

LOCAL SALES AND CELEBRATIONS:
A HISTORY OF RETAILING, MARKETING, AND CONSUMING
IN WESTERN NEW YORK STATE, 1920 - 1940

SARAH LYNN ELVINS

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in History
York University
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ABSTRACT

Local Sales and Celebrations: A History of Retailing, Marketing,
and Consuming in Western New York State, 1920 - 1940

Sarah Lynn Elvins, author of dissertation

Dr. Marlene Shore, director of dissertation

This dissertation explores the interaction of Western New York State with the emerging American mass market. In particular, it looks at the buying and selling of goods in Buffalo and Rochester, New York, during the period from 1920 to 1940. This time period witnessed the spread of new economic relationships across the nation. The growth of new networks of distribution and communication meant that many more Americans had access to the same goods. Branded items and mass-produced goods flooded all areas of the country. New forms of competition threatened the prominent position enjoyed by independent merchants.

Examination of retailing and consuming in Buffalo and Rochester complicates our understanding of this transformation. Local traditions and identities were not simply eliminated in the spread of these new relationships. Within New York State, regional patterns of selling and consuming flourished into the 1920s and 1930s. Merchants in Rochester and Buffalo played active roles in civic life. They emphasized their roots in the community, and encouraged consumers to shop "at home." In good times and bad,

they brought a range of entertainments and services to local shoppers.

The Introduction places the project in historiographical context, and outlines the main contours of the argument. Chapter One sketches the economic and cultural development of the two cities, particularly the ways in which retailers acted as civic leaders in each community during the 1920s. Chapter Two examines how Buffalo and Rochester department stores claimed superiority to competitors in New York City. Retailers asserted their ability to provide mass-market and fashion goods, while at the same time emphasizing their local ties and history. Chapter Three investigates how independent merchants in the two cities grappled with the "chain store problem" of the interwar era, using a discourse of civic pride and boosterism to differentiate themselves from "interloping" competitors based in other cities.

Chapter Four explores regional efforts to combat the Depression by organizing consumer spending. In Buffalo, this sentiment took the form of a special day of sales which organizers hoped would speed the return to normalcy, while in Rochester a pledge campaign encouraged participants to put more money into the local economy. Chapter Five demonstrates the persistence of downtown merchants in Buffalo and Rochester as cultural brokers throughout the 1930s. It also looks at how national marketers and advertisers tailored their messages to the particularities of the local market. Linking all of the chapters is the notion that local institutions were crucial to the experiences of consumers in this period, particularly in cities like Buffalo and Rochester.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. DOWNTOWN RETAILERS AND "MAIN STREET TOWNS"	44
2. SELLING IN HUB AND HINTERLAND	101
3. THE "CHAIN STORE QUESTION" AND THE INDEPENDENT RETAILER	161
4. THE DEPRESSION AND LOCAL SPENDING	214
5. HARD TIMES AND GOOD TIMES AT HOME	283
CONCLUSION	340
APPENDIX	347
BIBLIOGRAPHY	352

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Urban Territories in the U.S., 1920	20
2. Top 10 Countries of Origin, Foreign-Born White Buffalo Residents, 1920	35
3. Top 10 Countries of Origin, Foreign-Born White Rochester Residents, 1920	39
4. Pledges for Rochester's "Pledge for Prosperity," by Ward	270
5. Grocery Stores Most Frequently Patronized by Buffalo Housewives, 1938	335
6. Department Stores Most Frequently Patronized by Buffalo Housewives, 1938	336
APPENDIX	
1. Index of Sales of Buffalo Department Stores	347
3. Net Sales, Gross Earnings, and Net Earnings, Sibley, Lindsay & Curr, 1920 - 1940	348
4. Buffalo Business Indices, 1928 - 1936	349
5. Index of Sales of Buffalo Department Stores, 1925-1935, by Month	350
6. Index of Sales of Buffalo Department Stores, 1928-1937, by Year	351

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Map of Buffalo, showing downtown, 1920	51
2. Map of Rochester, 1920	56
3. Map of Rochester City Centre	57
4. Cartoon of Buffalo's Economic Relationships	75
5. Map of Buffalo's Trade Radius	136
6. Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Ad	137
7. B. Forman Ad	140
8. Buffalo Day Cartoon	246
9. "Ho Hum!" Cartoon	247
10. Bing & Nathan Buffalo Day Ad	248
11. Rochester Pledge for Prosperity Form	255
12. B. Forman and Todd Plan ad	256

ABBREVIATIONS

Newspapers and Periodicals

<u>BCE</u>	<u>Buffalo Courier-Express</u>
<u>BEN</u>	<u>Buffalo Evening News</u>
<u>CSA</u>	<u>Chain Store Age</u>
<u>CSM</u>	<u>Chain Store Manager</u>
<u>DSB</u>	<u>Department Store Buyer</u>
<u>DGMTJ</u>	<u>Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal</u>
<u>MM</u>	<u>Merchandise Manager</u>
<u>NATMA</u>	<u>National Association of Teachers of Marketing and Advertising Bulletin</u>
<u>NRDGA</u>	<u>Bulletin of the National Retail Dry Goods Association</u>
<u>RD&C</u>	<u>Rochester Democrat & Chronicle</u>
<u>RTU</u>	<u>Rochester Times-Union</u>
<u>SS</u>	<u>Statistical Survey</u>
<u>TT</u>	<u>Town Tidings</u>

ABBREVIATIONS

Archives and collections

BBR	Bureau of Business Research, Harvard University Business School
BBSR	Bureau of Business and Social Research, University of Buffalo
BECHS	Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society
BECPL	Special Collections and Local History Room, Central Branch, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library
BLHU	Special Collections, Baker Library, Harvard University
RHS	Rochester Historical Society
Strong	Research Collections, The Strong Museum, Rochester
UBA	University Archives, State University of New York at Buffalo

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the particularities of retailing and consuming in Western New York State, from 1920 to 1940. Buffalo and Rochester, New York, were home to a number of independent merchants with strong roots in the area. These merchants took pride in their service to the community and their place in the history of these cities. They acted as cultural brokers, bringing not only goods from around the globe, but guest speakers, celebrities, and other entertainments to their cities. Retailers encouraged area residents to view patronizing "home" stores as a form of civic expression.

The experiences of consumers in Buffalo and Rochester further illuminate how Americans in mid-sized cities participated in the emerging mass market. The 1920s and 1930s witnessed the spread of new economic relationships across the nation. New networks of distribution and communication meant that many more Americans had access to the same goods. Branded items and mass-produced goods flooded all areas of the country. New forms of competition threatened the prominent position enjoyed by independent merchants. A local perspective sheds light on the ways in which national trends in selling and consuming operated on the community level.

Local traditions and identities were not simply eliminated by the spread of these new relationships. Merchants in Rochester and Buffalo played on local sentiment in an effort to adapt to a changing climate of selling. As chain stores entered the region, area

retailers used a language of localism to encourage patrons to spend their money in institutions with ties to their home towns. Mass-marketers, as well, acknowledged the power of the local, tailoring ads to refer to local people and combat their perceived status as "interlopers." By taking a closer look at Western New York, one can gain a greater understanding of how local variations and loyalties could often co-exist with and occasionally challenge the hegemony of national culture.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, consumers in different parts of the country had very different levels of interaction with new retailing phenomena. For most Americans, a trip to Fifth Avenue or Michigan Avenue was an occasional experience at best. Their day-to-day participation in a "national market" was through local stores or mail-order catalogues. Well into the 1920s and 1930s, regional variations persisted in terms of the availability of goods, and more important, the retailers who supplied these products. Even within New York State, an area which one might assume would be dominated by the retailing innovations and distribution networks of its largest city, distinct local patterns of selling and consuming persisted.

The hinterland did take from the metropolis, to be sure; but many residents and merchants in smaller towns and cities took pride in their local institutions and their ability to put a local spin on national trends and innovations. By taking a closer look at the changing conditions of retailing in upstate New York during the twenties and thirties, we can gain a sense of the persistence of local identities even as national advertising, chain retailing and national brands flooded into the region. Local pride and traditions were

modified, not eliminated, in the spread of modern retailing and marketing during the 1920s and 1930s.

It is useful to put this study into broader historiographical context. In recent years, the study of new patterns of buying and selling, and the wider cultural shifts which accompanied them, has captured the imagination of a variety of scholars. The study of consumption has branched off to include histories of advertising, mass-market magazines, retailing, marketing, and leisure pursuits in America.¹ In most of these instances, scholars have used these stories to illustrate a national paradigm shift during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.²

¹This is not to ignore the sizeable literature about consumption in the European context. Notable works on retailing specifically include Rosalind Williams, Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late-Nineteenth-Century France (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1982); Perry Miller, The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869 - 1920 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981). Erika Rappaport uses women and department stores to explore the gendering of urban space in Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²A number of scholars are pushing back the timeframe of consumerism into the early nineteenth, and even the eighteenth centuries. See T.H. Breen, "'Baubles of Britain': the American and Consumer Revolution of the Eighteenth Century," Past and Present, 119 (1988): 73-104. This article, as well as others by James Axtell and Joyce Appleby on the "Roots of the American Consumer Society" appear in Lawrence Glickman, ed., Consumer Society in American History: A Reader (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 84-144. In English historiography, see Neil McKendrick, Colin Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). For a review of this debate, see Peter N. Stearns, "Stages of Consumerism: Recent work on the Issues of Periodization," The Journal of Modern History, 69 (March 1997): 101-117, also the bibliographic essay by Glickman in Consumer Society, 399-414. There appears to be some consensus, however, that any discussion of *mass* consumption properly begins in the postbellum period. This dissertation will deal with the 1920s and 1930s as another

Department stores, in particular, have been explored as catalysts in the creation of a new American culture. William Leach argues that department stores symbolized "the very essence of the consumer revolution."³ Given the dramatic changes initiated by the "grand emporiums" in larger centres, it is not surprising that historians of retailing have devoted much study to the merchants of New York, Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia. For example, although an appendix entitled "More Great American Stores" redresses the imbalance somewhat, most of Robert Hendrickson's The Grand Emporiums: The Illustrated History of America's Great Department Stores focuses on businesses in those four cities.⁴

In describing the evolution of these new "palaces of consumption," there has been a tendency to view the spread of new relationships in retailing and marketing as emanating out from these key centres to eventually engulf the entire nation. Leach's study of department stores melds business and cultural history. He goes beyond sketching the institutional history of the stores to demonstrate that their presence in the urban landscape had a profound effect on all who witnessed their cathedral-like interiors, striking window treatments and dizzying selection of goods. Leach suggests that a new

phase in American retailing, when new competition between chain stores and independents, as well as between stores in different cities, became more of an issue for retailers.

³William Leach, Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 15.

⁴Robert Hendrickson, The Grand Emporiums: The Illustrated History of America's Great Department Stores (New York: Stein and Day, 1980).

commercial aesthetic gained control of the public imagination, changing not only the buying habits but the very dreams of consumers. In tracing the emergence of a new national culture, however, Leach relies most heavily on records from Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. For example, Leach examines Wanamaker's not just as a Philadelphia institution, experimenting with new techniques in retailing and seducing consumers with the latest displays, but also as a symbol of an entire nation's seamless transformation into a "Land of Desire." My research reveals that this process was not as frictionless as this broad depiction suggests.

Studies of labour conditions within the stores offer a different perspective on the economic and cultural impact of retailers. Susan Porter Benson's study of department store workers serves as a reminder that while terms like "mass retailing" encourage us to think of these changes in broad strokes, the history of marketing in America is the story of transactions between individuals.⁵ The tensions between managers and saleswomen, as well as between retailers and customers, influenced the policies of department stores. Benson argues that the efforts of managers to assert control over retail operations were often hindered by the sales clerks themselves, who proved remarkably resistant to "rationalizing."⁶ Benson's attention to the power relationships within the store are illuminative, yet she likewise concentrates on big-city retailers like Macy's, Filene's, and

⁵Susan Porter Benson, Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890 - 1940 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

⁶*Ibid.*, 67.

Jordan Marsh. Exploration of stores in other regions might suggest that the "personal relationship" between shopper and store employee could be even more intimate in smaller cities.

Other recent forays into the history of North American retailing have explored the impact of national trade organizations, federal legislation, and the courts in guiding the fate of business. Mansel Blackford's history of small business in America, while not specifically about retailers, places small business at the centre of a narrative of American economic growth. Likewise, Jonathan Bean challenges the Chandlerian model of business history, pointing out that "modern" business and "small" business are not contradictory terms.⁷ Where Alfred Chandler focused almost exclusively on the managerial innovations of big business, Bean suggests that smaller enterprises have had a continuing significance in the American economy.⁸ David Monod's masterful exploration of the folklore of shopkeepers in Canada is a significant contribution to the history of small business. Monod retells the story of "modern" retailing, and argues

⁷Alfred Chandler's The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977) focused almost exclusively on big business, defining large companies administered by salaried managers as the "modern" successors to small traditional family firms.

⁸Mansel Blackford, A History of Small Business in America (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991); Jonathan J. Bean, Beyond the Broker State: Federal Policies toward Small Business, 1936 - 1961 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). There have been other studies in business history recently which redirect attention toward smaller firms, although more in the realm of manufacturing than retailing. See, for example, Phil Scranton, Endless Novelty: Specialty Production and American Industrialization, 1865 - 1925 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

against the idea that the growth of the mass market should be seen as a uniform shift in power away from merchants and towards manufacturers and consumers. He demonstrates that many of the small shop keepers who protested the costs of modernization were themselves transforming their business practices.⁹ Bean, Mansel, and Monod offer useful national frameworks for the discussion of the economic and cultural significance of small business, but their work would be productively supplemented by studies which test their hypotheses in specific areas of North America.

The history of American advertising has provided another avenue for scholars to explore how the very meaning of buying and selling has changed over time. During the 1970s, historians of advertising focused their attention on the perceived power imbalance between ad men and their audiences. In his provocative study of advertising and consumerism, Stuart Ewen argued that advertisers and industrial leaders worked together to become "captains of consciousness" who could direct not only the buying habits but the very desires of the general public. Advertising became another way for industrialists to both discipline workers and promote their participation in the consumer market.¹⁰ In Ewen's view, advertisers were not simply creating markets; they were passing on a whole new culture to Americans, instructing the public not only on what to buy but on what to dream. Yet by painting the emergence of consumerism as a

⁹David Monod, Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing 1890-1939 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 52.

¹⁰Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1976), 24-5.

conspiracy engineered by ad men, Ewen fails to acknowledge the complex relationship between advertisers and manufacturers. Michael Schudson, while still wary of the manipulative power of advertisers, remedies this oversimplification. He argues that attention must be paid to the relationship between advertising agencies and business.¹¹

A later group of scholars widened their focus to examine not only the ad industry and American business, but the cultural changes which accompanied, and in some cases were encouraged by, the emergence of advertising. James Norris places the rise of the advertising industry in the context of industrializing America. Roland Marchand's landmark study Advertising the American Dream uses advertising to eloquently explore a cultural shift in the United States. Marchand illuminates the strategies of professional advertisers in spreading a new vision of modernity built upon the consumption of goods. Marchand's expert dissection of the scenes of modern life depicted in national ad campaigns reveals that advertisers promoted not only specific goods but a whole new way of life. By presenting manufactured goods as the solution to a host of anxieties associated with modern living, Marchand argues, advertisers created a new national language, complete with its own parables and guides for behaviour.¹² With a less

¹¹Michael Shudson, Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society (New York: Basic Books, 1984); A less critical, but highly readable, assessment of the ad industry is Stephen Fox, The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984).

¹²Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920 - 1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). Marchand dates the emergence of "modern" advertising from the use of an approach which went beyond

conspiracy-minded outlook than Ewen, Marchand demonstrates how the ad men were themselves part of a middle-class culture which celebrated the possibilities of modern managerial capitalism. This dissertation complements Marchand's focus on national campaigns by exploring the regional variations in advertising and marketing.

The concentration of publishers and advertising executives in major cities like New York and Chicago has led many to look to the metropolis first, and simply assume that in addition to the advertising campaigns themselves, more general attitudes and business practices originating in these centres eventually radiated out to encompass the rest of the nation.¹³ Jackson Lears' analysis of the advertising industry assumes this type

simple announcement to individualized pitches which claimed to show the benefit of the product for the consumer. This emphasis on the individual at once singled out the reader for "personal" attention, while including him/her in a community not based on geography but on product choices. Others, like David Potter in People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954) and Daniel Boorstin in The Americans: The Democratic Experience (New York: Random House, 1973), have emphasized the development of a national character tied to consuming. Even critics of consumer culture like Warren Susman have emphasized the homogenizing (if alienating) tendencies of these developments. See Susman, Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

¹³Cultural historians not specifically interested in consumerism have also posited this model of cultural dominance. Some unapologetically present New York as the symbol not only of America, but of Western culture in the twentieth century. In explaining why she has chosen to study New York in the 1920s, Ann Douglas argues that this decade saw America seize "economic and cultural leadership of the West," and New York became recognized as "the world's most powerful city." Douglas, Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 3-28. Douglas makes a good case for New York's significance, although she expands her scope to include figures who lived far from Manhattan, claiming Ernest Hemingway, T.S. Eliot, Sigmund Freud, Gertrude Stein and Henry James as intellectual and spiritual New Yorkers. The city's indisputable artistic and cultural output should not, however, be

of perspective. Lears uses the discussion of advertising as a springboard for a broader cultural analysis of twentieth century mass society. He traces the tension between an older "carnavalesque" tradition which celebrated imagination, abundance and loss of control and late-nineteenth and early twentieth century corporate efforts to rein in and manage this magic.¹⁴ His provocative musings on the relationship between advertising and art, and advertising and popular tastes almost necessarily focus on national ad campaigns, widely exhibited artists and best-selling literature. A regional focus challenges Lears' sketch of a singular American culture, however nuanced that description may be. This dissertation examines local patterns of buying and selling, building on the work of scholars with more broad perspectives.

Just as historians of advertising have tended to look first to national ad campaigns, so too have scholars of marketing concentrated on those brands whose success was of national scale. Susan Strasser traces the rise of companies like Nabisco and Crisco that were pioneers not only in mass production but in the successful distribution of their products across the United States. Her study highlights the gradual and uneven development of mass marketing in America. Older styles of retailing lingered, forcing manufacturers to modify their marketing strategies.¹⁵ Richard Tedlow uses case studies

simply taken as wholly representative of a new national culture.

¹⁴Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 21-39.

¹⁵Susan Strasser, Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market (New York, Pantheon, 1989).

of businesses in both manufacturing and distribution that took advantage of innovations in production and distribution to dominate their particular markets.¹⁶ By tracing the battles of manufacturers of soft drinks and automobiles, of groceries and mail-order chains, Tedlow sets out to explain not only when certain companies had a competitive advantage, but why. Pamela Walker Laird's examination of the changing roles of manufacturers and printers in consumer marketing during the period 1870 - 1920 explicitly focuses on "brand-name" advertising, arguing that manufacturers have dominated both national marketing innovations and public awareness since the late nineteenth century.¹⁷ Strasser, Tedlow and Laird have good reasons to focus on the corporate players who made it on a national scale. Their institutional histories offer valuable insight into the often uneven growth of new markets and the personalities involved in making companies successful. But by turning the lens around to observe not the spread of these goods outward across the nation but the reception by a community of a chain store branch, or a newly advertised item, we can explore a range of different issues. Did consumers make distinctions between locally-made goods and those which came from other areas? Did local retailers view branded goods as allies or foes in their fight to remain competitive? Did national brands acknowledge any regional variations in the marketing of their goods?

¹⁶Richard Tedlow, New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

¹⁷Pamela Walker Laird, Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

Scholars focusing on the mass media have examined not only the advertisements but also the stories and articles of periodicals like the Ladies' Home Journal and Cosmopolitan to sketch the contours of an emerging urban middle class. Matthew Schneirov, Helen Damon-Moore, Jennifer Scanlon and Richard Ohmann effectively delineate the new audiences targeted by, or arguably created by, these magazines.¹⁸ Schneirov argues that the creators of periodicals like Munsey's or McClure's aimed to promote a new national sensibility, to create a new social order which emphasized modernity and progress. Although he does not state it explicitly, Schneirov's concentration on the cultural agenda of the magazine's creators gives little consideration to the possibility that different groups across the nation might have viewed this project in very different ways.

Damon-Moore and Scanlon use mass-market magazines to explore the gendered nature of American consumer culture. Damon-Moore contrasts the rise of the Ladies' Home Journal with the difficulties in launching the Saturday Evening Post as a men's magazine, demonstrating how the idea of women as consumers quickly underpinned the nineteenth-century magazine. Scanlon presents a compelling analysis of the

¹⁸Matthew Schneirov, The Dream of a New Social Order: Popular Magazines in America, 1893-1914 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Helen Damon-Moore, Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in the Ladies Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post, 1880-1910 (Albany: State University of New York, 1994); Jennifer Scanlon, Inarticulate Longings: the Ladies' Home Journal, Gender and the Promises of Consumer Culture (New York: Routledge, 1995); Richard Ohmann, Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century (New York & London: Verso Press, 1996).

contradictory nature of the Ladies' Home Journal, arguing that the magazine was neither a tool of patriarchy nor a vehicle for women's liberation. Even as it promoted traditional notions about femininity, the Journal helped sow the seeds for later change. Indeed, nowhere are these two contrasting purposes more evident than in Scanlon's presentation of the lives of Journal contributors and female advertising agency employees, who presented a view of happy domesticity which was often at direct odds with their own daily experiences.

Ohmann, on the other hand, seamlessly links the history of mass-market magazines with the rise of what he terms the PMC, or the professional-managerial class. He demonstrates that while these magazines may have been sold across the United States, geographic representation in the magazines was not so democratic. Stories concentrated in a few major cities (primarily New York, Boston, Philadelphia and to a lesser extent Chicago and Los Angeles) and did not include other cities or smaller towns as part of the "social space" of modernity. In their stories, photographs and articles, magazines reported the fashionable parties of New York society, the vacation homes of the rich in Sag Harbor, the activities of celebrities on Broadway or in Hollywood. The vast regions of the United States west of the Mississippi, south of the Mason-Dixon line, or for that matter, in areas of New York state north of Yonkers, simply were not visible in the pages of the medium.

That these new national periodicals can provide rich insight into the preoccupations of their creators is beyond doubt. The degree to which Americans across

the nation could relate to the messages outlined in the periodicals is more open to question. A closer look at this "unseen America" can test the universality of the mass magazine's cultural dominance. How did those who lived outside of the designated "circuit of places" inhabited by the wealthy and fashionable understand their own position? Did they aim to imitate the urban lifestyle depicted in the mass media, or were there ways for them to carve out their own space and their own styles within their own communities? Regional and local studies can offer this valuable counter-perspective to an overwhelmingly national level of analysis. This dissertation complicates our understanding of the national mass media, the culture of the city, and the spread of consumerism by paying attention to the particular experiences of retailers and residents of two smaller cities.

There are a few notable community studies which explore consumption and cultural change at the local level. The study of leisure, in particular, has led many to focus on the particularities of one town or city. Roy Rosenzweig looks at how attitudes over appropriate free time pursuits splintered along class lines in Worcester, Massachusetts at the turn of the century.¹⁹ Francis Couvares uses the leisure activities of Pittsburgh's residents at the turn of the century as a window to explore the changing class structure of the city.²⁰ Kathy Peiss examines leisure and working-class women in New

¹⁹Roy Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870- 1920 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

²⁰Francis G. Couvares, "The Triumph of Commerce: Class Culture and Mass Culture in Pittsburgh," in Michael H. Frish and Daniel J. Walkowitz, eds., Working-Class

York, examining how gender both opened up and limited opportunities for entertainment in the city.²¹ Lewis Erenberg's study of New York night life is actually a very specific local study, centring on the restaurants, nightclubs and theatres clustered in Harlem, Greenwich Village and Broadway.²²

In her study of industrial workers in Chicago, Lizabeth Cohen refuses to take at face value the homogenizing effects of twentieth century consumer culture and the power of manufacturers and advertisers to shape the buying habits of the general public. Cohen contends that the power of products to turn workers into middle-class-style consumers has been exaggerated and that historians should recognize that people did not respond in the same way to the same stores or items of mass consumption.²³ Working-class neighbourhoods often remained untouched by new retailing phenomena and nationally-advertised products might be used in surprising ways in ethnic neighbourhoods. Cohen's work serves as a reminder that consumers were often less predictable or malleable than manufacturers and retailers would have liked.

America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 123-152; also Couvares, The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877 - 1919 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984).

²¹Kathy Peiss, Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the Century New York (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

²²Lewis A. Erenberg, Steppin' Out: New York and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

²³Lizabeth Cohen, Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago 1919- 1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 102.

National syntheses have greatly furthered our understanding of cultural history. The debate over the nature of American culture in the early twentieth century has produced an exciting literature, which continues to grow.²⁴ Moreover, it is not surprising that many initial forays into the history of consumerism track the dramatic developments in cities like New York and Chicago; in the early decades of the twentieth century, these cities became veritable shrines to consumer capitalism. Yet in order to fully understand the nuances of these changes, studies of other communities are essential. New York was not, and is not, America. Works which purport to be national in scope and yet focus on only a few metropolitan centres obscure the heterogeneity of American experience. And the many forays into the past of the big city would be complemented by explorations into the experiences of those in smaller centres. This dissertation complements the existing discussion of American culture by examining the continued significance of local concerns and identities for consumers in Buffalo and Rochester during the 1920s and 1930s.

In taking a closer look at Buffalo and Rochester, some of the friction inherent in the spread of new economic and cultural relationships becomes more apparent. Local

²⁴Notable early contributions include Warren Susman, Culture as History, Miles Orvell, The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1865-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); T.J. Jackson Lears, No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Alice G. Marquis, Hopes and Ashes: the Birth of Modern Times, 1929-1939 (New York: Free Press, 1986).

pride and traditions were modified, not eliminated, in the spread of modern retailing and marketing during the twenties and thirties. The changes in retailing and marketing which are associated with the growth of a consumer culture in the United States in the late nineteenth century are often associated with homogenization, uprooting Americans from their distinctive local identities. A regional perspective reveals, however, that local loyalties persisted. Consumers were encouraged to take pride in products made in their own communities; merchants in smaller cities forcefully resisted the suggestion that any store could serve their particular market as well.

Western New York is a good choice for a history of American consumption in the 1920s and 1930s. Buffalo and Rochester at the turn of the century were booming cities, whose potential seemed almost unlimited. They were home to world-class architecture, society families, streets of stately homes, and rapidly expanding industries which drew new residents each year. Indeed, local boosters often made claims that Buffalo would become "the next Chicago," and that Rochester might someday rival New York (or at least St. Louis). Buffalo, New York state's second-largest city, was home to over half a million people. In the 1920s, Buffalo ranked eleventh among American cities by population (in contrast, by 1990 it would rank fiftieth). Moreover, it boasted more millionaires per capita than New York City. In 1920, Rochester had a population of almost 300,000 in its metropolitan area and a diversified economy which included cutting-edge technical and manufacturing industries like Kodak and Bausch and Lomb. The populations of both cities climbed steadily over the course of the 1920s, attracting

new settlers and workers. Established residents were optimistic about the possibilities for success in the region. Both cities had active civic and business organizations which trumpeted their local advantages.

Did these western New Yorkers feel that they lived in the shadow of a bigger, and therefore greater, city? Undoubtedly, some of these residents did indeed desire to break out, to "make it" in a metropolis like New York.²⁵ We should not assume, however that all felt this way, or that boosterism in such cities is to be laughed at as a quaint but ultimately misguided emotion. People took pride in being from these places; they identified with these cities, and had reason to believe that they, too, could participate in America's developing economy. Hindsight should not lead us to dismiss such high hopes as foolish or tragic.

Buffalo and Rochester can tell us a lot about the experiences of average Americans in two decades of both unprecedented prosperity and unmitigated economic distress. The census data indicating America's shift from a rural to an urban population serves as a standard point of departure for any undergraduate lecture about the emergence of "modern" America. In 1920, 51% of America's population lived in cities, a majority for the first time. This definition of an urban population, however, set a relatively low bar for admission. Any community with a population of 2,500 or more was eligible for

²⁵Local magazine Town Tidings (TT) ran an article about Buffalo-born people who had left the city to pursue careers elsewhere. Personalities interviewed included Dorothy Thompson Lewis, wife of Sinclair Lewis, William Bird, foreign correspondent, and Kathleen Howard, opera singer. TT May 1929, 13.

"city" status. Only three cities at the time had populations of a million inhabitants or more, with nine (including Buffalo) in the category from 500,000 to 1,000,000 and thirteen (including Rochester) ranging from 250,000 to 500,000. In other words, while most Americans were urban dwellers, not all lived in cities the size of Chicago or New York. A sizeable group lived in smaller or mid-sized cities. In fact, while 10,245,532 lived in cities of one million or more, 10,764,607 lived in cities of 250,000 to one million (see table 1). Living in one of these mid-sized cities was thus every bit as much of an "average" American experience as was living in New York, Chicago, or Philadelphia. Examining Buffalo and Rochester can give us a sense of how many Americans experienced the changes in consuming and marketing in this period. Historians have paid disproportionate amount of attention to the experiences of consumers and retailers in big cities; a closer look at mid-sized cities adds a new dimension to this history.

To fully appreciate the story of Western New York's participation in American consumer culture, we must examine the economic and social conditions of these cities as they entered the twentieth century. The region in 1920 seemed primed for great things. Since the early nineteenth century it had enjoyed a frenetic pace of development. This optimism makes both Buffalo and Rochester good subjects for this type of study. During the 1920s, local retailers and manufacturers tapped into local pride to encourage consumers to remain loyal to area businesses. Even as the Great Depression hit in 1929, Western New Yorkers were convinced that they could use local resources of capital and energy to turn the crisis around.

TABLE 1

URBAN TERRITORIES IN THE UNITED STATES, 1920

	No. of Places	Population	% Urban Population	% Total Population
All urban areas	2,787	54,304,603	100.0	51.4
Places of 1,000,000 or more	3	10,145,532	18.7	9.6
500,000 to 1,000,000	9	6,223,769	11.5	5.9
250,000 to 500,000	13	4,540,838	8.4	4.3
100,000 to 250,000	43	6,519,187	12.0	6.3
50,000 to 100,000	76	5,265,747	9.7	5.0
25,000 to 50,000	143	5,075,041	9.6	4.8
10,000 to 25,000	459	6,942,742	12.8	6.6
5,000 to 10,000	721	4,997,794	9.2	4.7
2,500 to 5,000	1,320	4,593,953	8.5	4.3

Source: U.S Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Abstract of the Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923) 17.

Many of the retailers who figure prominently in the story of retailing during the 1920s and 1930s got their starts in the nineteenth century. Before we embark on our examination of the interwar decades, a brief sketch of the history of the region, with special attention paid to the development of industries in both cities, is necessary. The settlement and economic development of Buffalo and Rochester in the nineteenth century

laid the foundation for the region's participation in America's consumer economy during the twentieth. The evolution of the retailing districts in the downtowns of both cities during this period also provides glimpses of things to come.

Although British and French agents had come into the Great Lakes region earlier in the eighteenth century, Buffalo's history entered a new phase in 1790 when the Holland Land Company purchased four tracts of land in Western New York.²⁶ Surveyor Joseph Ellicott designed the plan for the village of "New Amsterdam" in 1804.²⁷ The settlement, at some point renamed Buffalo, was first incorporated as a village in 1813. Skirmishes with the British (the city was burned to the ground by British soldiers in December 1813) combined with Buffalo's geographic isolation to limit the village's growth. Located at the conjunction of the Niagara River and Lake Erie, Buffalo needed a more direct connection with Eastern trade routes to put it on the map. Local settlers watched with interest as New York's legislature debated the creation of a waterway which would connect Lake Erie to Albany on the Hudson River, thus providing a water route from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean. A group of Buffalo entrepreneurs took the initiative to have Buffalo designated the western terminus of the canal by dredging Buffalo Creek and creating their own harbour and pier.

²⁶John F. Barry and Robert W. Elmes, Buffalo's Text Book, (Buffalo: Robert W. Elmes, 1924, 1929) 11-12.

²⁷Paul Suozzi, "Three Walking Tours of Buffalo, New York," booklet produced by the Landmark Society of the Niagara Frontier, n.d. [1980] 3.

The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 brought a flurry of economic activity and population growth. The route reduced the cost of transportation between Buffalo and the Hudson River from \$100 to \$10 per ton, opening the floodgates for shipments of wheat, corn, oats, and meat from the West and manufactured goods from the East.²⁸ Irish immigrants, in particular, flocked to Buffalo's Old First Ward to work first on the building of the canal and later on the docks loading and unloading shipments of grain. The city's population (also affected by an influx of German immigrants) grew to 10,000 by 1832. The technological achievement of "Clinton's Ditch" (named sarcastically for New York Governor DeWitt Clinton) became a source of local pride.²⁹ By 1842 Buffalo was home to the world's first steam-powered grain elevator.³⁰

Like Buffalo, Rochester's early history was also profoundly shaped by the opening of the Erie Canal. In his study of Rochester's religious community during the early nineteenth century, Paul Johnson characterizes the settlement as "America's first inland boom town."³¹ Located at the junction of the Erie Canal and the Genesee River,

²⁸Barry and Elmes, Buffalo's Text Book, 13.

²⁹For an overview of the impact of the Erie Canal on the entire Western New York region, see Carol Sheriff, The Artificial River: the Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

³⁰Selig Adler and Thomas E. Connolly, From Ararat to Suburbia: the History of the Jewish Community of Buffalo (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1966), 12.

³¹Paul Johnson, A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) 14.

and surrounded by rich farmland, the city was in a good position to capitalize on the increased commercialization of agriculture. Milling emerged as the dominant industry in the town; local farmers planted wheat, Rochester milled it and shipped it to New York City. By 1820 Rochester had acquired the nickname "Flour City," as it became a magnet for grain milling in the rich farmlands of the upstate region. As the city's exports of flour grew, a constant influx of newcomers was attracted to the city. In 1835, Rochester's economy entered a new phase: as the "Flower City," it became home to a sizeable plant and nursery industry.³² Both milling and nurseries remained important aspects of Rochester's economic identity, but clothing manufacturing emerged as the largest industrial employer by the middle of the century.³³ Shoe manufacturing also became increasingly important, as a number of leading firms set up factories in the central district of the city.³⁴ Woodworking, brewing, leatherwork, and tanning were also significant local industries.

In these early years, Rochester became notable not only for its economic growth, but its social upheavals. As the leading city in western New York's "Burned-Over District," the city was convulsed with the Second Great Awakening in the 1820s and

³²Prolific City Historian Blake McKelvey gave one book in his multi-volume history of the city the title Rochester: the Flower City (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949).

³³Blake McKelvey, "The Men's Clothing Industry in Rochester's History," Rochester History 22 no. 2 (July, 1960): 1.

³⁴McKelvey, Flower City 17.

1830s.³⁵ The religious revivals climaxed with the arrival of Charles Grandison Finney, who appeared in Rochester in 1830 and began a six-month campaign of daily prayer meetings and individual conversions which united and invigorated the city's Protestants. Although the religious impulse eventually would wane, it would exert influence on many subsequent reform movements in the region. In later years, Rochester would be the home of many prominent abolitionists and women's rights activists, including Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, shipping was no longer the only significant means of transport. Just as the building of the canal had spurred an era of development, the advent of the railway further helped the region's growth. In the mid-nineteenth century, Buffalo emerged as a nexus of rail travel. A short tramway connected Buffalo and Niagara Falls in the 1830s, and by 1842 lines linked the city to Attica, Corning, and Hornell, New York. A year later, a chain of railroads stretched across the state from Buffalo to Albany.³⁶ Eventually, links to Toledo and Chicago as well as routes into Canada and the coal regions of Pennsylvania were established. Mark Goldman observes that at the turn of the century Buffalo was second only to Chicago as a railroad terminus, with "seven direct lines connecting Buffalo with six different East

³⁵Johnson's A Shopkeeper's Millenium remains the definitive study of religious revivals in the area.

³⁶Barry and Elmes, Buffalo's Text Book, 13.

Coast cities; six direct lines to Chicago, Kansas City, Omaha, and St. Louis; and two direct lines between Buffalo and Pittsburgh."³⁷

Even in the nineteenth century, Buffalonians were concerned about becoming a mere satellite of the New York market. Local business leaders watched the influx of goods manufactured in New York City with a mixture of excitement and alarm. In Buffalo, commerce dominated; industries were few.³⁸ As Goldman notes, worried that trade would dominate all other local endeavours, they "tried desperately to channel some of Buffalo's commercial vigour into manufacturing."³⁹ As a result of their initiatives, Buffalo from an early date had a sizeable manufacturing sector and the roots of a highly diversified economy. Among the most significant industries were iron factories (which produced countless items, including stoves and building materials), furniture manufacturing, brewing, soapmaking, tanning, and printing. After 1896, Buffalo received electrical power from Niagara Falls, and industrial development began in earnest. Because of the area's excellent rail and canal connections, as well as its access to fresh water, a location in West Seneca, just outside of Buffalo, was chosen as a site for a new mill by the Lackawanna Iron & Steel Co. in 1899. The site at the eastern end of Lake Erie allowed easy shipment of ore from Minnesota and coal from Pennsylvania.

³⁷Mark Goldman, High Hopes: The Rise and Decline of Buffalo, New York (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 129.

³⁸Barry and Elmes, Buffalo's Text Book, 14.

³⁹Goldman, High Hopes, 34.

The plant, purchased by Bethlehem Steel in 1922, was hailed as state-of-the-art at the time it was built, another reason for the city to feel confident of its rising fortunes.

Milling continued to be an important industry, with eighteen grain mills churning out almost 30,000 barrels of flour daily by the early 1920s. Buffalo's growing population and economic expansion attracted merchants who hoped to profit from the boom. Many of the stores which would be established fixtures in Buffalo's Main Street in the twentieth century had roots in the nineteenth, when the founders of stores like Hengerer's; Adam, Meldrum & Anderson; and J.N. Adam's first decided to invest in the "Queen City."⁴⁰ William Hengerer was a clerk in the R.J. Sherman store in 1836 and eventually became a partner at another dry goods outfit, which was renamed Barnes, Hengerer & Co. in 1875. Hengerer's would become a lasting fixture on Main Street.⁴¹

Meanwhile in 1867, Robert B. Adam joined with two partners to open a dry goods venture, which would grow into Adam, Meldrum & Anderson Co., a pioneer in the use of the modern buying office. Another young Scot named J. N. Adam (no relation to

⁴⁰Clarence P. Foster, "A Brief History of the William Hengerer Co. Store," [pamphlet] Oct. 1936, Reprinted Sept. 1939, Vertical Files, Retailers H, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society (BECHS); "AM&A's 100 Years," [pamphlet] 1967, Vertical Files, Retailers A, BECHS; Buffalo Evening News (BEN), 14 November 1929, 6.

⁴¹Foster, "Brief History of the Wm.Hengerer Co. Store." It is worth noting that the store became a unit of the Claflin organization (Associated Dry Goods) in 1905, yet maintained a "local" identity, retaining the Hengerer name and using pro-Buffalo slogans in advertising. This mingling of the national and local will be discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, this pamphlet commemorated the 100th anniversary of the store in Buffalo in 1936 and stressed the long history of the institution in the community.

Robert B. Adam) arrived in the Queen City 1881 to found his dry goods business.⁴² His store occupied the first floor and basement of a seven-story "skyscraper" on Main between Swan and Erie, "whose towering height was the pride of Buffalo in those mauve days of the early [18]80's when Delaware Avenue was a speedway for trotting horses."⁴³ Easy access to electrical power also inspired early attempts to find alternatives to gas and oil lights in the downtown, and in 1886 Buffalo became the first city in the United States to light its streets with electricity.⁴⁴

Rochester had its own claim to fame with regard to innovative technology. As the home of the Eastman Kodak Company, the city became synonymous with the production of cameras and film. The first building at the large Kodak Park industrial site opened in 1891. The phenomenal success of Eastman Kodak benefited not only workers for the company, who enjoyed remarkable stock-sharing and bonus plans, but also other area businesses. Kodak subcontracted to firms such as Bausch & Lomb for lenses and Wollensak for shutters.⁴⁵ Rochester also benefited from the philanthropic largesse of George Eastman, who made generous bequests to the city and the University of Rochester, and founded the Eastman School of Music.

⁴²BEN, 14 November 1929, 6.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Barry and Elmes, Buffalo's Text Book, 23.

⁴⁵Blake McKelvey, Rochester, the Quest for Quality 1890-1925 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956) , 257.

The combination of increased transportation (through rail lines as well as shipping along the Genessee River) and a booming regional economy benefited Rochester's merchants, allowing them to expand rapidly. There were parallels between the development of the retailing district in Rochester and Buffalo: both Main Streets became home to a number of dry goods merchants in the latter half of the nineteenth century which grew into full-fledged department stores by 1900. As early as 1826, Rochester had 42 stores which catered to a population of 7,699.⁴⁶ Dry goods merchants like Howe & Rogers and Burke, Fitzsimons, Hone & Co. displayed an ever-increasing array of housewares. After the Civil War, Rufus Sibley, Alexander Lindsay and John Curr, two Scottish retail clerks and a Massachusetts bookkeeper, opened a "Boston Store" which would grow into the largest retail institution in New York State outside of Manhattan in the 1920s.⁴⁷

At the turn of the century Buffalo was such a symbol of the nation's progress that it was selected as the site of the 1901 Pan-American Exposition. The building of a Great White Way and a number of pavilions on the fair grounds led to great excitement, and the visit of President McKinley seemed to point to glittering new prospects for the city. The Exposition celebrated Niagara Falls as the site of the world's largest power station. Two

⁴⁶Rochester Democrat & Chronicle (RD&C), advertisement for McCurdy & Co., 1 January 1926, 3.

⁴⁷"A History of Sibley's." [pamphlet] n.d., Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Papers, Carton "History: 1868-1926," Special Collections, Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum, Rochester.

hundred thousand incandescent lights illuminated the fair's Grand Court, dazzling visitors.⁴⁸ Unfortunately for Buffalo, and the president, the actions of a gunman at the fair brought the city more infamy than popularity. Although he survived the shooting, McKinley succumbed to gangrene from the mishandled treatment of his wounds a week after the attack, and the city became the swearing-in place for vice-president Theodore Roosevelt. Yet well into the early decades of the twentieth century, a sense of prosperity buoyed Buffalonians and Rochesterians alike.

Buffalo and Rochester were medium-sized cities in the early decades of the twentieth century, but ones which had been growing steadily. According to the 1920 Census, Buffalo ranked eleventh in population, putting it just after Los Angeles and before San Francisco and Washington, D.C. Rochester was twenty-third on the list, falling between Jersey City, N.J. and Portland, Oregon in size.⁴⁹ Buffalo had increased just under twenty per cent in population between 1910 and 1920, and a similar amount from 1900 to 1910. Rochester had an even faster rate of growth, increasing by approximately thirty-four per cent during each of the two decades.⁵⁰

⁴⁸David Nye, Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990) 41-46.

⁴⁹U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Abstract of the Fourteenth Census of the United States 1920 (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1923), 50-2.

⁵⁰Abstract of the Fourteenth Census, 55.

Population		Increase		
1920	1910	1900	1900-10	1910-20

But estimates of city populations were seen as the starting point, not the limit, of the potential market available to Buffalo and Rochester merchants. Advertisers and retail trade writers acknowledged a radius around cities which made up the "metropolitan" or "retail shopping area" of major markets. This included not only direct suburbs but outlying communities whose citizens often patronized stores at larger centres. Buffalo drew shoppers from nearby satellites like Williamsville, Tonawanda and North Tonawanda, Orchard Park, Depew and Lackawanna, as well as the more distant Lewiston, Youngstown, Niagara Falls and Lockport. Rochester served the farming communities which ringed it, including Pittsford, Fairport, Greece, Irondquoit, Gates, Webster, Medina, Batavia, Mumford, Palmyra and North Chili.

In 1925, the J. Walter Thompson Company listed Buffalo as 12th on a list of "Group I" (over 500,000 population) cities. Buffalo had a city population of 538,016 and a retail shopping area population of 724,443.⁵¹ The Company went even further to suggest that Buffalo was considered the centre of a trading zone 42 miles in area, drawing from 34 other surrounding towns, and bringing its total metropolitan population to 850,000.⁵² Rochester, the eighth-largest "Group II" (population from 100,000 to 500,000)

Buffalo	506,775	423,715	352,387	19.6%	20.1%
Rochester	295,750	218,149	162,608	35.6%	34.2%

⁵¹J. Walter Thompson Company, Retail Shopping Areas: A Suggested Grouping of Counties About 683 Principal Shopping Centers, With 642 Sub-Centers Indicated, Supplementary to Part IV of Population and Its Distribution 4th ed., 1927, 21.

⁵²"America's Leading Markets: Buffalo," J. Walter Thompson Company Newsletter, 17 July 1924, Box 2, J. Walter Thompson Company Archives, Special Collections, Duke

city, had a city population of 316,786 and a retail shopping area of 513,935.⁵³ In 1924, the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle acknowledged that downtown merchants served not only those living within the city limits, but from a radius surrounding Rochester:

Every area has its metropolis and the tendency of people within that area to visit the "metropolis" when they wish to purchase something that cannot be secured in their community stores...There is at present circling Rochester a considerable area, known as the metropolitan area where Rochester has the dominating facilities for retail trade. There are department stores and men's clothing stores, that are held in high esteem among leading retail merchants of cities far larger than Rochester.⁵⁴

To encourage shoppers from outlying areas, the Rochester Retail Merchants Council urged that transportation services be gauged to the needs of outside visitors, enabling those from outlying districts to "conveniently hop a buss [sic] or trolley in the morning, do their shopping in Rochester stores pleasantly and profitably, enjoy an attractive meal and a first-class theater program and return without undue haste or delay."⁵⁵ Merchants in Buffalo and Rochester occasionally advertised in the newspapers of surrounding towns, and ran special promotions to lure out-of-town shoppers. As early as 1909, McCurdy & Norwell department store courted clientele beyond the city limits, offering free delivery

University, 6. Thanks to Dr. Daniel Robinson for passing along this information.

⁵³Retail Shopping Areas, p. 22.

⁵⁴"Merchants Aid Extension of Rochester Trade Area," RD&C, 16 October 1924, 1.

⁵⁵Ibid.

of goods over \$5 within 200 miles of Rochester.⁵⁶ Duffy-Powers of Rochester regularly ran "Suburban Days" promotions. Newspaper ads featured a drawing of the store building, surrounded by over twenty communities, including Webster, Chili, Geneseo, Honeoye Falls, and East Henrietta.⁵⁷ This ad was singled out for praise by the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal in a feature on "trade extension."⁵⁸

While retailers and advertisers liked to publicize the largest possible figures for potential shoppers, they acknowledged that not all consumers were created equal: even within a given geographic area, there could be wide fluctuations in income levels. Marketers and advertisers used income tax returns as a rough gauge of the "right sort" of shoppers - those families which had sufficient income to file a tax return presumably had enough to indulge in various consumer goods. The J. Walter Thompson Company Newsletter noted approvingly that nearly 11 per cent of the people living in Buffalo in 1925 had a sufficient income to file an income tax return, at a time when the average for the entire country was only 6.3 per cent.⁵⁹ The individual income tax returns in the area surrounding Buffalo numbered 43,787, giving a population of 16 residents per income tax return.

⁵⁶Lynda McCurdy Hotra, "McCurdy & Company Timeline," 1997, Private Collection of Lynda McCurdy Hotra, Rochester.

⁵⁷See, for example, the ad for Duffy-Powers, Inc. RD&C, 7 December 1927, 29.

⁵⁸"16 Page Community Section," Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal (DGMTJ), April 1926, 56.

⁵⁹"America's Leading Markets: Buffalo," JWT Newsletter, 17 July 1924, 6.

The most affluent Buffalonians by the 1920s lived in the wide, tree-lined streets to the North and West of the city's centre. Although some realtors tried to encourage the development of downtown apartments, in the style of New York penthouses, most families of means lived in detached houses.⁶⁰ Along Elmwood and Delaware, in Wards 18, 19, and 20, large stone and wood single-family homes sat beyond expanses of manicured lawn. The most prestigious streets - those backing onto Olmsted-designed Delaware Park, those adjacent to the remaining neo-Classical buildings from the 1901 Pan-American Exposition - were home to Buffalo's older families, some of which had been in the area for generations.⁶¹

The descendants of industrialists, the owner of the Buffalo News, and the children of politicians lived in Italianate villas, French Second Empire mansions, and Victorian shingle style homes. The northern end of Buffalo became an even more desirable address after 1880, with the creation of Frederick Law Olmsted's Parkside community. Parkside was an area of broad, curving streets, served by a parkway system of roads and a trolley line to the business district.⁶² It was in this neighborhood that Frank Lloyd Wright built a

⁶⁰There were some prestigious residential hotels to the north and east of the city center, most notably the Buckingham Hotel (Mariner and Allen streets) which had apartments as well as hotel rooms for tourists, and the Hotel Lenox on North Street. See Suozzi, "Three Walks," 10, 19.

⁶¹Samuel Clemens, before his fame as Mark Twain, had lived on Delaware from 1869-1871, when he was editor and part owner of the Buffalo Morning Express.

⁶²Francis R. Kowsky, "Municipal Parks and City Planning: Frederick Law Olmsted's Buffalo Park and Parkway System," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 44 (March, 1987), 63.

Prairie Style home for Larkin Soap Company executive Darwin D. Martin. In the early twentieth century, these were the lawyers, the professors, the capitalists and business owners of the city, whose wives could easily afford to shop in specialty stores and department stores downtown, or even travel to New York occasionally for purchases. These were the families most likely to have standing accounts at the department stores, to be on the mailing lists of dress departments.

Complicating the picture of class distribution in Buffalo was the existence of ethnic communities. Although not all immigrants lived in ethnic enclaves, there were clusters of settlement, particularly in the Fifth Ward, where Old World traditions and institutions flourished. Buffalo had over 120,000 foreign-born residents, including sizeable Polish, German, and Italian communities. In 1920 the foreign-born made up 31.6% of the city population. Of these, a sizeable group (31,876) came from Canada, Ireland, England, and Scotland and thus did not face the same obstacles in language and custom encountered by other groups coming to America. Just over 15% of the foreign-born population over the age of twenty-one was unable to speak English.

Buffalo's civic promoters went to great lengths to stress the high level of assimilation of the city's immigrants. A textbook designed for use in Buffalo schools gave a painstaking breakdown of the population, distinguishing between those "Foreign born" but "coming from strictly English speaking countries," those "Foreign born coming from non-English

speaking countries, but now able to speak English" and the "Foreign born and unable to speak English."⁶³

TABLE 2
TOP TEN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN,
FOREIGN-BORN WHITE BUFFALO RESIDENTS, 1920

Country of Birth	Number	Percent of Foreign-born population
Poland	31, 406	25.8
Germany	20,898	17.2
Italy	16,411	13.5
Canada	15,739	12.9 (specifically not French-Canadian)
Ireland	7,264	6.0
England	6,712	5.5
Russia	6,557	5.4
Austria	2,945	2.4
Hungary	2,736	2.2
Scotland	1,984	1.6

Source: Abstract of the Fourteenth Census, 378-81.

Other observers were more appreciative of the strengths of Buffalo's immigrant communities. J. Walter Thompson described the marketing potential of Buffalo's "highly concentrated and well-to-do Polish population," served by its own newspaper. Polish immigrants formed a "remarkably homogenous. . . city within a city with a life of its own."⁶⁴ The residents of the ethnic neighbourhoods of the city's East Side were also key

⁶³Barry and Elmes, Buffalo's Text Book, 19.

⁶⁴"America's Leading Markets: Buffalo," JWT Newsletter, 17 July 1924, 6.

to Buffalo's success as an industrial centre. Polish immigrants, in particular, were likely to find work in the city's factories.⁶⁵ Many working-class neighbourhoods sprang up within walking distance of the factories located near the waterfront, in the South and East sides. Buffalo's Italian population was concentrated near the Southwest corner of Main Street, extending from Niagara Street westward to the waterfront.⁶⁶ Close proximity to the canal was necessary for the many peddlers, fruit vendors and seasonal workers among the Italian community.⁶⁷ Buffalo was also home to a black community of over 4,500 residents, also concentrated on the East Side in the downtown, primarily in Wards 6 and 7. Although some black men found work in the industrial plants, because of discrimination from industrial employers and unions, advancement was difficult and many worked as pullman porters, carters and outside labourers. Black women were almost entirely confined to the field of domestic service.⁶⁸

⁶⁵Many Buffalo employers claimed to prefer Polish workers over Italians. See Goldman, High Hopes, 178; Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, Family and Community: Italian Immigrants in Buffalo, 1880 - 1930 (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 42-43.

⁶⁶Yans-McLaughlin notes that this area was known as "Little Italy" by the early 1920s. Family and Community, 59.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 37-54. Yans-McLaughlin argues that a number of cultural factors led Italian workers in Buffalo to choose seasonal labour (in road and building construction in particular) over factory work. Italian women were also much less likely to work outside of the home than women in other ethnic communities.

⁶⁸Niles Carpenter, Nationality, Color, and Economic Opportunity in the City of Buffalo (New York and Buffalo: University of Buffalo, 1927), 115-118, 155-167.

As consumers, Buffalo's ethnic working class was more likely to patronize small local merchants, and only occasionally venture into downtown department stores or chain branches. Immigrants were also less likely to buy branded goods, in comparison with other class groups. Professor Edmund McGarry of the University of Buffalo noted that the "alien populations" of Buffalo were less likely to patronize chain stores for groceries, where they could not secure credit or haggle with merchants. As a result, they were less likely to purchase that mainstay of the chain store business, the national brand-name good.⁶⁹

In between the mansions of Delaware and the more crowded neighbourhoods of the East Side were the neighbourhoods bordering the University, and to the east on a larger radius from the downtown, north of Broadway. Wards 16, 19 and 20 were almost entirely white, American citizens.⁷⁰ Native white males in Buffalo dominated the positions of factory foremen, highly skilled workers as well as the categories of office clerks and professionals.⁷¹ The families living in the North, University and Malden neighbourhoods of the city were less likely to send female members out into the workforce. Women from these neighbourhoods made frequent trips to the downtown, and were a major target for the advertising and promotions offered by Buffalo department stores.

⁶⁹Statistical Survey, Supplement, Vol VI April 1923 No. 8A.

⁷⁰Carpenter, Nationality, Color, and Economic Opportunity, 96-9.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 135.

Like Buffalo, Rochester had its share of wealthy residents. Rochester's Blue Book was dominated by local figures like George Eastman, the Bausches and Lomb, and other industrialists.⁷² The elite of the city lived in mansions on East Avenue, their wives sending limousines and carriages to line the curb outside of Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Department Store. The city's other neighbourhoods, while less opulent, tended to be dotted with free-standing homes and tree-lined streets. By 1890 most of the acres within the city limits had been developed for residential purposes, leading one observer to christen it the "City of Homes."⁷³

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a steady stream of immigrants transformed the composition of the city.⁷⁴ Although residents of Western European origin still comprised the majority of the city's ethnic minorities, an influx of eastern and southern European migrants was significant. In particular, Italian, Polish and Russian settlers challenged the dominance of the older groups.⁷⁵ Rochester's foreign-born residents made up 31.8% of the city population, with Italians and Germans forming the

⁷²Blake McKelvey, Rochester: An Emerging Metropolis, 1925-1961 (Rochester: Christopher Press, 1961) 4.

⁷³McKelvey, Quest for Quality, 3.

⁷⁴Blake McKelvey describes the 1880s in particular as the time of Rochester's "cosmopolitan transformation," when a number of new immigrant groups were integrated into city life. McKelvey, Flower City, 389.

⁷⁵McKelvey, Quest for Quality, 149.

two largest ethnic groups. Irish, English and Scottish immigrants, long a presence in the city, were still sizeable in number.

TABLE 3
TOP TEN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN,
FOREIGN-BORN WHITE ROCHESTER RESIDENTS, 1920

Country of Birth	Number	Percentage of Foreign-Born Population
Italy	19,468	27.3
Germany	10,735	15.0
Canada	9,338	13.1 (specifically not French-Canadian)
Russia	6,871	9.6
England	5,980	8.4
Poland	4,590	6.4
Ireland	4,385	6.1
Netherlands	1,891	2.6
Austria	1,536	2.2
Scotland	1,142	1.6

Source: Abstract of the Fourteenth Census, 378-81.

Only 9.7 % of foreign-born residents over 21 were unable to speak English. Long-established ethnic communities like the Germans in Rochester made an effort to encourage the rapid assimilation of new migrants, including offering English language classes.⁷⁶ Ethnic communities in Rochester were less geographically concentrated than those in Buffalo. Some groups, including the Scotch, Irish, Anglo-Canadian and German had long-standing roots in the city, and over time many had become integrated into more

⁷⁶McKelvey, Flower City, 379.

traditionally old-stock "Yankee" neighbourhoods. Groups which were newer arrivals, like the Italians, were more likely to live in separate ethnic enclaves. Even here, however, there was no single, compact colony. Clusters of Italian residents could be found in four city wards, primarily in the central business district and the Sixteenth Ward.⁷⁷ Italians in Rochester were likely to work in construction or as peddlers and small merchants.⁷⁸ Only one other group was similarly concentrated: the city's black population, which numbered over 1,500 in 1920.⁷⁹ Rochester's tradition as an abolitionist centre had attracted many free blacks earlier in the century. By the 1890s, however, its black population was economically and spatially segregated, primarily concentrated on the western edge of the third ward. Most black residents worked in the service trades.⁸⁰

By the early twentieth century, both Rochester and Buffalo were vital cities with established industries and diverse populations. The two also had developed strong central commercial districts, where a number of merchants had set up shop. Retailers played an active part in civic life. The following chapters will explore how retailers in Buffalo and

⁷⁷John W. Briggs, An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890 - 1930, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 98.

⁷⁸McKelvey, Flower City, 388.

⁷⁹Abstract of the Fourteenth Census, 108.

⁸⁰By this time abolitionist Frederick Douglass had left Rochester to reside in Washington. Blake McKelvey argues that black residents faced more barriers to advancement than any other group in the city. McKelvey, Flower City, 388-9.

Rochester coped with new forms of competition, and how local consumers participated in the American mass market. As Chapter One will explore, retailers took on a range of roles in the community, hosting a variety of entertainments for the local population, spearheading downtown development projects, and participating in charity drives. Perhaps even more than their New York counterparts, department stores loomed large on the local cultural scene.

Chapter Two examines how increased ease of transportation and the spread of national media made Rochester and Buffalo stores more aware of their competition in New York. Retailers drew upon their history and ties to the area in their advertising to encourage Western New Yorkers to shop at home. They reassured their patrons that they offered goods which were comparable to those found in stores in Manhattan, and asserted their ability to serve the local market in a unique way. They also used the mass-market media to assert their ability to stay "up-to-date" on trends in fashion.

Chapter Three looks at the way Rochester and Buffalo stores grappled with the "chain store problem" in the 1920s and 1930s. Just as local retailers took pains to differentiate themselves from New York stores, they drew upon a language of localism to put chain store branches in a bad light. Chain branches were criticized as interlopers with no interest in community affairs. At the same time, however, many were watching chain business practices with interest, adopting those which looked promising, while strenuously asserting their own "independent" status.

Chapter Four explores how the emphasis on local spending which stores had cultivated during the 1920s became the foundation for the region's approach to the crisis of the Depression. In Rochester and Buffalo during the early 1930s the debate over the depression was for the most part limited to the role of the private individual, in particular the private consumer, in turning the "so-called slump" around. With an almost messianic zeal, local business leaders embarked on campaigns to put more local dollars into circulation, through pledge drives, city-wide sales and private employment initiatives. It was only after initiatives to harness the power of local consumers came and went that Western New Yorkers turned to more far-reaching solutions involving federal intervention.

Chapter Five examines the persistence of downtown merchants as cultural brokers even during the hard times of the late 1930s. Many reinvested considerable amounts in expanding or updating their facilities, underscoring their continued faith that conditions in the region would soon turn around. The chapter also touches on how even national manufacturers tailored their advertising to sell to Western New Yorkers. By using testimonials from Buffalonians and Rochesterians, a number of national advertisers put a more familiar face forward in newspaper and magazine campaigns. This chapter continues to explore how the very definition of what was "local" and what was "national" was being renegotiated in the 1920s and 1930s.

