, a type of commercial structure built by land developers along the arterial roads and streetcar lines that began to spread out of cities' downtown cores. These ready-built structures, early-20th-century analogues of the strip mall, gave grocers ready access to growing residential districts. Stores often leased several contiguous storefronts, removing partition walls and blocking unused doors, to make room for the new four-to-six thousand square foot layouts.²⁰ Inside, wooden floors and bare bulbs gave way to linoleum and globe lamps, lending an air of refinement. Larger, more visible stores served a greater customer base, allowing chains to consolidate and reduce overhead costs, and independents followed the practice.

Like all other facets of commerce, the explosive growth of automobile sales catalyzed tremendous changes in the grocery industry, and developers were quick to capitalize on

¹⁸ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 121.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

newfound mobility in the design of retail structures. Inter-war Los Angeles proved to be a test bed for experimentation of new grocery typologies, accommodated by the city's proximity to both the booming oil industry and the fertile Central Valley agricultural region.²¹ Though an unlikely combination, the earliest convenience-oriented markets grew out of the development of the gasoline station. Intense competition among oil companies competing for an increasingly mobile populace led to the proliferation of service stations in newly built suburban neighborhoods; operators soon saw an untapped market in selling other daily essentials to their frequent customer base.

The arrival of automobiles in cities in the first decades of the century posed numerous spatial challenges in storage and circulation, not the least of which was locating space for servicing vehicles. The necessity of maneuvering cars led to the utilitarian, unenclosed filling station, set back from the street—a radical departure from the traditionally street wall-oriented urban development pattern, where each lot is built upon in its entirety. The filling station, whose buildings covered little of the parcel, represented a shift to continuous open space punctuated by buildings as objects in the urban landscape.²²

Filling stations soon expanded their offerings from petroleum products to related automotive services, often leased out to specialists; these secondary services brought in the greatest share of revenue, with gasoline serving as a “frontispiece”²³ of the complex. Shoppers came for gasoline, but stayed to complete their day's errands. For station owners, the enterprise became one of managing real estate rather than simply pumping gas. Unlike automotive dealers, who clustered together on the periphery of the downtown core, service stations proliferated on arterial roads serving booming residential neighborhoods. By 1920, filling stations evolved into entire retail complexes known as “super stations,” often collections of leased outbuildings surrounded by the motor court. An L-shaped layout on a corner lot proved the most lucrative

²¹ Longstreth, *The Drive-in.*, 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 10.

arrangement, both for visibility and ease of automobile access. No longer a novelty of urban design, the corner-lot typology was adopted by real-estate developers, who saw the success of super stations as a template for general retail blocks.²⁴

In residential districts, food retailers became the primary tenants in these new “drive-in” markets. Like public markets, they afforded one-stop shopping of a full range of grocery items from numerous vendors, but with the added luxury of using one’s automobile as a shopping basket of sorts.²⁵ Though prices were higher, customers were willing to pay for the privacy and convenience of groceries delivered to their car, perhaps as a quick errand run or, for men, a minor detour on the afternoon commute; markets were often open until midnight. For retailers, the drive-in, with professional management, coordinated advertising, and a large customer base, the enterprises were promising in an era of uncertainty. During the 1920s, the failure rate of standalone grocers in Los Angeles was reputed to be over 90%, versus forty for drive-in tenants.²⁶ Income was fourfold that of a traditional store, and both local chains and independent tenants benefitted from the arrangement.

The drive-in typology, as it appeared in the 1920s, was short-lived and died out as quickly as it emerged, both in Los Angeles and other metropolitan areas it made an appearance in. The impact on the urban form and retailing, however, was more permanent. The drive-in catalyzed commercial activity away from established business districts and urban centers. The arterial road became the new, linear locus of shopping, rather than pedestrian-oriented nodes. The drive-in further demonstrated the growing importance of convenience to consumers, both in terms of ease of access and products offered. These themes would recur in the drive-in's successor: the supermarket.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

A New Way of Selling: The Supermarket

The booming years of the 1920s came to an abrupt end at the onset of the Great Depression. For consumers, money was tight, translating to less spending on food, distressing for both families and grocers. Conversely, farmers and food producers faced a glut on the market, dropping prices, and their incomes, precipitously. The timing was ideal for mutually beneficial innovation in the form of bulk retailing. A number of chains lay claim to title of the “first” supermarket, a type of store not simply a larger combination store, but one selling a full complement of packaged and fresh foods organized by department; the industry put special emphasis on “adequate parking” and self-service dry-goods in this definition.²⁷

The closest contender was King Kullen, in 1930, at the height of the Great Depression. Founder Michael Cullen, a manager at Kroger, proposed a new, vastly larger store concept to his employer, who ran a large chain of combination stores. Cullen envisioned a high volume, low margin store, where savings from bulk food purchasing could be passed on to the consumer. “I would convince the public that I would be able to save them from one to three dollars on their food bill . . . Can you imagine how the public would respond to a store of this kind?”²⁸ Cullen banked on price, rather than selection and service, to lure customers.

When rejected by corporate management, Cullen brought his experiment to New York, opening in a former automobile factory in Queens.²⁹ Appropriately for the times, King Kullen’s sign was flanked by the boastful slogan “World’s Greatest Price Wrecker —How Does He Do It?”³⁰ The answer, of course, was low overhead in inventory and real estate. With industrial

²⁷ Mayo, *American Grocery Store*, 117.

²⁸ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 124.

²⁹ Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 137.

³⁰ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 125.

output decimated, warehouses and factories, particularly on the periphery of large cities, proved to be a lucrative setting for low-margin mass retailing. Oversupply in the agriculture sector resulted in low wholesale prices, and increased demand would be mutually beneficial for consumers and growers.

Two years later and a few miles away in Elizabeth, New Jersey, Robert Otis and Roy Dawson formed their own auto-plant-turned-grocer, Big Bear.³¹ True to its name, the store featured a costumed bear roaming the aisles as an opening-day attraction. Big Bear went a step further from King Kullen in offering more than just food, but also eleven specialty departments on the periphery of the sales floor. Seventy percent of Big Bear's selling space was leased to outside vendors selling paint, hardware, and automotive parts.³²

Here, a form recognizable to contemporary shoppers began to emerge, the confluence of earlier industry novelties: a large, open, warehouse-like building, often with ample parking; combined sales of various foodstuffs under one roof, organized into aisles; self-service selection and checkout stands; and dramatic advertising.

The combination was right for the meager times: customers came to gawk at the sheer size of product on display, but stayed for the low prices. By minimizing staffing and selling in bulk, savings were passed to the customer. The experiment was successful, but seen by industry leaders as a fad that would not outlast the Depression. The new markets were seen as a crude regression in atmosphere desperate customers put up with: "four walls—crude floors—bare ceilings—flimsy fixtures—glaring lights and gaudy signs—merchandise piled everywhere and apparently any old way—that's the inside of a typical cheapy in the food field . . . maybe they are just a depression phenomena that will vanish as times get better," assessed *Business Week* in 1933.³³

³¹ Bowlby, *Carried Away* 135.

³² *Ibid.*, 142.

³³ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 126.



Fig. 7: This Publix Market in Winter Haven, Fla., circa 1940, was an early adopter of the new discharge lighting technology. Originally used in industrial settings, fluorescent lights allowed stores to build larger footprints while still maintaining a high level of illumination away from the front windows. Their cost effectiveness allowed stores to stay open longer during hours of darkness. (State Archive of Florida)

However dismissive the established grocery industry was of the new phenomenon, the existential threat of the supermarket to the existing ways of retailing grew apparent. Some traditional store operators chose simply to ignore, or actively oppose the supposed fad initially, but the economic success was difficult to ignore: In Cincinnati, a single Albers Supermarket raked in revenue totaling more than seven nearby A&P combination stores in 1934.³⁴ Executives of grocery chains came to understand that the supermarket format, however unrefined, was where the money was, and by learning from the pioneers, it could be perfected.

Carl Dipman, editor of the *Food Trade* and *Progressive Grocer* journals, echoed the pessimism of the time, but, recognizing that supermarkets were here to stay, proposed analysis and refinement of the sales techniques that made the format a runaway success. The chaos on the sales floor, and lack of comfort and service, was tolerable for customers chasing sales, but ultimately hindered customer loyalty.³⁵ Taking cues from department stores, Dipman proposed that future supermarkets focus on providing air of comfort and luxury, becoming a place of enjoyment customers would willing to return to, similar to how drive-ins won over shoppers with convenience.

The "Scientific Salesroom"

Dipman later authored a series of books in the 1930s illustrating operation techniques that promised a new method of selling groceries, in which "the modern grocery store must be a scientific salesroom. The grocer must be a modern sales engineer."³⁶ His 'scientific' method was not one in the conventional definition, but a reasoned approach to changes in the shopping environment to spur sales growth, namely through aesthetics.

³⁴ Mayo, *American Grocery Store*, 147.

³⁵ Adam Mack, "'Speaking of Tomatoes': Supermarkets, the Senses, and Sexual Fantasy in Modern America," *Journal of Social History* 43, no. 4 (2010): 820, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.0.0328>.

³⁶ Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 163.

Though skeptical of the earliest discount-oriented supermarkets, Dipman saw potential in the connection between self-service and mass displays: “As far as possible, every square inch of the eyes’ range of vision. . .wherever the customer stands, wherever she looks, should display merchandise,” he wrote, but not before taking aim at Cullen and others, “Women are not interested in woodwork and lumber — in boards, planks and tin.”³⁷ In other words, everything inside the store, from use of floor space to decor, must reinforce the message of merchandising. Eliminating counters and clerks was not just an act to save labor cost, but to remove any barrier between shopper and product. The grand spectacle of the bargain store was to remain, but varnished with a luxurious sensibility.

Simultaneously, the supermarket industry was conscious to promote the store as a place ‘to linger,’ a third place of sorts in the same vein as today’s coffeehouses. Making appearances to look homey— with “a small space to be used as a customer’s rest corner . . . a grouping of table, comfortable colorful chairs, and if possible fern stand, lamp . . . or a canary, if the store has them”³⁸—gave customers reason to spend more time, and therefore more money, while hiding the otherwise transactional nature of the activity. Rest areas and caged birds evidently did not catch on, but the underlying theory of sales engagement stuck.

Inside the store, products were arranged to be attractive to the shopper, not simply impressive in scale. In the industry’s numerous trade publications pop-psychology approaches to merchandising abounded. Industry experts understood that, on top of reducing costs, store design must encourage customer spending beyond the necessities. B. Victor Gruzen, one of the first professional architects consulting on the interior design of supermarkets, emphasized the efficiency of motion and space enabled by aisles arranged in a regular gridlike pattern.³⁹ Other store layouts were attempted over the years, like radial-spoke and herringbone patterns, but none proved quite as successful at packing in a massive quantity of products on the sales floor.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 148.

³⁹ Mayo, *American Grocery Store*, 171.



Fig. 8: A Publix Market in Winter haven, Fla., circa 1940. As grocery chains expanded to building their own freestanding stores, contemporary architectural styles were used to evoke a modern, efficient way of shopping. Sign pylons, often in neon, affixed to the front of the building ensured visibility from across the parking lot. (State Archive of Florida)

As products moved beyond packaged goods, the table or cabinet display appeared alongside shelves to showcase produce and other bulk goods, resulting in a more open floor plan.⁴⁰ These low tables imparted a sense of openness in which shoppers could scan the panorama of the store. In order to utilize otherwise unproductive space, additional products were stacked on end-cap displays, where promotional items could potentially be picked up on impulse.

Refrigerated departments were placed along the perimeter of the stores out of necessity, for ease of access to loading docks and stockrooms,⁴¹ but this had the additional benefit of routing customers through the entirety of the sales floor en route to their staple items,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 175.

⁴¹ Ibid.

encouraging more exposure to what was *not* on the grocery list. On-site bakeries not only completed the full-service supermarket, but provided “olfactory marketing.”⁴² Placed at the rear of the store, a bakery department filled the store with the smell of fresh bread and pastries, encouraging shoppers to linger and subtly inducing a sense of hunger—both conducive to a fuller shopping cart.

Supermarket Technologies

Supermarkets were keen to tout cleanliness and efficiency of fresh products and uncrowded stores, differentiating them from the dreary, old-fashioned storefront markets and early bargain supermarkets. Upton Sinclair’s 1909 exposé *The Jungle* revealed just how dangerously unsanitary the emerging industrialized food system was, and inspired the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act.⁴³ Food safety was an issue lingering in the public eye for decades to come, and supermarkets adopted technologies to not only keep food fresh, but promote an image of freshness.

One such way was through dramatically increasing illumination of the sales floor, thereby showcasing the freshness of meat and produce and leaving nowhere for dirt to hide. Early taxpayer-block storefronts sufficed with utilitarian, bare-bulb lamps,⁴⁴ giving way to more permanent-looking fixtures as stores grew in size. When the warehouse-like supermarket took shape, incandescent lighting proved inadequate to illuminate these spaces. Fluorescent discharge lighting, developed and commercialized in the 1930s,⁴⁵ was quickly adopted in industrial facilities, where the new technology was well suited to efficiently illuminating large,

⁴² Mack, “Speaking of Tomatoes,” 828.

⁴³ “Achievements in Public Health, 1900-1999: Safer and Healthier Foods,” Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, October 15, 1999.

⁴⁴ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 123.

⁴⁵ Rick DeLair, “Fluorescent Lamp History,” Edison Tech Center, accessed January 21, 2019, <http://edisontechcenter.org/fourescentlampdev.html>.

windowless spaces. Accordingly, fluorescent lighting soon found its way into the warehouse-like spaces of supermarkets, beginning with a Handy Andy outlet in San Antonio, and a Rock Island, Ill. Kash and Karry by 1939.⁴⁶

Subsequently, lighting dictated transformations both inside and out of this second generation of supermarkets. Increased visibility, coupled with consumers apparent freedom of choice, necessitated more visually arresting branding and packaging by food manufacturers.⁴⁷ Whereas goods were before sold in bulk or behind the counter, they now needed shelf appeal to stand out from competitors. The field of packaging design was borne of this necessity. Architecturally, supermarkets began to emulate department stores, featuring large street-side windows—not for displaying merchandise, but to effectively turn the entire store into a display. At night, light spilling out made stores appear as “beacons of abundance”⁴⁸ to passing motorists in an increasingly visually cluttered streetscape.

Not only did supermarkets need to look clean, but needed to *smell* clean—a challenge when much of the product is perishable. Refrigeration technology aided in combating foul odors, which was crucial to maintaining an affluent clientele. With minimal face-to-face service, presenting an experience of hygiene was a significant component of customer satisfaction.⁴⁹

The introduction of refrigeration technology to replace the age-old practice of natural ice cooling allowed perishable goods, like meat and dairy, to be sold on a larger scale, and thus drive sales elsewhere in stores. Even once incorporated into supermarkets, these departments were still sold unpackaged at full-service, staffed counters, until the A&P introduced the open-top refrigerated case in the late 1930s.⁵⁰ As shoppers could simply pick up pre-cut and packaged meats, sales shot up 30%, driving overall revenue up.

⁴⁶ Halper, “Supermarket Use Part Three,” 414.

⁴⁷ Mack, “Speaking of Tomatoes,” 823.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 823

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 828

⁵⁰ Mayo, *American Grocery Store*, 159.

Similarly, the popularity of frozen vegetables and pre-made meals increased from this invention, as these packaged goods were no longer hidden behind heavily insulated doors as ice and ice cream had been. While frozen food was commercially available for some time, it had remained a relatively niche product until it was literally put on display. As women increasingly entered the workforce during the Second World War, time-strapped families appreciated the conveniences of frozen goods, cementing their popularity.⁵¹

As self-service shopping limited social interaction to the checkout stations near the front, conversation was all but eliminated. The result was a rising level of aural distraction from the increased mechanization of retail spaces: the sounds of refrigerators, cash registers and shopping carts echoing through the store. Supermarkets combatted this nuisance on two fronts. First, soundproofing technologies in flooring and ceiling materials reduced the din of foot traffic and activity, bringing a sense of calm and order to stores.⁵² The second was the introduction of background music to further dilute any unpleasant noises. Stores experimented with broadcasting radio programs, but shifted to more controlled music subscriptions, playing light fare to put customers in a “shopping mood”.⁵³

The ubiquitous shopping cart was an invention borne of the necessity of the self-service model, and became a useful tool to maximize sales. Despite the plentiful stock on display, shoppers were limited to what they could carry in their arms about the store. Much as the capacity of the automobile increased sales, the cart gave reason to linger longer and stock up further on impulse buys. Carts did not make widespread appearance until 1937, when shopkeeper Sylvan Goldman modified a folding chair to accommodate wheels and a basket,⁵⁴ allowing them to be stored away when not in use without occupying valuable floor space. The

⁵¹ Mack, “Speaking of Tomatoes,” 828.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 826

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Emanuel B. Halper, “Supermarket Use and Exclusive Clauses, Part Six—Response to Labor Shortages Completes the Self-Service Revolution,” *Real Property, Trust and Estate Law Journal* 43, no. 2 (2008): 233.

shopping cart's dimensions set a standard width for spacing aisles, and thus became the spatial module around which stores were designed.⁵⁵

While shopping carts increased product throughput, the front doors soon became the limiting bottleneck in moving shoppers quickly, exacerbated by the challenge in moving carts themselves through. Publix founder George Jenkins recognized the problem and, inspired by pneumatic doors aboard trains and at railway stations, installed similar automatic mechanisms at his chain by 1940.⁵⁶ The act of shopping was now entirely carried out by the customer, from shelf to car, without any hindrance.

Supermarket Architecture

On the outside, supermarkets came into their own as an architectural typology. Though spatially, the market remained essentially unchanged as a large warehouse, the exterior wrapper evolved to showcase modernity. Chains grew large enough to effectively manage their own real estate, and freestanding structures became commonplace, albeit with parking in the rear and a commanding street presence.⁵⁷ Streamline Moderne, a prevailing architectural style of the time, was a popular choice, as stores clad themselves in neon, glass block, and curved metal panels. Notable industrial architects, such as Albert Kahn and Richard Neutra, were commissioned to spruce up supermarkets' image.⁵⁸ ⁵⁹ Some stores, opening free-standing outlets, chose to decorate in more traditional, but equally visually striking, styles, like Tudor or Colonial touches, mimicking other roadside architecture.

⁵⁵ Mayo, *American Grocery Store*, 150.

⁵⁶ Supermarket Use Part Six 233.

⁵⁷ Longstreth, *The Drive-in*, 162.

⁵⁸ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 130.

⁵⁹ Longstreth, *The Drive-in*, 161.

