INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

MODERNIZING MAIN STREET: EVERYDAY ARCHITECTURE AND THE NEW DEAL

by

GABRIELLE ESPERDY

Volume I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1999

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

UMI Number: 9924804

Copyright 1999 by
Esperdy, Gabrielle

All rights reserved.

UMI Microform 9924804
Copyright 1999, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.

This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

© 1999

GABRIELLE ESPERDY

All Rights Reserved

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

4-27-1999
Date

Rosemarie Bletter
Chair of Examining Committee

4-28-99
Date

R.C.W. Long
Executive Officer

Prof. Marlene Park

Prof. Kevin Murphy

Prof. Joan Ockman

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Abstract

MODERNIZING MAIN STREET: EVERYDAY ARCHITECTURE AND THE NEW DEAL

by

Gabrielle Esperdy

Adviser: Professor Rosemarie Haag Bletter

This dissertation examines the impact of the Great Depression on everyday architecture in the United States and proposes a reevaluation of the acceptance of modernism in architecture before World War II. Specifically, it investigates a nationwide effort to "modernize" or improve commercial buildings as an antidote to the economic and social catastrophe of the 1930s. It offers a reassessment of the New Deal's impact on visual culture by broadening notions of federal sponsorship and by revealing the close relationship which existed between big government and big business, a relationship which, in turn, strongly influenced the architectural practice of building modernization. To this end, the dissertation engages issues of legislation (Title I of the 1934 National Housing Act), public policy (government-insured credit), manufacturing (of building materials) and marketing (of architectural service). On an urbanistic level it explores a moment when "Main Street," the traditional commercial core of the American city, attempted to stem the tide of burgeoning decentralization and rapid economic change through a program of deliberately modern architectural image-making. To this end, the dissertation explores the way architecture expanded the era's iconography of prosperity and contributed to a redefined self-image of small-town America that was progressive rather than nostalgic. On a theoretical level it demonstrates that debates about populism, consumerism, gender, and legibility were an important part of the discourse of the 1930s when architects and industrial designers began to exploit the scenographic and symbolic potentialities of the strip and when the practice of architecture, like the practice of advertising, emerged as a product of the consumer culture.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

To Julie Helen
who never tired of Main Street
despite many, many miles

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

We're in the money, We're in the money
Old Man Depression you are through you done us wrong

We never see a headline about a breadline today
And when we see the landlord, we can look that guy right in the eye

We're in the money, Come on my honey
Let's lend it, spend, send it rolling around.

-Harry Warren and Al Dubin,
from Busby Berkeley's *Gold Diggers of 1933*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to friends, family members, and colleagues too numerous to name who contributed intellectually and emotionally to the completion of this project. To those who instinctively knew when to ask "how's it going?" and when to ask nothing, I am extremely grateful. In this respect, my adviser stands out. In and out of the classroom, Rosemarie Bletter generously gave me her time and her unstinting support, offering advice and criticism both judicious and incisive. I have been extremely fortunate to work with an adviser whom I not only respect, but consider a mentor. Here, I also extend my thank Lora Rempel, whose criticality and discipline were a constant inspiration during my years at the Graduate Center, and Lisa Reitzes, on whose sage professional advice I have relied since college.

My research was greatly aided over the years by the many librarians and archivists who remained relentlessly cheerful as I requested countless moldy press releases and dusty trade journals. I extend my thanks especially to the staffs of the National Archives in Washington, Avery Library at Columbia University, and the Ward M. Canaday Collection at the University of Toledo. Thanks are also due to the American Council of Learned Societies, the College Art Association, and the CUNY Graduate Center for their generous financial support of my dissertation. However much this funding helped me defray the costs of research trips and living expenses, the symbolic value was far greater. In a cultural climate so beseached by anti-intellectualism and persistent "dumbing-down" as to exacerbate the already disjunctive and isolating experience of writing the dissertation, these institutions consistently validated my scholarly pursuits.

I wish to thank my parents, Theresa and Serge Esperdy, for supplying the "room of one's own" which allowed me to begin and conclude the writing of my dissertation. The weeks I spent by the ocean in the winter and by the lawn in the summer, away from everyday distractions, were an invaluable gift. Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to my partner, Julie Hertzog, who

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

accompanied me on this decade-long journey in pursuit of the Ph.D., helping me weather various emotional crises with the good sense and optimism which the Midwest bestows on the best of its citizens, helping me weather various intellectual crises with the insight and understanding that come naturally to someone who was reading Foucault when I was still watching soap-operas. For this and so much more--including her tolerance of my ever increasing desire to listen to the popular music of the 1930s--I thank her.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Table of Contents

Volume I

Abstract.....iv

Acknowledgements.....vii

List of Illustrations.....x

Introduction.....1

Chapter 1, Legislation & Lobbyists: Building Modernization as Public Policy.....13

Chapter 2, Organizing for Modernization: The Better Housing Program.....66

Chapter 3, Selling Modernization: The Field Campaign..... 134

Chapter 4, Main Street in the 1930s.....191

Chapter 5, The Main Street Initiative.....247

Chapter 6, Consuming Architecture: Building Modernization in Theory & Practice.....327

Conclusion.....395

Volume II

Illustrations.....416

Bibliography.....611

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

List of Illustrations

Figures 1 & 2. Barber Shop on Main Street in Manayunk, Pennsylvania, circa. 1937: View of store and block. Source: author's photo.

Figures 3 & 4. Newark Coin Exchange Jeweler and Sparta Restaurant on Main Street in Newark, Ohio. (Note Louis Sullivan's Home Building & Loan at far right of top image.) Source: author's photo.

Figure 5. First Modernization Loan: John P. Powers standing before his home in Cloquet, Minnesota. Source: FHA Clip Sheet 9 (No. 8, 1936).

Figure 6. Chart showing commercial building trends, 1933-35. Source: Real Estate Record, October 1935, p. 6.

Figure 7. Institutions (by type) Financing Modernization & Repair Notes, 1935. Source: FHA, 2nd Annual Report (1936), p. 15.

Figure 8. Value of Modernization Loans as of 31 December 1935. Source: FHA, 1st Annual Report (1935), p. 7.

Figure 9. Estimated Value of Modernization Work Created as of 31 December 1935. Source: FHA, 2nd Annual Report (1936), p. 12.

Figures 10 & 11. Main Street of Gainesville, Georgia: BEFORE repair (showing destruction by tornado) & AFTER reconstruction/modernization, 1936. Source: Architectural Forum 66 (February 1937): 157.

Figure 12. Federal Housing Administrator Stewart McDonald testifying before House Banking Committee, 1937. Source: Architectural Forum 69 (July 1938): 76.

Figure 13. Loans Accepted for FHA Insurance through May 1938, including modernization. home mortgage and large-scale housing mortgage. Source: Architectural Forum 69 (July 1938): 76.

Figures 14 & 15. BHP "House" Logo as Window or Advertising Emblem & Poster. Source: FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers (1934), p. 19.

Figure 16. BHP "Home" Logo as Poster. Source: FHA, Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and other Merchants (1934), p. 27.

Figure 17. BHP banner on Main Street in Greenville, Alabama. Source: FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers (1934), p. 7.

Figures 18, 19 & 20. BHP Campaign Headquarters in Jackson, Mississippi (in a storefront); in Akron, Ohio (in an abandoned bank building); in San Diego, California (in the U.S. Grant Hotel). Source: Better Housing, 20 September 1934; Better Housing, 21 December 1934; FHA, San Diego Sells and Idea (1935).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 21. Order form for FHA publicity materials. Source: FHA, Portfolio of Publicity (1934) , p. 103.

Figures 22 & 23. Sample FHA pamphlets & image showing extent of publicity materials available. Source: FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers (1934), pp. 14 & 15.

Figure 24. FHA Officials: Deputy Administrator for Title I Albert Deane, Administrator James Moffett, P.R. Director Ward Canaday. Source: Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 220.

Figure 25. Organization Chart for Local BHP Campaign. Source: FHA, Community Campaign (1934), p. 9.

Figure 26. Sample BHP advertisement "blanks" prepared by FHA Public Relations Division. Source: FHA, Sample Better Housing Program Advertisements (1936).

Figure 27. Actual BHP advertisements collected by FHA Public Relations Division. Source: FHA, Promotion Pointers 1 (no. 13, 1935).

Figures 28 & 29. Typical New York tenement building BEFORE and AFTER modernization. Owned by Excelsior Savings Bank (by default); modernized by architect J.M. Berlinger. Source: Architectural Forum 65 (September 1936): 243.

Figures 30 & 31. Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota: photograph of block selected for group modernization & rendering of group modernization proposed for block. Source: Better Housing, 10 June 1936.

Figures 32 & 33. Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Offices as modernized by George Howe in 1936. View of new street level facade and entrance. Source: Architectural Record 82 (November 1937): 75.

Figure 34. Typical BHP display in movie theater lobby. Source: Better Housing, 1 November 1934.

Figure 35. "Lo, and Behold!" BHP cartoon depicting modernization at Taos Pueblo. Source: FHA Clip Sheet 7 (no. 3, 1936).

Figure 36. Sample mat with generic feature article and BEFORE and AFTER photographs of typical storefront. Prepared by FHA Public Relations Division. Source: FHA, Portfolio of Publicity (1934), p. 77.

Figure 37. Clip Sheet feature: Repaired with $12,500, a commercial modernization in Riverside, California. Source: FHA Clip Sheet 4 (no. 5, 1935).

Figure 38. Clip Sheet feature: Modernized on Main Street, Block & Kuhl Store in Moline, Illinois. Source: FHA Clip Sheet 8 (no. 7, 1936).

Figure 39. Photo-collage of BHP parades. Prepared by FHA Public Relations Division. Source: FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers (1934), p. 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 40. BHP parade in Lewiston, Idaho. Source: Better Housing, 22 October 1934.

Figure 41. Modernization Demonstration from Renovize Washington Campaign showing house in front of Commerce Department BEFORE and AFTER modernization. Source: FHA, Community Campaign (1934), p. 14.

Figure 42. Sacramento BHP's "Inspiration House" AFTER modernization. Let Inspiration House Show You the Way (1934), p. 11.

Figures 43 & 44. San Diego BHP's "House of Magic" BEFORE modernization & volunteer architect explaining modernization plans. Source: FHA, San Diego Sells and Idea (1935).

Figure 45. Modernization demonstration at Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago showing house AFTER modernization, BEFORE modernization & Administrator James Moffett pulling off rotten siding. Source: Better Housing, 1 November 1934.

Figure 46. Oakland Demonstration House being moved to Memorial Plaza in front of City Hall. Source: Better Housing, 1 November 1934.

Figure 47. Typical building industry display installed at local BHP headquarters in New Jersey. Source: Report of the Better Housing Headquarters of the State of New Jersey (1936).

Figures 48 & 49. FHA Animated Information Booths: sketch showing single unit & combination displays. Source: FHA Form 801-8 & 801-9.

Figures 50 & 51. Main Street in Weslaco, Texas: store buildings BEFORE modernization & AFTER modernization into Mission style. Source: Architectural Forum 66 (March 1937): 60.

Figures 52 & 53. Cartoons depicting the BHP's profitability for participants & the BHP's impact on civic spirit. Source: FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers (1934), p. 3; Better Housing, 21 December 1934.

Figure 54. Field workers for the Elizabeth, New Jersey BHP canvass in January 1935. Source: Better Housing 6 February 1935.

Figure 55. A woman canvasser delivering BHP information to a housewife. Source: FHA, Community Campaign (1934), p. 29.

Figures 56 & 57. BHP Canvasser Button and Identification Card. Source: FHA, Selling Better Housing (1935), p. 11; FHA, Community Campaign (1934), p. 24.

Figure 58. Boy Scout canvassers in Wilmington, Delaware. Source: Better Housing, 15 October 1934.

Figure 59. Billboard in Morristown, New Jersey announcing local property canvass held in September and October 1934. Source: Better Housing, 22 October 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 60. Chart showing PROGRESS OF MODERNIZATION with respect to canvassing and pledges, 1935. Prepared by FHA Division of Economics & Statistics. Source: FHA, Construction and Real Estate Data (1936), volume C, section I.

Figures 61 & 62. Taxpayer strip in Elizabeth, New Jersey: BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Source: Chain Store Age, May 1935, p. 93.

Figures 63 & 64. Brunner's Jewelry Store in Westfield, New Jersey: BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed by William and Sylvia Wilde. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 104.

Figure 65. Chart of Community Campaign Activities showing progress of local property canvasses in 1934. Source: FHA, 1st Annual Report (1935), p. 10.

Figure 66. Map of United States showing locations of FHA Insuring Offices in every state. These cities hosted the first *Selling Better Housing* meetings in March 1935. Source: FHA, 2nd Annual Report (1936), p. 43.

Figure 67. "Ask 'em to Buy!" logo for *Selling Better Housing* sales meetings, 1935. Source: FHA, Selling Better Housing (1935), inside back cover.

Figures 68, 69 & 70. Tuttle Brothers Store, Cranford, New Jersey: BEFORE and AFTER modernization & interior building material displays. Designed by William and Sylvia Wilde. Source: Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 168.

Figure 71. Modernization advertisement for Iron Fireman Automatic Coal Firing Stoker. Source: Architectural Forum 65 (July 1936): 47.

Figure 72. Chart showing changes in architectural practice since 1929, according to firms active in Eastern states. Source: Architectural Record 71 (May 1932): 293.

Figure 73. Modernize Main Street logo, 1935. Source: FHA, Modernize for Profit (1935), inside back cover.

Figure 74. BEFORE & AFTER case studies appearing in FHA direct mail letters. Source: FHA, Modernize for Profit (1935), pp. 12-13.

Figure 75. West Jersey Trust Company's "Modernize Main Street" advertisement, 1936. Source: Better Housing 8 July 1936.

Figure 76. Foster's Restaurant, San Francisco, modernized by Farr & Ward. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Figure 77. Dunn's "When the Day is Done" Cocktail Lounge, San Francisco, modernized by Edmund Dunne. Source: Pencil Points 20 (August 1939): 500.

Figures 78 & 79. Restaurant La Buvette, San Francisco: BEFORE & AFTER views, modernized by Robert Stanton. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 106.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 80. 500 Sutter Restaurant, San Francisco, modernized by Douglas Stone. Source: Pencil Points 20 (August 1939): 503.

Figure 81. Postcard view of Main Street in Franklin, New Hampshire circa 1920. Source: Collection of the author.

Figure 82. "Main Street...a design problem." Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 86.

Figure 83. Retail patterns, shopping zones, and assessed valuations of a typical Main Street (Bridgeport, Connecticut). Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 77.

Figure 84. Chart showing evolution of typical Main Street corridor with respect to built fabric. Source: Richard Francaviglia, Main Street Revisited (1996), p. 60.

Figure 85. Postcard view of Main Street in Coshocton, Ohio showing typical corridor development. Source: Collection of the author.

Figures 86 & 87. Typical Main Street buildings from late 19th century showing tripartite organization and ornamental detailing. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 7 (1991), p.136.

Figure 88. Typical Main Street (Reading, Pennsylvania) with advertising superstructure (and 4th of July bunting). Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), p. 31.

Figures 89 & 90. Typical "taxpayer" commercial strips in Chicago, Illinois: one story with six retail units & two stories with five retail units. Source: American Architect 146 (April 1935): 20; Architectural Forum 62 (April 1935): 426.

Figure 91. The Planning of Neighborhood Shopping Centers as Affected by the Use of the Automobile, Catherine Bauer & Clarence Stein, 1934. Source: Store Buildings & Neighborhood Shopping Centers (1934), p. 7.

Figure 92. Neighborhood Shopping Center: Park & Shop in Washington, D.C., designed by Arthur B. Heaton, 1930. Source: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 51 (March 1992): 12.

Figure 93. Charts showing store turnover rate for typical Main Street (Bridgeport, Connecticut), 1924-38. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 78.

Figure 94. Main Street in Fort Smith, Arkansas with chain five & dimes (Woolworth and Kress). Source: Bernice L. Thomas, America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores (1997), p. 1.

Figure 95. Atlantic & Pacific Grocery Store, Long Beach, California. Source: Charles Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile (1985), p. 123.

Figures 96 & 97. Piggly Wiggly Grocery Store, Champaign, Illinois: BEFORE & AFTER views, modernization combining two retail frontages by George E. Ramey, 1935. Source: Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 61.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 98. "How Chains Modernized in 1935." Source: Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 91.

Figure 99. Rival Shoes in Newark, New Jersey BEFORE & AFTER modernization, 1932. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 654.