Although each chapter in this thesis is organized around one central theme, a common thread linking them together is the assertion by retailers that their interests were

inseparable from the community's interests. In prosperous times, this meant the merchant drew attention to the services he provided to local citizens; in times of crisis, area residents were instructed that by spending their dollars at home, they could help to usher in prosperity. The use of retailing conditions as a measure of local economic health was not limited to the merchants alone; local boosters, newspaper editorial writers, and area politicians saw "local spending" as a goal to be encouraged. And consumers, as well, made choices about where to spend because of feelings of attachment to local businesses. The persistence of these local loyalties complicates our understanding of the evolution of the American mass market, challenging the notion that the cultural patterns and business practices of larger cities like New York and Chicago were simply replicated across the rest of the nation. The merchants and consumers of Buffalo and Rochester did experience some profound changes in the ways they sold and bought goods in the 1920s and 1930s; yet some of these changes had a particularly local emphasis. A regional study of consumption allows us insight into these variations.

CHAPTER ONE

Downtown Retailers and "Main Street" Towns

The impression of an outsider coming into Buffalo toward our "Main Street" cannot be one of commendation, for our city is too large, too prosperous, to be joked about over the name of its most important thoroughfare, and this is especially true since Sinclair Lewis' famous book, several years ago, which seems to have characterized "Main Street" along with a small community. Certainly there is no individuality in the name, and I further believe that it has been one reason for keeping most of our business activity in a retail way, on one street.

S.A. Stephens, owner of a local business¹

How did the meaning of the selling of goods in America change over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? A range of scholars have explored how stores, particularly department stores, took on a new prominence as centres of cultural activity. In cities in both North America and Europe, the store became a meeting place, a pilgrimage site, a place to visit and revisit. And while the acquisition of goods was at the heart of the department store's purpose, at times the mundane act of ringing up sales was subsumed by a larger significance. Scholars have explored many of the ways in which retail stores presented a new cultural vision in the United States, one which fully embraced the possibilities of commercial capitalism. Not only did department stores supply material goods to customers; they offered a spectacle of light, mirrors and display which thrilled and often overwhelmed visitors. Some Victorian matrons were so

¹Town Tidings (TT), October 1929, 44.

overcome by the alluring merchandise on display that they seized it without paying for it.²

In New York City, as William Leach has pointed out, Fifth Avenue stores had a tremendous impact in terms not only of the goods they provided but the general atmosphere of celebration and indulgence which seduced patrons and passers-by alike.³ Yet while the retail districts of Manhattan and Chicago gained fame for their eye-catching shop windows and brilliant displays, their story is not the only one. In some ways, because stores like Macy's and Filene's were located in huge metropolises, they could not dominate the fabric of urban life. These stores had to compete with nightclubs, movie houses, museums, theatres, and even crowds of people in the streets for the

²Leach argues that department stores articulated a new visual language which served commercial capitalism. This new aesthetic aimed to promote goods on a scale never before seen, creating "an extensive public environment of desire." Land of Desire, 40. Simon J. Bronner has also explored new techniques in merchandise display in "Strategies of Display and the Production of Desire," in Bronner, ed., Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1989). Linda L. Tyler's article "'Commerce and Poetry Hand in Hand': Music in American Department Stores, 1880-1930," Journal of the American Musicological Society 45 (1992): 75-120, suggests not only the visual atmosphere but the sounds of the store could seduce patrons. In his account of the growth and cultural significance of a Parisian store, Perry Miller underscores the significance of department stores in this transformation. Miller argues that the department store alone "did not lead to the appearance of a consumer society, but it did stand at the center of this phenomenon." Miller, The Bon Marche, 165. Finally, Elaine Abelson's account of female shoplifting, When Ladies Go A-thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store, (New York: Oxford, 1989) provides hundreds of examples of the "shoplifting epidemic" which overcame the bourgeois senses of responsibility and self-control for many urban middle-class matrons.

³See, for example, Leach, Land of Desire, 39-70, 323-348.

attention of urbanites.⁴ In smaller cities, the competition was not quite so fierce.

Although Buffalo and Rochester were home to a range of entertainments, stores dominated the cultural landscape in ways that their New York and Chicago counterparts did not.

This chapter will explore how retailers in the two smaller cities acted as both civic leaders and cultural brokers. In terms of their participation in civic life, the attractions they brought to town and their physical presence in commercial districts, retailers were participants in public life on a level unattainable by other types of businesses. The owners and managers of department stores, usually men with long-standing roots in the community, were among the most prominent figures in civic life in smaller cities. They dominated local trade councils, headed Main Street improvement drives, and were a huge presence in daily newspapers. Yet smaller retailers - grocers, druggists, even managers of branches of chain organizations - also participated in public life in ways that went beyond the simple sale of goods.

Culturally, department stores and smaller retailers brought goods, services and entertainment together under one roof. In a smaller city, the role that stores played in

⁴Although they deal with two completely different social classes, the works of Kathy Peiss and Lewis Erenberg hint at the diversity of amusements in New York City during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Peiss explores working-class women's leisure pursuits in Cheap Amusements. She suggests that dance halls and amusement parks had a powerful pull for single working girls, some of whom might be employed in retail sales themselves. In Steppin' Out, Lewis Erenberg suggests that New York's nightclubs, like its department stores, acted as both evidence of and catalysts for a new culture of indulgence and informality. Urban white elites found the cabaret an exciting, interactive experience.

bringing the latest trends to the community was heightened. They were in one sense the main game in town. Movie stars and sports celebrities might never have visited Rochester if Sibley's department store had not brought them in for autograph sessions; no other businesses had the budget to sponsor city parades like the retailers of Buffalo did; no other destination was as alluring for women with leisure time, children at Christmas, or even businessmen seeking a luncheon place.⁵ This chapter will trace the evolution of the main retailing districts in Buffalo and Rochester, describing the activities of retailers in the two cities in civic life and as cultural brokers during the 1920s. This will provide the context for an examination of the changing connotations of the name "Main Street" in Buffalo.

Retailers were concentrated in the downtown cores of Buffalo and Rochester. Although by the 1920s there were other areas in each city which acted as hubs of shopping activity, Main Street was the most desirable location for department stores and specialty shops. The business districts in both Buffalo and Rochester radiated out from one main intersection, and over time evolved into comprehensive grids. In 1876, Frederick Law Olmsted praised Buffalo as "the best planned city, as to its streets, public

⁵This is not to suggest that Rochester and Buffalo did not have their own movie houses, restaurants, radio stations, museums and theatres. Yet the sheer size of a store like Sibley's in Rochester, for example, dwarfed the presence of these other institutions.

places and grounds in the United States, if not the world."⁶ Buffalo's Main Street was (and remains) the line which divided the city's East and West Sides. The East Side was home to working-class and ethnic neighbourhoods, while the city's elite remained on the other side of the divide. Buffalo's first merchants set up stores close to the waterfront area, to take advantage of the canal traffic. In the 1830s a cluster of stores was located in this area. Main Street, jutting north from Buffalo's inner harbour, later became home to Buffalo's largest dry goods emporiums. By 1920 a glance in the Buffalo Directory would reveal that seven of the city's largest stores, as well as a number of other smaller retailers, had Main Street frontage.⁷

Buffalo's downtown did not fully emerge as a "central business district" until the turn of the twentieth century. In a fairly short period of time, Buffalo's downtown experienced a rapid expansion. The development of this area was spurred by the building of electric streetcar lines which made the business district much more accessible to residents all over the city. The downtown was first served by a street car system in 1861, when three cars and twelve horses carried passengers along Main Street from Exchange to Goodell. This by the 1920s was expanded into a combined trolley and motor car

⁶Frederick Law Olmsted, quoted in Francis R. Kowsky, "Municipal Parks and City Planning," 49.

⁷The Buffalo Directory, 1920, listings under "Dry Goods," and "Department Stores," BECHS. When Sears-Roebuck first arrived in 1929, it too would select a Main Street location.

system, powered for the most part by Niagara Falls electricity, that consisted of a fleet of over a thousand cars.⁸ As historian Mark Goldman notes,

Now, for the price of a nickel, anybody, anywhere in the city, could jump on a streetcar and ride downtown. Suddenly, thousands of Buffalonians, whose social and cultural activities had been for so long confined to the limits of their ancestral neighborhoods, could leave and go downtown. The downtown retail business boomed as new and large department stores were built to accommodate the flood. Hotels and theaters, restaurants and music halls all sought downtown locations, as the social and cultural center shifted away from the neighborhoods to the new night life downtown.⁹

In addition to new streetcar routes, increased automobile traffic also changed the look of the downtown: parking garages were constructed, and at least one park was paved to become a traffic circle.¹⁰ The landscape of the downtown changed, with the creation of skyscrapers - new office buildings sprung up, many designed by some of the nation's leading architects. Louis Sullivan designed a modern skyscraper for the Guaranty Trust Company in 1896. Frank Lloyd Wright contributed the Larkin office building, as well as a number of private residences to the city.

Retailers kept pace with these developments, expanding and adopting new technologies. Adam, Meldrum & Anderson grew from a small general goods dealer to a

⁸Barry and Elmes, Buffalo's Text Book, 23.

⁹Goldman, High Hopes, 187.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 186-195. Mark Goldman has a detailed discussion of this period of expansion in Buffalo's history. He argues that the downtown's development was "swift, radical, and dramatic," as within a decade "the whole visual imagery and the physical scale of Buffalo had been irreparably altered." (187-188)

sizeable department stores with buying offices in New York, Germany, Italy, France and the British Isles.¹¹ The store first installed electric lighting in 1886.¹² Within ten years of its opening, J.N. Adam & Co. had outgrown its original building. Nearby properties were acquired, but as the store continued to grow, it moved to a new location, also on Main Street. By 1891 Adam had telephones installed, and the following year witnessed the installation of electric lights in the store, making it among the most modern establishments in the downtown area at the time.¹³ Crowds of tourists visited the store's engine room daily to view the dynamos which powered the lights.¹⁴ Hengerer's, too expanded. By the time founder William Hengerer retired in 1905, Hengerer's specialty shop was the store of choice for fashionable Buffalonians.¹⁵

Despite the cluster of major retailers on Main Street, other areas of the city also boasted active shopping districts. There was also a cluster of retail activity in the Broadway-Fillmore district, where slightly more budget-priced variety, furniture and

¹¹"AM&A's 100 Years." [pamphlet] 1967, Vertical Files, Retailers A, BECHS.

¹²"Golden Jubilee of Electric Lighting", Feb. 29 - Mar. 7, 1936. Pamphlet celebrating golden jubilee of Westinghouse Electric, commemorated by an Electrical Exhibit on Adam, Meldrum & Anderson's 4th floor. Vertical Files, Retailers A, BECHS.

¹³"Modern J.N. Adam & Co. Store Far Different From First One," BEN, 14 November 1929, 6.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Foster, "Brief History of Wm. Hengerer."

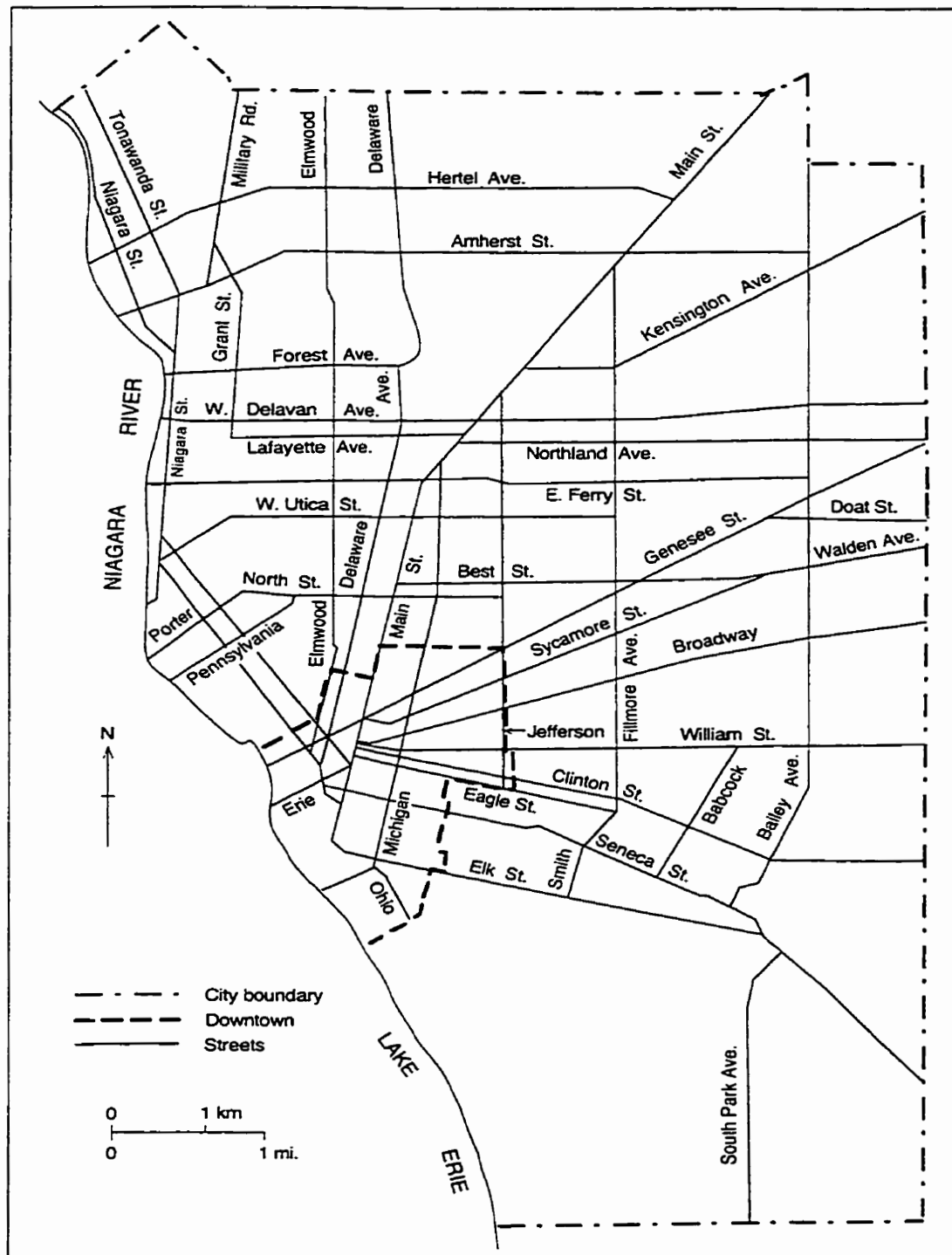


Figure 1 Map of Buffalo, showing downtown, 1920

department stores, including Jahraus-Braun and the Morgan Stores, were located. Drug and grocery stores were scattered throughout the city, serving local neighbourhoods, but the grocery business in the city as late as 1929 was still concentrated in the downtown district.¹⁶

In Rochester, Main Street also became the location of choice for large department stores. Over the course of the 1850s, buildings including the Reynolds Arcade (described locally as "Rochester's permanent crystal palace") sprang up to line the north side of Main Street.¹⁷ Although in the nineteenth century the strip of Main Street on the west side of the Genesee river was seen as the focal point of the city (the intersection of State, Main, and Exchange being known as the "Four Corners"), by the early twentieth century the east side emerged as the more important location for retailers.

The biggest difference between Buffalo's and Rochester's retailing scenes was the disproportionate influence of one store in dominating both the physical and economic landscape of Rochester. Rochester's largest and most prestigious store was Sibley, Linday & Curr, an enterprise which outstripped even the largest of Buffalo's retailing

¹⁶Edmund D. McGarry, "The Structure and Stability of Retail Trade in Buffalo 1929, 1933 and 1935 - Grocery Stores," Statistical Survey: Supplement 14 no. 7A (March 1939): Chart IV. Published by the University of Buffalo Bureau of Business and Social Research. A map of Buffalo showing the percentage of total grocery sales in 1929 revealed that the heaviest concentration of sales were in six tracts, three of which were in the downtown. Others were in the Broadway-Fillmore area, and on Jefferson Avenue, another commercial street. McGarry concluded that this concentration was due on one level to the heavy population in these tracts, although stores in the downtown appeared to do considerable business from patrons who lived in other neighbourhoods (13-14).

¹⁷McKelvey, Flower City, 23.

establishments: by the 1920s, Sibley, Lindsay & Curr was the largest department store in New York state outside of New York City.¹⁸ The business was founded by two Scottish retail clerks and a bookkeeper, who had worked together in a store in Boston. Although initially they planned to go to New York City, upon visiting Rochester in 1868 they decided to remain and invest their \$5,000 capital there. They brought with them the then-radical concept of a 'one-price-for-all policy,' which had originated in Boston.¹⁹ Capitalizing on this association, they called their enterprise "The Boston Store."²⁰ From an early period in the store's history, Sibley, Lindsay & Curr got involved in actually producing many of the items they sold, in order to ensure low prices and good quality. By 1873 they had expanded into the manufacture of over 400 items, particularly garments, including men's underwear, nightshirts, and eventually business shirts. Four stories of workrooms were employed for women sewers.²¹ The store also acted as a

¹⁸This claim was made in an ad for National Cash Registers in the DGMTJ, April 1926, 178.

¹⁹The notion that all customers would be charged the same price for a particular item (rather than bargaining individually with the store clerk until a price was reached) is seen as a defining characteristic of the department store. Where general stores in the nineteenth century had relied on highly variable personal relationships between the merchant and customer, the department store promised equal treatment to all.

²⁰"A History of Sibley's." [pamphlet] n.d. Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Co. Collection, Carton "History 1868-1926," Folder "Histories," Strong Museum.

²¹"A Glorious Past," News and Notes from the Rochester Historical Society, Summer 1990.

wholesaler and jobber, with salesmen travelling across New York state, a function that continued until 1928,

A severe fire that gutted Rochester's downtown in 1904 prompted a move to a new location at Main and Clinton streets, where Sibley, Lindsay & Curr remained until the closure of the business in the 1980s.²² 1906 witnessed the opening of a new grocery and bakery on the fifth floor of the building, an "elegant place where the upper bracket housewife" could examine delicacies from around the world."²³ In 1911, the six-story Tower Building was built adjacent to the main selling areas.²⁴ The tower held a large clock and bell and became a landmark in Rochester. Sibley's grocery would feature a line of products under its own "Tower" line. By the time of the store's fiftieth anniversary in 1918, Sibley, Lindsay & Curr had a main aisle which ran 373 feet from the entrance on North Street to the exit on Clinton Avenue. The store had fourteen acres of selling space. In 1926, six more floors were added to the main building, so that the Sibley store and

²²Sibley, Lindsay & Curr already owned the property on Main Street at the time of the fire, and accelerated plans to move to the new location. They quickly relocated remaining stock, opening the new store just months after the disaster. One apocryphal story (which has been included in promotional material) is that the fire destroyed all of the store's credit reports yet such was the goodwill of the community towards the business that every last charge account customer came forward to settle their accounts in the months after the fire.

²³"Sibley's Grocery and Bakery" [mimeographed page] Sibley Collection, Carton "History 1868-1926," Folder "Histories," Strong Museum.

²⁴Shirley Klem, "The History of Sibley's 1928-1955" typewritten manuscript, annotated in pencil. Senior Thesis for RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology], n.d. Sibley Collection, Carton "History 1868- 1926," Folder "Histories," Strong Museum, 21.

office building now occupied a solid downtown block.²⁵ During peak times the store employed 2500 people, or as one promotional pamphlet proudly asserted, "almost one out of every 100 people living in the city."²⁶ A fan system supplied warm air in winter and cooled air in summer, and electric clocks throughout the store were completely synchronized. Thirteen passenger elevators shuttled a steady flow of customers to each of the store's six floors, and modern electric lights replaced old arc lamps to bathe all merchandise in "soft, steady light."²⁷

Other department stores, while not quite as imposing as Sibley, Lindsay & Curr, were still a major presence on Rochester's Main Street. Although the west side had traditionally been home to retailers, beginning in the 1890s larger stores jockeyed for position on East Main Street. The pioneer in developing this stretch of Main was McCurdy & Company. After an apprenticeship at merchandising in stores in Belfast, Northern Ireland, John Cooke McCurdy immigrated to Philadelphia and eventually

²⁵McKelvey, Quest for Quality, 255. McKelvey notes this was the largest business block in the city, and the bell and tower each "exceeded all others in Rochester." The bell weighed 3,500 pounds.

²⁶The History of Sibley's 1868-1955, [notebook] Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Co. Collection, Carton "Sibley's Misc. Store History," Rochester Historical Society (RHS), 18.

²⁷Half a Century, 1868 - 1918, Published to Commemorate the Golden Anniversary of the founding of the Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Company, Rochester, New York, March 30, 1918. Sibley Collection, RHS.

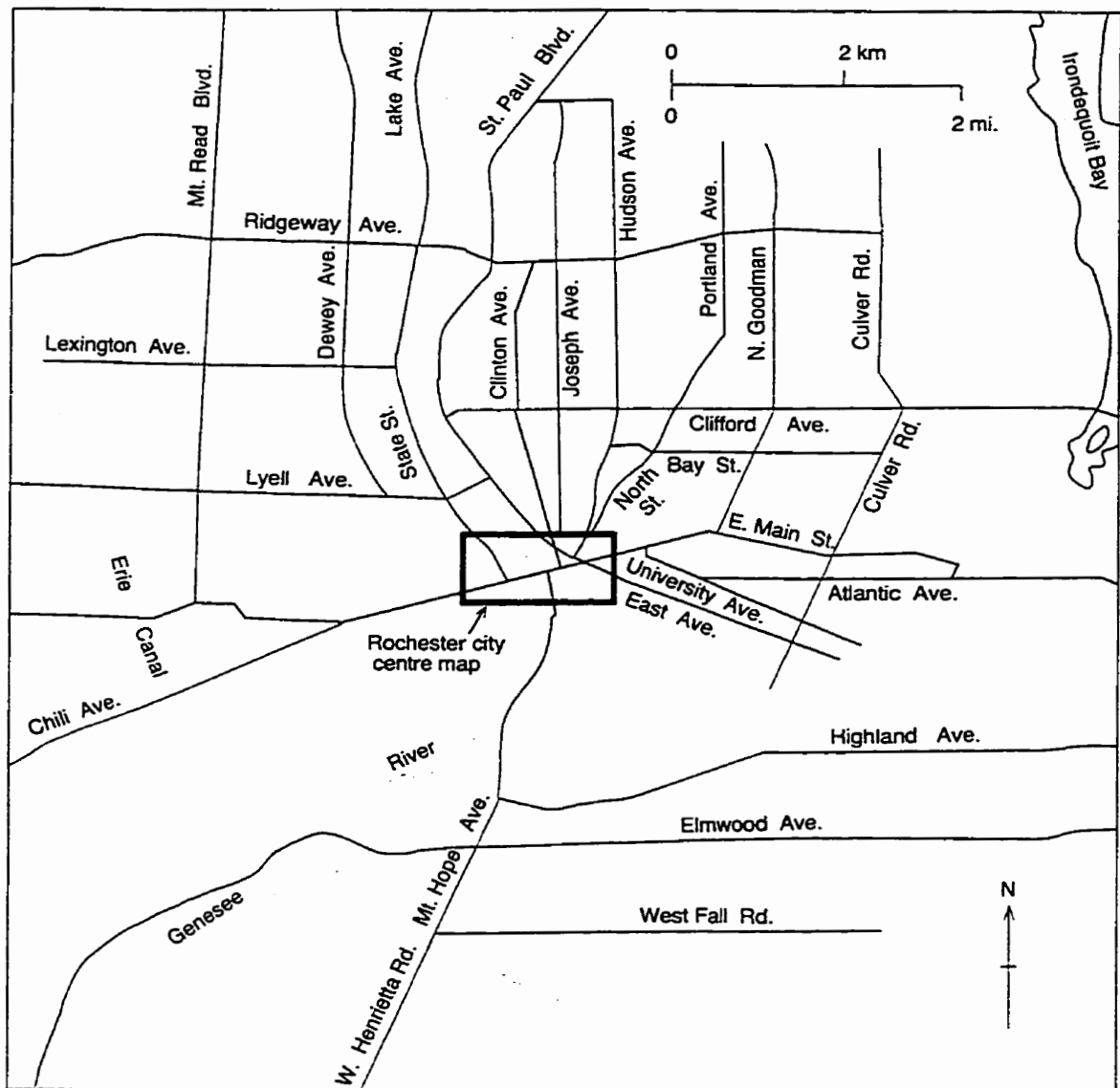


Figure 2 Map of Rochester, 1920

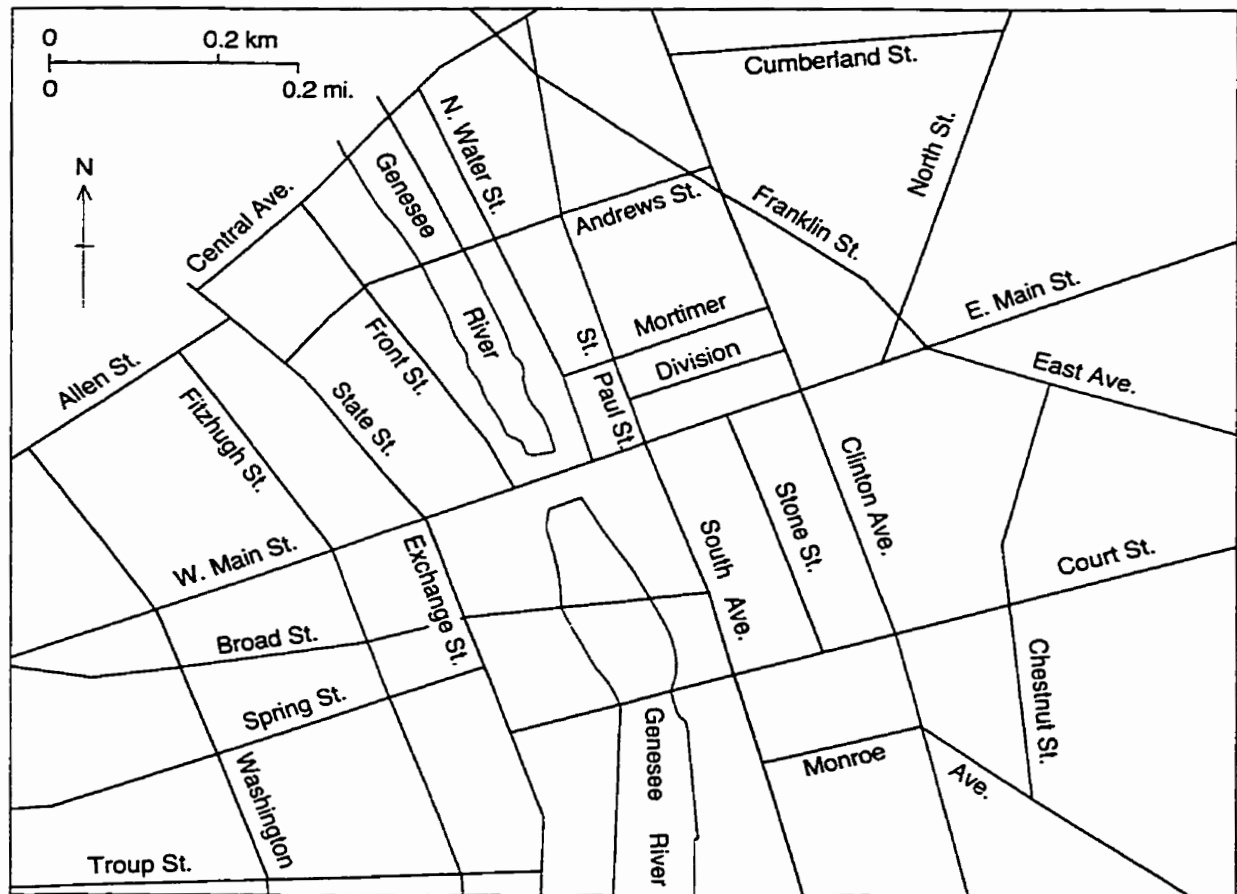


Figure 3 Map of Rochester City Centre

made his way to Rochester. He bought out C.H. Carroll to open McCurdy & Norwell east from the Four Corners. Many local merchants doubted his judgement. The store was located at the corner of Main Street East and Elm, the "wrong way" from the Four Corners and close to "Hoodoo Corner" (East Avenue and Elm), which was considered

bad luck because previous businesses had failed on the spot.²⁸ An ad for the store explained that "The east end of the city needed a store of its own, so we landed up here, at the corner of Main and Elm."²⁹ McCurdy & Norwell opened in March 1901, with a staff of 75 employees and 50,000 square feet of selling space. John McCurdy proved his doubters wrong, and in 1910 built a six story addition on the west side of the Palmer Block site. The store built a six-floor south wing in the years 1923-1925, and continued to make improvements like the installation of elevators.³⁰

E.W. Edwards & Son also occupied prime East Main Street frontage. The company was founded in Syracuse and by the 1920s operated stores in that city as well as Rochester and Buffalo.³¹ South of East Main Street on Clinton Avenue, the B. Forman Company was a pioneer, emerging by the 1920s as a leader in women's ready-to-wear clothing. B. Forman boasted that it was first to bring the women of western New York "a new method of merchandising, showing the new styles first, cleaning house four times a year to keep the stocks new and fresh at all times, and marking prices always at the lowest level consistent with the quality and the service rendered."³² Despite this

²⁸Lynda McCurdy Hotra, "McCurdy & Company Timeline," 1997, Private collection of Lynda McCurdy Hotra, 2.

²⁹"Something About this New Store Here in Rochester," [pamphlet] Fall and Winter 1901-2, private collection of Lynda McCurdy Hotra.

³⁰Hotra, "Timeline," 7-8.

³¹McKelvey, Quest for Quality, 255.

³²RD&C, 1 January 1926, 21.

flourishing business on East Main, West Main Street was not completely abandoned, as the Duffy-McInnerney (later Duffy-Powers) store grew to occupy six stories at West Main and Fitzhugh. The firm's vice-president boasted after a trip to Europe that the store had more floor space than Selfridge's in London.³³

During the 1920s and 1930s, most large retailers were concentrated in the central business districts of Rochester and Buffalo and faced quite lively competition. Within a few blocks, shoppers in either city could peruse wares at a number of sizeable department stores, not to mention countless smaller jewellers, tailors, dressmakers and other shopkeepers. Even the largest stores did not feel immune to competition. During the 1910s and 1920s, Sibley, Lindsay and Curr regularly sent employees to pose as shoppers at other stores and record the number of patrons in each department at specific times.³⁴ A fleet of six "professional shoppers" was also employed by two of the Buffalo department stores in their Comparative Shoppers' Bureaus to discover the price and quality of items

³³McKelvey, Quest for Quality, 255.

³⁴Untitled typed sheet with times and descriptions of shoppers, October 30, 1915, Folder "From Internal Memos Scrapbook, 1909-1917," Sibley Collection, Strong Museum. For example, at 7:30 on this date, the observer noted that there was no one in the Duffy-Power Co. Notion Department, but by 8:30 there was one person. In the Furniture Department, there was one person "only looking," and in Gloves there were 7 shoppers, "about 4 buying." On Dec 22, 1915, McCurdy's Basement had 50 people, "not over 10 or 12 buying." Similar surveys of shoppers were made of Princess Suit & Cloak House, Bedell's, Morgan & Kammer, Edward's, the Union Clothing Company, McFarlin's, White's Jewelry Store, Duffy-Powers Co., and E.J. Shafer Jeweler on Dec. 21, 1915.

at competitive stores. These positions had a high rate of turnover, as after about six months the "shoppers" became known to salesgirls in the stores, who would refuse to wait on them.³⁵

Displays were given careful attention, as well, in an effort to out-do competitors. Main Street stores tried their best to attract passers-by with ever-changing arrays of merchandise. Many merchants subscribed to trade magazines which instructed them on how to produce innovative displays. Walking past the Kleinhans Clothing Company store in Buffalo, shoppers could see a range of goods like gloves, handkerchiefs and belts, some men's suits on mannequins, and a price list prominently displayed.³⁶ During the 1920s, Sibley's used modernist backdrops to highlight women's clothing, employing geographic prints that suggested art deco trends.³⁷ One Buffalo department store eventually installed microphones close to its front windows so that passers-by on the street could be heard and their reactions to various displays gauged.³⁸

Stores constantly updated both windows and interior display areas. After its renovation in 1926, a reporter from the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal praised

³⁵"Public Benefactors!" TT, June 1933, 10. The comparative shoppers also reported on the service offered by employees at their own stores.

³⁶DGMTJ, December 1922, 86.

³⁷"Modernism Ties Up with Popular Prices," DGMTJ, September 1929, 148. The article features a photo of a Sibley's window display, which highlighted sportswear by using three panels of geometric prints.

³⁸TT, May 1936, 11.

Sibley, Lindsay, & Curr for exemplifying "the last word in store equipment, lighting and fixtures."³⁹ The trade periodical featured photos of the store's new fixtures in a special section on store equipment and display. Sibley's had wide aisles, with rows of globe lights to illuminate the merchandise. In the bedding section, shoppers could see linens in "homelike surroundings," as blanket cradles and even an actual made-up bed allowed them to imagine the goods in use. The store fixtures were of polished walnut and mahogany. New Terrazza flooring was installed on the Main Floor. Designers paid careful attention to layout and the efficient use of space, with the result that Sibley's merchandise seemed easily accessible and less crowded than in many competitor's stores. Even as five-and-dime stores popularized "jumble tables" which allowed customers to feel the merchandise, Sibley's stocked many items like hosiery and gloves in gleaming glass cases, behind which shopgirls trained in personalized sales were positioned.⁴⁰ When McCurdy & Company renovated in 1923, an entirely new front was put on the store and the show windows on East Main were expanded so that there was a display space of 300 square feet.⁴¹

The amount of attention devoted to display space became even more pronounced during the annual Christmas season. November and December were the busiest months

³⁹"New Interiors at Sibley, Lindsay & Curr's," DGMTJ, February 1927, 50.

⁴⁰"Three Views from the New Sibley-Lindsay & Curr Store," DGMTJ, February 1927, 51.

⁴¹"McCurdy's Forced to Enlarge Store Owing to Growth of Trade," clipping as part of McCurdy timeline, n.d [1923], private collection of Lynda McCurdy Hotra.

of the year for department stores, and elaborate Christmas displays were designed to entice shoppers both young and old. On Saturday, Oct. 30, 1920, Sibley's announced the opening of Toyland. In the spirit of Christmas, the store sacrificed some of the floor space from its luggage and housewares sections to the lights and mechanized models which dazzled visiting youngsters. A reporter for the Democrat and Chronicle surveyed the scene:

Wherever you look there is motion. It is one big, joyful, colorful "Land-of-Motion," designed especially for the children's pleasure...As you step from the elevator and enter this Fairyland of Toys and you find yourself spellbound gazing at a rapidly revolving and dazzlingly brilliant ball of light - the "Ball of a Thousand Mirrors." Four powerful spotlights playing upon it makes it catch the rays of light and reflect them to you....A little further on is a wonderfully interesting mechanical exhibit. The old Flour Mill stands at one end, the mill wheel moving slowly through the water - and it is real water. There is a long canal with a wide electrically lighted boulevard on one side. Across the canal are high mountains. Along the edge of the canal with the mountains towering above it, is a miniature electric railroad.⁴²

Stores experimented with different themes for Christmas displays each year, H.A. Meldrum held four shows for youngsters each Saturday in December, 1921, featuring appearances by Santa Claus and Huckleberry Finn.⁴³ In 1925, Sibley's show windows featured a tableau of carollers making the rounds of a village in "Merrie Old England," while in 1931 the display replicated "Washington at Valley Forge, Christmas 1777."⁴⁴

⁴²"Toyland Open, " RD&C, 30 October 1920, 15.

⁴³"The Christmas Store Bountiful," BEN 2 December 1921,. 7.

⁴⁴Photo SI-2 1925 ["Merrie England"]; Photo SI-4 ["Valley Forge"] Sibley Collection, Carton "Sibley's Photo's," Strong Museum.

Sibley's spent thousands of dollars in 1927 creating a "Fairyland" filled with goblins, sprites, and other magical creatures.⁴⁵ The transformation of stores for the Christmas season did not stop with the interiors and store windows. Merchants cooperated in creating lighting displays outdoors, making the Main Streets a magical experience. The Buffalo Courier-Express boasted that Main Street was going to be "Brighter than New York's Broadway; Chicago's State Street or London's Piccadilly Circus." Readers were encouraged to bring the whole family to peruse the lights and the over \$10,000,000 in merchandise available in Main Street stores.⁴⁶ The article reached high levels of hyperbole, boasting, "No Street Like Main Street within 4000 Miles. No Street so Dramatic - No Street So Thrilling - No Street so Superbly Ready for the Christmas Throng."

The identification of shopping as "women's work" most noticeably emerged in North America in the nineteenth century. Where once women and men had worked together in the production of goods at home, the rise of waged labour, and more significantly, a white-collar salaried workforce, increasingly categorized men as breadwinners and women as consumers. Although in their daily lives many women spanned the worlds of production and consumption, the notion that shopping was a

⁴⁵"Thousands of Dollars have been expended by the SL&C Store of Rochester, N.Y., on the Belief that Fairies are Real, to children," Toys and Novelties, November 1927, 53-54.

⁴⁶"Buffalo's Main Street is Going to be the Place - The Big White Way of All the World," Buffalo Courier-Express (BCE), 20 December 1930, 3.

female skill, or indulgence, was firmly entrenched by the twentieth century. As shopping became identified as a feminine activity during the nineteenth century, stores attempted to create an atmosphere which would attract women shoppers.⁴⁷

The very layout of departments within a store encouraged women to linger, and features like restaurants and tea rooms were comfortable spaces for middle-class women to meet and socialize. Sibley's had a popular Tea Room, which served tea and lunch to female shoppers, and offered feminine entertainment like bridge lessons and chamber music concerts.⁴⁸ The decor was refined and genteel, with white tablecloths and soft colors. The original Tea Room, in the Granite Building was built in 1893, six years before Marshall Field's in Chicago opened that city's first large tearoom.⁴⁹ The new Main Street Store Tea Room could seat between 350 and 400 patrons, depending on the arrangement of tables.⁵⁰ In 1926 Sibley's opened a restaurant that seated 515, and added a

⁴⁷William Leach argues that merchants further encouraged the separation of production from consumption, creating palaces of indulgence where buying became equated with playing, and the antithesis of the dreary work world. Land of Desire, 146-148. Modern commercial advertising took it as a truism that women did the bulk of the nation's retail buying, and pitched ads to an audience of female "purchasing agents." See Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 66-69.

⁴⁸Many stores sponsored concerts, particularly programmes of classical music. Linda L. Tyler declares the period from 1903 to 1915 to be the "heyday of live music in the department stores," and Sibley's continued this practice well into the 1920s. See Tyler, "Commerce and Poetry Hand in Hand," 83.

⁴⁹For a description of Field's tearoom, see Leach, Land of Desire, 137.

⁵⁰"Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Co.: Store Facts," [undated pamphlet], Sibley Collection, RHS.

cafeteria and marble soda fountain soon after. In 1934, a main floor buffet became another option for hungry shoppers. To facilitate meetings between women shoppers, the Service Bureau allowed visitors from out of town to register, and a clerk would telephone friends in Rochester and arrange social appointments. Parcels and luggage could also be checked there.⁵¹ Sibley's did not completely ignore its male patrons: in an effort to attract businessmen for lunch, Sibley's opened the "Pompeian Annex," designed as a cafe for men, with brick walls, tile floors and dark panelling, where "men friends" could enjoy a cigar or cigarette at the table.⁵²

By the 1920s, department stores in cities across America offered a dizzying array of merchandise and service. Those in Western New York kept pace. Sibley's store directory listed over 80 separate departments, carrying everything from draperies, rugs and leather goods to corsets, toys and groceries.⁵³ A branch of the public library was opened on the sixth floor of the store, and customers withdrew over 200 books per week.⁵⁴ New types of services were added to cater to every possible want of the

⁵¹"We Make it Easy for Out of Town Patrons to Meet Their City Friends," RD&C, 18 October 1920, 17.

⁵²"Program of Music," Rochester Ladies' Trio [program from Tea Room concert, April 3, 1909; "A New Cafe for Men," n.d. [1909], Sibley Collection, John White Johnson, Advertising Department, Scrapbook 1909-1912, Strong Museum.

⁵³"Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Co.," [pamphlet] n.d. [1909], Sibley Collection, Carton "Early Store History," Strong Museum.

⁵⁴History of Sibley's 1868-1955 [notebook], Sibley Collection, Carton "Sibley's Misc. Store History," RHS, 18.

customer. Beauty salons were popular features, allowing female customers a chance to rest and regroup while getting a manicure or permanent wave. One Buffalo store told of the pleasure that a "smart young thing" from Western New York enjoyed in the salon:

She enters the new Beauty Salon. . . . She telephoned ahead...where she is greeted by a hostess who has her appointment arranged. She stretches out in a comfortable chair, breathes a relieved sigh and gives herself up to the luxury of a relaxing interim in a hectic day. Being a modern young thing, she smokes if she wishes. She may enjoy a refreshing cup of tea, without charge. She leaves entirely refreshed, and later finds that her first visit becomes a weekly habit.⁵⁵

Services for the home were also offered. Flint & Kent boasted an Interior Decoration service with experienced decorators who would suggest ideas for furnishing a home - the store offered custom-made draperies, window shades, slipcovers, and furniture. Beyond purchasing new wallpaper and home accessories, patrons could even have rugs cleaned and furniture reupholstered.⁵⁶

Stores offered full delivery services to allow shoppers to purchase more than they could carry. Purchases could be wrapped, sent home, or even shipped abroad at Christmas time by the parcel service. B. Forman featured a Bureau in Paris which would buy, wrap and deliver Christmas gifts to "friends in France."⁵⁷ Downtown merchants in

⁵⁵BCE, 28 December 1930, 3.

⁵⁶TI, May 1928, 3.

⁵⁷BEN, 3 November 1930, chk pg.

Buffalo had a coordinated delivery service.⁵⁸ In Rochester, Sibley's had its own fleet of delivery vehicles. During the 1920s there were three regular daily deliveries within the city limits, at 8 a.m., 12:15, and 3:45. Those who could not make the trip downtown to make purchases were also accommodated. All of Buffalo's and Rochester's major department stores had telephone sales departments through which orders could be placed. The grocery business, as well, experimented with ways to improve delivery services. The Larkin Stores of Buffalo had an extensive system to facilitate grocery orders. Each order placed was recorded on a "Customer Card," so that preferences (brand of coffee, cuts of meat, average size of fish order) would be apparent to the operator. Operators could recommend specials in the store, or simply fill standing orders each week. Orders received before noon were delivered in time for dinner.⁵⁹

It is worth underscoring the importance of service as part of the shopping experience in department stores during this period. Contact with sales clerks was fundamental not only during the actual transaction of product for cash or credit, but even in examining goods. Although some departments by the 1920s were experimenting with ways to increase shoppers' "hands-on" contact with goods, many types of items were only displayed behind glass cases, and customers required sales assistance if they wished to

⁵⁸Flint & Kent, card from Downtown Merchants Delivery, dated 6/15 (no year), Vertical Files, Retailers F, BECHS. The card lists Adam Meldrum & Anderson, J.N. Adam, L. L. Berger, Inc., E.W. Edwards, Flint & Kent, Wm. Hengerer Co., Hens & Kelly, and Oppenheim, Collins & Co. as stores offering the service.

⁵⁹"A Larkin Customer card sits for its portrait and reveals a phase of Larkin customer-service," TT, October, 1931, 31.

touch or more closely examine gloves, hosiery, accessories and cosmetics. Shopping for items like shoes required asking a sales clerk to check the available stock for the correct size. This emphasis on the role of the store clerk served a number of functions. On the one hand, glass cases and hidden stocks of goods behind counters or in back rooms made it easier to control the goods in the store. Clerks had a better sense of which items were popular and could discourage shoplifting (always a concern in department stores). On the other hand, stores hoped that the experience of being "waited on" by a courteous clerk would enhance the shopping experience, making customers feel indulged and pampered and thus more likely to spend money.

Careful attention was paid to ensure that salespeople projected professionalism and efficiency. Salespeople were formally dressed, making it easy for customers to distinguish between those shopping and those able to offer sales assistance and subtly reinforcing the class distinction between moneyed customers and working clerks. Saleswomen at Sibley's wore all-black dresses until the 1910s, when during the summer they were given the privilege of wearing white shirtwaists and black or plain, dark-coloured skirts. Plaid or light-coloured skirts were considered too informal, and the company sent memos suggesting that if clerks did not recognize this fact, the store might quickly revert to enforcing a policy of all-black uniforms.⁶⁰ An employee handbook from 1926 stressed that all female workers who came into contact with customers had to fall

⁶⁰"From Internal Memos Scrapbook 1909-1917" May 25, 1917, Sibley Collection, Strong Museum.

within acceptable middle-class notions of appropriate business dress. They were to avoid "conspicuous cosmetics, extreme styles of hairdressing, elaborate jewelry or stirring peculiarities in apparel." Men were to forego "gaudy neck-ties" and were required to wear coats at all times when on the selling floors.⁶¹ By 1937, regulations had softened somewhat (for example, women could wear not only black dresses but navy, green, wine, and brown ones as well) but employees were still to select garments appropriate for business wear.⁶² Store personnel were instructed in the courteous treatment of all shoppers. A manual instructed workers, "Remember always that our customers are our invited guests and are entitled to the consideration you would give a visitor in your own home."⁶³

Members of the sales staff were expected to educate their customers about the benefits of particular lines. Certain departments, particularly those selling women's garments, relied on a skilled sales staff to recommend appropriate products for each customer. Female sales staff aided in not only the selection of items, but also the fitting of dresses and corsets, entering fitting rooms and even assisting customers in dressing and undressing. The saleswoman offered advice to the customer, often encouraging her

⁶¹"Employee Hand Book," [pamphlet] June 1, 1927, Sibley Collection, Strong Museum, 6-7.

⁶²"Operating Committee," [binder] January 25, 1937, Sibley Collection, RHS, 103.

⁶³"Employee Hand Book," 4.

to "trade up" to a slightly more expensive version of an item she had chosen.⁶⁴ Hens & Kelly boasted that while the store used newspaper ads to draw people in, the sales staff got all the credit for ensuring that women were sold the proper corsets, and for suggesting higher-line merchandise. Miss Bernadine Smith, assistant buyer for the department, argued

...when [shoppers] come to us, we do everything to sell them a good corset...We fit them correctly and send them away so that they'll come back. We sell their minds as much as their bodies. We educate Buffalo women to a new and better estimate of corsets. We sell them the type of garment they need and do everything to give them the best grade possible. We TRADE UP, NOT DOWN.⁶⁵

Salespeople also offered a range of services to shoppers, not all directly related to the sale of merchandise. For example, when occasionally local elderly residents or children went missing in Rochester, memos with descriptions were sent to the staff of Sibley's with instructions to keep an eye out for these people.⁶⁶

The education of shoppers about the advantages of particular products was not limited to informal interaction with members of the sales staff. Retailers in Buffalo and

⁶⁴For more on the interaction between saleswomen and customers, see Benson, Counter Cultures.

⁶⁵DGMTJ, July 1928. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁶For example, see entry for October 3, 1917 in Folder "From Internal Memos Scrapbook, 1910 - 1917," Sibley Collection, Strong Museum. A typical entry reads: "Mrs. Earl, 598 Hazelwood Terrace, 71 years old, 5 ft. 3 in. tall, weighs 90 lbs. Gray hair, wore a black suit and carried a small black hand bag. Wore gold spectacles. This is a description of Mrs. Earl, who left home on Tuesday. Please be on the lookout for Mrs. Earl, and notify office at once if you see anyone answering this description. H Williams, Superintendent."

Rochester organized more structured classes and demonstrations, bringing in guest speakers and offering a chance to try products before purchasing. The retail outlet of the Rochester Gas & Electric Corporation sold fridges, stoves and small electrical appliances. To encourage purchase of these goods (and increased power consumption in general), they offered classes to teach people to craft lightshades or use new features on stoves. The Home Service department regularly was filled with housewives registered for half-day sessions. The utility news reported on the cheery atmosphere of one class where women could learn to make Christmas cakes:

"Say!" one woman calls across to another, "do you know that your Elsie and Betty can come in here any Saturday morning and cook, or make a lamp shade, or learn to use the washer and ironer, or how to operate any of these electrical appliances? I'm sending Jenny next Saturday and maybe John will come along, for there are a few boys doing it too."...The baking, which takes three hours, is entrusted to the automatic oven with the oven control feature set to maintain the even, low temperature which is necessary if the cakes are not to be burned. This feature is fully explained to the women, one of two of whom seem to be acquiring a fixed, faraway look on their faces portending the acquisition of just such an oven control on their ranges at home.⁶⁷

The Gas & Electric Company also cooperated with community groups: local Girl Scout troops were given demonstrations in using electric washing machines and irons and could earn badges for bringing in items which they had carefully laundered. Beyond offering

⁶⁷Jessie Cary Grange, "Fruit Cakes as Christmas Presents," Rochester Gas & Electric News 16 no. 5 (Nov 1928): 174.

"hands-on" classes for small groups in its appliance showroom, the Gas & Electric Company organized larger demonstrations.

These types of classes were very popular with Rochester housewives. During 1929, the store held 59 lamp shade lessons where 254 lamp shades were made. In the baking classes, 443 women did their own work, while 452 others observed them. Over four hundred girl scouts attended the laundry classes. One Christmas party featured two chefs from the Seneca Hotel, who demonstrated the correct preparation of a suckling pig for roasting (in a modern electric oven, of course). The session was attended by 230 women.⁶⁸

Larger stores often brought in "experts" who promoted specific product lines for the edification of local shoppers. Sibley, Lindsay & Curr boasted that Miss Dorothy Strumph, a skin care expert from New York City, would be available for personal expert consultation in the cosmetics department of the store.⁶⁹ Sibley's had many promotions for the home seamstress, including fashion shows.⁷⁰ The store also had a dressmaking school, where a skilled seamstress taught cutting, fitting, and sewing and also did alterations for home sewers who bought notions and fabric there.⁷¹ William Hengerer sponsored a series of four lectures by Mrs. Marie L. Fenn, an authority from the

⁶⁸ A Year Book and Rochester Gas & Electric News, January 1930, 303.

⁶⁹ RD&C, 19 December 1927, 5.

⁷⁰ DGMTJ, October 1929, 63.

⁷¹ Ibid.

International Silver Company, who explained proper table settings for various social occasions.⁷² McCurdy & Co. used live models to demonstrate permanent waves in a hair style fashion show.⁷³

Beyond the events and displays designed specifically to promote store goods, retailers often took it upon themselves to promote the communities in which they were located. Buffalo and Rochester merchants were among the most vocal of their respective city's boosters. During the 1920s and 1930s, retailers used their ad space, their shop windows and even their selling floors to promote civic pride. It is not surprising that retailers in smaller cities often drew links between their own interests and the interests of their communities. In one sense, we can view this as a form of long-range business planning: the growth of the city would only mean good things for retailers. Events like parades and contests, while not explicitly about the sale of goods, nonetheless aimed to raise a retailer's profile in the hopes of increasing sales. And, as will be demonstrated in future chapters, retailers in smaller cities had good reason to stress their community ties once competition from chain stores and mail order businesses appeared to threaten their pre-eminent position.

Newspaper and magazine editorials underscored the civic importance of supporting local retailers, pointing out that money spent in the city was circulated in the

⁷²BEN, 11 November 1930, 12.

⁷³RD&C, 7 October 1930, 2.

form of wages for local workers. An editorial entitled "Buy It in Buffalo" in Buffalo Saturday Night argued that this was a matter of "cold, hard, business fact," not just noble sentiment:

It is not our purpose to urge upon our readers a narrow provincialism and to criticize milady if she chooses to buy a trinket in Fifth Avenue rather than in Delaware Avenue. At the same time, we would press home so far as is possible, the fact that Buffalo manufacturers cannot employ Buffalo labor unless they get business; and every dollar's worth of trade they get means added work for Buffalo labor; every time a retailers sells a dollar's worth of goods to a consumer, he is able to buy another dollar's worth of goods from the wholesaler and so on.⁷⁴

An accompanying cartoon depicted the network of relationships between Buffalo citizens who spent their dollars at home. The pay packet of a Buffalo worker made the rounds to his wife, a retailer, a local wholesaler, and finally back to the manufacturer who had originally supplied the wages (see figure 4).

Retailers themselves emphasized their own positive place in the community. The rhetoric of "community service" in department store ads could take on almost messianic proportions. Sibley's of Rochester used a fable about a philosopher who asked a number of workmen about their jobs to illustrate the store's commitment to goals beyond simply commerce. While some of the workers felt they were simply "digging a ditch" or "earning five dollars a day," one enthusiast claimed to be "building a cathedral." Sibley's applauded this sense of mission, noting

⁷⁴Buffalo Saturday Night, 1 no. 39 (December 10, 1921): 3.



Figure 4 Cartoon from Buffalo Saturday Night, 10 December 1921, 3.

For fifty-nine years, we too have been striving to build a cathedral...a House of Service worthy of the good people who expect from us the best. Fathers and sons have contributed their efforts. The lowliest and the highest have added stone on stone to this superstructure. The cathedral is unfinished. It will never be finished for we are restless people, never content with the efforts of yesterday. Tomorrow brings us new thoughts, new inspirations, bigger ideals. Each day finds us in the travail of growing pains with the goal of perfection still ahead of us, and in its wake the vision of building a better business cathedral most worthy of you...⁷⁵

Sibley's "House of Service" was a secularized church, a cathedral where visitors would visit for renewal and rejuvenation, not through prayer but through acquisition of material goods. William Leach dates a new fascination with "service" to the turn of the century,

⁷⁵RD&C, 19 December, 1927.

where retailers like John Wanamaker promoted a "new kind of store" that stressed the convenience of the customer above all.⁷⁶ This new ideology, he argues, was in part a response to reformers who equated large businesses of many types with exploitation and unfair practices. Benevolent treatment of workers, new services for customers and community activism shored up the stores' popularity and conveyed an image of caring responsiveness.⁷⁷

The rhetoric of service in smaller cities was more directly linked to local identities. Wanamaker and his competitors in Philadelphia and New York allied themselves with reformers and cultivated an image of compassion and decency, presenting their operations as stores for "the People."⁷⁸ Retailers in smaller centres framed their displays of "public service" more specifically, in the context of the local community. The extent to which stores in smaller cities clearly and directly linked their own futures with the rising fortunes of the cities in which they were located is striking. For example the B. Forman company of Rochester used a large newspaper ad to send out

⁷⁶This ideal of service was further adopted by hotel magnates like Ellsworth Statler, whose hotel in Buffalo was a landmark in the city. Leach, Land of Desire, 115.

⁷⁷Ibid., 117. See also Roland Marchand, Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1999). Marchand argues that department stores found it easier to counter the charge of "soullessness" which plagued other American corporations. Even the largest stores did not operate on the scale of manufacturers like, say, Standard Oil. Further, because stores at least in theory had to cater to the whims of the (usually female) consumer, the public had less of a sense that retailers were ruthless capitalists (10-14).

⁷⁸Leach, 114-5.

a holiday message each January 1 which recapped not only the store's but the city's achievements and forecast great things for the coming year. The 1928 message reflected not only on new buildings and apartment houses which were dotting the city, but even the rising stock value of local manufacturers and the level of trade in the region as a whole.⁷⁹ The ad trumpeted the confidence with which economists were viewing the upcoming year: "They prophecy good business and widespread development, of which we in Rochester should have a full share."⁸⁰ B. Forman also used its regular ad space to comment on local developments. When a new theatre was built in the downtown, the store proclaimed that this "new enterprise...pays additional tribute to Mr. Forman's foresight and judgement" in choosing Rochester as the location for his store.⁸¹ Claims to "local" status proved very pliable, as stores like William Hengerer and J.N. Adam still promoted themselves as local institutions even as they became part of the larger, New York-based Associated Dry Goods.

Merchants in Buffalo and Rochester further demonstrated their commitment to the community by using store space for civic promotions. During World War I, Sibley's devoted one show window to the display of photographs of local men who were in the service. The Soldiers Picture Window was so popular that it was expanded to fill another

⁷⁹RD&C, 1 January 1928, 3.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹RD&C, 6 November 1927, 3.

window in order to accommodate the flood of photos.⁸² On Armistice Day in 1921, several retailers held memorials to commemorate the loss of Rochester men in the First World War. William Hengerer used a newspaper announcement with no information about sales or promotions, just a simple drawing of a wreath and a notice about the service to be held "IN HONOR OF THOSE WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR ALL 1918 - 1921." The activities of "our boys," and "their heroic actions on the fields of France," were given solemn recognition.⁸³ Hengerer's carried out a program on November 11, 1921, complete with a Patriotic Song Service where all store personnel joined in singing hymns, and a local reverend delivered an address. A Buffalo Evening News reporter on the scene described the solemnity of the occasion:

A few minutes before noon an ex-service man in uniform took his position near the center of the floor. Promptly at 12 o'clock a regular army bugler sounded taps. At the first note of the bugle every activity in the store ceased. All but necessary lights were out, the tube and elevator systems ceased to operate. Clerks and customers alike bowed their head in silent meditation for two minutes.⁸⁴

A serviceman was stationed upon each floor of the store to signal personnel when to stand at attention. A similar program was carried out by J.N Adam & Co. and Hens & Kelly. Other stores closed from eleven o'clock to one or two. J.N. Adam and Adam, Meldrum & Anderson suspended business briefly during the afternoon, as instructed by

⁸²Entry for October 11, 1918, Folder "From Internal Memos Scrapbook, 1909-1917," Sibley Collection, Strong Museum.

⁸³BEN, 19 November 1927, 5.

⁸⁴BEN, Financial edition, 11 November 1921 front page.

President Harding.⁸⁵ Several stores had flags hanging in the windows, and war pictures and relics on display.⁸⁶

Retailers in Buffalo thus took the lead in commemorating Armistice Day, a fact that seems even more striking when we realize that there was no other civic ceremony held in the downtown. In her recent work on shopping centres in postwar America, Lizabeth Cohen argues that the mall in many ways displaced the traditional "town square" as a public forum. Cohen contends that the shift to shopping centres narrowed the spaces available for political protest and public assembly.⁸⁷ While her arguments about restrictions on acceptable behaviour in the "private property" of the mall are well taken, it is worth noting that even before the mall, merchants carefully orchestrated much of the public activity in the downtown, coordinating events which projected a particular image. Using local veterans, religious leaders and the iconography of the flag gave the stores a certain gravitas. Meanwhile, local citizens who came to participate in this particular ceremony had a very limited role, either observing decorations, listening to sermons, or maintaining silence at the appointed time.

⁸⁵BEN, 10 November 1921, 3, 5, 11.

⁸⁶Ibid. Week & Co. closed from 11 to 2, Flint & Kent from 11 to 1, and William Eastwood from 11:30 to 1:30.

⁸⁷Lizabeth Cohen, "From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America," American Historical Review 101 (Oct. 1996): 1068-1071.

Some retailers took an active role in local politics. In 1935, William A. Morgan (of the Morgan Stores) endorsed Frank Schwab for mayor, buying a quarter page in the Buffalo Evening News to write a "letter to voters" explaining his choice.⁸⁸ J.N. Adam actually served as mayor.⁸⁹ Not surprisingly, many were active in local associations like the Chamber of Commerce. Gilbert J. C. McCurdy was selected president of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce in 1930.⁹⁰ Merchants also commented on local issues that had little to do with trade. In a roundup of opinions on the issue of adopting Daylight Saving, published in the Democrat & Chronicle, F. Forman of the B. Forman Company stated, "It seems to me that all Rochester is unanimously in favor of Daylight Saving and you should feel that you are acting for the welfare of the entire community in working for it."⁹¹ While local reformers, doctors, and scientists contributed to the debate with reference to the health and medical advantages for the population, Forman was quoted simply because of his prominence in the community, as the representative of an important local institution.

Local merchants also took part in exhibitions that promoted area industries and services. The Rochester Chamber of Commerce and its Retail Merchants' Council

⁸⁸BEN, 7 November 1921, 21.

⁸⁹BEN, 11 April 1935, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4 [scrapbook compiled by the librarian of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library (BECPL)], 296-297.

⁹⁰McKelvey, Emerging Metropolis, 9.

