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Special Issue

# PHLF News

PUBLISHED FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE PITTSBURGH HISTORY & LANDMARKS FOUNDATION

No. 155 August 1999



Photo by William Rydberg, PHOTON

A view of the Fifth and Forbes area, downtown, with Market Square in the foreground.

## Downtown is “Hot”

Roberta Brandes Gratz

Downtown is “hot”: the place to be and be seen, shop and live, walk and window shop, eat and work, do all the other things possible ONLY in the kind of downtown that offers the variety of social, economic, and physical experience never possible in a mall.

Yes, downtown is hot. Corporations know it. Developers know it. And even some government officials know it. Downtown inferiority complexes should be a thing of the past with those city officials smart enough not to sell out and sell short exactly what makes their downtowns appealing. This is the real challenge in the era of big chains, big malls, big developers, and big public financing. The necessary, expensive, and



Roberta Brandes Gratz is an urban critic and author of the classic *Living City: Thinking Small in a Big Way* and the recently published *Cities Back from the Edge: New Life for Downtown*. *Aspects of Pittsburgh* are featured in both books. Roberta

Gratz came to Pittsburgh on October 7, 1998 to speak and tour the downtown area, as part of our “Making Cities Work” lecture series, co-sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, Pittsburgh Branch, and Landmarks.

inappropriate downtown projects are seductive, but never foster enduring appeal: they are a waste of public funds.

Downtown may be “in,” but this is true only of the downtown districts and streets that dare to be different, dare to be their own places, dare to resist the mall formulas. Only those downtowns that reflect the characters of their cities are growing in prestige and appeal. Fans come and go to stadiums. Visitors come and leave convention centers. But it is the people with vested interests and long-term connections to a locality who come, stay, live, work, spend money, and thus enliven a vital center. Without them, active life cannot evolve; enduring economic vitality doesn’t have a chance.

Pasadena’s Colorado Boulevard, Boston’s Newbury Street, Pittsburgh’s Carson Street, Norfolk’s Granby Street, Denver’s Larimer Square, New York’s SoHo, Denver’s Lower Downtown: in these, interesting rebirth is visible. These are not streets dominated by chains or enclosed malls: locally owned, modest-scale businesses and local events give a place character. Character of place can not be either bought or “developed.” It happens only where local people dominate.

In the end, the most essential need of a downtown *is* character. Character is the most effective engine for genuine

**So many downtowns lack confidence in the inherent value of their existing downtown retail districts that they seek big financing and big investment to reinvent, rebuild, and replace them. This kills a genuine downtown. The replacement never matches the quality lost.**

economic development. If nothing distinguishes downtown from the strip, the mall, the nearest megastore, or the formula chain, why would someone bother to come downtown?

Character is what old *buildings*, not just facades, can contribute. History disappears from view when old build-

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We Believe in Pittsburgh

This special issue of *PHLF News* is devoted to the new downtown retail development being proposed by the City of Pittsburgh for the Fifth and Forbes Avenues corridor, and to the conversion of the Mellon Bank building at Fifth Avenue and Smithfield Street into Lord & Taylor’s.

For over a year, the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation and Preservation Pittsburgh have been trying to work with City officials to encourage the preservation of downtown landmarks and the continuation of unique local businesses and ownership as we all work to enliven the downtown.

# Downtown is “Hot”

(Continued from page 1)

ings do. But it is not just old buildings and certainly not just old, architecturally appealing buildings. A fabric built over time, under different design mindsets and for different purposes, is the most valuable asset of downtowns fortunate enough not to have their traditional character wiped out by pave-over planning. Buildings of all ages, sizes, and styles are now suitable for varied uses, convertible to innovative activity. They offer the additional advantage that, whatever happens to the occupant of an individual building, the health of



Barry Hannegan of Landmarks encourages a colleague to admire the upper stories of a building at Wood and Forbes.

the whole street or district does not depend on the continued health of one component. Old department stores are transformed into mixed residential, commercial, and retail spaces. Quirky spaces turn into eateries. Theaters become nightclubs. No mall can offer that kind of variety.

Loft buildings attract residents, dance studios, graphic artists, architects. Small retail spaces with interesting configurations absorb the explosion of craft-based businesses increasingly found in pedestrian-oriented downtowns. Glassblowers, clothing designers, furniture makers, weavers, potters, doll crafters,

bakers, and candy makers are opening their own stores in front, and making their goods in back or upstairs, in such places. Sometimes, two very different producers share space. The lines between manufacturing and retailing have blurred.

“The more variations there can be, the better,” Jane Jacobs, the wisest of urban advocates, told us years ago. “As soon as the range and number of variations in buildings decline, the diversity and population and enterprises are too apt to stay static or decline, instead of increasing.”

As the malls get bigger and bigger and need more and more entertainment to draw people, and as the chains get bigger and bigger and more formula-based, the public seeks the different, the oddity, the innovation. Bigness and innovation are rarely partners.

So many downtowns lack confidence in the inherent value of their existing downtown retail districts that they seek big financing and big investment to reinvent, rebuild, and replace them. This kills a genuine downtown. The replacement never matches the quality lost.

Long-ignored but now reviving downtown districts exhibit the character lost in the downtowns rebuilt with megaprojects. But this rebirth process is gradual, often slow at first, small step by small step, *ad hoc*. This is both the good news and the bad news: the good news because this is simply how it happens best, the bad news because the “experts” fail to recognize and value this style of rejuvenation until big developers or retail chains notice.

The most interesting downtown rebirth is occurring in the cities and towns that have not malled or urban-renewed themselves into parking lots, enclosed malls, or corporate extinction. These streets and districts offer the opportunity to add new businesses and uses by filling in empty spaces, adding on to existing structures, or reconfiguring the interior spaces by combining or dividing. The existing fabric and some of the surviving uses are the most important assets. They are the foundation to build on. This is what Pittsburgh has that so many other cities no longer do. The challenge is to save what has not gone already and to build on its foundation, not to destroy it.



On October 7, 1998, a group of business and foundation leaders met under Kaufmann’s clock to tour the Fifth/Forbes area with Roberta Gratz. She stressed that hometown businesses reflect the personality and needs of hometown people and are the backbone of main streets.



## “MAKING CITIES WORK” LECTURE SERIES

Co-sponsored by Landmarks and the Federal Reserve  
Bank of Cleveland, Pittsburgh Branch

**Don Elliott and Michael Samuels of Clarion/Samuels Associates**  
Friday, September 24  
12:00 Noon to 1:30 p.m.  
Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, Pittsburgh Branch  
717 Grant Street, Downtown

Elliott and Samuels will discuss their findings for the first time at the “Making Cities Work” lecture.

Fee: \$20.00 for members of Landmarks and non-members  
Reservations: Seating is limited.  
Call Mary Lu Denny at (412) 471-5808 to make your reservation. Payment must be received by Monday, September 20.

**Coming in October Stanton Eckstut of Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut & Whitelaw**  
“Preserving and Revitalizing Downtowns in the United States”  
Thursday, October 14  
12:00 Noon to 1:30 p.m.  
Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, Pittsburgh Branch  
717 Grant Street, Downtown

Fee: \$20.00 for members of Landmarks and non-members  
Reservations: Seating is limited.  
Call Mary Lu Denny at (412) 471-5808 to make your reservation. Payment must be received by Monday, October 11.

PHLF News is published four times each year for the members of the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, a non-profit historic preservation organization serving Allegheny County. Landmarks is committed to neighborhood restoration and historic-property preservation; public advocacy; historic landscape preservation; and education and membership programs. Special issues, devoted to a particular theme or program area, are published on occasion.

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# Marketplace at Fifth and Forbes

*The City wishes to upgrade Pittsburgh's central retail area of downtown: a laudable aim. However the plan, as Landmarks understands it, would call for the City to acquire by eminent domain almost all of the buildings within the Fifth/Forbes Avenues and Wood Street/Market Square area. A significant number of historic buildings would then be demolished so that the City could turn the cleared property over to Urban Retail Properties—a Chicago developer.*

*The City plan, called “Marketplace at Fifth and Forbes,” would use approximately \$100 million in public dollars, and existing businesses would be dislocated in favor of national retailers.*

*Landmarks believes that the way to make downtown retail viable is to restore the significant older buildings, permit the demolition of insignificant ones for new construction (though in some cases preserving the facades), and anchor the project with a combination of national and local tenants in unique Pittsburgh venues.*

## The City's Position

According to newspaper publications of mid-June, the Marketplace area, as defined by the City, is to be bounded by Smithfield Street, Oliver Avenue, Liberty Avenue, Stanwix Street, and Fourth Avenue in a loosely inclusive border with large areas of property, notably PPG Place and Lazarus, unaffected. (Please see the map on page 4.)