The massive suburban migration of the middle-class to the periphery of American cities heralded the merger of the supermarket with the drive-in shopping center typology. Cheap land, minimal zoning restrictions, and distance from existing business centers encouraged large-scale commercial development, a move away from linear taxpayer blocks of the previous generation.⁶⁰ Rather than build speculative shopping centers, developers contracted supermarkets to anchor projects of twenty or more units. Ample parking, two to three times the area of selling space, was moved front and center and advertised as a selling point.

Around this time, drugstores, a type of retailer whose products expanded beyond pharmaceuticals and toiletries to stationery, toys and jewelry,⁶¹ began to emulate the supermarket typology, even co-locating within the same structure. Kansas City's Katz chain blurred the distinction between drugstore, department store, and grocery, selling food, hardware and clothing, and stores steadily expanded in size.⁶² While drugstores historically anchored traditional business districts, by the 1950s, they began locating as anchor stores in new suburban shopping centers. Most drastically, in 1949, Owl Drug partnered with Alpha Beta Food Markets to construct a massive 30,000 square-foot combined drug and food outlet in Pasadena.⁶³ Though operated separately, the store was one contiguous, full-service space. Larger chains operated similar co-branding arrangements for in-store pharmacies, in some cases purchasing drug chains outright. Though the spheres of of retailing overlapped, grocers and druggists were careful to maintain separate identities.⁶⁴

Following the Second World War, the visual identity of supermarkets took increased importance, as the freestanding store model exposed more walls visible to the public

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 166.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.



Figure 9: Food Fair Market in Collingswood, N.J., circa 1945. In the first decade after World War II, the pace of supermarket construction exploded, and stores featured a more utilitarian design that was easily replicated at scale. The growing popularity of the Modern Movement meant that these simple, unadorned forms were in vogue. (Pleasant Family Shopping)

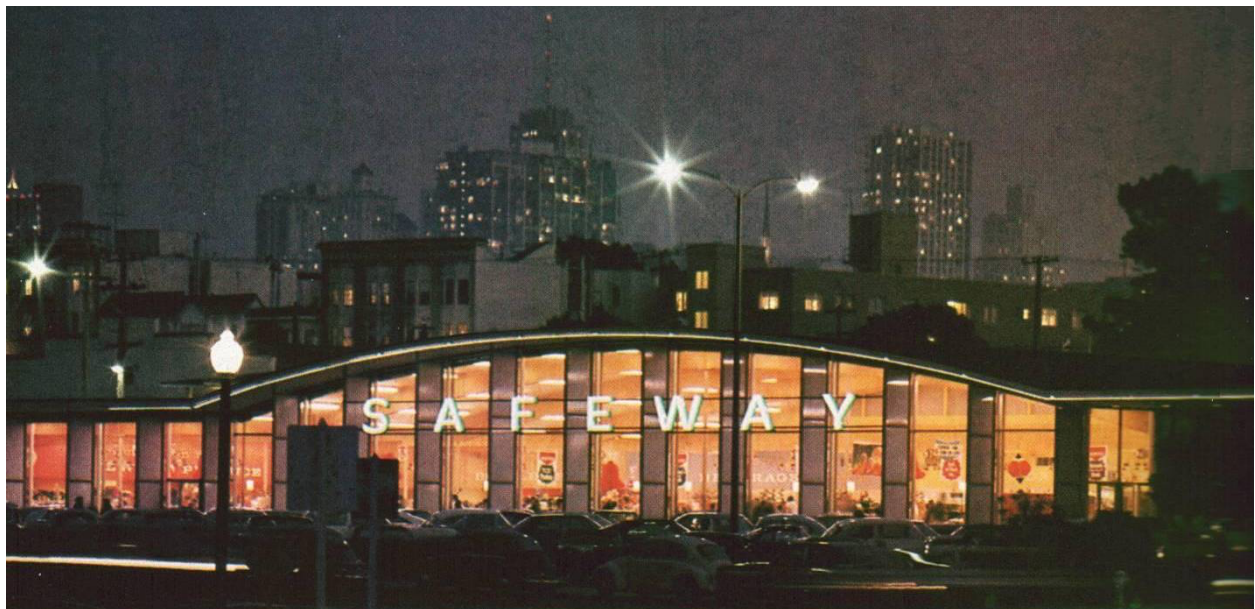


Fig. 10: A Safeway outlet in San Francisco's Marina District (built 1959), pictured in 1968. In the 1950s and 60s, the use of glass curtain walls and dramatic rooflines peaked as supermarkets sought to stand out from increasingly cluttered suburban business strips. In an era of intense expansion and competition, chains used architecture to differentiate themselves. (*Chain Store Age*)

with which to project the supermarket's identity to the street. Various flavors of the Modernist architectural movement became popular across the country, and supermarkets, ever seeking to brand themselves as clean and modern, adopted this new, unadorned aesthetic language.⁶⁵ The reductive expression of modernism had the additional benefit of simplicity in construction, accommodating the breakneck speed with which supermarkets were constructed following the wartime lull.

Supermarket design came to reflect the realities of the automobile era, rejecting traditional notions of scale. As traffic speeds grew faster and parking lots larger, the elements of signage and display windows ballooned to sizes visible at highway speeds.⁶⁶ Supermarket names and logos, once placed prominently over doorways, moved to towers alongside the roadway. Transparency across the storefront, achieved through tall glass curtain walls, allowed the potential shopper to see the buzz of activity inside from their cars.⁶⁷ The remainder of the store exterior was often simple and utilitarian, with flat roofs and concrete block walls; the supermarket, in effect, had come full circle, housed in a minimally adorned structure, and the visuals of merchandise, rather than architecture, as the featured selling point. The aesthetic was squarely middle-of-the-road, neither pretentiously upscale nor bargain basement, and customers were drawn to the casual convenience and novelty from existing business strips.⁶⁸

In short time, the novelty of supermarket shopping wore off, and their architectural interchangeability faded into the visual noise of the suburban shopping strip. There was little exterior differentiation between competing chains, both inside or out. As the 1950s came to a close, supermarket chains looked to kitsch roadside architecture, utilizing dramatic, exaggerated rooflines and huge, pole-mounted logos as visual branding unique to each chain. Once again, the general form remained warehouse-like, but architects took liberties with expressive structural

⁶⁵ Mayo, *The American Grocery Store*, 168.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁶⁷ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 130.

⁶⁸ Longstreth, *The Drive-in* 176.

systems and applied details at a scale visible from the road, effectively taking . Austrian-born retail architect Victor Gruen partnered with the Philadelphia-area Penn Fruit chain to develop a soaring, barrel-arched design in wood laminate, allowing a large glazed storefront. The high roof allowed the market's name to be affixed directly above the entrance, effectively merging sign and structure.⁶⁹ Gruen's standardized design was easily replicated by the chain, and quickly emulated by others, such as Safeway's West Coast stores.⁷⁰

The Grocery-Industrial Complex

Though much of the success of the supermarket industry is attributed to appealing to consumers in one form or another—prices, convenience, and service—the other component was the rapid streamlining of the food distribution system before products ever arrive at the store. After capitulating to the supermarket phenomenon, the A&P quickly grew to become the world's largest grocery chain, selling enough to “feed a country the size of Poland” in 1947.⁷¹ The chain, and the industry at large, were touted as models of American free-enterprise success at the dawn of the Cold War, but this success was largely the result of government intervention.

In their infancy, chains of all types were viewed by the public and business leaders as anti-competitive, as they leveraged their size to increase purchasing power over their suppliers and cut wholesalers out of the picture. Legislation in the inter-war years targeted these business approaches with little success: the Robinson-Patman act of 1936 restricted such preferential discounts, but chain markets responded with creative accounting;⁷² a federal chain-store tax

⁶⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 132.

⁷⁰ Shannon Teresa Garrison, “Penn Fruit and the Everyday Modern: Interpreting the Mid-Century Supermarket” (Master's Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2013), https://repository.upenn.edu/hp_theses/225.

⁷¹ Hamilton, *Supermarket USA*, 6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 10.

failed to make it to law in 1940.⁷³ An antitrust investigation of the A&P in 1945 did little to stem the company's growth.

More directly, Department of Agriculture research into agricultural efficiency beginning in the 1930s especially benefitted supermarket chains by fueling their supply networks. Research in fertilizers, pesticides, and animal husbandry paralleled grocery chains' imperatives on the supply side, as recognized in corporate literature: purchasing ages "have worked with [farmers] to improve the quality of the produce we offer to consumers . . . to find less wasteful means of moving food from farm to dinner table."⁷⁴ Varieties of produce were limited to only what kept well and was easy to grow and transport, facilitated by USDA biological research.

Hamilton points to corn as an example of sequential growth in other foodstuffs: academic research into hybrid seeds led to an explosion of farmers' output; subsequently, the surplus grain found its way as a primary cattle feed, growing the beef industry. Government nutritional guidelines and inspection encouraged dairy consumption and consumer confidence, respectively.⁷⁵

Market chains additionally relied on outside developments, such as the national road, rail, and communications networks, to fuel a centralized distribution system. The A&P developed a 9,000 mile-long communications and field-office system to monitor regional price, sales, and agricultural data across "forty-five of the nation's first-ranked agricultural states"⁷⁶. While this network provided the chain near-real-time information to allow buying produce as it ripened in different climates, resulting in nearly year-round availability and overcoming seasonality. Peas, for example, traveled on average 395 miles from farm to store. However, it had the feedback effect of standardizing products, with mass purchasing spurring further

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

research into increasing yields. The result to consumers was a seemingly massive choice of products, but only those dictated by the store itself: tomatoes year-round, but only one varietal.

As the supermarket touted themselves as a home-away-from-home, the household itself took on more responsibility as a ‘storehouse’ of food, a move harkening back to the time before modern food distribution systems. Elizabeth Cromley, in *The Food Axis*, argues that “food is the agent of architectural change.”⁷⁷ The pre-supermarket, or even pre-grocery, household was one where food was grown at home, nonperishables were stockpiled and meals prepared; consequently, pantries and kitchens were architecturally significant spaces in the home as centers of domestic production.⁷⁸ The urban grocer of the turn of the century, however, served to replace the function of storage as shoppers purchased food frequently and outsourced growing produce, and consequently, food-related spaces coalesced. In some urban apartments, kitchens were eliminated entirely.

By the postwar era, the wide proliferation of refrigeration and other home appliances shifted this duty back to the home. “The consumer has taken over the problem the retailer used to have, of making goods available frequently rather than infrequently. All he has to do now is to go and open his refrigerator door, and there his product is,” read one advertisement.⁷⁹ Supermarkets grew into the business of moving food rather than storing it, and the pantry, or, with the popularity of frozen foods, the refrigerator, became an extension of the store. The convenience of processed food and labor-saving appliances led to a transformation of cooking from a chore to a family activity, which has carried over to contemporary home design in open-plan cooking and dining spaces.⁸⁰ Like grocery shopping, cooking became a leisure activity albeit one still primarily the domain of the housewife.

⁷⁷ Elizabeth C. Cromley, *The Food Axis: Cooking, Eating, and the Architecture of American Houses* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 240.

⁷⁸ Howard Davis, review of *The Food Axis: Cooking, Eating, and the Architecture of American Houses*, by Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 19, no. 1 (2012): 127, <https://doi.org/10.5749/buildland.19.1.0126>.

⁷⁹ Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 150.

⁸⁰ Davis, review of *The Food Axis*, 128.

Similarly paralleling grocery stores, kitchen design itself was influenced by professionalization and ‘scientific’ rationalization. At the same time, kitchens grew to spill into other living spaces and vice-versa, as breakfast bars and dining nooks replaced pantries and partition walls. Cabinet and furnishing manufacturers claimed to be responding to shifting trends in Americans’ domestic lifestyles, but the notion of remodeling one’s kitchen was as much a product of firms attempting to move new products.⁸¹

In the 1950s, a curious trend emerged of do-it-yourself kitchen-planning kits in the form of miniature models, manufactured and sponsored by building materials firms promoting new ‘streamlined’ kitchens and work surfaces. Efficient kitchens were intended to eliminate drudgery, and women, as the primary users and ‘experts’ in domestic efficiency were encouraged to take part in designing them: “Who should know better than women what a kitchen should be?”⁸²

Yet while affirming the housewife’s authority, the experience was one that re-established her place domestically in the postwar period. The freedom of choice was illusory, as the design process was mediated by the (generally male) design professional, undermining the claim of amateur expertise.⁸³ In contrast to architectural models, which symbolized professionalism, the ‘toy’ kitchen kits evoked dollhouses, “a bridge between childhood and adulthood, signaling the girls dreams made real,”⁸⁴ infantilizing the housewife-turned-designer.

⁸¹ Chad Randl, “Look Who’s Designing Kitchens’: Personalization, Gender, and Design Authority in the Postwar Remodeled Kitchen,” *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 21, no. 2 (2014): 75-6, <https://doi.org/10.5749/buildland.21.2.0057>.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

Continuing Evolution: 1960s and Beyond

Inside the store, it became evident that the layout of stores, more or less unchanged since the 1930s, was in danger of becoming equally stagnant. Industry leaders again grew introspective, and the Super Market Institute, a trade association, commissioned industrial designer Raymond Loewy to analyze the future of the shopping experience.⁸⁵ Like Dipman's imperatives decades earlier, Loewy concluded that the shoppers of the 1960s desired entertainment and a "special atmosphere"⁸⁶ where they might be exposed to and inclined to purchase upmarket products like foreign wines and gourmet foods.

The nascent environmental and health movements of the 1970s led consumers to grow wary of the way food was marketed, and grocery chains responded in kind. In an inversion of the shift to a clean and modern image decades earlier, supermarkets projected an image of traditionalism and agrarianism. Markets experimented with a number of themed concepts, giving departments folksy names evoking traditional merchants long since replaced by the supermarket, and various nostalgic decorative styles. Ironically, the imagery of the 'old fashioned' corner grocers was used to advertising the increasingly streamlined corporate supermarket. Meanwhile, store exteriors toned down their aesthetic, opting for subdued natural materials and returning to relatively generic forms. *Progressive Grocer* called the trend "blending," explaining the concept as "pointed toward making [the store] an 'instant fixture' in the community." Supermarkets understood that luring customers with increasingly outrageous architecture and events was growing unsustainable, and instead sought to become shoppers' familiar "neighborhood store," however new to the neighborhood they may be.

Shifting demographics and environmental concerns in the latter half of that decade called long-standing industry practices into question, again spurring new concepts in retailing.

⁸⁵ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 133.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*



Fig. 11: Kroger's new superstore concept was introduced at their Hyde Park store in Cincinnati, seen in this 1976 annual report illustration. As consumers became health-conscious and environmentally aware, supermarket departments were given agrarian-sounding names like "Country Oven Bakery" and "OK Corral Meats". (Kroger Company, via Pleasant Family Shopping)

In the face of rising costs following the energy crises, lighting and conditioning tremendous spaces filled with refrigerated cases ballooned to eat up operation budgets. But rather than cut back on these staples of the shopping experience, grocers turned to streamlining inventory management, made possible by computerized management and point-of-sale systems.⁸⁷ The Baby Boom generation was coming of age with discretionary income to spend, but household sizes stagnated. Boomers were dining out, and fast-food in particular was taking away business. Convenience stores, pharmacies, and gas stations capitalized on the trend, understanding that customers were willing to pay a premium for pre-made meals and basic sundries. Supermarket shopping was still an event, but one increasingly seen as a hassle. Once again, supermarkets

⁸⁷ Ibid., 134.

responded by diversifying. The trend toward ever-larger stores broke, and some chains shrank their new outlets, focusing on specialty foods and upmarket prepared deli foods, replicating the appeal of fast food. Others, like Arkansas-based Walmart, expanded into extensive non-food offerings, much as Big Bear blurred the distinction between grocery and department store decades earlier.

Social and Cultural Impact

“Women’s expertise”

The dawn of World War II precipitated a reshuffling of gender roles in employment and society, yet, as ever, women remained the primary buyers of food in the household. As women took on more employment outside the home to replace men stationed overseas, the average household’s income grew, but time to spend preparing meals shrank.⁸⁸ Even as veterans returned, and women subsequently retreated to the household, their preference for the convenience of supermarkets remained, and most did not return to traditional grocers.

New work opportunities extended to the supermarket sector itself, as grocers warmed to the idea of employing women, but this was not without prejudices and restrictions. Some managers worried about the unsuitability and presumed flirtatious nature of younger and unmarried women, while others were concerned of the physical abilities and sociability of older “women who have lived secluded lives”.⁸⁹ In time, market operators found women satisfactory employees—and willing to work for lower pay. By the close of the war, women had made inroads in the otherwise impenetrable management and butchery positions.

⁸⁸ Halper, “Supermarket Use Part Six,” 251.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 261.

The earlier section on sensory experience illustrates the contemporary thinking on supermarket design, which focused on appealing to women's imagination and "delicate" senses—one trade article summed the concept simply as "men think—women *feel*".⁹⁰

The sensory experience of grocery shopping was deliberately tailored to encourage impulse shopping, which, according to prevailing stereotypes, women were most vulnerable to: as Adam Mack describes, "leaders in the supermarket business . . . deliberately targeted what they saw as women's base physical desires, contending that female consumption derived not from rational calculations, but rather from irrational "impulses" encouraged by sellers who knew how to manipulate the female sensory apparatus".⁹¹

The visual aesthetic of supermarket interiors was chosen specifically to complement not only the food on offer, but women's fashions and tastes, particularly in the early postwar period. Like contemporary trends in appliances, the austere white interiors of markets gave way to polychromy, signifying a break from wartime austerity and the arrival of a new era of middle-class prosperity and choice.⁹² On-trend pastels were specifically suggested, as one trade publication implored, to flatter the presumptive female customer's sense of style and complement her clothing.⁹³ To complement the scene, piped-in music featured pop hits with romantic lyrical themes. while one 1960 flyer described shopper loyalty as a "love affair".⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Mack, "Speaking of Tomatoes," 822.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 817.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 824.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 824.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 825.