Figure 100 & 101. Thom McAn Shoes BEFORE & AFTER modernization: new model storefront in West Sommerville, Massachusetts, 1932 & new unit with new model in Dallas, Texas, 1934. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 655; Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 98.

Figure 102. A.S. Beck Shoes in Brooklyn, New York BEFORE & AFTER modernization, 1932. Source: Chain Store Age, October 1932, p. 600.

Figure 103. "Modern businesses run by progressive merchants," modernized chain stores in 1936: Kinsel Drugs, Davidson Bake Shop, Miles Shoes. Source: Chain Store Age, June 1936, p. 112.

Figure 104. Mangel's Clothing Store, designed by Morris Lapidus circa 1935. Source: Lapidus, Too Much is Never Enough (1996), p. 106.

Figure 105. Mangel's Clothing Store, designed by Morris Lapidus circa 1935. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 93.

Figure 106. Typical "blighted" Main Street block (West Jefferson Street in Louisville, Kentucky) showing vacant storefronts and low-rent occupancy circa 1933. Source: Architectural Forum 65 (November 1936): 37.

Figures 107 & 108. Abandoned Main Street storefronts circa 1933-35. Source: Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 60; Architectural Forum 65 (September 1936): 242.

Figure 109. Postcard view of a modernized Main Street (Center Street in Goldsboro, North Carolina) circa 1940. Source: Collection of the author.

Figure 110. Store building activity: chart showing month by month progress in 1934 and 1935 with increased activity corresponding to introduction and expansion of FHA modernization program. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 33.

Figure 111. "How Chains Modernized in 1936." Source: Chain Store Age, November 1936, p. 79.

Figure 112. "New Customers...Better Satisfied Customers," PPG advertisement with early FHA tie-in including logo and copy. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 95.

Figures 113, 114 & 115. Regal Shoes: Old model standard storefronts, 1936 model in New York City, plan of 1936 model vestibule. Designed by Morris Lapidus. Source: Architectural Forum70 (February 1939): 94-5; Architectural Forum 65 (October 1936): 316.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figures 116 & 117. Texaco Service Station in Wenatchee, Washington: BEFORE & AFTER views of "house" type station modernized into Type "T" station according to guidelines established by by Walter Dorwin Teague, 1936. Source: Architectural Record 82 (September 1937): 69.

Figure 118. "Modernize Main Street Electrically," General Electric advertisement. Source: Building Modernization, March 1935.

Figure 119. "Johns-Manville modernizes a Main Street Shop," Johns-Manville advertisement. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 96.

Figure 120. Structural glass for sanitation & fashion: Men's room of Southtown Theatre, Chicago. Designed by Rapp & Rapp, 1925. Source: American Architect 141 (May 1932): 42.

Figures 121 & 122. Typical structural glass & chrome storefront circa 1933: Sullivan's Delicatessen (Chicago ?) BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Source: Libbey-Owens Ford. 1936 Advertising Scrapbook.

Figure 123. Pittco Store Front Metal, introduced March 1935. Extruded sash with cushion grip setting and contoured profile. Source: Architectural Forum 62 (March 1935): 49.

Figure 124. "It Pays to *Modernize Main Street,*" PPG advertisement with editorial-style copy. Source: Chain Store Age, June 1935, p. 73.

Figure 125. "Pittco Store Front Products offer new possibilities," PPG advertisement with BEFORE & AFTER photographs. Pictured is an optometrist in Bethlehem, PA, modernized by Karl H. Synder. Source: Architectural Forum 63 (December 1935): 59.

Figure 126. "Store fronts of Anaconda Bronze," American Brass advertisement with BEFORE & AFTER photographs. Pictured is Colyer's Clothing Store, Newark, N.J., modernized by Frank Grad with PPG products. Source: Architectural Record 81 (February 1937): inside front cover.

Figure 127. Pittco Store Front Metal, restyled in 1938 for "simplicity of line" to harmonize the visual transition from plate glass to facing material. Source: Architectural Record 88 (July 1940): 28.

Figure 128. Pittco Store Front Models from Store Front Caravan: luggage, china, and gift shops. Designed by Walter Dorwin Teague, 1936. Source: Real Estate Record, 19 September 1936, p. 14.

Figures 129 & 130. Typical modernized storefronts with similarity to Teague's Pittco models: general view and elevations of Goddes Food Shop & Dixie Market in Battle Creek, Michigan. Designed by P.H. Chute, 1937. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Figure 131. LOF Competition, Main Street photographs from *Modernize Main Street* announcement, June-July 1935. Source: Architectural Forum 62 (June 1935).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figures 132 & 133. LOF Competition Jury: (standing, left to right) Albert Kahn, Melvin Copeland, William Lescaze, John W. Root, (seated) F.R. Walker, Kenneth Stowell, J. André Fouilhoux, Kenneth Welch. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 209.

Figure 134. LOF Competition, typical winning entry: Montgomery Ferar, Mentioned Drug Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 218.

Figure 135. Frederick Kiesler, Asymmetrical Store Front Composition. Source: Kiesler, Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and its Display (1930), p. 83.

Figure 136, 137 & 138. O.R. Salvisberg, Scherk Perfume Shop, Berlin. General view, storefront entrance, elevation & plan. Published in Ladenbau, 1934. Source: Moderne Ladenbauten (1929), p. 134; Architectural Record 78 (July 1935): 64.

Figure 139. Wells Coates, Cresta Dress Shop, London. Source: Architectural Record 78 (July 1935): 51.

Figure 140. LOF Competition: Morrison Broun, Mentioned Drug Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 215.

Figure 141. LOF Competition: Lester Cohn, 2nd Prize Apparel Shop. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 226.

Figure 142. LOF Competition Winner: M. Righton Swicegood, 1st Prize Drug Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 212.

Figure 143. LOF Competition Winner: G. Foster Harrell, Jr., 2nd Prize Drug Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 213.

Figure 144. LOF Competition Winner: Melvin Wolfson, Mentioned Drug Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 223.

Figure 145. LOF Competition Winner: G. Foster Harrell, Jr., 1st Prize Food Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 41.

Figure 146. LOF Competition Winner: H.K. Bieg, Mentioned Food Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 249.

Figure 147. LOF Competition Winner: Theo Voyvodick & J.J. Pankuch, Mentioned Food Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 245.

Figure 148. LOF Competition Winner: Suren Pilafian & Maurice Lubin, 1st Prize Apparel Shop. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 225.

Figures 149 & 150. Morris Ketchum, Ciro Jewelers, New York City, 1939. Storefront and plan. Source: Pencil Points 20 (August 1939): 505.

Figure 151. LOF Competition Winner: DuBrul & Trivisonno, 3rd Prize Apparel Shop. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 227.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 152. LOF Competition Winner: Joseph M. Hirschman, Mentioned Apparel Shop. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 233.

Figure 153. Store building activity: chart showing increased volume between 1933 and 1936 for first six months of each year. Each complete symbol designates $5 million of store building. Source: Architectural Record 80 (August 1936): 38.

Figure 154. Typical modernized storefront showing influence of LOF Competition: Schwenk's Bakery in North Bergen, New Jersey. Designed and installed by Vitrolite Products Company of Newark. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Figure 155. Typical LOF advertisement promoting winning designs of *Modernize Main Street* Competition. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 95.

Figure 156. Owens-Illinois Insulux Store Competition: M. Righton Swicegood, 4th Prize Restaurant. Source: Architectural Forum 71 (November 1939): 19.

Figure 157. Frank Sohn, Vitrolite Storefront Designs emphasizing "agate" shades, 1936. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1936 Advertising Scrapbook.

Figure 158. Typical modernized storefront with bent glass bulkheads and displays: Ostergaard's Bakery, Racine Wisconsin. Installed by Patek Brothers of Milwaukee, 1937. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Figure 159. The LOF Colorful Storefront: Uniqué Ice Cream Parlor & Soda Fountain in Niagara Falls, NY. Designed by architect C.T. Macheras of Buffalo, 1938. The store has a Vitrolux signboard and Vitrolite bulkheads. Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1940): 18/2.

Figure 160. LOF Extrudalite Storefront Metal, introduced 1937. Standard sash members in three sizes and styles. Sections show sash grip of plate glass and facing glass. Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1940): 19/6.

Figures 161 & 162. LOF, *Modern Shopping Center*: 7/8 scale model & elevation diagrams of shopping center retail units, 1937. Source: Architectural Forum 67 (December 1937): 27; Libbey-Owens-Ford, "Colorful Storefronts" (1937).

Figure 163. Storefronts across the country modernized with LOF products. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, "Why a New LOF Storefront is a Business Asset" (1938).

Figure 164. "An appreciation of architecture long overdue," Owens-Illinois advertisement. Source: Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 125.

Figure 165. Perspective rendering of modernized storefronts on cover of American Architect 150 (June 1937).

Figure 166. Portfolio: Modernization of Small Shops from Architectural Record. Source: Architectural Record 76 (September 1934): 155.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 167. "Remodeling for Profit": case study of renovations to the Hotel Hollenden in Cleveland, by Oscar Nordstrom. Source: Architectural Forum 65 (September 1936): 241.

Figure 168. Store Modernization on Main Street: chart showing frequency of modernization activity, 1924-38. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 83.

Figure 169. *Typical streamlined storefront:* The Griddle Restaurant, San Francisco. 1937. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Figure 170. *Typical streamlined car:* Carl Breer, Chrysler Airflow Imperial Coupe, 1934. Source: Jeffrey Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited (1979), p. 150.

Figure 171. *Typical restyled refrigerator:* Raymond Loewy, Sears Coldspot, 1936-38. Source: Jeffrey Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited (1979), p. 107.

Figures 172 & 173. *Total Transformation*: The Hub Clothing Store in Grand Rapids, Michigan BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed by Harry L. Mead, 1937. Source: Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 12.

Figure 174. *Billboard-like facade*: Wise Shoe Store in Chicago, 1936. Designed by Elias Rothschild. Source: Architectural Forum 66 (April 1937): 97.

Figure 175. *Billboard-like facade*: Peggy Hale Clothing Store in Birmingham, Alabama, 1934. Designed by Morris Lapidus. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 116.

Figures 176 & 177. *Billboard-like facade*: Star Electric Supply Company, Newark BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed by Barney Sumner Gruzen, 1936. Source: Architectural Forum 64 (May 1936): 426.

Figure 178. Night view of Star Electric Supply Company, Newark AFTER modernization. Designed by Barney Sumner Gruzen, 1936. Source: Architectural Forum 67 (August 1937): 103.

Figure 179. Timeline of retail evolution, from LOF promotional piece "Keeping Store Today," 1939. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford Archives, Sales & Promotion.

Figure 180. Evolution Chart of Automobile by Raymond Loewy, 1936. Source: Martin Greif, Depression Modern (1975), p. 26.

Figure 181. Lancaster Movie Theater BEFORE & AFTER modernization. *Typical FHA case study.* Source: FHA, Modernize for Profit (1935), p. 10.

Figure 182. *Montage of obsolete buildings.* Source: FHA, Modernize for Profit (1935), p. 3.

Figure 183. Retailer to Architect: "I Want the Smartest Store on the Street." From LOF promotional piece, 1938.

Figure 184. *Modern shoppers* on title page of Modernize for Profit. Source: FHA, Modernize for Profit (1935), p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figures 185 & 186. *Women as consumers of home modernization.* Source: FHA, How to Modernize Your Home (1935), pp. 18-19.

Figure 187. "Accent on Style!" Oldsmobile advertisement. Source: House and Garden, January 1936, p. 65.

Figures 188-89 & 190-91. *Stripping & Sheathing*: Commercial block in Chicago BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed by Leo B. Steif, 1936. Source: Architectural Forum 64 (January 1936): 73.

Figure 192. Rialto Movie Theater in Waukegan, Illinois BEFORE & AFTER modernization, 1936. Source: Architectural Forum 66 (March 1937): 61.

Figure 193. "Give Packages Plate Glass Pulling Power," Celluloid advertisement. Source: Fortune, October 1936, p. 73.

Figure 194. *Modernistic drug packaging*: Publix Complete Manicure set, 1932. Source: Chain Store Age, January 1932, p. 38.

Figure 195. *Modernistic drug store*, Katz & Besthoff Store No. 9 in Chicago, 1932. Source: Chain Store Age, January 1932, p. 31.

Figures 196 & 197. Chock Full o' Nuts in New York City, designed by Horace Ginsbern, 1936. General view and store entrance. Source: Architectural Forum 65 (October 1936): 317.

Figures 198 & 199. Cushman's Sons Bakers: typical modernized units, circa. 1935-6. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1936, p. 114; Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 105.

Figures 200-201 & 202. Cushman's Sons Bakers: Units modernized by Raymond Loewy, 1936-39, general views and elevation. Source: American Architect 150 (June 1937): 93-96.

Figures 203 & 204. Bruder's Creamery in Cleveland, Ohio. Modernized by Wilbur Henry Adams, 1935. Day and night views. Source: Chain Store Age, June 1935, p. 72; Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 60.

Figures 205 & 206. Wilmington Blue Print Service in Wilmington, Delaware BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed by Samuel and Victorine Homsey, 1938. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 101.

Figures 207 & 208. Cocktail Lounge in Boston BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed and installed by Patriarca Store Fixtures, 1936. Source: American Architect 149 (August 1936): 114.

Figure 209. Pridham's Opticians by Brasco Store Fronts, 1938. Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1939), 19/1.

Figures 210 & 211. The Darkroom in Los Angeles, designed by Marcus Miller, 1938 & the Kodak Bantam Special Camera, designed by Walter Dorwin Teague, 1936. Source: Jim Heimann, California Crazy (1980), p. 48; John Heskett, Industrial Design (1980), p. 106.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figures 212 & 213. *Typical Beauty Shop Modernization:* Ann's Beauty Salon in New York City, designed by Walter Werkle, 1938. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 100.

Figure 214. "New Faces for Old Buildings," Republic Steel advertisement. Source: Architectural Forum 62 (June 1935): 45.

Figure 215. "World Premiere...." Elizabeth Arden advertisement for lipstick and lipstick case. Source: House and Garden, March 1936, p. 89.

Figure 216. "One cream to buy...," Primrose House advertisement for Delv Face Cream. Source: New Yorker, April 1936, p. 57.

Figures 217 & 218. Lantieri Beauty Salon in New York City, modernized by Vahan Hagopian. 1935. Source: Real Estate Record, 16 November 1935, pp. 19-20.

Figure 219. LOF, Standard Vitrolite Colors, 1939. Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1940), 18/2.

Figure 220. "*Smoky Shades* for Summer!" Cutex Lipstick and Nail Polishes, 1936. Source: Chain Store Age, June 1936, p. 59.

Figures 221 & 222. Kawneer Store Fronts, Colorful Facing & Standard Colors, 1939. Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1939), 19/6; Sweet's Catalogue File (1940), 19/5.

Figure 223. Kallet Theater in Pulaski, New York, modernized by George Ketchum, 1937. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Figure 224. Sun Drugs BEFORE & AFTER modernization, in US Steel advertisement. Source: American Architect 150 (June 1937): 116.

Figure 225. "Dress Up for Bigger Business," LOF advertisement from Apparel Arts, March 1938. Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1938 Advertising Scrapbook.

Figure 226. *Typical Brasco storefront*: "From sidewalk to coping unified in character." Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1939), 19/1.

Figure 227. "The Wallflower of Main Street," LOF advertisement. Source: Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 17.

Figure 228. Wise Shoes in Chicago, 1933, utilizing 1925 "Fifth Avenue" standard front. Compare to Fig. 174. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1933, p. 72.

Figures 229 & 230. Abraham Cigar Store in Burlington, Vermont, modernized by Louis Newton, 1934. Source: Architectural Forum 61 (August 1934): 116.

Figure 231. Diagram of Storefront Display by Morris Lapidus. Source: Architectural Record 88 (February 1941): 118.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 232. "Put on a Good Front, It Pays!" LOF promotional pamphlet, 1936. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1936 Advertising Scrapbook.

Figure 233. "Critical Eyes are Sizing You Up Right Now," Williams Company advertisement. Source: Saturday Evening Post, August 1932, p. 77.

Figure 234. "For Individuality in Store Fronts," PPG advertisement. Source: Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 9.

Figures 235 & 236. Childs Restaurant: Standard Dairy Front, c. 1900-1910 & modernized Childs at 196 Broadway, New York City, 1935. Source: Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 15; Chain Store Age, April 1935, p. 71.

Figures 237 & 238. George Sweet, Childs Restaurant, Times Square, 1936 & typical modernized Childs. Source: Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 15; Sweet's Catalogue File (1939), 19/1.