The situation at present is vague. The principal performer within the area is to be the Chicago developer Urban Retail Properties, though it has signed no development agreement with the City as yet.

Why Urban Retail Properties (URP) was selected as the project developer is unknown. URP brings an array of credentials, but Landmarks argued for an open-selection process. A number of good developers are working in downtowns, mixing old buildings with new, trying to create projects that enhance the unique local historic context.

In anticipation of the new development, PNC Bank has purchased the great majority of the land between its tower (at Fifth and Wood) and Liberty Avenue on the north side of Fifth Avenue. The City, it appears, will acquire most of the land between Fifth and Forbes Avenues between Smithfield and Graeme Streets on the west side of Market Square, as well as a few properties north of Fifth and considerable property south of Forbes. The city block long associated with the New Diamond Market, Murphy's and Donahoe's might (or might not) go to Nordstrom's—or might turn into a twenty-four screen movie theater.

Indeed, we seem not so much to have a plan by the City as a recurrent pattern of hopes whose specific contents keep changing. We are told that the result will be an addition of 500,000 to 800,000 square feet of entertainment and retail space to the project area for a “24-hour downtown,” or one at least that keeps late hours. Emphasis at first was on “national” chains as tenants, with established local businesses disregarded. However, to some small degree, Landmarks and others seem to have created a change of policy—or stated attitude—that would give distinctively local businesses an equal place in occupying the land.

The cost of development appears to be over double that estimated a year ago, from a possible low of \$175 million to more like \$400 million. The City, Urban Retail Properties, the State, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, and the Strategic Investment Fund might all put money into the project, and the land acquired by the City might pass as a gift to Urban Retail Properties, or might not.

## Our Ideas

### • *Encourage Local Businesses*

The history of this project has thus far favored “national” chains for this historic center of the city, complementing the anchor department stores, again “national,” with restaurants, shops, and entertainment places whose names are known nationwide. Our hope, on the contrary, is for a distinctively local character for the project area, strengthening the businesses that have been doing well there and encouraging the opening of new businesses by local entrepreneurs who have been doing well elsewhere in the Pittsburgh region. One might go to extraordinary lengths to keep what is there already, as happened in Boston when the famous old Durgin Park Restaurant was built around in the reconstruction of the Quincy Market. (It is worth noting that a large complex of historic buildings was adaptively reused for local and national shops in the reconstruction of Quincy Market.)

### • *Give Market Square a Traditional Role*

Market Square, the old “Diamond,” dates back to 1784 and the Woods-Vickroy survey for the Penn family. Until the demolition of the last Diamond Market house in 1961, Market Square has been a positive point of concentration for the city. Recently, planners have been at a loss to find a role for it, yet the presence of Nicholas Coffee Company and adjacent enterprises and the use of one quadrant as a rallying place give Market Square an air of positive use.

Market Square may indeed become more of a late-hours place, as seems to be hoped. With the recent introduction of rocking chairs and tables, more people are enjoying the Square as a place to enjoy a meal and relax. We may wonder, too, if it may not be possible, as it was in the beginning, to buy food there. Suppose the New Diamond Market, not too long ago extant in the Murphy Company block, were to be revived and extended, in good weather, into Market Square itself? In its merchandise, such a place would supply ordinary goods to an anticipated residential population as it arrived, and special delicacies for downtown workers homeward bound.

### • *Restore Significant Architecture*

We believe that some facades and some entire buildings within the project area have useful lives still before them and, if restored, will provide a sense of rejuvenation to the area. Restored, they will impart a mild and pleasant shock to



those who have passed them all these years: obviously old, yet so fresh, so ready for many years more! Behind such facades, which tend to be small-scaled, might appropriately go the established Pittsburgh businesses, leaving the new chains, more demanding of space, to the newer and larger buildings.

### • *Redirect the Public Investment*

The City, rather than spending large sums of money on acquiring all properties in the proposed area, should acquire only those buildings that may be usefully demolished for new construction, and should provide facade restoration grants for all the significant buildings. In order to qualify for such a grant, building owners would have to agree to join (or require their retail tenants to join) a master marketing and uniform hours program. Signage appropriate to the architectural styles of the buildings would also be required. This proposal would allow for the creativity of many architects and would, undoubtedly, cost less than \$400 million.

### • *Demolish Only When National Leases Are Signed*

We strongly urge that no buildings be demolished until actual leases are signed with national retailers that require clearance. We would point out that Planet Hollywood, All-Star Cafe, and FAO Schwartz were originally touted as potential national retailers for Pittsburgh's project. However the *Wall Street Journal* recently has described Planet Hollywood as having financial difficulties, the *New York Times* has said that All-Star Café in Times Square is for sale, and the *Business Press* has noted that the Dutch retail owner Vendex NV may sell FAO Schwartz because it is a “sore point in the earnings report” with sales down “sharply.” National tenants do not necessarily mean stability in the future.

### • *Develop a Marketing and Leasing Program*

The City should, on a performance basis, pay a developer to develop a total

plan: locate local and national tenants; provide shop design and consultation; oversee building restoration and new construction; and develop and implement a marketing plan and a uniform hours plan. A diversity of owners and architects would enhance the quality of the project as true urbanism.

### • *Develop Housing*

In place of some proposed national retailers that are readily accessible in the malls, first-rate housing within the area should be developed by the City. Retail will develop if the customers are there.

### • *Our Fundamental Principle*

If we develop a *Pittsburgh* retail center using national tenants in ways that support our local entrepreneurs, appoint a variety of designers both local and national, and restore our fine architecture to create a uniquely *Pittsburgh* center—not a repetitive national stereotype by an out-of-town shopping center developer—we will compete much more effectively at much lower cost both with our own suburban markets and with other city centers. Allegheny Center, based on a national stereotype model, is a failure. Station Square, based on our principles of urban planning, is successful. The Cultural District downtown, anchored by the restoration and adaptive reuse of a number of historic buildings along Penn and Liberty Avenues, is flourishing.

Why can't we learn from history, experience, and practical success as we work to revive the Fifth/Forbes corridor?

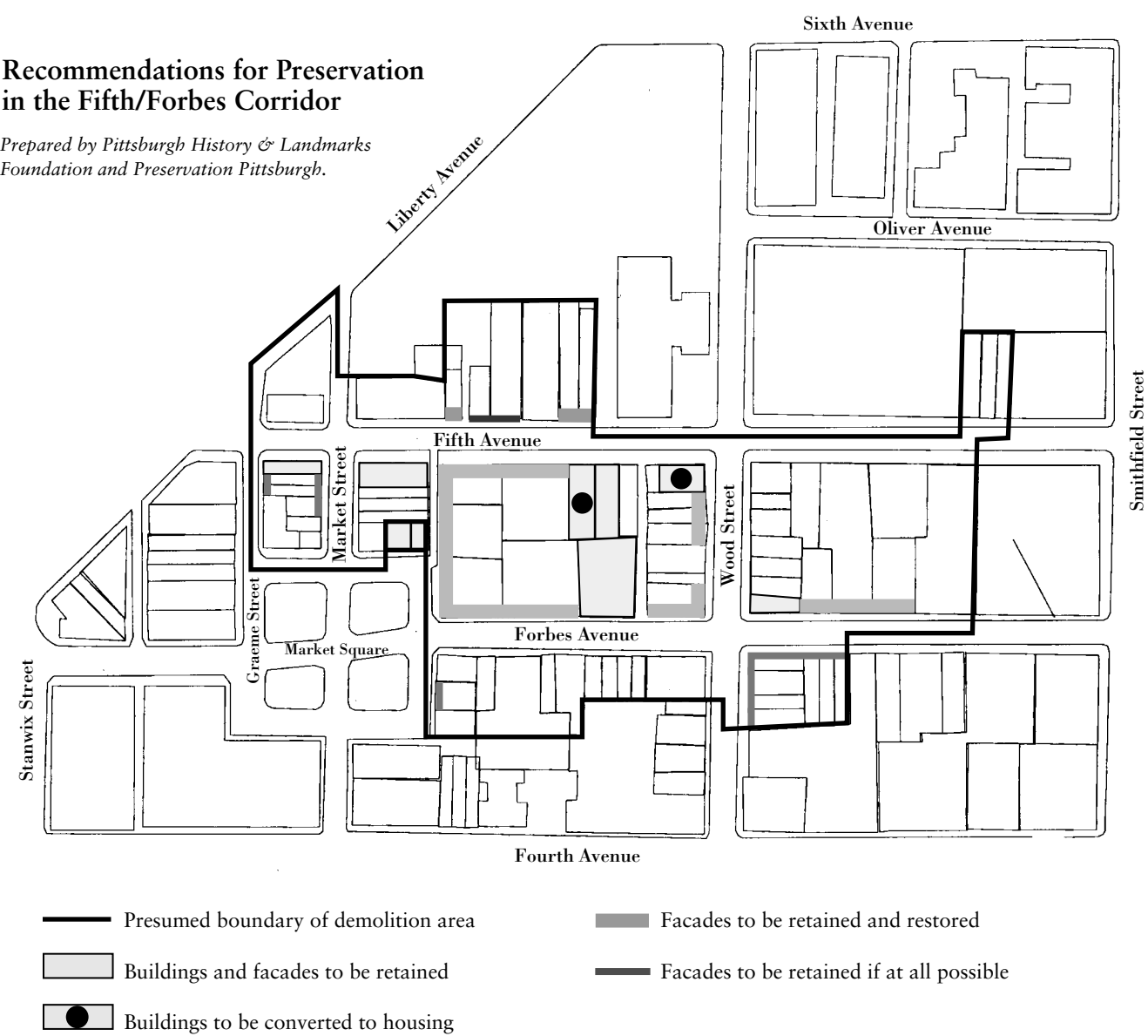
# The Shape of Things to Come

*This plan represents the entire area that we believe may be targeted by the City of Pittsburgh for redevelopment as the Fifth/Forbes corridor.*