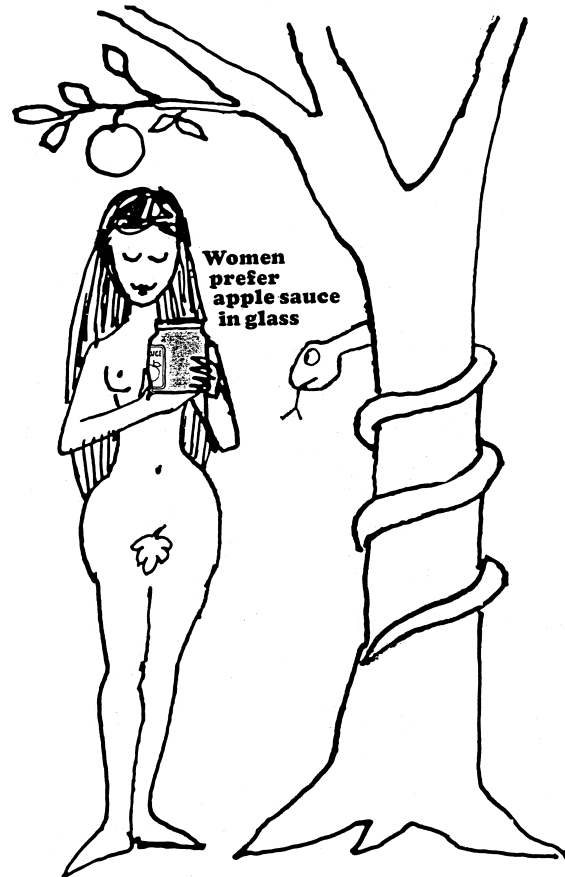
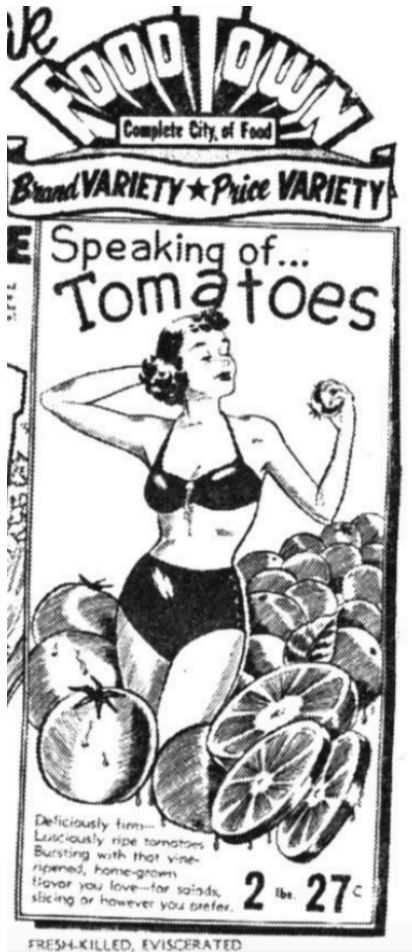


Fig 12 (left): A 1955 circular ad in *The Washington Post* advertising “deliciously firm, lusciously ripe tomatoes”. Adam Mack argues such imagery was intended to appeal to the sexuality of the domestic housewife. (Mack)

Fig 13 (right): An illustration accompanying a 1964 shoppers’ survey in *Progressive Grocer*. Images of fertility and indulgence were prevalent in marketing materials. (Bowlby)

Advertising and imagery further reinforced the image of women shoppers as both objectified and aspirational. One mural in a Publix, ostensibly intended to illustrate the exotic tropical produce for sale, featured “an insubstantially dressed woman” bearing a platter of fruit, linking sexuality and fertility, as well as maternal nurturing, with the act of dining.⁹⁵ A 1955 circular for Washington, D.C.’s Food Town featured a bikini-clad model in an advertisement for “deliciously firm, lusciously ripe” tomatoes.⁹⁶ Contemporaneously, supermarket grand-opening events frequently featured bathing suit and beauty pageant contestants. While all the preceding

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 825.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 831.

imagery, at face value, appears to appeal to the male gaze, as men grew as a shopping demographic, marketers were conscious of the fact that women were, in fact, their primary audience; Mack concludes that the sexualized advertising imagery “held out the housewife as a highly sexual being, but one who happily contained her desires within the confines of an institution - the supermarket - that helped her fulfill a conservative domestic role.”⁹⁷ Mack further notes that advertising, as well as internal discourse in trade publications, acknowledged traditionally restrictive gender roles yet offered an escapism from traditional domestic norms.⁹⁸



Fig. 14: a promotional image featuring a Portland-area Safeway in 1952 sporting a vibrant pastel color scheme. While the use of color in design was intended to differentiate between departments, the color palette reflected contemporary women’s fashion, in order to appeal to the consumer. (Pleasant Family Shopping)

⁹⁷ Ibid, 832.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 834.

Across the retail landscape, the act of shopping is viewed as a distinctly domestic, and thus female-centric affair. In the early stages of designing the Cherry Hill Mall in suburban New Jersey, architect Victor Gruen was cognizant of suburbia as the domain of housewives, a “‘Feminine World’ breeding conformities and limited life experiences — and one potentially rife with ‘mental health hazards,’”⁹⁹ which utopian architecture sought to address through controlled spatial experiences. The commercial developer, too, boasted the mall “would enrich the lives of the people of the Cherry Hill area.”¹⁰⁰ Indeed, civic activities normally the domain of the urban public space were programmed, including political and women's' group meetings.

Like supermarkets decades before, retailers and shopping center proprietors gave women a sense of actualization and agency, acknowledging ‘women’s expertise’ in all roles domestic; they further offered escapism (indeed, like the exotic murals in produce aisles, Cherry Hill Mall featured a tropical aviary) and aspiration beyond the suburban mundane. Yet these acknowledgements remained patriarchal: women may know the affairs of the home, but business leaders know women. Ultimately, they served primarily as marketing tools, but their complex relationships with traditional gender roles shifted with time.

Advertising

While most other consumer brands today advertise across numerous multimedia channels, supermarkets still heavily rely on the flashy newspaper circular. While newspaper advertising had been common practice for grocers in the days before mass media, it was during the chain-store and supermarket eras when it took its familiar form. In advance of opening his groundbreaking store, Michael Cullen ran advertising touting himself “The Price Wrecker,”¹⁰¹ a

⁹⁹ Stephanie Dyer, “Designing ‘Community’ in the Cherry Hill Mall: The Social Production of a Consumer Space,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9 (2003): 264.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 265.

¹⁰¹ Mayo, *American Grocery Store*, 141.

moniker that would grace the storefront as well. Newspaper advertisements prominently featured prices of goods and news of the latest sales, effectively allowing the customer to shop around before even setting foot in a store. Supermarkets took to discounting and heavily promoting certain brand name ‘loss-leader’ items, in hopes of getting customers to set foot in the door.¹⁰² Supermarkets in effect weren’t pitching *products*, but prices.

The grand-opening ceremony became another mainstay, growing in popularity as supermarkets expanded their national reach.

Clarence Saunders drew attention at the opening of Piggly Wiggly in 1916 by presenting a rose to every redheaded woman in attendance.¹⁰³ Within a few decades, grand-opening ceremonies became extravagant affairs, with “all the trappings of a gala Hollywood premiere.”¹⁰⁴ As television became widespread, the events were broadcast, featuring models on parade, giveaways and raffles, and local celebrity appearances. One A&P in Seattle featured a world-record skindiving attempt in a large swimming pool brought in for the occasion. With 17,000 supermarkets in operation nationwide by 1953,¹⁰⁵ and more coming quickly, opening galas were a common Sunday morning event.



Fig. 15: A 1935 advertisement for New Jersey-based Big Bear’s holiday sales. While grocers advertising in local papers wasn’t a new phenomenon, the first generation of supermarkets set the pattern of splashy illustrations and hyperbolic copy. (Bowlby)

¹⁰² Ibid., 123-4.

¹⁰³ Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 140.

¹⁰⁴ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 131.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Though television was most frequently the realm of national consumer brands, supermarkets took to sponsorship on the small screen. Most visibly, stores were the setting of the game show *Supermarket Sweep*, where housewives delegated their husbands to race to complete a shopping list, a spectacle *Eater* derided as “like most game shows, it is about nothing.”¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the series was wildly popular, airing in different incarnations across three decades. The game show spawned an entire international genre of shopping-spree programs, each hosted by a different chain.

¹⁰⁶ Jaime Fuller, “A Journey Through the Many Worlds of ‘Supermarket Sweep,’” *Eater*, October 23, 2017, <https://www.eater.com/2017/10/23/16500150/international-supermarket-sweep>.

GRAND OPENING!

Wednesday July 19th - 9 a.m.

Prices also effective at the following Stores
Wednesday - Thursday - Friday - Saturday - July 19 - 20 - 21 - 22

2363 N. W. 80th 462 N. 36th 5701-22nd Ave. NW 8704 Greenwood
7104 Greenwood 10342 Aurora Ave. N. 155th & Aurora 15th Ave. N.W. & N. W. 85th



As Modern As Tomorrow

15th Ave. N.W. and N.W. 85th-Olympic Manor

Official Ribbon Cutting by
"Mike" Mitchell
Councilman at Large
Wednesday - 9 a.m.
Attend this Great Gala Celebration

FREE COFFEE and DONUTS

FREE PRIZES

16 Foot ALJO House Trailer

STANDARD EQUIPMENT AND FEATURES:

- Assist handle.
- Directional signals and tail lights designed to contribute to highway safety.
- Usually ample driver and passenger space for a trailer of its size—full length windshield.
- Colored appliances to match decor—coast type range, 100-pound ice box (gas refrigerator available as extra accessory).
- Two large baggage doors for unobstructed storage.
- Homesmarting lighting fixtures.
- Drop-in "House of Fay."
- Extra large breadboard.
- Acid and stainless-steel sink and table top.
- Double bunk bed.
- Bureau light.
- Twelve-gallon water tank and pump.
- Plastic dinette seats—39 inches wide.
- Aluminum screen door.
- Lighter bureau lock.

FEATURING:

- ★ The very latest in travel trailer design.
- ★ Quality-controlled workmanship.
- ★ The finest of materials and fixtures.
- ★ Balanced color harmony.

**Length 15 feet 8 inches; Width 7 feet
Inside Height 6½ feet; Weight 1550 lbs.
Hitch Weight 190 lbs.**

Automation formed aluminum siding and roof — all seems locked for maximum strength.

Mink Stole
Genuine Mink—Every woman's dream!
Retail Value \$395.00

19" -TV Set
Silvertone Suburbanite Portable
Weight 37 lbs.
Retail Value \$159.95

7-Steam Irons
General Electric
Latest in Design
Enter—NOW!

"TEENY"
Safeway's Magical Clown
Fun for Youngsters and Oldsters alike
Wednesday—Thursday—Friday
12 Noon to 6 pm



Manning's BAKERY

Chocolate Cake
Green made with real German Chocolate and topped with chocolate icing. Retailer price etc. Special **75¢**

Bear Claws
MANNING'S—Fresh Daily Baked and served for breakfast. **4 for 39¢**

Ed Schatz
NEW STORE MANAGER

Formerly from the old store at 8315 N. W. 15th. "Ed" will be more than happy to serve you personally and will assure you that you can enjoy shopping at the new store where everything is arranged for shopping convenience.

EARLY BIRD AWARDS

To the first 200 Ladies to enter our store Wednesday and Thursday mornings.

Potato Chips
LUNCH BOX Triple Pack **49¢**

Cherub Milk
8 Tall Cans **\$1.00**

M. D. Tissue
4 Roll Pack **33¢**

Detergent 59¢
White Magic 49¢-45¢ Pkg.

LETTUCE
Red Leaf or Romaine For Summer Salads
Each 5¢

FREE Coffee & Donuts
During the 4 Day Grand Opening—Featuring Mrs. Wright's Fresh Donuts and Edwards Coffee

T.V. Dinners SWANSON'S Assorted Each **49¢**

Miracle Whip Quart Jar **49¢**

Marshmallows FLUFF-L-2-in. EST Pkg. **39¢**

Instant Milk LUCERNE 12-Oz. Dtn. **79¢**

Waldorf Tissue 4-Roll Pack **29¢**

SMOKED PICNICS

PIERCE BRAND LEAN and TENDER
6 to 8 POUNDS Lb. **29¢**

CORNED BEEF
SAFEWAY Mild Cured Delicious With Cabbage. Lb. **59¢**



SAFEWAY

Fig. 16: A circular ad for a new Safeway in Seattle's Olympic Manor neighborhood in 1961. Opening ceremonies featured appearances by dignitaries, prize raffles, and in this case, an appearance from the chain's "magical clown". (Seattle Times archive)

12 1/2 Block Seattle Street Wednesday, Sept. 13, 1956




IN ALL THIS MODERN WORLD

Grand Opening Thursday, September 13 ... your Crown Hill Tradewell. Designed for you ... the modern American woman. Wide aisles, tremendous selection, most modern of fixtures ... pleasing colors and fitting music. This store was created for YOUR shopping pleasure.

Shop in haste, shop in comfort.
Shop in friendly, spacious Tradewell.

8532
15th Ave. N.W.

FREE!



No Finer Store Than Your New Crown Hill Tradewell!

Prices Good At Crown Hill & Ballard Only!

PRICES ARE ALSO EFFECTIVE AT THE BALLARD TRADEWELL — 15th N. W. & MARKET STREET

SOUP Campbell's Tomato **3/29¢**
Cranberry **3/29¢**

STORE HOURS
Crown Hill Store (8532 15th Ave. N.W.)
Ballard Store (15th & Market)
Downtown Store (1st & Pike)
University Store (15th & University)

FREE!

The first one hundred ladies through the store during the grand opening will receive a complimentary gift. (Subject to availability. Limited to one gift per customer. Gift to be given on a first-come, first-served basis.)



Fig. 17: In addition to the newest products and prices, advertisements often touted the store's pleasant shopping experience. This 1956 ad for a North Seattle Tradewell proclaimed it was "Designed for you...the modern American Woman . . . This store was created for YOUR shopping pleasure." (Seattle Times)

The Supermarket in Pop Culture

As the supermarket reached maturity by the middle of the 20th century, its place in cultural memory was cemented. The market became the locus of consumer identity, activity, and socialization. In spite of competing chains and wares, a universal typology, and subsequently experience, emerged. The commonality of the experience of grocery shopping became a cultural touchstone.

During the emergence of the Modern movement in art in the early 1960s, artists sought to differentiate ‘sameness’ in the field of nonrepresentational art, much the same way consumer products seek to differentiate themselves: while Pop Art practitioners borrowed formal and color cues from commercial products and media, Abstract Expressionism took inspiration from the banality of the shopping space.¹⁰⁷

In 1964, two years after the exhibition of his well-known *Campbell’s Soup Cans*, Andy Warhol held an art show modeled after a supermarket, with objets d’art as constructed food products. “American Supermarket” featured sculpture imitations of common products by both Pop Art stars and replica food designers alongside their prototypes; to complete the setting, gallery staff took orders on grocers’ pads.¹⁰⁸ Though the exhibit elicited the question “What makes it art?” that had been asked of Marcel Duchamp’s ‘readymade’ sculptures, the contextual setting of gallery as supermarket questioned the differences between mass consumption and art consumption. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of real product and facsimile, in the case of *Brillo Boxes*, advertising “Shines Aluminum Fast,” explores the fiction of advertising and consumer choice¹⁰⁹: though identical, one box contains items of utility, while the other carefully designed and constructed, yet empty, package. Like much of Warhol’s work, “American Supermarket”

¹⁰⁷ David Salomon, “Fluorescent Architecture, or, Dan Flavin at the Supermarket,” *The Journal of Architecture* 19, no. 6 (November 2, 2014): 960, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2014.987532>.

¹⁰⁸ David J. Alworth, “Supermarket Sociology,” *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 315.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

blurs the differentiation between commercial design and fine art, while implying a more cynical motive behind advertisement.

In contrast, artist Dan Flavin worked with the other ubiquitous feature of shopping centers: the fluorescent lamp, an object that exists to disappear into the background of space. Beginning with *the diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Constantin Brancusi)*, a single fixture placed against a wall akin to a painting, Flavin's body of work constructs experiential spaces of light, devoid of object. The effect is simultaneously banal and sensorially extraordinary, tangible and ethereal.

His final, untitled, installation in 1996 at the Menil Collection in Houston is fittingly housed in a former 1930s supermarket.¹¹⁰ In it, multicolored tubes are installed along perimeter walls at shelf height. Were the installation turned off, the space is simply an empty box, programmatically ambiguous; the fluorescent tubes both define the space as a market and decontextualize it, calling attention to the cues given by lighting.¹¹¹

There was some recognition of the routine monotony of grocery shopping within the industry, again, particularly in the homebound lifestyle of the postwar housewife, that resulted in chains holding in-store events such as tastings or product demonstrations: as early as 1940, *Chain Store Age* acknowledged that "many a shopper comes in daily in an effort to break up the monotony of her existence,"¹¹² imploring that spontaneous, interactive events within stores can be as much a social event as a sales tactic. The supermarket became the locus of activity in one's daily life, albeit one with carefully orchestrated social interactions expressly with the intent of attracting sales.

¹¹⁰ Salomon, "Fluorescent Architecture," 967.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 969.

¹¹² "Demonstrations," *Chain Store Age*, January 1940.



Fig. 18: The 1964 exhibition *American Supermarket* transformed a gallery into a grocery store, with inert facsimiles of well-known products for sale. The show questioned and critiqued the notion of shopping as a pastime, the division between fine art and product design, and the definition of false advertising. (Henri Dauman, *Life Magazine*)



Fig. 19: Dan Flavin's 1996 installation *untitled* occupies a former Houston supermarket, its patterns and colors evoking the rhythm and spatial organization of the former space. (Salomon)

The uncanny mundanity of modern grocery shopping is pervasive in literature, as the symbolic setting of works ranging from Allen Ginsberg's "Supermarket in California," John Updike's short story "A&P," to passages of *White Noise* by Don DeLillo. Like Warhol's installation, these pieces critique or satirize consumerist culture, as symbolic of anti-intellectualism. In examining these fictional settings, critic David Alworth identifies the supermarket's social dynamic as "a microethnography of humans and nonhumans in a given site, a portrait of sociality that includes the inapprehensible, or partially apprehensible, 'swarming life' of foodstuffs, things, physical infrastructures, and technical objects."¹¹³ He cites "A&P" as the first literary example to explore this dynamic, in which several young women in bathing suits enter the titular store, an event that singularly shatters the construction of the shopper-object interaction.¹¹⁴ Shoppers otherwise engrossed in choosing their products, facilitated by technology of comfort and display, are distracted by the sudden corporeal appearance, subverting the intentions of the market.

The supermarket-set passages of *White Noise* exemplify similar themes of social order and agency defined by non-human entities. In its closing, DeLillo describes the social chaos when customers find shelves rearranged: "There is agitation and panic in the aisles . . . clusters of well-dressed figures frozen in the aisles, trying to figure out the pattern, discern the underlying logic, trying to remember where they'd seen the Cream of Wheat".¹¹⁵ When the order of products is disrupted, social behavior is too, and shoppers grow suspicious of betrayal by these objects.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Alworth, "Supermarket Sociology," 306.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 315.

¹¹⁵ Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York, NY: Viking, 1985), 325.

¹¹⁶ Alworth, "Supermarket Sociology," 322.

The Supermarket in Urban Design

In the realm of contemporary urban form, the ersatz public space of the supermarket anticipated the increasingly privatization of the city, and architecture as a commoditized product: in “Big Burb,” critic Christopher Knight observes the façade overhaul of a local chain supermarket: “Structurally, there wasn’t any need to repackage this vulgar neighborhood building, except insofar as commercial fashion requires that packaging be perpetually modified.”¹¹⁷ The core object, the retail space, remains unchanged, but has become too familiar and stale; like the products within, the shell must be repackaged to hold attention.