Figure 239. Rosario Candela, Rialto Theater, Times Square, 1935 (with George Sweet's modernized Childs at right). Source: Chain Store Age, June 1936, p. 105.

Figures 240-243. Horace Ginsbern, Hanscom Bake Shops, New York City, circa. 1936. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1934, back cover; Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 167.

Figure 244. Penn Street in Reading Pennsylvania circa 1930. Penn Square, the intersection of Penn and 5th Streets is at the lower center. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), p. 15.

Figure 245. The 600 block of Penn Street circa 1932 with vacant storefronts and bankruptcy signs typical of the early Depression. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 6 (1988), p. 73.

Figures 246, 247 & 248. Chain Retailers move in: Thom McAn Shoes at 621 Penn Street; A.S. Beck Shoes at 700 Penn Street; Pep Boys at 425 Penn Street. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 7 (1991), p. 18; vol. 6 (1988), p. 75; vol. 5 (1988), p. 138.

Figure 249. Institutional Failure & Retail Opportunity: Modernized storefronts occupying the former Penn National Bank in 1938. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), p. 161.

Figures 250 & 251. Competitive Modernization: A&P Supermarket at 806-10 Penn Street; Keystone Meats at 818 Penn Street. The A&P is visible to the far right of this image. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), pp. 159-60.

Figure 252. At the pulse of trade: the 500 block of Penn Street circa 1930. The Crystal Restaurant is at the far right of this image. Tri-Plex Shoes occupies the storefront two doors to the left. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), p. 29.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 253. The 500 block of Penn Street modernized. Note the Crystal Restaurant's streamlined storefront and that of the Crystal Bar two doors to the left. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 7 (1991), p. 16.

Figure 254. Tri-Plex Shoes in its modernized store at 520 Penn Street, occupying the former Kline, Eppihimer & Co. dry goods store. Note McCrory's (chain) 5 & 10 to the right. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), p. 173.

Figure 255. F. A. Iacone Mens Clothing Store at 519-21 Penn Street. Designed by Elmer Adams, installed by J.M. Kase, manufactured by Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1938. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Introduction

When considering the architectural legacy of the New Deal a range of government-sponsored projects immediately come to mind: modernist superblocks, stripped classical office buildings, picturesque post offices, suburban subdivisions with traditional houses, greenbelt towns, subsistence homesteads, and migrant camps, as well as the architectural elements of public works like dams, bridges, and highways. What do not immediately come to mind are the countless storefronts erected on Main Streets and commercial strips across the country in the midst of the Great Depression [Figs. 1 & 2]. Possessing a brash modernity characterized by their use of new materials like structural glass, porcelain enamel, glass block, and extruded aluminum, these modernized storefronts (so-called because they were new facades attached to existing buildings) are also part of the architectural legacy of the New Deal--and an important part at that--serving, through the recognizably streamlined forms of their sleek facades, as optimistic public symbols of a long-anticipated, and much heralded, return to prosperity.

It is not surprising that modernized storefronts have been overlooked in the architectural history of the New Deal.[1] Storefronts are so obviously commercial (as opposed to civic) and tied to the demands of the market (as opposed to public need) that any architectural connection with the federal government seems obscure. It is not as if any federal agency actually modernized storefronts the way the Public Works Administration built housing projects and schools or the Treasury Department built post offices. But just because the government did not directly build the modernized storefront does not mean that the government was not directly responsible for the modernized storefront. The government accepted this responsibility in 1934 when the Federal

---

[1] Studies of architecture and the New Deal have generally investigated the work of individual agencies or specific project types, a pattern my own project follows. See for example, Joseph Arnold, The New Deal in the Suburbs: A History of the Greenbelt Town Program (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1971). Phoebe Cutler, The Public Landscape of the New Deal (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Diane Ghirardo. Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989). Lisa B. Reitzes, "Moderately Modern: Interpreting the Architecture of the Public Works Administration," Ph.D. Diss. University of Delaware 1989.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Housing Administration launched a nationwide building modernization campaign to improve the depressed economy while improving the appearance of commercial and residential buildings. That campaign, the "Modernize Main Street" movement it initiated, and the modernized storefronts it produced are the subject of this dissertation.

If modernized storefronts as a group need to be written back into the architectural history of the New Deal, they likewise need to be reconsidered in other historiographic contexts, including 1930s visual culture and modernism in the United States.[2] The New Deal, 1930s visual culture, and modernism overlap in the history of streamlining where, perhaps more than anywhere else, modernized storefronts should have a prominent place, but do not.[3] The stylistic origins and development of the streamlined buildings and objects emblematic of 1930s America are well-established. In industrial design, streamlining is understood to have emerged out of engineering efforts to make cars, trains, and planes more functionally aerodynamic. By the early 1930s, streamlining had also become a styling technique for making vehicles more *visually* aerodynamic, regardless of their actual airstream resistance. By the late 1930s, in the work of designers like Raymond Loewy, Henry Dreyfuss, and Walter Dorwin Teague, streamlining had been applied to motionless objects as well, from pencil sharpeners to refrigerators and, most monumentally, the pavilions and exhibitions of the 1939 World's Fair. In architecture, streamlined forms, derived especially from the dynamic building studies of Erich Mendelsohn, are understood to have moderately influenced Howe and Lescaze's PSFS Building and Raymond

---

[2] To date, the only studies which have considered the storefronts of the 1930s as a group have had an historic preservation perspective. See for example, Rita Caviglia, "Architecture and Storefronts of the 1930s," Masters Thesis Columbia University 1981. My own study is more broadly cultural in focus.

[3] One exception is Martin Greif, Depression Modern: the Thirties Style in America (New York: Universe Books, 1975), especially pp. 80-85. Grief includes several modernized storefronts in this photographic survey of the 1930s and the caption accompanying the photograph of Steiner's Restaurant in Canton, Ohio (which mentions the "Modernize Main Street" movement) sparked my interest in this topic, as did references to architectural "styling" and "fashionable forms...most readily imposed on small shop fronts" in Rosemarie Bletter, "The World of Tomorrow: The Future with a Past," in High Styles: 20th Century American Design (New York: Whitney Museum, 1985), p. 103.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hood's McGraw-Hill Building, fully impacted Frank Lloyd Wright's Johnson Wax Administration Building and Robert Derrah's Coca-Cola Bottling Plant, and finally, intersecting with industrial design, reached a popular climax at the 1939 World's Fair, exemplified by the General Motors Pavilion designed by Norman Bel Geddes and Albert Kahn Associates.[4]

In the decade separating the curved granite banking hall of PSFS from the smooth silver shell of the GM pavilion, there emerged an entire class of streamlined structures, thousands of them, only marginally accounted for in the standard historical progression.[5] These were the modernized storefronts which existed in the 1930s somewhere between architecture and industrial design, between buildings and consumer products--a hybrid form intentionally developed during the Depression to meet the needs of architects (who were under-employed), manufacturers (who had stock-piled inventories), and merchants (who were suffering from consumer belt-tightening). Virtually mass produced (individualized compositions using standardized parts), easily purchased, and instantly recognizable, the modernized storefront was, by the end of the decade, a ubiquitous feature of Main Street America--one understood to have introduced modern architecture to a broad cross-section of the American public.

The ubiquity which made the storefront such a useful vehicle for the transmission of a popularized modernism served a larger purpose as well, giving it a powerful signifying dimension which enabled this everyday architecture to negotiate the social, political, and economic conflicts engendered by the Depression. Though, of necessity, the architectural expression of the modernized storefront was subjugated to the functional requirements of the

---

[4] On streamlining see Justin De Syllas, "Streamform," Architectural Association Quarterly 1 (April 1969): 32-41; David Gebhard, "The Moderne in the U.S., 1920-1941," Architectural Association Quarterly 2 (January 1970): 4-20; Jeffrey Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979); Donald J. Bush, The Streamlined Decade (New York: George Braziller, 1975); Claude Lichtenstein and Franz Engler, Streamlined: A Metaphor for Progress (Zurich: Lars Müller, [1993]).

[5] Storefronts produced by well-known designers are well-documented. See Meikle, pp. 117-25. Storefronts have also been included in studies of popular building typologies. See for example, Chester H. Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture (Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press, 1985).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Main Street marketplace, with architecture mediating and stimulating the transaction between seller and shopper. In an historical moment when New Dealers were sincerely attempting to convince Americans that it was possible for the country to buy its way out of the Depression, even the most basic commercial transactions on Main Street were charged with national urgency--as was the architecture which spurred them.

The modernized storefront and the nationwide movement which produced it demonstrate that for a brief time in the 1930s there existed a nexus between everyday life and architecture in the United States.[6] Indeed, during the Depression, American architecture culture purposefully responded to specific everyday practices as they were enacted and experienced on the quotidian landscape of Main Street. Architecture's engagement with everydayness was initially motivated by self-interest, as its practitioners and institutions sought a way to cope with the severe depression in the building industry. Main Street, recognized as a steady, though usually ignored, customer of minor building, offered an expedient for solvency as major building ceased, but as Main Street became increasingly important to architecture from an economic standpoint, its predominant practices of selling and shopping became a serious subject for architectural investigation. This was not regarded as a capitulation to consumerism, but rather as an acceptance of social realities and an opportunity for positive intervention in the commercial landscape. Architecture's sincere engagement with Main Street in the 1930s stands in opposition to Robert Venturi's ironic validation of the commercial landscape in the 1960s. When Venturi asked "is not Main Street almost all right?" he claimed to be celebrating the ordinary and offering it as a valid model for architectural inquiry, but his arguments were often tinged with

---

[6] My concept of everydayness and my thinking about its relationship to storefront architecture in the 1930s have been influenced by the work of Henri Lefebvre. Of particular importance to me is the way Lefebvre conjoined everydayness with modernity and blurred the distinctions between high and low, avant-garde and popular, the social and political. See Henri Lefebvre, "The Everyday and Everydayness," (1972) reprinted in Steven Harris and Deborah Berke, eds., The Architecture of the Everyday (Princeton: Princeton Architecture Press, 1997). See also Mary McLeod, "Henri Lefebvre's Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction," in the same volume, an essay crucial to my understanding of Lefebvre.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cynicism and condescension.[7] Significantly, however, the debates he stimulated centered on precisely the same issues which had interested architects involved in modernizing Main Street in the 1930s: legibility, facadism, populism and the scenographic and symbolic potentialities of the commercial landscape.

Excavating the Commercial Landscape

In the opening pages of William Faulkner's Requiem for a Nun, the author chronicles the founding and subsequent history of the town of Jefferson, Mississippi:

> Alexander Holston became the settlement's first publican, establishing the tavern still known as Holston House, the original log walls and puncheon floors and hand-morticed joints of which are still buried somewhere beneath the modern pressed glass and brick veneer and neon tubes.[8]

Here, Faulkner is describing a building of the 1830s modified according to the stylistic impulses of the 1930s, when the action of the novel takes place. On one level, Faulkner provides a vivid explanation of building modernization as it was practiced in the 1930s, when veneers of new materials were applied to the surface of a building in order to cover up old architectural forms. In the context of the novel in which this passage appears, we can also understand the modernized tavern as emblematic of the town's past and present, a founding Jefferson institution which, despite its commercial purpose, possessed only slightly less civic authority than the courthouse it predated. By virtue of its endurance through a century of development, the tavern witnessed the growth of Jefferson from a trading-post into "a town without ever having been a village" which after one hundred years "woke frantically from its communal slumber in a rash of Rotary and Lions Clubs and Chambers of Commerce and City Beautifuls."[9] Thus, on another level, Faulkner

---

[7] Robert Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), p. 104.
[8] William Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun (1950; rpt. Vintage Books, 1975), p. 7. I chanced upon this passage several years ago when this project was still in its formative stages. It seemed somehow pertinent to the critical enterprise at hand, though the precise nature of its relevance to modernization, Main Street, everyday architecture, and the New Deal has emerged only gradually.
[9] Faulkner, p. 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

provides a thumbnail sketch of a typical Main Street town, a community "seething with motion [and] progress" like so many real towns across the country. Communities like Jefferson (or Oxford, Mississippi on which Jefferson was modeled) would be called upon in the 1930s to organize those clubs and chambers to combat the Depression through a federally-sponsored program of building modernization which deftly exploited the urge toward progress Faulkner so accurately described, seeking to foster national recovery by encouraging the deliberate burial of those log walls and puncheon floors and hand-morticed joints beneath modern pressed glass and brick veneer and neon tubes.

By creating this image of historical layers and architectural strata, Faulkner's modernized tavern becomes an archeological trace, providing a useful methodological project for the historian wishing to explore the modern commercial landscape here described. That project is excavation. In the present context, to excavate the commercial landscape is to dig beneath the surface of the *storefront*--that most ephemeral architectural production, subject to the vagaries of history, fashion, and the economy. Continually covered-up and stripped away, the storefront--especially the modernized storefront of the 1930s--provides a shifting street-level panorama of colors, textures, and signs. Sometimes this excavation is literal, requiring Main Street field work to probe, assess, and document the material artifact of the storefront which, if it has survived from the 1930s, often exists in a tenuous state between preservation and decay [Figs. 3 & 4]. More often the excavation is archival, requiring only a metaphorical probe; but this probe is perhaps the richest in terms of critical revelations for, as Michel Foucault has shown, such an excavation has the potential to expose the deeply-rooted discourse--that domain of statements and regulating practices operating together as an influential force--which, in this case, lay beneath the surface of the storefront.[10] Thus, however chaotically vital and densely layered the storefront's surface may be, beneath that surface there is something more significant. While the

[10] See Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge (1971; rpt. New York: Pantheon Books,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

remnants of an earlier, imperfectly erased architecture may lay on the surface, beneath the surface are traces of an occluded commercial culture of which the modernized storefront was but one highly significant discursive part.

It follows that probing beneath the surface of the storefront is an attempt to excavate the discourse of modernization (or more precisely the archive of the discourse of modernization) as it was constructed in the 1930s by the government, corporations, and the architecture profession. To this end, a variety of governmental, corporate, and architectural texts are analyzed in the chapters which follow, not the least of which are the modernized buildings themselves. Also included are modernization advertisements, promotional literature, annual reports, house organs, and retail and building industry trade journals. These texts are analyzed at two levels of meaning--for their specific content as individual modernization statements and for their contribution to the larger modernization discourse. In placing the texts of modernization, including the storefront, on a single field of critical evaluation I am not denying the storefront's singularity as architectural form or significance as the principal cultural artifact of modernization. Rather, I am responding to Manfredo Tafuri's admonition concerning the "beyond architecture"--his caution that the historian recognize that "the manipulation of form always has an objective that transcends the forms themselves."[11] Recognizing that transcendent objective existing *beyond* the architecture of the modernized storefront--beyond a mere formal exercise in popularized modernism--means acknowledging its symbolic role in the return to prosperity, its fiscal contribution, however minor individually, to the actual return to prosperity through the economic stimulation its design, fabrication, and installation would generate, and finally its retail reality as a site of consumption responsive to the demands of shopping and selling. But, as will become evident in the narratives which follow, however much such an

---

1982), pp. 79-87.

[11] Manfredo Tafuri, "The Historical Project" in The Sphere and the Labyrinth (1987; rpt. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

acknowledgment moves us beyond architecture, it takes us back to the surface, for there, on the facade, was the social, economic and, finally, architectural performance the Depression-era modernized storefront enacted.

The Dissertation Narrative

Chapter 1, Legislation & Lobbyists, examines the emergence of building modernization as a New Deal public policy intended to stimulate the economy through directed pump-priming. After briefly explaining building modernization as it existed in the 1920s as a real estate strategy (mechanical upgrading, interior renovation, floor replanning, and facade changes--all intended to help a building retain its profitability), the narrative considers the formulation of New Deal modernization policy as a short-term emergency measure to bring relief to the severely depressed building industry and as a long-term systemic reform to loosen the flow of credit between the nation's financial institutions and its citizens. Both of these issues are considered in relation to the political and economic agenda of the New Deal, especially the determination after 1934 to move away from direct government aid toward private investment. It is through this discussion that Chapter 1 explicates how a single public policy of fostering building modernization served the seemingly disparate objectives of relief and credit flow. To this end the fiscal mechanism of federally-insured modernization credit is considered in depth through the lens of its legislative history as Title I of the 1934 National Housing Act. In charting this history, the narrative follows a twisting path through a decade of Congressional debates and industry lobbying efforts which accompanied the creation, ratification, and amendment of Title I.