⁹¹RD&C 6 November 1927, Section II, 28.

sponsored a "Rochester-Made Products Week" in 1927, in order to improve the understanding of regional products and services. A spokesman for the council argued, "It is not unusual to find manufacturers, retailers and consumers in other sections of the country who know Rochester products better than do the residents of Rochester." The two chamber bureaus hoped that exciting displays in local stores would change that sorry fact.⁹² During this week, stores featured the slogan "Rochester-Made Means Quality" and ran special promotions of city-made goods.⁹³ Sibley, Lindsay & Curr ran ads extolling the virtues of local industries and their own role in promoting these businesses. From the cameras at the Kodak counter, to the Monroe County-raised produce in the canned goods section of the Grocery, to the Rochester-made shoes and clothing in the men's department, Sibley's boasted in the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle that "in both retail and wholesale functions we are a mighty outlet for local products."⁹⁴ Sibley's devoted all 45 of its store windows to demonstrations of local products. Visitors could witness the construction of neckties, radios, kitchen appliances, spaghetti, spices, cameras and lenses. Even goods which were not carried in the store, such as a range finder made by the Bausch & Lomb Company for the U.S. Navy, were featured.⁹⁵ Sibley's made a tradition

⁹²Gas and Electric News, 15 no. 3 (Sept 1927): 112.

⁹³RD&C, 18 October 1927, 23.

⁹⁴RD&C, 18 October 1927, 26.

⁹⁵See, for example, RD&C, 18 October 1927, 26; 19 October 1927, 24; "Store Plans Display of City Products," [clipping, pencil date 1938 on back], Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press, 1936-1941," Sibley Collection, Strong Museum.

of the "What Rochester makes - makes Rochester" theme, promoting local industries yearly. In 1927, its newspaper ad campaign emphasized "Home-made wares." The tradition continued as late as 1938, when the store used all of its windows for the promotion of local industries.

Merchants also participated in civic promotions outside of the store buildings themselves. The Buffalo Centennial in 1932 featured exhibits from not only regional manufacturers but stores including AM&A's, The Wm. Hengerer Co., and the Larkin Company. The program for the Centennial explained why citizens should take notice of the event.

One-hundred-and-twenty important Buffalo industries are exhibiting a host of products that have helped carry the fame of Buffalo around the world on land, sky and sea! The industrial history of Buffalo has been written with the pen that has honored Buffalo products with the signature, **MADE IN BUFFALO!**

You will see Buffalo products in the making! You will see them in action! You will see their records of thrilling achievement in the affairs of the entire world. You will see how and why and where the quality of the products of Buffalo workers has brought recognition and honor to Buffalo.⁹⁶

Even the local branch of the Sears Roebuck Co. had an exhibit, suggesting that the definition of "Buffalo industries" described by the organizers was flexible.

Department stores also cultivated community goodwill through cooperative events with local clubs and charities. Adam, Meldrum & Anderson regularly sponsored a

⁹⁶Official Program and Guide of Buffalo Centennial, Vertical Files, Celebrations, BECHS, 33.

Junior League Day, where members of the league would act as saleswomen for a day. A typical newspaper ad trumpeted the benefits of the event:

The work of the JUNIOR LEAGUE OF BUFFALO is too well known to need comment here. It is a noble, purposeful endeavor to better human lives in need. Upon tomorrow, TUESDAY THE 12TH, we welcome once more the officers and members of the League. They will assist in the operation of our store for this one day, having representatives behind our counters as saleswomen, and upon the floor to assist customers and to direct them to the various departments. For this service, they receive nominal salaries, and a percentage of our sales - the money going to the general fund for carrying on their work.⁹⁷

Such events cultivated a positive public image for the store. They may also have been good business: League members encouraged their friends to come shop and be "waited on." When B. Forman's announced a benefit project for the unemployment fund of the Rochester Community Chest, the store remained open until 8:30 p.m. so that "men relatives and friends of the women workers may come to buy the gifts they will later make presents of at Christmas time."⁹⁸ Further, the opportunity to be "shopgirl for a day" allowed middle-class women to spend a day surrounded by merchandise, perhaps increasing the likelihood that they would make additional purchases when they returned as customers. Other stores claimed to "give back" to the community through special sales

⁹⁷"Adam, Meldrum & Anderson announce a 'Junior League Day,'" BEN, 11 November 1929, 11.

⁹⁸RD&C, 3 December 1931, 2. Members of the Chatterbox Club, Junior Workers' Association, and Twigs volunteered as "Storekeepers for a Day." The charitable contribution of the store should not be totally dismissed as a mere publicity ploy, as the donation of a percentage of the day's receipts during the Christmas season would have been sizeable.

events. Although many stores used the rhetoric of "service" to suggest that by offering low prices they were helping the city all the time, some went so far as to stage events where they sold merchandise at cost. Jahraus-Braun designated "Good-Will, No-Profit Day" as a way to show appreciation to "thousands of thrifty housewives for their loyalty to our stores." According to an ad announcing the event, the day would give "the people" a chance to save, while earning the store good will.⁹⁹

Stores publicized their treatment of workers in order to cultivated a positive image. Paternalistic policies were framed as the "right thing" to do for local citizens. Workers were not simply part of the "store family," but of the city as a whole. Adam, Meldrum & Anderson used this type of rhetoric in a store ad describing curtailed summer hours:

A.M.&A. always has believed strongly in treating Buffalonians right -- whether they happened to be our customers or our co-workers. And so, beginning one week from tomorrow -- Saturday, July 14 -- A.M.&A. will be closed for 6 successive Saturdays, or until August 25. Thus more than 1000 Buffalonians who are co-workers of A.M.&A. will be able to enjoy six glorious weekends with their families and friends. What does this mean from your standpoint as a customer? Just this: That by making your purchases at A.M.&A. during the other five business days of the week during July and August you will receive more satisfaction than ever from A.M.& A co-workers buoyed up by a wonderful week-end!¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹BEN, 31 October 1929, 4.

¹⁰⁰AM&A Papers, Box 1 Folder 9, BECHS. The ad is undated but given the days of the week described it could be 1917, 1923, or 1934. From the style of the type-face, it is most likely 1917.

By presenting the store closings as necessary for the well-being of a sizeable number of Buffalo citizens, the store would conveniently deflect any criticism from customers who faced the inconvenience of having to do their shopping on other days. Danahy-Faxon stores in Buffalo boasted that they brought special advantages to both employees and customers because of their "home-owned and home-operated - 100% Buffalonian" status. Every employee was a "partner" in the store, and all profits made by the company were poured back into the community.¹⁰¹

The merchants of Buffalo and Rochester framed the services they provided with references to the local community, and stressed their role as citizens and local leaders. Ads informed the unemployed in Buffalo in 1920 that Bing & Nathan would extend credit: they promised, "We'll carry you along until you're placed. In time of prosperity you made our success possible, in time of adversity we stand ready to help you."¹⁰² The Reliable Furniture Company reported that despite the cost ("thousands of dollars a year"), it offered a special form of security to Rochester patrons.

You can get insurance covering you against financial losses from anything ranging from the results of a hurricane to a summer shower. But it has remained for "The Reliable" to offer the people of Rochester a policy protecting their purchases in furniture. This policy is given free to every purchaser. It is a plainly worded, legal document stipulating that in event of the death of the head of the family - the balance the money due on ANY article purchased - is cancelled on our records. There is no price limit placed on this certificate. The amount purchased may be large or small. We gladly present you with a policy and offer you this unusual protection

¹⁰¹BCE, 15 December 1933, 17.

¹⁰²BEN 22 November 1920, 7.

without a penny's cost. The Reliable Furniture Co. . . 25 Years of Faithful Service Throughout Western New York.¹⁰³

This emphasis on the community was not wholly altruistic: as chapters two and three will demonstrate, their commitment to local causes became an important selling tool in the face of increased competition from both New York merchants and chain stores. Yet on another level these merchants had a genuine interest in the success of their cities, equating the prosperity of the community with their own advancement. Their actions in supporting "local" causes at times went beyond the simple promotion of goods, as stores attempted to edify and educate customers not only about products but about the advantages of the area in which they lived.

By the 1920s, any visitor to Buffalo wishing to visit the largest stores in the city would be directed to Main Street. The concentration of retailers in the downtown acted as a magnet not only for tourists but for residents of the city themselves.¹⁰⁴ Yet not everyone was contented with the characterization of Buffalo as a "Main Street town." Some felt that the very name Main Street had negative connotations. While smaller cities might hope to preserve vestiges of their "village days," Buffalo hoped to assert her

¹⁰³RD&C 20 November 1927.

¹⁰⁴For more on how the central business district (including Main Street) was seen to symbolize the rest of the city, see Alison Ellen Isenberg, "Downtown Democracy: Rebuilding Main Street Ideals in the Twentieth-Century American City," (Ph.D. diss, University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 59-60.

position as a leading city.¹⁰⁵ The name of its central street, the focal point for civic identity, became the target of boosters who felt it did not do the city justice.

Town Tidings, a magazine catering to Buffalo's elite, grappled with the dilemma of the city's development. Although Buffalo had grown steadily during the nineteenth century, by 1921 people despaired that it would ever "catch up" to cities like New York and Chicago. Writers at the magazine termed the problem one of psychology, which could be solved by the right types of promotion to "jolt" the city's denizens out of their complacency. At a time when modern advertising was becoming an increasing presence in daily life, it is interesting that many felt that it was not the "product" Buffalo itself that needed changing, but its "brand name" and associations. A public relations "spin" might be all that was needed to put the city back on track, not actual, structural changes. As chapter four will explore, during the Depression, the idea of using advertising to jolt the community out of a "psychological" state would dominate rhetoric about recovery.

A number of articles in Town Tidings explored the topic of Buffalo's future and proposed various remedies. Local writer Tristram Sweet described taking an out-of-town investor named Henry to lunch at the Main Street men's club. Although Henry conceded that the region had advanced transportation and communication facilities to recommend

¹⁰⁵Isenberg argues that the image of Main Street "embodied both America's rural roots and incipient urban growth." Ibid., 32-3. While many of the communities in Isenberg's study embraced this idea, Buffalo appears to have been particularly sensitive to the connotations of Main Street as symbolic of "the mud-rut period" in the city's history.

itself, he was not sure about business opportunities on the Niagara frontier. He admonished the local men to "stop bragging and do something about it."

Any other place in America with half the natural endowment of the Niagara Area would be chasing New York for first honors and laughing at the other cities. Look at Cleveland - just a spot on Lake Erie, and not a very good spot, either. Look at Chicago - entirely surrounded by prairie and bossed by bandits - or St. Louis, with nothing from Nature except the stickiest, muggiest climate this side of Sheol.¹⁰⁶

Despite these disadvantages, these other cities were outpacing Buffalo in growth. Henry concluded that it was psychology, not material factors, which was causing this lag. Buffalo remained an "overgrown village", whose citizens paid little heed to "metropolitan" issues like street widening, traffic regulations, and downtown parking. Henry linked an active downtown with metropolitan status: world-class cities facilitated the flow of people into the downtown, particularly into retail areas.

A listener at the table, lawyer Matt W-, accepted Henry's indictment and provided a diagnosis: "We are all suffering from a bad case of inferiority complex! . . . a panicky hesitancy in taking the initiative, an excessive fear of failure based on emotion rather than logic."¹⁰⁷ This collective condition was preventing Buffalonians from taking advantage of opportunities, while at the same time giving them "delusions of grandeur." Matt went so far as to identify the root cause of the psychological trauma afflicting the city.

¹⁰⁶II, October 1928, 13.

¹⁰⁷II, October 1928, 14.

The inferiority complex is usually implanted in early youth as a result of rigid repression or of a failure so overwhelming as to sap the victim's courage and spirit of adventure. The Niagara Area has experienced just such a calamity. . . . From 1888 to 1893 we had a time of exceptional expansion, together with a fever of speculation. . . . When the bottom fell out in 1893, the reaction was a terrible thing to behold.¹⁰⁸

The people who lived through this time of crisis became inhibited and unable to shake off feelings of worry and insecurity. Fortunately, Matt argued, a new generation of business leaders, unscarred by the legacy of the past, was rising up to take full advantage of all Buffalo had to offer. While Cleveland or Detroit might be at the high level of their expansion, he contended, Buffalo stood poised on the brink of rejuvenation. By the end of the lunch, Henry declared that he was going to stick around to witness Buffalo's imminent boom.

In an article entitled "The Superiority of Feeling Inferior," Town Tidings writer Joseph Leeming returned to the issue of Buffalo's inferiority complex. He described an encounter between a group of businessmen in the men's steam room at the local club. An argument breaks out over the feelings of inferiority suffered by many Buffalonians. While one man identified only as "The Optimist" points to the high output of Buffalo's factories as evidence of its economic, and in turn psychological, health, another known as "The Pessimist" counters that he is mistaken. He argues

This town is all wrong, too, and all that tommy rot about industry and production won't make it right. It's the people themselves that are wrong. . . . They're so wrapped up in their own petty affairs, the men with their business and their golf, and the women with their everlasting parties, that

¹⁰⁸TT, October 1928, 15.

they've made Buffalo just the kind of a hole in the ground that an ostrich would want to put his head into, to get away from what was going on outside.¹⁰⁹

He recounted that on returning to Buffalo after a recent trip to New York, he faced Buffalo residents who tried to cut him off before he even said hello, in order to prevent him from "high-hatting" like the New Yorkers do.

Restrained appreciation for the city's attributes seemed to best indicate the maturity and healthy adjustment of its citizens. The steam room's "Philosopher" posited that it was preferable to have an inferiority complex if that spurred one on to great accomplishments. Without an inferiority complex, he argued, Mussolini would still be an underpaid newspaper reporter. The town struck with an inferiority complex was fortunate, for "from it springs the Will of Power," which would help to put it on the map.¹¹⁰ The trick was to recognize one's shortcomings with dignity and resolve - this was half the battle. Perhaps Buffalo did not suffer from a sense of inferiority as much as some towns out West. Unlike the reserved Buffalonians, Californians were relentless in their boosterism:

Their bumptious shouting, while no doubt partly due to the *jejeune* enthusiasm of youth, the zeal of the pioneer, - also show unmistakably the consciousness of inferiority. We handle our complex, if, as I hope, we have one, with greater dignity and restraint. Urged on by it, we get results. My only fear is lest we do not feel quite inferior enough.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹II, November 1928, 13-4.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 14.

¹¹¹Ibid., 15.

An older statesman overhearing the conversation suggested yet another possibility.

While cities like Detroit and Cleveland took "bustling, noisy, head-achey New York as their ideal," Buffalo modeled itself after London and other English cities. Established of blue-blood New England stock, well past its pioneer phase, similar in climate, Buffalo and London shared many parallels:

There's no need to boast, unless we want to turn our present delightful city, into a thoroughly industrialized, mechanized bee hive, intent only upon the turning out of more and more articles that none on God's earth wants after they are turned out.¹¹²

Buffalo's diversification of industry allowed it to progress with quiet confidence, unlike rival cities which depended on a single industry. They "vacillate between a state of hysterical enthusiasm and depressing panic" while Buffalo moves quietly ahead.¹¹³ The solution Town Tidings proposed to counter Buffalo's "inferiority complex" involved changing the name of her principal street, and thus, changing her image. Articles asked if Buffalo really was a "Main Street" town, filled with narrow-minded, corn-cob-pipe-smoking inhabitants.

The animosity toward the name no doubt stemmed in some part from Sinclair Lewis's novel of the same name, first published in 1920 and serialized in the Buffalo Evening News.¹¹⁴ After her marriage, Lewis's heroine Carol Kennicott finds herself

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³Ibid.

¹¹⁴An excerpt appears in the BEN, 21 December 1921.

trapped in Gopher Prairie, Minnesota. Carol has lived in Chicago and St. Paul and is not impressed by the Main Street of her new town. She is dismayed by the plain store-fronts, the mud-filled street, the single movie theatre. The street seems to symbolize the limitations of the town and its inhabitants. Carol is overwhelmed by the street's almost hostile atmosphere: "Oozing from every drab wall, she felt a forbidding spirit which she could never conquer." After a brief walking tour, Carol "escaped from Main Street, fled home."¹¹⁵ All of her dreams of quaint village life were destroyed in a single afternoon.¹¹⁶

The writers of Town Tidings hoped that a name change would distance Buffalo from the Gopher Prairies of America. Lewis's novel brought new attention to the provincialism and narrowness of small-town life, and Buffalo's writers and civic leaders wanted their home to be seen as "big-city" rather than "small town" in all respects. But some of this angst over the name Main Street predated Lewis's novel. This was not the first time that a name change had been proposed: there had been a similar movement in Buffalo after the 1901 Pan-American Exposition, when area residents had similarly become preoccupied with the city's status and image.

¹¹⁵Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1920, Reprint, New York: Signet Classics, 1980) 38-41.

¹¹⁶Alison Isenberg uses Main Street to explore the ambiguities of city planning ideas at the turn of the century, the way American towns "oriented themselves towards both their village roots, and toward their urban potential." See Isenberg, "Downtown Democracy," 33-36.

By changing the name of Main Street, it was hoped that Buffalo would shed her provincial inhibitions and achieve true metropolitan status. Again, the language of psychology was appropriated to explain the city's situation.

"Main Street" has had an insidious psychological effect on our leading citizens, when the best reason they can advance for not giving the thoroughfare a truly metropolitan name, is the cost of new stationery and stationery dies! We may next expect that young ladies will refuse to be married because they could no longer use their maiden name calling cards. . . . Buffalo must overcome some of the provincial inhibitions that are strangling it, or the city deserves to be considered a "small town" forever. If we hesitate to change the name of Main Street because of such minutiae as stationery dies, an inferiority complex is obviously rampant.¹¹⁷

While Buffalo claimed to be the "Queen City of the Lakes," or the "Metropolis of Western New York," the mere existence of Main Street was thought to detract from the city's image. Buffalo needed a name for its main thoroughfare that was not "shared by every hamlet in the country."¹¹⁸ By holding on to the name, Buffalo was relegating itself to second-class status. Only communities like "Henpeck Corners, O'Flaherty's Flats, and Podunk," with their "whisker and concob pipe inhabitants" would "christen their avenue of monumental watering troughs and mud ruts" Main Street.¹¹⁹ Buffalo's central business street deserved more.

The major cities of the world had distinctive names for major streets. A writer from Town Tidings exclaimed, "No one needs to ask what cities are referred to when you

¹¹⁷TT, October 1928, 16.

¹¹⁸TT December 1928, 26.

¹¹⁹TT, November 1928, 19.

speak of Bond Street, Rue de la Paix, Unter den Linden, Fifth Avenue and Michigan Boulevard."¹²⁰ The names of these famous thoroughfares immediately summoned up their respective cities, representing the "distinctive spirit" of the place in which they were located, "the essence of the city itself." To truly "arrive" on the international scene, Buffalo needed to rethink the name of its principal street, finding a new moniker so suitable that "the mere mention of its name will be synonymous with Buffalo, whether the street be spoken of in Rangoon or Helsinfors."¹²¹ The name was harsh to the sophisticated ear, sounding like "one of Edison's early experiments on a wax cylinder," and should be relegated to "a remote corner of your attic" with the other remnants of the "gaudy parlors of the last century."¹²²

If Main Street was key to the city's identity, then the retailers who located there had a special responsibility. Nothing could make a town appear more backward than the existence of "old-fashioned" stores.

Main Street! The name recalls the days when the two-step was *risqué*. Sidewalks were made of planks, and a single "horseless carriage", in a cloud of dust, could paralyze traffic with its dizzy eight miles an hour. The name suggests a scattered sprinkling of stores with, "false fronts" *a la* Charles Burchfield: stores with dingy interiors, redolent of kerosene, potent cheese, herring in open tubs and sawdust on the floor.¹²³

¹²⁰TT, February 1929, 24.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid.

Given that Buffalo was now home to a number of leading merchants who employed the latest in display, merchandising and distribution techniques, a new name was in order if Buffalo were ever to escape the stigma of being "an over-grown, Main Street town."¹²⁴ A new name with "advertising value" would benefit the merchants on the street, and the city as a whole.

By June of 1929, the magazine's campaign to change the name of Buffalo's major thoroughfare had attracted correspondence from a host of other cities. Not all were enthusiastic with the proposal. The editor of the Houston Gargoyle felt no need to change the name (Houston also has a Main Street), despite "the assaults on its good name by Messrs. Lewis, Mencken et al." A writer from Denver pointed out that a group of merchants in his town had actually tried to change one of the downtown streets *to* Main Street, with no success. A member of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce cautioned that the surest way to advertise a city as a "hick town" was to change the name of Main Street. On the other hand, the editor of the Times-Picayune declared, "We have no Main Street in New Orleans. We feel sorry for you!" The Secretary of Indianapolis's Chamber of Commerce congratulated the magazine's editor on his progressive work, arguing "Buffalo is too big, too great to be handicapped with a 'Main Street'!"¹²⁵ For his part, Ralph Webster, the chief editorial writer of the Gannett Newspapers (which included both the Democrat & Chronicle and Times-Union) said that few Rochesterians showed much

¹²⁴TT, July 1930, 8.

¹²⁵TT, June, 1929, 80.

interest in changing the name of their own Main Street. Perhaps, he contended, city residents feared the possibility of changing the name for the worse: "Suppose the old Republican machine had wished "Harding Street" on us!"¹²⁶

Local observers were also divided. Buffalo's Mayor Schwab refused to give an opinion, and another writer simply asked, "What the Hell difference does it make? Some people make much ado about nothing." Retailers seemed to favour the idea. The Comptroller of L. L. Berger wrote to say that most of the store executives agreed that the name "marks the city with too provincial a flavor." He suggested Iroquois Avenue as a possible alternative, recognizing New York state as the home of the Iroquois Indians, or McKinley Avenue (although one might argue that the name would only serve as a reminder of a painful incident in Buffalo's past). The chairman of the Liberty Bank humbly suggested "Liberty Street" or "Liberty Avenue" as "glorious" suggestions. Another observer suggested that retention of the old name had helped to concentrate retail activity along one street only in Buffalo.¹²⁷

Yet some merchants were members of the Main Street Improvement Association, which only two years previously had reported excitedly on a proposal in Manhattan to change the name of Eighth Avenue, Central Park West, Jerome Avenue, West Broadway

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷TT, October 1929, 44.

and Hudson Street and parts of Greenwich Street to "Main Street."¹²⁸ If New York merchants had considered adopting a Main Street, some wondered, a name change might not be necessary for Buffalo.

There has been a feeling in the minds of some people that the name "Main Street" implied the sleepy little road of the backwoods four corners. Sinclair Lewis added to this opinion when he placed the name "Main Street" on his novel based on small town life. The fact that a group of business men in our largest city propose to adopt this name for their street shows that they realize its established value as a distinctive, short, easily remembered name which can be replaced by no other title.

The Association counted among its members representatives from some of the city's larger stores, including Paul C. Fleer, President of J. N. Adam & Co.; E. L. Kleinhans, President of the Kleinhans Co.; and R.H. Shone, Advertising Manager of Adam, Meldrum & Anderson Co. Others worried that a name change would cause confusion and incur financial costs in reprinting maps, promotional materials and stationery.

In the end, most felt that changing the name of the street was too drastic a step. Unless Buffalonians let the name Main Street "reflect a state of mind" and hinder their ambitions, many felt that the name alone should not be blamed for any failure to grow.¹²⁹ As one local observer succinctly put it, perhaps citizens were currently caught up in a

¹²⁸"VALUE OF THE NAME "MAIN STREET" APPRECIATED," Main Street no. 2, (February 1927): 3. Official Publication of the Main Street Association, Inc. Vertical Files, Retailers, BECHS.

¹²⁹The manager of the Buffalo Evening News expressed this idea, TT, October 1929, 46.

wave of interest in the issue, but the long-standing tradition of the name (and simple inertia) would win out.

Some years ago a man from the middle west wrote a book called *Main Street*. I never had time to read the book. After this book was written, a few people in Buffalo wanted to change the name of Main Street, but the people who owned property on Main Street, were satisfied with the name. Main Street has been Main Street in fact and name for about one hundred years. It probably will be Main Street for the next one hundred years.¹³⁰

The campaign to change the name of the street faltered, and Main Street still runs through Buffalo's downtown to this day. Despite this failure, the very nature of the controversy reveals a lot about the position of merchants in the city.

Main Street was the symbolic and geographic centre of Buffalo, and as the major "residents" of the thoroughfare, merchants were inextricably linked to the image of the city. Changing the name of the major retailing street of the city was proposed as a way to revamp Buffalo's image. Few suggested that the city's merchants themselves were not modern or forward-looking - if anything, it was thought that the name "Main Street" did not do justice to the actual institutions and businesses of Buffalo. At a time when Americans were increasingly aware of the power of the "brand name" to convey a certain image to the public, Buffalo's boosters felt that renaming the city's major street would firmly entrench their home in the pantheon of "big cities" of the world.

The tensions over Main Street reflect both the successes and the limitations of mid-sized cities in America in the 1920s. Main Street was the focal point of both Buffalo and Rochester. On the one hand, local residents were proud of the accomplishments of

¹³⁰Frank. S. Sidway, quoted in TT, October 1929, 44.

their cities. They celebrated the rapid expansion of area industries and had reason to believe that their communities would continue to grow. At the same time, however, they were keenly aware that their communities did not necessarily "measure up" to outside observers. In the case of Buffalo, writers at a local magazine teamed up with business and civic leaders to suggest that perhaps a name change would be all that was necessary to create a new, more dynamic image of the city.

The debate over what constituted a "modern" city and how to define a "cosmopolitan" perspective would continue throughout this time period. Merchants were central to this discussion, because of their active participation in the civic and cultural life of their communities. Retailers in both Buffalo and Rochester performed a number of functions which went beyond the sale of goods. As cultural brokers in their cities, they brought in entertainments, hosted concerts and lectures, and provided a host of services to their patrons. Department stores were an imposing physical presence in the centre of the city. They invested in new technologies and experimented with the latest innovations in display and lighting. Visitors to the downtown marvelled at innovative shop windows and elaborate Christmas decorations. Retailers helped to shape the cultural life of the city.

Just as Buffalonians compared their Main Street with the major thoroughfares of other cities, merchants and consumers kept an eye on retailing developments outside of Western New York. The growth of nationally influential advertising and mass media, as well as the increased ease of transportation by automobile, meant that residents in smaller

cities were increasingly aware of developments across the nation, particularly in larger centres. They were also acutely conscious of how their own communities stacked up in comparisons with others. As the following chapter will explore, merchants in Buffalo and Rochester tried to strike a balance between asserting that their businesses were equal to stores in metropolitan centres like New York and Chicago, and celebrating their distinctive local ties and traditions.

CHAPTER TWO

Selling in Hub and Hinterland

It is well known in the trade that Buffalo women are extremely style conscious. They want the latest, the practical and the best.

Myron Land, manager of Burt's Footwear store, Buffalo

New York is not America.

Department Store Buyer¹

Faced with increasing competition from "big-city" retailers, merchants in Buffalo and Rochester experimented with a number of strategies, and often played upon local loyalties in an attempt to retain customers. For retailers in smaller centres, new innovations in distribution, marketing, media, and transportation made satisfying local customers more and more of a challenge. Magazine advertising and movies made Americans in all regions of the country more aware of national brands and changing styles; trains and automobiles made it easier than ever for shoppers to leave their home towns to check out merchandise in the metropolis. In one sense, retailers in Western New York lay in the shadow of Manhattan: indeed, they kept a careful eye on the stores in the big city. At the same time, however, they were not willing to concede the superiority of retailing in the state's main hub of economic activity. They used a number of strategies to assure their clientele that Buffalo and Rochester stores offered the same brand names, the

¹Buffalo Times, 12 March 1939, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, BECPL, 5; Department Store Buyer (DSB), Feb. 1940, 23.

same new fashions, and the same level of service as their New York counterparts. By examining the interplay between Western New York stores and their Manhattan competitors on issues of retail management, and more specifically, in the selling of fashion, we can gain a greater sense of the how the many Americans living in medium-sized cities experienced new "national" trends in consuming.

The development of the American mass market can be understood on one level as the process of bringing the advancements of industry to consumers living further and further away from the city. While urbanites throughout the nineteenth century had enjoyed goods produced in English factories, it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that a multitude of manufactured products became readily available to individuals in all states of the Union, in city and hinterland.² Companies such as Gillette, National Biscuit, and Singer Sewing Machine rapidly established chains of distribution which snaked out from key cities to touch the rest of the nation. Merchants, too, played a key role in the development of the new national market. As Susan Strasser has noted, by 1910 mass marketers like the department store, the mail-order company and the chain store were transforming the practice of selling.³

By the 1920s, a consumer in a small town in the interior of the continent was able to purchase many of the same name-brand goods as a city-dweller on the east coast, often

²Strasser, Satisfaction Guaranteed, 5-6.

³Ibid., 204.

from the same general-merchandise retailer.⁴ National manufacturers, advertisers and mail-order houses were based in cities like New York and Chicago, and even national brands with roots in other areas came to realize that these hubs of distribution were crucial to their success. Yet there was no simple one-way movement of goods and ideas from metropolis to hinterland. William Cronon has demonstrated that Chicago's rise as a major centre was inextricably tied to the development of its surrounding rural areas.⁵ On the eastern seaboard, patterns of settlement were more complicated than those of the midwest, with numerous smaller towns and cities in New York's radius jockeying for advantage in the late nineteenth century. Boosters in cities like Buffalo and Rochester were aware that their communities lay in the shadow of New York City, yet they were convinced that a time would come when their cities would rise to greatness. The ability of local merchants and manufacturers to compete with the "best" New York had to offer became a major component of this civic pride.

The trade papers of the retail industry reveal how store owners and managers in hundreds of smaller American centres relied on New York City for supplies and ideas, yet simultaneously resented the city's influence. The Dry Goods Merchants Trade

⁴James C. Penney was operating more than a thousand stores across America by 1928, and Sears, Roebuck was entering the retail field after much success in mail-order. Tedlow, New and Improved, 290-93.

⁵William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 23-54.

Journal (DGMTJ), later known simply as the Dry Goods Journal, was a major periodical for owners and managers of dry goods and department stores from the late nineteenth century onward. The Journal aimed for a truly national perspective on the retailing industry, employing itinerant writers to visit stores in every state. This editorial decision certainly reflected the fact that most of the periodical's subscribers were the proprietors and buyers of independently owned stores in cities and towns across the country. These small retailers were likely to enjoy reading stories about their own stores or ones in cities of similar sizes and proportions. Broader coverage no doubt helped to boost the circulation of the magazine.

Writers went to great lengths to report on developments in all regions of the United States. Articles featured sales ideas from every part of the nation. In 1923, the Journal's editorial staff shared business ideas from 416 stores, representing each of the 48 states.⁶ The magazine consciously kept track of its coverage nation-wide: it conducted a survey of over 1,000 articles from the first seven months of 1928 to evaluate the breadth of the DGMTJ's coverage. The survey revealed stories from 340 cities and towns, located throughout the east, midwest, south and west. New York State was the subject of 70 pieces, and every state except New Mexico and Nevada was represented by at least one article.⁷ Although retail centres like Chicago and New York received consistent coverage, there was a conscious effort to go further in presenting a more fully

⁶DGMTJ , January 1924, 179.

⁷DGMTJ, August 1928, 188.

representative, national view. Moreover, the existence of separate sections devoted to cities with populations of 10,000 or less, and 10,000 to 50,000 suggested that the concerns of merchants in smaller towns could not always be solved by copying the merchandising strategies of larger firms. In some cases, smaller stores were urged to adapt these ideas to the scale of their organizations; at other times they were shown ideas which had originated in small stores. A typical story described how a small store located only thirty miles from a major centre was "whipping big city competition" through its selling of known lines.⁸ According to the Journal, one store in a small Minnesota town carried 75 nationally advertised brands, including a number featured in fashion magazines like Vogue and the Ladies' Home Journal. It could thus boast to customers that it provided a considerable range of the same brands that would be carried by stores in nearby St. Paul (the closest major city) and would therefore save them a trip there.

While stores on the eastern seaboard were much larger in terms of both volume of goods and customer base, the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal did not depict stores in larger cities as the unquestioned leaders in "the new retailing." Policies like standard pricing, departmental separation, and money-back guarantees for consumers are now identified as key to the successes of the early mass marketers.⁹ Industry observers at the

⁸DGMTJ, June 1936, 30.

⁹See, for example, Strasser, Satisfaction Guaranteed, 204-207; Chandler, Visible Hand, 227-29.

time did not, however, assume that big-city retailers like Macy's or Marshall Field's had a monopoly on such strategies. Innovations adopted by stores in Buffalo, in Waukesha, Wisconsin, or in Alden, Iowa, were judged to be as worthy of detailed description as were the latest fashions and window displays on Fifth Avenue.¹⁰ Journalists for the DGMTJ did not presume that merchandising experiments carried out by larger stores in centres like New York, Boston, Philadelphia or Chicago could, or even should, be mirrored throughout the country. Editorials admonished department managers and buyers to keep in mind the peculiarities and tastes of their own markets.

Indeed, the activities of the big department stores in New York, and later those of chain stores, were faithfully reported in the DGMTJ. But throughout the 1920s, at least, smaller stores constantly boasted of their ability to "compete with the best of them." Specific departments or individual buyers in stores in smaller cities and towns were singled out for praise. In December of 1922, Clem Kieffer, Jr., the display manager of the Kleinhans Co. of Buffalo was commended for devoting a window display to bridegrooms, with dress suits and accessories. The Journal claimed that this was "probably the first [window display] devoted to the groom in any store anywhere" and went on to draw the attention of the reader to the low prices in the display.¹¹ Sibley's department store of Rochester was featured for its success in promoting women's lingerie. Newspaper ads were reproduced for interested readers to inspect, and an effective saleswoman from the

¹⁰See, for example, DGMTJ, Jan. 1929.

¹¹DGMTJ, Dec. 1922, 86.

corset department was interviewed about her techniques in selecting the proper corset for each customer.¹²

One area in which smaller stores were encouraged to follow the lead of their larger brethren was in adopting modern management techniques. Like other sectors of the American economy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, merchandising was becoming a corporate enterprise, employing a new breed of specially-trained managers.¹³ In line with this shift, by the 1930s, the Journal adopted a much more "professional" tone in contrast with the "folksy" charm it had emphasized in previous decades. The proprietors of stores in markets of all sizes were counselled to streamline and systematize their businesses as much as possible. Articles were accompanied by estimates of the reading time they required, presumably to allow the busy store executive to maximize his or her time. For similar reasons, the table of contents of the magazine was divided into specific areas for different department store professionals: articles targeted for the Proprietor-General Manager and Merchandise Manager were separate from those written for the Display Director, Salespeople, and the Personnel Department.¹⁴

While competition from chains and Depression-era hard times had a disproportionate impact on smaller businesses, stores in small towns were described as

¹²DGMTJ, Mar. 1933, 57-58.

¹³Chandler, Visible Hand, 299, 493; Leach, Land of Desire, 18-20.

¹⁴DGMTJ, Aug. 1931, Index.

efficient, modern operations employing the same up-to-the-minute merchandising methods as their larger counterparts. Beir Brothers of Niagara Falls, New York, was the subject of a study of budget control in smaller stores. Despite being located in a city of 58,000 and competing with retailers in nearby Buffalo (less than 25 miles away), Beir's had relied on haphazard budgeting systems until 1925. According to the DGMTJ, adopting a new, more scientific system had taken the guesswork out of buying in each department. A new system of sensible buying resulted in an upswing in "the morale of its force of buyers." The article boasted that this attention to budgeting in each department allowed Beir's to increase sales and profits "in the face of active competition from large cities, syndicates and mail order houses."¹⁵ This emphasis on rationalization and systematization was heralded as the solution for shopkeepers who suddenly found themselves in a defensive position.

Significantly, stores such as Beir's saw the department stores of Buffalo as their "metropolitan" competition. While Buffalo might have been the hinterland to Manhattan, it in turn acted as a hub of retailing and marketing activity for the satellite towns that surrounded it. Sibley, Lindsay & Curr of Rochester considered a range of 15 counties part of its trade area, and placed advertisements in some 20 weekly newspapers in adjacent counties.¹⁶ This process of interaction between the hub and hinterland can thus

¹⁵"'Budget Control Pays in Smaller Stores,' Says Beir's," DGMTJ, April 1928, 39.

¹⁶Untitled Report from 1947, Sibley Collection, Carton "History 1868-1926," Folder "Reports," Strong Museum, 1.

be viewed as replicated on a number of scales: just as New York was the hub for the department store buyers and elite consumers of Rochester and Buffalo, those two smaller cities acted as hubs in their own retailing regions. Beir's hoped that modern management techniques would allow it to keep up with Buffalo competitors, just as Buffalo stores adopted this strategy to keep up with the big stores of New York.

Not everyone was enthusiastic about the changes in store culture as departments were systematized and skills were professionalized. A satirical piece of correspondence which circulated in the offices of Buffalo's Flint & Kent store contrasted sales fifty years ago and "today". Despite the fact that the older store had "carried everything from a needle to a plow," gave credit freely, did not bother with inventory, and placed orders for goods a year in advance, it "ALWAYS MADE MONEY." In contrast, stores which had modernized

...have electric lights, cash registers, elevators, escalators and air cooling systems, never have what the customer wants - trust nobody - take inventory daily - never buy in advance - have overhead, mark-up and mark-down, quota - budget - advertising - stock control - annual and semi-annual, end-of-the-month, dollar day, founder's day, rummage economy day sales . . . AND NEVER MAKE ANY MONEY.¹⁷

In this article, the "old days" when retailers could "trust everybody" were romanticized, but few felt that they could realistically hope to turn back the clock.

¹⁷Untitled mimeographed sheet, n.d. Flint and Kent Department Store Papers, Carton A70-100, Folder 1 "History," BECHS. The same piece appears in the Bureau of Business Research (BBR) Office Files, Folder "Amusing Letters," 1931, Special Collections, Baker Library, Harvard University (BLHU).

The DGMTJ was not the only retail trade periodical which acknowledged the achievements of stores outside of Manhattan. The thirties witnessed the birth of a new magazine for department store management. The Merchandise Manager described itself as a "Magazine for Major Executives in Department Stores." Although more centred on New York than the Journal, the Manager's second issue, in July 1931, featured a photo of Buffalo department store J. N. Adam's merchandise manager, who urged that store merchandising be backed by intensive research on consumer demand. Stories about the concerns of merchants in smaller cities remained a mainstay of the periodical. Editorials at times consciously advised smaller stores not to follow blindly the lead of big city precedents. In "The Macy Complex," writer Don Herold argued that "Big department stores and little hole-in-the-wall emporiums watch Macy's like hawks," but often they do not recognize that the big store is just as capable of mistakes.¹⁸ Herold noted that the successful merchant did not imitate, but ran his store his own way:

Stores ought to ape Macy's in the one, but fundamental idea that has made Macy's Macy's, and that is that Macy's is Macy's. All truly successful stores are themselves and nobody else. The flavor that puts a store over in a big way comes (just as it comes in an individual) from following some inner light, and not from following some other fellow.¹⁹

The most successful store in the author's home town of Bloomfield, Indiana, was able to attract people from other towns by following the same principle. Herold could not describe the secret of the store's owner, but simply stated that "he bought his own way

¹⁸The Merchandise Manager (MM), 3 no. 1 (July 1932): 34.

¹⁹Ibid.

and sold his own way." In the end, the writer's advice to store executives in smaller outfits was to carve out their own style, even if in the end they were less than successful: "It's even better to fail, being yourself, than it is to fail, aping Macy's."²⁰

This celebration of American self-reliance sheds some light on notions of individualism during the Depression (Herold goes so far as to instruct his readers to take a look at Emerson's essays once a year until they "get the idea") but it also illustrates the changing relationship between smaller stores and larger ones. Whereas once the independents had been proud to develop their own styles, Herold argued that by the thirties they were too reliant on the initiatives of the big stores, and, accordingly were too defensive in their approaches. The notion that smaller stores should follow their own instincts persisted in the retail trade press. As late as 1940, The Department Store Buyer was reminding its readers that "New York is not America." Buyers could not use the same formulas for success across the nation, for

...New York ways do not fit the merchandise routine of thousands of stores in every part of the country. Nor can it be said of store operations of stores in Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia or half a dozen other great urban centres, that these stores may be regarded as typical of methods which are slated for success in smaller cities and towns.²¹

Evidence suggests that despite store owners' expressions of pride and satisfaction with local initiatives, some were still looking to experts in larger centres for guidance. In 1934, Buffalo department store Adam, Meldrum & Anderson sought advice from an

²⁰Ibid.

²¹DSB, February 1940, 23.

advertising firm based in Long Island. Ad man Thomas Robb reported to Adam, Meldrum & Anderson that the store's newspaper advertisements in the Buffalo Evening News and Courier-Express suffered in comparison to those of J.N. Adam's, Hengerer's, Edward's, and Hens & Kelly. He attached a sheet of ads from New York firms including Macy's, Best & Co., Gimbel's and Lord & Taylor. A follow-up letter in May of the same year claimed that A.M.& A.'s print advertising lacked "a real selling urge" - that ads only presented merchandise, without actually selling it. Robb recommended getting tie-in cooperation from leading women's magazines to stage special promotions, as well as the development of private brands within the store.²² While A.M.& A.'s relied on a big-city consultant, other Buffalo and Rochester stores benefited from personnel who had trained at larger stores elsewhere. Harold Hecht, president of the Wm. Hengerer Co. in the late 1930s, had entered the executive training group at Gimbel's in Philadelphia before settling in Buffalo.²³

Another force, the university business school, worked in tandem with the trade press to encourage stores across the nation to adopt modern retailing methods. Hecht himself had attended the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.²⁴ Sibley's

²²Thomas Robb, Elmhurst, Long Island, two letters to Adam, Meldrum & Anderson, Buffalo, April 4, 1934 and May 8, 1934, Adam, Meldrum & Anderson Papers, B95-2, Box 1, Folder 1, BECHS.

²³DSB, March, 1939, 16.

²⁴Ibid.

recruited graduates from the Harvard Business School to enter the store's management.²⁵ Yet even stores whose personnel did not attend business school might be transformed by contact with the university. As universities developed new curriculae which focused on the actual workings of American business, they found it necessary to collect detailed information about business operations for study by their students. The "case study" approach to business education was pioneered by Harvard, and adopted by other schools across the nation. In 1911, Harvard's School of Business formed a separate entity to compile data about a range of industries. At its inception, the Bureau of Business Research (BBR) had two main objectives: to compile statistics in the study of operating expenses on an industry-wide basis and to collect specific cases, or profiles, of individual companies. These two types of information could be used together in training students.

The Bureau sent out field agents to collect information from a host of businesses, ranging in size from large steel manufacturers to small neighbourhood grocers. As the operation grew, the surveys were sent out by mail. In return for their completed surveys, participants in the surveys would receive copies of the school's findings. By 1920 approximately 5,000 cases were collected for use in 21 courses in the Business School and in one undergraduate course at Harvard College.²⁶ In the retail field, Harvard's

²⁵Operating Committee Minutes [binder of typed minutes], 3 March 1936, 48, Sibley Collection, RHS. Management authorized two senior officers to canvass the graduating class of the Harvard Business School, looking for two possible candidates to enter the business in the fall.

²⁶M.E. Osgood, "The Bureau of Business Research," The Alumni Bulletin, November 1929, BBR Office Files, BLHU.

Bureau of Business Research conducted separate studies of the operating costs of department stores, jewellers, drug stores, grocers, chain stores, shoe stores and specialty shops. Some of these surveys tracked business changes for over a decade. The findings of the BBR were described in 1929 as "yardsticks by means of which business men could determine whether or not they were operating as economically and as wisely as others in their field."²⁷

That businesses were hungry for this information is indicated not only by the increasing numbers of businesses participating in the surveys, but also by the fact that the costs of many of the studies were covered by national trade organizations. The National Retail Dry Goods Association published the findings of the Survey in their trade publication and funded the lion's share of the cost of collecting the data. Other smaller organizations encouraged their members to participate in the surveys. The New England Grocer and Tradesman, for example, roundly endorsed the project in 1925, noting "Many merchants have been able to reduce their expenses and place their businesses on a firmer basis by comparing their operating expense figures with the common figures for all firms reporting to the Bureau and then taking steps to remedy their weak points."²⁸ Even stores which did not participate in the studies could purchase copies of the results from the Bureau, and national publications like Women's Wear Daily often quoted from completed Bureau studies.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸New England Grocer and Tradesman, January 2, 1925.

A number of Western New York retailers, including McCurdy's, J.N. Adam's, William Hengerer, Duffy-Powers, and over 30 shoe stores, 20 drug stores, and dozens of grocers and jewellers, participated in the Harvard surveys during the 1920s and 1930s. Buffalo stores also were studied by the University of Buffalo's own Bureau of Business and Social Research (BBSR), which charted changing business conditions on a monthly basis in Buffalo and did occasional in-depth studies of local groceries and department stores. Buffalo's Bureau of Business and Social Research published a monthly Statistical Survey, which promised to present information "in a detached and scientific spirit," leaving it up to local citizens to draw conclusions and take action. A 1926 mission statement in the first issue of the publication declared, "It is the hope of the University that business men, citizens interested in social problems, and thinking Buffalonians generally will recognize the Statistical Survey as an important addition to the work the University is doing in service of its city."²⁹ Like the Harvard BBR, the University of Buffalo also embarked on extensive studies of retailers, surveying various operational methods in department stores, groceries and drug stores. By reading the findings of both Harvard and the University of Buffalo, Buffalo retailers could compare their operations with their counterparts across the country as well as next door.

The Harvard and University of Buffalo statistical reports show not only that stores used the surveys as "yardsticks" of operational effectiveness, but that many stores had to

²⁹Statistical Survey, Published by the Bureau of Business and Social Research (BBSR), University of Buffalo, 1 no. 1 (April, 1926), 1.

adopt more up-to-date record-keeping practices to simply report their operating expenses. In order to have figures which formed the basis of comparison, Harvard had to make sure that responses to the survey were uniform - in other words, to be sure for example, "that the expense item of A, in New York, could be compared with the expense item of B, in Chicago."³⁰ Harvard was instrumental in having stores adopt a uniform system of record-keeping, in order to ensure that the store figures compared were truly comparable. The initial surveys collected in the summer of 1911 revealed that even within the same industry, "hardly two firms in one trade used the same terms in the same sense."

The Bureau subsequently developed standard classifications of accounts to overcome this confusion. Some types of stores developed their own forms. For example, the Controller's Congress of the National Retail Dry Goods Association developed the standard account format used in Bureau reports. No matter the origin of the forms, the fact that Harvard encouraged their widespread use had a profound effect. As one 1920s historian of the Bureau noted, the new definitions quickly became more popular, leading to increased uniformity of accounting practices within specific sectors:

These standard classifications of accounts, each of which was prepared after a careful field investigation, are coming into more and more general use. In fact, one of the noteworthy results of the Bureau's activities during the last twelve years is the improvement of accounting methods among a large number of firms. Even many firms that have not adopted the complete classification are using some of its provisions. This

³⁰Seldon O. Martin, "Applications of the Experience of the Bureau of Business Research of Harvard University to the Retail Jewelry Business," Address before the Ohio Retail Jewelers' Association, Columbus, Ohio, April 24, 1914, BBR Correspondence Files, Division of Research, Folder 5, BLHU.

improvement in accounting methods has facilitated the collection of more and more reliable data by the Bureau.³¹

The Bureau sent out simple work sheets to assist stores which did not use double-entry bookkeeping. Many promotional pamphlets for the BBR and articles in various trade journals repeated the apocryphal story of a retailer who used outdated methods and as a result did not even realize that his business was losing money. He failed to take into consideration depreciation and shrinkage in inventory, and as a result calculated that he was making a net profit of six per cent when actually his store was running at a loss of four per cent.

The studies compared everything from overhead costs, fixtures, stock turnover and wages to the amount of floor space leased to other companies. Some of these categories required a complete rethinking of the way many stores kept their accounts. For many stores, keeping abreast of these changes would have been an uphill battle. Yet those that did take advantage of the latest innovations in accounting or inventory could assure themselves that they *were* doing all they could to remain competitive, to assert themselves in the face of competition from larger stores in bigger cities. In his study of Canadian retailers during the same period, David Monod has noted how this quest for uniformity transformed businesses of all sizes. He argues, "Looking back, then, we can

³¹Letter dated July 1, 1923, BBR, Correspondence Files, Division of Research, Folder "Letters to the Dean of HBS [Harvard Business School]," BLHU, 3.

see that 'modernization' involved a kind of homogenization of twentieth-century business."³² In the case of book-keeping this certainly appears to be the case.

At the same time, larger stores in Chicago and Manhattan were not simply dictating to the rest of the nation. Just as the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal aimed for broad coverage, the BBR tried to include as many stores as possible in their statistics. The BBR's emphasis on collecting returns from as many stores as possible meant that as early as 1923, the Bureau collected reports from over 2,000 retail shoe stores, 1,800 grocery stores, 300 druggists, and 500 hardware stores.³³ In 1930, 768 department stores in 45 states were regular contributors of returns.³⁴ Indeed, the BBR often classified stores according to net sales, so that stores operating in smaller markets or only ringing up a few hundred thousand dollars in sales a year were assessed separately from retail giants like Macy's.³⁵ Insofar as overall statistics for the industry were derived by putting

³²Monod, Store Wars, 170.

³³Letter dated July 1, 1923, BBR Correspondence Files, Folder "Letters to the Dean of HBS, 1923-1926," BLHU.

³⁴New York Times, July 9, 1930, Financial Section, clipping in BBR Office Files, File "Publicity - Department Store," BLHU.

³⁵If anything, the Bureau had more difficulty securing reports from the larger stores, and could count on returns from stores in smaller cities. In response to this observation by Dr. Melvin Copeland, Director of the BBR, Jay Iglauer, Secretary and controller, The Halle Bros., Cleveland, suggested that "Perhaps the reason that [the BBR] did not receive more reports from the metropolitan stores is due to the fact that the extremely large volume they enjoy distinguishes them in a way that makes it impossible to conceal their identity in any analysis in which actual figures are shown. Some of them have expressed this hesitancy in personal talks with me." Letter dated January 25, 1922, BBR Correspondence Files, Folder 9, BLHU.

all stores on an equal footing, even small shopkeepers were assured that their input mattered.

The Bureau took great pains to ensure the anonymity of all participants in the studies. Stores were assigned a confidential file number which would be used on all correspondence, and business students or BBR staffers working on the reports had no idea which particular stores they were dealing with, beyond the general geographic region and the size of sales indicated on a store's questionnaire. Nevertheless, stores in smaller markets were interested in what was going on in the metropolis, and some went so far as to request the names of New York and Philadelphia merchants who used the Harvard system of stock keeping.³⁶ While the Bureau would decline such requests, the Harvard Bulletins allowed stores to compare themselves with others in similar-sized markets, or with competitors who had roughly the same amount of net sales. Moreover, Harvard's findings gave the shopkeeper a sense of what was going on in the whole industry. The very methodology of the BBR suggested that it was worth keeping track of developments across the nation, rather than simply following the lead of the big stores in New York.

In-house management was not the only area where stores took pains to "keep up" with the latest national trends. For department stores, the issue of style was as important as price in competing with national chains and stores based in larger cities. In particular,

³⁶Hutzler Brothers Company, Baltimore Md., to BBR, letter dated November 12, 1921, BBR Correspondence Files, Folder 21, BLHU.

the selling of fashion could be the cause of tensions between the hub and hinterland. On the one hand, stores in smaller centers took pains to keep track of the latest styles displayed in New York and, by extension, in the fashion magazines which reached across the country. Just as smaller store owners were aware of new business practices adopted by their competitors, they kept track of the latest styles being offered in Manhattan. Yet at the same time, these merchants maintained that they had a special understanding of the needs and wants of their clientele and provided an edited version of styles which they believed would suit local tastes.

It was not that an entirely new emphasis on fashion took over the department stores during the early twentieth century. Fashion had been a concern of dry goods merchants decades earlier. In the 1880s, Flint and Kent in Buffalo had gained a reputation for carrying the latest laces, ribbons, velvets and gingham for seamstresses, as well as imported accessories and some ready-made items.³⁷ Rather, by the 1920s there was a perception that the pace of changing styles was accelerating. Retail industry observers acknowledged that merchants in smaller centers faced increasing pressure to constantly update their inventory to reflect the latest styles. Many looked back fondly to the days when the store owner rarely had to modify the selection of goods he kept in stock. Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal writer H.L. Post stated in 1934 that in an earlier period, "The wants of the people were simple. . . . Demands changed slowly." In

³⁷John Horton, Old Erie: The Growth of an American Community, (New York, 1947), 297.

this idyllic past, he claimed, merchants had intimate contact with their customers and thus an almost intuitive sense of the types of goods in demand. Post also described a localized market, where consumers were less influenced by national trends: "Because of the slow change of fashion and lack of means for travel, the consumer was more or less isolated from other towns and was forced to buy in his local trade center."³⁸ This slow rate of change allowed retailers to pack away goods left over from one season to be sold at regular prices later on - "markdowns were nil." In contrast, Post presented a view of fashion in which the modern customer was more fickle, and the merchant was less able to know his clientele and keep their needs in mind.³⁹ According to Post, the fact that ready-to-wear apparel was becoming increasingly important (Post dates this development from 1914 onwards) placed even more pressure on merchants to keep the latest goods in stock.⁴⁰

The shift from the "good old days" of slow change to the rapid pace of trend-driven "modern times" was not as clear-cut as Post described. Certain lines of merchandise, including millinery and dress goods, had been susceptible to changes in fashion even in the nineteenth century. Yet this Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal editorial touches on some real changes that were affecting relationships between the small-town retailer and the fashion-conscious consumer in the early twentieth century. As

³⁸DGMTJ, Jan. 1934, 22.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

consumers gained easier access to images of fashion from magazines, movies and advertising, as well as metropolitan shopping districts, smaller retailers developed a number of strategies to remain competitive. None were willing to concede the superiority of style retailers in New York and Chicago. Instead they aimed to demonstrate how they, too, were "up on fashion."

Some merchants in outlying areas recognized that their customers might take fashion cues from the big city: one store owner in a small town outside of Chicago argued in the DGMTJ in 1924 that the big city stores actually educated his trade to buy more at home:

When a woman goes to the larger cities in the afternoon, sees the beautiful dresses in the windows, sees well-dressed women on the street, she gets the idea that she needs a few clothes herself.

But she doesn't always go to the big stores to buy. She can be persuaded to go to her own store in her own home town and buy the best they have there, which is in reach of her pocketbook.⁴¹

His observation suggests that while many women in smaller centres desired "big-city style," they were less willing to pay the prices associated with designer wares. Moreover, the store owner claimed to encourage his sales staff to write to Chicago retailers regularly for items requested by customers which he did not have in stock. Although many women were astonished that he would provide this service, he estimated that this prevented his clientele from going to the city themselves and buying many more items there.

⁴¹"Smaller Stores Have Better Opportunity Now than Ever," DGMTJ, July 1924, 26.

The trade press cautioned retailers to recognize the fashion consciousness of their patrons. Modern mass-communication was bringing the world right to the doorstep of the customer; the retailer who "talked down" to the rural or small-town customer did so at his own peril. Customers, even those in smaller centres, were becoming increasingly style-savvy. In the Journal's view, it was a mistake to assume that women in smaller cities knew nothing of Fifth Avenue:

That would be as much as to say that she has never seen a moving picture, or the Saturday Evening Post, or a Montgomery Ward catalogue, or the Sunday newspapers, or been in an automobile, or listened in on the radio. The achievements in publicity, in advertising of all kinds, even during the last decade, have put the same information before us all. In these days, wherever she is, a woman knows about the length skirts and the style in hats.⁴²

Customers, then, had an increased understanding of the newest styles, and presumably would select the stores they patronized according to their ability to deliver these wares.

Yet while in one sense this increase in communication might produce more demanding shoppers, stores could also profit from this flood of information. Even stores in towns much smaller than Buffalo and Rochester could claim to be in step with current fashion if they relied on magazines to determine their stock. In smaller stores, in particular, name brands were thought to act as proof of the store's style currency. Lolliner's of Stillwater, Minnesota, a town with a population of less than 10,000, boasted in the pages of the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal in 1936 that

⁴²DGMTJ, Jan. 1929, 33.

in a recent check with one month's issues of national style magazines [the store] was found to sell 15 lines advertised in Vogue and a like number of those advertised in magazines such as McCall's, Good Housekeeping, Ladies' Home Journal, American Magazine and national weeklies.⁴³

Department store buyers could use the national media to stay current. Magazines provided an easy way for stores to assert that they, too, were aware of current fashion. In Buffalo, J.N. Adam and Co.'s success in selling notions was in part attributed to the "fashion knowledge" which assistant buyer Miss Cummings gathered through reading magazines. Although the store had carried a large stock of buttons, a large proportion of it was not fast selling. Miss Cummings "watched the fashion magazines. She knew at all times what buttons were right in style" and gradually built up a new stock of buttons which were "fashion-right" and consequently became best sellers.⁴⁴

These types of decisions were being made from Buffalo, from inside the store. J.N. Adam's presents an interesting example of locally based style knowledge. Although Adam's had ties to other stores in New York and was a member of the Manhattan-based Associated Merchants, it rested with local buyers to use the tools at hand to determine what was fashionable. There was no direct dictation from New York, not even within this particular organization. At a time when ready-to-wear clothing was becoming more of a mainstay of department stores, even buyers for departments like notions (aimed at women who sewed clothes for themselves) kept close track of mass-market fashion

⁴³Dry Goods Journal, June 1936, 30.

⁴⁴"Selling Best Sellers," DGMTJ, December, 1934, 76.

magazines. J.N. Adam's buyers assumed their clients were well aware of fashion trends, and turned to magazines themselves to attract these customers.

National advertising campaigns provided rich sources for cross-promotion. In 1920, the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal reported on the successful "Nationally Advertised Goods Week" promotional campaign of a St. Paul, Minnesota store. The store devoted all of its window and display space to the selling of brand names that were promoted nationally.⁴⁵ Sibley, Lindsay & Curr of Rochester used images from national advertising campaigns in direct mail circulars promoting fabric and notions. According to a 1929 DGMTJ article, a photo of an attractive style of dress from a "fashion book which is widely read" would be reproduced and attached to a swatch of material. This circular was mailed to women who often bought sewing materials.⁴⁶ Sibley's assumed that customers were well-acquainted with fashion magazines. The buyer of wash goods argued that this familiarity would encourage a woman seeing one of the circulars to come in and buy: "The recipient immediately realizes where she has seen the picture . . . and often looks it up to be sure. Then she reads the description and our advertising takes a stronger hold in her mind."⁴⁷

On other occasions, stores tied selling to specific magazines. The Journal noted with approval the decision by a Utica, New York, store to highlight selected goods which

⁴⁵DGMTJ, Feb. 1920, 108.

⁴⁶DGMTJ, Oct. 1929, 66.

⁴⁷Ibid.

were advertised in the March 1929 issue of the Ladies' Home Journal. It advised display managers that they should take advantage of the promotional work being done for them by national advertisers, stating, "Manufacturers are planting some excellent seed in these magazines, seed which begins to grow almost as soon as the cover pages are opened. Are retailers taking advantage of this, cultivating it, and harvesting it?"⁴⁸

Every reader of a fashion magazine was confronted by a number of advertisements - sometimes over half of the total pages of any issue - featuring goods which ranged from cosmetics to home appliances to clothing. These ads, according to the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal, were skilfully laid out to present a compelling message of "health, beauty, economy and utility" to the consumer. "With such a tremendous influence constantly bearing on her," store managers were advised, "it is only natural that the reader absorb some of these points and desire some of the products so fully described."⁴⁹ Smaller stores could thus view advertising in two ways: on the one hand, advertising was one of the forces reaching out to consumers to educate them about the latest styles, products and trends. Merchants in this view might hurry to keep up with the changing demands of consumers in their area. Yet both advertisers and retail industry commentators encouraged store managers and buyers to take a different, more positive, perspective. Stores could choose to work in tandem with magazine editorial content writers and advertisers, letting magazines do some of the selling for them.

⁴⁸DGMTJ, May, 1929, 47.

⁴⁹Ibid.