*The Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation and Preservation Pittsburgh have evaluated all the buildings in the Fifth/Forbes corridor and have made recommendations for preservation and adaptive reuse, all the while leaving ample tracts available for demolition and new construction. Development based on these recommendations as shown in the accompanying plan will retain much of the character of the area, because familiar landmarks will be saved and the historic scale will be preserved. Our position on facade retention has been flexible, recognizing that such a practice has been successful in other cities only where the enlargement of the new building behind the historic facade has been designed with sensitivity. Our proposals have addressed the unanimously shared goal of maximum variety in the new district, but we have gone further than the City and Urban Retail Properties in encouraging the salvaging of some buildings slated for demolition for reuse as housing.*

## Recommendations for Preservation in the Fifth/Forbes Corridor

*Prepared by Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation and Preservation Pittsburgh.*



# Pittsburgh at the Crossroads

Barry Hannegan

The central issue of this *PHLF News* and the essential problem of the City's proposed redevelopment of the Fifth/Forbes corridor in the downtown is the relation of historic preservation to retail vitality. We will leave aside questions about the quality of the retail operations being solicited by Urban Retail Properties (URP) for inclusion in this project. It clearly makes little sense to bring to the center of the city, at considerable public expense, those retail chains that are ubiquitous in the suburban malls, only to have the profits sent to headquarter offices in distant places, or even abroad. Downtown can use a few conventional national name stores for the benefit of those who live in Pittsburgh, and for the most part, down-

town can continue to rely on what we can find still here in the center core; but, if this new development is to be a regional shopping mecca it must offer what is unavailable anywhere else. Landmarks has been deeply concerned about the City's plan to demolish ten or twelve blocks in order to create an entire new shopping and entertainment district, and we have urged that distinguished buildings and the scale of the area be respected and retained—along, of course, with the small, locally owned businesses that give the corridor its present life. The mix of history and shopping demonstrably does work in smaller, peripheral neighborhoods, the "Main Streets" of current urban planning.

We see it here in the South Side, in Bloomfield, and in Squirrel Hill. Preservation is a variable; it is most evident along Carson Street, but it also plays a role in Bloomfield. Along Forbes and Murray, it may hardly yet be a factor; the old buildings continue to serve a variety of purposes. All such flourishing neighborhood commercial cores grow and change incrementally; any extensive planning intervention kills. We have seen the blight of central planning attack McKeesport, East Liberty, and, above all, old Allegheny, which has all but disappeared under the dead and alien presence of Allegheny Center. Somewhat similar peripheral centers can be seen around other older cities.

Portions of Georgetown, as vital as one could want in regard to retail, display a stimulating mix of well-restored older buildings, surprisingly housed big-box retailers such as Staples, with tactful and zestfully designed new infill. In Boston, what is possibly the finest combination of old and new buildings with primary and upscale specialty retail coexist in a large and exhilarating area in the Back Bay which is roughly defined by the Boylston-Newbury Streets corridor that significantly includes not only a Neiman Marcus and a Marshalls but two first rate grocery stores. Here, as in Georgetown and in our own local examples, there is a large resident population that has easy and quick access (often on foot!) to all these

East Carson Street on the South Side.



Forbes Avenue near Murray, in Squirrel Hill.



Photos by Jim Judkis



consumer goodies.

Many small cities have purposefully retained their historic images and characters in order to improve the quality of the citizens' life and foster a tourist economy. A chief example here might well be Charleston, South Carolina, which, admittedly, has an unbeatable advantage as a place to live and a place to visit. The City government did not scrap its heritage but enriched it so that both citizen and visitor would immediately see they were not in Montgomery, Alabama. Portland, Maine has used its nineteenth-century buildings and districts as a bootstrap to create an attractive and lively city center: one that, however, seems to cater more to the visitor than to the resident.

And here is indeed the rub. More often than not, historic districts and the neighborhoods that have most benefited from preservation do not provide primary retail. Even in one of our own older neighborhoods, Homestead, the necessities of life appear to be increasingly taking refuge in large new, relatively isolated buildings, easily reached only by car, leaving the historic Eighth Avenue to house less urgent commercial purposes.

Cities that bear the greatest resemblance to Pittsburgh—Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee—all are confronting problems much like ours here. The extreme instance is Baltimore, where the City proposes the demolition of the entire western half of what is left of the traditional commercial core of the city. The planned evisceration of Baltimore gained it the dubious distinction as one of the eleven most endangered sites in America. Lost in this obliteration would be the famous Lexington Market and the buildings that housed the four department stores that once provided upscale shopping. Arguing that the city's population can no longer support fine stores, the advocates of this radical new plan want to introduce big-box retailers, vast parking lots, and

townhouse developments. All this is the dreariest possible imposition of an unthinking suburban pattern on the center of the city. Heritage Baltimore, challenging the economics of the City's plan, has come up with a vivid counter-proposal that would save well over a hundred threatened historic structures and bring some variety and zest to a restored commercial core.

Cincinnati seems just to be holding on. There have been losses in the department store situation, and there is a persistent notion that retail should be shifted to the riverfront with all its new sports facilities, thus abandoning the historic retail and commercial core which still retains a good deal of vitality. A standoff between the Mayor, apparently favoring new development at any cost, and an opposed City Council seems to offer the best hope that there will be time to find a right solution.

Until recently, Milwaukee enjoyed a splendid downtown. However, the Marshall Field department store (which had taken the old Gimbels building) was closed, thus destroying one end of a fine shopping district that ran along the city's main thoroughfare, Wisconsin Avenue. The beginning of commercial decay has apparently prompted a grand new plan for the city that would enhance the attractions to tourists at the expense of its usefulness to its own citizens. In the course of this change-over, any number of older existing structures in the heart of the city would be demolished.

What all this means is that Pittsburgh is up against a very difficult situation for which the stock solutions entail much loss with little assured gain. We have here the opportunity to create a new philosophy of center-city renovation, to devise a method that will give us the vividness and prosperity that traditionally distinguish the urban core. This should build on what we have, both architecturally and commercially, to



Photo courtesy of the Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, Pa.

*Looking up Fifth Avenue toward Wood Street, in the late 1940s. G. C. Murphy would be at the extreme right, while several of the small buildings at the far left are still in relatively good condition. These we have urged should be preserved for their historic design qualities and incorporated into whatever is done in the course of the redevelopment of Fifth Avenue. What can all those people be doing crowding the sidewalk in that fashion?*

ensure that we do not lose our identity and sense of place, any more than we lose the small, individual shops and services that should define and sustain the city's life. By encouraging locally owned businesses that know our market, we will keep the profits working in our region.

During its first and greatest Renaissance, Pittsburgh showed the nation how a major city could re-create itself. Now we have the same great chance to provide a model for other equally troubled, equally determined cities across the land to regain a true quality of life.

*Pittsburgh, in its 241st year. The great natural amphitheater formed by the confluence of the three rivers has been the setting for the high drama of the City's history. Will the violence of the Fifth-Forbes redevelopment prove to be Pittsburgh's last act?*



Photo by Jim Judkins



Fortune magazine featured the interior of the Mellon Bank Building in October 1967.

# A Great Space and Departed Hopes

Ellis L. Schmidlapp

*Ellis L. Schmidlapp, president of Landmarks Design Associates, Architects, is a guest contributor to this Special Issue.*

From October 1922 through March 1924, Mellon Bank constructed “A Magnificent New Headquarters Building” on Smithfield Street. It was built on the site of the bank’s previous offices, which had been housed in a collection of smaller buildings acquired through the years as the bank expanded. The bank’s deposits had reached 100 million dollars that year, and Andrew W. Mellon remarked that the new building marked “a success beyond our most ambitious dreams of those early years.”