Writing in 1994, some two decades after Robert Venturi’s *Learning from Las Vegas*, Knight observes the convergence of monumental imagery with commercial architecture. The triumphal arch of antiquity is commercialized, “where the ceremony they mark is point-of-sale, the procession they straddle a victorious parade of modern consumerism.”¹¹⁸ The result is a blurring of urban and suburban space, where historically the former is the locus of public and civic life as a byproduct of commerce, and the former marked by privacy and refuge, with commerce substituting for civic activity. Hollywood’s Universal Citywalk outdoor mall is held up as one of the many examples of attempts to privatize urban public space, or, conversely, urbanize the suburban commercial setting, of which Los Angeles has a lengthy history of experimenting with: “it’s a virtual reality where the public world has been recreated as a theme park, which can be visited as a temporary distraction from your confining private realm.”¹¹⁹ The microcosm of the supermarket—shopping as entertainment in a pleasant, air-conditioned forum—is expanded to encompass a liminal new-urban space where public life is controlled by commerce.

¹¹⁷ Christopher Knight, “Big ’Burb,” *Design Quarterly*, no. 162 (1994): 2, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4091355>.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

The Supermarket's Future

Like fashion, supermarket trends are ever cyclical, as grocers rehash and refine techniques of the past while chasing the twin imperatives of cost reduction and customer convenience, swinging between novelty and nostalgia. Clarence Saunders, the founder of pioneering store Piggly Wiggly, experimented with a space-age 'robotic' store in 1945. Customers chose products from display cases with a key, where they were delivered by conveyor belt directly to the checkstand.¹²⁰ The shopper need only stop at the cashier to pay a pre-calculated bill, pick up her groceries, and be on her way. Perhaps the absence of the sensory experience Carl Dipman touted was too abrupt, and the concept quickly faded away.

Writing in 1985, historian Chester Liebs hypothesized that "perhaps the day is not far off when shop-at-home systems using closed-circuit TV may render the supermarket extinct,"¹²¹ a technological twist to the old delivery-on-credit schemes neighborhood grocers offered nearly a century before. The abundance of affordable personal computers and nascent online services promised to digitize every aspect of our day-to-day lives, but it took decades for this to come to fruition.

Today, in 2019, both of these futuristic ideas of shopping have materialized in some form or another. Just over a decade after Lieb's prediction, Webvan began taking grocery orders online and delivering direct to customers' doors, and a handful of companies, swept up in the e-commerce boom of the late 1990s, followed suit. Their heyday was brief and downfall swift, as the nascent dot-com startups learned that building out a distribution network to rival those of

¹²⁰ Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 141.

¹²¹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 135.

nearly century-old legacy supermarkets was a massively expensive undertaking.¹²² Today's home-delivery revival, with the likes of Instacart and Postmates, employs proxy shoppers to visit brick-and-mortar stores for the end-users' convenience.

Saunders's futuristic vision of mechanical automation was realized last year as Amazon Go, a cashier-less convenience store enabled by machine vision and artificial-intelligence technology; customers simply place items in their cart, and the store's myriad sensors tally up the tab to be billed electronically. Leveraging Amazon's existing and extensive distribution system, as well as that of recently-purchased Whole Foods, allows the store to scale up to 2,000 future outlets,¹²³ avoiding the pitfalls of the earlier entrants into the delivery game.

Saunders and Dipman might be proud to see the state of grocery marketing today: customers have no impediments from car to produce bin to checkout stand, if one might exist, few customer-facing clerks, and any number of convenience and impulse purchases. Delivery and automated shopping dematerializes and depersonalizes what is one of the last retail sectors still dominated by brick-and-mortar stores.

It remains to be seen if the grocery industry will continue to hold steady as a primarily brick-and-mortar realm or capitulate to an online-based model the way other sectors have. Among legacy stores, the trend of divergent sizes of stores continues, as chains expand to ever larger suburban outlets, while downsizing in urban markets. For example, Kroger's "Marketplace" concept stores—"the primary growth format of the future"—such as Fred Meyer and Fry's, average 161,000 square feet anchoring large suburban shopping centers.¹²⁴ In contrast, Trader Joes, the US division of German chain Aldi Nord, are around one-fifteenth of that size, at 10,000 square feet. On the heels of Trader Joes' success, numerous other chains,

¹²² Relan, Peter, "Where Webvan Failed And How Home Delivery 2.0 Could Succeed," *TechCrunch* (blog), September 27, 2013, <http://social.techcrunch.com/2013/09/27/why-webvan-failed-and-how-home-delivery-2-0-is-addressing-the-problems/>.

¹²³ Laura Stevens and Khadeeja Safdar, "Amazon Working on Several Grocery-Store Formats, Could Open More Than 2,000 Locations," *Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 2016, sec. Tech, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/amazon-grocery-store-concept-to-open-in-seattle-in-early-2017-1480959119>.

¹²⁴ "Kroger Fact Book 2015" (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Kroger Co., 2015), <http://ir.kroger.com/file/4004136/Index?KeyFile=1500086312>, 12

including Target and Whole Foods, are following suit and opening small, limited-selection stores in downtown areas.¹²⁵ The supermarket has essentially come full-circle, returning to the size of the prewar combination market but with today's modern conveniences.

What is evident is the slow extinction of the familiar, middle-of-the-road format that proliferated in the postwar years in cities and their older suburbs. Though many of these are still operated by legacy chains, others have been supplanted by larger stores further afield and repurposed, redeveloped, or simply lie fallow. Online delivery services hold potential for addressing the widening food deserts resulting from store closures,¹²⁶ but their efficacy remains uncertain; geographic barriers to food security are removed, but delivery services' markup and subscription costs raise questions of affordability.

The popularity of delivery is a high-tech twist on a century-old tradition. Before supermarkets, eggs and dairy products were not always purchased at a store, but frequently delivered to the doorstep by the local creamery, one less stop to be made on the weekly grocery trip. Today's delivery services utilize electronic payment processing and digital inventory to fulfill orders, but the physical process is still relatively human dependent: local supermarket employees pick items off the shelf, and deliver to end customers by automobile.¹²⁷ However, like other on-demand logistics services, there is a growing concern that the convenience of outsourcing one's shopping will lead to frequent impulse purchasing over consolidating shopping trips—a boon to retailers' bottom lines, but at the expense of clogging our streets with thousands of delivery vehicles.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Tom Ryan, "Are Smaller Stores a Big Opportunity for Supermarkets?," *RetailWire* (blog), accessed February 19, 2019, <https://www.retailwire.com/discussion/are-smaller-stores-a-big-opportunity-for-supermarkets/>.

¹²⁶ Elizabeth Segran, "This Online Grocer Wants To End Food Deserts By Underselling Amazon," *Fast Company*, March 27, 2018, <https://www.fastcompany.com/40548351/this-online-grocer-wants-to-end-food-deserts-by-underselling-amazon>.

¹²⁷ Christina Bonnington, "Amazon's 'Free' Grocery-Delivery Service Will Be Insanely Convenient. That's Going to Cost Us.," *Slate Magazine*, February 9, 2018, <https://slate.com/technology/2018/02/amazons-whole-foods-delivery-service-could-be-a-revolution-of-the-grocery-industry.html>.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

As it stands today, Amazon's PrimeNow, for example, relies on the physical infrastructure of recently-acquired Whole Foods supermarket chain to house goods before delivery. Yet the fate of physical stores remains in question, whether delivery demand will supplant the supermarket the way e-commerce did the big-box retailer and move to a warehouse model, or if stores will atrophy to small convenience stores. Between expanding delivery options and their Go stores, Amazon appears to be hedging bets on both sides.



Fig. 20: After several false starts in the dot-com boom of the 1990s, grocery delivery services took off in the last decade, leveraging the existing supermarket distribution infrastructure. Using computer vision technology to eliminate cashiers, Amazon Go fulfills the early supermarket goal of minimizing labor and overhead cost. Shown is the Go store inside the former Bon Marché department store in Seattle, where old retail has given way to new. (*Supermarket News*)

3. Preservation issues

In the introduction of *A Richer Heritage*, a collection of essays examining preservation issues that emerged since the National Historic Preservation Act's passage, Robert Stipe attempts to answer the existential question of the field: why? Protecting our beautiful buildings and the physical legacy of history are the simplest and most obvious answers to address, and have served as the purpose of the field since its inception. Only recently has broader social value been identified as a component of preservation: "Most important of all, we seek to preserve because we have discovered— all too belatedly— that preservation can serve important human and social purposes in our society. Ancestor worship and aesthetic motivations are no longer enough. Our traditional concern with great events, great people, and great architects will not serve the larger society in any full measure."¹²⁹ As the preservation field, and greater communities, are now realizing, there is a breadth of properties rich in value beyond historic artifacts to be mined.

In examining the historic significance of an early Philadelphia-area shopping mall, Stephanie Dyer remarks that the "professionalization of of real estate development, a long process that accelerated over the course of the past century, largely removed the shaping of common landscapes of ordinary Americans in metropolitan areas from their direct control."¹³⁰ In other words, the ordinary landscape of the built environment is no longer 'vernacular' in the traditional sense, but shaped by larger professional and economic forces, but nonetheless embodies rich social meaning. Dyer identifies the Cherry Hill (New Jersey) Mall, like other suburban shopping centers, as excluded from the vernacular canon due to its professional design, yet valuable for its history of intertwining social value with economic success. "[to] look

¹²⁹ Robert E Stipe, *A Richer Heritage Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century.*, Richard Hampton Jenrette Series in Architecture & the Decorative Arts (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹³⁰ Dyer, "Designing Community," 263.

for vernacular meanings in the productions of the modern real estate industry is to find shifting value that can be as ephemeral as fashion”¹³¹.

The architectural interchangeability of the supermarket, as well as other related typologies, ensured success in its simple replication and proliferation, but this same anonymity makes the case for preservation difficult under current methodologies. Even among other midcentury properties, the supermarket is, for the most part, generic: it lacks the stylistic flair of roadside attractions, the architectural pedigree of master-built homes, nor the historic mystique of industrial relics. Furthermore, while they are disappearing, supermarkets of this era are plentiful enough that very few have the honorific of a superlative distinction—“the best,” “the last,” “the most exemplary” of the type.

Why Formal Preservation?

As with other older structures, suburban and highway architecture since bypassed by modern shopping centers find new uses in an ad-hoc, self-selected manner: a gas station becomes a take-out restaurant, a drive-in cinema hosts a flea market. Former supermarket shells prove to be low-cost and easily adaptable structures for purposes requiring large and otherwise costly space. In Phoenix, Arizona and its surrounding environs, where retail vacancy rates stood at 11% in 2013, 168 former markets and big-box stores stood empty.¹³² These former stores provided low-cost space to new tenants, few of whom include shopping-oriented uses, including a new charter school and family recreation center.

In markets like Phoenix, with a glut of leasable space, obsolete retailers are a problem that seemingly find new community purpose through grassroots redevelopment. Examples like

¹³¹ Ibid., 273.

¹³² Parker Leavitt, “Vacant Grocery Stores in Metro Phoenix Find New Uses,” *The Arizona Republic*, November 14, 2014, <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/gilbert/2014/11/14/vacant-grocery-stores-find-creative-new-uses/19062583/>.

this naturally elicit the question of why, exactly, formal historic designation is really necessary when self-preservation abounds.

The resurgent interest in urbanism has yielded countless benefits for cities, from walkability and density to general improvements in quality of life, but of course this comes at the cost of demolition; the low-rise, parking intensive retail structures of the recent past are the first line of casualties, incompatible with urban values and, more directly, of lesser economic value than intensive development. Yet this line of reasoning, or an inversion of it, was the impetus for the contemporary preservation movement. Half a century ago, it was older buildings in the urban fabric destroyed in the name of progress, namely freeways, parking, and other modern amenities.

It perhaps seems strange that now there is an imperative to save the very structures preservationists fought against half a century ago, yet as they have become ingrained in the community, they serve purposes more valuable than simply generating commerce. In Seattle, there is a rich history of minority communities appropriating disused commercial space of this era. In the Central District, the historic center of the city's Black and African-American community, Promenade 23 was conceived in 1970¹³³ as a multi-block shopping and residential center, fairly typical of urban renewal projects of the era. While the project never materialized in full, leaving a gaping outdoor mall in an otherwise dense fabric, businesses and organizations serving the immediate community made the failed development home.

For over 25 years, the shopping center was anchored by a branch of the local Red Apple market chain, selling a unique selection of products shunned by other retailers. "A lot of black people from Federal Way and Renton drive all the way to our store because they can't get some of the things we sell out there," an employee told *The Stranger* in 2016.¹³⁴ A constellation of

¹³³ Polly Lane, "New Name, New Image for Seattle's Central City," *Seattle Times*, March 27, 1977.

¹³⁴ Charles Mudede, "The Coming Death of One of Seattle's Few Black-Loved Supermarkets," *The Stranger*, August 24, 2016, <https://www.thestranger.com/slog/2016/08/24/24503336/the-coming-death-of-one-of-seattles-few-black-loved-supermarkets>.

minority-owned businesses filled out the remainder of the center, such as clothing stores, restaurants, and a print shop.

Promenade 23 came down in 2018, to be replaced by a project of equal breadth and ambition as the original, this time with an architectural focus on high-density housing and rebuilding a walkable business district. Noble virtues for the spatial realm of the neighborhood, but at the expense of cultural displacement. Though the developer, Vulcan, promised retail space for those displaced, it is unlikely any will afford to return. Michael Moss, manager at the former Red Apple, acknowledged that rents in the new building were simply too high to be optimistic: "We don't want to end up having to be here for a year and then go out of business."¹³⁵

For the Central District, preservation failed twice: first, in allowing the destruction of the physical fabric of the neighborhood in the 1970s, and second, in failing to prevent the destruction of cultural fabric that had knit back together in the wake of the former. In each case, physical disruption came by outside intervention; historic protection may have given the district further agency to define its own legacy. Additionally, with only eight percent of National Register sites representing minority, women and LGBTQ communities,¹³⁶ failure to take action was a gravely missed opportunity to increase the diversity of recognized landmarks.

The deficiencies in the Criteria For Preservation

When codified in 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act granted protection to eligible properties prior to 1916, long before the era of mass suburban construction. The backdrop of this legislation was the looming threat of urban renewal, which promised to

¹³⁵ Joshua McNichols, "Red Apple, at Heart of Black Seattle, Likely to Close, Making Way for Vulcan," KUOW-FM, accessed February 25, 2019, <http://archive.kuow.org/post/red-apple-heart-black-seattle-likely-close-making-way-vulcan>.

¹³⁶ Patrice Frey, "Why Historic Preservation Needs a New Approach," CityLab, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.citylab.com/perspective/2019/02/tax-credit-historic-preservation-old-town-main-street/581989/>.

redevelop so-called blighted properties seemingly fallen into disrepair. Ostensibly, these threatened properties' obsolescence was precisely what made them valuable: mostly unchanged over the years, older structures were a window into the past.

Much has changed since that date, both in the threatening factors and how preservation has responded. As mentioned, increased interest in urban living, combined with a greater appreciation of historic places,¹³⁷ presents a challenging dichotomy.

The process of nomination to the National Register of Historic Places is proscribed by the Department of the Interior in *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, which summarizes eligibility in two points: a property must be "associated with a historic context *and* [retains] historic integrity of those features necessary to convey its significance."¹³⁸ While these twin imperatives appear flexibly subjective, the Bulletin lays out specific definitions of significance, listed under four discrete criteria:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. That embody 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; or
- D. That have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.¹³⁹

The criteria themselves are fairly self-explanatory, and can be essentially summarized as asking, "did something or someone historic happen, or happen to live, here? Is this property a unique example of what it is? And is this valuable for research?"

Supermarkets, like the vast majority of properties, may conceivably fall under Criterion A, for reasons illustrated in preceding chapters. A minority of those may also fall under Criterion

¹³⁷ "Reclaiming the Past in Bricks and Mortar: New Study Reveals Millennials' Desire to Connect with Historic Places," National Trust for Historic Preservation, June 27, 2017, <https://savingplaces.org/press-center/media-resources/new-study-reveals-millennials-desire-to-connect-with-historic-places>.

¹³⁸ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation," 1997, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/pdfs/nrb15.pdf>, 3.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

C, with caveats, should they be particularly architecturally unique. In certain contexts, the case may be easily made that a certain supermarket is emblematic of Another National Register Bulletin, *Historical Residential Suburbs*, acknowledges the development of suburban districts and building typologies, including shopping centers, as important cultural landscapes in the context of American history, yet as a guideline, recommends nomination context statements be crafted to “relate local patterns to both broad national trends and the specific events that influenced the growth of the metropolitan area”.¹⁴⁰

While this approach may be applicable to planned suburban communities and highway strips, it overlooks the immediate significance of a given property, especially one without a greater congruent context. This is especially true in urban contexts like those in Seattle, where supermarkets appeared on the periphery of now-historic districts, whose period of significance is often decades earlier.

One such case is the Columbia City Tradewell, built in 1957 on Rainier Avenue just north of the Columbia City Historic District. Though its award-winning thin-shell concrete construction, designed by noted Los Angeles architect Welton Beckett may have earned it landmark status under Criteria B and C, a 2008 historic review noted that the structure post-dated the District’s early 20th century character and period of significance by several decades.¹⁴¹ The same report, however, notes Columbia City’s, and the greater Rainer Valley’s, significance as a place of refuge for numerous ethnic and immigrant groups through the end of the 20th century.

In the last decades of its existence, as Columbia City grew into a destination district for South Seattle, Tradewell served as the neighborhood’s variety store in the guise of Columbia Plaza. A 2006 profile on the shopping center in *The Stranger* detailed the multicultural

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, “Historic Residential Suburbs: Guidelines for Evaluation and Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places,” March 7, 2003, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/suburbs/intro.htm>.

¹⁴¹ BOLA Architects + Planners, “A Building in Historic Columbia City: Review of 4801 Rainier Avenue South / Tradewell Store for Columbia Plaza Development, LLC,” April 2008, http://columbiacity.wdfiles.com/local--files/land-use%3A4801-rainier-ave-s/Tradewell_-_Columbia_City_Review.pdf. 7.

microcosm inside the walls, where retailers representing Seattle’s most recent waves of immigrants—Korean, Vietnamese, Ethiopian—hawked sundries a block from the historic district packed with restaurants and breweries. The Historic District is a valuable, but purely physical relic of the south end’s history, but Columbia Plaza offered a living embodiment of it. Declined historic designation and demolished in 2015, it is now the site of an apartment building anchored by a grocery co-op, but at the loss of dozens of small businesses.