Manufacturers often communicated directly with retailers, describing upcoming newspaper and magazine ad campaigns so that stores could coordinate their promotional efforts. Cannon towels bought space in the November 1924 Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal to show merchants the layout of its Christmas ads for towel gift sets.⁵⁰ The Kleiner's Rubber Company used a striking visual display to demonstrate to retailers the company's "Spring Campaign to increase *your* sales." It bought a two-page spread in the Journal to show the various media it used to advertise. The left-hand side of the ad consisted of a photograph of the December issues of nineteen national magazines, including Charm, Harper's Bazar, Vogue and the Ladies' Home Journal, which featured Kleinert's ads. The right-hand page was a jumble of over seventy newspaper mastheads. Among those visible are the Rochester Times-Union and the Buffalo Evening News.⁵¹ Along similar lines, the American Viscose Corporation, makers of rayon fabrics, boasted to merchants that "wherever you live, East or West, North or South," the company's national advertising in 11 national magazines was "working for YOU." The company asserted that "National Advertising Does a Local Job," doing the job of selling for merchants in communities across the country.⁵²

National advertising could do a "local job" in other ways. Stores could coordinate further promotional events to capitalize on the profile of national brands. In 1929,

⁵⁰DGMTJ, November 1924, 35.

⁵¹DGMTJ, January 1926, 132-133.

⁵²Dry Goods Journal, Feb. 1940, 35.

national manufacturers cooperated with the Zahn Dry Goods Company of Racine, Wisconsin in the store's "National Advertising Week," providing the store with additional display and advertising material. According to the DGMTJ, Zahn's stressed that by buying national brands at the store, shoppers could enjoy the benefit of a "double guarantee" on merchandise. Not only was Zahn's a reputable business, with forty years history in the area, but it also stocked brand-name goods with "Familiar Shopping Names" backed by large national manufacturers.⁵³

In addition to the advance notice and assistance provided by manufacturers, trade papers provided help for stores which wished to capitalize on magazine promotion. The Merchandise Manager went so far as to give an "advance picture" of the editorial content of some leading publications a month in advance to help stores coordinate their merchandising activities with the anticipated demand. Starting in the fall of 1933, they made a digest of the non-fictional content of six major women's magazines, with an aggregate monthly circulation of 13,374,922.⁵⁴ Department stores were advised to tap into this valuable source of influence since magazines provided suggestions which were "carefully heeded" by women buying for their personal wardrobes, their families and their homes.⁵⁵ Stores which carried American designers, for example, were likely pleased to learn that Good Housekeeping was instructing its readers to ask for particular dresses "by

⁵³DGMTJ, May 1929, 46.

⁵⁴MM, December 1933, 28.

⁵⁵MM, September 1933, 32.

the names of the designers" and were instructed to use window and interior displays to tie in with the magazine article. Others could tap into more general trends outlined in the magazines. To capitalize on a Woman's Home Companion piece on fall coats with decorative trim on the shoulders, the Merchandise Manager instructed stores to develop window displays comparing shoulder treatments for women of various ages. In addition, the new fall colours described by the Ladies' Home Journal could be highlighted in in-store promotions.⁵⁶

Response to this new service was enthusiastic. One store president wrote that he had struggled to read all of the women's magazines "in order to dig out the new trends."⁵⁷ The Merchandise Manager saved him the trouble of sifting through these issues each month, providing the main points of articles on fashion, housekeeping, home decorating and beauty a month before the magazines hit the newsstands. By the mid 1930s, Life magazine took the initiative to set up an entire merchandising department to encourage retailers to use tie-ins in their window and counter displays. The magazine sent reprints of ads, posters, arrows, "advertised-in-Life" stickers and blow-ups of covers to interested retailers. Vogue magazine provided similar services to retailers as well.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Tbid.

⁵⁷MM, December 1933, 29.

⁵⁸Leonard S. Marcus, The American Store Window (London: Whitney Library of Design, an imprint of Gupill Publications/NY Architectural Press, 1978) 41-42. Marcus argues that the impact of Life's merchandising efforts would have been even greater "in the smaller cities and towns, which became less and less their own economic and cultural centers during the thirties." While Marcus perhaps overstates the cultural demise of

Even without this type of coordinated advice and advance notice of advertising campaigns, magazines provided a valuable tool for buyers, display designers and window dressers. This use of magazines as a "measuring stick" of style in one sense can be read as evidence of the homogenizing effect of the national media. If stores jumped to show the current styles or colour outlined in magazines, they were in one sense forfeiting their own ability to make decisions in merchandise selection and display. Across the nation, perhaps, we can imagine store after store featuring similar window displays with the latest shade of hat or length of skirt as outlined in the Ladies' Home Journal or Good Housekeeping.

Yet in the context of competition between smaller cities and the influence of the large metropolis, magazines can also be seen as a welcome means for smaller stores to assert their own ability to stay up-to-date. The national media in one sense levelled the playing field for merchants in smaller centres. This use of national magazines to assert "fashionability" has not been fully considered by scholars. In his study of national magazines, Richard Ohmann has argued that not all places were equally visible to readers of periodicals. He notes, "People read the magazines in homes all around the nation, but the magazines did not consider all parts of the nation as places worth representing."⁵⁹ In particular, New York City and to a lesser extent Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia were

smaller cities, his notion that these tools were of particular use to retailers outside of New York appears accurate.

⁵⁹Ohmann, Selling Culture, 231.

the places to be, and readers who did not live in these centres were left with only the vicarious thrill of following the exploits of high society on the eastern seaboard.

At the same time, however, we can think of these readers as measuring their own experiences against those described in the stories and articles of the magazine. Readers and retailers in smaller towns may indeed have felt like "outsiders" peering into the prime social space of the nation, as Ohmann suggests. But merchants turned this equation around to assert their own participation in the national "scene." Stores used magazines to assert that although they were not located in New York, they were just as good as New York stores in providing key styles or brands. Readers might never hobnob with the elite in the Hamptons or see the latest Broadway play described in Cosmopolitan, but they could wear clothes that fit the descriptions in national magazines or buy the branded goods which advertised there. Local merchants maintained that there was no reason to look elsewhere for style goods: magazines were offered as "proof" that stores in smaller centres were keeping up with national trends.

Newspapers also acted as boosters for stores, asserting the ability of local merchants to provide the latest styles. The Rochester Democrat & Chronicle had a Fashion Bureau which provided many services to local women, including selling sewing patterns and directing shoppers in search of particular items to specific stores. The Bureau relayed style news provided by the newspaper's wire service, but remained committed to promoting (according to their official motto) "AUTHENTIC FASHIONS . .

. FOR ROCHESTER WOMEN . . . FROM ROCHESTER STORES."⁶⁰ Bureau writers reported on the availability of the latest styles in the departments of Rochester stores. One of the Bureau's female "shoppers" gleefully confided to readers, "I have seen the smartest coats in our own stores this week. . . . Aren't we lucky that we don't have to rush down to New York to find the things we want?"⁶¹ There were, of course, good economic reasons for the papers to promote local stores as centres of style: Rochester's department stores were the ones buying ad space in the Democrat & Chronicle. Yet it is significant that the paper explicitly rejected the idea that New York stores might offer more variety in style goods. Local stores were rated just as good at providing the fashionable wares described in newspapers and magazines.

Magazines were not the only force spreading style knowledge. By 1920, the automobile made travel to large cities much more of a possibility for the rural or small-town consumer. Rochester's Retail Merchants' Council directly linked the car with the changing appearance of customers who lived far from centres of style: cars blurred the boundaries of the metropolitan areas, allowing shoppers to travel a hundred miles to a particular downtown store if they so desired. A 1928 Council report noted,

Not many years ago the inhabitants of the small town could be recognized easily in the city because of the difference in dress; city styles had not penetrated even to near-by towns. The town merchant, therefore, had no demand for the variety of style or quality of merchandise which he recognizes as a necessary part of his stock. But there has grown up a

⁶⁰RD&C, 7 October 1930, 8.

⁶¹Ibid.

competition between metropolitan areas which formerly was unknown, and Rochester is in competition as a shopping center, not merely with Buffalo and Syracuse, but also, in a very real way, with New York and Chicago.⁶²

This new competition of course did not mean that Chicago or New York risked losing customers to Rochester, but that Rochester would have to take action to keep trade at home. In a similar vein, a speaker at the National Retail Dry Goods Association's annual convention argued that cars had increased competition between the small town and the big city. In his view, there were no small towns left in America: "What used to be known as small towns are in reality suburbs of larger cities. Distance has been annihilated."⁶³

While cars thus created new challenges for Buffalo and Rochester merchants, they also created new opportunities. Cars enabled more shoppers to come to the downtown to buy. Kenneth Jackson has argued that initially, the automobile was heralded by urban merchants, for it allowed easier access for customers wanting to shop downtown. During the 1920s and 1930s, he notes, "Employment in the central cities mushroomed. . . . Steel skeleton skyscrapers grew like weeds on the urban landscape."⁶⁴ Although problems of traffic congestion and other factors would lead to the demise of the downtowns in the postwar era, for a brief period many smaller cities envisioned their downtowns rising to

⁶²Rochester Gas and Electric News 15 no.10 (April 1928): 385.

⁶³Dry Goods Journal, February 1936, 86.

⁶⁴Kenneth T. Jackson, The Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 173-4.

compete with the best that New York and Chicago had to offer. And Main Street retailers were considered the heart of the dynamic downtown core.

For the areas around cities like Buffalo and Rochester, the downtown acted as a magnet for shoppers. Just as the elite of Buffalo saw shopping in New York as an entertaining excursion, many wives in the small towns that ringed Buffalo looked forward to going downtown on shopping trips. Trolley lines connected the outlying areas with the downtown, but automobile ownership often made the difference in terms of a family's decision to shop downtown. One survey by the University of Buffalo's Bureau of Business Research indicated that almost 60 per cent of the housewives who shopped in Buffalo once a week or more often travelled by car.⁶⁵ Respondents to the Survey had a variety of reasons for travelling to Buffalo to shop. Over 50 per cent cited wider selection as their main reason for making the trip, with price ranking second as an influential factor. Others simply enjoyed the experience of a shopping visit. One woman made clear that it was not simply a matter of better selection: she remarked that the stores in her town were "just as good as Buffalo's," but claimed, "I like to drive to Buffalo just for the enjoyment of shopping in different stores."⁶⁶ Some made an effort to shop in the outlying towns because their husbands owned businesses there: the wife of a

⁶⁵Edmund D. McGarry, "Consumers' Buying Habits in Satellite Cities," Statistical Survey (SS) 8 no. 3A (November 1932): 5.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 6.

Tonawanda merchant asserted, "I do all my shopping right here at home because my husband is in business here himself."⁶⁷

But many others happily made the trip to Buffalo's downtown, particularly to purchase shoes and clothing. A map produced by the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce highlighted the role of the city as the centre of a radius of trade. It boasted that 60% of the population of the United States and 80% of the population of Canada lived within 500 miles of the Niagara Area, or one night's ride (see figure 5).

Rochester also boasted of being the "hub of a great agricultural, industrial and trading area." Sibley, Lindsay & Curr claimed to cover a territory with a "radius of many miles" and often featured maps of "Sibleyland" in its promotions. One Christmas promotion in 1927 displayed the store as the heart of "Santa's Chartered Territory." A map of Western New York extended to communities as far as Scranton, Pennsylvania, to the South, Utica to the East, and Hamilton, Ontario, to the West (see figure 6).⁶⁸

⁶⁷Ibid., 5.

⁶⁸RD&C, 28 November, 1927.

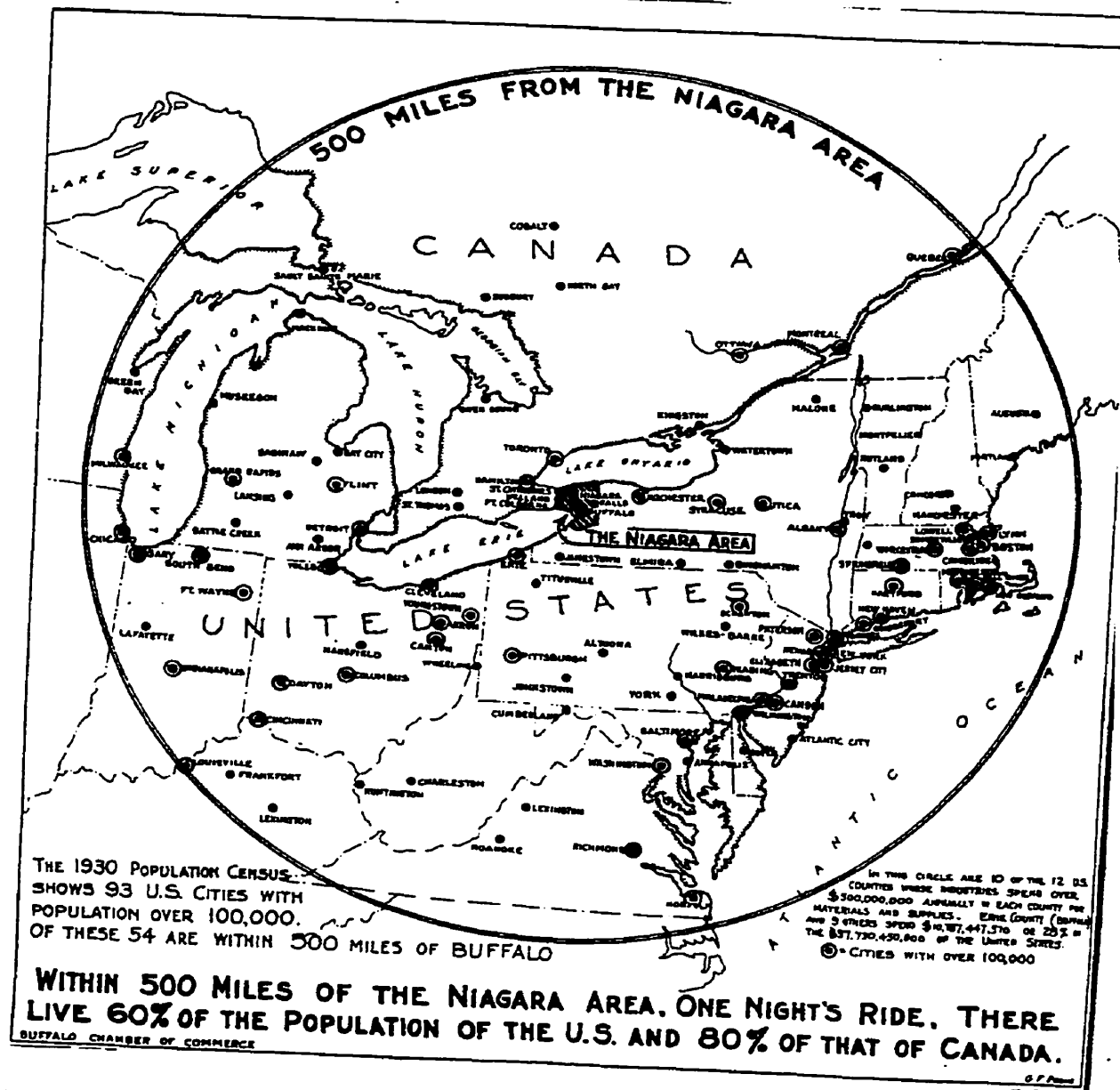


Figure 5 Map of Buffalo's Trade Radius. Niagara Area, January 1932, 28. Reprinted with permission of the Buffalo Niagara Partnership (formerly Buffalo Chamber of Commerce).

Santa's Charted Territory

OLD SANTA drew this map for you, pointing the road to Christmas merrily and good cheer. Wisely, he carved on it his wondrous landscapes. Then he pushed out the boundaries that all in Western New York might share in the good things assembled at Sibley's.

HERE the seasons are overflowing with Christmas cheer for you and all your family. For months our buyers have been busy in the far corners of the world collecting rare and intricate toys from Germany, unique mechanical wonders from Switzerland, trunks of art from every Spain, delicate fancies from France, and other gifts from all the famous workshops of America.

THOUGHTS of you and of your Christmas have dominated all our efforts. We have worked with heart and soul to give you the most unvarnished Christmas selections ever offered in Western New York. True, our gifts to you are material things, but beneath them live the good-will of our entire organization.

IT WILL be no small satisfaction to know that on Christmas morning, amid the glitter and sparkle of the merry lights, the bright cheeks of the children, and the merry laughter of all the happy members of the family, many of these things which are bringing joy to you, will bear some relation to us.

WITHIN a radius of many miles, hundreds of homes will be brightened by gifts our hands have touched. And because we have had open doors in the happiness of your dear ones, far as the influence of the Christmas spirit becomes a guiding force more persons.

IT IS therefore with sincere joy that you open our doors with warm cordiality to welcome you to the wonderland of the new Christmas display.

SIBLEY, LINDSAY & CURR COMPANY

Figure 6 Sibley's Ad. *RD&C* 28 November 1927, 19. Reprinted with Permission of the *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*.

A network of state and county highways linked the six counties around the city, and as one Rochester newspaper promotion boasted in the 1930s, the 139,619 automobiles owned in the area could bring "families from its farthest towns to Rochester in an hour's easy drive." This ease of transportation made shopping "a matter of minutes, rather than miles" for residents of the area.⁶⁹ According to a 1936 Rochester newspaper ad, it also bound the sizeable suburban population of the city into one market, a "compact, closely-knit community, with similar habits, tastes, and wants". The ad, which promoted the city for investment, boasted that "from every doorstep in this area, roads lead to the downtown shopping district of Rochester."⁷⁰ Buffalo and Rochester thus enjoyed new status as hubs in their own retailing regions, their downtown stores acting as magnets for shoppers in the outlying regions.

The stores' ability to respond to the changing demands of patrons depended on the success of their buyers in bringing home the goods featured in magazines and national advertisements. By the 1920s most department store buyers in smaller cities like Rochester and Buffalo made seasonal pilgrimages to New York and Europe to select merchandise. In their ad copy, they stressed how consumers in the local market could rest assured that they were receiving the latest from the runways of the world's fashion

⁶⁹RD&C, 20 December 1936.

⁷⁰Ibid.

centres. Sibley's newspaper ads featured "letters" from Madame Paulet, one of their Paris representatives. She promised Rochesterians that

Our Paris office not only keeps us in almost daily touch with everything of fashion interest in Paris, but also sees to it that we receive much that is new and beautiful in fashion in Paris the moment it is launched.⁷¹

Readers were told that Sibley's departments would stock the items Mme. Paulet discovered, or "clever copies of them," for their buying pleasure. The B. Forman Company boasted that its wares were "unduplicate-able" because they had been carefully selected from different countries around the globe (see figure 7). The store informed Rochester customers that their "style-scouts" had offices in Brussels, Paris, Lyons, Berlin, Chemnitz, London, Belfast, Vienna, Gablonz, Florence, and Zurich. Forman's promised to keep its clientele up to date on the absolute latest fashions, through its foreign buying offices, European buying trips, systems of direct importation, and "constant use of post, cable, and even trans-Atlantic telephone."⁷²

Hengerer's of Buffalo similarly stressed the store's connections in Europe, publishing a pamphlet which referred to buying operations in Paris, Florence, Vienna and England. Ad copy boasted of the superior service the store was performing "in bringing to this community the markets of Europe."⁷³ Berger's specialty shop made a tongue-in-

⁷¹RD&C, 20 July 1926, 18.

⁷²RD&C, 1 January 1928, 3.

⁷³"Importations: The Wm. Hengerer Co.," [pamphlet] n.d., Vertical Files, Retailers H, BECHS.

And the phrase "unduplicatable" applies not only to scores of Forman Christmas gifts . . . but also to the conditions under which you shop at Forman's. Air conditioning means comfortable shopping . . . clean, pure air circulating constantly.

Unduplicatable



THE strongest and most logical reason why you should do your Christmas shopping early is that so very many desirable items will be sold before the last-minute rush begins. The rare, and the unusually beautiful things are always the first to go, and the Christmas season is so very short that it is impossible for us to replenish many of our assortments. Moreover, ever so many of the bright ideas on our shelves come to us from across the Atlantic and the Pacific, and some of them are not to be duplicated, not just in any other store in this city, but in any store in any other American city. As an exhibit of the art of many different countries, these wares are, of themselves, very interesting; as the solutions to your gift-questions, they will most adequately convey your Christmas greetings to those you hold in high esteem. It will be a great pleasure to show them to you, at your early convenience.

B. FORMAN CO.

CLINTON AVENUE SOUTH

ROCHESTER, N. Y.

OFFICES in PARIS . . . LONDON . . . BRUSSELS . . . FLORENCE . . . HONG-KONG . . . VIENNA

Figure 7 B. Forman Ad. RD&C, 2 December 1924, 2A. Reprinted with permission of the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle.

cheek observation that the store's ability to provide up-to-the-minute French fashion might lead to some confusion. A female shopper was described as exclaiming, "So This is Paris!" to which Berger's replied, "No, *Madame*, it is Buffalo. But the mistake is easily explained. . . . Berger's since 1905 have always been just a little more like the Rue de la Paix than Main Street."⁷⁴ Having buyers in the centres of fashion could ensure that the right goods were brought home, eliminating the need for customers to look elsewhere.

The notion that Paris was the world's fashion capital was still firmly entrenched in the 1930s. Although New York designers were gaining recognition, Parisian trends still had a certain cachet which elevated them in the minds of many department store buyers and customers. The Merchandise Manager ran an article which urged Americans to "throw off the Paris fashion yoke" and instead embrace "American styling for American women."⁷⁵ The writer bemoaned the fact that while U.S. designers were coming into their own, they suffered a tremendous "commercial inferiority complex." All too often, he argued, Parisian designs were embraced simply because they came from Europe, and American designers of merit were ignored purely because of their country of origin.⁷⁶ The highly defensive tone of the article suggests that Paris was still at this point the undisputed centre of the style world - in this case, New York found itself relegated to the

⁷⁴TT, March 1929, 51.

⁷⁵MM, September 1932, 33-34, 53.

⁷⁶Ibid., 33.

role of hinterland to Paris's hub. In bypassing New York entirely, buyers for Rochester and Buffalo stores asserted that they were going to "the source" of fashion.

A Buffalo magazine article highlighted how the city's department stores culled the finest fashion goods from Europe. The writer noted, "It's awfully easy to feel that New York is the only place to shop, but you're wrong. We've tons of irresistible treasures right here in town."⁷⁷ The decision to shop at home could thus be made without fear of being limited in the array of items and styles available to the consumer. Buffalo merchants could use improved technology to keep up with fashion in Europe just like their Fifth Avenue rivals, as one editorial observed:

If we were living in an age devoid of transportation and communication, clothes in New York would be better. But look in the shops there. Ninety-five per cent of the dresses are merely copies of French models. These copies, quite as beautiful, every bit as good in quality, also come to Buffalo.⁷⁸

If Parisian fashion was the object, both Buffalo and New York could offer copies.

The ability to provide world-class fashion items and other style goods remained important even during hard times. As a later chapter will explore, during the Depression, newspaper editorials encouraged shoppers to spend their dollars at home, arguing that spending money in the area would boost the region's economy and help provide jobs for local people. Yet it is interesting to note that buying at home did not mean giving up on fashion. As one writer argued,

⁷⁷TT, June 1928, 59.

⁷⁸TT, April 1932, 6. The same article was reprinted June 1936, 34.

It's all right, Madam, to go to New York, or Paris, for something you cannot buy here in town. But the chances are that it's already on sale for less money in Rochester. . . . There isn't much in New York, anyway, which cannot be found in Rochester.⁷⁹

Women were not the only ones reprimanded for going to New York in search of fashionable clothes which they could just as easily get at home. A magazine editorial took issue with "prominent citizens" who made their fortunes in Buffalo but went to New York tailors. It admonished that these men need not go elsewhere and "watch our money slip into other markets. Our tailors will stand your closest inspection."⁸⁰ Use of New York interior decorators came under similar fire, for local services of equal calibre were available at home and had the additional advantage of helping the local economy. Patronage of local stores might even result in unexpected bargains. Some Buffalo stores actually acted as importers, selling goods to New York merchants who in turn charged higher prices for the same goods.⁸¹ B. Forman of Rochester boasted that it had exclusive selling privileges on many of the items in its store, which came "from across the Atlantic and the Pacific," and were "not to be duplicated, not just in any other store in this city, but in any store in any other American city."⁸²

⁷⁹RD&C, Wed. Dec. 9, 1936, 10.

⁸⁰TT, April 1932, 6.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²RD&C, 2 December 1934, 24.

Although ready-to-wear collections were most often associated with being on the "cutting edge" of fashion, department stores acknowledged that women who sewed their own garments were also very conscious of changes in fashion. In 1929, Sibley, Lindsay & Curr ran monthly promotions during which "fashion artists" spoke to home sewers about new style trends and demonstrated techniques in cutting and fitting. Display tables of fabrics were arranged in a square to create a "runway" for the demonstrations. The fashion artist wore a dress or suit made of featured fabric, and spoke about the pattern number required, the type of material, and notions. To complement her dress, she drew from other departments in the store, selecting suitable jewelry, hosiery and shoes, which were also readily available for purchase.

Occasionally she puts on a hat, calling attention to it and to the gloves and bag which correspond. All of this makes the onlooker "ensemble conscious," and creates a desire in her mind to design a costume which is complete and individual.⁸³

The department stocked paper dress patterns which were quick knock-offs of European designs. Sibley, Lindsay & Curr endorsed McCall Printed Patterns with the comment, "The promptness with which the latest Paris designs are duplicated in your paper patterns has encouraged us to add them to our other pattern services."⁸⁴ Women who sewed their own clothes had a variety of reasons for doing so: some were motivated by saving money, others enjoyed sewing, and still others might have had trouble buying clothes off

⁸³"Fabric and Piece Goods: Fabric Promotion Weeks Increase Demand For Piece Goods in Rochester Store," DGMTJ, October 1929, 63-4.

⁸⁴Ad for McCall Printed Patterns, DGMTJ, May 1929, 81.

the rack that fit. Sibley, Lindsay & Curr recognized that interest in Parisian lines and pulled-together ensembles was not limited to customers of haute couture or even ready-to-wear. Their promotions in dress goods used style as a selling point.

Beyond claiming to be "up-to-the-minute" in terms of European or New York styles, stores in upstate New York often tried to put a local spin on fashion. Buffalo's severe winters inspired the manufacturers and retailers of outerwear to claim special understanding of the needs of local customers. For many years, the Kleinhans Clothing Company offered the "Buffalonian fleece overcoat," arguing that it was an ideal coat for "our variable Buffalo climate."⁸⁵ The company promoted its new union suit (long underwear) with the warning, "You know how cold it gets in Buffalo in November."⁸⁶ Kleinhans stressed that upstate residents had to pay particular attention in choosing the right winter apparel, as "In Buffalo we wear an overcoat right through November, December, January, February, March. Five long months."⁸⁷ The Mt. Rock Fleece coat promised to make it seem like "Palm Beach in Buffalo," even at times "when Buffalo streets resemble the Antarctic."⁸⁸ Hengerer's similarly boasted "coats Designed with You

⁸⁵BCE, 14 November 1935, 8.

⁸⁶BEN, 6 November 1930, 3.

⁸⁷BEN, 18 November 1930, 3.

⁸⁸BEN, 9 December 1930, 20.

in Mind...And Buffalo's Icy winters!"⁸⁹ Hens & Kelly Co. offered a velvet and beaver combination hat christened "Miss Buffalo," and department store buyers claimed a special insight in selecting appropriate merchandise, because they lived in the area and experienced the cold.⁹⁰ Rochester merchants, too, made appeals based on local weather. Sibley, Lindsay & Curr boasted that it had snapped up some special suits in New York with local needs in mind: the suits "are warmly interlined - suits made to stand the Rochester kind of winter."⁹¹

Stores claimed that by selling to a specifically local market, they could better gauge the tastes of local shoppers. Buffalo's B. Forman Company prided itself on being especially responsive to the needs of local shoppers. It claimed a special advantage in merchandising because it took extra steps to find out "the wants of its public." In June of 1920 it sent out questionnaires to several thousand randomly-selected holders of charge account with the store, and used the information gathered through this process to inform its fall buying for October. Typical questions asked the female patron if she expected to buy an evening gown the following season, and how much she would be willing to pay. Forman's boasted that the information would directly shape its fall buying plans:

Every Forman order has been confirmed by the expressed wishes of our public; the largest assemblage of Fall Fashions this building has ever housed includes every article desired; values are better because we knew

⁸⁹BEN, 22 November, 1935, 5.

⁹⁰BEN, 10 November, 1920, 5.

⁹¹RD&C, 12 October 1920, 14.

not only what would be wanted but the prices at which these things would be wantable!⁹²

Retail industry observers claimed that this increased responsiveness was easier to accomplish in one particular community. In 1940, the Department Store Buyer argued that the characteristic intimacy of the small city store with its customers "simplifie[d] its buying problems." Stores in smaller centres could achieve a "more complete grasp of the buying preferences of the consumer populace," because their customers were more likely to be a homogenous group.⁹³ Stores in different regions had very different needs, depending on whether they were located in a company town, a resort area, a university town or some other particular type of city. The successful store was the one able to "find an individualized approach keyed to the character of its community" to attain a level of responsiveness to clients' needs not achievable in the big city.⁹⁴

Stores claimed they served the community not simply by responding to their customers' needs but by supporting local manufacturers. Many shops boasted that they stocked goods which had been made in the area. Rochester's status as the home of a number of national clothing manufacturers was translated into special bargains for the home market. McFarlin's Clothiers boasted that it had a long-standing policy "to give the lion's share of space to merchandise bearing Rochester labels. Imports are featured

⁹²BEN, 10 October 1920, 5.

⁹³DSB, February 1940, 24.

⁹⁴Ibid.

only in certain specialities which can only be secured abroad." Purchases would give local residents the added satisfaction of "knowing that you are helping Rochester business by wearing clothes created by Rochester labor."⁹⁵ Some of these companies were in fact manufacturing-retailing hybrids who shipped to merchants across the country but had single retail outlets in their home location.

Rochester's status as a centre for clothing manufacture, in particular men's clothing, persisted into the 1920s and 1930s.⁹⁶ The National Clothing Company, despite its "national" name, emphasized its roots in the area and in 1926 devoted a full page ad to thanking Rochesterians for their business. The company recapped its history, emphasizing that each innovation adopted by the business only helped to better serve the local market. The ad described the company as

Not the only men's store in Rochester, but one that has endeavoured to render service with courtesy, with intelligence and with profit to him who buys here. Pioneers in Rochester in the making of clothes we sell in order to give Rochester better values; Pioneers in maintaining our own representatives in foreign and domestic markets, in order that the city we serve might get the best they can produce; Pioneers here in group purchasing through association with leading stores in other cities, so that you and Rochester might share the advantages of volume buying, and have the values that cannot be secured in any other way.⁹⁷

⁹⁵RD&C, 9 October 1932, 3.

⁹⁶See McKelvey, "Men's Clothing Industry in Rochester's History," 22-31.

⁹⁷RD&C, 3 January 1926, 27.

The ad described the National's evolution in terms of the company's desire to provide Rochester with "better values." The company explained innovations in distribution or manufacture in the context of serving the community, not increasing profits.

Advertising suggested that a product's origin in one's home town might be a special source of pride. The story of the spread of national brands to ubiquity often emphasizes the "placelessness" of these products: by definition, success for these early mass marketers meant their ability to be sold *everywhere*, without appearing to favour one part of the nation over another. However, unless one hails from Atlanta or Battle Creek, it is at times easy to forget that brand names like Coca-Cola or Kellogg's originated in one specific community and thus had a special place in the hearts of local residents, even those not directly involved in its manufacture. The extent to which "localness" remained a strong selling point into the twenties and thirties is striking. Even giants of mass-market magazine advertising like the Eastman Kodak made clear their geographic roots. Well into the thirties, the company prominently identified itself as being located in "Rochester, N.Y., the Kodak City" at the bottom of national ads.

Newspaper ads, with their concentrated local exposure, could take this suggestion of place a step further. When selling to the home market, locally produced items had a special cachet, not only in terms of support for the local economy but more intrinsically, in the nature of the goods themselves. One 1923 ad described how locally-produced fashion items could serve as a point of reunion between Western New Yorkers. It described two passengers sitting in adjacent deck-chairs on a steam-ship heading out of

Hong Kong "You must come from western New York," one woman says one to the other, "for you are wearing the Eastwood pedestrian boot like mine. I bought this pair at the Eastwood store in Buffalo. My home is in Erie." Her new-found friend replies, "And I bought mine in the Eastwood store in Rochester." These shoes immediately identified their wearers with the region, a trait that Eastwood presumably felt would appeal to local readers of the ad. The company boasted of its "worldly" connections that were forged by patrons who wore their shoes far beyond the upstate region:

We have touched Asia, seen strange sights in Korea, visited a half dozen provinces in China, sauntered among the bazaars of Bombay, shivered with memories of rebellious deeds at Luchnow, heard the roar of the lion and recoiled from the snarling attack of the bengal tiger. Without moving, we have circumnavigated the globe.⁹⁸

Yet while these goods were circling the globe, they were also linking local wearers together, allowing them to reconnect in a world of exotic sights and strangers. Eastwood boots were not just American mass-produced goods; they were particular to the western New York region and could connect their wearers with home, no matter how far abroad they wandered.

On one level, then, certain "upstate styles" or locally made goods served as a means of selling specifically to the region. Conversely, not every New York style would make a successful transition to the smaller city or town. National trade magazines also recognized regional fashion tastes. The Department Store Buyer (DSB) ran an editorial about the differences between New York stores and their brethren in smaller

⁹⁸RD&C, 18 November 1923, 37.

cities. Entitled "New York is not America," the article outlined the different fashion priorities for women in smaller cities. It argued that the dress needs of a woman in a smaller city might actually be higher than that of the big-city dweller.

Fashionists find that, unlike women in New York and other large cities, the matron in the small city needs many costumes because her circle is limited and she is constantly with the same people. In New York, circles of acquaintance are likely to be so large that fewer costumes are required for the adequate wardrobe. This tendency of itself means that the few costumes of the New York woman will necessarily be better wearing and higher priced than the more numerous garments suited to the needs of the small town woman.⁹⁹

This condescending depiction of small town life as one of parties involving the same limited number of friends over and over recalls Sinclair Lewis's Main Street, where the heroine Carole tries in vain to break free of her limited social circle. Nonetheless, the Department Store Buyer was acknowledging that women in smaller cities were interested in fashion and had certain special demands because of their distinctive social engagements.

An ongoing feature in the same periodical reveals that even the makers of fashion in New York City acknowledged some limits in their efforts to dictate to the hinterland. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, Department Store Buyer ran "In the marts of trade," a column of humorous fiction describing encounters between a model in a chic New York City dress house and a buyer from upstate. Marge, the model, aims to show

⁹⁹DSB, February 1940, 34.

the hapless buyer the latest lines from the runways of the city. Mr. Adelstein, buyer from a nameless Buffalo department store, tries his best to select dresses he feels will move back home. It is not surprising that the DSB would feature articles relating to Manhattan: most buyers from around the country made the trip to New York once a year, if not once a season. The interaction between buyers and New York dress houses would have been familiar ground for the journal's readers and as such, would provide a rich source of material. One might imagine many scenarios where the "hick" from out of town becomes the object of ridicule as he clashes with a modern woman from the metropolis.

The humour of the feature does not, however, derive from Mr. Adelstein's lack of sophistication or inability to cope with haute couture. Rather, the two players often manipulate each other and enter into complicated negotiations before Adelstein finalizes his dress orders. And it is often Adelstein who prevails in these vignettes, due to his knowledge of his community and what will be practical to keep in stock in his store. He may defer to Marge in some matters of style, but in the end he is the one being courted by the dress house to purchase their new lines. Marge's willingness to follow any trend, no matter how ridiculous, is as much a source of amusement for the reader as is Mr. Adelstein's tendency to pick more conservative fashions for his customers. The two characters act as stereotypes not only of the metropolis and hinterland but of gender roles. Marge is flighty and emotional, concerned with fashion and frivolity; Adelstein is practical and rational, concerned only with the bottom line. The choice of the name

"Adelstein" for the buyer further fit the stereotype of the Jewish businessman involved in the rag trade and retail industry.¹⁰⁰

In a typical encounter, Adelstein comes to New York in May, seeking washable pastels and other sensible wares. Marge, in contrast, is already anticipating the fall season, and offers him black broadcloth dresses more suitable for November.¹⁰¹ In January, Marge proffers sheer dresses, causing Adelstein to sputter, "Of course, it wouldn't interest you, but we're having a blizzard up in Buffalo. . ."¹⁰² On another occasion, Adelstein complains when Marge shows him the newest fashion, sombre dresses with no trimmings which look like uniforms. Marge placates him by modifying the severe new dresses she is showing with white lace collars, pleats, and belts, and Adelstein happily orders fifty dresses in a full range of colours and sizes.¹⁰³ Each player in the drama feels smug about manipulating the other. Marge is happy to secure a large order of dresses and Adelstein is pleased to have obtained the more conservative styles which he feels will better satisfy his customers.

¹⁰⁰For an exploration of prominent Jewish retailers, see Leon A. Harris, Merchant Princes: An Intimate History of Jewish Families Who Built Great Department Stores (New York: Harper & Row, 1979).

¹⁰¹DSB, June, 1939, 22.

¹⁰²DSB, January 1939, 68.

¹⁰³DSB, March 1940, 25-6.

Adelstein appears in September with an eye towards dresses for the Christmas season. Marge attempts to sell him a ludicrous red sequined ski-suit with a suede seat and is insulted when he suggests that she provide him with his usual order of sequined dresses with jewelled belts. Adelstein shocks Marge by telling her that he modified the red chiffon evening dresses she had sold him last year, adding ostrich feathers and sashes.

Marge (tartly) - How were the markdowns?

Mr. A. (gleefully) - Didn't take any! Sold two dresses and put the other eighty-eight in the store-room and now they're all ready for this Christmas.¹⁰⁴

At this, Marge faints and Adelstein claims victory. Besides squabbling over the appropriate attire for the season, Adelstein and Marge clash over sizing. Marge presses Adelstein to buy smaller sizes, to which he snorts, "Buffalo's not the corn belt, miss, but it's not a city of midgets either."¹⁰⁵ Her protests that lots of stores are selling size tens are met with the observation that lots of stores are going out of business as well.

Although Adelstein dutifully checks out the newest styles on his trips to New York, he edits his choices to suit the body types and the tastes of his clientele. While some of the styles shown by Marge might be appropriate for young women, Adelstein knows his business depends on pleasing older matrons. When Marge pitches a particularly youthful style, Adelstein rebels:

¹⁰⁴DSB, Sept. 1940, 23.

¹⁰⁵DSB, Jan. 1939, 68-70.

Mr. A - Who cares about the young crowd, Miss? My customers are all middle-aged married women and they want. . .

Marge - Don't tell me! I know! Black dinner dresses! Then they'll love our new strapless black chiffon.

Mr. A - Strapless! (Ed. Note: The poor guy practically swoons. . .)

Marge - Look, Mr. Adelstein. Nothing above the bust-line!

Mr. A. (livid) - No, and nothing above the eyebrows, either! Now, listen, Miss. I've wasted enough time here. If this house isn't smart enough to know that conservative women still want black dinner dresses, I'll take my business elsewhere.¹⁰⁶

Adelstein knows the preferences and the limits of his customers and will not risk spending his entire budget on styles which will not sell at home. When Marge tries to get him to be a little more daring in his ordering, Mr. A. protests piteously, "But Marge, every time you make me buy imagination, I gotta take mark-downs."¹⁰⁷

This process of negotiation is a recurring motif in the serial. One encounter has Marge wearing a party dress shaped like a Christmas tree - complete with flashing lights and jingling bells. An alarmed Adelstein persuades her to sell him some plain black and white dresses, asserting that Buffalo loves simpler styles. He is willing to indulge Marge to a point, allowing her to show him outrageous styles as long as she eventually provides tamer versions, or in his words, "dresses to sell." In exasperation, Marge agrees to give him what he wants, acknowledging that all of her other customers

¹⁰⁶DSB, November 1938, 63.

¹⁰⁷DSB, September, 1939, 22.

also favoured plain woollens.¹⁰⁸ In the summer, Marge tries to sell Adelstein some extreme evening dresses with an outlandish stars-and-stripes motif, calling this the American Way line. When Adelstein rejects the dresses outright, she grouches, "I can see there's no point in wasting our masterpieces on you. However, we've developed some *modified* America Way for the volume trade." The buyer is delighted, for these dresses are so modified that they are exactly what he is looking for.¹⁰⁹

The timing of orders is another issue which causes continual conflict between the two characters. During a February buying trip, Adelstein makes the mistake of hoping to reorder a style of navy blue dress which is currently popular. He tries to convince Marge that despite her assertion that "navy's through," he was constantly getting requests in the store for more. Marge is unable to think of current sales, only future seasons:

Marge (genuinely baffled) - I can't understand you, Mr. Adelstein. You're always asking for the things women are wearing now.

Mr. A. (choking but accustomed to frustration) - Did you ever hear of the law of supply and demand?¹¹⁰

The joke here, of course, is that demand in the fashion business is highly unpredictable and always based on the next new thing. Marge claims to be able to predict what outrageous styles will be popular in the coming months, but is bewildered when Adelstein wants to obtain more of a style he has already ordered.

¹⁰⁸DSB, September 1939, 23.

¹⁰⁹DSB, August, 1939, 25.

¹¹⁰DSB, Feb. 1939, 43.

And no matter how early Adelstein appears in the Seventh Avenue showroom, it is never early enough. In September, the traditional time for Christmas orders, Mr. A. is frustrated as Marge has already moved on to the spring season.

Marge (unheeding) - It's the melting season, Mr. A! You've completely melted me. I *will* show you our new spring line and yours will be the first eyes to feast on it. Won't Buffalo be thrilled?

Mr. A. (frantically) - But, Marge! For Spring thrills Buffalo can wait. Right now. . .

Marge (gaily) - Thrills wait for no one, Mr. A. Open your arms to Spring!

Mr. A. (sobbing) - But I want Christmas! Here it is only September and I haven't had Christmas yet.

Part of the humour in the interactions between Marge and Adelstein lies in the fact that he is constantly behind the times, trying in vain to keep up with the young and flighty Marge. This could in one sense be seen as a comment on the fashion tastes of his clientele, always just a step behind New York. Yet for the readers of Department Store Buyer, many of them out-of-town-buyers themselves, the satire also touched on the failure by big-city manufacturers to adapt to local markets.

Readers of the trade journal would also have recognized Adelstein's frustration with the acceleration of the calendar urged by Marge. Buyers faced continual pressure from manufacturers to place orders as early as possible. A poem in another section of the DSB suggests that buyers viewed the hurried schedule for orders with a mixture of amusement and resignation. As the buyers began their all-important round of Christmas ordering, the poem acknowledged,

September may seem early to
 Begin the round-up, but the fact is
 We all must follow standard practice,
 And brood on skates and skis, although
 It will be months before there's snow.
 Come heat, come drought, we dare not pause. . .
 Them's orders, straight from Santa Claus.¹¹¹

Complaints about the four-month frenzy of preparation that went into each successful Christmas sales season peppered the articles in the Merchandise Manager every September.

The hijinks of Marge and Adelstein would only have been funny to buyers reading the magazine if the power struggle between them contained a kernel of truth. The outrageous items offered by Marge are amusing because they would be immediately rejected by the "average consumer" upstate. The readers of Department Store Buyer might have seen themselves in Mr. Adelstein, forced to deal with New York houses that pushed styles that might be briefly popular but would not translate into solid sales in smaller towns and cities. Adelsteins' frustration with Marge underscores how buyers, and by extension department stores, in smaller cities negotiated to bring the "big city" home to their clients while maintaining a distinct sensibility.

Stores in centres like Buffalo and Rochester tried to walk the line between "cosmopolitan" and "provincial," taking the best of what the mass market had to offer, but presenting themselves as the old-fashioned remnants of a bygone retail era.

¹¹¹DSB, September, 1939, 13.

Stores systematized their operations and followed the latest business practices described in the trade press and by university business schools. They carried a host of national brands and watched trends in national magazines. Simultaneously, they asserted their distinct ability to respond to the needs of their local market. The more fashion-conscious department stores assured consumers that they were being kept abreast of the latest style trends, carefully selected by the caring local merchant. With buyers around the globe, stores like Hengerer's in Buffalo or Sibley's in Rochester asserted that they were presenting an edited version of "New York style" or "Parisian fashion" for their clients.

This push and pull between the hub and hinterland complicates our understanding of the evolution of a national market in America. The changes in retailing and marketing which are associated with the growth of a consumer culture in the United States in the late nineteenth century are often associated with a homogenizing force, uprooting Americans from their local identities. Even as areas across the nation were flooded with the same goods, sellers took pains to differentiate themselves. Local pride and traditions were modified, not eliminated, in the spread of modern retailing and marketing during the twenties and thirties.

A regional perspective reveals that local loyalties died hard. Consumers were encouraged to take pride in products made in their own communities; merchants in smaller cities forcefully resisted the suggestion that any store could serve their particular market as well. Examination of these changes "on the ground" reveals that the spread of national phenomena like the mass-market magazine and nationally branded goods could

have a distinct meaning from the perspective of the smaller retailer outside of New York City. Eager to demonstrate their ability to keep up with national trends, shopkeepers in smaller cities measured themselves against reports in trade magazines and national magazine advertising. At the same time, they used a language of localism to differentiate themselves from metropolitan competitors.

CHAPTER THREE

The "Chain Store Question" and the Independent Retailer

Wegmans serve Rochester trading area EXCLUSIVELY. Being in close touch with each store, and with the wants of each customer assures a higher order of service. No red-tape and chain-store detail at Wegmans. No long-distance arm-chair executives to support in other cities. . . . Every Rochester family benefits from Wegman home-ownership. . . . Your own comparison will show you the benefits of shopping at Wegman home-owned food markets - where your dollars come back home to you, because Wegman's in turn, spend them right here in Rochester.

-- Newspaper ad for Wegmans groceries, 1936¹

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, independent merchants in Rochester and Buffalo looked to the "big stores" of New York as competitors for local dollars. The cachet of Fifth Avenue, the increased ease of transportation and the coverage such stores received in national media prompted smaller merchants to fight back, stressing their ability to provide competitive goods, while paying special attention to local needs. As time wore on, however, it was the chain store, not Macy's, which loomed larger and larger in the imagination of the independent merchant. Department stores themselves had faced opposition from small retailers during the late nineteenth century. Smaller merchants had viewed the arrival of "Boston Stores" like Sibley, Lindsay & Curr as a dangerous new hybrid. Carrying a number of lines under one roof,

¹RD&C, 20 November 1936, 11.

offering one price for all, these stores were thought to undermine the traditional relationship between store owner and patron, gaining unfair advantage because their volume of sales encouraged manufacturers to offer them better deals.

By the 1920s, Rochester and Buffalo's department stores had assumed the position of business leaders in their communities. No longer frightening new forms of operation, they were now familiar and seen as committed to the area. Moreover, operations like Sibley, Lindsay & Curr were anything but small businesses, having grown over the years into considerable operations with international buying offices set up in other cities.² Yet in terms of their images within their communities, the department stores were unassailable. As "independents," often owned by the same families who had founded the business, these stores asserted their place as part of the local fabric, with a stake in the success of the small and mid-sized cities in which they were located. The arrival of the chain store would challenge this dominant position, and put small merchants and larger department stores in these cities on the same side.

The chains put locally based department stores on the defensive in much the same way that department stores had put small retailers on the spot decades earlier. But with the arrival of the chains, small retailers faced an even greater threat. As Jonathan Bean notes, in the chains, smaller merchants had found a foe worthy of their mounting anxiety:

²Sibley, Lindsay & Curr had attained the 10 million mark in annual sales by 1920. At the peak of that decade's prosperity, they rang in \$13,107,305 in net sales in 1927. This figure would drop dramatically in the early 1930s, but still remain around the \$8 million range. Homer Hoyt & Associates, "Market Survey & Appraisal," March 1953, Table 18, Sibley Collection, Carton "Annual Reports," Strong Museum.

The verbal heat generated by the controversy over department stores and mail-order catalogs was out of all proportion to the amount of market share that small retailers lost to these mass-marketers. As late as 1920, department stores and mail-order firms accounted for less than 10 percent of total retail sales. But small merchants soon faced an even greater threat in the form of the chain store, which extended the "visible hand" into retailing and into America's small towns.³

At first, these new retailers were thought of as insignificant for merchants who had built up a loyal local clientele. With time, however, local merchants began to pay attention, first copying their management and buying techniques. Later, independent stores emphasized their local roots and community spirit to fight the encroachment of this new form of merchandiser, discrediting interloping chains for their ties to other areas and their perceived lack of commitment to the cities in which their branches were located.

Hindsight suggests that independent merchants had a lot to lose with the coming of chain groceries, druggists, five-and-dimes, and department stores. Yet local retailers, particularly independent department stores, did not immediately perceive the chains as a threat, initially viewing their new rivals as a possible source of renewed vigour and new retailing ideas. As late as January 1928, the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal could put a positive spin on the increased competition brought by chain stores. The article, "Why These Independents Do Not Fear Chain Stores," trumpeted the "good fight" put up by intelligent and aggressive merchants. According to this article, some independents tried to match the chains on advertised items, while others relied on service to persuade

³Bean, Beyond the Broker State, 26.

customers of the value of buying "quality" rather than "discount" merchandise. One department store owner from Wisconsin went so far as to announce that the arrival of the chains was good for business, for it shook the independent merchant out of a stupor of complacency:

In reality chain store expansion has been very valuable to the independent. It has shown them that if they are to remain in business they must become merchandisers rather than just storekeepers. Many stores have gone along from year to year in the same rut with no thought of placing their organization on a systematic basis. . . . The chain store has changed all of that. If many of the independent merchants would give more time and attention to increasing the efficiency of their own business and a little less to "crabbing" about conditions there would be fewer chain stores and more individual retailers making a regular yearly net profit.⁴

He argued that the key to the chain stores' success was not volume, as many smaller retailers complained, but the systematization of their business, a tactic that could easily be adopted by the independents.⁵

This emphasis on store systematization was echoed throughout retailing industry literature. "Scientific training of managers and other personnel" was ranked number one in a list of seven "common elements of success" for all retailers, chain or independent, in a 1929 Journal article.⁶ Even partisan observers like Godfrey Lebhar, editor of Chain

⁴"Why These Independents Do Not Fear Chain Stores," DGMTJ, January 1929, 40.

⁵Or this tactic could at least be adopted by independents of a certain size. David Monod argues that the independent merchants in Canada who were able to emulate large-scale business were larger stores. "Shoestring traders" were left behind in this process of modernization. Monod, Store Wars, 150.

⁶DGMTJ, January 1929, 48.

Store Age and outspoken advocate of the advantages of chain retailing, conceded that chain stores enjoyed little advantage over retailers who had modernized their operations. He claimed,

There isn't the slightest indication that the chain store will ever drive the really efficient independent out of business. Even those who protest most against the growth of the chains are constantly pointing out that the independent who is efficient, the independent who adopts modern methods, both in his buying and in his selling, has nothing whatever to fear from chain store competition, and if there is any doubt whatever on that point, I am sure that those of us who actually operate chain stores are in a position to confirm it.⁷

Lebhar reserved his praise for the "efficient independent." In his view, systematization and streamlining could usher in a new era of retailing populated by both chains and small retailers. Those who did not adopt up-to-date methods would become extinct. There was no question about the value of embracing the "modern."

The chains themselves argued that it was no fault of theirs if independent retailers could not keep up. As one editorialist noted indignantly in 1926, if a grocer continued to use 1776 methods while other merchant operated on a 20th century basis, he would be "criticized, outlawed, reviled and . . . destroyed."⁸ Store owners who did not adapt, in this view, deserved to go out of business. The Chain Store Manager sketched the transformation of the chain of distribution, noting its advancement with satisfaction.

The progress of distribution of the necessities of life has gone a long ways from the original trapper who handed his skin overcoat to the ultimate

⁷Quoted in "Meeting Chain Store Competition," DGMTJ, January 1929, 43.

⁸ Chain Store Manager (CSM), March 1926, 28.

consumer. Now a thousand laborers produce sugar at the opposite side of the globe and a thousand grocery clerks hand it over the counter to a million people. If this progress has taken place why should anyone expect the original one-store merchant to survive in the face of all the changes that have gone on around him . . . unless he changes with the times and becomes a marcher in this parade of progress?⁹

From the perspective of the chains, the independent who failed to "get in step" with this parade was perversely committed to outdated practices.

The debate over chain stores was thus not about whether their "professional" methods of operation were superior. Because the debate was framed by a Darwinian understanding of the evolution of business, the only question was whether these methods gave an *unfair* advantage to the chains. Independents with the proper initiative could adopt strategies like departmentalization and scientific training of personnel, so these kinds of tactics were not seen as problematic. Other advantages enjoyed by the chains, like special deals from suppliers, were attacked as not falling within the parameters of "square dealing" in part because they could not be easily copied by independent stores.

In his account of the changing culture of shopkeeping in Canada, David Monod argues that this emphasis on "progressive retailing" led to a homogenization of stores and business practices. By following the advice of suppliers and retail experts, he contends, "Retailers were being encouraged to think of themselves as on a par with big businesses, and in so doing they were being led to conform to the demands of the great

⁹*Ibid.*, 23.

transformation that had accompanied mass production."¹⁰ As we have seen in the previous chapter, however, evidence suggests that while merchants did indeed look to both manufacturers and industry experts for suggestions, not all of the advice proffered was accepted without question. This was not a process of dictatorship, with statisticians and retail giants prescribing universal formulae to be adopted immediately by all merchants across America. At the same time as they were being encouraged to embrace new retailing methods, local merchants were encouraged to adapt this advice to the particular circumstances of their stores and their communities. And they often came up with their own innovations, taking part in a dialogue, although admittedly an imbalanced one. The successful independent appropriated the best of the "new retailing" methods, while trying to maintain those practices which gave the store its distinct character.

Group buying was another example of a strategy adopted from the chains to make the independent retailers more profitable. By banding together to make purchases, independent stores from smaller centres hoped to attain the same purchasing clout as their national competitors. A new regular feature in the Merchants' Trade Journal, entitled "Meeting Chain Store Competition," explored group buying as an option for independent retailers. The pooling of resources amongst the independents was declared the "way out" for stores, "the Moses which [would] lead them out of the wilderness of chain store and

¹⁰Monod, Store Wars, 171.

mail order store competition."¹¹ The Pelletier Company of Sioux City, Iowa, made group buying the focus of an ad campaign, noting that chain stores often emphasized the advantages that came from cooperative buying. Pelletier's argued that they had joined with 65 of America's great independent stores to enjoy the strength of group buying, yet carefully adapted their business to remain in touch with local conditions.¹² The DGMTJ argued that a "voluntary chain" of independents retained the "personal touch with the local community."¹³ As Monod has noted, options like systematization and group buying were most feasible for medium- to large-size independent merchants. He argues that while "everyone could see what the bigger businesses were doing; not everyone could afford to copy them."¹⁴

Still, many retailers, particularly department stores, did adopt at least some aspects of chain-store operation. Local newspaper advertisements carefully positioned the retailers involved in group buying as "community stores" who offered the advantages of the chain store (cheap prices, scale in buying) while remaining "able to select style merchandise to fit the individual needs of the community which they serve, something

¹¹"Group Buying - How Stores Are Using It Profitably," DGMTJ, January 1929, 42.

¹²"Pelletier's Meet Chains with Powerful Pep," DGMTJ, June 1929, 36.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Monod, Store Wars, 191.

the chains are handicapped in doing."¹⁵ Retail pioneer Edward A. Filene, of Filene's department store in Boston, predicted that buying pools and associations of retailers in groups would "give the independents buying power as strong as that of the chains."¹⁶

Buffalo and Rochester stores experimented with various forms of group buying. As early as 1905, the Wm. Hengerer shop of Buffalo had become part of a buying group, although its ads continued to present the store as an "independent" with local roots and traditions.¹⁷ The Duffy-Powers store ran an ad in 1931 explaining that the store was, and would continue to be, "owned and operated exclusively by Rochesterians - for Rochesterians," but would now participate in a joint-buying agreement. Ad copy stressed that the store was "controlled by the same families as always," and that the president of the company was the son of the founder of the business. The agreement with 106 other stores would allow them to bring new values to their home market. Joining the organization meant that manufacturers made concessions to ensure orders, and Duffy-Powers would pass on the savings to the shoppers of Rochester. The start of the group buying venture also coincided with the beginning of a new cash-only policy, suggesting that at least some of the older traditions of trust between merchant and customer were to be jettisoned in the pursuit of large-scale efficiency.¹⁸ In 1937, Sibley's of Rochester

¹⁵DGMTJ, January 1929, 43.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Foster, "Brief History of Wm. Hengerer Co. Store."

¹⁸RD&C, 1 October 1931, 8.

stopped supporting its own buying office in New York City and became a member of the Frederick Atkins Buying Office. The organization, a group of "30 independently-owned, non-competitive, department stores throughout the nation" hoped to use the combined buying power of thirty large stores to get low prices for Rochester consumers.¹⁹

Joining these types of organizations raised some questions about who actually was setting store policy. In 1929, the New York representative of a group buying organization reported to the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal that buyers from other communities often resisted the influence of the central buying office, not wanting to completely centralize buying (and possibly limit their own influence).²⁰ Stores were also careful to counter the suggestion that joining a buying group meant that distant bureaucrats had control of a local institution. In 1929, E.W. Edwards & Son of Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse used ads in the Buffalo Evening News to explain how store policies were set from within. The company claimed that it was able to act as a "new kind of Santa Claus for Buffalo people." The store was a family company, "now in the hands of its third generation of founders," and boasted that it made decisions with the welfare of the local community in mind. While chain stores might have to adopt policies to please executives in other cities, Edwards was different: "Because of its independent ownership, entirely apart from any national chain organization, its policies as to prices are

¹⁹"The History of Sibley's, 1868-1955," n.d. [1955], Sibley Collection, Carton "History 1868 - 1926," Folder "Histories," Strong Museum, 21.

²⁰"Group Buying - How Stores Are Using it Profitably," DGMTJ, January 1929, 42.

entirely its own." As an example of this independence, the store announced a new selling strategy for Christmas in 1929. Instead of featuring a special gift department with marked-down prices, all merchandise would remain the same price all year.²¹

Chain Christmas marketing seemed particularly ripe for attack from independents stressing their fine-tuned local feeling. W. Bruce Philip, secretary of the Alameda County Pharmaceutical Association in California, wrote a spirited defense of the independent retailer in 1931, in which he drew a line between the local merchant's sincere Christmas window and the opportunistic displays of his chain competitor:

The chain store, unlike the independent store, has its windows and policies guided from afar. On a certain day it displays apples in all its branches; on another day cabbages are featured; on another day it may be garlic. These people dress their windows for profit and do not show or feel any local enthusiasm. Of course, at Christmas time everybody celebrates by making their windows part of the Christmas spirit, but there is this difference: the independent store catches the real enthusiasm of the holiday and often makes its decorations local or personal, while the chain store makes a Christmas display from only a mercenary standpoint, that of more dollars per holiday.²²

Philip drew a distinct line between the "mercenary" chain and the spiritual and civic-minded independent, dismissing the notion that the independent might also design his windows for profit as well as Christmas sentiment. In his view, if independents prospered, it was not because they were stooping to the calculating levels of the chains,

²¹BEN, 18 November 1929, 13.

²² W. Bruce Philip, "The Position of the Independent Retailer," Commonwealth, Part Two: Official Journal of the Commonwealth Club of California, San Francisco, 7 no. 28 (July 14, 1931): 224, McGarry Papers, Box 2, Folder "Chain Stores - Correspondence and Clippings" University Archives, State University of New York at Buffalo (UBA).

but because they were intrinsically more adaptable. The independent merchant, he noted, was more flexible to change, for he was able to "accept at once the best that any group or independent offers," unlike the slow-moving bureaucracies that dominated chain stores.²³

Philip was not alone in his characterization of chain bureaucracies as problematic. Some industry observers suggested that independents might do best to wait and see just how successful some chain policies actually were before adopting them. As late as 1929, Harvard's Bureau of Business Research suggested that independent department stores were tending to show lower operating costs than chain department stores. According to a report in Business Week, chain bureaucracies did not always earn their keep: too many chain stores were "paying for central organizations not yet organized to save more than they cost."²⁴ Higher advertising, purchasing, and "professional service" costs, including the maintenance of central offices, were thought to inflate chain expenses.