The building was constructed “to state architecturally the clean, open, lofty, yet dignified image of the Mellon Family,” according to the bank’s official history. Newspapers declared the building to be “a fitting symbol of the stability, enterprise, and sense of public responsibility characteristic of the organization it housed.”

For seventy-five years, the building remained remarkably little changed from its original appearance. Built to impress its competitors, reassure its depositors, and attract new customers, it accomplished these goals with verve and style.

The exterior is entirely sheathed in granite, conveying strength and stability through a simple, almost severe use of a colossal order of pilasters stretching along all three facades. In the middle of the main elevation, monumental bronze doors stand behind two Doric columns. The structure, only four stories high, commanded an entire block of Smithfield Street in the heart of the business district at a time when other

banks were including fifteen to twenty floors of offices above their banking rooms to provide additional income.

Through the enormous bronze doors and companion doors on Fifth Avenue lay the great central banking room. This space was at the core of the bank’s business and the means by which it was remembered. Few commercial enterprises of the day so relied upon architecture as an instrument of business. The great room, 160 feet long and 62 feet high, impressed and reassured its customers with the beauty and audacity of its twenty-four marble Ionic columns (brought from Italy of course), each weighing 28,000 pounds, lining all four sides of the room. The space was filled with light from a skylight and huge windows along three high walls. But this was no mere showpiece, no reception parlor as an introduction to the space where the real work of the organization was done: this was the workroom of the organization. Tellers lined one side of the great hall, while bank officers worked at desks along the Smithfield Street side of the space and the owners of the bank—yes owners, not hired managers—worked within view in adjoining offices.

The building and the organization met its biggest test on March 4, 1933, as the panic phase of the Depression set in. The Governor of Pennsylvania declared a banking holiday, and many banks did not open that day or ever again. Mellon Bank opened as usual. The bank recorded 10,000 people in the bank on that day between 9 a.m. and 12:15 p.m. It is unlikely that the space was built with this scene in mind, but again according to the bank’s official history “all customers were satisfied and R. B. Mellon, President of the Bank, was in full sight and in charge.”

Today we are reassured of our deposits by pixels on a computer screen

and something called FDIC, which is, of course, just ourselves again as taxpayers. In 1933 nervous depositors were reassured by the professionalism of the tellers, the presence of the owner whose money was at risk, and this magnificent space.

The space is anachronistic in today’s banking business. You can get a higher interest rate on your savings from a mutual fund whose sole contact (and formulaic friendliness) with you will be by electronic blips. But while the building’s past use is no longer viable, what of its cultural and artistic significance? It remains. Now tax dollars are being used to rip out the marble columns and fill the space top to bottom with multiple sales floors, obliterating all the qualities of this spectacular space. Smithfield Street’s Grand Hall is disappearing. The space was built at a time when the owners and the employees were Pittsburghers. What Mellon Bank built to serve its own goals contributed to the greater glory of the city. Now Lord & Taylor (not owned by

Pittsburghers) will not set foot in the city unless the citizens contribute their tax money to destroy a city treasure.

Imagine, for a moment, that no commitment to the destructive process has yet been made. There are certainly other options that could respect the cultural value of the space. A valuable function for a revitalized downtown would be served, but in a way based on the building’s unique qualities rather than trying to mimic the spatial homogeneity of suburban development. Mellon Bank may have to vacate the space but it should not walk away uncaring from its past.

Retail is a likely and compatible reuse option for the Mellon Bank space. The main floor is all on one level, immediately adjoining Fifth Avenue and Smithfield Street, both active retail streets. Significant amounts of space between the columns and the outer walls could be fitted with mezzanines that provide additional retail space while maintaining views to the windows and not detracting from the great

The Mellon Bank Building at Smithfield Street and Fifth Avenue.



central space. A small portion of the central space, perhaps 15%, could also accommodate new floors if these were carefully inserted. Indeed, there are two floors above the main space that could be reused.

Mellon Bank could yield area on the lower floors of its adjoining office building to provide additional retail space to be reached through the banking room. These measures would both preserve spatial character and create a distinctive retail space, different from competitors' offerings.

Photo by William Rydberg, PHOTON



Above and right: details of the great banking space.

Cities compete with suburban locations by providing taxpayer subsidies to make up for their high tax and regulatory policies. (Unfortunately, it appears that the developer is planning to mimic the generic suburban retail experience.) The city will never compete with the suburbs in ability to provide huge areas of chain retail surrounded by free parking. A better strategy competes through the unique quality and real character of urban structures and is therefore good for the whole region, rather than once more copying happenstance design in the exurb.

The Mellon Bank space was unparalleled in the region and matched in few other places in the world. It was a great Classical basilica of light and marble; a building half its size would have impressed the previous American Century. The soaring space is most immediately impressive by its display of colossal white marble columns, but the



walls are almost entirely sheathed with two- to four-inch thick slabs of white marble. There is simply no comparison between the generous use of the most luxurious materials available in the early twentieth century and the half-inch slivers of marble glued to concrete or gyp board that impart "character" in today's retail establishments. Further, the Mellon Bank interior is testament to the skilled workforce that manufactured, fabricated, and installed the steel, marble, bronze, granite, and glass that make up the building.

Back to reality. The banking room has gone. What a travesty that it is now destined to be obscured with concrete floors, tile ceilings, and acres of gyp board. I expect that there will be paper thin "touches of elegance" added—just as in new stores everywhere.

Right and below: Interior demolition was underway in early July.



Photo by William Rydberg, PHOTON



Grand Central's main concourse.

## Great Buildings Make Great Cities

Barry Hannegan

New York is always a case apart. Its vastness and the scale of its resources, problems, successes, failures, and self-image all make it an unlikely model for mere middle-size cities. Yet, recently, the powers that be in Manhattan have provided the entire country with a superb example of the value of historic preservation. The recently completed restoration of Grand Central Terminal has brought to life and light, again, one of New York's truly great spaces. It is no longer a dirty railroad station (Pittsburghers may well ask what that is), but a glittering vastness of infinite grace and power, to which visitors and residents alike are drawn. Once there, they enjoy upscale shopping; the delights of the venerable and restored Oyster Bar; provocative, sumptuous art exhibitions; and the possibility of abundant rail commuter service.

The irony is that the New York Central Railroad, whose very heart was the Grand Central Terminal, has been dead and gone for almost three decades. Yet its image, at least in New York, is vivid and vital in a way that exceeds even the glory of the NYC in its heyday. But here, in Pittsburgh, Mellon Bank, still among the living of the corporate world, has seen fit to divest itself of its historic heart and turn it over for destruction to an alien group, thus depriving Pittsburgh of an integral part of its heritage and of a truly marvelous building.



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# A Tale of Two and Somet

Barry Hannegan

*Over time, great cities experience episodes of massive physical renewal, inevitably presented as sweeping improvements to the setting and quality of the city's life. Rome's Via Giulia, with its Renaissance imposition of order on a medieval city, London's speculative residential squares of the eighteenth century, the wholesale regularization of traffic patterns of Paris under the Second Empire, and Manhattan's Lincoln Center all readily come to mind as vast set pieces of planning and architecture. And, yet, for every one of these, the visitor to or resident of those cities could offer a counter image of irregularity, variety, and surprise in neighborhoods that have simply grown and changed according to much more discrete forces. It is in just such neighborhoods that one finds the vibrant richness of commercial enterprise that tempts and rewards the partaker of urban life.*

Pittsburgh's dense fabric is still filled with such variety despite three major campaigns of clearing in the last half century that have emptied the areas of the Lower Hill, of the Point, and of the multi-block territory of PPG Place. Faced, now, with a fourth onslaught of demolition in the Fifth/Forbes corridor, we might pause to look at some of the smaller downtown buildings that are witnesses to change, chance, survival, and the continuing if dwindling retail vitality of the downtown. It is the smaller buildings on twenty or thirty-foot frontages that testify to change and the fluctuation of architectural taste as applied to store fronts. The larger commercial buildings tend to retain their integrity, even after their function has been entirely altered; the former Frank and Seder Building, opposite Kaufmann's on Smithfield, continues to make a sober and refined contribution to its setting even though its original department store occupant is long gone.

The wide-spread practice of re-cladding the first story or two of a facade in order to bring it into line with the presumed notion of what will seem up-to-date to the consumer tends very much to discourage us from seeing what such ostensible remodeling has cost us in architectural quality. To look upward is to see another city altogether, one that more generously gave a sense of substance and commitment.