Chapter 2, Organizing for Modernization, examines the vast promotional program which the government undertook in the fall of 1934 to stimulate modernization activity. This Better Housing Program (BHP), organized by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), was a publicity campaign conducted in thousands of American cities and towns with the cooperation of civic groups, chambers of commerce, and especially members of the local building and banking

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

industries. Using the FHA's own campaign guidelines as a narrative outline, Chapter 2 details the implementation and activities of the BHP with examples drawn from participating communities around the country. Here it is revealed how thoroughly the FHA orchestrated the local BHP campaign and how convincingly the FHA exploited the community spirit rhetoric of the Rotarian/Booster culture in which the BHP campaign existed. To this end Chapter 2 also considers the inherent business basis of the FHA itself and the local committees it established, analyzing in particular the *for-profit* mentality which pervaded all of the agency's publicity efforts. Finally, the considerable range of these publicity efforts are documented--from parades and modernization demonstrations to radio broadcasts and newsreels, along with a substantial volume of promotional literature. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the burgeoning modernization movement as a populist enterprise appropriate to the cultural climate of the Depression.

Chapter 3, Selling Modernization, deals with the BHP field campaign, a coordinated effort of the promotional projects analyzed in Chapter 2. The field campaign was a program of door-to-door canvasses undertaken between 1934 and 1936 with a stated goal of convincing property owners and long-term tenants to modernize their buildings. As this campaign is discussed, special attention is paid to the parallels which existed between the canvassing program and direct selling practices of the 1920s and 1930s, in particular the FHA's borrowing of sales management techniques used to educate the sales force, to cultivate sales prospects, and most importantly, to make the sales pitch. With respect to the latter, Chapter 3 examines the way the FHA carefully distinguished between the field campaign's public identity as a patriotic community service and its private identity, revealed only to volunteers and managers, as an aggressive sales drive replete with high-pressure tactics. Chapter 3 also reveals the extent to which the FHA consistently fostered an ethic of salesmanship among BHP participants, especially canvass volunteers drawn from the ranks of the building industry's unemployed, including construction workers and laborers, building material dealers, contractors, and architects. The chapter concludes with an examination of that

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

latter group during the Depression, charting certain transformations in the architecture profession brought about by the economic crisis. It particularly explores the alteration of the architect's self-conception from artist to salesman necessitated by the decline of building industry activity, which forced the architect to hustle for work like any other working stiff--to sell his architectural services, especially for building modernization, on Main Street which became an increasingly important category of minor architectural production.

Chapter 4, Main Street in the 1930s, explores how and why the archetypal commercial corridor and business district became the almost exclusive focus of the government-sponsored modernization movement in the spring of 1935. It briefly examines the development of Main Street's physical form (its commercial building types) and follows Main Street's decline in the early 1930s due to the triple pressure of shifting retail patterns, decentralization, and the Depression--all of which caused high vacancy rates and increased physical disrepair. Of particular importance is the emergence at this time of a highly publicized Main Street conflict which pitted corporate chains against independent merchants. Though seemingly a straightforward clash of retail rivals, of big business versus small business, during the Depression this conflict had social, economic, and architectural dimensions which informed the government's modernization program to a large degree. Chapter 4 considers each of these aspects in turn. Throughout this discussion, Main Street's cultural significance is also addressed and an interpretation is offered which argues that the very ubiquity of this everyday landscape gave it a representational potency during the Depression.

Chapter 5, The Main Street Initiative, chronicles the national promotional campaign which paralleled the work of the BHP at the local level. In particular it examines the extent to which the FHA successfully enlisted the cooperation of the building industry, including the architecture profession and building material manufacturers, in the modernization movement, securing industrial participation through blatant appeals to pecuniary self-interest and profitable

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reciprocity. The focus of the chapter is on the efforts of building material manufacturers to employ modernization as a marketing angle and merchandising technique for selling their products during the Depression. Such marketing, especially when utilized with explicit, FHA-sanctioned tie-ins to the government program, allowed manufacturers to cloak themselves in a mantle of corporate responsibility for national recovery even as they desperately sought to make a positive impact on their own bottom lines. Simultaneously, through a detailed case study of a single building product, structural glass, Chapter 5 considers the ways in which building material manufacturers influenced architectural developments during the Depression decade, notably the emergence of a recognizable commercial modernism in such quotidian structures as drug stores and shoe stores. The promotional programs of the nation's two leading manufacturers of structural glass--the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company and the Libbey-Owens-Ford Company--are analyzed in depth. This analysis reveals not only the extent of these corporate marketing campaigns--advertising, competitions, traveling exhibitions, etc.--but also the degree to which these corporations contributed to, indeed were largely responsible for, the architectural formulation of the iconic streamlined storefront as it appeared on Main Street in the 1930s.

Chapter 6, Consuming Architecture, examines building modernization in theory and practice. It demonstrates, with respect to both, that a crucial relationship existed between modernization and consumer culture, that this relationship was born of the Depression, and that it brought to bear upon everyday American architecture such issues as advertising, obsolescence, gender, fashion, and social anxieties. Each of these issues is shown to have had a significant impact on the most common modernizing strategies, in particular those which focused on the storefront--on the architectural facade--as the principal site of formal and conceptual investigations. In analyzing these investigations, Chapter 6 demonstrates several ways the storefront was conceptualized in the 1930s (as a billboard, as a package, as cosmetics, as dress) and shows how those concepts were translated into architectural form by stripping and sheathing

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the storefront in a variety of materials chosen for their specific associations with newness and modernity. Here, what I call the consumer goods model is proposed as a totalizing paradigm for building modernization in the 1930s--a paradigm which informed every aspect of building modernization, from the promotional propaganda of the government and its corporate partners, to the fiscal mechanism of modernization credit and installment buying, to its visual expressions in which buildings--like contemporary consumer goods--were restyled to convey a range of associations and images intended as a psychological salve for the crisis of the Depression and a public symbol of recovery. The discussion of consumer culture in this chapter does not emerge out of a narrative vacuum, but in fact has been touched upon in some way in each of the previous chapters. Thus, Chapter 6 serves as a summation, bringing together the full range of modernization's discursive material through which the storefront was culturally constructed in the 1930s.

In the Conclusion, a brief case study of the Main Street of Reading, Pennsylvania during the Depression precipitates a return to the local scene before offering two final assessments of the national impact of the modernization movement. The first assessment situates the modernized storefront within the visual culture of the New Deal and argues that it possessed a highly legible iconography of prosperity. The second assessment situates the modernized storefront within the architectural polemics of the International Style, as understood in the United States in the 1930s, and argues that the storefront embodied something more than a borrowed stylistic idiom--that it embodied a fully-realized everyday modernism.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter 1 Legislation & Lobbyists: Building Modernization as Public Policy

On August 10th 1934 a working-class homeowner named John P. Powers walked into the First National Bank on Main Street in Cloquet, Minnesota to secure a loan for long delayed improvements on his house [Fig. 5].[1] When he walked out that same day with $125, John Powers had little idea that halfway across the country in Washington, DC a group of government bureaucrats working for the newly established Federal Housing Administration (FHA) were gathered in makeshift offices in the new Post Office Building on the Federal Triangle, waiting expectantly for the economic impact of this first federally-insured modernization loan. While Powers might have been aware that his loan was part of a recently announced government initiative to stimulate the economy, he had no way of knowing that months of partisan politicking, business lobbying, Presidential speeches, and Congressional debates had preceded--had made possible--his borrowing of $125 payable in equal monthly installments over the next year. In his 1920 novel Main Street Sinclair Lewis wrote, albeit sarcastically, of the relationship of small town America to the larger pageant of history: "That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store, Hannibal invaded Rome and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters."[2] Thus it was 14 years later on another Main Street, in another historical moment: That John Powers might paint his house, repair his roof, and install a water tank, Franklin Delano Roosevelt sent a message to Congress regarding upcoming legislation which would eventually be signed into law as the National Housing Act (NHA).

In his message of May 14th 1934 the President declared that his legislative package "should improve conditions for those who live in houses, those who repair and construct houses,

---

[1] Powers was a timekeeper in a local paper factory. His house and loan were featured in "First Home Modernized Under FHA Plan," FHA Clip Sheet, 9 (August 1936), p. 1. See also The FHA Story in Summary (Washington, DC: GPO, 1959), pp. 9-11. Actually, there was some confusion over who had secured the first modernization loan. In 1934 the FHA's Better Housing newsletter claimed that the honor belonged to Miss Alma McCrum of Georgetown, D.C. See Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 6.

[2] Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: P.F. Collier & Sons, 1920), prologue, n.p.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and those who invest in houses."[3] If Roosevelt's sketch of potential beneficiaries included seemingly all Americans except the most abject of the nation's poor, its broadness revealed the sweeping extent of the bill the President had just sent up Pennsylvania Avenue attached to his Congressional message. In terms of legislative scope, in fact, Roosevelt's declaration was almost too narrow: though designated a *housing* bill, the proposed law embraced not only residences, but, as Roosevelt acknowledged, commercial and industrial structures as well. According to the President's message, the bill was intended to initiate a comprehensive program of "real property conservation" to bring all American buildings "up to the standards of the times" through "repairing and modernizing." Concomitantly, it would "return many of the unemployed to useful and gainful occupation" in a rejuvenated building industry.[4]

As a federally-sponsored effort to preserve the built environment while generating productive employment, the program Roosevelt outlined was akin to the natural conservation efforts already underway by the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Civilian Conservation Corps. But unlike those initiatives, products of the legislative fervor and fiscal largesse of the Hundred Days of the first New Deal, this new program was the product of the more cautious and restrained political climate of 1934 in which Roosevelt was forced to address growing conservative discontent with relief expenditures, of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) and Civil Works Administration (CWA) in particular, and the restrictions of the National Recovery Administration (NRA).[5] Thus, in explaining the so-called housing bill in his message, Roosevelt subtly addressed these concerns, carefully distinguishing its potential for job creation from *boondoggle* work relief and deferring unequivocally to business interests and the free-market.[6] He noted, for example, that the program offered "support for" and "cooperation

---

[3] Congressional Record 78 (part 9, 14 May 1934), p. 8739.
[4] Congressional Record 78 (part 9, 14 May 1934), p. 8739-40.
[5] For an analysis of the altered political climate of 1934, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960, pp. 1-11.
[6] "Boondoggle" as a derisive term for supposedly unproductive work relief came into general

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

with private capital and industry" rather than intervention and regulation. Instead of direct government funds for property conservation, Roosevelt proposed government insurance of loans made for property conservation. This loan insurance mechanism would, in the President's words, "produce tangible, useful wealth in a form for which there is great social and economic need."[7] According to partisans across the political spectrum, the form of "wealth" for which there was the greatest social and economic need circa 1934 was one which resulted from real recovery and not merely relief--money in workers' pockets put there by private sector paychecks and not by government handouts.[8] In this way, as the FHA would later claim, the loan insurance program was "reaching deeper into the problem" of the economic depression.[9] The distinction between relief and recovery represented a decided policy shift toward what is generally recognized as the ideology of the second New Deal.[10] This policy shift would bring to the fore such Keynesian-sanctioned steps to economic prosperity as expanded employment, cheap and accessible credit, and large-scale, coordinated government action--precisely the steps called for in the real property conservation program Roosevelt outlined in his Congressional message of May 14th.

The Building Industry Depression

Representing as it did, a new direction for the New Deal, Roosevelt and his advisors took pains to spin the program positively in the press, hoping to garner the support of labor, business, and the general public for the bill introduced on the House and Senate floors following the delivery of the President's message. The proposed legislation became the lead story in most of the nation's newspapers on May 15th, with typical headlines, such as that on the front page of the

---

usage in the spring of 1934. See William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 123.

[7] Congressional Record 78 (part 9, 14 May 1934), p. 8740.

[8] Many businessmen believed that direct relief was undermining the American work ethic. Roosevelt was beginning to feel that it was too much of a financial burden on the nation. See Leuchtenburg, pp. 90-2.

[9] Federal Housing Administration, Mutual Mortgage Insurance, Circular no. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 27 November 1934), p. 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

New York Times, emphasizing economic recovery and employment: "Roosevelt Acts to Speed Building Trades Recovery; Congress Gets 4-Point Plan." Though, as the Times noted, the plan would "relieve distress" in the short-term, this "humanitarian aspect" was presented as secondary to--the byproduct of--the plan's larger objective: "to spur recovery in the construction industry."[11] Already for several weeks prior to this announcement, news reports had been tracking the development of the administration's plan, first revealed in early March, to address the serious problem of continued, drastic unemployment in the building industry. The reasons New Dealers--and the national press--zealously turned their attention to this particular industry were distressingly obvious by 1934.

The building industry was the most severely depressed in the nation and had proven the least responsive to the general economic recovery measures undertaken since 1933 and even earlier by Hoover. Building activity, including new construction and additions, alterations, and repairs--residential and commercial--had declined gradually in the second half of the decade of prosperity, from a 1925 high of $4 billion to $3 billion in 1929. In the first year of the Depression building activity experienced a precipitous drop of nearly 50% to just over $1.5 billion in 1930 and continued its downward trajectory until it reached an absolute nadir of $400 million in 1933 and 1934 ($300 million in residential building; $100 million in commercial building) [Fig. 6].[12] Accompanying this decline in activity, in direct proportion to it, was an increase in layoffs. Historically, the building industry always faced a certain amount of unemployment in its workforce: much of its labor was contracted and subcontracted and seasonal layoffs, during the winter cessation of construction, were as inevitable as the first frost. But the

---

[10] On the ideology of the second New Deal see Schlesinger, especially pp. 385-408.
[11] "Roosevelt Acts to Speed Building Trades Recovery," New York Times, 15 May 1934, p. 1. The Times also printed the full texts of the President's message and the housing bill. See pp. 1 & 36.
[12] U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Value of Building Construction as Indicated by Building Permits, 1925-1941," reprinted in Broadus Mitchell, Depression Decade, Economic History of the United States, Vol. IX (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1947), p. 447. Estimates of building activity vary widely. Some period sources used an activity "aggregate" which, for example, placed the 1925 high at $11 billion. Since the FHA based its estimates on

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

unemployment which hit this workforce as a result of the Depression was unprecedented: the building trades and allied professions experienced higher unemployment in the 1930s than any other American industry, placing among the jobless such highly-skilled, highly-paid workers as carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers, electricians, and plumbers, as well as architects and engineers. While the exact number of unemployed workers in the building industry was difficult to determine, in 1934 Labor Secretary Frances Perkins, testifying in Congressional hearings, estimated it to be approximately 2 million people, some 80% of all workers attached to the building industry and representing, by one count, nearly 30% of all unemployed Americans in the worst years of the Depression.[13]

As discouraging as these figures were in themselves, their significance was even more grave, for the actual impact of reduced building activity and increased building trades unemployment extended far beyond this one industry. Because the building industry was regarded as one of the basic components of the national economy, its depressed state had a far-ranging, draining effect. Industries directly related to building or supplying building needs, especially manufacturing of durable and producer goods such as glass, steel, cement, lumber, and electrical parts, suffered a proportional decline in production and rise in layoffs. According to figures cited by Secretary Perkins, between 1929 and 1933, employment in these manufacturing areas fell over 50%, leaving approximately 2.5 million workers jobless. Though nearly one million of these would be absorbed by consumer goods manufacturers and federal work relief, by mid-1934, according to the most conservative estimates, over 3.5 million workers in the building trades and related industries inclusively, stood idle with some estimates putting this figure at over

---

building permits, only those figures are cited here.

[13] Cited in U.S. Senate, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), p. 168. Colin Gordon cites the figure of 2.5 million workers in the building trades throughout the 1920s. See Gordon, New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America 1920-1935 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 117. Estimates of total unemployment, released by government agencies, policy institutes, trade associations and labor unions, ranged from 12 million to 17 million for 1933 and 1934. See Mitchell, p. 453. Perkins put the range between 8 and 17.5 million, accepting 13 million

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

5 million.[14] In addition, with the CWA to be all but shut down in the coming months, there was grave concern that the unemployment problem would become even more dire as the winter of 1934-35 approached.