Chain stores themselves recognized that the independent merchants in particular markets enjoyed certain advantages. Speaking to a convention of domestic science teachers in Des Moines, Iowa, a representative of the J.C. Penney Company spoke frankly of trying to build up community good will for Penney stores by visiting state, county and district fairs throughout the middle and far west, in order to make themselves

²³Ibid., 229.

²⁴The Business Week, July 16, 1930, n.p. BBR Office Files, Carton "Publicity: Dept. Stores," BLHU.

known to farmers and residents of smaller towns. The Penney Company set its sights on the trade that went to local merchants simply by "right of heritage."²⁵ The S.S. Kresge Co. and Montgomery Ward took a more proactive stance in cultivating local goodwill, realizing that "they had a public relations problem to solve."²⁶ Charity work and local involvement became matters of corporate policy, not simply to be left to the whim of the individual manager. In this sense, we can think of new chain store branches as imitating the established merchant in allying themselves with local causes and concerns.

Chain stores worked hard to get a feel for the various communities where stores were located. The director of Personnel for J.C. Penney in the early 1930s stipulated that the manager of a new store should have lived in a city the same size as the one where the new store was to be located. The new manager would arrive in town at least a month before the store opened for business, to talk to people and to peruse the windows of other stores "trying to analyze the type of merchandise that appeals to that community and the kind of store that will be especially liked. He [would begin] to sense the special needs of that town."²⁷ Although the layout of each Penney Store was set out by the company, the manager had discretion in buying stock and arranging departments depending on the needs of the city. The general manager of a small chain of drug stores in Colorado

²⁵"Why Chains Strive for What Independents Have," DGMTJ, September 1928, 37.

²⁶Theodore N. Beckman and Herman C. Nolen, The Chain Store Problem: A Critical Analysis (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1938) 70.

²⁷Chain Store Age (CSA), April 1932, 221.

argued that there should be a certain level of individualism, even among chain branches in the same town:

We cannot switch managers easily, for we must have managers whose personalities fit in well with the personalities of the people in their communities. For example, the man in charge of our store located in the railroad district must be able to handle railroad men and their families. I manage the main store myself because it is located in the foreign section and it is difficult to find a man who knows the people and their languages as well as I do.²⁸

This emphasis on the fit between the store and its surroundings was recognized as an important trait of the successful independent, one which the chains were wise to copy.

Trade publications acknowledged that chain store managers often kept an eye on the activities of the independent merchant. The Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal noted that in addition to exchanging management ideas internally within their organizations, chain stores also adopted ideas from their independent counterparts. One editorial argued,

The Journal can testify from its own records that chain stores such as J.C. Penney and others are constantly reading trade papers and profiting from this very "interchange of ideas" which the Journal and other publications provide.²⁹

J.C. Penney not only subscribed to the Journal, it ran ads in the periodical for personnel, highlighting the training offered by the company and the opportunities for advancement within the organization. In advertising in a medium aimed at independent merchants, the

²⁸CSA, April 1928, 29.

²⁹"Some Plain Facts for Independent and Chain Stores," DGMTJ, January 1929, 48.

Penney Co. appropriated the language of self-sufficiency to override any qualms readers might have about working for a chain organization. One 1929 testimonial from a happy Penney employee described how in his previous position, he had enjoyed a good salary but had "little hope of self-betterment or of even gaining financial independence."³⁰ Now, working for Penney he felt assured of a successful future. Another ad asked, "Are you a *Partner* in the business?" and offered young men "without any capital" the chance to become partners in a progressive business. It exhorted the reader to "Measure yourself against our requirements! Are you well educated; have you a thorough grounding in the dry goods, clothing or shoe business; are you between the ages of 21 and 35; have you lived cleanly?"³¹

By listing not only a level of business experience but a certain moral standard for prospective employees, J.C. Penney attempted to undercut the suggestion that chains were run by unscrupulous managers. In line with this, the company used a certain definition of manliness to attract potential employees: it only wanted "men who can look us straight in the eye," "red-blooded men" who recognized that a partnership was more valuable than a mere job.³² Implicit in the Penney recruitment campaign was the need to overcome any sense that chain store employees were less autonomous and thus less manly than their independent counterparts. Emphasizing the masculinity of financial

³⁰DGMTJ, November 1929, 168.

³¹DGMTJ, September 1929, 208.

³²DGMTJ, November 1929, 168; DGMTJ September 1929, 208.

independence, the company offered the chance of a "partnership" to clerks, assistant buyers or lower-level managers who presently worked for independent merchants, and thus read the Journal, but might consider jumping ship to join the chains. The "interchange of ideas" between the chains and independents thus could also involve a swapping of personnel.

In addition to their close relationship with the towns they served, the independents were thought to have another weapon in their corner: their ability to provide specialized service could not be duplicated by the chains. In a 1938 study of chain store competition, Professors Theodore Beckman and Herman Nolen of Ohio State University argued that the very structure of the chain operation made personalized service less of a priority:

The independent merchant usually realizes that he must serve his individual customers as they wish to be served or his entire business existence is imperiled. The chain store manager, on the other hand, feels that even though the success of his particular store may be of considerable importance to his own career, the success or failure of the chain is not dependent on the accomplishments of this one single unit. Customers are often aware of that attitude and appreciate the individual attention the independent merchant can give them.³³

For working-class consumers, the personal relationship between the smaller merchant and the surrounding community was particularly important. University of Buffalo economist Dr. Edmund McGarry observed in 1923 that Buffalo's immigrant population had more immediate reasons for avoiding chain stores. In an article published by the Bureau of Business and Social Research's Statistical Survey, he noted that these largely working-

³³Bechman and Nolen, Chain Store Problem, 64.

class consumers realized "their language handicaps in buying from American stores," and often had few options but "to purchase their goods from merchants of their own race or those who can speak their language."³⁴

In her study of Chicago's working class during the same period, Lizabeth Cohen describes a similar tendency for ethnic workers to favour neighbourhood independents over chain stores.³⁵ Working-class consumers would forgo any price savings in order to patronize stores that had staff who spoke their language and that offered more flexible credit and services like cheque-cashing. Cohen contends that although Chicago's neighbourhood ethnic grocers were successful in staving off the influence of the chains and supermarkets during the 1920s, their situation was precarious. She notes, "So long as chain stores took little interest in the working-class market, foreign groceries and neighbourhood drugstores thrived. Once chains and large commercial interests became more aggressive, though, alternative market arrangements became severely threatened."³⁶ While Cohen dates this change to the mid 1930s in Chicago, the timeline for this change seems to be slightly later in Buffalo, where as late as 1939, University of Buffalo economist McGarry contended that chain competition had not threatened the livelihood of most small grocers in the working-class neighbourhoods of Buffalo:

³⁴Edmund McGarry, "Retail Trade Areas in Buffalo," SS 6 no. 8A (April 1923), 11.

³⁵Cohen, Making a New Deal, 100-120.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 120.

It would seem more reasonable that these stores, scattered throughout the area and catering to a population which, though price-conscious, have little opportunity to compare prices, enjoy a monopolistic position which enables them to charge somewhat higher prices than are charged elsewhere. Furthermore, it is significant that stores of this character have been little affected by the development of voluntary chains since their volume of sales and methods of doing business seldom approach the standards set by these organizations.³⁷

McGarry argued that these smaller stores provided a valuable service to their clientele, selling smaller quantities than large grocers, remaining open longer hours and even providing extra services such as cheque cashing. He cautioned, however, against seeing these small stores as beneficent members of the working-class community. In order to remain profitable, they had to charge much more than large stores or chains with superior buying power. As a result, he noted, "it may mean that the less fortunate parts of the population, those having least with which to pay, in turn pay most for what they get."³⁸ While Cohen has stressed the solidarity between the small grocer and the community he served, this relationship was also exploitative to some extent. In working-class neighbourhoods, geography prevented consumers from comparison shopping. McGarry explored the behaviour of grocery shoppers by income group across the city and noted that while housewives from high-income neighbourhoods preferred to drive to what he termed "shopping sub-centers," to compare prices and look at a wide variety of goods, those in poorer sections often did not have access to cars and might find even street car

³⁷SS, 14 no. 7A (March 1939): 24.

³⁸Ibid.

fares too expensive. These patrons frequented corner grocery stores "as their needs arise, buying from meal to meal."³⁹

Yet there was no simple equation relating income and level of chain patronage. While working-class consumers might feel more comfortable patronizing neighbourhood grocers, those facing hard times could find the lower prices of a chain store worth a special trip. On the other end of the spectrum, families with high incomes were often more sympathetic to the notion of the independent merchant, and more able to spend money according to principle, rather than price. A study of attitudes towards chains in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois in 1931 indicates that people of very different income levels might share anti-chain sentiment, although for different reasons. Paul D. Converse of the National Association of Teachers of Marketing and Advertising identified two groups of occupations that were "particularly hostile" to chain stores: the local business men and the building trades. Respondents to Converse's survey who belonged to these two groups were 60 percent opposed to chains. Opposition to chains thus might make strange bedfellows, including local business owners who feared chain competition and unionized workers who viewed chain labour policies with mistrust. In contrast, "[n]on-union labor, executives, and salesmen show the most friendliness for the chains," revealing that income level alone was not enough to determine one's position on the issue.⁴⁰

³⁹SS 14 no. 7A (March 1939): 24.

⁴⁰Paul D. Converse, "Prices and Serices of Chain and Independent Stores in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, National Association of Teacers of Marketing and

There was also often a gap between respondents' stated attitudes toward chain stores or independents, and their actual buying behaviour. While 36.9% of families from the lowest income bracket (earning \$1500 or less per year) claimed to favour chains, only 16.1% actually bought from them, suggesting that perhaps geography played a great role in determining their patronage. For families on the other end of the financial spectrum, the idea of patronizing chains was less appealing in sectors like clothing, where the cachet of buying from an independent outweighed any possible cost savings of chain patronage.

Not all retailers were willing to leave it to the consumer to select which type of store organization was preferable. Some smaller shopkeepers argued that the way to compete would be to educate the public about the cost to local institutions if people patronized chains. Although they might enjoy lower prices in the short term by patronizing the chains, consumers would ultimately contribute to the demise of their own communities. The editor of the Michigan Tradesman argued that while the independent kept bank deposits in the community and invested locally,

The chain store, on the contrary, sends the entire receipts of the store (less rent and wages paid the store manager and his clerk) to the headquarters of the chain system in Detroit or elsewhere, to be immediately transferred to New York, where they are absorbed by high priced executives and clerks and divided among the greedy stockholders of the organization. This steady stream of money, constantly flowing out of town every week, never

to return, must ultimately result in the complete impoverishment of the community. It is a process of slow but sure starvation.⁴¹

This stream of money was understood to flow only one way; it was assumed that the absentee executives and rapacious stockholders had little incentive to reinvest back in the towns and smaller cities which were home to chain branches. Any consumer who patronized the chain store instead of the regular merchant was thus "placing an embargo on the further progress of his community" by contributing to business stagnation and lowered property values.⁴² By making the public aware of the consequences of their buying habits, the editor argued, merchants could encourage civic-minded consumers to avoid chain stores and waive any personal short-term savings which might have negative long-term consequences for their home towns.

In a full-page ad in the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle, Butterick, publishers of national magazines including The Delineator and Everybody's Magazine, offered another way for independents to "fight fire with fire": by selling national brands.⁴³ Historians of marketing have often described the emergence of national brands as part of a

⁴¹The Editor of the Michigan Tradesman, comments in Modern Merchant and Grocery World, April 13, 1929, quoted by James L. Palmer, Assistant Professor of Marketing, University of Chicago, in "Economic and Social Aspects of Chain Stores," an address given before the Iowa Association of Economists and Sociologists, May 10, 1929, McGarry Papers, Box 2 "Chain Stores: Correspondence and Clippings 1928-1929," UBA, 5

⁴²Ibid., 5.

⁴³RD&C, 3 November 1920, 3.

transformation which stripped small retailers of their power. In this view, independent merchants were under siege from both chain stores and national manufacturers who wanted to erode their power in the local market. Susan Strasser, for example, argues that brand names undermined the discretionary power of the small retailer at the point of sale:

[Small retailers] could attempt to respond to the mass merchandisers' low prices by substituting private brands or brands. But more and more of their customers asked for Ivory soap and Baker's cocoa; national advertisers were training them to "refuse all substitutes." Against these brands - and against the systematic methods that gave the mass retailers so much power - independent merchants stood little chance.⁴⁴

David Monod similarly argues that retailers lost influence in the minds of consumers when goods became associated with the manufacturer, not the seller. Larger stores and chains became "models to be emulated" because they knew how to promote the type of image desired by national brands.⁴⁵ Nationally branded goods, in this view, worked to the advantage of chain stores, whose bulk buying power allowed them to undercut the independents. Yet for observers at the time, the relationship between independent stores and branded goods was not so clearly antithetical.

Instead of seeing national brands as part of a revolution in distribution which would spell the demise of the small store, independent merchants were encouraged by manufacturers to view national brands as their *allies* in the battle against chains. Because small retailers could not afford the large advertising budgets of the large chains, they

⁴⁴Strasser, Satisfaction Guaranteed, 249-251.

⁴⁵Monod, Store Wars, 158.

should look to national manufacturers to do their advertising for them. Butterick argued that stocking national brands gave the small retailer support from these national enterprises: "By selling trade-marked, standardized, nationally advertised goods, a merchant can ally himself with enormous aggregate manufacturing capital."⁴⁶ A moderately stocked grocery store could thus benefit from national advertising campaigns with budgets totaling \$50,000,000. Butterick appropriated the "chain-link" metaphor and applied it to the independent merchant, stating, "Even the smallest store may thus become one of a chain protected by this national barrage fire."⁴⁷

Butterick clearly had its own reasons to encourage merchants to stock brand-name goods: national manufacturers bought sizeable ad space in the company's mass-market periodicals. Further, there was no love lost between chains like A&P and some national brands: in the 1910s, a series of lawsuits had pitted grocery chains that sold items for less than their nationally advertised prices against manufacturers who refused to sell to them.⁴⁸ Butterick may have thought it had found a solution that pleased manufacturers and independents alike: manufacturers would be happy to sell to independents who could not afford to price-cut, and smaller stores would appreciate the ad expenditures for goods they kept in stock.

⁴⁶RD&C, 3 November 1920, 3.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸See Susan Strasser's account of the conflicts between A&P and Cream of Wheat, in Satisfaction Guaranteed, 227-8.

Department stores, as well, were encouraged to capitalize on the power of the national advertiser. For example, in 1936 the Dry Goods Merchant touted the sale of "known lines" and nationally advertised brands as one strategy for smaller stores facing competition from chains and mail-order merchants.⁴⁹ By 1940 the relationship between retailing chains and national brands would shift: new-style supermarkets came to rely exclusively on branded and nationally advertised goods.⁵⁰ It is important to note, however, that smaller merchants in the 1920s and 1930s did not automatically see the national brands as harbingers of a new era in retailing which would erode their power. They instead envisioned branded goods as possible allies and hoped to harness the clout of national manufacturers for their own benefit. That this development made the store into "a kind of promotional mechanism, a sort of free-standing corollary to the newspaper ad and the sales catalogue," as Monod notes, may have indeed been the case.⁵¹ Yet perhaps small store owners at the time envisioned this as a new alliance, one that would give them access to a level of public attention they had not previously enjoyed. A shopkeeper who tapped into, say, a national campaign for Aunt Jemima pancake mix by using a promotional card in his shop window may have been relinquishing his ability to

⁴⁹"Under 10,000," DGMTJ, June 1936, 30.

⁵⁰See, for example, Richard Tedlow's account of the philosophy behind the King Kullen supermarket chain in New and Improved, 226-238.

⁵¹Monod, Store Wars, 159.

substitute other brands for that particular product.⁵² But he was also identifying himself as a "reputable dealer" of the product, and might even be featured in local advertisements by the manufacturer.

Although initially optimistic about their ability to compete with the chains, by the mid-thirties, many independent merchants were less sure of their place in the retailing pecking order. Articles in the Merchants Trade Journal about chain stores took on a decidedly more pessimistic tone. A series of pieces in 1934, entitled "The Independent Does Not Need to Surrender," highlighted the ways in which the independents should study the factors which led to chain store success. The headline suggests the siege mentality of many independents. Standardization of price lines, studies of local and community buying and lowering of markups allowed chain stores to take customers away from department stores. In departments like notions, shoes, hosiery and lingerie, chain stores managed to suck away business.⁵³ In 1934, author H.L. Post warned beleaguered merchants that the "Whoopee Era" of 1914 - 1929 had lulled them into a false sense of security. During the boom times, an orgy of consumer spending had encouraged merchants to expand or to specialize in higher-priced goods because the middle and upper classes were spending freely. The next phase of this boom was a migration of shoppers to other cities: "The upper middle and rich consumer in village, town, and city began to

⁵²See, for example, Aunt Jemima pancake mix ad, RD&C, 6 December 1934, 4.

⁵³DGMTJ, March 1934, 27.

migrate to the next larger center to buy. No longer was he or she satisfied with the assortments offered in home-town stores." In Post's view, stores in towns and medium-sized cities stocked higher-priced goods in an effort to hold onto the trade and "forgot all about the old staple profit producers." New buyers had become accustomed to shopping for the wealthy, not the ever-elusive "average consumer."⁵⁴

The key to the chains' success, in his view, was their ability to recognize both the needs of the rich and those of the broader masses. Undercutting the independents in price in key departments (notions, hosiery), the chains lured customers away. Efforts to combat the trend through special sales events often backfired, as "Mrs. Consumer . . . soon discovered that many of these sales items were the same values she could get all the time at the chains." Superficial remedies like the installation of new store fixtures or the creation of new departments often failed to stop the slippage. Again, systematization seemed the answer. With this in mind, Post argued that perhaps intense competition would in the end be for the benefit of the small stores. Only those which adapted would survive. He argued, "I am of the opinion that all will be forced to recognize the simplicity of chain store operation and cut many wasteful services and do more efficient merchandising and promotion." Post advised merchants in smaller stores to think long and hard about the remaining buying power in their communities. Were there "enough people with money left in the community to support a main and upstairs floor,

⁵⁴DGMTJ, February 1934, 21.

merchandised to higher quality ranges," or would it be better to include average or lower-priced lines?⁵⁵

Still, even at the height of competition with the chains, Post pointed out some advantages enjoyed by the independent merchants. The fact that these stores were run by home-town merchants not only pleased local customers, but allowed managers of independent stores to have a much better sense of local demand than a chain store manager who relied on marketing information supplied by the chain headquarters. Post also believed that the personnel at the independent store was of higher quality than in the chain, as workers have been "treated more fairly and will work harder for a comeback."⁵⁶ He prescribed a complete rethinking of the store policies, with advertisements geared to tell the public that this was a "reorganization" rather than simply another liquidation.⁵⁷ Stores had to keep up with the newest innovations, to beat the chains at their own game while still retaining the elusive status of the "independent."

Yet part of the confusion over the appropriate response of independent merchants to the "chain store problem" lay in the very definition of the chain. The National Association of Teachers of Marketing and Advertising had an ongoing debate in the pages of their Bulletin over whether voluntary chain stores, that is, stores which came

⁵⁵DGMTJ, March 1934, 28.

⁵⁶DGMTJ, April 1934, 99.

⁵⁷DGMTJ, April 1934, 106.

together with a wholesaler to enjoy "chain" benefits like group buying, could still be considered "independent" merchants. A "Committee on Definitions" was struck in the early 1930s to discuss how members of a "voluntary chain" differed from branches in a chain store and reported an even division of opinion on the matter.⁵⁸ Edmund McGarry, an economist at the University of Buffalo's Bureau of Business and Social Research, also explored the issue. The U.S. Bureau of the Census collected data on retail chains in 1929, 1933, and 1935 and designated any organization with four or more units to be a chain.⁵⁹ In contrast, the Federal Trade Commission used two units as the point of demarcation between independents and chains, provided that both units were centrally owned and carried substantially similar lines of merchandise.⁶⁰ This lack of clarity allowed some stores to stress chain-store attributes when advertising low prices, for example, while maintaining the positive moral connotations of "independent" status.

The Independent Grocer's Alliance was one such organization. The hundreds of IGA stores which dotted cities across the nation, including upstate New York, based their very name on the concept of the independent merchant. The Alliance was first formed in Poughkeepsie, New York, in August of 1926, when seventy-six retailers joined with a wholesaler to form a co-operative group. Their purpose was to eliminate price-

⁵⁸"Report on the Committee on Definitions," NATMA Bulletin, 1933 Series, no. 4 (November 1933): 2-3.

⁵⁹Beckman and Nolen, Chain Store Problem, 29.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 2-3.

competition with chain stores and maximize collective buying power.⁶¹ IGA founder J. Frank Grimes was an outspoken critic of the chain store movement and defended the rights of the independent merchant in almost mystical terms. At an address to the Advertising-Selling League of Omaha, Nebraska, Grimes played up the spectre of faceless, absentee bureaucrats associated with the chains:

I say to you that if the chain stores start in the state of Nebraska until they cover every avenue of retail endeavor, I say to you that Omaha will suffer, and it will suffer severely. There must remain always the individual in business, because big business in the retail field cannot understand what the cities like Omaha need. It cannot understand it. Men, sitting back, managing these big corporations in the eastern states, with no intimate knowledge of what this territory needs, send out their stores here to break down the individual in business; they don't understand what the west or any other part of the country needs, or how it really lives or how it exists.⁶²

Grimes admonished his audience that the nation was at a crossroads in retailing history. The time was at hand to determine, "Shall America cease to be a country of proprietors, or shall it become a country of clerks?"⁶³ In his view, the chains were commercial despots with little stake in the communities in which stores were located. Although the chain organizations were technically legal, he argued, their natural tendency was to encourage the concentration of wealth and as such they threatened American traditions of

⁶¹NATMA Bulletin, 1934 Series, no. 3 (November 1934): 6.

⁶²J. Frank Grimes and Godfrey M. Lebharr, "A Debate on the Chain Store System Between J. Frank Grimes, President, Independent Grocers' Alliance and Godfrey M. Lebharr, Chain Store Age" Omaha, Nebraska, Sept. 16, 1929, McGarry Papers, Carton 27/F455, Box 2, Folder "Chain Stores Literature," UBA, 5.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 21.

initiative and self-reliance.⁶⁴ Newspaper ads in Buffalo presented the IGA proprietor as responsible to the customer alone and thus "free to select the foods you wish." The customer was his "one and only boss."⁶⁵

Yet in some ways the proprietors of Grimes' own IGA branches were more like franchise managers than independent merchants. IGA store proprietors, or members, shared a common logo to help customer identification and make possible group advertising by the wholesaler for the retailers. By 1929 the IGA had developed its own label for goods. Members paid a weekly charge (about \$3.50 during the 1930s) for advertising and store management advice. New recruits were advised of ways to renovate or modernize their stores and began subscriptions to the company's monthly house organ and weekly merchandising bulletin. All promotional materials were coordinated by the head office, including window displays, newspaper ads and direct mail flyers.

All stores, of course, carried the IGA brand label, and some IGA wholesalers required quotas for the amount of merchandise to be purchased each month by a particular store.⁶⁶ All stores were to be self-service operations (a relatively new phenomenon in the twenties), in order to maintain the organization's image of modernity

⁶⁴National Wholesale Grocers' Association of the United States, "America Chained or Unchained," [pamphlet] New York, n.d., McGarry Papers 27/F455, Box 2, Folder "Chain stores - correspondence and clippings 1928-1929," UBA.

⁶⁵BEN, Thurs. Oct. 31, 1929. p. 36.

⁶⁶Perry O. Snider, Northwestern University, "The Independent Grocers' Alliance of America," NATMA Bulletin, 1934 Series, no. 3 (November 1934): 4, 6, 14.

and efficiency. One of the few services not provided by national headquarters was the negotiation of orders for manufacturer's nationally advertised brands. While the branches could enjoy special deals on IGA-brand goods, they had to negotiate with the wholesalers of other national labels on their own.⁶⁷

A similar type of alliance of independent retailers was the linking of independent druggists under the McKesson Service symbol. In a large 1929 ad in the Buffalo Evening News, McKesson listed "10 reasons why millions of people prefer to buy at the *Independent Druggist's*," including not only competitive prices, extended operating hours and delivery service, but also factors which called into question the character of the chain drug store. By declaring that the independent drug store "gives that special service which is obtainable only from men who own their own store," the ad invoked Grimes' prophecy of a "country of clerks" who did not control their own destinies and were thus less motivated to please the customer. Another reason for patronizing the independent druggist was that "You can send your children shopping there with perfect peace of mind," suggesting that the friendly local druggist would look out for children in a way that the faceless, bureaucratic chain could not. Finally, the McKesson ad boasted that most independent stores offered charge account service, implying that chains were not willing to extend the same sort of trust to the consumer.⁶⁸

⁶⁷Ibid., 18.

⁶⁸BEN, 20 November 1929, 16.

For their part, owners of bona fide chain operations looked on the voluntary organizations with skepticism. Godfrey Lebhar, editor of Chain Store Age, compared the voluntary chain where unit stores had "the right to do as they like" to a military operation which lacked discipline. In his view, one of the big challenges of the regular chain operation was to get its managers to follow all directions from the head office without fail. Lebhar assumed that "owner-managers" might prove even more resistant to directives from on high. Voluntary chains often lacked any sort of discipline structure to enforce prices, for example. Only when the owner-manager of branch units were convinced to "surrender their independence *entirely* so far as the operation of their stores went" did Lebhar feel that the voluntary chain stood a chance in competition with more centralized business organizations.⁶⁹

Another wrinkle in the definition of chain stores was the existence of regional chains, often concentrated in one city. At what point did the successful independent merchant who was able to open up a few more branches in his home town become part of the "chain store menace," usually associated with faceless bureaucrats located in distant centres? The answer, of course, is that few stores could be neatly classified as purely "independent" or "chain" and no store was, or would want to be, completely local. Defenders of the chains pointed out that the owner of a chain store was simply a businessman who had started off small and through hard work and perseverance had developed a large, successful enterprise. Instead of regarding chains as an aberration,

⁶⁹CSA, 3 no. 5 (May, 1927): 72.

they urged consumers to recognize these stores as part of the natural evolution of American business. In 1926, the Chain Store Manager argued,

THIS IS THE REAL CHAIN STORE GIANT as he actually lives and works. He started out in life as a small merchant with one store. Every chain of grocery stores now in existence commenced with one store and from the original store the progressive merchant enlarged his field of activities to serve more people. So the chain store giant is HUMAN. He is not a born monstrosity, but has naturally developed into his present size.⁷⁰

In a similar vein, in a 1931 issue of The Rotarian, one chain store defender presented the fable of John Jones, a hard-working grocery store operator who finds that he cannot enlarge his present store in his home town. Instead, John buys out the store of his neighbour Jim Smith in the next town, puts his best assistant in charge to run it, and finds himself suddenly the owner of a chain store system.⁷¹ To castigate him for being a "chain store dealer," it was implied, was to punish him for working hard and succeeding. The alternative was to reward the unindustrious and unscientific. Sure enough, the founder of the Hart grocery chain took this line of attack in an article in Chain Store Age. He argued that many grocery businesses were started by the type of individual who had "failed to make good as a railroad man or a farmer or a bookkeeper or a carpenter" and so had little

⁷⁰CSM, 1 no. 5 (March 1926): 28.

⁷¹C.O. Sherrill, "Across the Chain Store Counter," The Rotarian, June 1931, BBR Archives, Case 19, Folder "Chain - General Publicity and Clippings 1929-1932 (Not Bureau Studies)", BLHU.

ability or knowledge in the grocery business. Thankfully, in his view, this was changing so that stores were no longer inefficiently run and badly stocked.⁷²

In an address about the social and economic aspects of chain stores, Professor James L. Palmer of the Marketing Department at the University of Chicago rejected the notion that any retailer could be purely locally based and still remain competitive. He argued that it was unrealistic for consumers to think that they could find a way to spend money that kept it in the community. Even if they patronized local merchants, consumers inevitably would buy products manufactured in other cities. He argued, "The Battle Creek cereal manufacturer and Detroit automobile manufacturer take money out of the community just as does the chain store organization."⁷³ A car from Detroit could be sold much more inexpensively than one from a small local company; consumers who did not take advantage of this were simply being foolish. Palmer also discounted much of the criticism that chain stores undermined local civic spirit. Because they originally developed in larger cities which lacked "the community life which characterizes the small town," the notion that the chains negatively affected social organization was in his view doubtful. He felt that trading relationships in larger cities had already become "depersonalized" before the advent of the chains.⁷⁴ Finally, Palmer contended that although chain stores might drive some local independents out of business, in the end

⁷²CSA, July 1927, 39.

⁷³Palmer, "Social and Economic Aspects of the Chain Store," 6.

⁷⁴Ibid., 7.

their presence would result in a stabilization of the retail trade structure and the reduction of risk, for only competent stores would survive. This increased competition would benefit local consumers.

Chain branches, although certainly controlled from without, tried to cultivate local community goodwill through charity gestures. They also emphasized how chain stores could bring employment and other benefits to the community. When Walgreens drug stores opened its first branch in Rochester in 1936, newspaper ad copy stressed that the "LABOR OF CITY BUILT STORE" and listed the local concerns that had been involved in the building's construction.⁷⁵ While their management might be parachuted in from elsewhere, chains often employed local workers and thus could lay claim to some community feeling. Sears boasted that it was company policy to hire area people to work in its retail stores. This was good for business, a store executive argued, for two reasons:

One is that it is in harmony with Sears' desire to do everything it can to help in the development of those communities in which its stores are established. This desire is apparent also in the company's effort to stock its retail store with merchandise purchased from manufacturing sources within the community.

And the second reason for employing local residents is simply because a local person can do a much better job in a Sears store in Buffalo than a clerk of equal ability from outside. No one else could possibly know the folks of this community better; could understand their needs so

⁷⁵RD&C, 13 November 1936, 14.

readily. It is apparent from this that we find hiring a local personnel good business.⁷⁶

In ads and statements to the press upon the opening of a new store in Buffalo, Sears went to great lengths to emphasize its commitment to "hiring local."

In one sense, however, this emphasis on local pride was perhaps disingenuous: it made financial sense for Walgreens or Sears to use local labour in the building and staffing of their stores. It would have been a sizeable and unnecessary expense to move workers into the area. Although a few management positions might have required extensive company training, many local people would already have possessed the skills required for jobs in construction or sales. By claiming to have "chosen" local workers, these concerns could make a play for community goodwill. It is debatable whether there really was a choice to be made.

A similar use of the idea of "choice" framed the discussion of the new stores opened by Loblaws grocery chain. Loblaws originated in Canada, and first expanded across the border to Niagara Falls, and then to the Buffalo area by 1925. Newspaper ad copy regularly emphasized the investment that Loblaws was making in the community. A 1931 Buffalo newspaper spread promised, "Loblaws believe [sic] in Buffalo," and thus earned and spent money in the community.

It is a constant endeavor of Loblaw groceterias, to share with their customers in Buffalo and the municipalities in which they operate, the profits accruing from their business. Loblaws take pride in the fact that

⁷⁶BCE 14 June 1938, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 322, Vol. 4, BECPL.

they are contributing to the success of Buffalo as a city, by the very substantial investment represented in the new Loblaw warehouse. In addition to this, many thousands of dollars have been spent with Buffalo workmen, in the erection of stores. Thousands of dollars are paid out monthly in Taxes and Store Rentals.⁷⁷

By suggesting that Loblaws stores were choosing to spend money in Buffalo and disregarding the fact that taxes and rent were not choices to be made but simply the cost of doing business for both independents and chains, the campaign subtly counteracted criticism that the chain stores did nothing but siphon money away from the community.

The W.T. Grant company, which originated in Lynn, Massachusetts, in 1906 and operated almost 500 stores coast to coast by 1939, drew attention to its use of steel from the Buffalo and Lackawanna plants of the Bethlehem Steel company in the construction of its newest Buffalo store. A 1939 newspaper article about the store opening highlighted the advantages that the company was bringing to the community.

Last year, the W. T. Grant Company bought \$200,000 worth of merchandise made in the City of Buffalo. This merchandise was sold not only in Grant stores in Buffalo, but in many other Grant stores throughout the country. In other ways, too, the Grant organization makes important contributions to Buffalo prosperity. For instance, last year more than \$200,000 was paid in salaries to their own employees in this city. In addition, \$50,000 was paid by Grant's for local and state taxes, and \$266,000 was spent locally for rent and miscellaneous expenses.⁷⁸

⁷⁷BEN, Inter-Urban Edition, 8 June 1931, 17. The company referred to its stores in the plural - thus instead of saying "Loblaws takes pride in Buffalo" (with Loblaws as the company name, as is more conventional in ads today) it would state "Loblaws [the stores] take pride in Buffalo." Wegmans of Rochester also frequently used this construction.

⁷⁸"Grant's new store open to public today," BCE, 1 November 1939, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol 4., 360, BFCPL.

Again, any money spent by the company was held up as "proof" of local feeling, even expenditures like rent, salaries, and taxes, which one could argue were by definition local expenses and could not be spent in any other way.

For their part, independent stores, while strenuously asserting their "mom-and-pop" nature during the interwar years were changing to remain competitive. Rochester consumers enjoyed the buying power of a number of area-based grocery operations. The Hart chain stands as a good example of the "local chain" phenomenon. Founded in 1917, by the late 1920s the organization operated close to a hundred stores in the Rochester area, while maintaining in promotional materials that it "served Rochesterians" in a way that other groceries like the A. & P. did not.⁷⁹ On the one hand, the Hart stores seemed to embody the new trends in chain merchandising: large-scale buying, centralized distribution, coordinated weekly specials and self-service convenience. But at the same time, the Hart chain took pains to emphasize its local character, and the fact that it had adopted these innovations only to better serve the Rochester customer. Hart's ad copy boasted,

We have forced competitive chain organizations to sell their products cheaper in Rochester than in any city in the country. Our success is a triumph for the housewives of Rochester.⁸⁰

For a brief overview of the origins of the Hart chain, see Stuart E. Rosenberg, The Jewish Community in Rochester, 1843-1925 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954) 161-162.

⁸⁰RD&C, 21 November 1923, 19.

The ad also pointed out that customers in Buffalo, a larger city, actually paid higher grocery prices than their Rochester counterparts. Elimination of overhead costs like expensive fixtures and delivery service allowed Hart's to keep prices competitive. The stores also had their own premium system of coupons to encourage customer loyalty, not to one particular branch, but to the Hart organization itself.

The Hart chain also based its success on its ability to provide branded goods. The founder of the company argued that it was against store policy to offer private label items. He contended that substitution of private labels for requested brand-name items did little except to annoy customers and eventually drive them away.

We still stick to standard, nationally-advertised brands. We have never handled a product bearing an exclusively Hart label and probably never will. I believe that the slight extra profit to be had on most private brands is much more than offset by the sales assistance and by the irritation to customers in having something sold to them which they do not know about but which is represented as being "just as good."⁸¹

The stores were therefore "local successes" at handling nationally-advertised goods. They saw no apparent contradiction in claiming "home-operated" status while simultaneously selling branded items which were anything but local goods. The store's ownership was what qualified it for "home" status.

The Wegman grocery stores also drew this distinction between the locally-owned chain and the branches of a national outfit. Declaring that its outlets served the Rochester trading area exclusively, ads trumpeted the close attention to local needs provided by

⁸¹CSA, July, 1927, 40.

their company. The customer enjoyed lower prices, for there was "No red-tape and chain-store detail at Wegmans. No long-distance arm-chair executives to support in other cities."⁸² Advertising for Wegmans emphasized its "home-operated" status, arguing that the stores' use of strictly local personnel eliminated "costly district supervisors and a wide variety of executives and other 'long-distance' expenses" passed on to the consumer by national chains.⁸³ Instead, dollars spent at the stores "come back home to you, because Wegmans, in turn, spend them right here in Rochester."⁸⁴

The S.M. Flickinger organization, with grocery stores covering Western New York and Northwestern Pennsylvania, was another regional chain which claimed to provide the benefits of co-operative operation, while clinging to independent status. Company founder S.M. Flickinger proclaimed a "revolution" in chain grocery store merchandising. He noted that the Flickinger manager was required to invest capital in his store, and thus became a part owner and received a majority of the net profits of his store. This qualification made the manager "in fact, a real merchant, instead of an employee."⁸⁵ His personal stake in the company would make a difference for consumers:

It is also true that the independent grocer, when he is at his best, brings to his business, because of his proprietorship, advantages in personality and a community interest which the chain store management cannot instil into

⁸²RD&C, 20 November 1936, 11.

⁸³RD&C, 18 December 1936, 19.

⁸⁴RD&C, 20 November 1936, 11.

⁸⁵BEN, 11 November 1929, 13.

the average paid employee who becomes more or less of an automaton under chain store operation.⁸⁶

In this manner, Flickinger was "Humanizing the Chain Store." With mass buying power, uniform standards and high turnover of merchandise, Flickinger stores combined "modern" selling with the charm of the "old-time" grocer.

The Flickinger organization also developed a new hybrid of subsidiary stores. In addition to operating 310 stores under the Flickinger name, it was in charge of the Red & White grocery chain, which was intended to be "a cross between the chain store merchant and the independent grocer."⁸⁷ The 250 Red & White grocers were former independents who at one time had been wholesale customers of the Flickinger company. Red & White grocers sold the same private label goods as the Flickinger stores, bought dry groceries from a Flickinger distributor, and painted their stores in standard colours. They received advice on layout, shelving and fixtures, monthly advice on bookkeeping and other management ideas, and an annual audit which allowed each store owner access to "full information as to prices charged by the Flickinger company to its chain stores." All stores were to operate on a cash-and-carry plan, eliminating the discretion of the individual merchant in offering credit. By becoming part of the Red & White plan, a grocer gained a guarantee that he would receive all merchandise carried in stock at the

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷CSA, January 1926, 12.

same price as the Flickinger company charged its own chain stores.⁸⁸ The company boasted that it avoided problems finding good personnel because its managers each had a personal investment in their stores, having formerly owned them.

Red & White cut costs by eliminating the need for many jobbers. They struck deals with a few manufacturers and ordered in large quantities. Producers of name-brand products were contracted to make similar lines under the "Serv-us" name. A price per unit under the cost of the name-brand good was determined, and all units of the Red & White organization would stock the goods. In this way, the organization "controlled its own brands" and was not at the mercy of the manufacturers of advertised brands. Instead of sending salesmen to each individual merchant to bargain, the Red & White plan enabled a few jobbers to cover large amounts of territory. Manufacturers, in turn, agreed to this plan because their selling expenses were eliminated, except for a small brokerage fee which went to the Red & White corporation. Eventually, another line of in-house brands was adopted: "Serv-us" remained the line of high quality, comparable to advertised brands, while the "Red & White Brand" represented "good wholesome food at popular prices."⁸⁹

Flickinger took pains to earn goodwill not just from the patrons of independent grocers but from the merchants themselves. The company offered to buy out independent grocers who were their wholesale customers and if refused, agreed not to locate one of

⁸⁸Ibid., 12.

⁸⁹CSA, December 1928, 32.

their chain stores within two blocks' distance (this was the opposite strategy of most chains, which opened up in direct competition with neighbourhood grocers). As a result, they boasted, "this brought us good will and left a good impression in the mind of the retail trade."⁹⁰ Store managers who did join the Red & White organization not only gained a promise that the Flickinger company would not operate another grocery branch in direct competition, they might even be given the edge over a particular trading area. President S. M. Flickinger noted, "For instance, in a village of a few hundred, the grocer is given a monopoly." By creating the Red & White chain, the Flickinger company was "Taking the Independent into the Fold," organizing separate grocers under centralized control and converting "troublesome competition into helpful co-operation."⁹¹

Despite this language of harmony and altruism, the Flickinger company had good economic reasons for getting the independent merchants on side. The Red & White plan offered the Flickinger Company an increased number of retail outlets for wholesaling, even in territories which seemed to have reached the saturation point in terms of Flickinger store locations. Red & White stores were typically located in smaller cities and towns in western New York and northern Pennsylvania. The subsidiary chain also increased exposure for Flickinger private-label goods. Flickinger was thus able to capitalize on the benefits of "independent" status while running a highly centralized business organization. The Red & White was not the only "hybrid" organization of

⁹⁰CSA, January 1926, 12.

⁹¹Ibid.

grocers in operation in the U.S. in the late 1920s. Chain Store Age described the Chicago-area Royal Blue Stores as another "so-called independent chain," a loose organization where participating stores paid a membership fee and gained consolidated buying power.⁹² Both the Royal Blue and Red & White chains were initially centred in a specific region, although by 1928 the Red & White had successfully expanded not only outside of New York and Pennsylvania but into Canada as well.

The advantages of independent proprietorship were also outlined in ad campaigns for the Danahy-Faxon chain of "Home Operated Stores." By drawing an implicit comparison with chain store managers who had no personal investment in their business, Danahy-Faxon men were said to serve in the "spirit of, and for the rewards of 'PROPRIETORSHIP.'" Every store manager and many assistants were partners in the business, and Danahy-Faxon suggested that this associated ownership encouraged "a more sincere desire to please you."⁹³ Other types of businesses besides traditional merchants used the language of the independent proprietor. In 1931, the Texaco gasoline corporation placed an ad in the Buffalo Evening News encouraging motorists to "Spend Your Money With The Man who Spends His Here." Describing all dealers of Texaco gasoline as independents, who "spend their money in the community where they earn it,"

⁹²CSA, February 1928, 21.

⁹³TI, May 1931, 57.

the ad suggested that patronizing a Texaco dealer was a way of doing a "good turn" for the local area.⁹⁴

Chain stores attempted to put a different spin on the idea of keeping money in the local community. A&P ads in the Buffalo press introduced the notion of "homing pennies," which provided benefits not to the community but to the individual consumer.

There's an A&P store close to your house as we could possibly put it. It's selling the best food at prices that allow hundreds of dollars in penny savings to find their way back to the homes of its customers every year. That's what we mean by Homing Pennies - the money you save, which returns home with you in your purse after shopping at A&P. And, once there, it's money that really stays at home - at your home.⁹⁵

By relating to individuals, not communities, A&P effectively took the notion of "local loyalty" one step further - consumers were to look out for the interests not of their home towns but their actual households. A&P argued that this money "really stays at home" in the pocket of the consumer, deflating the appeals of local merchants to play upon "home store" loyalty.

The amount of energy used by retailers and industry observers in studying the chain store phenomenon during the 1920s and 1930s suggests that the chains touched a nerve for many merchants fearful of new forms of competition. Did the chains warrant this attention? Were they becoming a threat in this period? Even within the grocery

⁹⁴BEN, 3 September 1931, 63.

⁹⁵BEN, Home Edition, 15 June 1931, 3.

industry, the sector most inundated with chain competition, chain branches did not form the majority of stores. By 1927, only about 15% (or 376) of Buffalo's 2,673 grocery stores were chain branches. Of these, 295 were part of six local chains. Only two national chains operated in the area. Chain stores made up 19% of the 1,549 grocery stores in Rochester. The city had three local chains, operating a total of 131 stores. Other chains operated an additional 163 stores. Chain stores made up only 19% of the total number of stores in the city.⁹⁶

These figures do not tell the whole story, however, for it was not the number of stores which mattered but the share of the market they were gaining. Chain branches tended to be larger and dominate a trading area. In terms of market share, their impact was much greater. The grocery trade in Buffalo can serve as an example of this tendency. In 1929, chain stores numbered only 355, but made 42.8% of the total grocery sales in the city, averaging \$54,259.96 in annual sales. Independents were far more numerous, with 1,609 stores, but averaged \$15,975.27 in annual sales. Chain stores averaged \$54,259.96 in sales in the same year.⁹⁷ In the period from 1929 to 1933, chain store business dropped by 15% but independents suffered even more dramatically. Chain stores took in 53% of the city's total sales. By 1933, the independents had made something of a comeback, and

⁹⁶All figures from the J. Walter Thompson News Bulletin, September 1927, 9, 11.

⁹⁷Edmund D. McGarry, "The Structure and Stability of Retail Trade in Buffalo 1929, 1933 and 1935 - Grocery Stores." SS: Supplement 14 no. 7A (March 1939): 2. Table 1: Independent and Chain Grocery Stores and Sales 1929, 1933 and 1935, Total sales for independents in 1929 was \$25,704,206, compared with \$19,262,287 for chain branches.

chain store sales went back down to 48% of the total sales in the city. Still, total chain store sales during this period remained virtually unchanged, despite the fact that the actual number of chain store units actually decreased. In 1935, 320 chain store branches averaged \$54,760.43 while independents averaged \$10,600.10.⁹⁸ Clearly, each chain store branch could do a volume of business equal to that of a number of independent stores.

The impact of chain branches on department stores is somewhat harder to gauge. While departments which featured lower-cost merchandise (for example, hosiery or nail polish) might face stiff competition from five-and-dime chain branches, others were for the most part able to retain customers, particularly in selling goods where style or quality was emphasized more than price (shoes, women's clothing, men's suits). An observer in the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal asserted that certain departments were put in jeopardy by chain variety stores like Kresge's and Woolworth's.

Chain variety stores literally stole the notion business from many department stores. . . . Chain shoe stores, hosiery and lingerie shops, chain ready-to-wear stores and general dry goods and department store chains slowly but surely took a nibble here and a bite there out of the popular and medium priced business of many independents until their once healthy businesses began to show weakness.⁹⁹

⁹⁸Ibid. Total grocery sales for chain stores in the city in 1933 were \$16,325,311 in 357 chain store branches, compared with \$16,428,193 in 1935 for 320 chain store branches. The total sales for independent stores went from \$14,470,205 in 1933 to \$17,638,561 in 1935. There were 1,449 independent grocers in Buffalo in 1933, compared with 1,664 in 1935.

⁹⁹H.L. Post, "The Independent Need Not Surrender," Third of a series, DGMTJ, March 1934, 27.

Other types of purchases, however, were less susceptible to chain competition. A 1931 survey conducted by the National Association of Teachers of Marketing and Advertising tried to determine which products consumers would purchase from chains and why. Families in higher income brackets (those making over \$5000) reported that 100% of their purchases of men's and women's clothing were made at independent stores, no doubt reflecting the fact that most chains handled lower-priced goods. Despite the fact that 39.6% of lower-income families (those with incomes under \$1500) reported that they "favored chains" for men's clothing, over 82% of purchases of men's suits came from independents.¹⁰⁰ The survey reached the general conclusion that "the percentages of the consumers favoring and buying from the chains decrease as their incomes increase," yet even within the poorer income classes, independent clothing retailers enjoyed the advantage. Further, a sizeable percentage of the middle-income groups reported shopping at *both* independents and chains, suggesting that for some items chains offered better prices, but consumers still patronized independents for some types of purchases.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰NATMA Bulletin, 1931 Series, no. 4 (October 1931): 22. Table VIII: Consumers' Attitude Toward Chain and Independent Stores.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, quote on p. 22. Over 25% of families in the \$1500 - 2500 income group reported that they shopped at both independents and chains for men's and women's clothing. 22.8% of the same group reported that they shopped at both for groceries, as did 34.5% of those in the \$2500 - 5000 group.

In the late 1920s, independents tried new means to sway public opinion against the chain stores.¹⁰² In radio broadcasts, pamphlets and editorials, anti-chain activists used the power of the mass media to spread the view that the chains posed a threat to traditional values and the American way of life. Sentiment against chains ran so high that fraudulent anti-chain associations were able to solicit donations from small retailers "ostensibly to go into a fighting fund against chain stores but in reality used to enrich the promoters."¹⁰³ Defenders of the chains warned of "Anti-Chain Bolsheviks," whose propaganda was breaking out like a "severe rash in every part of the country."¹⁰⁴ By the mid 1930s, the "chain store problem" would be a source of heated debate in trade publications and legislatures across the nation. States experimented with special chain store tax legislation, which steeply increased taxes for every additional unit beyond a

¹⁰²See Jonathan Bean's brief account of anti-chain store activists like W.K. Henderson, of Louisiana, who used the radio and a fleet of "Minute Men" to bring the public's attention to the abuses of the chain store. Bean, Beyond the Broker State, 27-31. For an intriguing account of one city's efforts to rout the chains, see David A. Horowitz, "The Crusade against Chain Stores: Portland's Independent Merchants, 1928 - 1935," Oregon Historical Quarterly, (Winter 1988) 341-67. Horowitz argues that Portland's independent merchants were "able to use populist themes to further their specific economic interests," combining "rational and quixotic approaches" to the problems they faced. (363)

¹⁰³"Fraudulent Anti-Chain Associations," Better Business 3 no. 8 (April 15, 1930), Issued Semi-monthly by the Bureau of Business and Government Research, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colo., McGarry Papers, Box 2, Folder "Chain stores - correspondence and clippings, 1928-1929," UBA.

¹⁰⁴CSM, 3 no. 3 (March, 1927): 5.

retailer's initial store.¹⁰⁵ The federal government also got involved in legislation to aid the independent merchant, in the form of the Robinson-Patman Bill. The bill prohibited manufacturers from discriminating in price between different purchasers of goods. In other words, it was supposed to prevent chains from enjoying "special" discounts from manufacturers - not eliminating the chains, but levelling the playing field for smaller businesses.¹⁰⁶

Despite these aims, many retailers viewed the legislation with skepticism. Arthur Boreman, publisher of the Dry Goods Journal, included the full text of the Robinson-Patman Bill for his readers and provided his own analysis. He argued that loopholes in the bill would allow chains to evade its provisions by buying factories and added that "if this happens the independent merchant may be much worse off than he is now."¹⁰⁷ Boreman had little faith in the ability of the government to enforce the legislation and predicted that as soon as the chains protested that the new law was causing them to raise prices, consumers would revolt. He also criticized the diffuse language of the bill, noting that in his opinion, "almost any group of high school students could and would have

¹⁰⁵Bean, Beyond the Broker State, 28. Not only states but even municipalities passed anti-chain store legislation. Portland, Oregon initiated the first city tax on chain stores, which was duplicated in other cities including Milwaukee, Knoxville, Louisville, Phoenix, and Cleveland. The law was enforced until 1942. David A. Horowitz, "The Crusade against Chain Stores," 359-363.

¹⁰⁶Bean, Beyond the Broker State, 33-34. Bean argues that the bill was supposed to act as a "panacea for the ills afflicting small business and the nation at large," and appealed to many anti-chain activists.

¹⁰⁷"The Publisher's Page," Dry Goods Journal, August 1936, 10.

prepared a more intelligently drawn, less inconsistent, less confusing piece of legislation."¹⁰⁸

In the end, many of Boreman's fears proved well-founded. Historian Ellis Hawley concludes that despite the good intentions of the bill's sponsors, Robinson-Patman was largely ineffective. Like other initial attempts at regulation in this area, it "tended to restrict production, prevent change, hold up prices, and bilk the consumer."¹⁰⁹ Part of the reason that the bill appeared inconsistent was that it included a number of amendments from different groups, which added a number of qualifications to the prohibition of price discrimination in the act.¹¹⁰ The Federal Trade Commission's enforcement of Robinson-Patman was not overly harsh towards big business or the chains, and instead officials decided to accept "all good-faith efforts" by manufacturers to meet the law's requirements.¹¹¹ Far from acting as "The Magna Carta of Small Business," as it was intended, Robinson-Patman ended up both hurting small business and irritating consumers.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 10.

¹⁰⁹Ellis Hawley, The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) 268.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 252-3.

¹¹¹Bean, Beyond the Broker State, 39-40.

¹¹²Ibid., 62-5.

Whatever the actual impact of chain stores on local business, evidence suggests that the rise of chain stores certainly captured the imaginations of Western New York retailers. Although the emergence of chain stores is often described from a national perspective, the battle between chains and independents was waged at a local level. A national perspective has caused many historians of retailing and marketing to assume a seamless progression from small, backward-looking independents to centrally organized, national chains. A closer look at changes "on the ground" reveals a much more complex story. The very definition of terms like "independent" and "chain" proved highly malleable in the hands of retail trade activists and store owners themselves.

Just as Buffalo and Rochester stores attempted to draw a distinction between "local" interests and metropolitan competition, they drew upon the same language of localism to suggest that chains run by far-off bureaucracies were "foreign" interlopers into the community.¹¹³ Yet at the same time, many of these businesses were adopting some of the strategies of the chains, including group buying, systemization, and other

¹¹³David A. Horowitz acknowledges the tension between a reverence for "traditional" values and "modern" management which characterized many independent merchants. He argues that anti-chain store crusaders in Portland "embodied both rational and quixotic approaches to the problems faced by the entrepreneur and independent middle class in modern society." His emphasis on the "romantic rejection of corporate modernism" of independent merchants goes a bit far. Independents were often quite willing to adopt many of the business practices of the chains even as they protested their unfairness. They pursued a number of strategies to combat the chains, beyond seeking stabilization through the regulation of competition. David A. Horowitz, "Crusade against Chain Stores," 363.

"modern" management techniques. In the face of this new form of competition, independent merchants strenuously resisted the encroachment of chain retailers and asserted their own place in the communities they served.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Depression and Local Spending

"HOARDING IS NOT THRIFT."

-- J.N. Adam's newspaper ad, June, 1931

"Buffalo women are aiding recovery by shopping now."

-- photo caption, Town Tidings, February 1934

In late summer of 1931, nearly two years into the Great Depression, store owners and business leaders in Buffalo decided that hard times had gone on long enough. Something had to be done to improve economic conditions in their city. Despite its diversified economy, Buffalo had experienced rising unemployment and stagnant retail sales. Merchants felt they had the solution: they declared "Buffalo Day," a special occasion when retailers would offer drastic savings and hire 6,000 unemployed persons to serve the needs of shoppers.¹ The idea behind the plan was to have a huge day of sales, which would pump more money into the local economy and overcome the "psychological barrier" to spending that many felt was the main thing keeping America in an economic slump. The day would have a "carnival" atmosphere, with a band concert, automobile parade, baby beauty contest, dog show, and doll display. Festivities were concentrated in

¹Lewis Lansky, "Buffalo and the Great Depression, 1929-1933," in Milton Plesur, ed. An American Historian: Essays to Honor Selig Adler (Buffalo: State University of New York at Buffalo, 1980), 207.

the downtown area, although other shopping districts throughout the city also planned their own events.²

Merchants redoubled their efforts to woo Western New Yorkers into Buffalo's retail districts, buying pages of newspaper space to publicize new shipments of goods and special savings. They decorated their stores in "official Buffalo Day colors," and declared September 4 the "One Great All-Buffalo Bargain Day." Local institutions went to great lengths in trying to mention the name of the city as much as possible in their advertising. R. B. Adam boasted that as president of Adam, Meldrum & Anderson Co., a "Buffalo store, owned and supported by Buffalonians - the All-Buffalo Store that for more than half a century has led the way," he was confident that 1932 would be a year of prosperity "for Buffalo, for Buffalonians, for all who are interested enough to keep, mainstay and uphold Buffalo as the Queen City of the Lakes."³ Bing & Nathan furniture store featured a sketch of Buffalo City Hall in its advertising.⁴ Mayor Charles E. Roesch proclaimed September 4 a day "to uphold Buffalo's reputation as a great shopping

²BEN, 26 August 1931, 23; "Buffalo Day Plans to be Made Friday - Mayor Roesch Will Speak at Merchants' Session," BEN, 27 August 1931, 30; "Stores Get Stocks in Order as Buffalo Day Draws Near - Carnival Spirit Runs High on Eve of Great Community Selling Event," BEN, 3 September 1931, 1. Participants in a mass meeting of Buffalo retailers included the Broadway-Fillmore Business Men's Association, the North Main Citizens' Association, the North Park Association, the West Side Business Men's Association, and the North Jefferson Business Men's Association among others.

³BEN, 5 September 1931, 14.

⁴BEN, 3 September 1931, 22.

center."⁵ In addition to retailers, other local businesses and services pitched in to help with the success of the event. Bus fares within the city were lowered for the day, and designated parking lots also offered reduced rates. To encourage shoppers to "shop first" and then go to the movies, the Shea Theatre chain advertised that it would feature afternoon matinee prices throughout the evening, not only downtown but in all community moviehouses. Hotels offered free rooms from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. to "bona fide out-of-town shopping visitors" who needed a place to rest and regroup. Hotels and restaurants displaying the "Buffalo Day" seal offered reduced prices on special menus.⁶

The story of Buffalo Day helps revise our understanding of how local communities grappled with the Depression. Because of the dramatic developments of the New Deal, the story of the early 1930s is often told in light of what came afterwards. The efforts of local communities, when they are recognized, are seen as laying the groundwork for the eventual development of the social welfare state. The arc of this narrative begins with the notion that in communities across the United States, people initially tried to solve the problems of the Depression privately, through voluntarism. Despite the valiant efforts of private charities, soup kitchens and churches, however, these forms of private relief were not enough to mitigate the suffering of the vast ranks of the unemployed. Beginning in 1933, the federal government finally stepped in to pick up

⁵BEN, 2 September 1931, 1.

⁶BEN, 2 September 1931, 5.

where these private initiatives left off. Among the most ambitious and lasting programs of the New Deal were relief programs like the Unemployment Relief Act and the Social Security Act. For this reason, historians have tended to highlight those local initiatives in the 1930s which seemed to be precursors to a federally-sponsored social safety net.⁷

But as the story of Buffalo Day demonstrates, there was another dimension to local responses to the Depression. At the same time as local charities were grappling with diminishing relief resources, merchants and other business leaders in Western New York were seeking local solutions to the crisis.⁸ As it became apparent that Western

⁷For example, Bonnie Fox Schwartz, "Unemployment Relief in Philadelphia, 1930-1932: A Study of the Depression's Impact on Voluntarism," in Bernard Sternsher, ed., Hitting Home: The Great Depression in Town and Country, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 60-84, highlights how the city's welfare leaders "made Philadelphia a model to other cities and future inspiration for New Deal projects," despite the fact that local efforts at employment relief "completely failed by June 1932." (63) In the same volume, David M. Katzman's "Ann Arbor: Depression City," 47-59, similarly centres on the efforts of private and municipal services to the poor and unemployed, including the Family Welfare Bureau and Community Fund. Roman Heleniak, "Local Reaction to the Great Depression in New Orleans, 1929 - 1933," Louisiana History 10 (Fall 1969): 283-306, also tells the story of local relief activities. Lizabeth Cohen's chapter on the failure of private charities in Making a New Deal outlines the failure of ethnic and religious welfare agencies to meet the demands of the crisis. (218-238)

⁸This is in no way meant to suggest that Western New York citizens were not also involved in charity and relief work. Lewis Lansky describes the distribution of food and clothing by local charities, as well as municipal relief. He also briefly describes Buffalo's Man-A-Block plan, which provided work to over 7000, and devotes one paragraph to Buffalo Day. Lansky, "Buffalo and the Great Depression," 204-213.

New York would not emerge unscathed from the Depression, area businessmen brainstormed for possible solutions to the predicament they faced.⁹

The answers they came up with are notable for two reasons. First, many looked to private consumption as the answer to the economy's ills. Buffalo Day was not an attempt to increase the relief coffers of local welfare agencies, nor was it a charity drive. It, and many other similar initiatives, broadened the conception of consumption, making it a civic act more than a self-interested activity. Consumption was redefined as a civic activity with benefits for the community as a whole. By consuming more, it was argued, citizens would grease the wheels of industry, creating jobs in the community and eventually bringing the nation out of its slump. An increase in individual spending would give a needed boost to business, while avoiding the questionable morality of providing "charity" to the unemployed.

Second, efforts to increase consumer spending had an emphatically local emphasis. Instead of simply encouraging the residents of Buffalo or Rochester to put

⁹A comprehensive account of the experience of the Depression in upstate New York is beyond the scope of this chapter. The story of the unemployed in Rochester and Buffalo, the work of private charities, and the intervention of state and federal authorities could each be the subject of their own monographs. A number of scholars have explored the experiences of particular cities during the Depression. Among the most useful I have found Katzman, "Ann Arbor: Depression City" and Schwartz, "Unemployment relief in Philadelphia, 1930-1932", in Sternsher, ed., Hitting Home; Jo Ann E. Argersinger, Toward a New Deal in Baltimore: People and Government in the Great Depression (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and Charles H. Trout, Boston, the Great Depression and the New Deal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). All are most concerned with the expansion of state powers to meet the growing crisis in these communities; each suggests that local economic conditions and institutions could make a big difference in terms of the impact of the New Deal.

more money into the economy generally, citizens were directed to spend these dollars *at home*, in order to create jobs and bring back good times within their own communities. It was only after initiatives to harness the power of local consumers came and went that Western New Yorkers turned to more far-reaching solutions involving state and, later, federal intervention.