A recent pilgrimage through the downtown, motivated by the Fifth/Forbes plan with its concomitant destruction of much good historical building, brought to our attention a number of interesting, sometimes moving, architectural palimpsests that we record here in pocket descriptions and evaluations.

## 242 Forbes Avenue

Since this excursion is all about the flux of the city's landscape, we might start with an example of facade remodeling that has already begun to disappear. The accompanying photograph was taken several decades ago when the building might be said to have attained its ripest state. And what a wonderful maturity that was! Reading from the top downward, we see two stories, probably survivors of the original building, of the most rampageous design. They defy historical characterization, at least as to

sources, but are, rather, great demonstrations of the untutored inventiveness of, I should think, the 1870s. Especially delightful are the paired dentils that serve as brackets under the ends of the window labels on the top floor—architectural buck teeth.



242 Forbes Avenue

The facade's second story was likely added around 1910 when, perhaps, the building was pushed outward to the property line, allowing for the introduction of the unexpected, felicitous balcony. This early twentieth-century remodeling is a handsome example of Classical, particularly Roman, design as it was understood at the time, and the comparison of the console brackets sustaining the balcony with their earlier counterparts beneath the cornice at the top is an instructive and amusing exercise. The ground level facade defies description—there's nothing there. This resurfacing of some time around 1960 must have obliterated the lower portion of the c. 1910 design and introduced a vacuousness and cheapness to the sidewalk level that has sadly characterized this sort of commercial updating. Is there such a category as the Particle Board Style?

More recently, all of the architectural relief ornamentation of the upper floors has been removed, thus destroying a fine documentation of Pittsburgh's downtown commercial vitality during three phases of its history. This facade will disappear altogether under the headache ball for the new Fifth/Forbes development.



*In addition to showing one of Pittsburgh's major department stores, this postcard also gives us a good idea of what the Floyd Building originally looked like (see the far right).*

## 610-12 Wood Street

Here again are three successive records of the commercial desirability of this central downtown site. The surviving building, dated 1880, was for its time a high-rise clothed in a variation of the Eastlake-Gothic Revival style. In the 1920s the lower-most two floors were reclad in a routine but able version of the sparer



kind of Classicism favored at the time. Much more recently, the street level of the facade has been overlain above the plate glass window with large panels that are little more than a screen on which to display aggressive graphics. Is the choice of a cheap, easily manipulated material (particle board or not) for the renovation here and on Forbes Avenue yet another manifestation of a throw-away material culture?

## 215 Fifth Avenue

Belonging to a larger parcel of real estate now owned by PNC Bank, the former Floyd Building is one of the finest surviving non-ecclesiastical examples, even if fragmentary, of the High Victorian Gothic style in the city. It exhibits, in general, the incisive, muscular qualities of that style, and in particular, it is a fine



demonstration of what the Victorians would have called Permanent Polychromy, that is, the use of a variety of colors but relying only on materials that were inherently of a particular hue, using no paint and no misrepresentation. Just look at those upper two stories when you are next on lower Fifth Avenue. There are four or five visible tints (the grimy condition makes certain reading difficult), including the blue of tiles set in the very gable. A much less good example of this type of Victorian design still stands at 107 Smithfield Street, but this facade, in spite of its greater integrity, is humdrum indeed compared to the Fifth Avenue building.

Solid, hard, high-minded, colorful, beautifully ordered and articulated, even the remnants of the Floyd Building would bring joy to the heart of John Ruskin. This bit of decrepit facade is one of the great treasures of the downtown.

## 634 Smithfield Street

Here's an example of a building, really a pair of them, that normally one would walk by without taking any notice. It pays to stop now and again and just look. These two units may have started life as identical twins, but parted company long ago. The right-hand facade is what interests us at the moment. Long home to various furniture stores, the building is now nearly effaced, not so much by the flimsy overlay of the lower stories, but by a uniform coat of dark



# imes Three Cities



634 Smithfield Street

brown paint, an entirely anti-architectural color when it comes to traditional masonry forms such as these. Ignore the color, and the building reveals itself as a refined, rather dry, and slightly sinister exercise in facade design of 1896. The entire surface, which is not all that extensive in light of the narrow vertical window strips which are the chief articulating element, is neatly incised with a pattern of rustication, a traditional technique of enlivening masonry which here gives the surface attractive crispness and scale. A solitary architectural feature of note is the aedicule window surround at the center of the second floor. The street level facade seems not to have suffered much if any from modernization, and the entire building, cleaned and shorn of the recent shrouds of panels and perfunctory roll-top awnings, would achieve a reticent elegance.



## 320 Forbes Avenue

Elegant possibly, reticent surely not, is the building that bears the name "ROYAL" across its frieze. Again, our

appreciation is limited to the upper floor; how many reworkings the facade at street level has undergone is anyone's guess as is, regrettably, the original appearance of that area. What does still very clearly emerge here is the vision of a rich, festive, even slightly swaggering

building that well evokes an Edwardian flavor to counteract the prevailing dourness of Pittsburgh's turn-of-the-century image. The design is of real interest. In its somewhat finicking embellishment of almost every architectural feature, it recalls cast iron facades of the 1850s, but the delicacy here, much heightened by the choice of white glazed terra cotta, is akin to the taste for eighteenth-century refinement just around 1900. The architectural vocabulary is, I suppose, ultimately Renaissance, and there are vague intimations of the Venetian sixteenth century. The glazing pattern in the fine, round-topped windows is worth noting since it repeats in somewhat simplified form the windows of the Chapel of the Chateau of Versailles of c. 1700. The Royal and its eye-catching companions just further up Forbes (nos. 322 and 330) were to have been included in the Fifth/Forbes demolition area, but a recent, apparent shrinking of that project fortunately may have saved these facades for a better fate.



## 307-09 Forbes Avenue

Almost certainly doomed by the proposed new commercial center, this building, like so many of our older, semi-neglected buildings, does not invite casual attention. The condition here is shabbier than usual, and the varying treatments of the sidewalk level of the facade are a compendium of bad ideas. However, if you can see through the disfiguring fire escapes to the upper floors, you will be looking at what is probably the finest example in the downtown of archaeological revivalism in architecture. This reasonably intact upper area is a very close and fine evocation of Parisian design of c. 1780. It may be that there was in fact a specific model taken by



our unknown Pittsburgh architect; I do not know. However, whoever he was and whatever his source or sources might have been, his building amply preserves the standards of the academic architectural practice of the earlier decades of our century when a designer

could be fluent in a number of stylistic languages. Lest it be thought that adherence to a Classical canon limits variation and creativity, we have only to compare the use of the Ionic Order here with its appearance on the adjacent Bolan's Candy Store at the corner of Wood and Forbes. That, too, is Ionic, and also Parisian, but it is the Paris of 1900 that that delicious little corner building evokes.



804 Penn Avenue (center)

## 804 Penn Avenue

For the sake of a bit of relief from these bifurcated facades, we should take a walk through the Cultural District where a number of commercial buildings of eighty and 100 years ago are still flourishing intact, at least as far as their facades are concerned. This one, probably built just about a century ago, is a peacock among its neighbors since it is

entirely faced in a rich grass-green glazed terra cotta. Much the greater part of the elevation is given over to glass, either in large sheets or small panes held by iron muntins; the terra cotta enframes all these with a delicate but sumptuous scaffolding. The sensual quality of the terra cotta is not limited to its color; at street level, the very texture and luster of the material invites caresses. When did you last hug a building?

## 413 Wood Street

Since the whole point of this issue of the *PHLF News* is the relationship of retail vitality to architectural preservation, we end this highly selective survey of facades with an example of an ideal situation. Weldin's stationers has been a fixture downtown as far back as one can remember. A locally owned business, it understands the market which it serves, and that is the operative word, with attention and cordiality; members of its sales staff become acquaintances to be saluted both in the store and in passing along the city's sidewalks. And just look at the Weldin's building! The present facade is a replacement of around 1905 on an earlier existing structure. The unknown architect was rather fashionable in his design since he gave Pittsburgh a faint but perceptible echo of McKim, Mead, and White's New York *Herald* building of 1895-1900. Whether old hat or cutting edge, Weldin's exemplifies the contract between retailer and customer, an ornament for the city in return for the city's patronage.

J. R. Weldin Company, stationers, at 413 Wood Street.



Photos by William Rydberg, PHOTON

# To Market, to Market, to What Avail?

Barry Hannegan

Somewhere in all the discussion about the future of the downtown, there ought to be a more extended consideration of the paucity of shopping opportunities for food. The photograph to the right, probably a document of the 1950s to judge from the prices posted on the Economy Market and from the quaint summer attire of the pedestrians, tells us what no older Pittsburgher needs to be reminded of; we could during much of the city's history buy our provisions in the downtown, more than likely in stores either on Market Square as was the case with the Economy Market, or nearby, in McCann's just a bit further down Forbes, for example.