There is limited precedent for official designation of the supermarket typology on both national and local registers. In New Orleans, the inaugural store of the Schwegmann Bros. chain, built in 1946, is listed on the National Register under Criterion A, (“associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history”).¹⁴² The structure’s nomination recognizes the historic significance of rise of the large chain supermarket as both an economic transformation as well as well-known local institution, representing broader national trends in commerce. As a relatively utilitarian warehouse-type store, the architecture itself is of little importance, but its relative integrity, in spite of years of abandonment, to the original design secures the nomination.

At the local level, a Penn Fruit store in Philadelphia’s Frankford District secured listing on that city’s Register of Historic Places in 2016. Designed in a distinctive glass-front style emblematic of the chain, the 1954 store was nominated under Criterion A, as well as C (“reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style”) and D (“embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen”).¹⁴³ The supermarket in this case not only embodies the same historical significance as Schwegmann’s, but also architectural superlatives, as one of the last remaining unaltered locations of the chain’s distinctive, period-defining style.

¹⁴² National Register of Historic Places, “Schwegmann Bros. Giant Supermarket No. 1,” April 29, 2014, National Register No. 14000314, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/14000314.pdf>.

¹⁴³ Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, “Penn Fruit Supermarket, 5129-5135 Frankford Avenue,” April 28, 2016, <https://www.phila.gov/historical/Documents/5129-35-Frankford-Ave-nom.pdf>.

While triumphs for preserving postwar history, both examples illustrate the deficiencies of the nomination process. Regardless of their historical significance to the local community, integrity—the lack of identifiable changes to appearance—was critical to the nominations’ approval. Each provided long service to their communities as grocery stores, necessitating few alterations over decades of use; it is by happenstance that these two examples survived in their original form. Countless other examples altered for new purposes, or simply remodeled in the industry’s omnipresent push for modernization, are offered no such amnesty. A threshold must be drawn to prevent the abuse, or overuse, of the nomination process, but adherence to architectural integrity ignores potential social history.

Furthermore, historic protections stymie the destruction of local assets in the face of redevelopment, but potentially hinder adaptive reuse through strict aesthetic regulation. Since the closure of Thriftway, housed in the Penn Fruit structure, shortly after designation, the transit-adjacent site lies boarded up, another eyesore on an economically depressed neighborhood. Community business leaders wish for neighborhood reinvestment: “People are interested in the location . . . there’s zero interest in the historic designation,” a representative of the Frankford Community Development Corporation told the Philadelphia Inquirer, who deemed the building potentially “unusable” out of development restrictions resulting from the designation.¹⁴⁴ Other stakeholders question the utility of preserving a low-density, auto-centric site adjacent a major transit hub in a district that needs quality affordable housing.

Local preservationists are optimistic about the future return of a grocery store in the neighborhood—“It had a 60-year run as a grocery store. I don’t see why it couldn’t continue,” one told the paper, while a local resident stated “every neighborhood needs a supermarket”—but prevailing economic forces and needed building updates make this property a less-than-attractive investment prospect. With the loss of Thriftway, Frankford has become a food desert. In the current framework of preservation, there is little room to compromise and adapt to

¹⁴⁴ Jason Laughlin, “Transit-Rich and Ripe for Revival, Frankford Struggles to Make Space for Penn Fruit Landmark,” <https://www.philly.com>, accessed February 20, 2019, https://www.philly.com/philly/business/real_estate/frankford-philadelphia-penn-fruit-supermarket-landmark-septa-20180222.html.



Fig. 21: The former Frankford Penn Fruit, pictured in 2013 while still in operation as a supermarket. Today, the property is boarded up, and neighborhood stakeholders disagree over its immediate value to the community. (Peter Woodall, *Philadelphia Inquirer*)

changing uses. Frozen in time, Penn Fruit is a triumph in preserving unique architecture, but of mixed provenance for the neighborhood it sits in.

Upzoning

Between the popularity of upmarket, health-oriented stores and on-demand delivery, the traditional supermarket may appear to be obsolete, but their closure deeply affects those who rely on them. This is especially true in urban markets with rapidly ascending land value, where low-rise grocery stores are attractive redevelopment opportunities. In New York City, new projects on the site of supermarkets occasionally offer affordable housing and large retail space that may potentially host a high-profile grocery chain as a tenant,¹⁴⁵ which nominally appear to

¹⁴⁵ Tanay Warerkar, “New York City’s Disappearing Grocery Stores, Mapped,” Curbed NY, February 22, 2018, <https://ny.curbed.com/maps/new-york-grocery-stores-closing-real-estate>.

benefit the neighborhood, but the loss is a blow to existing residents. As upmarket stores move in, business lags at legacy supermarkets, making their closure more likely—“Stores like Trader Joe’s and Whole Foods are taking away business, but they’re not economically viable for a lot of people,” a shopper at the Park Slope Met Foods told *The Brooklyn Paper*, whose closure left few affordable grocery options in the area.¹⁴⁶

It is undetermined if formal protections would have saved these crucial neighborhood grocery stores; this certainly was not the case in Philadelphia. Yet it would have, at minimum, preserved the physical plant, and avoided the inevitable loss of affordable space and subsequent displacement. As currently written, there is no language in the National Register’s criteria, or the numerous local statues based upon them, that neatly covers local community value present in these examples.

¹⁴⁶ Noah Hurowitz, “Met Loss! B’Hill Met Foods Closure Sparks Shopper Agita,” *Brooklyn Paper*, accessed February 23, 2019, https://www.brooklynpaper.com/stories/37/31/dtg-smith-street-met-foods-2014-08-01-bk_37_31.html.

4. Seattle's Supermarkets

Mapping Seattle's Supermarkets

Early in the research phase of this project, a selection of supermarkets, extant and since demolished, was mapped and analyzed. By no means a complete listing, this database represents a broad section of markets built during the topical era. Weekly circulars and advertisements from The Seattle Times archives provided historical location and ownership data; these points were cross-checked with a simple Google Maps search for relevant contemporary businesses. Each extant building was referenced to square footage from the King County Tax Assessor's Office, which only provided contemporary sizes, including expansions and remodels. For clarity's sake, the scope was limited to within a few blocks of the Seattle municipal boundaries; modern supermarkets anchoring mixed-use structures, convenience and drugstores, and taxpayer-block markets were omitted.

The resulting data illustrates both the reflection of broader national trends, as well as local patterns in the microcosm of Seattle. Spatially, stores consistently tend to locate at intersections with arterial streets, a pattern set by the early drive-in markets of 1920s Los Angeles to attract motorists and accommodate ease of automobile entry.

Stores generally trended larger as time went on, nearly quadrupling in size, from averaging around 12,000 square feet in the 1940s to over 45,000 square feet by the end of the century. Today, most stores are owned by large national



Fig. 22: House of Hong, in the International District, is a rare standing example of a prewar supermarket in the Seattle area, built as a Safeway in 1940. (Google Street View, 2018)

chains or their subsidiaries, namely Safeway and Kroger (QFC, Fred Meyer), operating numerous locations once belonging to regional and local organizations.

Within the context of Seattle proper, patterns emerge intertwining the supermarkets' history with the evolution of the city. Like the early experimental supermarkets in New York, Seattle's earliest examples (and sole surviving drive-in) were located outside the city's core in spare, warehouse-like structures. While not occupying disused industrial buildings, The A&P's outlet in Wallingford (1929, now CVS) and Montlake Drive-In (1931, demolished) made their homes in Seattle's nascent streetcar suburbs, where land was plentiful and a customer base soon to grow. In the decades following the war, the pace of market construction ticked up considerably, springing up along major thoroughfares in all four corners of the city: California Avenue, Empire (Now Martin Luther King Jr.) Way, 15th Ave N.E., and Bothell Highway (now Lake City Way)—major routes leading to growing residential zones and out of the city. These new stores often located themselves just outside established neighborhood villages, capturing travelers en-route to shopping districts and luring them with ample parking. Even Big Bear, after their success in the Northeast, came to the University District in 1932.

Though national players like The A&P and Piggly Wiggly once had a footprint in Seattle, Northwest regional chains like Safeway and Albertson's (both originally managed by members of Tacoma's Skaggs family¹⁴⁷) were more common, often clustering alongside smaller locals and cooperatives. In this period of intense growth and competition, some neighborhoods were fortunate to have a handful of supermarkets to choose from: the corner of Othello Street and Empire Way was, at one point, home to four

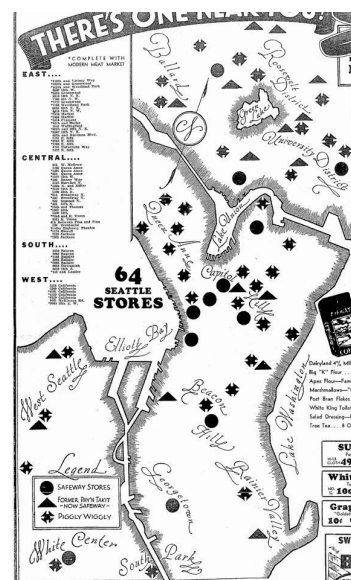


Fig. 23: In 1935, Safeway purchased the regional Piggly Wiggly franchise. This advertisement illustrating the combined footprint shows how prevalent combination markets were, particularly in the core of Seattle. (*Seattle Times*)

¹⁴⁷ "History of American Stores Company – FundingUniverse," accessed April 3, 2019, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/american-stores-company-history/>.

different markets serving the Holly Park housing development. Other neighborhoods were less fortunate; comparatively few supermarkets were built in the high-density neighborhoods surrounding the central business district, where small city blocks limited the utility of the format.

In spite of turbulent changes in the grocery industry by the 1960s and 1970s, resulting in mergers and the emergence of discount grocers, much of the physical infrastructure remains intact. Today, a large share of supermarkets currently operating in the city are either housed in, or on the site of, a market built half a century or more ago, now valuable large parcels hemmed in by development. Many have undergone large remodels or expansions, adding gasoline stations, or, in the vein of the prototypical drive-in, auxiliary leasable retail space. Few new markets appear to be constructed in this period: while Seattle did not experience the same level of population loss and urban disinvestment as other cities, the Boeing Bust chilled the local economy¹⁴⁸ as suburbanization

picked up pace. Two supermarkets—Safeway and Fred Meyer—were constructed in the dense Broadway corridor, resulting in the demolition of blocks of homes and met with protests.¹⁴⁹

In the 1990s and 2000s, several Safeway locations, such as those in the Roosevelt and Greenwood districts, were replaced with significantly



Fig. 24: As the urban fabric has grown around and hemmed them in, older supermarket sites, until recently, were continually remodeled or rebuilt upon. This Safeway in Ballard was completed in 2000, on the site of a large parcel owned by the defunct Tradewell chain. (Dykeman Architects)

¹⁴⁸ Sharon Boswell and Lorraine McConaghy, "Lights out, Seattle," *The Seattle Times*, November 3, 1996, http://old.seattletimes.com/special/centennial/november/lights_out.html.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Dunphy, "Police Clash With Protesters," *The Seattle Times*, June 17, 1971.

larger, multi-story outlets with structured parking, offering vastly greater products and services. Local gourmet chains, like Metropolitan Market and the late Larry's Market, found older, smaller markets ideal homes for their niche products. These parcels staked out half a century or more ago have proved valuable investments for retailers.

In spite of this, not all supermarkets have met the same fate of continued use. Most postwar supermarkets in the central core, like in Queen Anne and Capitol Hill, have since been replaced by high-density housing, reflecting the renewed interest in downtown living and correspondingly valuable redevelopment potential. In contrast, the Rainier Valley, in the southeastern end of Seattle, lost nearly a dozen supermarkets over the years, a blow to one of the nation's most ethnically and economically diverse neighborhoods. Two large, 60,000 square foot Safeway outlets built in the 1990s, in Mt. Baker at the north and Rainier Beach to the south, may have hastened the wave of closures. Several have been repurposed in their post-supermarket life, including as an Asian specialty grocer and concert venue, but following the opening of a rapid transit line through the corridor in 2009, others were demolished to make way for high-density housing near station nodes. The balance sit vacant, awaiting more favorable economic or zoning climates. In the north end of the city, the recent merger of Safeway and Albertson's led to consolidation and closure of a store in each respective brand.¹⁵⁰

Today, the vast majority, if not the totality, of new supermarkets in Seattle are as anchor tenants in multi-story, mixed-use development projects in neighborhood village cores. Vancouver developer Milliken introduced the 'vertical' supermarket typology, with parking and retail on the roof, with Harvard Market and Queen Anne Marketplace in 1995.¹⁵¹ More recently, upmarket grocers like Whole Foods, cooperative PCC Community Markets, and Portland-based New Seasons Markets fill the retail spaces in multi-family projects.

¹⁵⁰ ““Albertsons Closing Two Seattle Stores,” *The Seattle Times*, May 14, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/business/retail/albertsons-closing-two-seattle-stores/>.

¹⁵¹ Justin Carder, “How Harvard Market Got That Way,” Capitol Hill Seattle (Blog), December 12, 2010, <http://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2010/12/how-harvard-market-got-that-way/>.

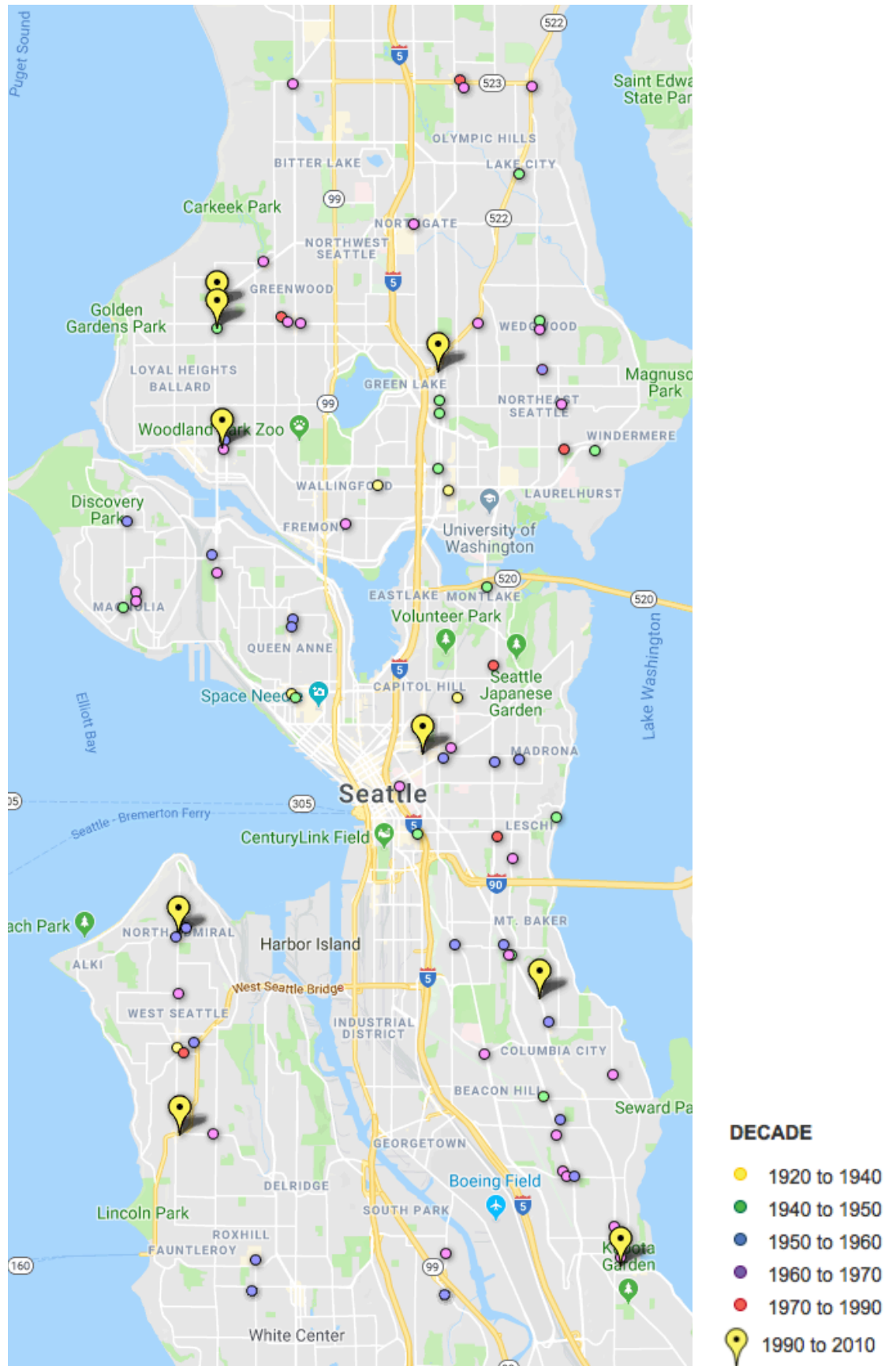


Fig. 25: Supermarkets extant and demolished, by decade. (author)

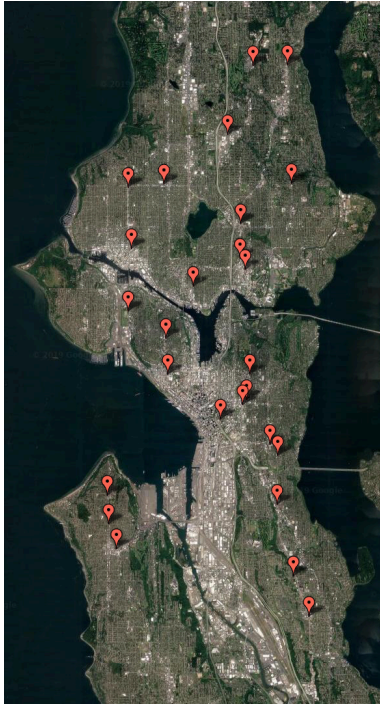


Fig. 26: Demolished supermarkets. Several of these were torn down to build larger stores in recent decades. (Author)

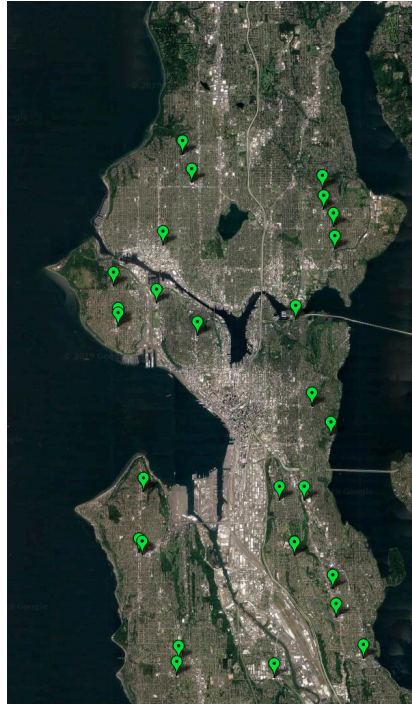


Fig. 27: current "legacy" (i.e., pre-1990) supermarkets still in use as food retailers, as of Oct. 2008. (Author)