The stock market crash which closed the twenties had brought new worries for merchants and consumers across the United States. In the nation's capital, political theorists, policy makers, and economists engaged in a battle over the very nature of the crisis. Did it originate at home, or were external factors to blame? Was the American economy generally healthy, or did it need a massive overhaul?¹⁰ How could one tell if the worst was over? For the Hoover administration, the Depression was initially believed to be a minor adjustment, a "natural" oscillation in the cycles of the capitalist economy which would eventually correct itself.¹¹ As a result, Hoover was reluctant to intervene in the economy, focusing instead on maintaining business confidence and renewing private

¹⁰See Theodore Rosenof, Economics in the Long Run: New Deal Theorists and their Legacies, 1933-1993 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 8, 13-27; Anthony Badger, The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940 (New York: Basingstoke Macmillan Education, 1989); Michael A. Bernstein, The Great Depression: Delayed Recovery and Economic Change in America, 1929-1939 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Barry D. Karl, The Uneasy State: The United States from 1915 to 1945 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Ellis W. Hawley, The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966); Jordan A. Schwartz, The New Dealers: Power Politics in the Age of Roosevelt (New York: Knopf, 1993).

¹¹Rosenof, Economics in the Long Run, 8.

investment.¹² Hoover met with leaders in industry, agriculture, and finance, extracting promises that they would do their best to maintain employment levels and wage rates.¹³ This, broadly stated, was the framework of discussion in Washington's corridors of power at the start of the 1930s. While later initiatives by Franklin Delano Roosevelt would experiment with federally funded programs to create jobs, revive industry and bail out agriculture, Hoover put more emphasis on encouraging counter-cyclical spending in the private sector. With the utmost faith in voluntarism, he urged both businessmen and elected officials to maintain employment and wage levels and follow through on planned public works and expenditures.¹⁴ The crisis, he believed, could be solved without dramatic intervention by the national state.

Popular discussion of the economic crisis was even more prosaic. The debate over the economic situation in Western New York lacked a sense of urgency in the early

¹²William Barber argues that the roots of the New Deal can actually be sensed during Hoover's term in office, that as early as 1921 when Hoover was secretary of commerce he was exploring ways to tame the business cycle. Barber, From New Era to New Deal: Herbert Hoover, the Economists, and American Economic Policy, 1921-1933 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 16. See also Joan Hoff Wilson, Herbert Hoover, Forgotten Progressive (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975).

¹³Roger Biles, A New Deal for the American People (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 17.

¹⁴Michael E. Parrish, Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920-1941 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 248-249. Elliot A. Rosen describes Hoover's attempts to come to grips with the Depression as "at best inadequate and belated, at worst restrained by voluntarism, calculated to avoid the creation of governmental mechanisms that would outlast the duration of the immediate crisis and alter existing institutional relationships." Rosen, Hoover, Roosevelt, and the Brains Trust: From Depression to New Deal (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) 53.

1930s, in part because many remained hopeful that their cities would not be hard hit before the "so-called slump" was over. At least initially, Buffalo and Rochester were not as affected by the economic downturn as were other cities in the United States. Both cities enjoyed a level of industrial diversification which provided a small (if in the end only temporary) level of protection from unemployment, and local business leaders remained optimistic that the economy would rebound.¹⁵ As Mark Goldman notes, even as late as 1932, Buffalo's Chamber of Commerce "continued to believe in the resiliency of the city's diversified economy."¹⁶ Steel production and flour milling were affected by the downturn, but other local businesses were thought likely to remain solvent and good bets to survive the "slump." Eastman Kodak, Rochester's largest single employer, was able to maintain its full workforce during the early years of the Depression.¹⁷ While cities like Pittsburgh and Detroit which relied heavily on one industry faced immediate

¹⁵Lansky, "Buffalo and the Great Depression," 205. A text for Buffalo public-school students boasted that the Buffalo was represented in over 70 per cent of the 334 different census classifications for industry, leading the American Encyclopaedia to note, "*Buffalo has a more diversified line of industry than any other American city.*" This diversity ensured that "[n]o industry so dominates, that depression in that business means general depression. In other cities general prosperity depends on the prosperity of one industry, " but in Buffalo "there is no business tieup which affects the whole city whenever one industry is affected." [emphasis in original] Barry and Elmes, Buffalo's Text Book, 40-41; Rochesterians similarly placed great faith in the "productivity of local factories and in the soundness of local banks," Blake McKelvey, Rochester on the Genesee: The Growth of a City (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973) 190.

¹⁶Goldman, High Hopes, 225.

¹⁷McKelvey, Emerging Metropolis, 21.

calamity, residents remained confident that Buffalo and Rochester were relatively well positioned to weather the storm.

Buffalo and Rochester boosters at first seemed to be in a state of denial about the seriousness of the situation. In the early months after the stock market crash of 1929, local pundits went to great lengths to stress the region's immunity to the economic downturn. The Rochester Democrat & Chronicle attempted to attract national advertisers by stressing the optimism of Rochesterians and the fact that the city was not suffering as much as the rest of the country. A full-page advertisement/editorial recounted the positive observations of recent visitors to the city. An economist making a survey of retail activity in the city was reported to have exclaimed, "The economic disease seems to leave no scars here." A financial man called his visit a "tonic," noting humorously that he had been in cities "where one is arrested if he smiles publicly."¹⁸

The paper also boasted that Rochester's 2,190 retail stores showed net sales in 1930 of almost \$208 million. This evidence of Rochester's optimism holds a clue about the types of approaches with which Western New York cities would experiment as the Depression lingered on. Retail sales were presented as an indication of the city's positive outlook. As long as the city's cash registers were ringing up sales, the ad copy suggested, conditions could not be that dire. And local citizens were sensible in their spending habits - economical but not too frugal. Residents were characterized as "thrifty in

¹⁸RD&C, 25 October 1931, 11C.

viewpoint, but generous in spending for self-betterment."¹⁹ This emphasis on "good" spending would become the rallying cry for local initiatives to combat the depression. Moreover, by differentiating Rochester from other cities, the paper reassured local readers that they at least were buffered from the chaos engulfing the rest of the nation.

The attractiveness of private consumption as an approach to ending the economic downturn of the early 1930s cannot be understood apart from the profound cultural change which preceded it. Consuming was an appealing course of action for a public which had come to equate spending with succeeding. As the previous chapters have explored, Americans during the early decades of the twentieth century had become more comfortable with material goods and self-indulgence as a part of daily life. Consuming, instead of producing, became the cornerstone of identity for most wage workers.²⁰ This shift involved more than a quantitative increase in the amount of manufactured goods which were purchased by people in every income bracket.²¹ Guided by new institutions

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Daniel Horowitz's seminal study of the evolution of American attitudes towards spending highlights the increased power of a new attitude towards material abundance by the turn of the century. He argues, "In the late nineteenth century a shift started from self-control to self-realization, from the world of the producer, based on the values of self-denial and achievement, to a consumer culture that emphasized immediate satisfaction and the fulfilment of the self through gratification and indulgence." Daniel Horowitz, The Morality of Spending: Attitudes toward the Consumer Society in America, 1875-1940 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) xxvi, 134-165.

²¹The middle class was the most visible participant in this change. A number of scholars including Roland Marchand, Jennifer Scanlon, and Richard Ohmann have explored how magazines and magazine advertising helped inculcate the middle class into this new culture. But although members of the working class were less able to buy into

like mass-market magazines and professional advertising, Americans increasingly found the purchase of consumer goods to be a means of self-expression and self-development, which overshadowed concern about religious salvation.²² By the end of the 1920s, notions of self-control and restraint seemed "old-fashioned" and out of step with the times. In their place came a dominant ideology of consumption.

The proliferation of mass-produced goods, as well as the innovations in advertising and distribution which encouraged their purchase, was indeed a dramatic development. Yet the growth of a new "consumer culture" did not completely eclipse all that came before. First, not all Americans embraced this transformation. As Daniel Horowitz notes, even within the business community, whose members arguably had the most to gain from a public that consumed without restraint, "the acceptance of new values was far from complete."²³ Other, more detached observers also voiced reservations. While advertisers trumpeted the importance of consumption in maintaining an increased

the idealized depiction of domestic life in The Ladies' Home Journal, there is evidence that working families as well experienced a qualitative shift in lifestyle in the early twentieth century.

²²T.J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930", in Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds., The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 3-38.

²³Daniel Horowitz, Morality of Spending, 135.

standard of living, social critics like Robert and Helen Lynd and Stuart Chase worried about the alienating and stultifying effects of excessive consumption.²⁴

Second, older traditions of individualism and self-help did not vanish from the cultural landscape. Reverence for "Yankee thrift" and self-reliance were not completely eradicated. Indeed, the very strength of this new culture lay in its ability to incorporate older traditions. Just as local loyalties persisted in the face of national trends in advertising and selling, older notions of self-control and restraint were often reworked so that they reinforced ideas about the positive potential of consuming. While on the one hand advertisers and manufacturers encouraged Americans to give in to the hedonism of luxury goods and conspicuous consumption, a simultaneous emphasis on control and personal efficiency underscored their messages.²⁵ A housewife who tried to be an efficient "domestic manager" through the proper selection of goods for her family did not

²⁴Richard Wightman Fox argues, "[Robert] Lynd never did give up his distaste for the consumer ethic; in that respect he remained a strong, indeed bitter critic of consumer culture. Like his idol Thorstein Veblen, he detested the notion that living could be conceived as the art of consuming." Fox, "Epitaph for Middletown: Robert S. Lynd and the Analysis of Consumer Culture," in Fox and Lears, eds., The Culture of Consumption, 140.

²⁵In recent years, Lears has urged a more nuanced understanding of this transition, arguing that two competing impulses persisted in the world of advertising: the celebration of desire and sensuality, and the rhetoric of control. Lears, Fables of Abundance, 10-13, 19. Lears was not the first to recognize the managerial impulses which underlay much of early twentieth-century advertising. Roland Marchand devotes a chapter in Advertising the American Dream on the preoccupations of professional advertisers with efficiency and control. Nevertheless, Lears's tracing of the tensions between the carnivalesque and the managerial in American advertising rightly highlights the older traditions which infused the "culture of abundance."

exactly fit the stereotype of the hedonistic spender. She was a spender, indeed, but was commended for taking the time to discriminate between products before selecting the "right" one for her family. Men depicted in ads were most often ambitious office workers, not indulgent consumers of luxury items.²⁶ At the same time that ads encouraged people to buy, they often portrayed successful consumers as those who maximized their resources and made reasoned product choices.

Even new mechanisms of credit, which critics charged were creating a nation of impulse buyers, were not necessarily anathema to the idea of control. Lendol Calder's recent work on the history of consumer credit further emphasizes the continuity of attitudes toward "responsible" spending. While the proliferation of consumer credit during the early decades of the nineteenth century has been characterized as a triumph of goods and luxury over self-control, Calder demonstrates that installment credit imposed a form of discipline over consumer debtors, encouraging them to be industrious enough to

²⁶Marchand's exploration of the visual clichés of interwar advertising contains countless examples of ads featuring both men and women who have maximized their productivity and are paragons of efficiency and hard work. See particularly Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 238-247. Ads were not the only medium for these messages of efficiency and productivity. Matthew Shneirov emphasizes how journalists, novelists and magazine writers in a slightly earlier period were also preoccupied with channelling the nation's energies into productive pursuits. Although Shneirov at times overestimates the influence of his chosen circle of writers and editors, he convincingly demonstrates their commitment to the notions of technological, scientific and industrial development. Although these "cultural entrepreneurs" celebrated the self and rebelled against some of the restraints of Victorianism, they still maintained a commitment to creating an "efficient, rational, and above all organized social order." Schneirov, Dream of a New Social Order, 200.

make their monthly payments.²⁷ Even as people became more comfortable with spending, they still retained notions of the "right way" to make purchases, the "responsible" way to spend. Spending could be serious business, and during the Depression the responsibility of the consumer was emphasized even more.

Furthermore, anxiety over the expansion of governmental powers ensured that private initiatives during the early 1930s would outpace any consideration of action by state or federal governments. As Michael Parrish has noted, Hoover took great pains to ensure that no effort to fight the Depression would "subvert the character of Americans by violating the fundamental principles of their social and political life: individualism, self-reliance, and voluntarism."²⁸ The emphasis on the importance of local communities in solving the problems of their own citizens did not disappear even as the federal government began to experiment more broadly with the concept of a planned society after 1932. Despite his own growing commitment to increased federal intervention, even President Roosevelt himself maintained that traditional voluntarism would always have a place in American life. He commented, "we must never lose sight of the fact that no matter what contributions the Federal government makes, local communities will always have their peculiar duties to perform."²⁹ Roosevelt was careful not to insult the efforts of

²⁷Lendol Calder, Financing the American Dream: A Cultural History of Consumer Credit (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 30-31.

²⁸Parrish, Anxious Decades, 244.

²⁹Quoted in Argersinger, Toward a New Deal in Baltimore, xv.

the local municipalities even at a time when his administration was stepping in to take over some of the responsibilities which they had overseen.

What is striking about the campaigns to pull Western New York out of the economic slump is the way that they fused these competing lines of rhetoric into one seamless justification for spending. If voluntarism was commended by both Hoover and Roosevelt at a national level, not surprisingly it appealed to business leaders at the local level as well. Local efforts did not, however, focus solely on the expansion of traditional channels of relief like churches or charity, although these institutions still remained active. Instead, local leaders set their sights on private consumption as the primary form of "voluntary" action. Merchants, manufacturers and civic authorities in Buffalo and Rochester encouraged families to spend more money and to spend it at home. They played upon notions of both frugality *and* self-gratification, of individualism *and* community service.

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, the idea that people from the region should try to keep dollars "at home" was not new in the 1930s. Just as they had during times of prosperity, business leaders used a language of localism to unite residents and marshal their available dollars. In the dark days of the 1930s, buying local was presented as an even more important answer to a variety of woes. Business leaders before the crash had tried a number of strategies to educate the public about the benefits of local spending. In 1928, the New Industries Bureau of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce sponsored a

slogan contest to promote Rochester-made goods. The winner of the \$25.00 prize came up with an instructive, if rather wordy, entry: "A Rochesterian purchasing a Rochester-made product is really investing in the industrial progress of the city, which pays dividends in the form of future prosperity."³⁰ After October 1929, the idea that "buying local" was beneficial to Western New York gained new urgency. While in the past merchants had tried to use their local status to retain customers who might be straying to chain retailers or to Manhattan boutiques, now local business leaders felt that harnessing the power of area dollars was the only way out of the slump. Their campaigns encompassed not only goods produced in the Western New York area, but all goods purchased there.

Consuming was an attractive solution to the economy's woes not only because it gave individuals the rationale to accumulate even more material possessions, but because it still was premised on a model of individualism and self-help. Those who had accumulated money should spend it, putting more funds into circulation and creating more demand for goods which would *incidentally* create new jobs for the unemployed. This was a very different impulse from, say, the giving of a handout to an unemployed and possibly undeserving candidate. During the early days of the Depression, commentators in Buffalo and Rochester carefully outlined plans which would improve local business conditions, yet not undermine the moral character of the community by

³⁰Kodak Magazine, 9 no. 6 (November 1928): 12.

indiscriminately handing out charitable gifts. The Buffalo Courier-Express described shopping as the "Best kind of philanthropy," for it "makes philanthropy unnecessary" by putting money into circulation, stimulating business and creating jobs. This rhetoric married older notions of individualism and a reluctance to help others for fear of making them dependent with a new acceptance of spending and indulgence in material goods as not only acceptable but positively virtuous. According to this scenario, all parties would win: shoppers could enjoy new goods, and employees could remain on the job.

Spending at the local level was particularly encouraged. A Courier-Express editorial qualified its advice by encouraging shoppers to direct their buying power into the local economy, not simply to spend money generally:

Such philanthropy begins at home - through the resumption of normal buying for normal needs on the part of everybody whose income remains steady. . . . Christmas is only 31 days away. Start your Christmas shopping now. It will help to put many people back to work right away. Come on Buffalo! Let's go!³¹

Significantly this conception of the economy used a rather loose definition of "local spending." Buying "at home" simply entailed shopping in local stores; no mention was made of selecting "Buffalo-made" products or even American-made ones. The site of consumption was what was important; a product's point of manufacture did not matter as long as it was bought locally.

The campaign also implied a certain understood level of "normal" buying which went beyond basic necessities. The use of the term "normal needs" implies a recognition

³¹BCE, 23 November 1930, 7.

of a division between necessities and frills. Yet in this instance, the purchase of gifts, arguably an "extra" which marked a special occasion, was consciously inserted within the parameters of "normal" spending. Christmas shopping was categorized as part of "normal buying," which would presumably be conducted even during a time of economic crisis. That "normal needs" went beyond subsistence purchases like food and clothing went without saying: it was assumed that shoppers had reigned their spending in and were only purchasing necessities.³² The free-spending days of the 1920s, when retail sales in Buffalo and Rochester had achieved record heights each year, were presented as the benchmark of "normal" buying, remembered fondly by retailers.

Buffalo newspaper writers and advertisers highlighted Christmas shopping as an opportunity for citizens to give to their own circle of family and friends while simultaneously making a civic contribution. A front-page story in the Buffalo Courier-Express, in December 1930 excitedly described the beginning of the Christmas shopping season, encouraging Christmas gift-buyers to congratulate themselves for their generosity on two levels. People who shopped early were "not only getting the choice of the entire

³²This distinction is especially striking given that the exchange of manufactured, as opposed to home-made, Christmas gifts itself was a relatively recent development. In his study of American gift-giving, William Waits argues that this shift occurred between 1880 and 1920. Initially, manufactured gifts tended to be cheap, gaudy and disposable "gimcracks." The purchase of more expensive items like home appliances or luxury goods for immediate family members and close friends did not begin until the early twentieth century, most significantly after 1910. Christmas gifts had thus become "normal" purchases in a relatively short span of time. Waits, The Modern Christmas in America: A Cultural History of Gift Giving (New York: New York University Press, 1993) 17-21, 50-69.

display of Christmas goods," but were "making an appreciable contribution to unemployment relief." This unemployment relief was not in the form of charity but in job creation. It is also notable that the story focused on jobs in the service sector: shoppers could feel pleased that their actions were causing stores to hire "[a]dditional salesmen and saleswomen," beyond the regular ranks of store employees. The extra pay received by shop workers "means a lot to many families."³³ Four days after this front-page editorial, a similar article urged shoppers to spend in Buffalo stores and "help others to help themselves." Additional crowds would require extra hands behind the shop counters of the city and result in "welcome pay envelopes" for jobless men and women in the community. The paper counselled, "Buyers make workers and prosperity is made by spending."³⁴ No mention was made of expanding the payrolls of local factories, perhaps indicating the belief that salespeople would be the first and most visible group to benefit from increased levels of retail sales. This emphasis on salespeople also reflected the increasing importance of the service sector in the Buffalo economy. Although manufacturing still remained central to Buffalo's identity, an increasing percentage of Buffalo workers worked in trade (most importantly in retail) by the end of the 1920s.³⁵

The moral imperative of spending money locally to help reduce unemployment was highlighted in stories which underlined the deserving nature of those receiving jobs.

³³BCE, 2 December, 1930, 1.

³⁴BCE, 6 December 1930, 1.

³⁵Goldman, High Hopes, 217.

In 1931 the Courier- Express featured an article about the "extras" who were hired as staff by Buffalo's stores.³⁶ Interviews with a number of young women employed by retailers revealed the worthy goals towards which they were working. One of the clerks was trying to pay off debts from doctor's bills, another had hopes to send a young sister to school, others simply had to help feed their families. A typical story stressed the harsh home conditions faced by a young, hardworking shopgirl:

Behind Miss E.'s pre-holiday job in a local department store is the dream of giving her family "a real Christmas." Her father hasn't worked for four years, and her older brother can't get a job either. The family lives in a suburban cottage that was once their summer home and was not built for winter use.³⁷

The emphasis on the meritorious nature of such workers was designed to alleviate any qualms shoppers might have that the legions of unemployed were down on their luck due to character flaws or personal failings. No one could dispute that "a real Christmas" was a worthwhile endeavour, particularly for a young woman who had been forced to assume the traditionally masculine mantle of provider for her family after her father and brother had failed. It is also striking that the paper celebrated the creation of jobs for girls, given the prevailing belief that the nation's first priority was to get *men* back to work. Perhaps because department stores were traditionally places of female employment, there would be less weight to the argument that these shopgirls were "taking jobs away" from men.

³⁶BCE, 8 December 1931, 4.

³⁷Ibid.

Buffalo's newspaper pundits were not original in distinguishing between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor. Yet the rejection of charity as a course of action, especially during the Christmas season, is revealing.³⁸ Consuming was a less controversial solution to the problems of the 1930s than charity. By helping themselves, those who bought goods would also help others; they would not risk insulting the pride, or encouraging the laziness, of the less fortunate. This initiative would not entail a radical redistribution of wealth, for those with money were simply encouraged to spend it on themselves, with the happy byproduct of helping others. The holiday season, a time traditionally associated with giving alms to the poor, or more typically during the 1920s with donating to the local "Community Chest," was in this instance divorced from any hint of charity. One could buy gifts for friends and family members, indulging them while giving gainful employment, not handouts, to the poor.

³⁸Christmas charity for the poor was increasingly seen as "old-fashioned" by the 1920s. William Waits argues that the idea of Christmas charity had been transformed during the Progressive era as reformers insisted that assistance to the poor was best coordinated by large organizations, not left up to the individual, and spread out throughout the year instead of concentrated in December. Yet even though personal individualized Christmas charity was on the wane, Waits notes, the Depression years "once again encouraged Americans to perform small acts of kindness or to give small remembrances to the poor at Christmas." Waits, Modern Christmas, 170-177, quote on p. 175. Buffalo's attempts to encourage private consumption emphasized how superior a solution this was to traditional Christmas charity, and suggested helping the poor through creating employment rather than handouts.

In Buffalo's newspaper editorials, consuming was thus redefined as a civic act.³⁹

Commentators in 1930 repeatedly pointed to private spending as the path out of the Depression. The underlying assumption of these messages was that once consumers understood their part in the system, they would make the rational decision to do their part and go out and spend. The Buffalo Evening News explained the workings of the economy in simple terms, and highlighted the role of the consumer in an editorial in November, 1930:

The law of supply and demand is constant - consumer, retailer, manufacturer. It's logical and self-evident. Merchants supply the consumers' needs - your needs. Manufacturers supply the merchants - your merchants. . . . You are a necessary part of the business cycle, and upon your filling your place in this cycle depends the prosperity and welfare of the nation. If you stop buying, the merchants' shelves remain stocked, the sales force must be thinned, factories must shut down. Result . . . Unemployment.⁴⁰

³⁹Consuming had, of course, been given political meaning before this time. At the time of the American revolution, patriots identified themselves by their conspicuous non-consumption of English goods. See T.H. Breen, "Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution." Dana Frank's recent survey of "Buy American" campaigns, as well as her earlier work on consumer boycotts, explores how consuming could be a powerful political act for organized labour and other groups. See Frank, Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999). Yet what is striking about the Western New York campaigns is that the consumption involved little or no sacrifice. While patriots chafed in their homespun garments, or housewives made the effort to look for the union label, Western New Yorkers could congratulate themselves for *anything* they purchased which put more money into the local economy. All consuming, in this view, was good, civic-minded spending.

⁴⁰BEN, 20 November 1930, 1.

The solution was clear: individuals had to take the initiative to "Buy Out the Depression." This would not require abnormal or "spendthrift" behaviour on the part of the public, only the resumption of "normal buying." If the return to prosperity simply awaited the resumption of "normal buying for normal needs," the individual was warned, "Stinting on your part means unemployment for others."⁴¹ To hold back at such a time was not to be wisely frugal, in the mode of Ben Franklin in Poor Richard's Almanack; it was to be selfish and short-sighted. These proposed early solutions to the Depression deployed a rhetoric of private initiative and market self-regulation, not state intervention, to encourage consumer spending. Consuming in this line of reasoning became not just a mode of self-expression but a marker of civic responsibility.

Retailers and editorialists picked up on the emphasis on "home buying" that had permeated advertising during the 1920s and in the battle against chain stores. Not only was it foolish to spend the extra money to travel to New York seeking fashionable goods, for example, it was one's civic responsibility to spend those dollars at home and try to alleviate the crisis. The wealthy of the community, in particular, were thought to have a responsibility to the less fortunate. Those who made their fortunes in Buffalo were warned of the dire consequences when they chose to shop in New York rather than at home. One editorial writer pointed out that women who shopped in New York were married to men who sold goods or services to the citizens of Buffalo. Given that these

⁴¹BEN 2 December 1930, 29.

men had "worked hard for their salaries or their share of the profits of their companies," the writer asked, shouldn't they be allowed to spend their money wherever they chose? Although the idea of limiting consumer choice seemed anathema to the whole culture of consumption, the answer was not so simple. The decision to shop away might be acceptable during "ordinary times,"

But today every one's [sic] expenditure is a matter of public import. And just how shrewd, we ask, is it to trade out of town and then complain because your business does not pick up? In prosperous times, every one is buying. Today the wealthier citizens have a definite duty to perform. No one asks them to buy more than they should. But what they do buy should be purchased here in Buffalo. The profit to each individual is indirect. Today, however, we must have far-sightedness.⁴²

The same arguments marshalled to keep local dollars at home in good times gained a new urgency during the 1930s. If all else failed, appeals to self-interest were trotted out. It was simply "good business" to boost local merchants, for they in turn "bought from you" in the form of actual purchases of services or more abstractly in paying the wages of local people. Given that "Buffalo products and Buffalo stores" were of proven quality, there was simply no good reason to go away to shop. Anyone who disagreed was reminded that "Money spent outside of Buffalo is poured into a bottomless well."⁴³

In a time of economic crisis, consumers were not the only ones whose ethical behaviour mattered. Local manufacturers and merchants took pains to assert that their business practices were above reproach, and that they would not use hard times as an

⁴²TT, April 1932, reprinted June 1936, 34.

⁴³Ibid.

excuse to bilk the public. The Mitchell Knitting Mills of Buffalo reported that a sale on their goods should not be viewed as a precursor to the firm's demise.

This is no bankrupt stock. Nor are these fine stylish and staple sweaters any tag-ends of stocks. They are all 1930 Fall and Winter goods. All made in Buffalo, by Buffalo workers. We are not thinking of loading up our Buffalo friends and then going out of Business. Quite the contrary. We have been in this sweater knitting business here for many years, and believe that Buffalo people in these times are entitled to these bargains.⁴⁴

While manufacturers and retailers encouraged people to spend locally, even banks tried to get into the action, implying that they too were local institutions that should be patronized. One Rochester newspaper ad proclaimed, "Your deposits Keep Workers on the Job. By depositing in a Rochester bank you help your community. Your savings are safe, available and earning interest."⁴⁵

As the civic importance of consumption gained emphasis, sales appeals directed toward men increased. Shopping traditionally had been firmly categorized as a "feminine" activity, a notion underscored by commercial advertising directed at "Mrs. Consumer" throughout the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁶ Yet by the 1930s, when consumer spending was deemed a matter not of fashion or frills but of economic

⁴⁴BEN, Home Edition, 8 December 1930, 6.

⁴⁵RD&C 3 October 1932, 19.

⁴⁶For a discussion of the perception of the consumer as female during the nineteenth century, see Kathleen G. Donohue, "What Gender is the Consumer?: The Role of Gender Connotations in Defining the Political," Journal of American Studies 33 (1999): 21-23. See also Roland Marchand's chapter on how advertisers perceived their audience, Advertising the American Dream, 52-87.

survival, it was increasingly presented as a serious subject, worthy of male attention. Appeals to economic reason most often appeared in ads directed at male shoppers as well as, or even instead of, women. While female customers had often been the main targets of department store newspaper advertising, ads which used a "reason-why" approach, explaining the benefits of spending as a way out of the Depression, were as likely to speak to men as to women. When J.N. Adam's trumpeted the benefits of buying clothes in 1931 that were twice the value of those from 1930, its ad commended "thousands of Buffalo Women, Men and Children":

They're going to be better dressed than they were last year on the same money. They're going to put more money into circulation - and more money in circulation will help put more men back to work. They're going to get rid of the "depression complex".⁴⁷

Ads regularly flattered readers by suggesting that they were intelligent enough to make the right choices, even when the rest of the nation foolishly panicked. One 1931 ad for J.N. Adam's pointed out that many of the great fortunes of America were created during "dull times": the wise families who had money to spend in an economic slump could take advantage of the opportunity. The ad argued, "Right now intelligent people are buying more and more - because quality is on the bargain table and because prices are so drastically low." Smart shoppers would maximize this opportunity to stock up on quality goods at low prices and simultaneously display their concern for their community.⁴⁸

⁴⁷BEN, 26 June 1931, 6.

⁴⁸BEN 23 June 1931, 7.

Yet even as men were congratulated for turning their attention to buying, women were acknowledged as experienced purchasers. Some of these appeals flattered women for not overreacting to the crisis: J.N. Adam's commended housewives for their ability to size up the economic situation, and not be overcome with pessimism. They credited women with being able to recognize that conditions would soon be on the upswing.

While all the keen-eyed "Miracle Men" of America have been in serious conference - wondering where the bottom of the depression might be - the keen-minded housewives of America **have sensed that this is probably the bottom right now.** . . . So - J.N. Adam's takes a bow to the housewives of Buffalo - they know real values when they see them.⁴⁹

At least implicitly, the ad suggested that men were the ones who were holding back; if women were willing to spend, it was their husbands who needed to be educated with the "hard facts" of the economy. And despite some acknowledgement of women's superior economic sense, older stereotypes about women as innate, emotional spenders remained strong. Strikingly, ads which directly addressed women or referred to women shoppers separately from men were more likely to suggest that women *wanted* to buy. By simply maintaining their "natural" enthusiasm for spending, women could make a valuable contribution. This emphasis on the different perceptions of men and women of the economic situation was emphasized in a department store ad in Rochester. McCurdy & Company attempted to sympathize with women shoppers who felt fed up with talk of the depression. Women were characterized as less concerned with financial conditions -

⁴⁹BEN 25 June 1931, 7.

while men actually enjoyed "moaning and groaning over juicy tales of bankrupts, busted prices and wobbly stocks," women missed the days when they spent freely:

[Men] haven't had such an inexhaustible topic for conversation in years - it has been a joy for them to suffer through the Depression. But we girls, that's different. We've been suffering from Repression. We can't go anywhere because we're practically *naked*. Home economy programs have ruined us.⁵⁰

The ad played with notions of women as shoppers with no self-control.⁵¹ While their husbands fretted over family finances, these deprived women longed for "gay evening things" that would help them forget their present troubles. McCurdy's took on the role of confidante, assuming the role of the shopper who exclaimed, "We girls are just sick of it!" and speaking of the store workers in the third person. The dismissal of women as frivolous spenders, more concerned about fashion than the harsh realities of the economic situation alternated with portrayals of women as budget-conscious domestic "managers" who maintained the family budget. The suggestion that women "naturally" craved luxurious items was not exactly complimentary; while stores on one hand commended

⁵⁰RD&C 8 December 1931, 5.

⁵¹The stereotype of the middle-class woman who was easily seduced by department store displays became entrenched in the late nineteenth century. The extreme example of this figure was the woman who not only purchased on impulse or beyond her means, but stole items which tempted her. In her study of female shoplifting, Elaine Abelson argues that stores were reluctant to prosecute "kleptomaniacs" who were often women of good social standing, and regular customers. She notes that explanations for female shoplifting often rested on "woman's weak state of mind and frequent episodes of irresponsible behavior." A doctor testifying on behalf of a woman accused of shoplifting in 1893 excused her behaviour by reinforcing the idea that "the female was often unstable, ruled by her nervous system and her emotions." Abelson, When Ladies Go A-Thieving, 13-41, 120-172, quote on p. 169.

women for avoiding the "depression-mindset" of their husbands, the tone of ads directed at "we girls" suggested that women were interested in fashion for selfish reasons, not because they knew that spending would help the economy.

Merchants used newspaper ads to "educate" readers about the economic situation. The didactic quality of such appeals allowed merchants to claim that they were performing a "public service" by including whole paragraphs explaining the workings of the economy. Where during the 1920s a full-page newspaper ad might have been trumpeting the arrival of new stocks in the millinery department, for example, now columns of text painstakingly described the economy in "layman's terms." A typical treatise appeared in a 1931 ad for J.N. Adam's:

If low prices will cause more people to buy more merchandise - more people buying more merchandise will necessitate greater production. Greater production will bring more workers back to their jobs. More people working and spending will put more dollars into circulation. And more money distributed through the channels of more buying, more wages, more production, more spending will help open wide the door to better times. J.N. Adam's dramatic presentation of today's low prices is made with the intention of showing Buffalo just how much sound, substantial value in good, dependable merchandise their dollars will buy today. The price of thousands of articles is lower than for years. Good merchandise has not sold so inexpensively for a decade. Right now is the time to stock up. . . . You can't afford to hold off any longer!⁵²

The altruism of stores encouraging "home buying" is open to question. On one level, merchants were probably genuinely committed to improving conditions in their cities. Many took very seriously their role as "pillars of the community" and were active in local

⁵²BEN 22 June 1931, 7.

politics and trade initiatives.⁵³ McCurdy & Co., for example, did its best to keep as many local citizens employed as possible - the store did not fire anyone during the entire Depression, though it curtailed employee hours week by week until economic conditions improved.⁵⁴ Another Rochester store staged a "Community Day" where members of three women's organizations volunteered as "shopkeepers for a day," and a percentage of the day's sales receipts were turned over to the unemployment relief fund of the Rochester Community Chest.⁵⁵

At the same time, one should not take their protestations of acting for the "public good" entirely at face value. Merchants hoped to capitalize on local anxiety, turning around slumping sales by emphasizing the local responsibility of citizens to consume. While these businesses often had long-standing local ties, their actions were not only motivated by the desire to improve the lot of Western New Yorkers, but by their own bottom lines.

⁵³Buffalo, in particular, had a tradition of merchants playing a large role in local politics. J.N. Adam, founder of the department store of the same name, even served as mayor of Buffalo. BEN, April 11, 1935, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 297, BECPL.

⁵⁴Hotra, "McCurdy & Company Timeline," 9.

⁵⁵"Today - Members of the Chatterbox Club, Junior Workers' Association, General Hospital Twigs Unite in Becoming "Storekeepers for a Day!" Community Day at Forman's - a Benefit Project for the Unemployment Fund of the Rochester Community Chest," RD&C, 3 December 1931, 2. Store workers were presumably not included in the "community" benefiting from these events, which would prevent them from earning a day's wages as volunteers took over their jobs. Some store clerks may have enjoyed a day of holiday, even if it was unpaid.

In 1931 local leaders in Buffalo and Rochester experimented with two organized campaigns to increase consumer spending in the area. Both of these initiatives assumed that a "loosening of purse strings" would help the community to rebound; in turn, these types of community efforts would have a ripple effect and eventually pull the entire nation out of its slump. This was not sophisticated "counter-cyclical spending." It relied on a much more basic model of economic growth and the market. In retrospect, it is clear that it would take much more than an increase in private spending to turn the U.S. economy around. Yet the fact that these initiatives were boldly presented as the answer to such a crippling problem underscores how, at least early on in the 1930s, many believed that solutions were within the grasp of the local community. Once the proper course of action was outlined, consumers would step up to do their part to pump money into the local economy. Nowhere was this faith in the power of the individual consumer more evident than in the two campaigns organized by merchants and business leaders in Buffalo and Rochester in 1931: "Buffalo Day" and the "Monroe County Pledge for Prosperity." Although each city had a different approach to encouraging local spending, both played up the responsibility of the local citizen and the importance of boosting local retail sales as a way to turn things around for the region, and in turn, the country.

Buffalo Day, as described earlier, was touted as the solution to the region's problems. Local pundits were optimistic about the potential for the Buffalo Day campaign to improve economic conditions in the city. By holding a city-wide sale, merchants would give local citizens a reason to celebrate and indulge themselves, while

helping to put their neighbours back to work in local stores and factories. The editorial cartoonist of the Buffalo Evening News depicted a female shopper in a car labelled "Business" who planned to spend the day taking advantage of bargains. In the distance, at the end of the road lay, her destination: "Normalcy" (see figure 8).⁵⁶ Another editorial cartoon depicted the public's buying impulse as a sleeping fish. It remained to be seen whether "bait" like sales and cut prices would succeed in enticing the public to wake up (see figure 9). Weldon C. Smith, chairman of the Buffalo Day organizing committee, outlined the reasons for holding the event. The event was as much about overcoming a psychological condition as an economic one, in his view:

Believing that the so-called "business depression" is now largely a mental condition, Buffalo Day was conceived by the merchants of this city to help restore confidence and encourage the public to resume buying. . . . Unless there is a return of buying consciousness, the wheels of industry will not revolve rapidly and any plan to bring back prosperity that does not include a restoration of the customary habits of spending a reasonable share of one's earnings wisely will necessarily fail.⁵⁷

That Smith could still refer to the depression as "so-called" after nearly two years of unemployment and economic stagnation only underscores his belief that the crisis was one of perception, not reality. This emphasis on achieving a "psychological breakthrough" through symbolic activity echoed the language of earlier reformers who tried to jolt Buffalo's development by changing the name of its Main Street. In a single day, planners of the event hoped to wipe away months of economic stagnation.

⁵⁶BEN, 2 September 1931, 3.

⁵⁷BEN, 2 September 1931, 3.

Now Watch It Pick Up?



Figure 8 Buffalo Day Cartoon. BEN, 2 September, 1931, 3. Reprinted with permission of the Buffalo Evening News.

Ho Hum!

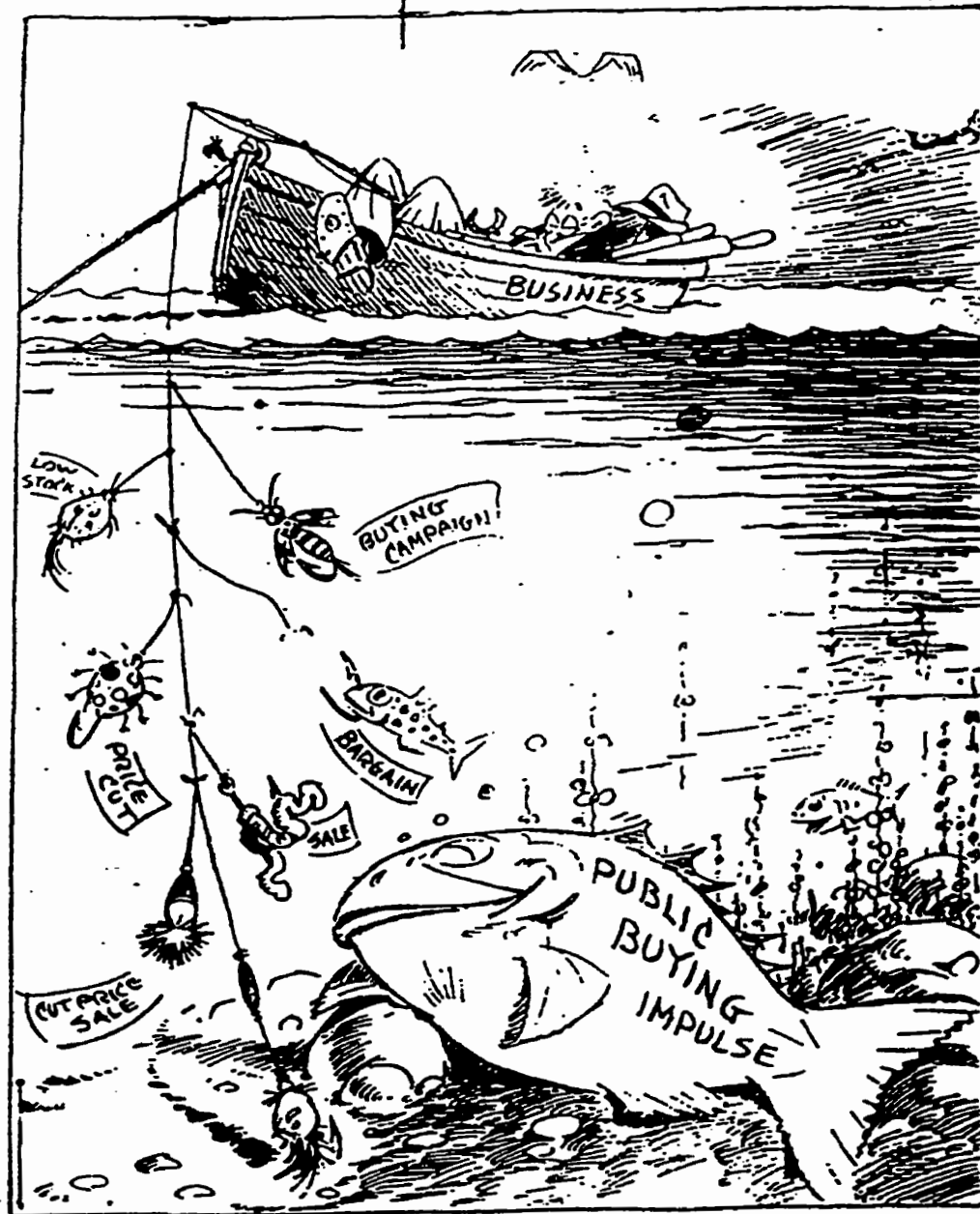


Figure 9 "Ho Hum!" Cartoon. BEN, 3 August, 1931, 4. Reprinted with permission of the Buffalo Evening News.

BUFFALO DAY SPECIALS

FOR BUFFALO DAY ONLY

- To be given away with every \$10.00 purchase of any of the following:
- AQUARIUM
 - TABLE LAMPS
 - CEDAR CHESTS
 - LOUNGE CHAIRS



To be given away with every \$10.00 purchase of any of the following:

AQUARIUM



To be given away with every \$10.00 purchase of any of the following:

TABLE LAMP



To be given away with every \$10.00 purchase of any of the following:

CEDAR CHEST



To be given away with every \$10.00 purchase of any of the following:

LOUNGE CHAIR

STORE HOURS
9 A. M. to 6:00 P. M.
Open Saturday Until
8:30 P. M.



DRESSING TABLE

Unfinished
Here's just the thing for that extra bathroom. It comes with a mirror and stands in any room. Priced for Buffalo Day

\$3.95



DAY BED

Unfinished, especially for Buffalo Day. A handsome table, covered in any room. Priced for Buffalo Day

\$11.39



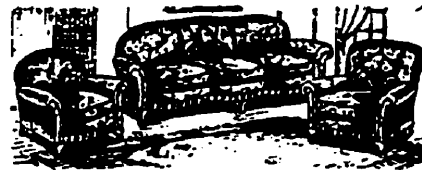
SECRETARY

A real improvement in desk-making and writing. Priced for Buffalo Day

\$26.95

The Committee asked for Our Co-operation and here it is.

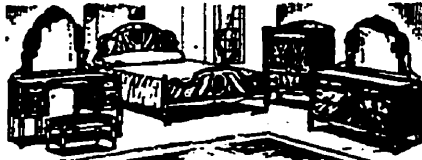
After weeks of preparation, we take pride in offering to the public on Buffalo Day, the greatest accumulation of honest to goodness furniture values that we have ever known. Look at these master and old pieces, note the exceptional quality and styling and then look at the sensationally low prices. We know you'll agree that Buffalo Day is the day of super values. Come in, make friends and be convinced.



3 PC. LIVING ROOM SUITE

We are offering for Buffalo Day only—this marvelous suite with inviting lines—of sturdy construction and covered in alluring multi-colored jacquard. Priced for Buffalo Day

\$59.00



3 PC. BEDROOM SUITE

Here's an attractive Bedroom Suite that has been priced within the reach of all for Buffalo Day. Includes Dresser, Bed and chair of Chest or Vanity. Priced for Buffalo Day

\$61.00



3 PC. DINING ROOM SUITE

You'll ask for another Buffalo Day after you see this exceptional Dining Room Suite. Includes Buffet, China Cabinet, Two side Chairs and Host Chair. Priced for Buffalo Day

\$59.00

ALL ODD PIECES & SUITES CAN BE YOURS ON THE EASIEST TERMS IN BUFFALO

THE NEW BING & NATHAN
MAIN AT MONAWK WATCH OUR WINDOWS

Figure 10 Bing & Nathan Buffalo Day ad. BEN, 3 September 1931, 22. Reprinted with permission of the Buffalo Evening News.

A mass meeting of all Buffalo retailers was held on August 28 in the prestigious Statler Hotel, and every store owner in Buffalo, "regardless of the store's size or location," was encouraged to participate.⁵⁸ The Mayor addressed the store owners, and representatives from fourteen local merchants' and taxpayers' associations were in attendance. On an organizational level, their efforts were a success. To kick off the celebration, a parade of 200 cars and floats wove through Buffalo's West Side the night before Buffalo Day. Local radio stations featured short talks from notables including Mayor Roesch, outlining the purpose of the day and urging the public to participate. Large and small retailers, department stores and specialty shops across the city opened their doors with special Buffalo Day bargains.⁵⁹ Not only independent merchants but chain stores with branches in the area participated in Buffalo Day. Sears boasted that it "Leads in Buffalo Day Bargains" and offered extra savings on everything from a Kenmore electric washer to a canary with cage and stand.⁶⁰

⁵⁸BEN, 26 August 1931, 23.

⁵⁹Among those advertising with special reference to Buffalo Day in the Thursday, September 3, 1931 edition of the Buffalo Evening News were J.N. Adam & Co. (dept. store), Adam, Meldrum & Anderson Co. (dept. store), Sears, Roebuck & Co., Berger's Specialty Shop, Flickinger's Food Shops, Bing & Nathan (furniture), Harvey Marshall (dress shop), Palmer's (specialty shops), Alexander Kornhauser (dress shop), A.M. Keating Millinery Importer, Peter Young (men's clothing), Hy-Pure Drug Stores, Scher Shop (women's dresses and coats), Jean Smart Dress Shop, Matrix Shoes, and Joan Baker (beauty salon).

⁶⁰BEN, 3 September 1931, 48-49.

Local leaders were unanimous in their support of the venture. A number of speakers, including the mayor, were featured in radio addresses to encourage citizens to take part in the festivities. Weldon D. Smith, chairman of the organizing committee, again emphasized that the local initiative would mean better days not only for Buffalonians but for all Americans. He argued, "This day was not planned just to bolster up sales, but is the merchants' contribution to the general plan to solve our national problem."⁶¹ And sure enough, over 200,000 shoppers flooded the downtown core for the event, ringing up record cash register receipts. Downtown stores and Main Street were "literally jammed with shoppers," the Evening News reported on its front page.⁶² Other cities imitated Buffalo in organizing shopping days - local papers crowed that Chicago was considering copying Buffalo's initiative.

Yet while the "shopping troops" were marshalled on Main Street, "Buffalo Day" did not achieve its larger goal of jolting the community, and the nation, out of the Depression. Department store sales in September of 1931, while an improvement over the lull of the summer months, did not even match those of September 1930, never mind the high-water mark of the mid-1920s.⁶³ This failure did not end enthusiasm for "home

⁶¹BEN, 2 September 1931, 3.

⁶²BEN, Stocks Edition, 4 September 1931, 1.

⁶³"Index of Sales of Department Stores," BBSR Records, Box 2, Folder "Department Store Sales," UBA. With the yearly sales from 1925-1926-1927 taken as 100%, monthly sales in September, 1931 were 79.6, while those of September 1930 were 100.2. For more complete figures, see Appendix..

shopping" as a solution to the economic situation, however. And Buffalonians were not alone in experimenting with initiatives to increase consumer spending, as the efforts of the residents of Rochester demonstrate.

In November of 1931, Rochester's Civic Committee on Unemployment also developed a strategy to inject more consumer dollars into the local economy. Like Buffalo Day, the plan was an ambitious one which hoped to turn the power of individual consumers to the benefit of the Western New York region. Rochesterians were used to pulling together in the face of adversity. As city historian Blake McKelvey notes, local residents met the onset of the depression with a sense of confidence which stemmed "from the triumphs they had won in face of earlier cultural as well as civic and economic challenges."⁶⁴ Drives to build the university, to raise war bonds, to support the city's museum and public library had been met with enthusiasm. As the depression wore on, however, unemployment soared and work-relief projects initiated by the city seemed to accomplish little beyond increasing Rochester's debt. While the Depression was not as bad in Rochester as it was in many other industrial cities, as Richard E. Holl notes, "it was bad enough."⁶⁵

⁶⁴McKelvey, Emerging Metropolis, 42.

⁶⁵Richard E. Holl, "Marion B. Folsom and the Rochester Plan of 1931," Rochester History 61 no. 1 (Winter 1999): 5.

In February of 1931, a group of Rochester employers led by Marion B. Folsom, assistant treasurer of Eastman Kodak, initiated a program of unemployment insurance for their workers. Employees laid off due to poor economic conditions who had been on the job for at least one year and earned less than \$50 per week would be eligible for benefits up to \$18.75 per week. These benefits would last between six and thirteen weeks, depending on the individual's seniority.⁶⁶ Folsom conceived of the plan as a form of employment stabilization, which would help some jobless workers, but more importantly, encourage management to retain workers through tough times.⁶⁷ One major drawback of the plan, however, was that it covered only a small percentage of the city's workers. Smaller firms could not afford to participate in the plan, and only fourteen companies signed on in 1931.⁶⁸

Another plan of action, one which could mobilize all Rochesterians, was needed. First conceived by Civic Committee Chair Libanus Todd (and at times referred to as the "Todd Plan" in its early stages), the scheme targeted local people who were hoarding their savings. Unemployment was explained as the result of the excessive frugality of those with money. Instead of spending, people were stockpiling. Left unchecked, this trend

⁶⁶Ibid., 7.

⁶⁷Ibid., 10.

⁶⁸Ibid., 16. Folsom would eventually endorse the federal-state unemployment insurance system proposed by FDR in 1934-1935 as a way to expand unemployment insurance to a majority of American companies. He would be active as a member of the Advisory Council on Economic Security, working for the passage of the Social Security Act of 1935.

could have dire consequences, as a newspaper ad explaining the Committee's strategy argued:

Such penny-pinching is at present one of the major reasons for business stagnation. When people stop buying, mills stop manufacturing, men are laid off and their buying power is shut off. All this but leads to an endless cycle from one tragedy to another; more shut downs, more unemployment, again less spending, fewer dividends, less income, more charity, greater taxes for relief. Finally, if these things continue, all buying would cease, all production would be dammed up and the suffering of every industry, every community and every individual would be beyond imagination. This is not a pretty picture.⁶⁹

The Committee hoped an organized effort to encourage spending would ameliorate the situation. By December, the Democrat & Chronicle first featured an ad for the "Pledge for Prosperity" campaign, which was designed to have local citizens promise to spend a certain amount of money "in an intelligent effort to bring back normal times."⁷⁰ Readers were advised to include in their total pledge any direct hiring of labour (i.e. hiring a contractor for home renovations), as well as "the indirect employment of labor in the consumption of products already made or produced."⁷¹

A list of over 150 suggestions for home improvement included cosmetic changes like "Replace tub, lavatory, and water closet with modern types," or "Provide improved toilet seat," as well as more ambitious home projects like replacing pipes and wiring, building a

⁶⁹RD&C, 9 December 1931, 2.

⁷⁰RD&C 14 December 1931, Section II, 15.

⁷¹RD&C, 3 December 1931, 8.

sleeping porch, or installing a telephone.⁷² The Committee enlisted the help of other sponsors who stood to gain from the project, including the Rochester Retail Merchants Association, the Industrial Management Council, and the Builders and Contractors' Association.

For ten days, 1500 workers canvassed Rochester and Monroe County, asking local residents, "Have You Signed the Pledge for Prosperity?"⁷³ Anyone missed in the door-to-door campaign could mail in a pledge form to be included in the total. The Democrat & Chronicle kept a running tally of the total pledges made on the front page of every issue. The written statement formed a sort of "pledge of allegiance" for local consumers, asking the individual to promise to hold up his/her end of the economic relationship for the benefit of the community. Instead of national honour, the campaign required a commitment to local spending. Subscribers endorsed the following statement:

Believing that a dollar invested in employing labor does more good than a dollar given as charity, and desiring to help to increase employment, I hereby pledge that I will, during the next three months, (or before 1932), expend at least \$..... in improving my home, factory, store, buildings or grounds by purchasing desirable equipment or by making needed additions, repairs or alterations; or by making personal purchases for myself, family or friends, which otherwise might be deferred.⁷⁴

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³RD&C, 14 December 1931, 16.

⁷⁴RD&C, 9 December 1931, 2.

Have You Signed the Pledge for Prosperity?

FOR ten days, 1500 workers have been canvassing the city and the country in your interest and in the interest of every citizen, employed or unemployed. Tonight, the eyes of the nation will be focused on Rochester, for this is the day when the final pledges will be recorded and the wires will carry to America the news of how Monroe County has freed millions of dollars toward restoring normal times.

You Will Want to Share in This Triumph—

Possibly, you have not been reached. If so, there is still time for you to share in this triumph. Simply clip out the pledge printed below, fill in the amount you wish to expend, add your name and address and mail the pledge to the Civic Committee on Unemployment at 25 Spring Street, Rochester, New York.

The Pledge Tells the Story—

The pledge below tells the story in a very few words. By signing it you agree to join thousands of other citizens in an intelligent effort to bring back normal times. Your promise thereby gives you the opportunity to be generously selfish by doing something for yourself and by so doing you provide work for others. That's how simple it is. You immediately set aside dollars in motion directly in employing labor or by making deferred purchases which

in turn will set in motion the wheels of industry.

What Should You Include?—

In signing this pledge, you naturally ask yourself the question, "What is fair for me to include?" Mr. L. M. Todd (in whose mind this plan originated) explains this point clearly.

"All direct employment of labor," said Mr. Todd, "beyond your regular schedule, all purchases for yourself, family or friends which have not been contemplated, and are made as the direct result of this appeal to aid the movement, may fairly and reasonably be included."

So—if by any chance our "Official Worker" has not found you at home when he called, you can still have a part in this tremendously popular movement by clipping the pledge below, filling it in and mailing it as directed.

Reach for Your Pencil *NOW* and
Sign the Pledge for Prosperity

THE PLEDGE:

BELIEVING that a dollar invested in employing labor does more good than a dollar given as charity, and desiring to help to increase employment, I hereby pledge that I will, during the next three months, (or before..... 1932), expend at least \$..... in improving my home, factory, store, buildings or grounds by purchasing desirable equipment or by making needed additions, repairs or alterations; or by making personal purchases for myself, family or friends, which otherwise might be deferred.

Signed

Address

Clip Here and Mail to

Figure 11 "Pledge for Prosperity"
Form. RD&C, 14 December 1931, 6.
Reprinted with permission of the
Rochester Democrat & Chronicle.

Figure 12 B. Forman and Todd Plan ad.
RD&C 22 November, 1931, 7A. Reprinted
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Chronicle.

Speaking of Rochester's New

Todd Plan

to Stimulate Spending . . .



You Should See How

Our Store is

Decorated for Christmas

B. FORMAN CO.

110-112 EAST AVENUE, ROCHESTER

CORSTAD STREET

We placed our participation in the great community plan
 perfect. Forman's not only will comply with the suggestion
 to do extra spending—Forman's has been enjoying
 We've subscribed to the plan in spirit for many weeks
 page by. We've not only made an interesting and
 pending for different completion of interesting and
 have made. The time we've even been celebrating
 Just take our Christmas decorations as a case in point.
 No ornament here! There are more spectacularly
 elaborate, more dramatic than any De-
 cember decorations in town.
 We've lowered the price strings, called in the workers,
 thought up new additions to make old traditions—and
 soon they will be finished . . . and then, we urge you
 to come to see them, to test your eyes on December
 brightness and assure your part in Christmas cheer.

The campaign offered Rochesterians the opportunity to give a special "Christmas gift" to their families, neighbours and community. Monroe County was taking "the bit in its teeth," setting an example for the rest of the nation in "how to dynamite the dam of accumulated dollars and turn loose the reservoir of wealth to flood the dried up fields of prosperity."⁷⁵

The language of the pledge was a bundle of contradictions. Monroe County residents were exhorted to help others by abandoning "Perverted Thrift." Self-denial, in this context, was characterized as stingy and short-sighted. Those who had money "salted away," yet persisted in living below their means were "pettily denying themselves and their families the comforts and luxuries they really would like and really can afford."⁷⁶ Instead, good local citizens were "generously selfish," indulging themselves not only for personal pleasure but in order to help others. The very idea that selfishness or self-sacrifice was necessary for the success of the plan was challenged by pledge organizers, who emphasized that their campaign was "not a plea exhorting you to unselfishness." On the contrary, citizens were instructed, "it is a plea urging you to be selfish for *the sake of Self-Preservation*- preservation of yourself, your family, your home, your business, your city and your nation."⁷⁷

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷RD&C, 3 December 1931, 8. Emphasis in original.

The Victorian triumvirate of frugality, thrift, and financial planning was transformed during the 1930s, so that saving became selfish "hoarding" and spending was presented as a form of civic activism. During the nineteenth century, thrift and self-denial were considered indicative of one's character and commitment to the community. Lendol Calder notes that Victorians viewed personal savings as key to capital formation, and thus, necessary for national wealth. Those who saved were "lauded as public benefactors."⁷⁸ Daniel Horowitz has argued that the emergence of a new culture centred around buying divorced Americans from meaningful personal and political expression. In his view, consumption "became a substitution for compelling moral commitments, engaged political activity, or genuine selfhood."⁷⁹ In this instance, however, Rochesterians did not have to choose between consuming and fulfilling a civic responsibility; they were encouraged to view spending money as a positive political act. Like Buffalo Day, Rochester's Pledge for Prosperity campaign took the relaxation of Victorian restraints on spending one step further: not only was it morally acceptable to consume, it was one's civic duty. By denying themselves "the comforts and luxuries they really would like and really can afford," local families were hurting their neighbours and their city.⁸⁰ A resurgence of local spending would reverse this trend.

⁷⁸Calder, Financing the American Dream, 89.

⁷⁹Daniel Horowitz, Morality of Spending, xvii.

⁸⁰RD&C, 9 December 1931, 2.

In 1920, along with 700 other cities throughout the United States, Rochester had celebrated Thrift Week, a commemoration of the 214th anniversary of the birth of Ben Franklin, the "father of thrift." Each day had a different theme and motto. For example, Bank Day emphasized the importance of bank accounts and was backed up with the theme "A bank account guards money from burglar and fire and the worst thief of all - foolish spending."⁸¹ Other days promoted prompt payment of bills and household budgeting. Now, just over a decade later, Rochesterians were being assured that all spending was good spending, and hanging on to excess savings was foolish and short-sighted.

Thrift in this instance was not simply old-fashioned, but actually detrimental. While the "idle dollar benefits no one," as one pledge ad noted, money which is put into circulation "keeps on working for the benefit of the entire community."⁸² How much actual engaged political activism was engendered by the Pledge campaign is unclear. Unlike a consumer boycott or wartime conservation effort, the campaign did not require tangible sacrifice on the part of citizens, or even much modification of activity beyond a return to "normal" spending. Indeed, area residents were encouraged to give in, to buy all items they secretly coveted yet had been holding back from purchasing. Yet the language of the drive merged consumption and civic activity, equating consumption with community commitment.

⁸¹"Continuous Thrift," Rochester Gas and Electric News, 8 (February 1920): 146.

⁸²RD&C, 3 December 1931, 8.