Since the closing of the market in one corner of the old G. C. Murphy enterprise, there is really no place to do one's marketing in the center of the city. The present version of Murphy's still vends packaged foods and household items, while several of the larger drug stores also offer foods with long shelf lives. However, both Murphy's and two of the larger drug stores fall within the area to be demolished for the new Fifth/Forbes commercial district. Their loss would be serious, leaving only Nicholas Coffee Company on Market Square for certain comestibles, the dwindling food offerings on Kaufmann's seventh floor, and a scattering of smaller drug and convenience stores as suppliers of take-home foods. Hardly a balanced diet.

Much is being made of the possibility of enticing people to live in the Triangle. Not much is said about where they might do their marketing. The Strip is too distant, for the most part, to be a viable source unless one were to go by



car. To live, say, in Firstside and to drive to Smallman Street is to make a mockery of city living. Until there is adequate shopping for food in the Triangle, we can forget about developing any significant downtown population.

As a commuter passing through the city daily on my trips between Station Square and North Oakland, I constantly regret the absence of an adequate green grocer and butcher somewhere near my point of transfer from one bus route to another. To be able to pause on the homeward journey to pick up a veal chop and a bunch of water cress, or perhaps an already prepared dish of the kind abundantly offered in enterprising food stores, would both simplify and enrich life while providing the kind of urban living experience that Pittsburgh entirely lacks.



Diamond and Ferry Streets are now Forbes Avenue and Stanwix Street. McCann's is now the Kossman Building.

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*The Diamond and the first Allegheny County Courthouse, painted from memory after its demolition in 1852.*

# The Diamond

Walter C. Kidney

The Diamond—also called Market Place or Market Square at various times—was laid out in 1784, when the Penn family in Philadelphia had their “manor” adjacent to Fort Pitt surveyed. In the mid-1790s, it became the location of the first Courthouse, since Allegheny Town was not ready for its intended role as county seat. The Courthouse became increasingly jostled by the neighboring market stalls, was replaced in its role by a Courthouse on Grant Street in 1841, deteriorated badly, and eventually was demolished in 1852.

The Diamond’s character, rather open thus far despite all the building, now changed. Two tall market houses with arched windows stood alongside Market Street; Diamond Alley (later Diamond Street and now Forbes Avenue) apparently never had passed all the way through, and was not to do so until the buildings of the 1850s were demolished around 1910.

The mid-1910s saw the remarkable Diamond Market many of us remember: four isolated building masses on the ground floor, two building masses, parallel to Market Street, above, with a system of arched enclosed bridges so that the third and uppermost floor was under one roof. This system let Diamond Street pass through the Square and intersect with Market Street.

In 1961 this peculiar structure came down too, and yielded to not much of anything but pleasant openness, trees, gaslights of dubious cuteness, pavements of self-conscious variety, and a place for concerts and rallies. With no emphatic architecture inside its boundary (about 260 by 275 feet wall to wall), the Square seemed rather shapeless, its surrounding buildings of not much interest in themselves and of no particular consistency in height.

Two decades after the space was cleared, though, the enframing architec-



*Market Street in 1893 looking north. A market house (left) and the City Hall of 1854 occupied the old Diamond.*

ture received some remarkable additions. PPG Place, centered around a neat and despotic square of its own, arrived to loom over one side of Market Square, this informal place of the people, as an alien presence; PPG Place was begun in 1979 and finished in 1984.

In 1982 or thereabouts, moreover, a refacing of the building row including the Nicholas Coffee Company established quite another tone. If one uses the frozen-music image for architecture, PPG Place might be something cold and academic, and these restaurants and stores around Nicholas something rather like Leroy Anderson. The tallest of these 1980-ish facades, though, have a height that seems right for the Square, say forty or fifty feet.

The terra-cotta front of Lubin & Smalley on the opposite side is fifty-six feet high, and one might hope that, though PPG with its more-or-less seventy-foot heights is past praying about, any new construction might well limit itself to about fifty feet.

Sometimes one wishes for some

central feature to strike a grand note in the middle of this space, where now there is merely an occasionally over-worked village crossroads. But the last such feature, the Diamond Market, was not all that practical-looking. Perhaps a coherent frame to a space basically empty would suffice, or perhaps Market Street within the Square might be found expendable and yield to a market hall all along one side of Forbes, an attraction to bus-bound workers and an increasing number of downtown residents.

Around 1800, when the Circuit Court Judge came to town, he rode to the Courthouse clad in scarlet, preceded by a blind and barefoot drummer feeling his way through the street mud. One hopes that the character of the old Diamond will not revert to such extremes, but still that it will be a tasteful yet a homely and informal place.



*The old Diamond Market was demolished in 1961.*



*Frozen music, classical and pop: PPG Place (above) and the 1980-period shops (below) on Graeme Street.*





# Memoirs of a Disgruntled Consumer

Barry Hannegan

The promised (or threatened, depending on your views) revitalization of the retail situation in downtown Pittsburgh serves to call attention to just how limited and perfunctory the remaining stores are in our metropolitan core. A recent trip to New York was partly motivated by the need to do a bit of shopping; socks from Bloomingdale's and a hearth rug of Kashmiri origin from a large and elegant new Indian emporium on East Sixty-fourth Street, not to mention a new faience cup for morning coffee from a tiny, long established shop on upper Madison Avenue.

The current agitation over hoped-for appearances of Lord & Taylor, Nordstrom's, Tiffany's and the like, serves, too, to rustle the dry leaves of memory, bringing back to the light vivid snippets of what it was like to shop downtown when it was truly the retail center of the tri-state region, and the center of a fine trolley and bus system. The rueful pleasure of this excursion into life in Pittsburgh of a half-century or more ago should not obscure the cold fact that that world, with its richness and variety so far as retail was concerned, is irretrievably lost. The way we (or most other Americans) live now is antithetical and actually hostile to the tradition of commercially active cities, a tradition of some eight millennia entirely repudiated and destroyed in a mere generation.

Since I began writing this article on the threshold of spring, perhaps the most relevant memory is of Horne's and its great vernal display of flowering spring bulbs. Tulips and hyacinths, daffodils, scilla and whatever, were banked in massed plantings throughout that vast street-level floor. They were not there just for seasonal decoration; a sales attendant would provide the gardener-shopper with an order form which listed every single species and variety on view, and beside each entry there was space where you could indicate how many of such and such a tulip bulb you wanted. The completed order form (I have still one filled out by my father some time in the late 1940s) was returned to the attendant, and the next thing one knew was that the entire order arrived from Holland in late September for planting. What could have been more exhilarating or easier? The experience surely beat by a mile those dubiously tinted photographs in even the best dealers' catalogues, and nothing could replace the natural perfume that filled the store.

Any reference to Horne's, of course, obliges one to mention the Tea Room which, in its heyday, conferred an element of glamour on the process of both shopping and lunching. I wish I could recall just when it was redecorated with a rather good group of Victorian paintings. At that undetermined time, those items would have been obtainable for next to nothing and yet succeeded in giving an air of comfortable richness to the surroundings.

However, when it came to lunch, in the years of my earliest shopping trips to the downtown, it was to Donahoe's that I was taken. I think we always used the Fifth Avenue entrance, and I do seem to recall a broad but steep flight of stairs that turned ninety degrees at a landing. I certainly remember the brilliant impression of glazed white tile revetments, just as I happily remember baked ham sandwiches served on outrageously soft white bread. That would be followed by a chocolate sundae, and then the stairs had to be navigated again. *Vaut le voyage*, without a doubt.

For a while, the first block of Oliver Avenue, long since lost to PNC Plaza, was a smart little enclave. It was there that one could stop in at the Studio Shop, one of the major sources for introducing Scandinavian design to Pittsburgh in the immediate post-World War II years. There were also elegant and understated examples of Japanese ceramic art, and the entire shop, at least in retrospect, embodied the best of the spare, high-minded aesthetic of those years. Perhaps the chief pleasure, though, of the Studio Shop was the opportunity to chat with its owner, Diana Kaplan, who seemed to share the same qualities as the refined yet hospitable merchandise her store offered.