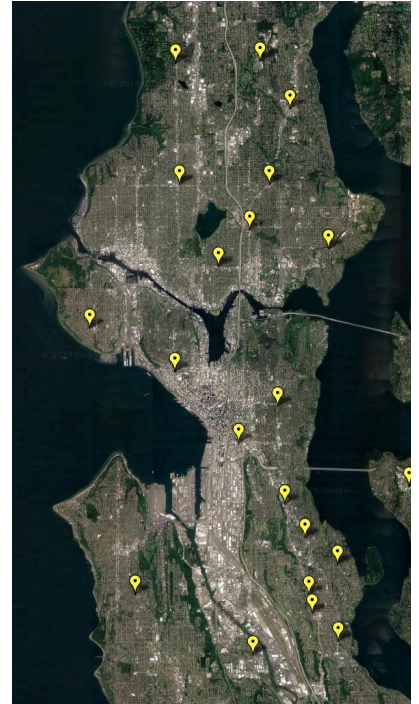


Fig. 28: Former supermarkets repurposed for other programmatic uses. (Author)

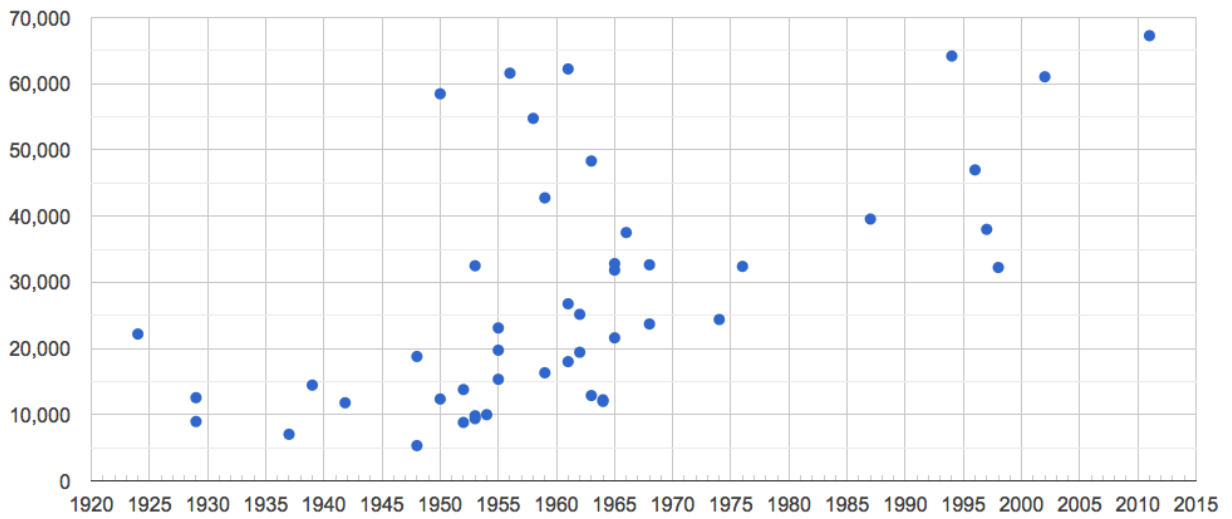


Fig. 29: Square footage plotted versus year built. A steady trend of larger stores is clearly evident, although in the 1950s and 60s, store sizes varied wildly. These larger stores were on the periphery of the city proper. (Author)



Fig. 30: The 1994 Larry's Market complex, now home to Metropolitan Market and other retailers, is a unique permutation of the supermarket typology: grocery sales on the ground floor with pedestrian access, and a strip-mall type retail complex, complete with parking, on the roof. This type of development can be found in several Seattle neighborhoods. (Joe Veyera, *Queen Anne News*)



Fig. 31: Today, the lions share of new supermarkets are anchor tenants in large, mixed-use housing developments, located in dense business districts; parking lots are no longer in vogue. Upmarket grocers are expanding their footprint in Seattle, while legacy stores are in decline. Pictured is a rendering of the recently completed East Union block in the Central District, soon to house a branch of Portland-based New Seasons. (New Seasons Markets)



BRUCE FORD, LEFT, AND HARRY OSBORNE
Old supermarket is behind them

Old Supermarket to Become Auditorium

Work is under way on conversion of the old Market Basket building at 14220 Sunset Highway in Eastgate into an auditorium for community and family entertainment and theatrical productions.

The building will have a 20- by 40-foot stage with backdrops. It will have 15,000 square feet of floor space and will accommodate from

1,400 to 1,700 persons.

Portable seating will equip the auditorium for many purposes, including dances, Harry Osborne and Bruce Ford, who have leased the building, said.

Ford is founder of the Ford Music Stores. Osborne is a well-known theatrical and entertainment producer. They said they intend to bring in top entertainment

for both teen-agers and adults.

The new facility, to be known as the Bellevue-Eastgate Auditorium, will bring a new era of entertainment to the Bellevue area, the sponsors said.

The auditorium will be remodeled and redecorated and ready to open the first week in May, Ford and Osborne said.

Fig. 32: Supermarkets in the Seattle area have a long history of reuse. In 1966, a former Market Basket in Bellevue became a community theatre and auditorium after the chain relocated to the new Crossroads Mall. This structure no longer exists, likely demolished during construction of Interstate 90. (*Seattle Times*)



Fig. 33: The former Tradewell/Pay-n-Save in Mt. Baker boasted the first automatic doors in the Seattle area. Today it is occupied by QFC and Rite-Aid; The façade is drastically altered, but the distinctive roof remains visible inside, typical of many supermarkets still in operation. (Author)

5. Case Studies of Reuse: Seattle

Among spaces vacated by chain supermarkets, a broad gamut of new uses have taken root, ranging from specialty and ethnic grocers to a regional art museum. Architecturally, they include minimal intervention, infill construction, and complete remodel and reconfiguration. The following sites were chosen as model examples of reuse that directly address the communities in which they are located, be they primarily retail or non-profit in nature, particularly in dense urban villages. This selection is not exhaustive and focuses primarily on sites within the city of Seattle; numerous other examples of reuse can be found throughout the region. Other sites, repurposed as chain retail stores, are omitted.

While several of the following examples are thriving, some have closed recently, and others' futures are uncertain amid changing zoning regulations in Seattle. It is important to note that none of the following examples fall under any formal historic designation or protections; under current practices, it is unlikely they will near-term, because of significant visual and aesthetic modifications.

Neighborhood Cultural Centers

Columbia Plaza, Columbia City

In 1957, local grocery chain Tradewell replaced their small turn-of-the-century storefront in the core of Columbia City with several new, modern supermarkets along the Rainier Avenue corridor, including this one prominently sited at the northern edge of the business district. The new store, completed in 1957, was one of several experimental thin-shell concrete buildings debuted by the chain, designed by noted Los Angeles architect Welton Beckett.¹⁵² The novel engineering was intended to be economical and simple to build, easily scaled, and provide a striking visual branding for the growing chain. Despite winning an AIA Award of Merit in 1959,

¹⁵² Rob Ketcherside, "50s Futurism Forgotten - The Burien Tradewell Story." *Ba-Kground* (blog), February 9, 2016. <http://ba-kground.com/50s-futurism-tradewell/>.



Fig 34: Columbia City Tradewell pictured shortly after opening. Architect Welton Beckett, whose early career included drive-in markets in Seattle, designed three award-winning experimental concrete structures for the chain. They did not catch on, and Beckett's later designs for Tradewell were more conventional. (*American Builder*, 1958)

only three scallop-roof stores were built before Beckett returned to a more conventional architectural language for Tradewell.

Following the closure of the Tradewell chain in 1987, this particular store underwent several alterations, removing the sign tower and roof overhangs, and replacement of glazing with marblecrete panels,¹⁵³ rendering the structure unrecognizable as its former self.

By the early 1990s, the building was rechristened Columbia Plaza and housed a handful of small businesses, “specializing in cheap necessities, affordable luxuries, and minor splurges: poly-filled puffer jackets, gold chains, and subwoofers for the back of your Honda,”¹⁵⁴ as described by *The Stranger* in 2006. Each of the minority-owned shops represented a microcosm of the different ethnic and immigrant groups in the Rainier Valley—stores where English was not frequently heard, but one’s familiar native tongue might be. One business, Another Barber Shop, came to be a gathering spot for neighborhood gossip, a disappearing tradition. “It’d be

¹⁵³ BOLA, “A Building in Historic Columbia City.”

¹⁵⁴ Valdez, “White City.”

wrong for them to take this away,” a customer remarked.¹⁵⁵ Though the 93-slot parking lot was rarely filled, it hosted the popular Columbia City Farmers Market on Wednesdays, and a small fleet of food trucks the remainder of the week.

The property changed hands several times in 2007 and 2008,

after which the vendors lost their leases and moved out. The site was then occupied by a pet groomer, a harbinger of the changing economic climate of the district. As part of the permitting process for planned development, a historic landmark review was commissioned, and the review document ultimately painted an unfavorable picture of the property. In spite of the original architectural significance, the evaluation declares that the “original design appears to be typical for a large supermarket of its time,”¹⁵⁶ and that those architectural features were lost to time, further noting it’s age and auto-oriented character are out of place in the historic district. Particular attention was noted on the physical disrepair of the building.



Fig. 35: Columbia Plaza in 2008. Much of the exterior glazing was obscured with solid panels, and the expressive roof overhangs were truncated to accommodate the awning. These modifications challenged the historical integrity of the building. (BOLA Architects + Planners)

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ BOLA, “A Building in Historic Columbia City.”

In 2013, the building was ultimately demolished and replaced with a multi-story mixed-use structure, anchored by PCC Community Markets, after a lengthy community review process.¹⁵⁷

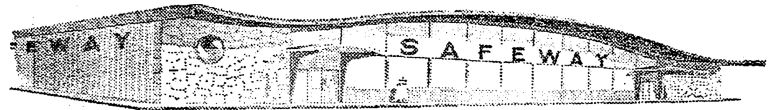
Rainier Mall, Columbia City

Just to the north of Columbia City sits a small commercial strip, officially signed as “The Genesee Business District,” at the crossing of two long-gone streetcar lines. For nearly 30 years, the district was anchored by an arch-roofed Marina-style Safeway, built in 1968, following Tradewell’s lead in sizing up from their previous 1920s-era storefront.

In 1994, Safeway moved to anchor a far larger outdoor mall further north on Rainier Avenue (incidentally, the site of an earlier Mayfair Market), leaving a gaping hole in the district for five years. With a dearth of

general merchandise retailers in South Seattle, some residents hoped for a big-box store: “Kmart, Walmart, some kind of department store

because there is nothing in this area. We have to go to Renton or West Seattle,”¹⁵⁸ a Beacon Hill



Another New Safeway In Seattle

At Rainier South and Genesee Street
Now Ready To Serve You

Fig 36: Grand opening announcement on May 1, 1968. The new store featured plentiful parking, an on-site bakery and a selection of “oriental foods”. The architect is unknown, but the building sports an upswept variant of the prolific “Marina” typology. (*The Seattle Times*)

¹⁵⁷ “Columbia Plaza Site, New Development,” Wiki, Columbia Citizens, accessed March 17, 2019, <http://columbiacitizens.net/forum/t-41103/columbia-plaza-site-new-development>.

¹⁵⁸ Jerry Large, “Rainier Avenue Wedding Mall — A Marriage Of Cultures,” *The Seattle Times*, February 28, 1999, <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/archive/?date=19990228&slug=2946607>.

resident told the *Seattle Times*. At the time, much of that strip of Rainier Avenue was home to drug deals, prostitution and seedy bars.

South Seattle local Billy Vu leased the property from Safeway in 1999, hoping to reuse the property as another grocery. While the landlord vetoed that proposition, Vu saw opportunity in the lavish weddings held by Vietnamese and Chinese families living in the area, and Rainier Mall opened as a one-stop shop for matrimonial services. A bridal shop, shoe store, jeweler, photo studio, and enormous, banquet-capable restaurant all shared one roof and a dramatic new façade. Local resident and *Times* columnist Jerry Large described the crowd at the grand

Especially Designed With You in Mind

Completely Modern . . . Loads of Free
Parking . . . Special Customer Surprises

OPENS TOMORROW . . . at 9 A.M.

You Are Invited to Attend This Gala Opening
BE SURE TO BRING THE CHILDREN — SPECIAL NOTE: THE SPECIAL FEATURES ARE EFFECTIVE at ALL A&P SUPERMARKETS!

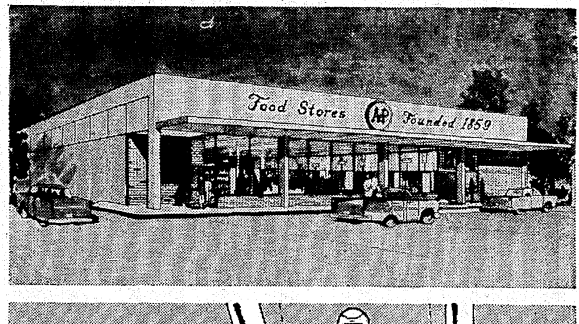


Fig. 38: The “Rainier Shopping Lanes” opened in 1963, opposite Safeway, and named after the Rainier Bowling Lanes next door. The numerous stores in the area took advantage of crowds piling in for Rainiers games at nearby Sicks Stadium. (*Seattle Times*)

opening: “The mall is a feast of accents and faces. East African, Eastern European, Samoan, Vietnamese, Chinese. Black and white.”¹⁵⁹ Large noted that more mainstream retailers long enjoyed by the rest of Seattle—a Starbucks in Columbia City, QFC grocery in Mt. Baker, and later Ross Dress For Less by the new Safeway— the mall “serves a need” for specific communities, one that mainstream shoppers were not likely aware of.

Like the nearby Columbia Plaza, Rainier Mall closed for good in late 2016, and Safeway sold the site to Kane Properties the following year. Large eulogized the shopping center in his column and remarked that, again, locals were mixed on what they envisioned for the site in a now-popular neighborhood: some were interested in a Whole Foods, others favored low-income

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

housing,¹⁶⁰ sparking acrimonious debate over who, and what, belongs in the revitalized



Fig. 37: Rainier Mall pictured in 2019, now vacant for over two years. Though the façade bears little resemblance to the original appearance, the iconic arched roofline is obscured but intact. (Author)

Columbia City.

While a construction permit for 3 mixed-use apartment buildings was filed in December 2017, the plan was withdrawn months later.¹⁶¹ The now-fenced off site is listed for sale on commercial listing services, touting re-leasing or redevelopment opportunities, with the caveat of uncertain zoning regulations.¹⁶²

While physically incompatible with Columbia City’s pedestrian-friendly business district, Rainier Market provided a compliment of shops and services to a district now known for restaurants and entertainment, and more specifically one that served a demographic otherwise ignored by larger chain retailers. At its inception, the shopping center was a bright spot in a blighted neighborhood, whereas today the inverse is true. Rainier Mall’s multi-tenant operation was a novel use of otherwise unusably large space, making room for small tenants in the scale of

¹⁶⁰ Jerry Large, “A Seattle Mini-Mall Closes and Neighbors Hope and Worry ... Again,” *The Seattle Times*, January 9, 2017, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/a-seattle-mini-mall-closes-and-neighbors-hope-and-worry-again/>.

¹⁶¹ Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, “Construction Permit 6636735-CN,” March 19, 2018.

¹⁶² “Rainier Avenue South Building, Listing #584385.” Commercial Brokers Association, March 12, 2019. <https://www.commercialmls.com/Search/ListingDetailsPrint/584385?html>.

the rest of the district; in today's real-estate climate, it is instead ripe for large-scale redevelopment and future opportunities in the same vein will be lost.

Kings Hall, Mt. Baker

In the shadow of Seattle's professional baseball stadium, the crossroads of two former state highways (Rainier Avenue/Route 167 and Empire Way/Route 599), once an agricultural area well into the 20th century, was fertile ground for nascent supermarkets: Safeway moved into the area in 1942, followed by A&P immediately to the west in 1963, and Tradewell, the first Seattle-area store with automatic doors, later that year. By the early 1970s, the structure was repurposed as a Value Village thrift store.

Light-rail construction in the mid-2000s claimed the former Safeway building and a number of surrounding structures, and transit-oriented development has lagged behind other districts along the Link corridor, with numerous vacant parcels in the vicinity. The elevated Mt. Baker rail station physically and visually cut off the glass-fronted A&P structure from Rainier Avenue, ending its brief tenure as a Grocery Outlet discount store.

By 2012, Sultan Mohamed, an Ethiopian-born artist and educator,¹⁶³ reopened the glass-fronted space as King's Hall, a multipurpose event space. Programming is diverse, hosting banquets and wedding receptions by day and musical acts by night. The artists featured are local, national and international acts, often ones popular with the Rainier Valley's Latinx and East African communities along with more mainstream musicians. While the space also hosts town-hall style political meetings and similar civic functions, King's Hall is particularly valued by the area's immigrant community as an entertainment venue distinct from cultural centers and clubs; one appreciative Facebook review stated, "As an Ethiopian I would like to say that

¹⁶³ "Sultan Mohamed." SEED. Accessed March 16, 2019. <http://www.seedseattle.org/board/sultan-mohamed/>.

Kings Hall is our place of Unity . . . Please keep doing this amazing job bringing people together.”¹⁶⁴

The 14,000 square foot venue fills not only a niche in South Seattle’s minority communities, but in greater Seattle, as other small performing arts venues disappear.¹⁶⁵ The venue appears to be continuing business in the near future, but long-term is uncertain: the property is owned by the University of Washington as part of a parcel shared by the institution’s commercial laundry facility. UW announced the closure of the laundry in November 2018 to public outcry over lost working-class jobs; in a letter to the university, Washington State House Speaker Frank Chopp suggested the site as “ideal for the development of affordable, transit-oriented housing” as a compromise.¹⁶⁶ It is unclear if, or when, the site may be redeveloped, or if that might include King’s Hall.

¹⁶⁴ Tsegaye, TareTokkichaw. “Review of Kings Hall MS LLC.” Facebook, March 6, 2016. <https://www.facebook.com/tariku.tsegaye/activity/1020325161369358>.

¹⁶⁵ “A Lesson for Capitol Hill? What’s Being Saved When It Comes to Seattle’s Showbox,” Blog, Capitol Hill Seattle, August 30, 2018, <http://www.capitolhillseattle.com/2018/08/a-lesson-for-capitol-hill-whats-being-saved-when-it-comes-to-seattles-showbox/>.