Obviously, unemployment adversely affected the purchasing power of this vast group of workers whose standard of living, prior to the Depression, was considered relatively high. These "ready spenders"--as Perkins called them--had formerly spent large portions of their incomes on goods and services in their local communities. But as the buying power of individual building workers declined, the stores and establishments with which they regularly did business began to suffer as well, leading first to local economic depression and creating an eventual "lack of market" for national manufacturers of consumer goods. This, in turn, would impact negatively on those industries, their workers, and then *their* local communities, as the fallout from the economic downturn continued to spread.[15] Thus, the state of a single industry reverberated throughout the country, creating what Frank Walker of the National Emergency Council called the "vicious circle" of the building industry depression.[16]

Trial & Error in Modernization Policy

Roosevelt established the National Emergency Council (NEC) by executive order late in 1933 and charged it with coordination and procedural oversight of the field activities of the myriad alphabet agencies and relief programs that had come into existence in the first year of the New Deal. The Council was essentially a cabinet committee whose membership included, among others, Labor Secretary Perkins, the NRA's Gen. Hugh Johnson, and the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) chairman John H. Fahey. To the position of executive director, Roosevelt named Frank C. Walker, a longtime political ally and treasurer of the Democratic

---

as a fairly accurate count.

[14] 1934 Senate Hearings, pp. 168-9. The latter figure was cited by the NRA's Durable Goods Industries Committee, pp. 286-87.

[15] U.S. House of Representatives, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), p. 66.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

National Committee, who convened the Council soon after New Year's 1934. At one of the NEC's first meetings that January, at which the President himself was in attendance, John Fahey requested a $2 billion appropriation to enable the HOLC to expand its money lending operations beyond the prevention of mortgage foreclosures to include loans for the improvement and modernization of houses. According to Fahey, this expansion would not only help stabilize and improve residential property values, it would also "create healthy activity in the building trades." There was enough support among NEC members for Fahey to announce this new HOLC initiative to the press in late January.[17] However, while the modernization scheme had Roosevelt's general approval, and while the President was keenly aware that a revival of building activity could help revive the national economy, he was apparently concerned about the use of direct government funds for these new HOLC loans. "Was there," he wondered aloud to the members of the NEC, "any way to get the government out of the lending business?"[18] Frank Walker responded immediately to the President's query and began formulating a program to mount what he would eventually call "a frontal attack" on the building industry depression, seeking to "reemploy the huge army of [building] workers" without the use of huge government subsidies, even in the form of loans.[19]

Walker's initial proposal was a nationwide home renovation campaign modeled on the enormously successful Liberty Loan drives of World War I and propelled by a two-tiered financial mechanism. First, the plan offered a 20% discount on labor and materials as an inducement for property owners considering home improvements. However great an incentive

---

[16] Frank C. Walker, "Housing Bill Explained," New York Times, 15 May 1934, p. 37.
[17] "Home-Loan Groups Plan Building Aid," New York Times 30 January 1934, p. 33. For recollections of the meetings of the National Emergency Council see Ferrell, Robert H., ed. FDR's Quiet Confidant: The Autobiography of Frank C. Walker (Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1997), pp. 90-100.
[18] This NEC meeting is described in Marriner S. Eccles, Beckoning Frontiers: Public and Personal Recollections (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 145. Roosevelt's reticence here indicates the degree to which he was still uncertain, in early 1934, of the efficacy or the political ramifications of continued deficit spending, even though this HOLC money would, theoretically, be paid back with interest.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

these discounts might have been to home owners, they had significantly less appeal for the contractors and manufacturers who would be forced to absorb the price reductions. According to Walker's plan, the depressed building industry would nonetheless accept the discounts in order to get a piece of the burgeoning home improvement market. This acceptance would simultaneously force the building industry into compliance with NRA codes for scales of labor wages and product prices over which both trade unions and manufacturers had been openly contentious. In addition to the discounts, Walker's plan also proposed that the government initiate the national campaign by underwriting $50 million worth of home improvement loans channeled through private banks. While this didn't exactly get the government out of the lending business, it significantly scaled back John Fahey's plan for HOLC modernization loans.[20]

The property improvement schemes Walker and Fahey proposed did not emerge from a vacuum. Perhaps the closest model to the program outlined in the bill sent to Congress--and with which Walker and Fahey were familiar--was one not specifically designed to combat the Depression. The Johns-Manville Million-Dollar-Fund, also known as the "Million Dollars-to-Lend Plan, was a nationwide promotional effort begun in 1931. The Plan, which encouraged home owners to repair and modernize using Johns-Manville's asbestos building materials, offered an installment buying option which allowed consumers to "make these improvements now [and] pay out of income," with added interest of course. Though it was really nothing more than an attempt to sell its products, the company claimed that the Plan was fulfilling a true civic need: "Realizing that in many communities there is a lack of credit facilities to finance needed home repairs and improvements, Johns-Manville has set aside a fund of a million dollars from which homeowners can borrow."[21] The following year, Johns-Manville, along with several other

---

[19] Walker, "Housing Bill Explained," p. 37.
[20] Arthur Krock, "Ask Cut Rate Plan to Improve Homes," New York Times, 2 March 1934, p. 3.
[21] Johns-Manville had tried similar lending schemes throughout the 1920s but without success. The Plan is described in 101 Practical Suggestions on Home Improvement (New York: Johns-Manville, 1934), p. 2. Its operation is explained in 1934 House Hearings, pp. 329-46 and 1934

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

building material manufacturers, also helped organize the Rehabilitation Corporation, a credit finance company which specialized in helping owners of "obsolete" income-producing buildings (apartment houses, hotels, and office buildings), "meet the competition of new structures through modernization." Though it had the stated goal of "improving the depressed real estate situation," the company's real priority was made obvious by the fact that in order to receive Rehabilitation Corporation financing buildings owners had to agree to modernize using only the products of participating manufacturers.[22] However insincere Johns-Manville may have been in its claims of corporate responsibility during the economic crisis, the expansion of credit facilities which the company actively promoted would become an important aspect of the government's modernization scheme.

Other plans advanced in the early years of the Depression which *were* specifically designed to deal with the crisis relied on property improvement funds not unlike those of Johns-Manville. In 1933, the year the Emergency Council began formulating a government program, a number of bankers and builders had offered similar approaches and, like thousands of other Americans who were convinced they knew how to end the Depression, these men had even sent their proposals off to Washington for New Deal consideration. In D.C. itself, a group of District bankers created a "credit pool" of $500,000 out of which they intended to make $500 loans for home improvements with the goal of encouraging employment and preventing depreciation. To attract attention to their credit pool, the bankers planned to move a run-down building to the Mall for a renovation demonstration which they hoped would convince other communities to follow their example. Two New York builders made separate proposals for government lending programs to benefit property owners and stimulate business. One scheme called for a private fund modeled on the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) which would make self-

---

Senate Hearings, pp. 293-4.

[22] "Big Companies Join in Rehabilitation," New York Times, 2 October 1932, sec. IV, p. 8. Other particpating manufacturers included Westinghouse, Otis Elevator, American Brass, and U.S.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

liquidating, fully amortized loans for repairs; another proposed that the RFC itself begin making modernization loans, especially for improvements to bond-financed buildings which would protect bond-holders' interests and real estate values, as well as create a demand for labor and materials.[23]

In addition to these fiscal gimmicks, since at least 1932, trade associations and professional organizations had publicly urged the establishment of modernization programs to jump-start the building industry and assist American property owners. The Director of the New Jersey Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, for example, presented "A Plan to Create New Business for the Architect" to the AIA's 65th annual convention, in which he called for a national movement of architectural consultations, akin to medical house calls or office visits, to encourage property renovation and rehabilitation. In addition to netting the architect a five or ten dollar fee for each consultation, this service was intended to "materially aid" the property owner who would be advised as to which "repairs, replacement, or renovation [would] reduce the overhead due to continued depreciation and waste."[24] More concretely, a number of municipalities and corporations had undertaken small-scale programs, many of which even had federal imprimatur.

During the last year of the Hoover administration the Department of Commerce initiated several nation-wide building modernization efforts which, like so many of Hoover's official responses to the Depression, involved no government money (beyond operating expenses) and were essentially booster campaigns. In the summer of 1932 Hoover established the National Committee on Reconditioning, Remodeling, and Modernizing, chaired by the Commerce

---

Rubber.

[23] "Home-Repair Pool Set up in Capital," New York Times, 19 February 1933, p. 13. "Government Loans as Realty Benefit," New York Times, 14 May 1933, X & XI, p. 1. "Suggests Government Authorize Loans for Modernizing Existing Buildings, New York Times, 5 November 1933, X & XI, p. 1.

[24] Arthur B. Holmes, "A Plan to Create New Business for the Architect," American Architect 141 (June 1932), pp. 14-5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Department's Frederick M. Feiker. This 18-person committee drew its ranks from across the public and private sectors, including the Agriculture Department, the Bureau of Standards, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB), and the Federation of Women's Clubs, as well as three architects and three magazine editors. The committee's function was "to cooperate with every community interested in promoting repairs and improvements of commercial, home, and industrial structures for the purpose of energizing industry and relieving unemployment." This cooperation would be effected by "a campaign of information, counsel, and constructive organization." By September over 200 community campaigns were underway to "accelerate the demand for men and materials" by securing pledges from property owners to modernize their buildings.[25] A separate committee was also appointed to organize a national drive to modernize factories. By the time Hoover left office in March 1933, the National Committee on Industrial Rehabilitation had persuaded AT&T, Johns-Manville, Westinghouse, Standard Oil, Pittsburgh Plate Glass, American Radiator, two dozen railroads, and dozens of smaller firms to commit to undertake completely privately-financed modernization plans. The benefit of these projects, according to the committee, would be straightforward, trickle-down economic stimulation:

> If industry will...remedy through modernization the run-down condition of its productive equipment, employment will be created for hundreds of thousands of workers in the capital goods industries. In addition, it will bring back on payrolls hundreds of thousands of workers in other industries which furnish the parts, raw materials and services bought by the machinery and equipment manufacturers. This will release millions of dollars in wages spent for individual and family purchases affecting business in every community.[26]

While the economic goal of modernization would not change with the new administration, the strategy by which it was achieved would. Hoover may have convened a "council of war" when

---

[25] "National Drive is Pressed for Repair Work to Produce $3.5 Million Wages," New York Times, 17 August 1932, p. 19.
[26] "Hunt 1,620,000 Jobs in Run-Down Plants," New York Times, 12 September 1932, p. 17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

he established the "renovizing" committees;[27] he may have found a weapon to fight the Depression in modernization pledge drives; but in refusing to provide a fiscal mechanism for undertaking modernization, Hoover failed to provide his weapon with ammunition. It was only with the arrival of Roosevelt that fiscal fire power would be given to this potentially lethal Depression-fighting weapon.

The proliferation of these assorted "renovizing" programs before the advent of the New Deal represented a distinct shift in attitude toward building modernization. Prior to the Depression, especially in the 1920s, modernization was regarded almost exclusively as a real estate strategy, concerned with ends and not means. In other words, the modernized building was more important than the act of modernization. It was only after modernization was completed that a building would generate the increased, or at least stabilized, property values, rents, and profits which, according to architectural writer Randolph Williams Sexton in his 1928 book American Commercial Buildings of Today, were the primary economic motivations for undertaking facade changes, interior renovations, or mechanical plant updating.[28] If this realty-biased position tended to disconnect modernization from those who produced it--from the architects, engineers, contractors, tradesmen, and manufacturers--this was symptomatic of the boomtime marketplace of the prosperity decade. It was also largely inconsequential: not only were those same producers sharing in the profits of prosperity, channeled into the building industry through the construction boom, but the industry as a whole minimized the importance of modernization practice, regarding it as a sideline, merely "the odd-job alleyway of building" and not the whole shebang--a mere $300 million worth of work versus $3 billion worth of new construction throughout most of the 1920s.[29] After 1929, this situation reversed itself with the

---

[27] "Central Council Set Up," New York Times, 27 August 1932, pp. 1 & 8.
[28] R.W. Sexton, American Commercial Buildings of Today (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Company Inc., 1928), p. 154.
[29] "Remodeling, Modernization, Repair...," American Architect 146 (April 1935), p. 10. Figures are from "Value of Building Construction as Indicated by Building Permits." Reprinted in Mitchell, p. 447.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

onset of the Depression, the virtual cessation of new construction, and the rising tide of building industry unemployment. By the early 1930s, as evidenced even in these tentative, initiatory programs, modernization was repositioned as a crucial building industry activity, capable of producing jobs, increasing demand for materials, and generating economic revival. This shift does not imply that the modernized building--the finished product--somehow ceased to matter, far from it. Indeed, as we shall see, the modernized building would come to play a critical social and psychological role in national recovery--a role which at times seemed far more important, or at least more dramatic, than its concrete economic contributions.

It is fair to say that each of these early organized property improvement efforts had some bearing on the modernization plan taking shape in the spring of 1934 and finally emerging in the Housing Act signed into law in early summer. In the experimental policy ferment of the New Deal, as Roosevelt and the Brain Trust cast about for innovative solutions to the national crisis, a certain try-anything-once-attitude clearly prevailed, especially with respect to industrial recovery which, the high-profile Blue Eagle campaign of the NRA notwithstanding, was still languishing. It is highly likely that someone would have eventually brought a modernization scheme to the table, especially given the presence of the Commerce Department on the National Emergency Council and the amount of press coverage Hoover's rehabilitation committees had received. As it turned out, the framers of the current federal modernization program were familiar with most of these plans. A parade of witnesses appearing before Congress made this abundantly clear as representatives from, among others, Johns-Manville, the AIA, and the NAREB, testified to the relative success or failure of their own programs and the importance of promoting modernization to stimulate the building industry (see below).

Even as these pre-New Deal property improvement programs were drawing to a conclusion, Frank Walker's own modernization plan was being made public in early March 1934. At the same time, the NEC director appointed a special subcommittee to refine his scheme

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and work out the difficulties of discounts and government funding. The subcommittee was also charged with preparing a long-term housing initiative and drafting both these programs into a bill to be presented to the President. Finally, with the help of the Labor Department, the subcommittee was "to canvass the need for this bill" to further ascertain its urgency.[30] Walker named Marriner S. Eccles, a fiscally liberal Utah banker, as the subcommittee's head, and Winfield Riefler, a Federal Reserve economist who had collaborated with Walker on the discount plan, as its secretary. Eccles and Riefler assembled a three-man technical staff consisting of a housing expert, a Reconstruction Finance Corporation lawyer, and Albert L. Deane, special assistant to Averill Harriman of the NRA and president of the General Motors Holding Corporation, one of the auto maker's consumer finance divisions.[31] Eccles and Deane would become the principle authors of the revised building modernization plan, Eccles and Riefler the principle authors of the mortgage guarantee program. Together, the subcommittee would draft these measures into Titles I and II of the housing act introduced to Congress on May 14th.

Building a Fiscal Mechanism for Modernization

Eccles, who had come to Washington as a special assistant to Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau and would shortly be appointed a governor of the Federal Reserve Board, was a Keynesian in theory, if not in name. He was a staunch supporter of deficit spending by the government, but only if it was used to increase purchasing power, expand credit, and stimulate the circulation of private funds:

> I felt that in a depression the proper role of government should be that of generating a maximum degree of private spending

---

[30] 1934 Senate Hearings, p. 166.

[31] The housing expert was James Daigler; the RFC lawyer was Frank Watson. Albert Deane was formerly vice president of the GM Acceptance Corporation and had also been involved with the General Motors Modern Housing Corporation which had been building worker's subdivisions since in 1919. On the GM Modern Housing Corporation see Gail Radford, Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 49.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> through a minimum amount of public spending. This was the basic justification for deficit spending.[32]

The trick, Eccles admitted, was figuring out how to accomplish this correct public/private spending mix, especially in the short-term when immediate fiscal relief was so desperately needed in the building industry and, by extension, the nation. Deane, by contrast, was largely unconcerned with federal deficits, anxious instead to maximize consumer credit to bolster the shrinking purchasing power the Depression was effecting. In the early 1930s, Deane was regarded as an expert on consumer credit, having helped pioneer the auto industry's installment buying and low-downpayment schemes which significantly expanded the market for new cars. He was also responsible for some impressive Depression-era sales gimmicks, including a refund-and-return policy for customers who lost their jobs subsequent to GM-financed purchases of GM cars. Deane was known to favor any plan, federal or otherwise, to support aggregate worker income, since this could be finessed through careful marketing into potential car sales. He even offered his own plan, widely-circulated in business and political circles, for direct income assistance which, according to critics, amounted to little more than subsidized consumption.[33] Given their respective backgrounds, Eccles and Deane brought distinct fiscal agendas to the subcommittee table in March 1934. However, in a few short weeks they had produced a workable plan for the immediate stimulation of the building industry--a plan that, by Eccles's recollection, "represented a union between Albert Deane's practical knowledge of the costs of consumer credit and the scheme I advanced to finance that credit."[34] This union produced the Modernization Credit Plan (MCP), drafted as Title I of the bill which became the National Housing Act. However unconnected or unrelated to the nation's Main Streets this financial

---

[32] Eccles, p. 148 and pp. 142-3. See also Schlesinger, pp. 237-41.
[33] See Gordon, pp. 43-45 and 272. By 1925 75% of all car sales, both new and used, were on installment.
[34] Eccles, p. 149. According to Walker, the general outlines of the new plan had been worked out by March 29th. See "Wide Housing Plan Awaits Approval," New York Times, 30 March 1934, p. 23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

mechanism might have seemed as Eccles and Deane were crafting it in subcommittee in Washington, within a few months it would directly influence the form of buildings on commercial strips and residential neighborhoods across the country.