At the very opposite pole of the shopping experience was Schoyer's second-hand book store on Market Street near Fourth Avenue. The business disappeared some while before the building itself, seemingly a relic of pre-Great Fire Pittsburgh, succumbed to the gargan-



Looking down Fifth Avenue from William Penn Way, at 11:15 o'clock on a summer's morning some forty years ago. A portion of Kaufmann's Department Store appears at the left, followed by Frank & Seder's at Smithfield Street. Notice that Kaufmann's used the roofs of its entrance marquees to stage lush jungles of summer greenery. It has been some time, I think, since a commercial operation in the city's center made such a gesture of ornamenting both itself and the streetscape, merely for delight.

tuan PPG complex. The store filled the first floor and basement of what had surely been a private house when new, and the arrangement of the merchandise was little more than stacks and shelves with narrow aisles weaving here and there. The basement was dank enough that I doubt that any book stored there had a long life. The atmosphere would make present-day Skleder's look like Border's in comparison. Nevertheless, the store was a wonderful hunting ground, and I still have some obsolete volumes on Egyptian and Central

American archaeology that I found there. Also from that musty trove and still on my own shelves is a group of Sax Rohmer's lurid novels, for which I had a great appreciation. Best, perhaps, were very early copies of the *National Geographic Magazine*, dating from a time when it was still a scholarly journal with few if any photographs and those, of course, in black and white.

If one wanted new books, and one did indeed, there was the book department at Kaufmann's, presided over by

(Continued on page 14)

433 Fifth Avenue, probably in the early 1920s. This typical small shop front reveals the origins and meaning of the expression, "window shopping." One can discern several pairs of spats being offered for sale, but not a single pair of jogging shoes!





P. T. Donahoe, owner



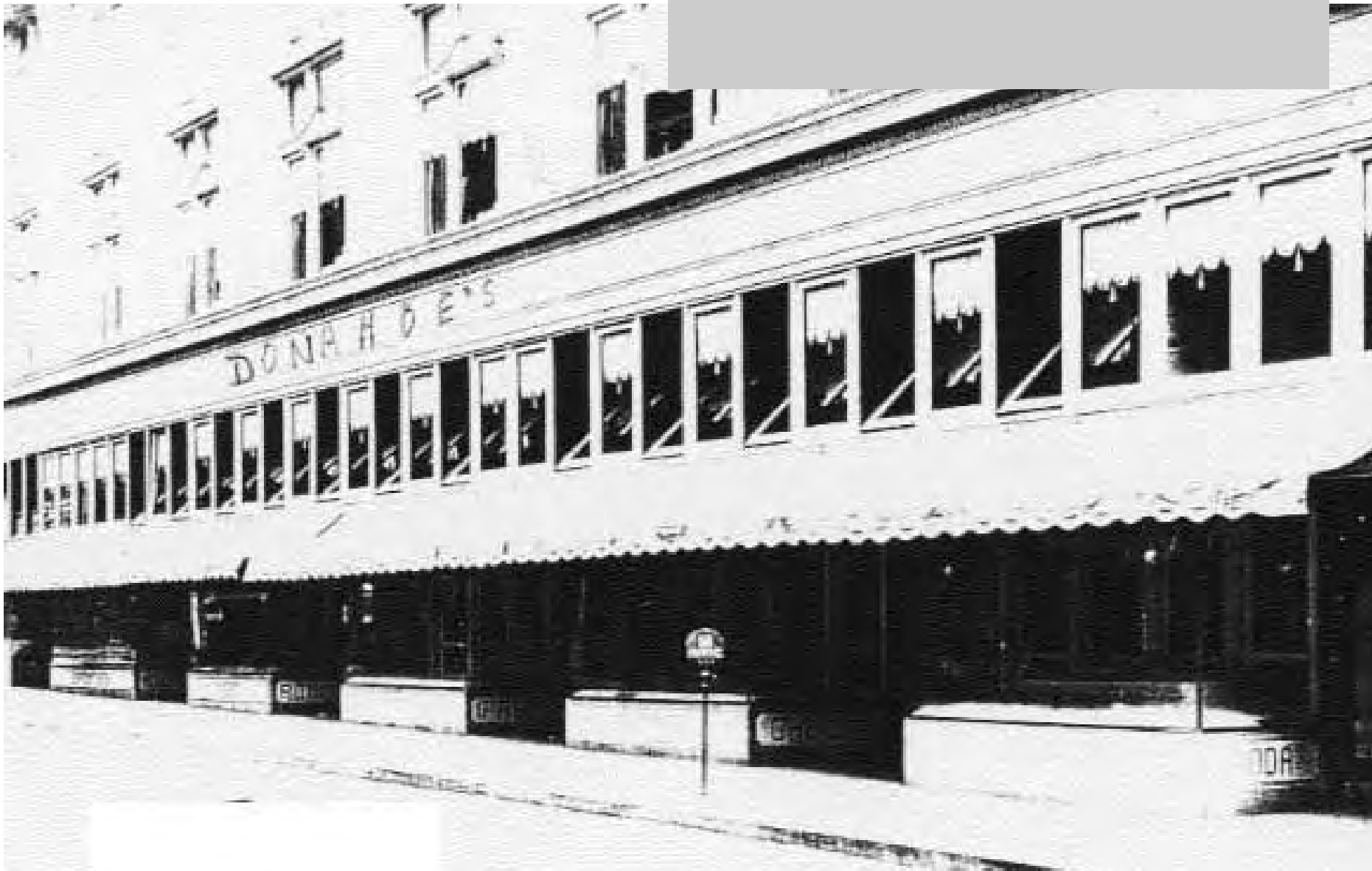
The staff of Donahoe's Butter Department!



Donahoe's, with its colossal order of Corinthian columns, looking above Forbes Avenue, then Diamond Street, in the early 1920s.

Why not restore Donahoe's? The grocery and cafeteria are still fondly remembered by many Pittsburghers.

Below: Inlaid tile signage guided the shopper to the right department for various food stuffs. The dining room lies behind the elegantly dressed windows on the second floor. Right: Revco now occupies the ground floor of the old Donahoe's Building.



# Memoirs of a Disgruntled Consumer

(Continued from page 12)

Arthur Bergholz and Nan Husted. Nestled away under the balcony and fitted out with pecan(?) paneling and shelves, the atmosphere was rather clubby, an ideal environment in which to browse and to chat with any of the staff, who were most knowledgeable and seemed to have all the time in the world to discuss books and publishing. That department for decades had the reputation of being the best place of its kind between New York and Chicago for book lovers; perhaps the Bibliophiles could persuade the May Company to place a memorial plaque somewhere in the present wilderness of ties and shirts.

If Horne's offers a memory always linked to spring, the old Kaufmann's provides one best appreciated on one of our miserable winter days, the grimness heightened in memory by the dirt and dark of erstwhile Pittsburgh. Just inside the first floor of the department store, at the corner of Smithfield and Forbes (ex-Diamond), there was a small nook that held a rack-like fixture in which were displayed small bunches of wood violets. These were kept presentable by a constant mist of cool water that must somehow have been collected and recycled. However, the technology was incidental; the vision of those fragile, perfumed distillations of a world so removed from the reality of Pittsburgh in winter was nearly hallucinatory. The memory of that vision must serve—where, now, in all of Western Pennsylvania would I find fresh violets?



Food, food, beautiful food, as it was displayed and sold, in Donahoe's great first-floor market.



Photos courtesy of the Library and Archives Division, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, Pa.



# We Believe in Pittsburgh

Arthur P. Ziegler, Jr.

We believe in the future of Pittsburgh. However, we feel that there is ample evidence from development efforts here and across the nation in the last half-century that the future is best secured by coupling the historic resources of our past with a vision of and planning for the world as it may be in the next half-century.

While we believe in the value of our historic resources, we do not believe in throw-back solutions, reviving the principles of projects of the 1950s that have proven themselves failures.

In the second half of the Twentieth Century in Pittsburgh, there were four major commercial and mixed-use renewal projects, three of which were planned by the City, its Urban Redevelopment Authority, and its Department of Planning, and one planned by our organization.

The “official” renewal projects were the gutting of North Side to construct Allegheny Center, the massive demolition and street eliminations in East Liberty, and the dream of building an Arts Acropolis by demolishing hundreds of houses in the Lower Hill district.

All of the official projects had the blessing of and ample funding from local and Federal government; all failed to fulfill their intentions. All are human, economic, and architectural disasters.

Station Square, developed with no City or County money, less than one million dollars of grant funds from the Federal government, and \$4.5 million UDAG loan funds (repaid), was frequently predicted to fail. But it didn’t. We reused and adapted historic buildings in an industrial environment without erasing that entire environment. We capitalized on the riverfront, a concept overlooked until then, as a place that people could enjoy. Our work was financed with private capital and grants from the Allegheny Foundation, a Scaife Family Trust, which took the big risk with us.

The results are in. When we sold Station Square in August 1994, there were 3,000 jobs, 134 businesses, and a series of attractions that brought three million visitors a year to the site, the most visited site, in fact, in Western Pennsylvania. To the City and County that had been asked to make no investment in it, we were delivering four million dollars a year in parking and real-estate taxes, a number confirmed

by the Mayor’s office at the time.