¹⁶⁶ Heidi Groover, “UW Will Shutter Mount Baker Laundry, Putting Nearly 100 Employees out of Work,” *The Seattle Times*, November 15, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/uw-will-shutter-mount-baker-laundry-putting-nearly-100-unionized-mostly-minority-employees-out-of-work/>.



Fig. 39: Kings Hall in 2018 is a multifunctional community space, serving primarily as a concert hall for foreign-language acts. It shares a parcel with the former Rainier Lanes bowling alley, now the UW Consolidated Laundry (right). The property under consideration for redevelopment by the university. (Author)

Adaptive Reuse

Union Gospel Mission HQ/Hope Place Shelter, Othello



LOCATED AT EMPIRE WAY and OHELLO ST.

Fig. 40: Marketime Drug at Holly Park, pictured in an opening announcement on November 11, 1958. The advertisement boasted ‘five acres of parking for 700 cars’ and no interior walls so one could ‘see the entire shopping area from any part of this massive store.’ (*The Seattle Times*)

Following the construction of Holly Park by the Seattle Housing Authority during World War II, several supermarkets sprang up at the corner of Othello Street and Empire Way. One such store was Marketime Drug, the Seattle-area brand of Fred Meyer, selling groceries, housewares, clothing and hardware. Built in 1958, the store was significantly larger than the adjacent Safeway at 54,000 square feet.

It is unclear when Marketime closed, leaving Safeway as the last remaining full-service market in the area, but tax records show Union Gospel Mission (UGM) purchasing the property in 1993, turning the former store into their administrative offices. UGM is a faith-based homelessness services provider, whose outreach has grown far beyond the downtown soup kitchen founded in 1938.¹⁶⁷

In anticipation of the opening of a rail transit station in the area in 2009, the aging Holly Park housing was redeveloped into a walkable, New Urbanist-inspired community. Following

¹⁶⁷ “Serving Those in Greatest Need for More than 85 Years,” Union Gospel Mission, accessed February 28, 2019, <https://www.ugm.org/about-us/our-history/>.

transit-oriented density zoning increases, high-density, mixed use projects emerged on the site of a former Tradewell and roller rink. Rather than redevelop the large property in its entirety, the UGM chose to locate Hope Place, an emergency shelter, on the street-facing parking lot.



Fig. 41: UGM administrative offices in 2018. Like many of the other case studies, much of the exterior glazing is now obscured. In 2011, some of the ‘five acres of parking’ was given over to a new emergency homeless shelter. (Author)

Completed in 2011, Hope Place provides 99 rooms for women and children experiencing homelessness, along with a cafeteria, child care and counseling services in a strategically transit-accessible site.¹⁶⁸ The five-story structure fills the void left by an unneeded parking lot in an increasingly densifying neighborhood, and street-level storefronts, housing community healthcare and drop-in services, rebuilds the Othello corridor streetwall on the approach to the rail station. The site illustrates that, as parking requirements are relaxed, infill construction allows former supermarkets to assume new, multiple purposes while still achieving urbanist ideals of density and walkability.

¹⁶⁸ “Hope Place (UGM),” Costigan Integrated, accessed April 5, 2019, <https://costiganintegrated.com/portfolio/hope-place-ugm/>.



Fig. 43: The renovation of the old Thriftway was substantially extensive, involving removing the existing false ceiling and floor, as well as cutting new window openings on the north wall. Much of the interior character, or lack thereof, was removed. (Métis Construction)



Fig. 44: While not historically accurate, the structure offered rich architectural opportunities to create a dynamic, inviting space, while still revealing the nature of the building. (Métis Construction)

As of January 2019, citywide upzoning proposals call for increased density in this district, which has uncertain implications for for cultural mainstays as a whole. As a religious nonprofit, the UGM is exempt from historic preservation regulations and could, in theory, develop the remainder of the site without restriction. However, at the time of this writing, there are no immediate plans to redevelop the northwestern quadrant of this district.

Third Place Books, Seward Park



Fig. 42: PCC Seward Park on opening day, 1985. The small store was originally Ray's Thriftway, opened 1951. (Puget Consumers' Co-Op Archives)

Between the Rainier Valley and Lake Washington is another minuscule business strip once served by streetcar¹⁶⁹ that forms the civic heart of the Lakewood-Seward Park neighborhoods. Several years before nearby Columbia City received a supermarket, Ray's Thriftway opened on Wilson Avenue in 1951, in a small, bow-trussed structure fronting the

¹⁶⁹ Elmer S. Yates, *Rainier Valley's Toonerville Trolley*, typescript, n.d., Rainier Valley Historical Society.

street and flanked by parking. Despite competition from newer, larger stores in the Rainer Valley, Thriftway thrived for decades; in 1985, the growing Puget Consumers' Co-Op (now PCC Community Markets) took over, opening its fourth store here,¹⁷⁰ bringing organic produce and specialty foods to South Seattle.

With over 56,000 members in the Seattle area, PCC outgrew the small, 7,000 square foot market by 2015 and moved to a new mixed-use structure in Columbia City,¹⁷¹ bringing a grocery store back to that neighborhood for the first time in 20 years. Unlike other supermarket vacancies, the Wilson Avenue site was quickly sold to Ron Sher, owner of the independent Third Place Books chain. Sher had converted another previous PCC location in the Ravenna neighborhood, originally a drugstore, to a bookstore, cafe, and pub. "Having a community-oriented successor at our property was extremely important to us, and based on our prior experience in working with Third Place Books, we are hopeful that the property's new purpose will be welcomed by the local community," PCC CEO Randy Lee wrote in the co-op member newsletter.¹⁷²

Third Place Book's name comes from sociologist Ray Oldenburg's book *The Great Good Place*, describing a community recreation and gathering place between one's work and home, and guides the ethos of Sher's projects.¹⁷³ The first location in the chain, opened in 1998 in a failing strip mall north of Seattle, encompasses not just a bookstore and cafe, but the nonprofit Third Place Commons, a cultural event center partnering with Shoreline School District, King County Library System, and the Lake Forest Park Farmers' Market.¹⁷⁴ At Seward Park, Sher

¹⁷⁰ John Caldbick, "PCC Community Markets," HistoryLink.org Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History, March 25, 2018, <https://www.historylink.org/File/20522>.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Moira Macdonald, "Seattle Bookstores Were Doomed. Then Third Place Helped Rewrite the Story.," *The Seattle Times*, December 20, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/books/seattle-bookstores-were-doomed-then-third-place-helped-rewrite-the-story/>.

¹⁷⁴ "Our Story," *Third Place Commons* (blog), accessed February 28, 2019, <http://thirdplacecommons.org/about/our-story/>.

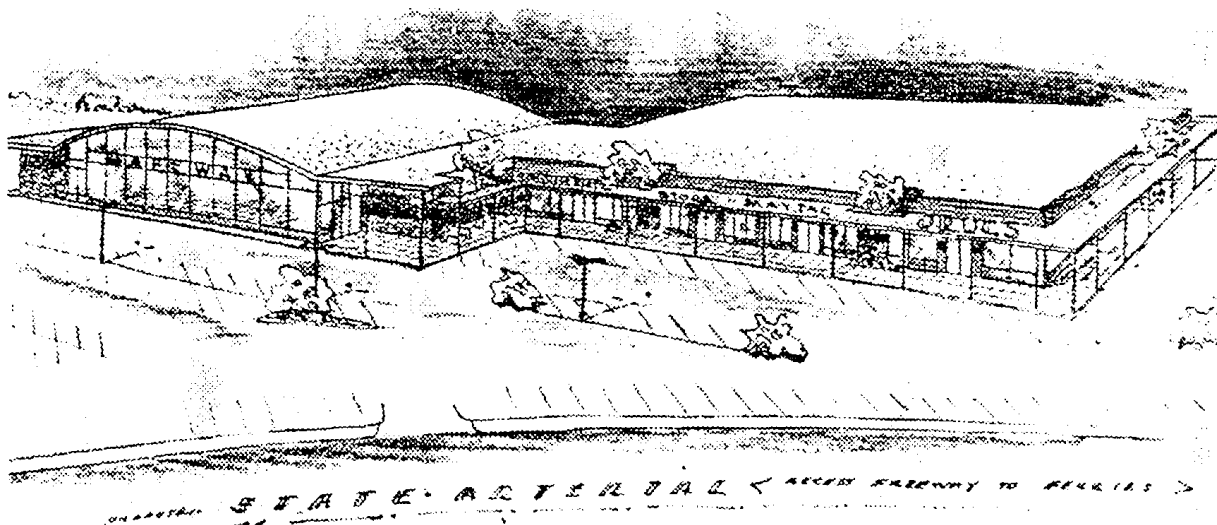
sought to bring this sense of community to the neighborhood anchored by the former tenant, with book clubs, author events, and informal language classes.

The remodel of the former PCC, supervised by architect Mike Whalen, was more extensive than that of the previous case studies, gutting much of the interior to reveal the structural system of the bow-truss roof and rebuilding the floor to accommodate a basement restaurant.¹⁷⁵ After the closing sale price of \$1.25 million, remodel permit values totaled an additional \$600,000.

From an architectural preservation standpoint, the project runs counter to current practice guidelines set by the National Parks Service on the treatment of historic properties. Preservation Brief 18 states, “Caution should be exercised in developing plans that would radically change character-defining spaces or that would obscure, damage or destroy interior features or finishes,”¹⁷⁶ a guideline which aims to acknowledge the integrity of properties’ interiors, a feature overlooked in nominations. While this particular property is not currently landmarked, the extensive renovation wholly ignored this guideline, removing most, if not all interior finishes. However, the interior reconfiguration adds value to the property in numerous ways: by readapting to new programmatic requirements, the structure as a shell is given new life, where it may have otherwise been demolished. Additionally, the structural system is revealed, uncovering other historic building elements that were previously invisible.

¹⁷⁵ “Third Place Books & Raconteur: Rehab and Retrofit,” Metis Construction, Inc., accessed February 28, 2019, <https://metisconstructioninc.com/project/old-pcc/>.

¹⁷⁶ H. Ward Jandl, “Preservation Brief 18: Rehabilitating Interiors in Historic Buildings Identifying and Preserving Character-Defining Elements,” U.S. Department of the Interior, National Parks Service, Technical Preservation Services, accessed March 1, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/18-rehabilitating-interiors.htm>.

 Cascadia Art Museum/Salish Crossing, Edmonds


DRAWING OF A. H. PARKER COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Shop Center Under Construction in Edmonds

Fig. 45: Architectural rendering of Salish Crossing, then called Parker Plaza, as it appeared in a business announcement in 1966. The developers built similar shopping centers in Redmond, Mountlake Terrace, and Port Townsend; the latter is still standing. (*Seattle Times*)

While this project is outside the city limits, and core urban area, of Seattle, it is a unique example of balancing preservation and new development in a transit-adjacent site.

This building, wedged between State Route 104 and a commuter rail station, was built as Parker Plaza in 1966 on the edge of downtown Edmonds. A groundbreaking announcement in *The Seattle Times* touted the ample parking along the new highway, serving a drugstore, laundromat, and a 21,000 square foot Safeway as the centerpiece.¹⁷⁷ This was one of several similar shopping plazas the developer constructed in Mountlake Terrace, Redmond, and Port

¹⁷⁷ "Shop Center Under Construction in Edmonds." *The Seattle Times*, April 24, 1966, sec. Real Estate.

Townsend, each designed by Charles Ogden of the Everett firm Hall & Dykeman. The firm and its successors have had a long relationship with Safeway as their local architects,¹⁷⁸ designing many of the iconic Marina-style stores in the Puget Sound area, and continues to design supermarkets today.

By the 1990s, Safeway had moved on to larger and more suburban locations, and the site became a large antique mall. The property's owner long sought to redevelop the highly visible site, but the 25-foot height restriction limited the appeal. By 2012, the property had fallen into disrepair and the owner behind on taxes; the property was acquired by the local Echelbarger family, who told the Everett Herald at the time of purchase, "we see the building as a 'diamond in the rough,' and that is our focus. . .we have a vision of it being a mid-century ornament for the community."¹⁷⁹

After extensive remodeling and restoration, the new Salish Crossing, anchored by the locally-focused Cascade Art Museum, was unveiled in September 2015. The Seattle architecture firm Johnson Oaklief presided over the renovation, which involved stripping down the interior, modernizing mechanical systems, and finishing with period-appropriate architectural details. The high ceiling and clear span of the former store was ideal for displaying art, and founder Lindsay Echelbarger called the new space "a modern cathedral".¹⁸⁰

The interior of the space was divided in two by a corridor, allowing the southernmost end to house restaurants with outdoor dining where the loading dock once sat. Some parking was given over to street-side retail, a small step in reclaiming the pedestrian realm at this transportation crossroads. At the southeast corner of the site, an archway, the portico salvaged from the former Edmonds High School, marks the entrance to town for ferry riders.

¹⁷⁸ "Projects." Joel Niemi, Architect. Accessed March 17, 2019. <https://jniemiarchitect.com/portfolio-of-projects/>.

¹⁷⁹ "Melissa Slager, "Edmonds Waterfront Strip Mall to Get Fresh Start," *The Everett Herald*, September 28, 2012, <https://www.heraldnet.com/news/edmonds-waterfront-strip-mall-to-get-fresh-start-2/>.

¹⁸⁰ "Lynn Porter, "Old Grocery Now a Museum: 'It's a Modern Cathedral,'" *Daily Journal of Commerce*, October 14, 2016, sec. Architecture & Engineering, <https://www.djc.com/news/ae/12093904.html>.



Fig. 46: Salish Crossing, seen in 2012 shortly after the Echelbarger family purchased the property. While the structure retained much of its exterior historical integrity, it was in poor repair after decades of neglect. (*MyEdmondsNews*)



Fig. 47: The remodel process left much of the character-defining features, such as the glue-laminate beams, curtain wall mullion pattern, and brick veneer, substantially intact, while updating mechanical systems to meet modern needs. New hardscaping buffers the building from the parking lot. (Tom Marks, *Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce*)

6. Challenges to Preservation

Under-appreciation

Certainly one of the most significant barriers to formal preservation efforts is simply a lack of appreciation, and misunderstanding of significance, of midcentury properties, both by the general public and members of the preservation community. The former group does not often find aesthetic interest in these structures, lending little popular support, while the latter is highly divided on academic merits of postwar vernacular properties versus the mechanics of actually preserving them.

Much of this bias comes down to the notion of taste, and that supermarkets, strip malls, and other auto-oriented typologies are essentially non-architecture and anonymous. These buildings may have an architect associated with them, but are a standardized form of which hundreds or thousands exist, built for quantity over architectural quality. Donovan Rypkema, otherwise a strong proponent of preservation, echoes public sentiment in declaring that “The vast majority of what has been built in America in the last fifty years is crap.”¹⁸¹

The preservation field has made tremendous advancements in inclusivity since its earliest days, when, in the United States, much of its energy was focused on the protection of famous landmarks or the homes of Founding Fathers. Today more types of properties, with more means of community and historical significance, are added to registers, like cultural and vernacular landscapes. Protection of non-architectural properties like these came of age in the 1970s and 1980s, as the National Parks Service issued bulletins on how to evaluate and treat these ephemeral and living, both literally and figuratively, properties.¹⁸²

Evaluation of architecture, however, has remained grounded in form.

¹⁸¹ Donovan Rypkema, “Saving the Recent Past,” *Forum Journal* 20, no. 1 (Fall 2005), <https://forum.savingplaces.org/viewdocument/saving-the-recent-past-a-philosop>.

¹⁸² Stipe, *Richer Heritage*, 191.

For the past half-century, the academic value of preservation has been justified by economic benefits and urbanist goals, which the architecture of sprawl runs counter to. Jane Jacobs, in

The Life and Death of Great American Cities, laid this groundwork by

identifying the value of old buildings in providing affordable real estate and small-scale, walkable communities.¹⁸³ While the case studies previously mentioned illustrate the former point, suburban buildings, now as then, define sprawl in the built environment. The notion of protecting the very structures that preservationists a generation ago fought against has stirred a crisis in the field. In the early years of the contemporary preservation movement, the specter of Modernism and urban renewal loomed heavy, adding fuel to the fire. “The champions of modern architecture seldom missed an opportunity to ridicule the past. At best, the past was treated as a closed book whose chapters had mercifully ended with little bearing upon the present. But often the past was portrayed as an evil,” Richard Longstreth said of the ethos of mid-century era.¹⁸⁴



Police officers led away Lindsay McDonald as a bulldozer crunched into a house

—Staff photo by Greg Gilbert.

Fig. 48: Seattle police haul away a protestor on Capitol Hill's Broadway, blocking construction of a new Safeway store in 1971. Preservationists and urban advocates are reluctant to preserve the same buildings they fought against decades ago. (*The Seattle Times*, June 17, 1971)

The Labor Department announced today it is imposing a Philadelphia-type racial-hiring plan on construction unions and contractors in Seattle and King County. Seattle is the fourth city in which the department has ordered mandatory racial-hiring plans for construction. The orders are Philadelphia, Washington, D. C., and San Francisco.

“EFFECTIVE immediately, these specifications set goals and timetables for achieving equal job opportunity to all but four construction trades,” said the announcement by Secretary of Labor J. D. Hodgson, Assistant Secretary Arthur A. Fletcher and John L. Wilks, director of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance.

Contractors who fail to comply could be barred from bidding on federal jobs, the officials said.

They said the requirements are similar to those

workers, unions and civil-rights groups, but that the voluntary plan had not worked.

The four construction crafts exempted from the order are iron work, electrical work, plumbing and piping and sheet metal work. They are already covered by a court-imposed plan, the Labor Department said.

OTHER unions affected by the department's action must set specific hiring goals for Negroes, Spanish-born Americans, Orientals and American Indians, the announcement said.

It set goals for minority groups on an elective immediately until the end of the year ranging from 2.2 to 6.5 per cent, 1972 goals ranging from 0.5 to 5.7 per cent and 1973 goals of 0.7 to 1.3 per cent.

Contractors failing to meet the goals will be given an opportunity to show that they were unable to do so despite affirmative action and “very good faith effort,” the Labor Department said.

Police clash with protesters

By STEPHEN H. DUNPHY

Police and Safeway Stores security men clashed with protesting residents as bulldozers moved in to tear down homes for a new supermarket at 18th Avenue East and East Mercer Street shortly after 9 a. m. today.

Police took two protesters into custody, then released them without arrest after checking identification. One was identified as Lindsay McDonald, who was dragged by police from the porch of a house at 319 18th Ave. E., adjacent to a house being knocked down.

About two dozen members of the police Tactical Squad lined the street as about 40 long-haired residents milled about.

rees they had planted earlier.

Hastily drawn signs replaced the trees. One read: “Wanted to rent. One bulldozer to tear down Safeway.” Another: “People need homes, not Safeway.”