Eccles's ingenious credit financing scheme replaced direct government funding in the form of relief and loans with federal loan insurance which would cover 20% of the aggregate amount of modernization loans made by any one institution. In practice, this meant that lenders would be reimbursed 100% of their losses on bad loans as long as the total amount of losses did not exceed 20% of total modernization funds advanced. Since statistical research showed that the loss ratio on similar loans was around 3%, the 20% aggregate insurance scheme was "tantamount to a complete guarantee for financial institutions."[35] Eccles proposed an initial $200 million cap on loan losses the government could absorb, essentially the equivalent of a $200 million appropriation. But, unlike a relief appropriation of equal value, which would allow the government to spend only the stated amount of $200 million, or an appropriation for direct federal loans, which had no stimulating effect on private lending and idle private funds, this subsidy had the potential to place $1 billion of private capital into circulation. To receive the insurance, individual loans were limited to $2,000 with no collateral requirement, only--and this was a bold move in 1934--a positive assessment of "strength of character" to be made by the local lender. By standing behind these loans--rather than making them--the government would, Eccles believed, bolster private lender confidence which would gradually, as the New York Times put it, "coax reluctant capital out of hiding." Eccles was unequivocal about the private nature of the credit plan, "which avoided any direct encroachment by the government on the domain of private business, but which used the power of the government to establish the conditions under which private initiative could feed itself and multiply its own benefits."[36] It

---

[35] FHA, Modernization Credit Plan, Bulletin No. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, August 1934), p. 5.
[36] Eccles, pp. 149 & 151. "Roosevelt Acts to Speed Building Trades Recovery," p. 1. Eccles credited Winfield Riefler with the co-invention of the loan insurance mechanism.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was this emphasis on the machinery of *private* credit which caused Arthur C. Holden, an architect and consultant to the NRA, to describe the MCP, with a mixture of cynicism and begrudging admiration, as "a product of genius." In a Survey Graphic article calling for the immediate passage of the National Housing Act, Holden, who would become an enthusiastic supporter of building modernization, argued that the plan's brilliance lay in its assumption of "the existence of a nation composed of disillusioned self-interested individuals." He thus concluded that "the business men will be the first to see the opportunities in the Fletcher Bill [NHA]," but cautioned that "those who stand for liberal thought"--not the business class, in other words--ought not to overlook "the far-reaching social implications of the control of the flow of credit."[37]

Before Eccles and Deane devised the elegant loan insurance mechanism which would drive the MCP, they had initially sought to create a program which might reconcile Fahey's HOLC loan proposal with Walker's discount plan and be placed under HOLC authority, but this became impracticable on several fronts after the short- and long-term aspects of the program were clarified as initiatives for property improvement and new house construction respectively.[38] When certain conflicts with the HOLC arose, Eccles and the subcommittee determined to establish an entirely new agency to manage their program; that independent agency would become the Federal Housing Administration. While the foremost difficulty with Fahey's plan at

---

[37] Arthur C. Holden, "'Modernization'--Ballyhoo or Progress?" Survey Graphic 23 (July 1934): 334. Though published after the NHA was enacted, the article was clearly written prior to it's passage.

[38] The long-term program was drafted into Title II which provided federal insurance for fully-amortized mortgages to purchase houses. New houses were preferred, but mortgages to purchase existing homes could also be insured. By making it less risky for financial institutions to extend mortgages, the federal government made it easier for prospective home owners to secure mortgages, hopefully inducing more Americans to purchase homes. Because of Title II's low-interest and long-term mortgage stipulations, buyers could finance a high portion of the purchase price and, concomitantly, make smaller downpayments. It was hoped that the expanded home-ownership market would prove a boon to the residential construction industry, encouraging a gradual return to normal, pre-Depression levels of home building activity and then, because of long-range mortgage reform, eventually to even higher levels of housing starts. The mortgage insurance mechanism of Title II had a lasting impact in the United States, aiding and abetting the suburban expansion of the pre- and post-war periods. See Gwendolyn Wright, Building the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

first seemed to be the old chestnut of public vs. private funding, it quickly became apparent that Fahey also objected to Eccles and Deane's proposed broadening of lenders eligible to advance building renovation and house construction funds to embrace "every kind of credit agency in the country with idle money on its hands."[39] In 1934 this included a variety of institutional lenders such as commercial banks, mutual savings banks, building and loan associations (B&Ls), and insurance companies, as well as installment lending companies and the finance corporations run by manufacturers and retailers like Johns-Manville, General Electric, and Sears. According to government statistics, prior to New Deal reforms only 1% of American banks had been authorized to make, or were interested in making, the type of small character loans proposed by the Modernization Credit Plan.[40] Finance corporations did make such loans, but these were generally limited to the purchase of consumer products like cars and refrigerators. Only the building and loan associations, as small community lenders with personal knowledge of most of their customers, routinely made renovation and construction loans based on character, rather than collateral.[41] Eccles's proposed credit plan would drastically change that situation, enabling banks and financial institutions of all types to make character loans for modernization and construction, since in essence the federal government had agreed to act as virtual cosigner and guarantor [Fig. 7].

HOLC Chairman Fahey was concerned that this expansion of credit facilities would lead to unfair competition in the housing financing field to the ultimate detriment of the B&Ls with

---

Dream (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 240-61 and Marc A. Weiss, The Rise of the Community Builders (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 141-58.

[39] Eccles, p. 149.

[40] Cited in FHA, First Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 1. After the passage of the National Housing Act, state banking regulations were liberalized, at President Roosevelt's request, to allow banks to make this type of non-collateral loan. See "Correspondence between State Governors and President Roosevelt Concerning FHA Legislation, 1934-35," National Archives, Record Group 31, FHA Records, Entry #11.

[41] In Congressional hearings B&L directors and trustees were characterized as "small tradesmen in their communities, who know the properties and a good deal about these homes in their immediate neighborhood." See 1934 House Hearings, p. 215. The iconic American B&L was the fictional Bailey Building and Loan, community lender and moral backbone of the town of Bedford

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

whom, according to Eccles and evident in Fahey's Congressional testimony, his sympathies clearly lay.[42] Apparently, Fahey was unconcerned that his own agency's proposed modernization loan program would unfairly compete with the B&Ls. In his view, the new HOLC modernization loans were merely a way of jump starting the home renovation field. Once the HOLC spent down the initial $12 billion appropriation, the government would abandon the field, leaving the B&Ls to reap the profits of a stimulated market. His charge of unfairness to the B&Ls seems largely to have been a gripe against the entry of so many new financial institutions into what had been an almost exclusive B&L domain, an objection which was also reported in the New York Times.[43] In Congressional hearings on the Modernization Credit Plan, B&L lobbyist Morton Bodfish complained loudly about this possibility. He protested especially against institutions lacking previous experience in the housing market, observing that having installment-lenders make modernization loans was like "getting a blacksmith to repair a watch."[44]

Fahey did bring another B&L complaint to the subcommittee table which seemed somewhat less like sour grapes, especially with respect to the long-term plan of financing new house construction. Because B&Ls were not permitted by law to receive the newly established Federal Deposit Insurance, Fahey argued that they would be at a disadvantage in the newly stimulated credit markets (modernization and mortgage).[45] Since FDIC member banks were more attractive to depositors than non-members in the wake of the Depression's bank failures, these institutions had at their disposal a large pool of funds on which they paid low interest and which they could lend profitably at low interest rates. By contrast, the B&Ls had to pay higher

---

Falls in Frank Capra's *It's A Wonderful Life* (1946).

[42] Fahey's chief advisor at the HOLC would soon resign his post and become general counsel for the United States Building and Loan League, a national lobbying organization. Fahey also insisted that the League's Vice President, Morton Bodfish, attend the NEC subcommittee meetings, much to the dismay of Eccles and Riefler. See Eccles, pp. 153-54.

[43] The Times identified the B&Ls as one of several "element[s] which opposed the idea." See "Loans are Planned for Home Repairs," New York Times, 29 April 1934, X & XI, p. 1.

[44] 1934 House Hearings, p. 253.

[45] The FDIC was established in June 1933 by the passage of the Glass-Steagall Banking Act; it guaranteed bank deposits of up to $5,000.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interest rates on savings to attract depositors and thus were forced to charge higher rates on the money they lent. Though Eccles and Deane proposed a 5% interest cap on the modernization loans, they believed that most lenders would offer consumers even lower rates in a competitive market. Fahey countered that B&Ls would be unable to offer lower rates on modernization loans and that, furthermore, such differences in percentage points would become a critical factor in the long term mortgage market. To level the playing field of interest rates, Fahey urged the establishment of deposit insurance for B&Ls and when, at the President's request, Eccles finally agreed to write this insurance into the bill Fahey and B&Ls gave their support to the MCP.[46] When the bill was taken up in Congressional hearings, lobbyist Bodfish stated that the B&Ls were "enthusiastic" to "fully cooperate in behalf of the repair and modernization program," not only because they stood to benefit as "lending institutions" but "because so many of [their] investors [were] from the building trades."[47] Fahey, for his part, declared that he did "not regard [the MCP] as a sound proposition" and only begrudgingly admitted to the House Banking Committee that if the MCP did indeed "mean the expenditure of a billion dollars" in private capital for modernization and repair than it was "certainly better than a billion dollars paid out in PWA and it distributes just as much and better employment."[48]

While grappling with Fahey over the issue of credit expansion in the late winter of 1934, Eccles and Deane were also reckoning with Walker's discount plan--and realizing its limits. Though discounting building materials and labor was intended to make property improvements cheaper, and hence more attractive to consumers, it had a further economic motivation.

---

[46] Title IV of the National Housing Act established the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation (FSLIC) under the Home Loan Bank Board. Fahey and the B&Ls were less supportive of the Title II mortgage program associated with new construction and refinancing.
[47] 1934 Senate Hearings, p. 244.
[48] 1934 House Hearings, pp. 25-27. If Fahey was less than enthusiastic in his testimony this was likely because his own agency's modernization program, though authorized and underway, had not only been limited to a $200 million appropriation, but also to improving only properties on which the HOLC held the mortgages or had acquired through foreclosure. This HOLC program was enacted on 27 April 1934, Public Law No. 178. See also "300,000,000 in 'New Money' Is Provided for Modernizing and Building of Homes," New York Times, 30 April 1934, p. 23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Discounting was, simultaneously, a preemptive strike against an upsurge in prices for materials and labor that stimulated consumer demand for building modernization might cause, especially after the long stagnation of the Depression.[49] What the framers of the MCP quickly understood, however, was that regardless of how desirable labor and material discounts were, they would be too difficult to regulate or enforce given the disparity of construction costs in different parts of the country and the spotty effectiveness of the NRA's industrial codes which was becoming apparent after the Blue Eagle's first year of operation. While industry might be encouraged to reduce costs gradually over the life of the housing program by establishing building standards and guidelines, particularly for the construction of new homes, this would have little or no effect on the emergency modernization plan.[50] Eccles and Deane determined that cost reductions for property improvements should not be legislated. Instead, they would be left to local oversight committees, which were powerless to set prices, but might persuade local dealers to offer discounts. Excepting this, Eccles and Deane fell back on the free market which they believed could still be relied on to bring construction costs in line, despite its seeming incapacitation during the recent economic upheavals. Given time, the market would adjust itself as volume production of building materials, spurred by modernization demand, led to lower costs and eventually to lower prices for consumers. Their laissez-faire instincts were justified when, within days of the bill's passage, the lumber industry announced that it intended to cut lumber and building material prices by 10% as an act of good faith in the MCP.[51]

---

[49] For a discussion of price policy during the Depression see Gordon, pp. 176-77 & 180-6.

[50] The establishment of building standards and guidelines for new construction did become one of FHA's founding objectives. See FHA, Second Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936), pp. 2, 5-6. For NEC subcommittee statements labor and material cost reductions see Arthur Krock, "In Washington: Labor Cooperation is Part of 'Home Renovising' Plan," New York Times, 15 May 1934, p. 20.

[51] The quick response of the lumber industry, represented by the National Retail Lumber Dealers Association, was not surprising given its endorsement of the MCP in Congressional hearings and its early and ardent support of the NRA. See 1934 Senate Hearings, pp. 405-11 and Gordon, pp. 62-8 & 172. See also "Housing Bill Signed, Lumber Prices Cut," New York Times, 29 June 1934, p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The decision not to attach discount requirements or price regulations to the MCP was not insignificant in the spring of 1934, especially given that, at the same moment, the HOLC had decided to make NRA code compliance a prerequisite for participation in its own modernization program. To receive business resulting from HOLC loans, contractors and dealers would have to be under the Blue Eagle, which would secure them a place on lists of approved firms and enable them to bid for modernization jobs. While the HOLC's stipulation was precisely the kind of intra-agency cooperation the NRA hoped for, and expected to receive, it remained fairly exceptional. Indeed, though the New York Times indicated in early May that the Emergency Council's modernization plan, to be sent to Congress imminently, would make a similar NRA restriction, this never came to pass--a testament to the inherently private nature of the MCP and perhaps to the private sector allegiance of Albert Deane, whose influence it betrays.[52] Though Deane was on temporary leave from General Motors and assigned to the NRA at the time he was working with Eccles on the MCP, this federal position did not necessarily prejudice him in favor of the Blue Eagle. If anything, it may have made Deane skeptical of, if not antagonistic to, industrial codes and their enforcement, especially given the NRA's almost laughable inability to even draft effective codes, much less impose them once drafted.[53] In addition, given the MCP's emergency status and its aim to provide immediate stimulation and recovery, Eccles and Deane obviously wanted to avoid any course of action which might impede the plan's rapid implementation. Because the building trades and material manufacturers crossed so many industrial boundaries, forcing NRA compliance would have been unduly complicated as firms attempted to negotiate a labyrinth of conflicting codes, potentially transforming this economic pump-priming into nothing more than an industrial clog.

---

[52] "Home Rebuilding only Under Code," New York Times, 7 May 1934, p. 5. On the lack of intergovernmental support for the NRA see Gordon, pp. 190-1.

[53] Most of the nation's large industrial concerns, including the Big Three auto makers, had a love/hate relationship with the NRA, desiring regulation, but only when it served their narrow competitive interests. Since participation was essentially voluntary, the leading industrial firms

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

However sagaciously Eccles and Deane may have regarded the MCP's ultimate avoidance of code compliance to reduce material and labor costs (given that the NRA would be invalidated within a year, it was a remarkably prescient move), it was a notable--and noticeable--omission. In fact, when the New York Times reported the introduction of the housing bill in Congress in May, Arthur Krock, then chief of the paper's Washington Bureau, led his column with the exclusion of compliance provisions, noting that this "aspect of the plan," which he described as "vital to the success of the scheme," did not make it into the final draft of the bill, despite earlier announcements to this effect from the administration. Though Krock cited a statement by Winfield Riefler in which the NEC subcommittee secretary confidently asserted that cost adjustments would work themselves out at the local level, the reporter also disclosed that some "sympathetic" New Dealers--"who cannot be assigned to the Right or even to the Centre in economic thought"--had "grave doubts" that such adjustments would occur.[54] During Congressional hearings Eccles and Deane gave evasive answers to questions about the wisdom of severing the MCP from the price controls of industrial codes, preferring instead to emphasize its re-employment and credit expansion aspects.[55] Their reticence was vindicated when the NRA itself gave its unqualified endorsement to the MCP in an open letter from its Durable Goods Industries Committee addressed to the Code Authorities and the durable goods industry at large. Declaring the modernization plan "a constructive measure" and affirming the NEC's contention that it would "bring about immediate stimulation" of the building industry, the committee urged all members of the durable goods industries to contact their Congressional representatives in support of the housing bill.[56] When the chairman of the Durable Goods Committee, Lewis Brown of the Johns-Manville Company, subsequently testified before Congress, he not only reiterated NRA support of the MCP, but even argued that the whole issue of building material

---

were able to exact huge concessions in the codes in exchange for their participation.