Military metaphors underscored the urgency of the cause. The hundreds of volunteers canvassing local homes and businesses in the pledge drive were "shock troops in seven divisions." By bringing millions of dollars into circulation, Rochesterians would "rout completely this stupid and devitalizing depression," engaging in a "counter-attack" against hunger, sickness, misery and distress. Cooperation would combat the "evils of today." The rhetoric of wartime bond drives was picked up in exhortations that, "The county can afford *no* slackers."⁸³ During World War I, Rochesterians had been active participants in Liberty Loan drives, and thus would have been familiar with the idea of setting aside money for a cause.⁸⁴ Bond drives had commonly emphasized the necessity of frugality and self-discipline in a time of crisis.⁸⁵ Yet while in war there was an acknowledgement of self-restraint, and the idea that Americans had to give "'til it hurt," Rochester's Pledge for Prosperity only asked people to "spend *'til it helps*, because there will be no real prosperity for any until there is prosperity for all."⁸⁶

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Spurred on by the leadership of George Eastman, who personally donated \$2.5 million to the Liberty Loan campaign, Rochester frequently outstripped goals for Liberty Loan and Red Cross campaigns in 1918. McKelvey, Rochester on the Genesee, 164-5.

⁸⁵For example, a Liberty Loan ad distributed by the U.S. Government Committee on Public Information noted, "You are called upon to economize in every way. It is sometimes harder to live nobly than to die nobly. The supreme sacrifice of life may come easier than the petty sacrifices of comforts and luxuries. You are called to exercise stern self-discipline. Upon this the Allied Success depends." James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, Words that Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939) 169.

⁸⁶RD&C, 3 December 1931, 8. Emphasis in original.

In addition to recalling bond drives from wartime, the promotions for the Prosperity Pledge drew freely from the vernacular of commercial advertising, often echoing the language and sloganeering of magazine ads. One full-page pledge ad in the Democrat & Chronicle urged readers to take a critical look at their homes, making an inventory of what was needed and "noting down what a guest *could* tell" about the occupants. The suggestion that a "Guest-Eye Inventory" would provide a much more critical evaluation of one's home played upon a theme much utilized in commercial advertising during this time period. Roland Marchand finds numerous examples of magazine ads in the 1920s and 1930s which cultivated consumer anxiety by suggesting that unwise purchases could give the wrong impression to others. He notes:

In advertising tableaux, friends, casual acquaintances, and strangers peered under people's rugs or inspected their handwriting for such signs of deficient character as might be revealed by a leaky pen. They retreated with disgust from bathrooms in which the "otherwise perfect appearance" had been spoiled by a "mussed towel" or a "slow-draining, gurgling lavatory."⁸⁷

Homes in this view were not simply for shelter; they were a reflection of their owner's character and as such had to be continually maintained to ensure that they projected the correct impression about their owners. Rochester's Committee on Civic Unemployment similarly reminded local citizens that they were not always objective in viewing their own surroundings, warning them that, "The place you live in - the things you love. How

⁸⁷Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 212-213.

different they look when stripped of the film of romance with which you and yours have lovingly entwined them!"⁸⁸

Just as ads cautioned consumers to avoid making the wrong impression by overlooking a single detail in their homes, the pledge campaign counselled Rochesterians to be vigilant in evaluating their surroundings. Only by taking a critical view, in the way a stranger or guest to the home would, could the individual be assured of projecting the correct image. An ad for the Pledge campaign featured a checklist of over eighty "Needs" to be surveyed within the home, ranging from repairs like new paint jobs to purchases like new furnaces, towel racks and modern lighting systems. Fostering this type of self-doubt would serve to encourage people to buy, not specific branded goods, but any additional goods or services which would contribute to "Monroe County's Magic Circle of Prosperity."

The campaign fused commercial advertising's messages about fulfilment through consumption with rhetoric about private spending as a civic responsibility. Everyone would win by the acquisition of new products. Families which had been misguidedly denying themselves would get a lot of pleasure from these expenditures and at the same time help to relieve unemployment. Any guilt over "unnecessary" purchases was summarily dismissed. A different promotion for the campaign outlined not only home improvements but a range of personal purchases:

⁸⁸RD&C, 6 December 1931, 10C.

Concretely this means that . . . the individual who usually purchases two suits should not now provide himself with merely one, and that the purchase of all other apparelling should be considered in the same way; that if new furnishings or equipment for home are contemplated, they should be purchased immediately rather than deferred; . . . that if you want a new radio, buy it now; that if a new automobile is being considered, contact a dealer at once; that so-called luxuries should not be considered as non-essentials, that the Christmas list should be extended rather than curtailed.⁸⁹

Local Community Chest clerks were given the task of coordinating the campaign.

Canvassers were instructed to distinguish between everyday spending and emergency spending, which would not have been made except for the campaign. The plan was to stimulate extra spending, above and beyond the necessities of daily life. Even Christmas gifts came under scrutiny. When asked by those solicited if they could include their Christmas gifts in the amount they pledged to spend, canvassers were instructed to reply, "No" unless the giver agreed to spend \$10 for a gift where it was originally planned to spend \$5."⁹⁰ Just as the Buffalo newspaper categorized gifts as part of "normal" spending, Rochester's campaign classified presents as either "necessary" or "additional." A certain level of spending would be expected at holiday time; only *additional* generosity would qualify for "credit" under the campaign. To prevent harassment of the pledgers by those seeking work, the names of those who had committed to spend in the campaign or hire contractors to do repairs were not released to the public.

⁸⁹RD&C 9 December 1931, 2.

⁹⁰RD&C, 14 December 1931, Section II, 16.

Local leaders were confident that Rochester could serve as an example to the rest of the nation. The Chicago Tribune News service reported that the Rochester plan of "emergency employment and business stimulation" was under discussion in Chicago, although Edward L. Ryerson, of that city's Joint Emergency Relief Fund, expressed doubt that private expenditures could solve the problem of immediately needed relief.⁹¹ Such criticism didn't dampen enthusiasm in Western New York. Rochester's civic leaders, perhaps under less pressure to supply immediate relief to the unemployed than their Chicago counterparts, remained confident that local spending in the community could provide a sufficient "jolt" to conditions, not only helping the area but eventually showing "the rest of the country the way out." Libanus Todd expressed confidence that Rochester would be able to take a leading role in publicizing this type of strategy. He argued that Monroe County was "one of the best places - perhaps the best place" to try such a cooperative effort, for "Here we are accustomed to pulling together - we know how to do team work - and in this particular effort, we have outdone ourselves."⁹² He predicted that as the plan spread across the nation, it might "as a byproduct" become associated with the city itself: "It might be termed the Rochester depression remover, or the new Monroe Doctrine."⁹³ Libanus Todd filled a scrapbook with clippings from around the country. San Francisco, Minneapolis, Hartford and Utica were among the cities which expressed

⁹¹RD&C 14 December 1931, 15.

⁹²RD&C, 15 December 1931, 14.

⁹³Ibid.

interest in trying the "Rochester method." President Herbert Hoover himself wrote a brief note to Rochester resident Colonel Oscar Solbert (who had written the White House about the plan) stating that he was "greatly interested in the plan and in the success of the movement so ably directed in Rochester."⁹⁴

The Democrat & Chronicle on December fifteenth trumpeted a figure of \$6,026,351 which had been pledged by a total of 10,771 residents.⁹⁵ The headline boasted, "Canvass succeeds beyond best hope of its sponsors," noting that the original figure projected for the campaign was \$2,000,000. In addition to the volunteer force of 1,550 canvassers, members of the local Community Chest did the clerical work. Local leaders were ecstatic: "There has never been a campaign waged in Rochester since the war, with more determination, or with more individual concentrated interest," said Henry H. Stebbins, chairman of the Civic Committee on Unemployment. "It has been a most unusual campaign, in that we helped ourselves in helping others. So we may say it was a mutual campaign; a wonderful thing for the community."⁹⁶ The newspaper reported the number of pledges and total amounts in each city ward. No ward in Rochester lacked participants, and the average amount pledged ranged from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand.

⁹⁴RD&C, Financial Edition, 26 February 1932, Section II, 17. The story featured a copy of Hoover's letter, including his signature.

⁹⁵RD&C 15 December 1931, 1, 14.

⁹⁶RD&C 15 December 1931, 1.

The breakdown of pledges reported in the Democrat and Chronicle on December 15, 1931, provides a sense of the distribution of pledges. Ward 7, one of the wealthier areas of town, reported only 14 pledgers, but the average pledge was over five thousand dollars. Even working-class neighbourhoods, like ward 24, still reported pledgers - in this case 447, although the average pledge was a more modest \$185. This amount was still a considerable sum in an era when a new Ford Roadster could be purchased for just over four hundred dollars. Perhaps the fact that the pledge was designed to indicate spending over the following three months encouraged people to enter a rather generous amount. Since there was no real way to enforce the pledges, some expressed doubts that all pledges would be fulfilled.⁹⁷

Like Buffalo Day, the Pledge campaign promised the best of both worlds: if city residents "helped themselves" to consumer goods which they had been foolishly avoiding, things would get better. The plan did more than simply alleviate guilt over personal indulgences and purchases; it turned spending into a virtue, a way to help the community itself. Rochester's Pledge campaigners shared the inflated rhetoric and unstinting optimism of the Buffalo Day organizers. Both initiatives redefined consumption as a civic act, making *all* spending a positive contribution to the local situation. They also underscored the role of men in making spending decisions. The spending suggestions in Rochester's Pledge for Prosperity emphasized major expenditures which would probably rest with the male head of the household. Although renovations or

⁹⁷RD&C, 15 December 1931, 14.

new appliances would improve the "feminine" realm of the home, it is likely that final say over such expenditures rested with men, and that even the signing of the pledge would often be up to the male authority figure. Although convention made it more likely that ad copywriters would refer to the individual as "he," often shoppers were categorized as "she" or "Madam." It is therefore interesting to note that the Pledge for Prosperity campaign described how canvassers were trying to "show each individual how *he* can help by signing the pledge printed above."⁹⁸

The rhetoric of these campaigns was essentially democratic. Just as advertising during the 1920s had emphasized how specific products could improve the lives of the rich and poor alike, all citizens were instructed to "do their best" and take part in the Pledge.⁹⁹ Rochester's Democrat and Chronicle ran editorials which emphasized that each and every person living in the city, no matter their financial or social rank, could help out by spending more:

It doesn't require a lot of money to help - every dollar swells the total, every hundred dollars is multiplied over and over as it passes from hand to hand, the thousands of dollars grow to hundreds of thousands and there will be millions for work, for happiness, for prosperity - if everyone helps.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸RD&C, 9 December 1931, 2. Emphasis added.

⁹⁹Roland Marchand explores how advertisers used the idea that "every home could afford" a particular product to imply an American society of essential equality. Bankers and workingmen could eat Cream of Wheat; conversely, even the rich were not immune to afflictions like B.O. or Athlete's Foot. See Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 217-222.

¹⁰⁰RD&C, 9 December 1931, 2.

Libanus Todd, evaluating the success of Rochester's Plan for Prosperity, excitedly informed a visiting journalist that citizens of ample as well as modest means were taking part in the plan. George Eastman, the city's wealthiest citizen, "was sold on [the] idea from the beginning." After looking over his stately mansion for needed improvements, Eastman could not find anything that required fixing. He instead decided to build a private sewage disposal plant for his home.¹⁰¹ At the same time, Todd warmly praised a citizen of much more limited resources who did her own small part to improve Rochester's situation.

"Then there was a woman who had very little money, but a big desire to help. She looked about her small home for a spot she could afford to spend a few dollars in fixing up. Finally she decided to have an old sofa recovered. Those two cases are typical of the responses we have had."¹⁰²

The inclusiveness of these campaigns is significant, for it emphasized that all citizens, not simply the wealthy, had a responsibility to act. The hard times of the Depression put everyone "in the same boat," from the millionaire capitalist to the humble but respectable worker.

On another level, however, it is remarkable the extent to which these campaigns *avoided* dividing participants according to class. The two figures in the above example did provide a contrast in means: the woman's "small home" and old sofa was no match for Eastman's new sewage facility in terms of the amount of money put into the local

¹⁰¹RD&C, 14 December 1931, Section II, 15.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

economy. Yet the campaign praised both for doing their part. What was missing from this discussion was the possibility that some people could not afford even modest expenditures. Campaigns which emphasized the power of "hoarded" dollars to grease the wheels of the economy suggested that most people were not actually impoverished by the Depression, but simply were holding on to their money until conditions stabilized. The unemployed, those who had exhausted their savings, or lost their homes, were overlooked in campaigns which emphasized the importance of "everyone" participating. The discussion of "perverted thrift" as a "psychological barrier" to be overcome did not acknowledge the rising numbers of jobless in Rochester. This emphasis on focusing the resources at hand to benefit local people was not unique to Rochester, however.

On February 6, 1932, Herbert Hoover appeared at a Washington rally for civic leaders from across the nation. Audience members included representatives of forty national associations, including the American Legion, American Federation of Labour, American Bankers' Association, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Hoover urged the creation of a national anti-hoarding association to combat individual currency withdrawals from banks across the nation and hoped to unite 20,000,000 citizens in an "anti-hoarding war," Charles G. Dawes, president of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, suggested that a return to the drive methods of World War I would stop "what he called a mass movement toward currency deflation."

TABLE 4

PLEDGES FOR THE ROCHESTER "PLEDGE FOR PROSPERITY," BY WARD

Ward	Total Pledges	Amount	Average Pledge
1	77	\$ 69,045	\$ 896.69
2	39	105,275	2,699.36
3	88	84,865	964.38
4	143	318,600	2,227.97
5	137	91,807	670.12
6	271	201,927	745.12
7	14	70,650	5,046.43
8	197	129,118	655.42
9	75	29,655	395.40
10	1,391	438,230	315.05
11	100	47,690	476.90
12	716	456,806.69	638.00
13	176	37,188.50	211.30
14	611	256,879.75	420.43
15	107	155,321.50	1,451.60
16	116	31,027	267.47
17	368	106,547.50	289.53
18	514	144,802.50	281.72
19	1,919	829,491.25	423.25
20	227	543,421.28	2,393.93
21	228	205,934.50	903.22
22	447	82,812.10	185.26
23	232	83,724	360.88
24	537	668,315.11	1,244.53
Totals	8730	\$ 5,189,133.00	\$ 594.40 (city avg.)

(Totals are for city wards, does not include other pledges in the rest of the county)

Source: RD&C, 15 December 1931, 14.

Ogden L. Mills, Undersecretary of the Treasury, linked the anti-hoarding drive with efforts to expand spending. Consumers should not withdraw their bank deposits and keep the money hoarded at home: they should instead spend and "put hoarded dollars to work." The development of a national campaign, with local "branches in every community," was to be headed by Col. Frank Knox, publisher of the Chicago Daily News. A White House statement issued after the meeting noted that most of the audience agreed with the President that

. . . a large portion of the hoarding was due to misunderstanding of the national effect of such acts, that it arose out of unnecessary fears and apprehension and that nothing could contribute more to the resumption of employment, to the stability of agriculture and other commodity prices, than to restore this money to work to turn the tide of depression on the way to prosperity.¹⁰³

Although most attendees of the meeting promised to put the support of their respective organizations behind the anti-hoarding drive, at least one representative expressed doubts. J. E. Spingarn, representative of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the sole black delegate to the meeting, argued that it was "merely ironical" to invite black Americans to join in such a movement "when they have no money to hoard."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³"Twenty Million Citizens Back Hoover Anti-Hoarding Drive," R&C, 7 February 1932, 1A, quote on p. 7A.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 1A. The relationship between black leaders and efforts to encourage consumer spending was ambivalent at best. During the mid-1930s, black consumers in Harlem would mobilize to boycott stores which refused to hire blacks in white-collar positions. Instead of participating in "Buy American" campaigns, black housewives were reminded not to buy where they could not work. See Cheryl Greenberg, 'Don't Buy

Local initiatives to encourage spending complemented later, national, campaigns to encourage consumer spending, including those which emphasized purchasing American-made products. By the fall of 1932 renewed interest in "Buying American" was noted in newspapers and retail trade periodicals, in part encouraged by William Randolph Hearst. Hearst used the twenty-seven newspapers in his empire as a pulpit from which to preach the "Buy American" concept. Dana Frank argues that Hearst's pronouncements "landed in a fertile field," making it easy for him to enlist the resources of upper-class club women and others alarmed at America's economic situation.¹⁰⁵ One could argue, however, that the "fertile field" which Hearst found in America in 1933 was not only due to Americans' desire to "turn inward" from engagement with Europe, as Frank contends, but because local communities which had experimented with efforts to harness consumer dollars had laid the groundwork for a national campaign.

Organizers in Buffalo and Rochester were articulating a "buy local" argument, and running ambitious campaigns based on this notion, at least a full year before Hearst began his "Buy American" editorials. In 1933, the Hearst papers featured "Buy American pledge forms" which were designed to function like the Monroe County Pledge for Prosperity, except on a national scale. Frank asserts that the Buy American movement was quickly spun off into local calls to "buy state" or "buy city," and refers to campaigns

Where You Can't Work," in Glickman, ed., Consumer Society.

¹⁰⁵Dana Frank devotes a chapter to Hearst's Buy American campaigns, in Buy American, 56-78, quotation on p. 61.

in California and by New York canneries in 1933. While she acknowledges that many campaigns "antedated the Depression," she emphasizes that the national Buy American campaign brought a new swell of support to the idea of state and city economic "nationalism."¹⁰⁶ The story of Buffalo Day and Monroe County's Pledge for Prosperity suggests that at least some of the impulse behind economic nationalism came from the local level, and then gained national momentum.

Trade journals, as well as the national mass media, picked up on the "Buy American" rhetoric. An article in the Merchandise Manager noted that some store executives were reporting a slump in imported goods, including Irish linens and French perfumes. Although these items were usually only a small percentage of sales, their symbolic value was much more important. The article reported how purchasing decisions could often be the cause of domestic strife, noting that a recent incident in a Buffalo department store illustrated the "psychology of the movement."

...a business man rebelled at paying his wife's monthly bill because it covered primarily French made articles.

"Why," he indignantly queried, "should I, who am contributing liberally to the support of the unemployed in my own country, exert my family purchasing power in directions which give employment to French workers instead of our own?"¹⁰⁷

Finally he paid the bill, after it had been tactfully pointed out that the problem which he raised was "one of domestic relations," not international trade. In this vignette, it is the

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 64-5.

¹⁰⁷Merchandise Manager, February 1933.

man who knows the workings of the economy and the true value of his wages in turning America's economy around. His wife, pre-occupied with fashion, has no grasp of the impact of her actions. Yet even as Hearst and others tried to whip up economic nationalism, regional loyalty remained a touchstone of proposed solutions to the Depression. An editorial in the Buffalo magazine Town Tidings in 1933 exhorted, "*Buy American* if you want to, but BUY BUFFALO first."¹⁰⁸

Hindsight permits us to evaluate these campaigns more critically than observers at the time did. Buffalo Day, while a successful one-day sale for retailers, by no means solved unemployment in the city. The predicted "psychological breakthrough" for local shoppers did not materialize, and one can argue that even if it had, the combined spending power of Western New Yorkers would not have reversed economic conditions in the region, never mind in the entire nation. In Rochester, despite the sincerity of the thousands of individuals who solemnly swore to do their best to spend their way out of the Depression, the Pledge for Prosperity did not have the desired effect of jump-starting the city on the path to normalcy. Given the eventual limitations of these plans, how do we account for these two communities embracing such initiatives?

In one sense, this marshalling of local spenders can be seen as a way for people to feel that they were doing their part to end the Depression. By asserting the responsibility of every individual to do his or her part to end the economic downturn, these shopping

¹⁰⁸"Around the Town," TT, February 1933, 7.

and spending campaigns asserted that the individual could make a difference. To relegate all action to Washington or the state government was to acknowledge the powerlessness of individuals over the course of the nation's progress. These proposals appealed to individuals who wanted to do something - anything - to try to improve economic conditions.

The popularity of this strategy also had a lot to do with popular understanding of the workings of the economy. It made sense for residents of the area to think of all individuals as participating in a large "circle of distribution:" they had been hearing this message for some time in local editorials and advertising. During the 1920s, local merchants had encouraged people to spend at home as a way to further boost their region's prosperity; now this became a matter of survival. Similarly, merchants borrowed the rhetoric of civic campaigns like the "Pledge for Prosperity" to emphasize the role of the individual in the local economy. Retailers turned around the popular language of fiscal responsibility to encourage people to come back to the stores. Spending was not about giving in to desire, in this view, but a rational decision.

As time wore on, it became clear that local initiatives like Buffalo Day or the Rochester Pledge for prosperity were not effective in ending America's slump. In Buffalo, relief expenditures in December of 1933 reached a high of \$611,677 and over 21,000 families relied on public assistance. In contrast, a decade earlier, expenditures in

December of 1923 had been under \$12,000, and 453 families were on assistance.¹⁰⁹ By 1934, some expressed doubt that the private consumer had the power to make a difference in the economy. As one newspaper article noted, the slogan "Buy Now and Aid Recovery," was "a good one, but of limited effectiveness for the excellent reason that ole John Consumer is, at the moment, a trifle short of spending money."¹¹⁰

In the end, Rochester suffered from a serious loss of morale, and many fled the city. In order to screen the overwhelming numbers of applicants for public assistance, officials used work projects, including a rock pile, to distinguish "the worthy from the shiftless male vagabonds."¹¹¹ Even Rochester's Community Chest, which had received generous bequeaths from city patron George Eastman, was unable to meet the needs of the unemployed. After Eastman's death by suicide in 1932, residents fell into a torpor and abandoned many local initiatives.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹Niles Carpenter, "Trends in Relief Expenditures in Buffalo," SS 9 (February, 1934), Table II : Expenditures for Relief and Number of Families on Relief for July and December, 1922 - 1933.

¹¹⁰TT, April 1934, 8.

¹¹¹McKelvey, Emerging Metropolis, 66.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 67. McKelvey argues that Eastman's suicide had no connection with the depression and instead resulted from "his desire to escape the debilitating pains of advancing age and threatened infirmities." The Kodak founder's final message stated, "My work is done. Why wait?" Despite Eastman's assertion that it was time for him to go, his death was still shocking to local residents and hardly helped the community to view conditions with optimism.

By the mid 1930s, solutions which called upon the federal government for funding became more attractive, and FDR's willingness to spend money on New Deal programs prompted some local residents to entertain creative new notions of government intervention.¹¹³ Buffalo's George C. Andrews, a prominent city engineer and former Water Department official, developed a plan to help "Uncle Sam put some money in the consumer's wallet."¹¹⁴ Andrews presented his "Federal Handout Scheme" in speeches before various luncheon clubs and in a pamphlet entitled "Why Postpone Prosperity?" He argued that the government should provide "taxable money" which would have to be put into circulation immediately or would lose its value over time. To prevent anyone acquiring this special currency from simply saving it, the plan would require the attachment of a stamp to each unspent dollar bill every fifteen days, which would reduce its value by two per cent. According to Andrews, the government would redeem it in ordinary currency two years after the date of issue, provided fifty stamps were attached.

The Andrews plan had parallels to the Old Age Pension Plan advocated by Dr. Francis Townsend, which also relied on the government to provide handouts of cash to consumers. Townsend, a California doctor, rose to national prominence as the spokesperson for Old Age Revolving Pensions, Ltd. He advocated a \$200 monthly

¹¹³Beginning in 1935, Buffalo received federal relief money, primarily for public works. Between 1935 and 1937, Buffalo received over \$45 million on projects including the building of a downtown auditorium, new police headquarters, public housing, modernization of the zoo, and countless other renovation projects. Goldman, High Hopes, 227.

¹¹⁴TT, April, 1934, 8.

pension for seniors, provided that they retire from work and spend the whole amount within thirty days.¹¹⁵ By 1935, a network of "Townshend Clubs" had stretched through California and into the Midwest and Northeast.¹¹⁶ It is not clear whether Andrews was familiar with Townshend's plan. Alan Brinkley points out that Townshend himself was not the first to suggest such a scheme, as others including ad man Bruce Barton and Seattle dentist Stuart McCord had proposed similar plans.¹¹⁷ Late in 1934, Louisiana Senator Huey Long devised his own form of wealth redistribution, the Share Our Wealth Plan. Long's plan would heavily tax the wealthy - for example, and income an individual made above one million dollars would simply be confiscated, and strict limits would be set on inheritances. The money gained by the government would be distributed to every needy family in the country.¹¹⁸

In contrast to Townshend and Long, Andrews targeted homeowners as the main beneficiaries of his plan. Stating that it was impossible for the government to give employment on public works to all of the jobless, Andrews proposed that homeowners be used to create employment. Each homeowner would receive an amount of this "taxable

¹¹⁵Parrish, Anxious Decades, 328-9.

¹¹⁶Alan Brinkley, Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 223. Brinkley and Parrish state that the Townshend proposal was for \$200 per month. James R. McGovern puts the figure at \$300. McGovern, And a Time for Hope: Americans in the Great Depression (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000), 51.

¹¹⁷Brinkley, Voices of Protest, 223.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 71-2.

currency" equal to five percent of the assessed valuation of his or her property, with the stipulation that the money be expended to repair or improve the home. The plan would provide employment for "all carpenters, plumbers, painters, et cetera" as well as those in other industries such as construction supplies or furniture. The workers hired to improve homes "would be allowed to spend the money paid them by the home owner in any way they desired," but naturally, every recipient would spend it immediately so as to avoid the necessity of attaching stamps. Andrews believed that "with hoarding penalized in this way," the money would turn over at least twenty-five times in a year, or about three times faster. His plan would have entitled Buffalo residents to about \$200,000,000 for home rehabilitation.

In one sense, Andrews's plan can be seen as a compromise between wholly private spending initiatives and state employment and public works ventures. While the citizens who went shopping on Buffalo Day or pledged money in the Monroe County plan were trying to make a difference by putting their own savings into circulation, Andrews recognized that not everyone had sufficient funds to contribute. His plan relied on government money, but put that money in the hands of individual consumers. The desired result would be very similar to goals announced by the promoters of the Rochester Pledge for Prosperity: homeowners would hire extra labour, or make additional purchases which in turn would fuel the economy. Andrews did not go so far as to advocate that the state simply hand out this money directly to the most needy. Nor was he willing to entertain a radical redistribution of wealth, as Long proposed. Where Long

wanted to take money from the wealthy and give it directly to "the people," Andrews would reward homeowners (presumably including the most wealthy citizens of the country) with money to spend, and they in turn would hire workers and put these additional funds into the economy.

Despite the fanfare surrounding the announcement of the plan, Andrews's plan was never adopted. By 1935, federally funded public works had become the main strategy to alleviate unemployment in Western New York. People in the area grew more resigned to the idea that individuals had little power when it came to changing the direction of the economy. Dr. Robert Riegel, professor of statistics in the School of Business Administration at the University of Buffalo, mused on this change in the Buffalo Times. He drew a distinction between "old-fashioned" businessmen who followed common sense and scorned statistics and economic theory and those who recognized their dependence on much larger market forces. The former group had been rendered "extinct as a dodo bird" by the Depression. "Besides its extraordinary length and the vast unemployment situation it has created, there is one thing that distinguishes this depression from all that have gone before it," Dr. Riegel declared.

That distinguishing characteristic is the absolute dependence of the individual on general economic conditions, certainly nation-wide and in many respects world-wide. The businessman, the industrialist, the workingman, the professional man and the investor have all come to realize that only a general recovery on a large scale can change their individual lot for the better.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹Buffalo Times, 13 October, 1935, n.p. BBSR Records, Scrap Book "Bureau of Business Research, 1932-1934," UBA.

Riegel argued that in former times, this was not the case as conditions in one community were not so closely linked to those in another - "one could be prosperous and flourishing and the other depressed at the very same time."

The growing belief in the powerlessness of the individual to have an impact on the Depression is not surprising. By the mid-1930s, neither Rochester nor Buffalo could claim "immunity" from the economic slump. Local unemployment soared, as those businesses which did manage to stay afloat sharply curtailed their payrolls. Local leaders made increasing appeals to the state and federal governments for aid. And although stores would still experiment with "buy local" appeals in advertising, few entertained grand proposals like Buffalo Day or the Pledge for Prosperity as the solution to the continuing Depression.

These initiatives, which aimed to harness the purchasing power of the individual for the good of all, reveal the continued power of local identities. Faced with the downturn of business conditions, the people of Western New York first looked at home for solutions, hoping that by coming together in their communities they could help themselves, and perhaps, even the rest of the nation. They also focused on consuming as the most effective means for every individual to "make a difference." Consuming was seen as a "win-win solution," allowing citizens to indulge themselves and simultaneously give a boost to the economy. Finally, in proposing plans which encouraged consumer spending, Western New Yorkers attempted to redefine older notions of thrift and fiscal responsibility. By the early 1930s spending eclipsed saving as the ideal for the civic-

minded, as merchants and local leaders promoted buying as the "way out." These local spending initiatives show the resourcefulness of Buffalo and Rochester merchants and citizens; as it turned out, the resources they had at hand were not enough to turn the tide.

CHAPTER FIVE

Hard Times and Good Times at Home

"THIS HAPPENED IN BUFFALO."

- ad for Lifebuoy soap in the Buffalo Evening News,
December, 1929

"Rochester husbands make wives blush."

- ad for Spry shortening in the Rochester Democrat &
Chronicle, November, 1936

Local identities both persisted and were transformed during the late 1930s. This chapter will explore the continued significance of the community appeal as a selling tool after 1931, and the persistence of local stores as sites not only of consumption but local entertainment, education and celebration as well. Further, it will suggest that other groups, including national advertisers, tried to tap into local loyalties with varying amounts of success. In this sense it challenges the narrative of national homogenization which frames much of the literature on American popular culture during the interwar period. Scholars have emphasized how Americans from coast to coast were becoming more and more alike, and were more likely to see themselves as part of a national culture. The spread of consumer culture is assumed to have had a homogenizing and unifying effect on all areas of the United States. Urban historians suggest that the nation was becoming integrated in broad networks of communication and distribution, and less tied

to the "island communities" of the nineteenth century, to use Robert Wiebe's famous phrase.¹

The development of a mass market, in this view, encouraged a sense of participation in a world beyond one's home town. Advertising campaigns further contributed to the development of a national vernacular, where people across the country could identify the slogan of Wrigley's Gum or Lucky Strike brand cigarettes.² Magazines, movies and radio programs presented themselves as common experiences for consumers in all regions of the country, encouraging individuals to feel they were sharing something which spoke to the nation as a whole.³

¹Robert H. Wiebe's The Search for Order 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967) in some ways framed the debate over the Gilded Age and Progressive Era for decades after its publication in 1967. Wiebe emphasizes the sense of alienation and confusion for Americans living through this period, stressing how life in the smaller, isolated communities of the nineteenth century did not prepare people for the challenges of industrialization and urbanization. Wiebe's search is a national project, and he suggests that political and economic upheaval at the turn of the century caused a "widespread loss of confidence in the powers of the community." (44)

²See Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 77-87.

³Matthew Schneirov argues that the writers and editors of popular magazines like McClure's and Scribner's consciously promoted a new national culture in the late nineteenth century. Dream of a New Social Order, 3-6, 103-124. Jennifer Scanlon suggests that while the magazine excluded some groups (black women, those who worked for wages), those it did speak to (white, middle-class wives and mothers) were encouraged to feel that they were part of a larger project. Ladies' Home Journal readers were continually reminded that "their values . . . held the family, community, and nation together." Intricate Longings, 232. In both editorial content and advertising, these magazines suggested an ideal, "typical" American life, with little recognition of the particularities of place beyond references to life in "the city."

On one level, this emphasis on a growing national consciousness rings true. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, examination of Rochester and Buffalo during the 1920s reveals that residents did feel increasingly connected to others in the rest of the country. By the 1930s, certain well-established mechanisms enabled the residents of Buffalo and Rochester to keep well abreast of developments in the rest of the nation. As we have seen, improvements in roads and railways made it easier for people to venture beyond their immediate surroundings. At the same time, improvements in distribution and transportation brought brand-name goods to Western New York, and businesses based in other parts of the country, in particular chain stores, became an increasing presence in the region.

Yet in another sense, what has been described as the new "national" culture in the early 1920s could be more accurately termed a "big-city" culture. More specifically, the entertainments, fashions, habits and lifestyles of those living in centres like New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Chicago became increasingly familiar to all Americans. As movies came out of Hollywood, as Madison Avenue ad agencies cranked out national campaigns, Americans in all regions became increasingly familiar with the goings-on in these places. The artistic and cultural output of these metropolises seemed to make these places "matter" in a way that smaller cities like Buffalo and Rochester did not. Scholars interested in America's emergence as a nation of consumers have invariably emphasized

how profound changes in a few key cities had resonance throughout the rest of the country.⁴

What is missing from this equation is the persistence of local identities in the formation of American consumer culture. Even in the late 1930s, by which time the various apparatuses of the mass market including national advertising, magazines, and media were firmly in place, local particularities still shaped the experiences of consumers in Western New York. The emphasis on local identities and local roots cultivated by retailers persisted not only through the 1920s but well into the Depression and beyond.

In the 1930s, merchants in smaller cities presented themselves as mediators between the mass market and local interests. Department stores boasted of carrying wide ranges of branded goods, allowing the citizens of Buffalo and Rochester full access to the wonders of American mass production. At the same time, they asserted their own place

⁴As noted earlier, works ranging from Lewis Erenberg, Steppin' Out, to Paula Fass's The Damned and the Beautiful, to Leach's Land of Desire, focus primarily on cultural shifts within America's largest cities, while suggesting the emergence of a new "national" culture. A notable new study which explores how rural Americans experienced these changes is David Blanke, Sowing the American Dream: How Consumer Culture Took Root in the Rural Midwest (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000). Blanke argues that Midwestern farmers tried, and ultimately failed, to reconcile individual materialism with communal values. Because rural residents were much more likely to peruse goods in a mail-order catalogue than first-hand in a department store, Blanke notes, they had very different notions about the possibilities of consumer capitalism. He argues that movements like the Grange were the articulation of a "rural consumer ethos," which targeted the existing distribution system and aimed to increase the availability of goods. In contrast, town consumers were "charmed by the dynamism of the local department store" and less likely to search for collective solutions. (129-31, 159)

in the continued evolution and success of their communities. Throughout the 1930s, retailers in Western New York used local sentiment as a tool for selling, whether by linking sales events to significant dates in the history of the city, or by using appeals to community solidarity in newspaper advertising. In 1934, for example, the B. Forman Co. tied its own twenty-fifth anniversary with the Rochester Centennial, affixing a 25-foot replica of an early map of the Rochester area to the front of the store. The canvas map covered almost the entire front of the store, noted the Dry Goods Merchants Trade Journal, extending from close to the top of the building down to the second-floor windows. Treated to withstand the elements, it was lashed to the building with decorative ropes. The Journal noted approvingly of the high level of local interest in the map: "At night the map is lighted from below and causes much comment. In fact, it has aroused so much interest that its picture has appeared in local newspapers, with resultant free publicity to the firm."⁵ Crowds reportedly gathered to examine the map and marvel at how the city had developed since its founding.

Even after the failure of "local spending" initiatives like Buffalo Day and the Rochester Pledge for Prosperity in 1931, retailers continued to emphasize the importance of patronizing area retailers. For example, during the Christmas season of 1936, the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle editorialized that businesses were "human" and reacted best when under the "stimulus of local encouragement and support." Readers were encouraged to begin their gift shopping to demonstrate their commitment to Rochester.

⁵"Enormous Old Map is Anniversary Feature," DGMTJ, August 1934, 24.

The paper admonished readers that citizenship carried "a definite responsibility to the community."⁶ Shopping was presented as a painless way to encourage local businesses and foster employment for fellow citizens.

As a guest, be loyal to your host. As an employe [sic], be loyal to your business. As a citizen, be loyal to your community. If you live in Rochester, patronize Rochester's stores. Give your business to the merchants who give employment to your fellow citizens. . . . Rochester merchants are of, by, and for the community in which they are doing business. They hire Rochesterians for clerical and executive staffs. Payrolls are made up from money you spend over the counters and in various departments. As the stores prosper, the community prospers. Yes, shop in Rochester, and shop early. But when you think of the many fine business institutions in this city, and when you realize that every dollar spent in Rochester aids the people and prosperity of Rochester, you cannot help resolving to spend even a higher percentage of your money here. . . . Be a booster and share in the pride of building a greater Rochester.⁷

Such entreaties emphasized the money spent by local retailers in wages, while disregarding the fact that most of the products available in the stores were actually not locally manufactured but shipped in from all over the country and the world. No mention was even made of trying to buy American-made goods. The more immediate transfer of funds from the shopper to the retailer, and then to the sales clerk, seemed the most crucial. This logic persisted, and the retail trade press continued to report "Buy-At-Home" drives in communities across the nation throughout the late 1930s,⁸ Local

⁶RD&C, 9 December 1936, 10.

⁷Ibid.

⁸For example, see the description of a "Buy-At-Home Drive" in The Dalles, Oregon, Dry Goods Journal, September 1938, 32. The ads featured in the articles had slogans like "Why not spend your money in the city where you make it?"

consumption was the main focus of such drives, although occasionally recognition of area manufacturers might accompany promotions for local retailers.

During the dark days of the Depression, residents of Western New York continued to visit area stores, even if their actual purchases were limited. The economic downturn hit department stores hard. Figures for Sibley, Lindsay & Curr in Rochester suggest a steady decline in net sales from 1929 to 1933, with a slow recovery for the rest of the decade.⁹ Buffalo department stores similarly hit bottom in 1933 and only gradually made their way back up to 1920s levels of sales.¹⁰ Yet although unemployment and relief levels grew throughout the 1930s, people still strolled down Main Street and still visited stores, at least to look. Indeed, some of the people walking by show windows in the downtown were undoubtedly among the newly unemployed, who were out pounding the pavement in search of work and might have had ambivalent reactions to seeing goods which were beyond their ability to acquire. At the same time, perusal of wares in department or discount stores continued to be a pastime for many people, including the unemployed. The distractions of the store, the fantasy world which merchants had so

⁹Sibley's net sales were \$12,606,898 in 1929, almost \$900,000 lower than in the store's peak year of 1926. Still, the late 1920s would be recalled fondly after the Depression hit, when sales reached a low of \$7,710,850 in 1933. The figure climbed slowly for the rest of the 1930s, but did not reach \$12,000,000 again until 1943. See Appendix III. All figures from Table XVIII, "Net Sales, Gross Earnings and Net Earnings, 1915-1952," March 1953, Carton "Annual Reports, Homer Hoyt, Market Survey & Appraisal," Sibley Collection, Strong Museum.

¹⁰"Index of Sales of Department Stores," BBSR, Box 2 "Sales," Folder "Department Stores, Data from Statistical Survey," UBA.

carefully cultivated in prosperous times, had a particular allure in hard times. Visitors to the store could revel in the luxurious surroundings, perhaps forgetting the privations they endured at home. Further, the transformative power of goods appealed to people in desperate times. Throughout the 1920s, advertisers and retailers had stressed the importance of choosing the right products in order to ensure personal success. During the Depression the notion, however fanciful, that one might be able to reverse bad fortune simply by selecting the proper new necktie for a job interview had a potent allure.¹¹

Some impressionistic evidence supports the view that the central business district remained a place of activity, if not actual purchases, throughout the later 1930s. Buffalo's Main Street Association performed periodic counts of pedestrians at various points in the downtown. According to one count on Wednesday, November 1, 1933, almost three thousand people passed in front of Adam, Meldrum & Anderson during two half-hour blocks from 11:00 to 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 to 3:00 p.m. A similar count outside of Lerner's discount store on the West Side of Main Street indicated 4446 passers-by, and another 2047 outside of J.N. Adam's on the other side of the street.¹² These figures

¹¹Roland Marchand argues that advertisers emphasized how surviving the Depression depended on the consumer's ability to maintain a positive self-image and remain competitive. The very real threat of joblessness loomed large for Americans; advertisers played on this fear to suggest that a man might lose his chance at promotion simply because he did not purchase the proper grooming products, or a child might fail at school because of a poor diet. See Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 288-292, 296-299.

¹²The Main Street Association, Inc. Sidewalk Pedestrian Counts, Issued June 1938. This figure is lower than during previous years. On November 1, 1929, for example, the count at the same location was 3306. There appears to have been a slight decline in

suggest that the downtown did not become a "ghost town" even during 1933, the year that Buffalo's department stores reported their lowest sales during the Depression.

Throughout the 1930s, literally thousands of people walked through the retail district every business day. During subsequent counts in June and November of 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, and 1938, no fewer than two thousand people were counted outside of J.N. Adam's during two thirty-minute segments, with the average reaching over three thousand.¹³

Special events staged by the department stores, in particular, drew crowds regularly. The unveiling of store improvements was an event attended by local leaders and residents alike. The installation of the first store escalators in Rochester (explained as "electric stairways" to those unfamiliar with the term) became an occasion to celebrate the city's advancement and the wonderful possibilities of modern technology. These new

pedestrian traffic from 1929 onwards, judging from the pedestrian counts in front of Adam Meldrum & Anderson, Hengerer's and Kresge's. It is impossible, however, to make an exact comparison between years, as the data was usually collected on November 1 and June 1 each year (not on the same day of the week each year, a discrepancy which undoubtedly skewed the results obtained). Weather was also acknowledged as a factor affecting traffic patterns (and similarly impossible to compare). Not all counts indicate a decline, as those performed in front of Flint & Kent and J.N. Adam show no discernable pattern, but vary widely from year to year. The point remains that the number of passers-by in downtown Buffalo from 1928 to 1938 can be counted in the thousands.

¹³Ibid. J.N. Adam's was chosen as an example because the store had a central Main Street location. Adam's was Buffalo's largest department store during the period, catering to the "middle range" of shoppers, fitting between the higher prices of Hengerer's specialty shops and the discount counters of the five and dime stores. The average of counts conducted during two half-hour periods during a single day in June and November of 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, and June of 1938 was 3034.125.

conveyors were greeted with a high level of excitement. Men, women, and children flocked to the stores to ride the escalators, some for the first time in their lives. In some ways both the public excitement over escalators and the leading roles taken by department stores in adopting this new technology echoed similar developments surrounding the adoption of electric lighting in the late nineteenth century. During the 1880s, clothing and department stores had been among the first locations to be wired for electricity. In Buffalo, merchants had spearheaded the drive for electric lighting in the downtown. Now crowds gathered to see the escalators set in motion.¹⁴

In 1936, a group of over three thousand Rochesterians jammed the main floor aisles of Sibley, Lindsay & Curr to witness Mayor Charles Stanton press a button that started the escalators between five floors of the store. The new feature cost the store over a quarter of a million dollars.¹⁵ Before the unveiling, the store's board of directors and officials hosted a breakfast for 350 local officials, Chamber of Commerce executives, presidents of civic clubs and other Rochester citizens.¹⁶ The store boasted that the

¹⁴David E. Nye points out that the public soon became accustomed to these changes in technology: he notes that while in 1880 "one arc light in a store window drew a crowd," people quickly viewed such innovations as "normal." Nevertheless, public excitement during the initial phase of introduction of escalators ran very high. Electrifying America, 5, 114, quotation on 57.

¹⁵"3,000 Crowd into Sibley's to See New Escalators Start When Mayor Presses Button During Unveiling Ceremony," Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press, 1936-1941," [no newspaper or page indicated] 1 October 1936, Strong Museum.

¹⁶"Sibley's Sets Escalator Opening," Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press, 1936-1941," [no newspaper or page indicated] 23 September 1936, Strong Museum.

installation was the largest in New York State outside of Manhattan. After the assembled crowd was brought to attention by the sound of bugles, Rochester's mayor praised the store for its leadership role in the community. Stanton noted that Sibley's was "keeping up to the minute, as always. . . . Sibley's has become an institution in Rochester. It is a landmark for thousands who go shopping. This new equipment will add to their convenience."¹⁷ The crowd roared its approval as the mayor set the escalator in motion. The fact that this event could draw such a large crowd at 9:30 on a Wednesday morning perhaps also indicates that the local business leaders present at the occasion were joined by at least some of the ranks of Rochester's unemployed.

In Buffalo the following year, the opening of the escalators at J.N. Adam & Co. became a civic event, with people lining up on Main Street to await the initial run of the "moving steps." Samuel W. Reyburn, Chairman of the Board of the Associated Dry Goods Corporation, was on hand to speak, but the highlight of the evening was the chance for Buffalonians to ride the stairs for the first time. The Buffalo Courier reported on the revelry associated with the starting of the escalators:

An early augur of success for the debut was the line of Buffalonians at the Main Street store as early as 7 o'clock. Attentively these citizens watched while the current was turned on to start the moving steps on their endless journey. . . . Maybe it was the "kid" in them, but lots of folks joined in riding both up and down the five flights of "stairs," and then up and down again. And, as store executives had planned, the debut became an open

¹⁷"Throng Sees Sibley Escalator Unveiled," , Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press, 1936-1941,"[no newspaper or page indicated] 30 September 1936, Strong Museum.

house party, with hordes of citizens invading every department, asking questions of salesgirls.¹⁸

The opening of the escalators was viewed by store management as a selling occasion, to be sure, but it also was a chance for local residents to experience the new technology, free of charge, and celebrate the advancement of their city. Buffalo's Health Commissioner noted approvingly that the new escalators would eliminate the nausea or fainting spells associated with "old-fashioned" elevators.

The opening of new or expanded stores drew similar attention. The 1930s witnessed considerable reinvestment in downtown stores. Despite the constraints of the Depression, many stores either expanded or renovated their buildings. Buffalo saw quite a few new developments. Just prior to the installation of the escalators in 1937, J.N. Adam completed a \$500,000 renovation, building a new six-story structure at the corner of Main and Eagle Streets and modernizing the existing structure. At the ceremony to lay the cornerstone of the new building, Samuel W. Reyburn, president of the Associated Dry Goods Corporation, explicitly equated the investment by retailers into the city with the larger efforts by the American private sector to lead the way out of the Depression. Taking the opportunity to criticize Roosevelt's New Deal, Reyburn rejected the notion that the state should become more involved in regulating the economy. He compared the role of government to that of officials at a football game, who should "enforce the rules

¹⁸Courier, 22 September 1937, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 292, BECPL.

but leave the actual playing to the players."¹⁹ Only by giving business a chance to "fight its way out" would both state and federal officials help the return to normalcy.

Walter Brunmark, president of J.N. Adam, explained that the decision to embark on a huge expansion program indicated the faith of J.N. Adam & Co. in the future of downtown Main Street, and more generally in Buffalo as a whole. He argued,

This new building and expansion program, involving so substantial a capital investment . . . has come about after several years of careful study of all the important facts that determine a logical, successful location for a large, modern department store business. . . . It is also very gratifying that we find it necessary and logical to embark on this important development at this time because it will provide employment for hundreds of Buffalo's skilled craftsmen engaged in the building trades and allied industries in our immediate trading area. It is also a sincere expression of our faith and belief in Buffalo as a community and expresses our confidence in the future of this splendid city.²⁰

Research into traffic patterns, transportation and parking facilities reinforced the company's decision to expand. The location was also close to large office buildings, banks and other stores, leading the store's management to conclude that it would be "most desirable, not only for this generation, but for those that will follow." The J.N. Adam construction contract was awarded to the same Buffalo firm which constructed the \$7,000,000 Art Deco, downtown landmark City Hall. All materials were from the Buffalo area and all labour was local. The only exception to this rule was the selection of architectural firm Starrett & Van Vleck, of New York City. The firm had earned a

¹⁹"U.S. URGED TO GIVE BUSINESS CHANCE," BEN 24 June 1935, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier Vol. 4, 303. BECPL.

²⁰Ibid.

reputation for department-store design since overseeing the redesign of Lord & Taylor's Fifth Avenue store in Manhattan 23 years previously.²¹

The modern styling of the new building, featuring horizontal lines, was commended in the local press.²² After the completion of the project in 1936, the Main Street Association awarded a prize to the store for the finest major building construction in the city. Accepting the award, Walter Brunmark stated confidently that "Main Street never would degenerate into a Coney Island boardwalk" if businesses continued to invest in maintaining and modernizing their buildings. He noted that the satisfaction of store executives and employees, combined with the public's positive response to the project, had provided ample compensation for the company's investment.²³

Buffalo's William Hengerer store spent \$1,000,000 modernizing its Main Street store in 1937 and 1938. New store fixtures, fire-enclosed stairways, new departments and a 36,000 square foot addition were designed to make Hengerer's "the most modern store

²¹ "J. N. Adam & Co. plans \$500,000 store building," BCE, 1 March 1936, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 295, BECPL. Lord & Taylor was another Associated Dry Goods store, suggesting a long-term relationship between the parent company and the architects.

²² "Bright New Face in Store for Downtown Skyline" BEN, 11 April 1935, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 296-7, BECPL.

²³ "Merchants Who Bring Beauty to Main Street are Honored - New Store of J.N. Adam & Co. Takes Award," Courier 5 June 1936, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 291, BECPL.

in New York State."²⁴ Five Westinghouse elevators with blue-green leather doors and bronze trim were installed. Attention went into every facet of the store's design. The interior featured alternating pilasters and a glass and brick penthouse for the store's office workers. The facade of the building was refaced in white granite and trimmed in bronze, with an off-white terracotta facade running from the second floor to the penthouse. Sweeping display windows encouraged shoppers linger out in front, while bronze revolving doors ushered them inside. The tea room was "redone in the modern style," with bleached straw walls, maple woodwork and "strong accents of turquoise."²⁵ Despite Hengerer's long-standing image as a "store of specialty shops," catering to Buffalo's elite, the new building featured budget dresses, coats and millinery, and a new dress thrift shop, perhaps indicating that even Hengerer's had to make concessions for the Depression. The Store for Men had a contrasting interior, with walnut and simulated pigskin walls. To further encourage the sense that male shoppers were distinct from their feminine counterparts, the men's shop was arranged as a "store within a store" with a facade of its own and a separate entrance.

In 1938, E. W. Edwards & Son of Buffalo opened a new store with what were described by the Courier-Express as "impressive ceremonies," attended by civic and company officials and 150 merchandisers' and buyers' representatives. Five hundred

²⁴BEN, 30 March 1938, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 314, BECPL.

²⁵Ibid.

salespeople were on hand to welcome customers. The store had planned to give each visitor to the store a rose, but the supply of an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 blossoms was exhausted by three o'clock in the afternoon, and the total number of visitors reached between 30,000 and 40,000.²⁶ Attendants at the nearby Statler Garage reported that one thousand shoppers took advantage of the free parking spaces arranged for the occasion. The store's design was the culmination of "extensive study" of department stores in New York and other cities. The structure was guaranteed fireproof, and the interior had a state-of-the-art ventilation system. Twenty-seven show windows brought natural light into the store and were supplemented by a lighting system installed jointly by General Electric and Niagara Hudson. The feeling of light and openness was echoed in the pale "peach blossom" hue chosen for the interiors and the cream ceilings. The layout of store departments was also revised according to new research. The men's department was designed with separate street entrances, which, according to Edwards' promotions director Adam Eby, allowed "men, who usually despise shopping," to "duck in one door, make their purchases, and duck out the other door."²⁷ Kleinhans of Buffalo also modernized, hiring local architects Bley & Lyman and awarding the construction job to another city

²⁶"Edwards' New Store Viewed by Huge Crowd," BCE, 3 May 1938, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 312, BECPL.

²⁷Ibid.

firm. The store hoped its new facade of pink granite and improved display windows would complement the other improved buildings in the downtown.²⁸

At the same time that the independent merchants of Buffalo and Rochester rejuvenated their stores, chain stores also increased their profile in the central business districts of the two cities. Department stores were longstanding fixtures in the downtown. Now a range of discount stores and chains (both regional and national) invested in new, modern facilities. Buffalo, in particular, saw a new mix of chain stores popping up in its downtown. Some of these stores were new additions to the area; others were expanded versions of existing chain branches.

Neisner's five-cent to \$1 stores opened a new branch in Buffalo at 450 Main Street. The Rochester-based chain already had two Buffalo branches, one in the Broadway shopping district (traditionally home to more discount retailers and five-and-dime chains than the Main Street area) which had opened in 1923, and one on Bailey Avenue which had been in business since 1935. By the time this new "flagship store" was being built in Buffalo, the Neisner chain had 103 stores in 63 cities, spread out over 16 states.²⁹ According to the Buffalo Times, the new store featured the "longest lunch counter in the world," seating 80 diners, who faced a wall of green and white tiled glass,

²⁸Times, 17 January, 1938, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 319, BECPL.

²⁹BEN, 21 September 1938, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 322, BECPL. The Times on 19 September 1938 reported that Neisner was a chain of 115 stores.

inset with diamond-shaped lights and soft multi-colored effects."³⁰ Green leather swivel chairs featured convenient built-in footrests, and a special rack under the counter allowed shoppers to relax while eating lunch with their purchases safely stowed away. Food preparation was done using stainless steel equipment and methods "parallel [to] those of the best modern hospitals in sanitation."³¹ The trained staff of 300 on hand for the grand opening were "all Buffalonians," the manager was careful to point out.³²

Some merchants joined forces to capitalize on the publicity surrounding new store openings. When Woolworth's held a special re-opening ceremony to unveil improvements to its downtown Buffalo store, its neighbours on the block bounded by Main, Clinton, Washington, and Eagle Streets held their own programs. Kleinhan's held fashion shows in the shop for men and featured orchestra music in its own newly refurbished lobby, while J.N. Adam held women's fashion shows. The joint "good neighbor celebration" was designed to call the public's attention to the "central location" of the stores, served by 21 bus and streetcar lines.³³ Woolworth's unveiled a new selling

³⁰Times, 20 September 1938, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 320, BECPL.

³¹Ibid.

³²Times, 19 September 1938, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 319, BECPL.

³³BEN, 26 September, 1939, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 352, BECPL.

floor with a 200-foot lunch counter (extending from Main St. to Washington St.), new fixtures, lighting, and air conditioning.

Chain stores including W.T. Grant and Sears, Roebuck reinvested in Buffalo's downtown during the 1930s. Buffalo became home to yet another chain "flagship:" W.T. Grant's new store at Main and Huron was the largest of the Grant chain of 497 units. The Courier-Express reported that over 3,500 applicants were given interviews for 750 jobs in the store, and all sales women were "either high school graduates or college girls, and every one [was] a Buffalonian."³⁴ The Grant organization, founded in Lynn, Massachusetts as a 25-cent store, adopted a "1 cent to 1 dollar" merchandising strategy after W.W.I., and maintained a centralized staff of buyers in New York City. The new Buffalo branch had a modern, streamlined design with a blue terra-cotta exterior on the first floor and long rows of tapestry glass above. The Courier-Express described the new design features in detail:

With an eye to the many occasions on which Mrs. Buffalo wants to arrange for a meeting with a friend who is doing some shopping down town, or to sit down for a few minutes and rest from her arduous buying, the management has provided a large mezzanine lounge at the back of the store, where customers may get a bird's eye view of all the merchandise on the street floor and of anyone entering the store.³⁵

³⁴BCE, 1 November 1939, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 360, BECPL.

³⁵"Grant's New Store Open to Public Today," BCE, 1 November 1939, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 360, BECPL.

Paul Gleason, manager of the Grant store, explained that the company had "faith in the future growth and prosperity of Buffalo," and thus felt that the \$500,000 spent on the store was a good investment. Ninety per cent of the appliances in the store were purchased from local concerns, and all the steel used in construction came from the nearby Bethlehem Steel Company. Sears, Roebuck joined the ranks of stores growing in downtown Buffalo. The company enlarged its store at 1905 Main Street in 1939. The Buffalo Evening News excitedly reported that a \$300,000 addition was planned, increasing the size of the store by 40% and expanding practically every department.³⁶

The considerable reinvestment in the downtown core by department stores and chain stores alike during the late 1930s underscores two points that are often overlooked in hindsight. First, while suburban development in the Buffalo area was underway during the two decades prior to W.W. II, at this point few business leaders felt that the downtown area was in decline as a retail district.³⁷ Indeed, companies like Neisner's and W.T. Grant were constructing new stores on Main Street in the 1930s. The fact that

³⁶"Sears, Roebuck Enlarging Store," BEN, 18 April 1939, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 48, BECPL.

³⁷A study conducted by the University of Buffalo Bureau of Business and Social Research indicated a decline in the population of the midtown section of Buffalo between 1920 and 1930 of almost 30,000, which was more than offset by gains in the outer city, so that during the decade the City as a whole grew by 66,301. The metropolitan areas surrounding Buffalo outside of the city limits (including Amerherst, Lancaster, Aurora, Cheektowaga, West Seneca, Tonawanda, Lackawanna, Grand Island, Hamburg and East Hamburg) grew by 56,369 residents during the same period. Edmund D. McGarry, "Population Shifts in Buffalo, 1920 - 1930," SS Supplement 10 no. 10A (June 1935): 1, 4.

suburban development (and the growth of suburban malls) would outpace, and eventually replace, reinvestment in the central business district in the postwar period leads to a sense that Main Street was in decline. From the perspective of store owners during the 1930s, however, Buffalo's Main Street was still the main retail area of the city and companies (both locally owned and those based elsewhere) viewed investment in the fixtures, display areas, building facades, and restaurants of the stores downtown as a wise investment.

This leads to a second important point to remember about the thirties. Even though unemployment had reached unprecedented levels in Buffalo, and despite the low levels of retail sales which persisted throughout the thirties, many still believed that private initiatives and the power of consumer spending would be able to bring America out of its economic "slump." Historians now know that it would take more than private spending, and even more than the New Deal to turn the U.S. economy around. Yet the underlying optimism of businesses that invested millions of dollars in renovations or constructions of new stores even as the Depression continued is striking. The President of the Associated Dry Goods Corporation (owner of J.N. Adam and Hengerer's by the 1930s) explained to stockholders why it was necessary for retailers to put money back into the communities in which they were located:

During the early years of the depression prices declined, volume of business shrank, and work on the maintenance of physical properties was held to a minimum. . . . Revival of business required larger investments in merchandise inventories and accounts receivable, and justified expenditures for improvement of plants, fixtures and equipment. . . .

Distribution is a barometer of all industry and of general welfare. It can only prosper with prosperity, and it cannot protect itself against loss in a period of recession. To attempt to do so would cause such a curtailment in the selection of goods offered for sale and lowering of standards of service, that the loss of goodwill and position in the community would far outweigh any possible temporary decrease in losses.³⁸

It was worth it, in Knauth's view, to continue to spend on both inventory and fixtures in order to retain community goodwill. The new and revamped stores were tangible evidence that retailers felt that conditions in Buffalo would get better and that their investments would be recouped as consumers loosened their purse strings and spent as freely as they had done in the 1920s.

Even as hard times persisted, the stores continued to act as cultural brokers within their communities. At a time when many family budgets had little cash to spare for anything beyond the bare necessities, local stores offered entertainments which attracted huge crowds. Although retailers hoped that these promotions would help business, many who attended fashion shows, parades and other ceremonies could do so without having to make a purchase. Throughout the Depression, merchants continued to devote considerable resources to sponsor public entertainments.

Celebrities were a huge draw for major department stores in Rochester and Buffalo. Booking special appearances by entertainers, musicians, sports heroes or other

³⁸Associated Dry Goods Corporation, "Annual Report, year ended January 31, 1937," 5, Sibley Collection, Carton "Annual Reports R.E. Committee Minutes," Folder "Annual Reports, Associated Dry Goods Corporation, 1924-1971," Strong Museum.

famous figures was not a new practice in the 1930s, although the hard economic times made such free shows especially popular. Some famous figures combined autograph sessions at department stores with other local appearances. For example, in 1938, Guy Lombardo and his orchestra played at the Rochester Main Street Armory, but the bandleader also autographed records in Sibley's radio department.³⁹ Yet others would probably not have visited Western New York without the promotional efforts of the department store. Baseball player Walter Johnson autographed baseballs and sold copies of his new board game for shoppers in Hengerer's Toyland in Buffalo.⁴⁰ Yvonne Leroux, nurse of the famed Canadian Dionne Quintuplets, gave talks twice a day in Sibley's as part of a 30-city tour in 1937. She promoted baby goods while relating stories of the "fun and headaches" associated with caring for the five babies.⁴¹

Guest appearances often occurred in the departments of the store which carried related merchandise. Other promotions required much more elaborate staging. Sibley's regularly held fashion shows in the store auditorium, hiring models and arranging seating for preferred customers. As noted in chapter two, the store often boasted that it was bringing the best of New York and Paris to Rochester:

³⁹RD&C, 24 April 1938, Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press 1936-1941," Strong Museum.

⁴⁰"Walter Johnson in Hengerer's Toyland Today!" BCE, 4 December 1930, 12.

⁴¹"Quins [sic] Cause Fun and Headaches, Admits Nurse of Famous Babies," RTU, 30 September 1937, Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Local Clippings, 1936-1941," Strong Museum.