If we look at the record of the past fifty years of demolitions, of neighborhood annihilations, of tragic losses of buildings removed for “sustained growth and prosperity,” we see a record of dwindling prosperity here, an aging population, and the flight of young people. Three Renaissances have not stemmed this unfortunate tide. Dr. Mehrabian’s report of several years ago to the Allegheny Conference, which statistically verified how much we have been sinking, has been followed now by a series of further reports, all indicating that our skyline might look beautiful but prosperity and growth for all our citizens is not occurring.

We believe that recognizing and using our existing resources, whether it be reusing buildings or involving a much broader public in the planning process, will improve the fundamental economy of Pittsburgh.

I remember well when I was told the North Side Market House, the Diamond Market House, the Old North Side Post Office, and the Carnegie Library, together with hundreds of houses in the North Side, the Hill District, East Liberty, and Wilkinsburg were expendable for our “growth and prosperity.” I look at the tragedies of Allegheny Center. I look at the tragedies of the Hill District and of East Liberty. I listen to the words used today to support the Fifth/Forbes retail project and a number of other projects in the city. I heard the same words in the 1950s and the 1960s. We took an opposing position on those projects then and I believe that we have been proven right.

The plans for Pittsburgh in 2000 are almost identical with plans for Pittsburgh in the 1950s. Our position is also still the same. The difference is that there is a half century of evidence now available to determine which position has more credibility.

We agree that downtown retail needs improving, but we also believe that the best way to arrive at a good solution would be the approach we used at Station Square:

1. Assess all of the architectural and other designed-environment resources of the area for their value and possible reuse, and study the history of the development of the area.
2. Discuss the needs and possible solutions with a wide variety of

Pittsburghers who now use or might be attracted to the retail core.

3. Recognize that unique Pittsburgh qualities will attract people, not a standard set of national stores that might or might not stay in business in spite of public subsidies.
4. Attract Pittsburgh investors who, when they receive profits from the successful project, will be here spending and investing their money in our city, not sending it to a remote and faceless headquarters elsewhere in the nation, or in Europe or Asia.
5. Allow for a variety of owners and architects to create genuine urban vitality.
6. Interview a variety of developers who have a track record in creating successful downtown revitalization projects, and appoint one developer to implement the overall concept of the project, seek local and national tenants, develop a marketing and leasing program, and provide store design assistance. The developer should be paid as results are produced, but does not need to own all the property.
7. Anchor the Fifth/Forbes corridor with the restoration of the great Mellon Bank interior, a market flowing onto Market Square—perhaps the revival of Donahoe’s market and restaurant—and a City-funded facade restoration program.
8. Attract successful local retailers to the area and encourage retailers to locate in the historic buildings as well as in newly constructed ones. Create housing in both historic buildings and new ones.

Such an approach, we believe, will reduce the public cost considerably and greatly improve the chances for successfully revitalizing the Fifth/Forbes corridor. The commercial element in the Triangle will grow into something new, well-suited to the modern city, yet not a total replacement of what we have known.

We, as shoppers and customers, will continue coming to the best of the familiar places and we will get to know some of the new businesses. As Pittsburghers we will enjoy the sight of familiar architecture made fresh again, and our city will continue to feel like home.

## CALL TO ACTION

### Fifth and Forbes Retail Development Project

*Would Boston demolish Faneuil Hall to build a Gap?*

If you have concerns about the proposed Marketplace at Fifth and Forbes, please write to any or all of the following individuals.

Please send a copy of your correspondence to Arthur P.

Ziegler, Jr. at Landmarks, One Station Square, Suite 450, Pittsburgh, PA 15219. Or fax a copy to Arthur at 471-1633.

Governor Tom Ridge  
225 Main Capitol  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

City Council  
The Office of City Clerk  
510 City-County Building  
414 Grant Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

*Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*  
Letters to the Editor  
Station Square  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*  
Letters to the Editor  
34 Boulevard of the Allies  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222



*Already lost: the historic Wood Street buildings between Oliver and Fifth Avenues were demolished in 1997 for the construction of Lazarus Department Store. \$48 million of public money was used to develop the site for Lazarus, and the company refuses to tell the taxpayer investors how the department store is doing. During the day, we have never seen more than eighteen people on the first floor.*

# Two Interiors Destroyed: *The May Company Déjà Vu*

Albert M. Tannler

The May Company, owners of Lord & Taylor, left its mark on Pittsburgh earlier in this century, too.

In 1927, Pittsburgh architect Benno Janssen and his partner William Cocken redesigned the first floor of Kaufmann's Department Store and created—in Edgar Kaufmann, jr.'s words—a “bold art deco” masterpiece. The opening of the remodeled first floor in 1930 was a “spectacular unveiling . . . that resembled a movie premiere,” according to one news account.

The multi-million dollar remodeling (new escalators alone cost one million dollars) was an artistic and technological triumph. Edgar J. Kaufmann wrote: “The world was searched for materials, new and proper for decoration . . . The final choice fell upon stainless ‘white bronze’ for metal work, black carrara glass for columns, the beautiful avodire [light yellow hardwood] from Africa.”

8,230 separate pieces of black Carrara glass—forty tons—developed by Pittsburgh Plate Glass (a variation of the white, marble-like glass PPG had created as a substitute for the famed Italian marble) encased the structural columns. The tops of the columns were decorated with strips of light that illuminated and defined the edges of each column, rising to and spreading across the ceiling in a grid—a “linear lighting installation” composed of 10,000 Westinghouse lamps.

The floor was black and brown terrazzo—a mixture of marble chips and tinted mortar—laid in fourteen-inch by twenty-nine inch diamonds edged with one-eighth-inch brass. A recently invented metal alloy of copper, zinc, and nickel that was harder than bronze and exhibited a “peculiar gold-like sheen” was used on elevator doors, the railings around the mezzanine level arcade, and the frames of ten murals, approximately seven feet by fourteen feet, that illustrated “The History of Commerce,” commissioned

for the space from New York muralist Boardman Robinson. Cut and engraved glass in a leaf and berry pattern was designed by French artist Bernard Sauveur Akoun for the Arcade Grill and fabricated by artisans from his studio.

In 1946 Kaufmann's was sold to the May Department Stores Company; Edgar Kaufmann remained president of and continued to manage the Pittsburgh store until his death at the age of sixty-nine on April 15, 1955.

Five months and twelve days later (September 27, 1955) an article in the store's employee newsletter declared “First Floor Redecorated—Famous Black Glass Columns Lightened”:

*Kaufmann's famous First Floor columns of marble and black Carrara glass have been enclosed in wood, painted and covered with vari-colored fabrics in pastel shades including pink, natural, turquoise, grey and off-white. The elevator banks and walls surrounding the central Service Desk have been covered with grey fabric. This vast redecoration plan conforms with the rest of our expansion program, creating a light, spacious atmosphere.*

*Existing fixtures on the First Floor were refinished and the top ledges have been covered with white rubber.*

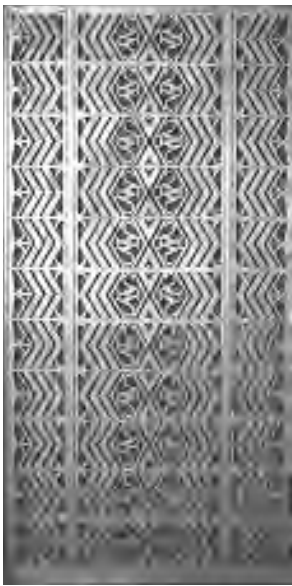
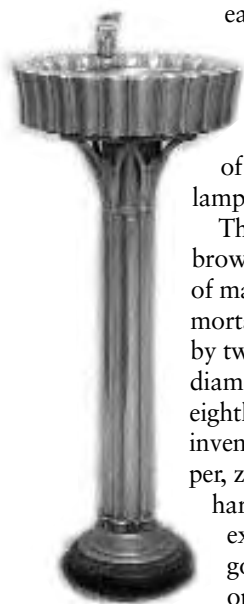
An Art Deco masterpiece and Pittsburgh landmark was obliterated for the sake of pastel shades and white rubber.

*Portions of this article were published in the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review Focus magazine, March 22 and September 27, 1998.*



The first floor of Kaufmann's, downtown, designed in 1927, completed in 1930, and destroyed in 1955.

Only bits and pieces of the 1930 design remain in Kaufmann's, downtown, to remind us how extraordinary the interior once was. Several of the pieces were displayed at the Carnegie Museum of Art in “Merchant Prince and Master Builder: Edgar J. Kaufmann and Frank Lloyd Wright.” Here we show the drinking fountain and stair railing of stainless “white bronze” (left). Below: the elevator doors. Right: entranceway grille.



Photos by William Rydberg, PHOTON