[54] Krock, p. 20.

[55] 1934 Senate Hearings, pp. 161-5, 1934 House Hearings, pp. 9-10.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and labor costs was overblown. Claiming that "the cost factor is relatively unimportant as an obstacle to revival," Brown cited recent surveys which found that among the four main reasons for stagnation in the building industry, the "high cost of construction" was the least significant. The most significant was a lack of purchasing power, precisely the void which the MCP and the long-term mortgage guarantee program were designed to fill.[57]

Congressional Debates on Modernization Policy

Since the housing bill, of which these two programs constituted the most important titles, attempted to correct the depression in the building industry almost exclusively through fiscal mechanisms applied to financial institutions, the panel before which Lewis Brown--along with Marriner Eccles, Albert Deane, and John Fahey--appeared was the Senate Banking and Currency Committee, to which the bill had been sent after its introduction on May 14th as S. 3606, "a bill to improve nation wide housing standards, provide employment and stimulate industry..."[58] It was introduced simultaneously in the House as H.R. 9620 and sent to the equivalent committee. By the time the bill reached the House and Senate for committee hearings and floor debates, the draft prepared by the NEC subcommittee had already been thoroughly scrutinized by a succession of Congressmen, including House Majority Leader Joseph Robinson and Senate Banking Chairman Duncan Fletcher, as well as cabinet members and industry representatives, all of whom participated in White House conferences held during the first two weeks of May. Though Eccles, Deane, and Riefler had largely completed their work in late April, Roosevelt delayed sending their bill to Capitol Hill until he was assured of its prompt passage. To this end, he brought potentially opposing factions together in a Presidential parley to air grievances over

---

[56] The full text appears in "Housing Program Endorsed," New York Times, 21 May 1934, p. 33.
[57] 1934 Senate Hearings, pp. 286-90.
[58] Senate Journal, 10 May 1934, p. 409. The rest of the bill's introduction concerned Titles II-IV: "to improve conditions with respect to home mortgage financing, to prevent speculative excesses in new mortgage investment, and to eliminate the necessity for costly second mortgage financing, by creating a system of mutual mortgage insurance and by making provision for the organization of additional institutions to handle home financing; to promote thrift and protect savings; to amend the Federal Home Loan Bank Act; to amend the Federal Reserve Act."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the loan insurance and mortgage guarantees programs, hoping to diffuse any conflicts which might stall the bill and prevent its enactment before the end of the current Congressional session.[59] Despite Roosevelt's precautionary arbitration, the bill still faced serious hurdles once the hearings began, on May 16th in the Senate and May 18th in the House, though most of these concerned Title II, the long-term mortgage program, and are thus beyond the scope of the present study. Nonetheless, according to Marriner Eccles's recollection, though the Title I short-term modernization credit plan "had fairly clear sailing" through the Banking Committees, it still had to weather at least a few legislative squalls.[60]

At issue in the debates over Title I were four main points of contention: the measure's emergency character, the encouragement of consumer debt inherent in the plan, its property eligibility requirements, and, of course, its cost to the government. Of these, the latter two were dealt with expeditiously. Both Banking Committees were quickly satisfied that the government's potential maximum expenditure, consisting of the $200 million loan insurance fund plus the operating costs of the new agency and the nationwide modernization campaign--estimates of which were unspecified--was money well-spent given the amount of private capital it could put into circulation.[61] Concerning qualified properties, though several committee members were confused that provisions for commercial or business properties were included in a housing bill, most accepted Eccles's explanation that in order to induce as much modernization and repair work as possible the MCP should be extended to every type of real estate: "If a man with a small store building or a garage or an apartment house was willing to make repairs up to $2,000 that money loaned and spent would serve just as useful a purpose as the money spent on a home."

---

[59] "Loans are Planned for Home Repairs," New York Times, 29 April 1934, X & XI, p. 1. "Housing Guaranty to be $200,000,000," New York Times, 4 May 1934, p. 40.
[60] Eccles, p. 154. Senate hearings were held May 16-24. House hearings were held May 18-June 4.
[61] See 1934 Senate Hearings, pp. 158-162.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Beyond this, Eccles went so far as to predict that "a very substantial amount of [modernization] funds would be used toward improving property other than homes."[62]

Regarding the first two points, while the text of Title I seemed to provide satisfactory explanations, once the Banking Committees began consideration of the bill, each was subject to careful scrutiny and occasional misinterpretation, depending on the political stripe of the scrutinizer. Regardless of party alliance, however, no member of either Banking Committee seemed to doubt the dire necessity of Title I's stated objective of providing employment and stimulating industry. Nonetheless, throughout both the House and Senate hearings a substantial amount of time was devoted to this issue, as witness after witness was called upon to testify to the severity of the building industry depression and its tremendous impact on national recovery. The roster included a preponderance of representatives from trade organizations like the National Lumber Manufacturers' Association, the Brick Manufacturers' Association, the Federation of Construction Industries, and the National Association of Real Estate Boards, as well as worker and professional groups like the American Federation of Labor, and the AIA.[63]

Two AIA representatives appeared before the Senate Committee and testified in support of the bill. The first was AIA President Ernest J. Russell, a residential architect in independent practice in St. Louis who had been active in the profession for a number years, serving as an officer of the AIA and the Construction League, a broad-based industry trade group. In an opening statement in which he claimed to "express the views of architects generally...from all over the country," Russell declared that architects, himself included "are absolutely on our uppers so far as present conditions are concerned and need some sort of relief." The profession was so "desperate" that architects were engaged "in practically every occupation except that of architecture"--from gas station attendant to golf course security guard. (Indeed, the situation was

---

[62] 1934 House Hearings, p. 174 and 1934 Senate Hearings, p. 159.

[63] The 1920s and 1930s were decades of great associational expansion, due first to the enforcement of antitrust laws and then to the NRA. Trade groups emerged to represent all

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

so bad that the AIA had canceled its annual convention in 1933 to avoid the expense to its members.) Russell believed that a government-initiated "priming of the pump" through the modernization loan insurance program would be "the most effective [means of] helping us to go along and thus help the whole country." Since, Russell continued, "there is practically nothing doing" in the repair and renovation of home and business properties, and hadn't been, according to his estimates, for four years, the MCP would enable the building industry to make up the slack, providing increased employment, more employment, in fact, than under normal conditions.[64] As Russell was appearing before the Senate Committee in mid-May, the AIA membership, at its 66th annual convention, was passing a three-part resolution in support of Title I in which they first, endorsed the pending bill; second, recorded their "willingness to cooperate in the formulation of the [modernization] program" once the bill became law; and third, appointed a special committee to deal with building finance in relation to the National Housing Act.[65]

The other AIA representative to testify was Stephen Vorhees, a partner in the firm of Vorhees, Gmelin, & Walker, best know for exuberant art deco brick piles like the New York Telephone (1923-6) and Western Union Buildings (1928-30). In addition to serving as an AIA board member, Vorhees was also Chairman of the Construction Code Authority of the Durable Goods Industries Committee of the NRA, which was favorably disposed to the bill. In his testimony he likewise offered his support, calling Titles I and II together "a most valuable contribution to recovery," especially for durable goods once the industry was marshaled by renewed construction. In addressing the need for Title I in particular, and the business and employment it would generate, Vorhees relied on personal experience, calling attention to "a

---

manner of business and industrial concerns. See Gordon, pp. 128-65.

[64] 1934 Senate Hearings, pp. 137-139. To be "on one's uppers": wearing shoes with worn-out soles; impoverished, destitute.

[65] "Convention Resolutions," Octagon 6 (May 1934), p. 31. During the Senate hearings Russell was asked if the AIA had passed such a resolution; he said it was pending and promised to send

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

great deterioration" and "a lack of upkeep" which required his clients of the past few years to "spend considerable sums of money to bring properties back to proper condition"--not including additional sums to be spent specifically on modernizing, or updating, obsolete fixtures and facilities. This was the situation not only with single-family houses but also, Vorhees claimed, with apartment houses, hotels, and office buildings in both the cities and the suburbs. Vorhees was clearly making the case for extending Title I to include commercial as well as residential properties. He concluded his testimony with an analogy between buildings and cars that was soon to become a standard trope in the modernization rhetoric which developed as part of the national campaign soon after the passage of the National Housing Act. In explaining the need for modernizing obsolete buildings, Vorhees observed that while the "carry-all" in his barn was "perfectly good to get to people uptown...no one under the sun would anticipate using [it]" in 1934. The same was true of a building: "people will not pay reasonable rent for a hot-air heating plant, and they do not like coal." Were the financial mechanism of the MCP made available, Vorhees concluded, such "ancient" systems could be easily replaced--to the ultimate benefit of the renter, the property owner, the building tradesmen, and the banker.[66]

In addition to industry spokespeople like Russell and Vorhees, a number of individuals in building and related industries not representing any group came before the committees to give first-person accounts of their fields' troubled state, including bankers, real estate brokers, lumber dealers, contractors, and architects. Of all the varied building occupations--masons, bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers, excavators, etc.--only white-collar practitioners were invited to give testimony; Roosevelt's *Forgotten Men*--the tradesmen and day laborers who felt the Depression most acutely--were not necessarily unremembered in the chambers of the Banking Committee, they were just unheard. In their stead, however, appeared such New Deal heavy-hitters as FERA chief Harry Hopkins and, as already noted, Labor Secretary Frances Perkins, who would testify

---

it to the Committee if such a resolution was adopted. 1934 Senate Hearings, p. 137.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

convincingly on their behalf. Hopkins, then directing the country's principal relief program, was well qualified to address the issue, which, as the first House witness, he did with typical verbal directness, stating and restating the importance of putting building tradesmen back to work:

> Now, there are a group of people in every city of America, skilled men, the finest workers in America, who are on the relief rolls in much larger numbers and percentages than are represented in any other single group in America. I know of no city in the United States—no city in the United States—where not less than one-third of the building trades workers are not now on the relief rolls, and a far larger number are still unemployed Now, a purpose of this bill, a fundamental purpose of this bill, is an effort to get these people back to work.

When Hopkins added that repair and modernization, especially of houses, represented the "socially useful things that will be done" as a result of the proposed bill, it sounded like an afterthought, with the means justifying the ends in what was becoming the standard Depression-era interpretation of building modernization.[67]

If Frances Perkins's testimony began as dry recitation of facts and figures which supported Hopkins's oratory, it soon became an eloquent defense of Title I, especially when the Labor Secretary was interrogated by the sometimes hostile Republican members of the committees who were far more concerned than the Democrats with the four points mentioned above. Republicans first questioned Title I's short-term provision, which stipulated that the program of federal insurance of modernization loans would have an 18-month life, with the most intense period of loan activity (and modernization work) coming in the fall of 1934, as a nationwide campaign of property improvement was launched. Intended as a temporary, emergency measure to bring relief through employment with minimum delay, Title I would, its framers believed, have served its purpose by January 1936 when it was scheduled to expire. At this point, the long-term mortgage program would be operational and responsibility for providing

---

[66] 1934 Senate Hearings, p. 181-3.
[67] 1934 House Hearings, p. 2. Schlesinger, p. 352: "His [Hopkins'] public image was of a quick, caustic, informal figure."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

building industry employment would shift to new (residential) construction. As housing starts rose, the theory went, employment would exceed the levels it had reached under the modernization program, eventually reaching pre-crash highs. This coupling of short-term and long-term employment measures, a typical New Deal contrivance of immediate relief, sustained recovery, and permanent reform in a single piece of legislation, did not in itself present a problem to committee members.[68] Rather, they questioned the efficacy of the employment spike modernization activity would precipitate–what Rep. Oliver Cross of Texas called a "temporary inflation of building"–since it would surely be followed by a "drop-back" or complete cessation once government intervention in private credit markets ended, leaving flattened and then depressed employment levels in its wake. Secretary Perkins responded that the modernization program's "deliberate stimulation" was necessary for "substantial labor recovery." While she admitted that there might be a "drop in building operations afterward," she predicted that if the government's "scientific measurements" and "foresight" were correct, the program would also engender a "certain degree of real recovery" leading eventually to "our normal industrial balance and our normal industrial turnover."[69] In terms of building industry employment, then, the emergency would give way to normality.

Rep. Robert Luce, a Republican from Massachusetts, had no quarrel with the necessity of stimulating industry and employment, nor did he question the ability of modernization activity to accomplish this revival. What concerned Luce was the mechanism by which this activity would be spurred, namely the encouragement of consumer debt through installment-buying, which he saw as the most disturbing, "anxiety"-producing provision of the bill under consideration. Rep. Cross concurred once the issue was raised, calling consumer debt the "greatest demon of punishment in the world" and "an incentive to trouble and revolution." What

[68] Such legislative couplings could be problematic, since solutions to the immediate crisis of the Depression often came into irreconcilable conflict with solutions to systemic problems, as the inconsistencies of the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act made clear.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

both men recognized, and found disturbing, was that for the stimulus plan to function properly, property owners--hundreds of thousands of property owners--had to be encouraged to take out modernization loans to pay for repairs and upgrades (and labor and supplies) which they had long-delayed for lack of cash. NEC director Frank Walker had already acknowledged that a nationwide campaign would be implemented "to persuade people to take advantage of this plan," but he had only managed to weakly defend the endeavor against charges that it amounted to little more than a "buy now" sales plan.[70] Thus, to Rep. Luce and others it was obvious that the only way to achieve this persuasion would be through what he rightly called "high-pressure methods of salesmanship" [see Chapter 3] that just might lead to "abuse of the system"--meaning that consumers would take on debt they could not afford. Such abuse, had, in Luce's opinion and in the opinion of numerous conservative economists, "contributed greatly to the smash of five years ago." Luce pointedly asked Perkins whether she regarded "add[ing] the Government impulse to stimulate still further the contracting of debts in order to gratify individual desires" as "a social desideratum."[71] The Secretary refused to answer either yes or no though she could have deflated Luce's argument easily enough by pointing out that the purchase of a new roof or a hot water heater hardly constituted the gratification of individual desires. Instead Perkins merely reiterated an oppositional economic belief, one held by New Dealers generally, that increased consumption on a vast scale was essential to end the Depression and that consumer debt was an inevitable, necessary evil:

> It is almost inconceivable that a means large enough to sustain [consumption] should develop in general without some provision for deferred payments for paying the price of an article which is well within the means of a family but not within its actual cash account on a given week or a given month.[72]

---

[69] 1934 House Hearings, pp. 69-70.
[70] 1934 Senate Hearings, p. 24-5.
[71] 1934 House Hearings, p. 71-5. According to John Kenneth Galbraith, the cause and effect relationship between easy credit and crash is one of the great myths of the Depression. See Galbraith, The Great Crash, 1929 (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1988), p. 169.
[72] 1934 House Hearings, pp. 71-2. In the New Deal scenario, underconsumption had caused the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Perkins was careful, however, to distinguish between thoughtful deferred payments for "permanent and durable goods" like building supplies and equipment and impulse installment buying for consumables like clothes. (Perkins had no way of knowing that these distinctions would soon be deliberately collapsed by modernization promoters. See Chapter 6.) For Congressmen troubled by the accumulation of consumer debt which the program would clearly promote such distinctions were irrelevant, especially after it came out during the hearings that the finance corporations, personal credit agencies, and miscellaneous quasi-banking institutions which had contributed to the rapid expansion of consumer credit--and debt--in the 1920s would be eligible for insurance under the MCP.[73]

The high-profile presence of General Motor's Albert Deane, as the MCP's chief architect, and Johns-Manville's Lewis Brown, as a prominent supporter, did nothing to calm conservatives' fears that the program would stimulate the building industry and get tradesmen off relief rolls squarely on the backs of middle-class consumers who could ill-afford the expense, especially at the 15% to 25% interest rates repeatedly mentioned in Congressional hearings.[74] These figures, which represented a gross inflation of the 5% interest cap Eccles and Deane originally proposed for the MCP, were floated in the hearings because the lower rate was never written into the bill sent to Congress. Instead, the allowable rate for modernization loans was left to the discretion of the Federal Housing Administrator and fixed in the rules and regulations established to carry out the provisions of Title I after it was enacted. As a result, potential modernization loan interest rates were subject to intense speculation throughout the hearings.

Depression and was also causing its prolongation and severity; hence the corollary belief that increased consumption would bring the crisis to an end. Today historians question the economic validity of the consumption theory, but it drove much of the recovery effort of the 1930s, as a business trend and public policy. See Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday (1931; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 285. See also Stanley Lebergott, Consumer Expenditures: New Measures & Old Motives (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 9-21.