Mrs. Sarah Allen, chairman of the Neighborhood Council, said seven homes are to be torn down, displacing between 20 and 40 persons.

She said the principle involved is “schools... homes... and people.”

A REPRESENTATIVE from the mayor's office was mediating minor disputes between residents, bulldozers and City Light linemen.

He said Safeway had been completely legal in its efforts to construct the mar-

¹⁸³ Michael Powe et al., “Jane Jacobs and the Value of Older, Smaller Buildings,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 82, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 168, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2015.1135072>.

¹⁸⁴ Richard Longstreth, “I Can't See It; I Don't Understand It; And It Doesn't Look Old to Me,” *Forum Journal* 27, no. 1 (2012): 35–45.

Thus was the fight preservationists faced, attempting to justify historic value in an era where it was little understood, or stood in the way of progress. “Evil” is a recurring term in discussing the atmosphere of preservation in the 1950s and 60s: Kelli Shapiro remarked that “Places particularly embroiled in the preservation community’s debate over what one might term ‘preserving the enemy’ include the automobile-oriented environment, suburbia, and the landscape of mass consumption, as well as the modernist architectural/planning philosophy, which many deemed responsible for massive urban renewal teardown.”¹⁸⁵

Significance

The primary component of landmarking a property, at all levels of preservation registers, is establishing significance, whether historical, architectural, or otherwise. In *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles & Practice*, the authors use a “significance thermometer” as a metaphor for evaluation: the more criteria and elements apply, the more likely the case can be made for protection.¹⁸⁶

As mentioned earlier, supermarkets have been successfully nominated elsewhere as representative of broader trends in national history, or as unique architectural works, but this tells an incomplete story. For the purposes of saving an endangered building, this may be sufficient, or more of a story may be needed to raise the thermometer. Yet for the purposes of illuminating our local history, one of the more academic goals of preservation, a broader narrative must be told.

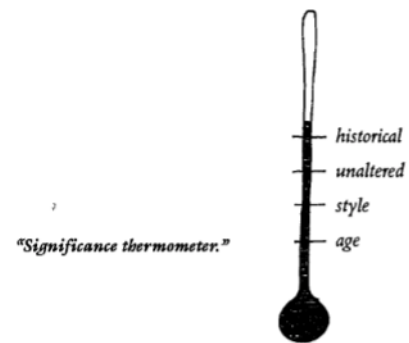


Fig. 49: The thermometer metaphor for determining how likely the case for protection may be for a property. (Tyler et. al)

¹⁸⁵ Kelli Shapiro, “From Modernism to McDonald’s: Ideology, Controversy, and the Movement to Preserve the Recent Past,” *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-) 61, no. 2 (2007): 10.

¹⁸⁶ Ted Ligibel, Ilene R Tyler, and Norman Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice*, Second edition. (New York: New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009); 139.

When dealing with preservation of the recent past, advocates face an entrenched culture of viewing buildings primarily through the lens of age and architectural style: in another sweeping declaration, Rypkema proclaims that “Mount Vernon and McDonald’s are not equally important. Period.”¹⁸⁷ While true, and few argue for such an equivalency, this statement denies that cultural associations have equal validity.

The case study of the former Columbia City Tradewell illustrates how architectural merit often trumps other historical considerations. In the 2008 historic review completed by BOLA Architects, much detail is paid to Columbia City’s past and present makeup as a diverse community, and history as a refuge for successive waves of immigrants, from Europeans at the turn of the century, to West African migrants today.¹⁸⁸ This history is reflected in the diverse cultures that appropriated the space for commercial and social purposes in its later decades. While other factors contributed to its disqualification, no mention was made of its social significance. Perhaps there was no easy way to categorize this in the existing view of evaluation.

There is room for optimism. In “From Modernism to McDonalds,” Kelli Shapiro relates a number of cases where cultural significance, particularly for groups rather than specific individuals, has been recognized. One such example is Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo which, in 1977, deemed to be ineligible for National Historic District status; less than a decade later, the neighborhood achieved that goal, though with the caveat of being only of state, rather than national, significance. By 1995, it became a full National Historic Landmark—“one of the most significant places in American History.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Rypkema.

¹⁸⁸ BOLA, “A Building in Historic Columbia City,” 3.

¹⁸⁹ Shapiro, “From Modernism to McDonald’s,” 7–8.

Integrity

The second component of the landmarking process is establishing integrity: as defined by the National Parks Service, integrity is “retain[ing] . . . the essential physical features that enable it to convey its historic identity.”¹⁹⁰ National Register Bulletin 15 lists seven discrete aspects of integrity to consider, several of which, “Design,” “Materials,” and “Feeling,” are of particular importance when dealing with architectural properties. These three specifically address the physical condition of a structure in question. However, much like the significance component, this is a binary distinction; officially, either a structure or site possesses integrity, or it does not, the threshold of which is arbitrary.



The Bulletin makes specific acknowledgement that properties do change over time and not *all* defined aspects of integrity must be present, leaving some room for qualitative

¹⁹⁰ U.S. Dept. of Interior, *National Register Bulletin 15*.

interpretation. In theory, this simple definition is open-ended enough to accommodate properties in a wide variety of conditions, but in practice, becomes a pedantic issue that frequently disqualifies properties.

The Columbia Plaza site demonstrates two problems inherent in this method of assessment. First, that integrity is contingent on *present* condition: many (though not all, such as the absence of sign and overhangs) changes can be reversed or repaired, but such remediation must be completed before integrity is assessed. Ostensibly, one goal of landmarking is incentive for rehabilitation, resulting in a recursive catch-22.

Second, the concept of integrity is inherently a physical one. It cannot take into account intangible elements of significance, such as historical or present use. Even for sites listed under Criterion A (“Broad Patterns”), the National Parks Service recommends that a site is “eligible if it retains the essential physical features that made up its character or appearance during the period of its association with the important event, historical pattern, or person(s).”¹⁹¹

Closely related are the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, which must be followed to qualify for federal tax incentives.¹⁹² In a nutshell, this guideline, as the name implies, proscribes preservation of character-defining spaces, materials and architectural elements. The Third Place Books renovation, while sensitive to the architecture and revealing the physical history of the building, defies these guidelines.

Development Pressure

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² “Tax Incentives,” U.S. Department of the Interior, National Parks Service, Technical Preservation Services, accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm>.

In eulogizing the demise of the Red Apple at Promenade 23, columnist Charles Mudede identified the struggle at the core of the the neighborhood, one that is repeated elsewhere around the city:

This is an urbanist vision adopted for a profit-making scheme. Yes, this area should be denser, and yes, the parking lot is ugly and too big. But there is a lot of cultural history here. Which should it be? If you side with the black community, you are also siding with pro-car, pro-fossil-fuel, anti-urbanist backwardness . . . it is true that walkability is important for health and environmental reasons, but it is also true that blacks and other people of color can no longer afford to live in neighborhoods with virtues like walkability.¹⁹³

This is the latent struggle neighborhoods face with new construction. Whether single-family homes, strip malls, or the supermarkets discussed here, redevelopment, however many housing units it may add, ultimately results in the net loss of affordable space. At the least, it exacerbates displacement; tenants must relocate, and can ill afford to wait around until the new construction is completed, in the small chance there is space. The urban benefits of density and walkability therefore benefits newcomers, and not the existing community.

This need not be the case; the Union Gospel Mission site, and to a smaller extent, Salish Crossing, demonstrate that, at least physically, old and new can coexist, and begin to address these urban ideals. However, there are few mechanisms to facilitate this. To developers, there is greater financial return to demolish and build from scratch to maximum allowed density than take a piecemeal approach. Conversely, landmark protections, even if some properties achieved them, are seen as excessively rigid in what is allowed to be added or updated.

The latter problem has given rise to a curious phenomenon in Seattle: the preemptive “anti-nomination,” as Historic Seattle dubbed it. The highly publicized debate over Mama’s Mexican Kitchen in Belltown illustrates this activity, wherein a property developer submitted a nomination prominently noting the “run-of-the-mill” architecture and compromised integrity,¹⁹⁴ with the aim of a negative decision by the governing board. While preservation won out in this

¹⁹³ Mudede, “The Coming Death.”

¹⁹⁴ “Mama’s Mexican Restaurant Building Nominated.” Historic Seattle, December 10, 2016. Accessed March 16, 2019. <https://historicseattle.org/mamas-mexican-restaurant-building-nominated/>.

particular case, the ultimate goal. The process serves to exemplify not only what is problematic of the nomination process, but the lack of alternative incentives available.

Federal tax incentives for rehabilitation, long championed as a success of the modern preservation movement and narrowly rescued by the 2017 tax reform, are of marginal benefit on smaller incremental projects. The National Trust reports that, generally, projects valued under \$5 million have difficulty utilizing credits.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, Transfer of Development Rights, where potential density is sold from a landmark property to a different site, is severely underutilized in Seattle. Restrictions on receiving sites (limited to the immediate vicinity) and high costs disincentivized this otherwise powerful tool.¹⁹⁶

Ultimately, innovative reuse is the product of private developers like Sher and the Echelbargers, who see value beyond dollars in these projects. There is little monetary incentive to encourage this further, and it is the community that loses, economically and culturally.

¹⁹⁵ Patrice Frey, "Why Historic Preservation Needs a New Approach," CityLab, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.citylab.com/perspective/2019/02/tax-credit-historic-preservation-old-town-main-street/581989/>.

¹⁹⁶ Larry Costich and Joe Stockton, "Transferable Development Rights: Where's the Incentive?," *Daily Journal of Commerce*, February 23, 2017, sec. Real Estate, <https://www.djc.com/news/re/12097784.html>.

7. Reflections

At just over 50 years, it is clear the current mechanisms of preservation no longer reflect the realities of today's issues. The underlying framework and has allowed the field to grow beyond the purview of house museums and historical parks, and to that end, credit is due, especially in creating a formally sanctioned preservation program nationwide. As the emphasis has shifted beyond an art-history approach and moved to a broader cultural discussion, preservation has become constrained by this framework, and there is a growing divide between the academic and practical methodologies. Now is the time to revisit our approaches to address this disconnect.

This change likely will need to begin at the local level. While some of the case studies presented here carry a tone of pessimism, there is much to be optimistic about in Seattle. This city is one of a handful where the minimum threshold for local landmark status, special cases excepted, is younger than the 50-year benchmark of the national program. As commonly agreed, this age restriction is intended as a buffer to establish an objective, historicist examination of sites, but even former NPS historian Robert Ultey stated the “[50-year rule] was never intended to be rigidly applied”.¹⁹⁷ While the aim of objectivity is noble, the age rule only promotes the view of landmarks as historical relics, rather than living resources in the built environment. More practically, Seattle's lowered threshold and mandatory historical review program better accommodates the city's rapid pace of redevelopment. At minimum, this system gives preservationists, as well as the greater community, a chance to analyze properties when threatened, rather than before it is simply too late.

Fig. 50: Residents of Seattle's Central District wait for the commencement of a community design meeting for the Midtown Block redevelopment project on Oct. 24, 2018. The former Tradewell supermarket held a post office and a handful of small businesses central to the district's dwindling black community, but will be demolished for a mid-rise apartment building in 2019. “There's nothing wrong with the design,” one resident told a representative of the developer, “but you're not from here. —You don't know this community.” A business owner pleaded, “Please don't forget about me.”(Author)

¹⁹⁷ John H. Sprinkle, “‘Of Exceptional Importance’: The Origins of the ‘Fifty-Year Rule’ in Historic Preservation,” *The Public Historian* 29, no. 2 (2007): 100-1, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2007.29.2.81>.

Other municipalities are taking different approaches to preservation to encourage adaptive reuse in ways sensitive to the current social and economic climate. Los Angeles, a city with a breadth of postwar buildings, introduced the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance in 1999, which waives certain requirements and variances for buildings undergoing reuse as hotels or housing.¹⁹⁸ The ordinance, as the National Trust describes it, is “permissive, rather than restrictive,” incentivizing preservation and simultaneously adding housing stock—addressing the diametrically opposed interests familiar in Seattle and other growing cities.

The National Trust’s pilot Partnership for Building Reuse chose Los Angeles for their project on the strength of this ordinance and seeks to improve upon it by encouraging policy reforms, and touts this program as a template for future ordinances.¹⁹⁹ Programs like these help ensure that old buildings of all vintages continue to contribute economically and environmentally to our cities. Going hand-in-hand with incentives like these is the necessity of reforming existing protection programs. Much as the criteria for landmarking is a binary distinction, the protections afforded are an all-or-nothing treatment.

Writing in *The Atlantic’s* CityLab, Patrice Frei of the National Main Street Center calls attention to the UK’s three-tiered system of designation, sorting properties into those of “exceptional interest” (Grade I), “particularly important buildings of more than special interest” (Grade II), and “buildings of special interest” (Grade III), acknowledging this approach allows for different intervention strategies.²⁰⁰ A monumental public building, a historic residential district, and a supermarket each have their place as recognized landmarks, with significance at varying scales, and consequently require different treatments to express this. Absolute, untouchable preservation and conservation, as afforded by current policy, has its

¹⁹⁸ Urban Land Institute and National Trust for Historic Preservation, “Learning From Los Angeles,” October 2013, <https://la.uli.org/building-reuse/learning-from-los-angeles-now-available-online/>.

¹⁹⁹ National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Green Lab, and Urban Land Institute, “Untapped Potential: Strategies for Revitalization and Reuse,” October 2017, <https://forum.savingplaces.org/viewdocument/untapped-potential-strategies-for>.

²⁰⁰ Frey, “Why Historic Preservation Needs a New Approach.”

place, but so do more inclusive treatments encouraging reuse, such as the mentioned efforts in Los Angeles.

A multiplicity of approaches, especially those engaging multiple stakeholders like tenants and property owners, can be a hedge against the popular perception that preservation only serves the interests of the elite. Joe Cortright of *City Observatory* is one of numerous writers who question the value of preservation, especially more inclusive efforts, as a direct barrier to economic development and housing affordability, citing examples of property owners abusing policy to protect views and neighborhood character.²⁰¹ Cortright and others do not refute protection of *some* buildings, namely the most important, but believe policy is ripe for abuse.

Cary Moon, former Seattle mayoral candidate, refutes that preservation is a driver of unaffordability, citing greater economic forces in shaping housing costs in this city.²⁰² Furthermore, the quality of life issues and overarching fear of displacement often labeled NIMBYism are valid concerns for those across the socioeconomic spectrum. Policy reform that advances inclusivity can work on multiple fronts, addressing inequality through economic reuse, and reconciling the historical importance of preservation with the practical aspects.

Historian Richard Streiner claimed that “history is a continuum that flows without interruption into the present instant and the future.”²⁰³ Preservation goes beyond merely recognizing the past as if a textbook, but continuing a building’s legacy through continued use. San Francisco, a city known for its historic built fabric, is recognizing the value in preservation beyond brick and mortar through the Legacy Business Preservation Fund, which disburses

²⁰¹ Joe Cortright, “Historic Preservation: NIMBYism for the Rich?,” *Strong Towns*, June 14, 2017, <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2017/6/13/historic-preservation-nimbyism-for-the-rich>.

²⁰² Cary Moon and Charles Mudede, “Why NIMBYs And Their Haters Can’t Offer a Deep Solution to the Seattle’s Growing Housing Crisis: Part Three,” *The Stranger*, August 10, 2016, sec. Slog, <https://www.thestranger.com/slog/2016/08/10/24446897/why-nimbys-and-their-haters-cant-offer-a-deep-solution-to-the-seattles-growing-housing-crisis-part-three>.

²⁰³ Richard Striner, “Scholarship, Strategy, and Activism in Preserving the Recent Past,” in *Preserving the Recent Past*, ed. Deborah Slaton and Rebecca Shiffer (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 1995), iii–19.

annual grants to eligible businesses and their landlords,²⁰⁴ ensuring neighborhood anchors continue to serve their community. This is but a small step towards redefining what encompasses the term “preservation.”

²⁰⁴ “Legacy Business Registry & Preservation Fund.” San Francisco Heritage. Accessed March 18, 2019. <https://www.sfheritage.org/legacy/legacy-business-registry-preservation-fund-2/>.

Conclusion

The grocery store is a common ground for American society . . . There is often a community atmosphere where shoppers meet friends and chat for a moment, a customer says hello to a familiar clerk, or one shopper helps another find a food item. Sometimes bulletin boards are provided for community announcements, and promotional displays evoke images of a forthcoming carnival or public holiday. Shoppers do buy groceries, but they may do more.²⁰⁵

The supermarket's place in history is notable for its runaway success and influence on retailing practices in general, but this is only a single component of its significance. While it was, and still is, a profit-seeking enterprise, for generations the supermarket was an incidental center of community: a place for chance encounters, a blending of the public and domestic spheres, a democratic space. At its apex during the Cold War, it represented an optimistic future of space-age architecture and American economic triumph that customers could partake in week after week. Later, the supermarket came to symbolize the banality of suburban life and excesses of consumerism. Both of these stories are integral to the American experience and worthy of being told and reinterpreted.

The significance of the supermarket goes far beyond architecture and style. It is a typology representative of a postwar vernacular, albeit one mass-produced, that in their current states represents a continuum of decades of change. Moreover, they continue to be occupied and reappropriated, building upon this physical trace of history like geological strata.

It is unrealistic to expect the supermarkets be preserved in their original states, as time capsules of a bygone era. Nor need they be: creative reuse, like the examples shown here, continue the symbolic social functions supermarkets held as gathering spaces. Perhaps in the distant future, there may be a supermarket museum in the vein of other historical displays, but near-term, there is more value in uses like the Cascadia Art Museum.

²⁰⁵ Mayo, *American Grocery Store*, xv.

Projects like Third Place just scratch the surface of architectural possibilities for this flexible building typology. Just as the case was with industrial lofts a generation ago, the supermarket provides an architectural canvas rich with potential to turn once undesirable buildings into dynamic urban spaces. By breaking the traditional restrictive notions of preservation, compromise can be made between reuse and urbanist goals of density and walkability.

There are practical implications of preservation, in which affordable space is retained, and waste of materials minimized by avoiding demolition.

To meet these goals, there must be a ponderous shift in how preservation is approached, both of the academic side of ‘why,’ and the practical side of ‘how.’ Preservationists and historians are only recently warming to once objectionable thought of preserving the recent past, and blurring the distinction between absolute protection and careful, considered reuse. The economic and legislative aspects of protection, by nature a contentious political process, must still make progress to accommodate this new interpretation.

Perhaps, as some preservationists claim, the supermarket and its contemporaries are too new a phenomenon to evaluate. Alternately, as Donovan Rypkema suggested, the mass-market architecture of the postwar era is mostly useful in teaching lessons of its failures. It will be up to future generations to make this determination. Yet the supermarket, once prolific, is endangered; now is a critical juncture in which to save them.

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