So smartly clad they seemed to step from fashion portraits, and stamped with the style and cut of the world's most famous designers, twelve models paraded today along a flower-bordered runway in two showings of the annual fashion revue of the SL&C Co Store. . . . Eight professional models from New York were among those who wore the latest creations of Aliz, Lanvin, Mainboucher and Hattie Carnegie and the copies of Paris and New York designed apparel which will be on sale in the Sibley store.⁴²

The emphasis on cosmopolitan design did not, however, preclude local tie-ins. At times stores used local women as models. One type of show that was particularly well-received relied on the talents of local high school girls to walk the runways. An audience of friends and family ensured the success of these types of shows.⁴³

Some attractions were decidedly more exotic. Department stores at times sponsored attractions similar to exhibits at World's Fairs. From the late nineteenth century onwards, "anthropological" exhibits of native peoples from North America, Africa, and the South Pacific had become expected features of international and trade fairs. By showing "primitive" civilizations in their "natural" habitats, these exhibits purported to allow new understanding of man's development.⁴⁴ Buffalo's Pan-American

⁴² "Thousands Attend Sibley Style Show," [no newspaper name indicated] 30 September 1936, Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press 1936-1941," Strong Museum.

⁴³ See, for example, "McCurdy's Today at Four O'clock a PRE-HOLIDAY FASHION SHOW with 75 Rochester College and High School Girls," RD&C, 18 November 1936, 6.

⁴⁴ The definitive work on American international expositions is Robert Rydell, All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876 - 1916 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). See in particular the photos of the Igorot tribespeople from the Philippines, at the Louisiana Exposition of 1916 (174-176).

Exposition in 1901 had featured an exhibit of native "savages". The popularity of such attractions persisted into the 1930s, and department stores staged them for a nominal fee, or more frequently, free of charge.

Buffalo and Rochester merchants experimented with these types of attractions. In 1932, B. Forman's of Rochester was home to a display of Hopi Indians, along with their "curios and craftsmanship." Response to the exhibit was so positive that an extra opportunity for school children to meet "these picturesque native Americans" was scheduled.⁴⁵ The "Believe It or Not Odditorium," famous as a big draw at the World's Fair in Chicago, opened in the annex of the E.W. Edwards & Son Store in Buffalo in 1933. Performances sponsored by the American Legion ran from noon until midnight. Buffalo residents could see a range of different "living wonders," including

Jon T. Bowers, who speaks without vocal chords; Freda Pushni, the armless and legless half girl; Edna Price, swallower of swords and electric bulbs; Singalee, Hindu fire worshipper, whose body apparently is immune to fire; Betty Williams, a Georgia baby with four legs and three arms; Juan and Martina de la Cruz, "world's smallest people;" Roy Bard, the ossified man; Medusa, with the body of an infant and the head of an adult, and Marden J. Laurello, "the man with a revolving head."⁴⁶

⁴⁵"SCHOOL CHILDREN Last chance to see the HOPI INDIANS this Morning - 9 to 11," RD&C, 19 November 1932, 2.

⁴⁶"Many View Odditorium," BCE, 5 December 1933, 20. The Odditorium was the creation of New York Globe columnist Robert Ripley, who initiated the phenomenally popular "Believe it or Not" cartoon and trivia section in 1918 and later had his own radio show. He created the Odditorium for the Chicago World's Fair and toured the country with it after the fair ended. The collection included not only "living oddities" but objects like shrunken heads and medieval torture devices. By 1940 there were three Odditoriums running simultaneously in the U.S. and a number of traveling companies touring the world. See Andrea Sulman Dennett, Weird and Wonderful: The Dime Museum in

That department stores were willing to house such exhibits, even those considered less educational and more seedy "midway" fare, is not surprising. Even though the Odditorium was not linked to the sale of goods per se, it attracted huge crowds which would pass through the store. At least some audience members would make purchases. These attractions reinforced the role of the store as a cultural centre, providing inexpensive or free entertainment to the Buffalo public. Department stores had used these types of attractions from the turn of the century as part of a strategy to dazzle consumers and create the impression of a fantasy world where wishes seemed easily fulfilled. In hard times, these exhibits remained popular even if the number of sales they produced for the stores dropped. Visits to stores to witness a new exhibit or the unveiling of a new technology may well have become even more attractive when the average family's entertainment budget was constrained. Movie attendance in Buffalo dropped (particularly at "first-run" theatres with higher prices of admission) from 1932 to 1935, with a slight recovery in 1936.⁴⁷ Free exhibits like the "Odditorium" would have been especially attractive to those who had curtailed other types of entertainment.

Stores were also responsible for hosting entertainments in other venues in the city. McCurdy's of Rochester rented the Columbus Civic Center in order to stage a benefit for the store's employee welfare fund. At this benefit, a group with the unfortunate

America (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 129-130.

⁴⁷Edward J. Fitzmorris, "Income of Motion Picture Theaters in Buffalo, 1932 - 1936," SS: Supplement no. 9A (May 1937): 3, 6.

designation "McCurdy's Kotton Klub Komics" produced an "old-fashioned" minstrel show for a large paying audience, including the stereotypical characters Sambo, Rambo, Hambo and Siambo. Appearing against a "vivid backdrop of the river wharf of a Mississippi-River plantation," the cast presented stories and songs of the South. White actors wore blackface. Other stock figures including the plantation owner's wife were trotted out to the delight of patrons.⁴⁸

Educational exhibits drawing on local history or the achievements of area businesses were mainstays in department stores in both Rochester and Buffalo. Adam, Meldrum & Anderson, in conjunction with the Electrical League of the Niagara Frontier, held a commemorative show of electrical lights, recognizing the 50 year anniversary of the opening of the Westinghouse Electric Company and the building of Buffalo's first commercial generating station. The store had been the "pioneer user" of electricity in the downtown, installing the first electric lighting system in Buffalo in 1886.⁴⁹ Newspaper

⁴⁸"Snappy Steppin' applauded at McCurdy Minstrel Show," RD&C, 25 October 1934, Section II, 16. It is unfortunate, but perhaps not surprising, that the group would openly adopt a name with a "KKK" acronym and stage a show based on a nostalgic view of the plantation South, complete with white performers in blackface. Western New York had been home to active Ku Klux Klan chapters during the early 1920s; perhaps there was little stigma to the name "Kotton Klub Komics." See Shawn Lay, Hooded Knights on the Niagara: The Ku Klux Klan in Buffalo, New York (New York: New York University Press, 1995). Although it enjoyed its zenith in the mid-nineteenth century, minstrelry continued as a popular form of entertainment, and many of its traditions were incorporated in vaudeville acts and Harlem clubs in New York into the 1930s. The Rochester show appears to have been a more "traditional" minstrel show, but was not an anomaly at the time. See Erenberg, Steppin' Out, 68, 256-7.

⁴⁹"Light Advances Over 50 Years are on Display," Courier, 1 March 1936, Industry in Buffalo and the Niagara Frontier, Vol. 4, 294, BECPL.

coverage of the event pointed out how, in hosting the exhibit, the store was carrying on a long tradition.

Fifty years ago crowds of local folk jostled each other in broad aisles, standing entranced to watch "light that can be turned on and off like gas, but with no odor, no heat, no matches, and no danger." Yesterday a younger generation stood and chortled at a historical lamp display and the lamps that lighted the Columbian exposition in Chicago in 1893 where millions saw for the first time "flameless" lighting.⁵⁰

Robert B. Adam, president of the store, recalled being present the first time the store was lit. The drama of the event remained a vivid memory for him: electricity, "the flash between the thunder clouds, the omnipotent, indescribable force in the universe, harnessed and tamed and made subservient to the will of man, who refuses to bow before creation," took the place of the dim yellow gas jets and dangling gas chandeliers in the store. By staging the educational display, the store reminded Buffalonians of its past contributions to the development of the city.

Sibley, Lindsay & Curr hosted a display in 1938 which conflated civic aspirations with local sales. Its "Made in Rochester" exposition featured nearly one hundred local businesses. All of the store's display areas, including its forty-five show windows and areas on every selling floor, were taken over by demonstrations of the manufacture of Rochester products. From Tuesday to Saturday, May 10 to 14, crowds thronged the exhibits. The range of displays was astounding, covering technical instruments, luxury items, industrial products and more. Counters were heaped with everything from radios

⁵⁰Ibid.

to fishing tackle, playing cards, perfume and even spaghetti and spices. A report in the paper promised,

Visitors may see how a necktie is made, learn to hand-dip candy, make eyelash curlers, cut shoes from the original hides, make women's hats, upholster chairs, play solitaire bridge or get lessons in modern ironing, sweeping and coffee-making. Everything from potato chips to upholstered chairs, including brooms, mattresses and telephone switch boards will be made completely before the public's eyes. The latest cameras, lenses, and instruments will be on display, along with a glass boot, the newest medical way of treating circulatory diseases.⁵¹

Most of the manufacturers granted exhibit space in Sibley's sold their wares in the store throughout the rest of year. Others were included as the store hoped to "make Rochesterians realize the national and international importance of local companies."⁵²

Sibley's claimed that in staging the exhibition, the store was performing a public service by making Rochesterians realize the national and international importance of local companies. The slogan "What Rochester makes - makes Rochester," adopted previously by the Rochester Chamber of Commerce, was emblazoned on signs in the display windows and throughout the store. Classes of school children were brought by their teachers to benefit from the educational presentations, and the chance to witness the actual production of goods drew men into the store "in great numbers to see displays of

⁵¹"Store Plans Display of City Products," [n.d., pencil date 1938 on back], Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press, 1936-1941," Strong Museum. Other articles give the date of the exhibition to be in May, 1938.

⁵²Ibid.

household products bought usually by women."⁵³ The store's transformation into a place of industrial demonstration and civic expression, rather than simply feminine indulgence, made it a more comfortable destination for Rochester men. A total of 100,000 visitors were estimated to have seen the exhibits in the store, not including the many who lined the Main Street windows for a glimpse of live demonstrations. Sibley's presented the exhibit as a chance for the store to express its pride in the community, and to encourage others to share this civic spirit. The exhibit proved so popular that it was sponsored in following years. In 1939, Sibley's boasted that it showcased home industries at the city's own "World's Fair."⁵⁴

Sibley's continued to promote local pride and local history in another window exhibit, this one designed in conjunction with the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences starting in 1939. Norman Akely of the Museum staff undertook creating a special miniature scale model of part of downtown Rochester as it had appeared one hundred years previously. Using sketches of the city's oldest buildings (including the First Presbyterian Church, St. Luke's Church, and the Court House) as well as interviews with older residents of the Rochester, Akely hoped to be historically accurate in his portrayal of Rochester in 1839. After completing a few scale buildings, Akely was going

⁵³"100,000 Inspect Home Products," RTU, 13 May, 1938, Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press, 1936-1941," RTU, Strong Museum.

⁵⁴"Exhibits Give New Facts on City Industry," RD&C 18 May 1939; "Products of 106 Home Industries Shine at City's Own 'World's Fair,'" RTU, 18 May 1939. Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press 1936-1941," Strong Museum.

to stop the project when Sibley's approached the museum with the idea of reproducing the whole city at the time. To supplement the museum's sketches, engravings, and water colors from the nineteenth century (which gave a general sense of the appearance of many buildings), the city engineer's maps of the period were consulted to gauge the location and the actual size of the sites buildings occupied.⁵⁵

Raymond Shantz began construction of the entire village in Sibley's own workshops, on the eighteenth floor of the store. He was aided in historical research by three Museum employees. Ultimately Shantz made more than fifty building structures and homes. Each model had a balsa wood framework, with walls made from cardboard cut to shape. Windows were made from transparent acetate, with threads for partitions. Three store display artists painted the buildings, using colours in "as close an approximation of the hues used in early Rochester as could be deduced from the data available."⁵⁶ The entire village was assembled using a scale of 3/8 of an inch to one foot. It was then moved down to the store's largest show window. On the Main Street side, the display stretched for twenty-four feet. Completion of the project took four months of work. The finishing touch was the placement of lamp posts along the streets of the model - it was thought that dim lighting would best recreate the sense of life in the community during the 1830s. The educational display attracted passers-by on Main Street and

⁵⁵Edmund W. Peters, "Rochester in 1839," Museum Service: Bulletin of the Rochester Musuem of Arts and Sciences, 13 (January-February 1940): 8.

⁵⁶Ibid.

eventually was donated to the Museum of Arts and Science, where it became part of the permanent collection.⁵⁷ The creation of the diorama was the result of the investment of personnel, work space and resources by Sibley's, and the painstaking attention to detail by all involved indicated a respect for Rochester's history.

It was not such a stretch for department stores to take on these types of projects. With their glass display cases and rows of carefully arrayed objects, department stores in many ways resembled museums.⁵⁸ With a more flexible definition of service to the community than the museum, however, retailers hosted both the educational exhibits usually associated with trade fairs or museums, as well as more "lowbrow" attractions like the Odditorium. While museums took seriously their role in the shaping the intellectual life of America, department stores were not limited to providing strictly edifying fare.⁵⁹ Displays explaining the history of the city or the achievements of local industry were indeed promoted as educational, yet even these appeared in the same space where customers were encouraged to touch and try out different types of merchandise. And while retailers emphasized the "public service" they provided in staging such shows,

⁵⁷The diorama was still available for viewing in the Museum in the late 1990s.

⁵⁸Steven Conn makes explicit this connection between the department store and the museum, arguing that both acted as "institutional embodiments of Veblen's culture of conspicuous consumption." He argues that the late Victorians lived in a "world of objects," and museums, department stores and fairs helped them to make sense of this world. Conn, Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 13-15.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 16-20.

their main goal was simply to attract as many people as possible to the attractions. They had no compunction about switching from an educational display to something which offered only entertainment. The store could act as both industrial fair and midway, museum and sideshow.

Not all events sponsored by retailers took place within the confines of the stores themselves. Among the most popular of the attractions organized by area stores were the Christmas parades. During the 1920s, the tradition of a Thanksgiving Day Parade had been famously adopted by Macy's in New York.⁶⁰ The practice was embraced with enthusiasm by Western New York merchants, and continued throughout the Depression. In 1936, Sibley, Lindsay & Curr staged a procession of giant balloons, floats and clowns in Rochester which went from East Avenue and Culver Road, and continued to Main Street. According to the Democrat & Chronicle, parents and children gathered early and jostled for the best vantage point to view the parade. The crowd reached record proportions, causing congestion in the downtown core. The paper estimated the crowd at 80,000:

Every artery was chocked with thousands of automobiles, street cars and pedestrians. Street cars ran behind schedule throughout the day and special details of police tried vainly to keep traffic moving in the outlying districts were the downtown tangle resulted in standing lines of cars.⁶¹

⁶⁰Leach, Land of Desire, 335.

⁶¹"Balloon Zoo Led by Santa Attracts 80,000 Downtown," RD&C, 22 November 1936, 2, Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press 1936-1941," Strong Museum.

Rochester police made a statement that the crowd reached 100,000, and the Journal noted that from the vantage point of Sibley's roof, "not a foot of sidewalk could be seen."

Police worked hard to keep the throngs of children and parents from entering the road.⁶²

Thirty-nine giant balloons made by Goodyear Rubber, including an 80-foot dragon and the "world's biggest edition of Mickey Mouse," entranced the viewers.⁶³ After making his way along the parade route, Santa Claus stepped down from his float to enter Sibley's and assume his post in Toyland. At this point, a crowd of children surged into the store, sweeping aside photographers who had been positioned inside to capture the event.

Sibley's was able to cope with the crowds, although counters who were placed at the foot of the escalators were unable to keep up with the patrons who crowded "four and five to a step." The store asserted that nearly 10,000 were counted proceeding to toyland, with "an unestimated number missed."⁶⁴ The fourth floor of the store was roped off into aisles which led to and from a Toyland display with the theme "Twenty-Thousand Leagues

⁶²"Downtown Jammed for Sibley's Parade," Journal, 21 November 1936, Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press 1936-1941," Strong Museum.

⁶³"Circus Parade to Help Santa - Circus Day November 21," RD&C, 8 November 1936, Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press 1936-1941," Strong Museum.

⁶⁴"Downtown Jammed for Sibley's Parade," Journal, 21 November 1936, Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press 1936-1941," Strong Museum.

Under the Sea." The following year, Toyland featured a pre-view with music of Walt Disney's motion picture "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs."⁶⁵

The continued ability of department stores to attract crowds and their new investments in store upgrades and openings should not be taken as an indication that they did not suffer during the Depression. Retail sales slumped as unemployment soared. Buffalo's department store sales in 1933 were only 56% of what they had been in the boom years 1925, 1926, and 1927. Sales would not recover to even 80% of what they had been until the 1940s.⁶⁶ New York merchants felt particularly put-upon because of the tax strategy adopted by the state. In 1933, New York proposed a 1% retail sales tax in a desperate attempt to raise revenue to cover increased relief roles and mounting debt. In April of the same year, W.H. Bramley, Director of Sibley, Lindsay & Curr, spoke out against the proposed tax. Invoking the ideal of public service, Bramley compared the role of retailers in the community to the role of the state: "Upon retailers, as well as upon government, rests a mandate for the preservation of service to the public. And upon retailers rests also the dire economic necessity of rendering that service within limits of the available funds."⁶⁷ The rhetoric of service in this instance went beyond the simple

⁶⁵ "Animal-shaped balloons of sizes seldom imagined," RTU, 11 November 1937, Sibley Collection, Scrapbook "Clippings, Local Press 1936 - 1941," Strong Museum.

⁶⁶See Appendix.

⁶⁷"Excerpts From a Statement by W.H. Bramley, Director, Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Company, Rochester, N.Y., "Bulletin of the National Retail Dry Goods Association

providing of assistance in the store. In Bramley's view, retailers played a key role in the functioning of the economy, and thus of the nation. Any restrictions which interfered with the ability of merchants to serve the public were counterproductive and would go against the spirit of government efforts to end the economic crisis.

The New York State Council of Merchants quickly passed a resolution against the sales tax measure, and retailers from Buffalo and Rochester formulated arguments against it. Gilbert J. C. McCurdy, president of McCurdy & Co. in Rochester, wrote an eloquent essay in the pages of the Bulletin of the National Retail Dry Goods Association indicating the special role that merchants could play in solving the economic slump.

It is a matter of common knowledge that the problems of the depression under which the entire world has labored during these last three years, are problems of distribution. The application of science to industry has long since made possible the production of the necessities of life, and indeed of the complete range of luxuries, in quantities vastly larger than would suffice for our entire population. Yet we behold today the incomprehensible spectacle of want in a land of plenty, of unsatisfied desires in the midst of agencies eager to fulfil those desires, of poverty in a nation of untold wealth, and in the mightiest State of that great Nation.⁶⁸

Retailers, he noted, were precisely the agencies who might fulfil the "unsatisfied desires" of the public, but the proposed legislation would handicap them in their efforts to not only provide the necessities but the luxuries which had come to be associated with the American way of life. McCurdy and his fellow members of the New York Merchants' Association came forward to comment, not as government experts, but as representatives

(NRDGA) , April 1933, 23.

⁶⁸Tbid., 22.

of the retailers in their state, "whose lives have been devoted, in good times and in bad, to the business of distribution, to the sale of goods, to the exchange of the products of labor for the wherewithal to employ more labor." In other words, McCurdy argued, these were people who had spent their careers studying the exact problem facing the country.⁶⁹ But how were merchants supposed to help the country and aid recovery, they asked, when a new tax would sap their strength? Bearing the "responsibility for providing the vital impulse for the recovery of employment," merchants were now being asked to provide revenues out of the very capital required to do the job of distribution.

Despite the concerns of merchants, New York passed the 1% tax as an emergency bill which was set to expire on June 30, 1934. Mobilized to respond, civic and commercial groups representing communities in every county and section of the state flocked to a meeting on January 15, 1934, at the Ballroom of the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York City. They passed a unanimous motion opposing the present tax, condemning any extension of it beyond the emergency period and petitioning the governor of the state and all state officials to wipe out the present tax.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, for months after its enactment, the National Retail Dry Goods Association published statements condemning the tax. One Albany department store president suggested that a state retail sales tax was "absolutely opposed to the principles of the National Recovery Act," for it slowed down

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰"Militant Action by New York Merchants and Civic Organizations Against the Retail Sales Tax," Bulletin of the NRDGA, February 1934, 113.

the buying power of the public, which in turn slowed down the business of the merchant, which meant only a reduction in factory production and employment.⁷¹

Buffalo and Rochester merchants continued to be among the tax's most vocal opponents. Weldon D. Smith, general manager of Adam, Meldrum & Anderson, President of the Retail Merchants Association of Buffalo and Director of the New York State Council of Retail Merchants, decried the "psychological effect" of a sales tax, which would only "create buying resistance and diminish spending."⁷² Smith argued that merchants in Buffalo and across the state were doing their best to keep the wheels of the economy rolling, by encouraging people to buy instead of hoard and help increase employment. He felt that a tax which hit consumers would only delay recovery and impede the efforts of merchants to return to normalcy. The Rochester Retail Merchants' Council added its name to the list of critics of the measure. Gilbert McCurdy presented a brief at a Rochester hearing of the Commission for the Revisions of the Tax Laws of the State of New York, in which he condemned the sales tax not only on behalf of retailers but "in the interest of our customers, the citizens of Rochester."⁷³ Ultimately, the combined efforts of retailers across the state was successful, and the sales tax measure was not extended past the June 1934 deadline.

⁷¹Bulletin of the NRDGA, June 1934, 81.

⁷²Weldon D. Smith, "The Sales Tax Should Be Repealed Instead of Increased," Bulletin of the NRDGA, January 1934, 70.

⁷³Gilbert J.C. McCurdy, "A Sales Tax a Stumbling Block to Recovery," Bulletin of the NRDGA, January 1934, 71.

So far this chapter has explored how department stores and other merchants in Buffalo and Rochester continued to cultivate community loyalty and maintain an image of civic leadership in their cities during the Great Depression. Another measure of the persistence of local identities during this period is the way those outside of the area attempted to capitalize on local sentiment. Department stores and area retailers were not the only ones to recognize the importance of local selling during the 1930s. A number of national manufacturers used local references when selling to area consumers, a phenomenon overlooked by many historians of advertising.⁷⁴

It is not surprising that manufacturers with local roots would attempt to use their area connections to foster local pride, and thus, local sales. Just as retailers pointed to their longstanding history in Buffalo or Rochester or their employment of local people, manufacturers hoped that by suggesting that they were from the same place as their patrons, they would encourage brand loyalty. A typical campaign for a local business

⁷⁴Part of this oversight simply has to do with the fact that scholars have not tended to devote much attention to local or regional advertising. The extensive literature on national advertising and magazines persuasively demonstrates the emergence of a new style of selling, and new techniques to capture the attention of "the audience." National advertisers were the originators of the most sophisticated techniques of modern advertising, so it is not surprising that they have attracted so much attention. But at the same time that Americans were poring over the pages of magazine advertising described by Marchand, Lears, Schneirov, Scanlon, Pope, Fox, and Shudson, among others, they were also faced with newspaper ads from businesses in their own communities which often combined new selling techniques with appeals to local loyalty. See Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, Schneirov, Dream of a New Social Order, Scanlon, Inarticulate Longings, Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance, Helen Damon-Moore, Magazines for the Millions, Stephen Fox, Mirror Makers, Michael Schudson, Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion.

was one for Arpeako sausage, which described the vacation of a "Rochester Couple" who went away to the Adirondacks with less than enough sausage meat, and were pleasantly surprised to find that they could purchase more of their favourite brand from a dealer near their campsite.⁷⁵ In this case, patrons of Arpeako were informed of the growing distribution of a local product to a wider radius of stores.

One of the more significant twists on this theme of community promotion is the existence of national ad campaigns which were "tailored" to the local market. This phenomenon was especially prevalent in campaigns which used testimonials. The use of consumer endorsements was nothing new in the 1930s, dating back well into the nineteenth century. Patent medicines, for example, had long used statements from satisfied customers. The use of testimonials declined by the turn of the century, in no small part due to the increasing disfavour with which these drug- and alcohol-laced remedies were received. The technique did not fade completely, however, and agencies experimented with ways to increase the reader's confidence in the words of "satisfied customers."⁷⁶ Advertisers believed that the most effective ads presented praise for a product as coming from an "apparently disinterested party," rather than from the

⁷⁵BEN, 13 November 1930, 19. This ad appeared in the "Western New York" edition of the paper, which may be why the ad refers to a "Rochester couple" rather than one from Buffalo specifically.

⁷⁶Advertisers increasingly embraced this style of selling following the success of campaigns by Fleishmann's Yeast, Listerine, and Kotex. See Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 14-22. Stephen Fox argues that during WWI, letters from soldiers praising razors and other personal items provided advertisers with highly effective testimonials. Fox, Mirror Makers, 88-89; See also Scanlon, Inarticulate Longings, 216.

manufacturer or sales representative.⁷⁷ Recognizing the negative publicity associated with some testimonial ads, the Advertising Federation of America circulated a statement in 1929 asserting that most advertising was honest, but abuse of testimonials needed to be curbed because of its "disproportionate impression upon the public mind."⁷⁸ While not wanting to go so far as to suggest coercive measures for advertisers who persisted in using "insincere" testimonials, it condemned those who used unscrupulous methods to elicit testimonials.

Endorsements from celebrities and society figures during the 1920s and 1930s were viewed as one way to distance the testimonial from the taint of patent medicines while conveying impressions of high class and good taste. A highly successful campaign for Pond's cold cream, first started in the mid 1920s, revived the use of the testimonials for "mainstream" products.⁷⁹ Yet while celebrity endorsements were effective in selling cosmetics or other luxury items, not all products could adopt this strategy. When selling

⁷⁷Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 112.

⁷⁸Advertising Federation of America, "Memo to the Board of Governors, The Advertising Commission, Presidents of Affiliated Clubs and Associations, Editors of Advertising Club and Association Publication," [mimeographed bulletin] 430 Lexington Avenue, 21 August 1929, McGarry Papers, F27/455, Box 2, Folder "Professional Organizations General 1928 - 1947," UBA.

⁷⁹On the history of the Pond's campaign, see Fox, Mirror Makers, 88-90; Scanlon, Inarticulate Longings, 216-19. Fox credits Helen Resor of J. Walter Thompson with giving testimonial advertising new credibility "by obtaining endorsements from famous people, not just ordinary citizens." (88-89) He notes that despite this veneer of respectability, often the celebrities used in JWT ads had never actually made the statements attributed to them.

a brand of soap flakes, for example, testimonials from "average" wives and mothers appeared more believable than an endorsement from a Hollywood star. Roland Marchand thus has argued that advertisers in the late 1920s and early 1930s emphasized a new realism, where stereotypical character types (businessman, doctor, housewife) were replaced by "real people."⁸⁰

It is here that we see how advertisers combined national campaigns with appeals to the local market. Newspaper ads, while in some ways similar in layout and copy to magazine ads, offered the additional opportunity for advertisers to feature "typical" consumers from the actual community in which the ad would appear. In other words, readers of the Buffalo Evening News or the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle saw testimonials from not only "real people" with similar occupations and concerns, but from fellow Western New Yorkers. To give an added sense of authenticity to these statements, advertisers included the full home address as well as the name (and often the job) of the "person on the street."

Ads in Western New York papers throughout the 1920s and 1930s included statements from area residents like Mrs. Sara Dubawsky, of 10 Wislow Avenue in Buffalo, who exclaimed, "I'll never go back to those slow-sudsing, lazy soaps. Not as long as I can get Rinso, the hard-water soap!"⁸¹ Lux soap featured a letter from "local woman" Mrs. Margaret Furey, of 24 DeWitt Street in Buffalo, claiming that it was "LIKE

⁸⁰Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 14.

⁸¹BEN, Inter-Urban Edition, 4 June 1931, 30.

THROWING AWAY MONEY TO WASH COLORED SILKS THE OLD WAY," and demonstrating her new resolve to switch from other cake soaps, chips, and powders to Lux.⁸² Some campaigns would combine two of the most popular styles of selling in the same ad. In the 1930s, ad agencies became increasingly enamoured of using comic strips to sell. An ad for Rinso combined the company's typical comic strip with local testimonials. The strip told the story of two housewives who were comparing their laundry, while in a separate statement Mrs. W. MacDermot, of 29 Huetter Avenue in Tonawanda, New York, exclaimed, "Never saw such suds! I'll never forget the first time I used Rinso in my washer."⁸³ She commented that the water was very hard in Buffalo and so Rinso was necessary. Another ad which echoed the layout of a news story referred directly to the women of Western New York:

You washed CLOTHES. . . . You washed DISHES. . . . You VOTED "new improved Chipso is best" - in Rochester - Albany - Syracuse - Buffalo - Women tried the new improved Chipso. For two weeks they tested Chipso - for laundry - for dishes - for cleaning. And the way those speedy Chipso suds got the dirt, opened their eyes.⁸⁴

The sense that the ad was speaking directly to the reader (appellation) was intensified because Chipso was endorsed by women in the specific area where the reader lived. Chipso based its campaign on the notion of a consumer democracy, where housewives "voted" for their product choices. Another ad featured the testimonials of six women

⁸²BEN, 1 December 1929, 12.

⁸³BEN, Inter-Urban Edition, 4 June 1931, 30.

⁸⁴RD&C, 23 November 1934, 24.

from Albany, Rochester, Buffalo and Syracuse who were "TYPICAL OF HUNDREDS IN 4 NEW YORK CITIES WHO VOTED "NEW IMPROVED" CHIPSO BEST PACKAGED SOAP BY FAR."⁸⁵ Accounts from women like Mrs. John Ryan, of 317 Helen Street in Syracuse, were enhanced by personal details: Mrs. Ryan had eight children to wash for, and so was qualified as a skilled judge of washing soap.

Given their long associations with testimonial advertising, it is not surprising that the manufacturers of patent medicines would continue to employ this technique. Here, too, the extent to which advertisers included testimonials from area people is notable. Doan's Kidney Pills used the slogan "Ask your neighbor!" to accompany lists of "Rochester cases" who had been cured of aches and pains by the medicine.⁸⁶ Some ads included not only the address of the person endorsing the product but the place where they purchased it. "Read How These Rochester Folks Found Relief," proclaimed an ad which explained how Elmer E. Laning, Stationary Fireman, used "two boxes of Doan's Pills from Jones' Drug Store" and was rid of his back pains, and how Geo. Wilcox, heating contractor, purchased his pills from Reynolds' Drug Store.⁸⁷ In Buffalo, visits from company representatives created an opportunity to solicit testimonials. The words of Mrs. Emma Turner, 213 Sycamore Street, Buffalo, to a Konjola sales rep at her usual

⁸⁵RD&C, 9 November 1934, 24.

⁸⁶"Be Rid of that Nagging Backache!" RD&C, 11 October 1920, 11.

⁸⁷RD&C, 23 November 1925, 13. The statement of the testimonial was dated 27 May 1922. This ad also used the "Ask Your Neighbor" tag line.

drug store, were reprinted in newspaper ads. She attested, "Konjola proved to be exactly what I needed, and I found this wonderful medicine just when I was about to give up in despair."⁸⁸ Readers were encouraged to "Meet the Konjola Man" at the Harvey & Karey Drug Store, and hear the praise from a "Grateful Buffalo Lady" for the special medicine.⁸⁹

Even more "respectable" products, with many national campaigns behind them, experimented with local pitches. An ad for Lifebuoy soap alerted readers that "THIS HAPPENED IN BUFFALO," as a Delaware Avenue woman told of her neighbour's embarrassing "body odor" experience. Although this woman had many wonderful qualities, she eventually lost her place in Buffalo society because of her hygiene problem.

When we first met her, we all thought her charming. Her clothes were so smart and becoming - her manner so friendly and pleasant. But what a sad disappointment when she spent an evening with us. It was tragic that such apparent charm should be completely ruined by "B.O."⁹⁰

The woman went on to explain that while she "wouldn't dream of mentioning" the name of her former friend, she wished that she had the courage to tell her about Lifebuoy. The ad presented a high-class, respected confidante who clearly outlined the worst fear of the socially ambitious: the notion that one improper product choice could jeopardize even the most carefully cultivated image. The reader was encouraged to reflect on her own

⁸⁸BEN, Mail Edition, 9 November 1929, 18.

⁸⁹BEN, 18 November 1929, 7.

⁹⁰BEN, 2 December 1929, 15.

grooming habits and to wonder if her own friends would make a similar confession. Yet readers in Buffalo could take their association with the ad one step further: not only was the friendless B.O. sufferer a "real" person, she was identified as someone from their own city. The woman who confessed, "We finally stopped inviting her . . . *all because of 'B.O.'*"" was not just any society matron, but a resident of one of the Delaware Avenue mansions and as such instantly identified with the upper echelons of Buffalo society.

This ad was different, however, from other testimonials which used local people. The ad's claims to realism rested on the testimony of an unnamed local woman. Given the premise of the ad, the notion that the speaker wanted to preserve both her own anonymity and that of her former friend when speaking of such a delicate subject presumably precluded the listing of her name and address. The ad copy assured, "The above experience was related to us by a woman in this city. It is by no means unusual. It happens far oftener than we realize." Yet it is unlikely that this ad was based on actual testimony, or had anything to do with Buffalo in particular. The Lifebuoy ads were created by the New York ad agency of Ruthrauff & Ryann, part of a national campaign linking use of the soap with elimination of "B.O."⁹¹ The agency had clearly done some research, enabling them to suggest Delaware Avenue by name as the place where "fashionable" people were likely to live in Buffalo.

On another level, the Lifebuoy ad had very little to do with the city. It evoked "localness" without the participation of an actual Buffalo resident. The lip service paid to

⁹¹Fox, Mirror Makers, 99.

locality was another way for advertisers to personalize their message, and give the impression of relating to the concerns of residents in a particular community. Other examples of this tactic were frequent in newspaper advertising. Climalene water softener asserted that "Local Women" had come to realize that "[t]his city's water is too hard for the best washing results." Despite repeated references to "local housewives," "this hard water" and "this city," the ad did not specifically name Buffalo and thus could have been reproduced in any city's newspaper with equal success.⁹² A Lux soap ad similarly featured an endorsement from an ostensibly local woman who had been dissatisfied with her soap until "a buyer in our best department store advised me always to use Lux."⁹³ The department store was not named.

Advertisers recognized that different regions had different shopping habits. In 1938, Scripps-Howard Newspapers commissioned a study of the buying habits and brand preferences of consumers in sixteen cities, including Buffalo. Nationwide, over 53,000 housewives completed the survey. Over 4,000 randomly-selected Buffalo housewives filled out questionnaires, providing an inventory of household products and describing their choice of stores.⁹⁴ In Buffalo, women were encouraged to fill out the forms by Mrs.

⁹²BEN, Mail Edition, 6 November 1930, 36.

⁹³BEN, 1 December 1 1929, 12. The same ad featured a testimonial from a woman in Stanford, Connecticut.

⁹⁴Scripps-Howard Newspapers, Market Records: From a Home-Inventory Study of Buying Habits and Brand Preferences of Consumers in Sixteen Cities. Volume I, 1938.

Marie Daigler, President of the Buffalo Council of Parents and Teachers. Since PTA groups did not exist in all areas to be included in the survey, the ladies auxiliaries or other clubs from twenty different churches were used to help distribute and return the cards.⁹⁵ Scripps-Howard paid all of these organizations for their participation. The reports represented 3.0% of Buffalo's population. Punchcards were then used by I.B.M. to tabulate the results of the questionnaires. The completed study allowed a comparison of the sixteen cities with the national average and each other.

The respondents to the survey were in some ways self-selecting: only those who could read and write in English, and were involved in community or church organizations were able to fill out the questionnaires. For this reason, the survey likely provides a more accurate picture of middle-class, native stock Buffalo's shopping habits than the practices of the residents of working-class or ethnic neighbourhoods.⁹⁶ Respondents were also most likely married women, and more specifically mothers (given that the PTA was a major force in collecting the surveys). This would also skew the sample towards established households in which the wife had sufficient time to undertake responding to the survey. Newly married couples, single people, the unemployed, the poor, the

Published by Scripps-Howard Newspapers, 1938, 5.

⁹⁵Ibid., 247.

⁹⁶The ladies' auxiliaries of twenty different churches scattered across the city were involved in collecting the survey. It should be noted that Scripps-Howard did not focus on Buffalo's WASP elite in its selection of churches: Catholic, Protestant and Jewish groups were all represented. Two Polish churches, one missionary society, and one Seventh Day Adventist Church were participants.

illiterate, non-English speakers, and single parents would be less likely to participate in the survey.

Nevertheless, Scripps-Howard endeavoured to gain a cross-section of the city. The map of Buffalo was divided so that each census tract was put into one of three groups. The median rental cost for each census tract was used to determine whether residents in a particular district fit into the top 17%, the middle 58% or the bottom 25% of probable income levels. The company's representatives gathered reports from a proportionate number of families within each group, and within the groups a proportionate number of respondents from each tract was culled for the sample. The representativeness of the sample was tested in each city against findings including the numbers of renters and owners of homes in each area, types of homes, and number of persons per family.⁹⁷ Because the sample included families from every tract throughout the city, and Scripps-Howard consciously included proportionate numbers from areas representing a range of income levels, we can take the findings of the survey as representative of larger consuming patterns in the city. Although certain groups were excluded by the methodology of the inventory for our purposes the Scripps-Howard Home Inventory provides a useful snapshot of the shopping habits of Buffalonians.

The Scripps-Howard survey suggests that by 1938, nationally branded goods dominated the shelves in Buffalo homes (as well as the homes in other cities in the survey). When asked about their brand preferences for over 20 products, the Buffalo

⁹⁷Market Records, 19.

housewives in the survey overwhelmingly chose national brands. From Pond's Cold Cream to Coca-Cola, respondents displayed a familiarity with and a preference for nationally-established products. When asked to name their favourite mayonnaise, for example, 55.8% named Kraft and another 15.6% named Hellmann's.⁹⁸ The only "regional" brand to make the list was Red & White (house brand of the Red & White grocery chain), which was only named by 2.1% of respondents. Buffalonians overwhelmingly chose brand names when selecting grocery items like canned soup. 82.3% of Buffalo households named Campbell's tomato soup as their favourite brand. This was the case for all three class groups in the survey: respondents from the top income group (ranked according to the real estate value of the census tracts in which they lived) were slightly less likely to choose Campbell's than the other two groups.⁹⁹ Some brands which were nationally available but had local ties did comparatively better in Buffalo than in the other cities surveyed. Nabisco Shredded Wheat, which was produced at a factory in nearby Niagara Falls, New York, was preferred by 19.0% of Buffalo households surveyed, compared with the average in all 16 cities of 11.7%.¹⁰⁰

The Scripps-Howard Home Inventory did reveal regional differences in product choices. Yet in most categories, the competition for market share was between two or

⁹⁸Ibid., 102.

⁹⁹Ibid., 257. The percentage of people selecting Campbell's tomato soup in the top income group was 80.1%, in the middle group was 82.9 and in the lowest income group was 82.3

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 96.

more national contenders. In other words, while more people preferred Kraft packaged cheese in Cleveland, Columbus, and Washington than in Buffalo, in all four cities it was still the overwhelming favourite, and the next choice for housewives in Buffalo, Cleveland, and Columbus was Borden's, not a locally-produced brand.¹⁰¹

More distinctive than the brand choices were the shopping habits of residents in different cities. Scripps-Howard was able to conclude that Saturday was the heavy food marketing day in all cities, where an average of 41.2% of the week's food budget was spent (42.7% in Buffalo).¹⁰² Less consistent was the day of the week when people shopped in the downtown area. Although Saturday was the most popular day to shop overall, different cities had distinct patterns in weekday shopping. Buffalo reported Thursday as the busiest weekday, while for Washington, D.C., Thursday was the least busy day of the week. Residents of Akron, Ohio, shopped on Wednesday, while those in Cleveland shopped on Tuesday.¹⁰³

The study revealed that while certain items were likely to be purchased at a chain store, others were much more the domain of the independent merchant. Thus although over a quarter (25.7%) of Buffalo housewives surveyed reported that they shopped most

¹⁰¹Ibid., 76. 51.2% of Buffalo households chose Kraft's packaged cheese, compared with 76.1% in Cleveland, 68.2% in Columbus, and 74.3% in Washington.

¹⁰²Ibid., 50.

¹⁰³Ibid., 52-53. Buffalo's figures for the entire week were as follows (no figures for Sunday, when stores were closed):

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
14.9%	9.2	12.0	17.8	9.9	36.2

frequently at the A&P, when asked where they last purchased fresh meat, only 5.2% said that they had done so at the national chain. In contrast, 55.3% reported buying meat from an independent grocer, and another 11.5% patronized a butcher or meat market. Similarly, while only 18.9% said that they patronized independent grocers most frequently, 54.5% reported that they last purchased fresh vegetables from an independent grocer.¹⁰⁴ In contrast, a packaged item like canned milk or cold cereal was much more likely to have been purchased at a chain grocer.¹⁰⁵ This wide discrepancy in the preferred point of purchase for groceries, meats, and vegetables indicates that many households went to independent stores for certain items, even if they considered themselves "chain store" shoppers.

The impression of Buffalo housewives as chain store shoppers becomes even more complicated when the existence of regional chains is taken into account. A&P was indeed identified as the most popular grocery store in the city. Yet closer study reveals that local businesses still accounted for more business than national chains. If those who shopped at various *regional* chains (including Danahy-Faxon, Loblaw, Red & White, Mohican Markets) were grouped together, they would make up a larger percentage than

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 248.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 251.

the A&P shoppers.¹⁰⁶ Regional chains, as discussed in Chapter 3, hoped to combine the purchasing power of a large organization with appeals to local loyalty, and thus enjoy the best of both worlds. From the statistics developed by the Scripps-Howard survey, they appeared to be successful in doing so (see table 5).

TABLE 5
GROCERY STORES MOST FREQUENTLY PATRONIZED
BY BUFFALO HOUSEWIVES, 1938

A&P	25.7%
Danahy-Faxon	16.6
Loblaw	16.2
Red & White	4.4
IGA	4.3
Bishop Stores	4.3
Sattler's Grocery Dept.	3.9
Mohican Markets	3.8
B.W.G. Stores	1.9
Others	18.9

Source: Market Records, 247.

¹⁰⁶For that matter, proprietors of IGA and Red & White stores would have objected to the characterization of their stores as part of either national or regional chains. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Independent Grocers' Alliance stressed the idea that it combined national buying power with independent ownership and commitment to the community. Red & White, located primarily in New York State and Pennsylvania, similarly purported to be a "chain of independents," carrying a common house brand and sharing a common distributor but maintaining independent ownership and day-to-day operations of stores.

Moving away from the grocery trade, when asked about cosmetic items or household goods, Buffalo housewives indicated that they bought nationally advertised goods, but from independent merchants. The 4191 Buffalo housewives in the sample were asked at which one department store they shopped most frequently. Women in all three income groups overwhelmingly selected independent department stores as their first choice (see table 6).

TABLE 6
DEPARTMENT STORES MOST FREQUENTLY PATRONIZED
BY BUFFALO HOUSEWIVES, 1938

J. N. Adam	27.3%
Adam, Meldrum & Anderson	21.9
Sattler's	12.8
Hengerer's	11.9
Hens & Kelly	6.2
Edwards	5.4
Sears, Roebuck	4.0
Baker's	3.8
Flint & Kent	1.5
Others	5.2

Source: Market Records, 247.

Again, however, if we imagine a typical shopper's range of purchases, we can see that Buffalo housewives shopped at department stores for some items, and chain or discount stores for others. Prestige items like face cream, dry rouge or lipstick were more likely to

be purchased at department stores.¹⁰⁷ Department stores faced much stiffer competition from 5c - \$1 stores for smaller items like liquid nail polish, safety razors or tooth brushes.¹⁰⁸

The findings of the Scripps-Howard study reinforce the value of using local and regional perspectives when considering the history of consuming. Moreover, a focus on the history of a specific type of retail institution can reveal some things, but mask others. For example, in considering the rise of chain stores, one might posit a point in time when most consumers switched from patronizing "old-fashioned" independent stores to embrace the "modernity" of the chain store. The household inventory suggests that often the same shopper might go to a locally-owned department store for clothing, purchase cosmetics at the five-and-dime, buy canned goods at a chain store, and shop for meat at an independent grocer. Only by considering the range of options available to residents in particular regions or communities can we get a full sense of how consumers interacted with the marketplace. This study has tried to suggest that the interaction of both retailers and consumers in Western New York with the American mass market was a complex

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 262. For example, 41.5% of Buffalo housewives purchased lipstick at department stores, compared with 35.2% who bought at discount stores and 10.8% who purchased at drug stores. 49.5% reported buying paste rouge at department stores.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 262-263. 62.6% reported buying liquid nail polish at 5c - \$1 stores, compared with 19.6% who bought at department stores. Safety razors were most often purchased at drug stores (by 47% of shoppers) compared to 18.1% who purchased at department stores and 5.6% who bought razors at discount stores. This last example may suggest that male customers were more likely to patronize drug stores for purchases like razors or shaving cream, rather than entering a large department store and seeking out the specific counter to make their purchase.

process of negotiation. The same Buffalo woman who shopped at Woolworth's one day went to J.N. Adam's the next; similarly, the same family which read national magazines and saw ads for nationally branded goods read the Rochester newspaper and its ads for local businesses.

This chapter has suggested that even in the hard times of the late 1930s, appeals to local loyalty and identity remained a significant component of the selling strategy of area merchants, and were even picked up by national advertisers. Even (or perhaps especially) during hard times, the retailers of Western New York were still deeply connected to the very psyche of the communities in which they were located. During the Depression, merchants continued their roles as cultural brokers, bringing diverse entertainments to their cities and staging celebrations of local achievements and potential.

Department stores and other downtown retailers assumed a mantle of economic as well as cultural leadership during hard times: many felt that as experts in distribution, they had a special role to play in ensuring America's economic recovery. The high level of reinvestment in downtown stores in Buffalo reflected not only this sense of authority but a feeling of underlying optimism in the future of Western New York. That things did not turn out as the retailers and other area leaders predicted perhaps indicates a certain naivete and a tendency towards boosterism that in retrospect seems misguided: retailers did not "solve" the problems of the Depression, and in the postwar period, suburban development would outstrip the growth of the downtown. This should not be taken to

indicate, however, that the connection between community identity and retailers did not have a certain resonance, or that local citizens did not respond to such appeals. Stores in Rochester and Buffalo assumed many different roles: their fostering of local pride was in many ways inseparable from their other economic and social functions.

CONCLUSION

In August 1957, the board of directors of Sibley, Lindsay & Curr in Rochester voted unanimously to recommend acceptance of an offer from Associated Dry Goods to buy all of Sibley's common stock. At the time, the vast majority of the store's shares were held by descendants of the store's founders or of early investors.¹ The board of directors assured staff and customers that even if Sibley's was bought by Associated, the store's traditions and policies would remain the same. All 1,200 Rochester employees of the store would retain their jobs. Local patrons, as well, were reassured that they would not see major changes at their beloved store. Although Associated was a national company, it allowed its stores a high level of independence in their operations. John R. Sibley, son of the store's founder, explained to the Rochester Times-Union why he had given his personal seal of approval to the deal.

One of the many things I like about Associated is the strict home-management aspect of its operation. The corporation calls it 'autonomy.' I prefer to look on it as home-management. Associated is a huge organization which, with the Sibley business, will do about 250 million dollars worth of business a year, yet in its headquarters on Madison Avenue, New York, it employs a staff of only 15 people. That's an indication of how thoroughly autonomous its various store operations are.²

¹RD&C, 21 August, 1957. Folder "1950s," Sibley Collection, RHS. The paper reported that approximately 220,000 shares were held by descendants of the store's founders or of early investors, with only 33,000 shares held by the public. There were 400 stockholders in the company. Associated's offer was \$40 per share, totalling over \$10 million.

²RTU, 21 August, 1957, Folder "1950s," Sibley Collection, RHS.

Sibley argued that he had long observed Associated's operations in other cities, and although he had received many offers for the store over the years, he settled on the company because he "wanted to live to see that all that my father and his partners built should come into the best possible hands."³

Robert J. McKim, president of Associated Dry Goods, stressed that Sibley's would not become a chain store because of the sale. Describing his organization as "a group of stores, rather than a chain," McKim emphasized "our stores have strong individual personalities reflecting their many years of operation in their own communities."⁴ Although the company's overall management was centralized, many aspects of store operations remained under local control. Buying was not done through a central office but by the stores themselves. The company encouraged stores to assert their individuality in terms of display and merchandising. The main function of the head office in Manhattan was to analyze and disseminate information on sales, costs, finance, and administrative techniques. Sibley's board of directors underscored that in joining Associated, the store would operate as an autonomous division, while enjoying the competitive benefits of being part of a much larger organization. Above all, the store would retain its local character. A statement released to the public asserted, "It will be a store managed and operated by Rochesterians, who know Rochester and its people."⁵

³Ibid.

⁴RTU 10 September, 1957, Folder "1950s," Sibley Collection, RHS.

⁵RD&C, 21 August, 1957. Folder "1950s," Sibley Collection, RHS.

As this dissertation has demonstrated, Sibley's assertion that the store was maintaining its proud local traditions even as it joined a new type of business organization was nothing new. Sibley's was not even the first Western New York store to join Associated Dry Goods, as J.N. Adam's and Hengerer's of Buffalo had long been part of the organization. Other area stores had been part of buying groups, which combined the power to bargain for low prices from suppliers with the ability to assert "independent" status. What is clear from the statements by both store officials and Associated spokespeople is that it remained very important to Sibley's public image to be perceived as a "local" institution, with a proper appreciation for Rochester's particular history and tastes.⁶ The sense that the store served Rochesterians in a way that other "interlopers" could not survived well into the postwar period.

During the 1920s and 1930s, retailers in both Rochester and Buffalo asserted their position in the communities they served. They were active in civic life, providing a range of services and entertainments which went beyond the simple sale of goods. The interwar period in some ways witnessed significant changes in the business of selling. As Buffalo and Rochester stores became more integrated into national networks, they risked losing

⁶It is beyond the scope of this conclusion to trace the complete history of all retailers in Buffalo and Rochester to the present day. A brief sketch of the history of Sibley's is illuminative of larger trends in suburbanization and corporate consolidation which characterized department stores in the latter half of the twentieth century. Sibley's was the largest department store in Western New York, and continued to operate its downtown flagship store as it opened branches in the suburban malls ringing Rochester. In 1986, Associated Dry Goods was itself acquired by the May Company. The May Co. closed the downtown store, and consolidated all remaining Sibley's with Kaufmann's of Pittsburgh.

what had made them distinct. The sale of stores to Associated Dry Goods, the joining of group buying associations by other independent stores, even the very success of Buffalo and Rochester merchants in "bringing the world" to Western New York, were all developments which had both positive and negative implications. Retailers who changed how they did business, even in the interest of bringing more selection or better prices to local markets, risked diluting whatever "local" identity there was left in these institutions.

Close examination of retailing, marketing and consuming in Western New York during the 1920s and 1930s reveals, however, that the local remained important in the way consumers experienced the market. Residents of Buffalo and Rochester took pride in knowing about the latest fashions, or in being able to purchase the same mass-produced item advertised in national magazines. Yet they also responded to retailers' appeals to local loyalty. Consumers flocked to exhibits of "city-made" goods and celebrated the opening of new stores or improved facilities as symbolic of the growth of their communities. During hard times, they attended special promotions which promised to help area businesses, or they pledged to spend more money locally.

For their part, retailers were happy to cultivate the notion that they had played a prominent role in the evolution of Buffalo and Rochester. Merchants were visible business leaders, active in local Chambers of Commerce and tireless in their boosting. In their advertising they trumpeted the advances not only of their stores but of their cities. In the 1920s they navigated new forms of competition by asserting their local roots on the one hand, while simultaneously keeping an eye on developments in the rest of the nation

and the world. Retailers in Western New York used new innovations in communication to keep abreast of trends around the globe. They assured patrons that they could provide the best of Parisian fashion, or the same items advertised in the Ladies' Home Journal. They argued that local customers did not have to travel to New York City for better selection. When chain stores appeared to threaten their position, Buffalo and Rochester retailers adopted strategies like group buying yet never conceded the moral superiority of "independent" status. Chain stores, as well, learned to cultivate local goodwill by emphasizing how they recruited area personnel and stocked locally produced goods.

As economic conditions worsened, retailers used the same emphasis on "home buying" to encourage patrons to spend money in their own cities. Retailers devoted columns of their advertising space to explanations of the "chain of distribution" and the need for increased consumer spending. They blamed hoarding and "selfish thrift" for creating unemployment, and formulated different strategies to engage the public. Merchants in Buffalo organized a special day of sales which was hoped to restore consumer confidence and provide a boost to the local economy. Rochester's "Pledge for Prosperity" campaign was premised on a similar understanding of private spending as the key to solving the Depression. Even after the failure of such initiatives, retailers remained active in their communities and devoted considerable resources to store improvements throughout the late 1930s. We must always keep in mind that the retailers who made local appeals were not purely altruistic. By appealing to local sentiment, retailers hoped to gain a competitive edge over newly arrived chain store branches or

stores in nearby cities. Yet at the same time, merchants took their role in civic affairs seriously. They were active in promoting local causes, helping charities, and finding solutions to area problems.

In his study of Buffalo's automobile clubs, Ernest Grogan Brown argues that trends in mass leisure cannot be understood without paying close attention to local particularities. He notes, "Despite fears of local institutions being unable to resist the hegemonic pressures of mass society, many have flourished, given a local character to mass phenomena, and acted as mediators or agents between mass society and the individual."⁷ Brown's observations about car culture can be broadened to include larger developments in leisure and consumption. Buffalo and Rochester consumers experienced the mass market through the filter of local institutions. Retailers in Western New York often assumed the role of cultural mediators, bringing not only specific types of goods but even celebrities, entertainments, and exhibits to Rochester and Buffalo for the edification and amusement of local patrons.

This dissertation has argued that medium-sized cities are important to fully comprehend the history of American consumerism. Much of the scholarship on consumption, advertising, and cultural change during first few decades of the twentieth century has assumed a national perspective. More specifically, many historians have looked to developments in larger cities like New York or Chicago as emblematic of

⁷Ernest Grogan Brown, "The Automobile and Leisure in Buffalo, New York During the 1920s: Local Institutions Shaping Mass Leisure," (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1995), 295.

national cultural changes. This dissertation has worked from the premise that New York was not America, and that there is much to be learned from examining the experiences of retailers and consumers who lived outside of the metropolis.

And while cities like Buffalo and Rochester are crucial to a full understanding of the history of consumption, retailers are key to a nuanced view of the life of these centres. Examining the consumption patterns of the city can provide new insights into civic life during the 1920s and 1930s. Stores, particularly the major retailers clustered on the Main Streets of Buffalo and Rochester, were central to the cultural life of these cities. Taking a closer look at retailing in Western New York allows us to better understand how Americans in different regions and different sized communities interacted with the mass market, and found their own ways to "consume locally."

APPENDIX 1

MAJOR DOWNTOWN RETAILERS, 1920 - 1940

Name	Location
Buffalo	
J.N. Adam & Co.	383-393 Main St.
Adam, Meldrum & Anderson Co.	396-408 Main St.
E.W. Edwards	460-470 Main St.
Davis Brothers	West Ferry and Grant
Flint & Kent	554-562 Main St.
William Hengerer Co.	457-471 Main St.
Hens & Kelly Co.	478-488 Main St.
W.T. Grant Co.	546-552 Main St.
Jahraus-Braun Co.	977-979 Broadway
Oppenheim, Collins & Co.	Main and Huron
Sears, Roebuck & Co.	1095 Main (at Jefferson)
Rochester	
Duffy-Powers	Main St. at Fitzhugh
E.W. Edwards	110 & 144-158 Main St. E.
B, Forman	46 Clinton Avenue S.
McCurdy & Company	219-274 Main St. E. (at Elm)
National Clothing Company	159 Main St. E.
Neisner Brothers	200 Main E. (main branch)
Sibley, Lindsay & Curr Co.	228-280 Main St. E. (at Clinton)
W. T. Grant	293 Main St. E.

APPENDIX 2
NET SALES, GROSS EARNINGS AND NET EARNINGS,
SIBLEY, LINDSAY & CURR, 1920 - 1940

Year	Net Sales	Gross Earnings	Income Tax	Net Earnings
1920	10,680,726	970,260	345,256	625,004
1921	11,094,573	1,438,940	136,974	1,301,966
1922	11,522,685	1,557,505	408,180	1,149,325
1923	12,684,411	2,009,616	187,950	1,821,666
1924	12,668,293	1,416,831	213,280	1,203,551
1925	12,623,774	1,323,711	161,385	1,162,326
1926	13,504,706	1,024,489	148,024	876,456
1927	13,107,305	1,346,591	123,358	1,223,233
1928	12,816,108	1,055,961	127,766	928,195
1929	12,606,898	936,199	115,157	821,042
1930	11,504,721	584,865	143,126	441,739
1931	10,248,562	302,319	30,000	272,319
1932	7,994,247	19,986	5,000	14,986
1933	7,710,850	98,802	11,000	87,802
1934	8,382,970	188,838	25,000	163,838
1935	8,382,970	221,004	26,000	105,004
13 mos. ending Jan 31, 1937	9,923,347	306,578	49,500	257,078
Fiscal yr ending Jan 31, 1938	9,911,941	51,912	18,000	33,912
1938	9,248,762	152,435	24,000	128,435
1939	9,693,219	418,074	52,000	366,074
1940	10,197,678	494,150	68,000	426,150

Source: "Homer Hoyt Market Survey & Appraisal, March 1953," Table XVII. In carton marked "Annual Reports," Sibley Collection, Strong Museum.

APPENDIX 3

BUFFALO BUSINESS INDICES, 1928-1936 (1933=100%)

	Motion Picture Receipts	Bank Debits	Department Store Sales	Factory Payrolls
1928	N/A	235	171	247
1929	N/A	284	170	263
1930	N/A	214	157	210
1931	N/A	159	138	153
1932	130	110	107	98
1933	100	100	100	100
1934	98	109	108	130
1935	91	119	115	150
1936	96	136	130	186

Source: Statistical Survey, Supplement, May, 1937, p. 3

APPENDIX 4

INDEX OF SALES OF BUFFALO DEPARTMENT STORES, 1925-1935,
BY MONTH

(Unadjusted for seasonal variation and the number of days in the month)

1925-1926-1927 = 100%

	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
Jan	82.2	83.1	75.2	74.5	79.6	70.6	65.6	54.7	39.3	44.0	47.7
Feb	80.1	77.9	74.4	74.9	73.7	66.4	60.4	54.3	37.7	44.2	45.6
Mar	91.3	82.0	81.6	84.3	89.0	81.6	75.6	59.3	42.4	63.6	57.6
Apr	113.8	101.1	109.9	96.8	95.4	100.8	98.1	71.8	63.4	63.0	67.0
May	107.1	104.8	103.6	102.2	107.2	97.4	76.4	55.7	59.9	62.3	61.2
June	102.8	96.6	95.4	91.4	92.9	84.7	80.8	58.7	54.9	59.1	61.7
July	75.9	72.1	70.3	68.3	70.3	63.3	56.2	38.8	41.2	39.2	44.3
Aug	73.9	76.8	82.3	70.1	72.8	64.5	60.8	45.0	54.0	51.7	54.7
Sept	98.3	97.8	96.7	101.9	99.1	100.2	79.6	65.0	58.6	59.9	68.6
Oct	134.1	114.5	120.0	119.2	115.3	95.4	82.6	62.9	65.6	71.1	71.0
Nov	102.4	104.3	101.4	100.4	97.8	86.5	71.7	59.0	56.2	62.9	77.2
Dec	173.6	169.8	172.0	171.8	158.1	149.1	126.4	96.8	103.3	112.5	123.0

Source: BBSR, Data for Statistical Surveys, Box 2 "Sales", Folder "Department Store Sales," UBA.

APPENDIX 5

INDEX OF SALES OF BUFFALO DEPARTMENT STORES, 1928-1937,
BY YEAR

(Unadjusted for seasonal variation and the number of days in the month)

1925-1926-1927 = 100%

Year	Monthly Average
1928	96.3
1929	96.0
1930	88.4
1931	77.9
1932	60.2
1933	56.4
1934	61.1
1935	65.0
1936	73.7
1937	78.2

Source: "Buffalo Business Indices," BBSR, Box 2 "Sales," Folder "Department Stores," UBA.

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