[73] 1934 Senate Hearings, pp. 15, 24-25. For a useful summary of the expansion of consumer credit see William Leach, Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture (New York: Pantheon, 1993), pp. 298-302.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Though Albert Deane confidently claimed to the Senate Committee that the MCP represented "the finest type of credit in the country"--implying low-cost and consumer friendliness--his comparison between time-payment purchases of refrigerators and cars, which he managed for General Motors, and the proposed scheme for financing building repairs was hardly comforting, particularly when he observed that federal insurance was a security stand-in for "repossessed chattel."[75] Once Lewis Brown's statement was entered into the Senate record, its veracity with regard to Johns-Manville's Million Dollar Fund was promptly called into question by both committees. At issue again were the actual interest rates and finance charges associated with Johns-Manville's home improvement loans, which Brown claimed were only 12%, but which other claimed were as high as 22% (15% was a normal rate for this type of credit).[76]

The accuracy of Brown's figure was disputed by the consumer advocates who appeared before the Banking Committees and whose statements gave credence to Congressional anxiety over the participation of the credit finance corporations lobbying so eagerly for the passage of Title I. Both Arthur Gross, an expert on personal credit who identified the American consumer as "the real forgotten man," and Marvin Farrington, of the Washington-based Home Owners' Protective Enterprise (HOPE), testified that however meritorious the stated goals of the MCP, these would prove fiscally--and morally--damaging if achieved by further encumbering property owner/consumers with exorbitant interest rates on modernization loans.[77] They argued that if past lending practices were any indication, even the most reputable credit finance corporation could be expected to charge inflated rates. For, despite claims made by Eccles and others that competition would drive down interest rates for modernization loans, the invisible hand had no grip on this particular segment of the credit market in which purchasing and financing were effectively the same. When they were separate, a property owner interested in modernization

---

[74] 1934 House Hearings, pp. 345-7.
[75] 1934 Senate Hearings, p. 30.
[76] 1934 Senate Hearings, p. 293.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

could shop around to see which bank or building and loan association was offering the best terms; then, with modernization funds in hand the property owner could purchase labor or supplies from any contractor or dealer he or she chose. By contrast, when a single company like Johns-Manville handled the whole modernization transaction--as many believed would be the case under the MCP since such companies were already set up for installment lending and appeared to simplify the loan process for consumers--there was no opportunity for comparison shopping and no protection for the consumer from high interest rates. Farrington and other HOPE representatives who appeared before the committees demanded that consumers be afforded such protection by amending the bill with specific language to fix the interest rate and spell out all associated fees which, they argued, even in the proposal (as opposed to the bill) actually amounted to 11% and not the 5% Eccles and Deane claimed.[78] The debates over consumer credit were never fully resolved before the House and Senate Banking Committees concluded hearings on the National Housing Act on June 4th and May 24th respectively, but it was clear that the Achilles' heel of the Modernization Credit Plan had been discovered. Charges of irresponsible consumer debt--accrued, according to Congressional critics, through installment purchases foisted on unsuspecting property owners by unscrupulous salesmen--would plague the MCP throughout its existence, leveled by the same Senators and Representatives of the same committees each time Title I came up for renewal and amendation.

With the hearings concluded, the House and Senate Banking Committees recommended the bill to Congress in early June. Though the Democratic majority and Republican minority of both houses reported favorably on Title I as "a short-term home repair and renovation campaign" intended to "attach [sic] the problem of unemployment in the construction industries and in the building trades," partisan wrangling continued over Title II.[79] As the bill moved back and forth

---

[77] 1934 Senate Hearings, p. 185 and 1934 House Hearings, p. 345.
[78] 1934 House Hearings, pp. 320 & 347. 1934 Senate Hearings, p. 384.
[79] "National Housing Act, Minority Report," House Reports, 2nd Session of the 73rd Congress, III

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

between committee conferences and floor debate, Title I occasionally got caught in the crossfire, notably in a lengthy speech delivered by Rep. William Sirovich, a New York Democrat representing Manhattan, who denounced the modernization program as an "expedient"--a poor slum clearance substitute which "only plasters the sore and does not heal it."[80] Other objections focused, once again, on the eligibility of business properties under Title I, including a lengthy exchange to determine whether small buildings containing street-level stores and rear or upper level dwellings should properly be considered home or business properties.[81] As the debate raged on, it began to seem less and less likely that the National Housing Act would come to a vote before Congress adjourned on June 30th. Thus, a concerned President Roosevelt sent a message to Congress urging immediate passage of this "must" legislation, which was crucial, he claimed, not only to national recovery and reconstruction, but to "making it possible for American families to live as Americans should"--in "decent homes" and "engaged in productive work."[82] Whether it was the President's rousing words or simply fading support for a Republican filibuster, the House finally voted on June 13th, passing the bill by a margin of 176 to 19. Three days later, after a last-minute appeal by Duncan Fletcher of Florida, Chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, in which he declared that the legislation "will prove a major factor in economic readjustment in the United States," the Senate passed the bill with a vote of 71 to 12.[83] Congress adjourned the next day. On Thursday, June 28th 1934 President Roosevelt signed the National Housing Act into law.

Title I Enacted & Amended

(Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), p. 1.

[80] Congressional Record 78 (part 10, 12 June 1934), p. 11188.

[81] Congressional Record 78 (part 10, 13 June 1934), p. 11366. While this determination was irrelevant to Title I it did have a bearing on Title II. Because of unclear classifications, owners of such buildings had been unable to get mortgage refinancing from the HOLC.

[82] Congressional Record 78 (part 10, 8 June 1934), p. 10770.

[83] Congressional Record 78 (part 11, 15 June 1934), 11973.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

As enacted, Title I of the National Housing Act, identified as "Housing Renovation and Modernization" consisted of five sections.[84] Section 1 created the Federal Housing Administration and charged it with carrying out the act's other provisions under the supervision of a single Administrator, a position to be shortly filled by James Moffet, a prominent--and conservative--executive at the Standard Oil Company who was also a close friend of Roosevelt's. Within the alphabet soup of the New Deal bureaucracy, the FHA was one of several agencies active in the housing field by mid-1934. Unlike the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration, the FHA's main housing rival, the agency established in Section 1 was *not* a direct builder and engaged in no actual construction.[85] Instead the FHA's activities were limited to housing *finance* or more properly, given the scope of Title I, real property finance, with an emphasis placed on what the New York Times called the agency's "strictly business administration," as stipulated by the NHA itself and underscored by the appointment of businessman Moffet.[86]

It was in Section 2 of Title I, "Insurance of Financial Institutions," that the FHA was empowered to move beyond the housing field to insure loans made for "financing alterations, repairs, and improvements upon real property"--with the type, be it residential, commercial, or business, left purposely unspecified in the language of the law.[87] This section, which enabled the

---

[84] See National Housing Act as Amended (Washington, DC: GPO, 1938), pp. 1-5. Unless otherwise noted all NHA citations and quotations refer to this document.

[85] For housing activists in the 1930s the FHA's non-involvement in direct building was one of the agency's most controversial aspects. On early opposition to the FHA see Radford, pp. 177-98.

[86] "Moffet Named Housing Chief," New York Times, 1 July 1934, p. 21.

[87] Sections 3-5 supported the provisions of Sections 1-2. Sections 3, "Loans to Financial Institutions," authorized the FHA to make direct loans to institutions it approved for modernization insurance. Under this section the FHA was able to advance funds amounting to the full face value of all individual modernization loans made by an institution under Section 2. Making loans to cover loans was not unprecedented, both the RFC and the HOLC engaged in this practice, but these FHA loans were not meant to forestall insolvency or protect past obligations. Rather, they were essentially seed money, representing an investment in the future of a stimulated credit market with the modernization loans offered as security. These institutional loans would prove short-lived, as Section 3 was repealed in the amendments of 1936. It was just as well: the FHA liked to claim that modernization loans were not government money, which was technically untrue if an institution had received a loan to cover the modernization funds they advanced. Once these loans were eliminated, the FHA could makes its claims for private capital without fear of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Modernization Credit Plan, was the blood and guts of Title I. Because of its critical importance to the Title's successful operation, Section 2 was subject to the continual probing and cutting of legislators who attempted, in the amendments of the coming years, to make the MCP both more responsive to the nation's economic needs and less liable to potential abuse. These subsequent amendments to Section 2, all of which had a significant impact on the nationwide modernization campaign as it developed in 1934 and 1935, deserve detailed analysis. In essence, this section permitted individual modernization loans of up to $2000, with federal insurance capped at 20% of the total of modernization funds advanced by an institution. These requirements would remain in effect until January 1st 1936, giving the MCP an initial eighteen month life span to carry out its emergency work of building industry and economic stimulation.

Once Administrator Moffet delivered the FHA's first annual report to Congress in January 1935 it became obvious that the government's emergency strategy was working. Through the mechanism of modernization credit, property owners whose buildings were in "disrepair" and "out-of-date" because of a lack of capital had been successfully brought together with unemployed building tradesmen to "bring about a revival of work after several years of lowered activity." After five months of operation, the insurance program had encouraged private financial institutions to make nearly 73,000 modernization loans worth over $30 million [Fig. 8]. The average loan was $419 with the majority taken out by individual homeowners. The program had also, according to FHA estimates, generated an additional $200 million worth of non-loan modernization work and, most importantly, at least in terms of Title I's stated goals, it had furnished employment for 750,000 building workers [Fig. 9]. In its report the FHA also announced that 2500 (unspecified) industrial concerns had pledged to spend a total of $490

---

prevarication. For the year during which the FHA did make institutional loans as part of Title I, the necessary advances were authorized by Section 4, "Allocation of Funds," which enabled the FHA to access the resources of the RFC to meet its obligations. This section also allowed the FHA to draw funds to cover up to $200 million worth of losses sustained by participating financial institutions on properly-insured modernization loans. Section 5, the last of the original Title,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

million to modernize their physical plants during 1935.[88] Such pledges, which marked a continuation of the 1932-33 industrial modernization drive of Hoover's Committee on Industrial Rehabilitation, were obviously beyond the scope of the MCP and its $2,000 loans. But shortly after these figures were released, Congress acted at the request of the FHA to liberalize the MCP, broadening its scope to allow the modernization of, among other types of buildings, factories, hotels, apartment houses, and department stores whose renovations under the insurance program as then constituted had been essentially precluded by the low loan limit.

Thus, in late January 1935 Rep. John Dingell of Michigan introduced a bill (H.R. 4687) to amend Section 2 of Title I to allow the insurance of loans up to $25,000 for commercial properties. It was sent to the Banking Committee for consideration and was eventually re-introduced in late February, attached to a bill (H.R. 6021) designed "to provide added Home Mortgage Relief." The Banking Committee, about to commence hearings on the controversial and--at 20,000 words--lengthy Banking Act of 1935, which, like the NHA was also from the pen of Marriner Eccles, had no desire to protract consideration of the Title I amendments and turned H.R. 6021 around in a single day, reporting it favorably to the whole House on February 21st.[89] Surprisingly, given that the amendment to Title I was only a small portion of the entire bill, much of the floor debate which took place prior to the House vote on March 12th concerned this provision, in particular an amendment to the proposed amendment which would raise the loan limit to $50,000--the cap preferred by the FHA which hoped to raise the loan average from $400 to $10,000 as larger institutions participated in the program.[90] Opposition to the increase was voiced, interestingly, by Republican minority members of the Banking Committee, especially Frank Hancock of North Carolina, who argued that allowing loans of even $25,000--much less $50,000--distorted the aims of

---

required the Administrator to make an annual report to Congress on all agency activities.

[88] First Annual Report, pp.1-3.

[89] U.S. House of Representatives, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Report No. 202 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935).

[90] National Housing Act as Amended and Provisions of Other Laws Pertaining to the FHA

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

what was intended as "a 'better housing' proposition." The interests of housing had, of course, motivated fixing the original loan limit at $2,000--a figure which represented about 30% of the amount it would ideally, or eventually, cost to build a new house with the FHA financing provided by Title II. In this context, $2,000 emerges as a generous, almost stellar amount, permitting individual homeowners to undertake extensive renovations or additions. In the view of Hancock and his colleagues, the original motivation to meet the needs of "home owners of moderate means" was utterly forgotten in the present amendment which they believed instead represented "a government hand-out" to banks, blatant "favoritism" to ten un-named American manufacturing companies, and clear partiality to "big city" property owners, who now "get 50,000 bucks at a whack."[91]

The Democrats, led by John O'Connor of Manhattan, countered that "fifty thousand dollars would not even touch repairs to any large apartment hotel in New York City." They argued, in fact, that the higher insured loan allowance would specifically benefit small town businesses, whose owners would be able to secure large loans for property improvement from banks which had previously considered them too great a risk. Furthermore, since it was estimated that less than 5% of modernization loans made in the first five months of the MCP went for work on such commercial properties, small businesses were seen as a largely untapped market.[92] But not just business owners stood to gain materially from the Title I amendment before the House. As O'Connor acknowledged, working-class city dwellers, most of whom were renters in multiple-family dwellings, would also benefit, and not in the manner implied by the Republicans:

> There are many little tenement houses, cold water tenements...The Government has not done anything for such homes...A loan, 20% of which is guaranteed by the Government, would turn a cold-water railroad flat into a livable place; the owner could put in steam heat, he could put in toilets, he could put

---

(Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 2.
[91] Congressional Record 79 (12 March 1935), pp. 3471-72.
[92] "50,000 Modernization Loan Bill Signed by President," Building Modernization, June 1935, p. 15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> in bathtubs for the benefit of those who make such places their homes.[93]

Thus satisfied that the amendment served the interests of the majority of Americans, the House agreed to a higher loan limit to encourage the modernization of commercial properties and multi-family dwellings. It passed the amendment with a vote of 401 to 2 with 29 abstentions and sent the bill on to the Senate.

The Senate, which had introduced its own version of the bill (S. 1771) in early February, eventually agreed to all of the Title I amendments submitted by the House, and passed the bill on April 11th.[94] But this occurred only after a Subcommittee of the Senate Banking Committee held a week of hearings during which, once again, a parade of trade association representatives, along with officials from the FHA, passed through the committee room testifying in support of the liberalized regulations. FHA head James Moffett stated merely that his agency was "anxious" for the loan increase and the widening of the modernization market to commercial buildings, leaving ardent persuasion to the industry representatives.[95] The latest round of lobbyists included the Associated General Contractors of America, the National Limestone Industry Associated, the NAREB, and the Construction League of the United States. The Construction League, a self-described association of associations, represented 20 national organizations, such as the AIA, the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Producers' Council, and over 100,000 building industry employers. Thus, when the League offered its "earnest support" for the amendment to raise the loan limit to $50,000, it spoke for a substantial portion of the industry as a whole which, having seen the positive results of $2,000 loans, now wanted the government to generate even more modernization business. In contrast, the testimony of Edward Harding, Director of the Associated General Contractors, though

---

[93] Congressional Record 79 (12 March 1935), p. 3472.
[94] See U.S. Senate, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Report No. 438 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935).
[95] U.S. Senate, 74th Congress, 1st Session, Home Owners' Loan and National Housing Act: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 62.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

acknowledging how "eagerly" American contractors bid on even the smallest renovation jobs in the hopes of becoming once more "busily engaged," focused on the benefits to be accrued by commercial enterprises which could undertake large-scale modernizations if the amendment passed. Voicing many sentiments that would soon become a part of standard modernization rhetoric, Harding stated that modernization would raise personnel morale, increase sales, and protect investments.[96]

A number of witnesses from New York City appeared before the Senate Subcommittee during the hearings to present the special needs of the nation's large urban areas. These included Manhattan's Rep. O'Connor who argued, as he had earlier on the House floor, that in New York a $2,000 loan had "no effect on large tenements and apartments"--buildings which, he continued in an eloquent defense of the urban housing stock, "are just as much the homes of our people as the little bungalow out in the rural section."[97] Charles Sander of the Council of Real Estate Associations dispensed with emotional pleading and presented New York as a largely untapped modernization market. He noted, for example, that the city's huge stock of multiple dwellings in both slum and stable areas--the kind of buildings which required renovations costing in excess of $2,000--had a value of $200 million as compared to only $100 million worth of small single-family houses in the city. According to Sanders, the type of modernization made possible by a higher loan limit (heating, plumbing, electricity) would benefit everyone: the landlord who would increase occupancy and/or rents in his renovated building; the tenant who would enjoy the modern conveniences of a renovated apartment and be willing to pay more for them; the municipality which would increase its tax base once delinquent properties were turned into profitable ones; and of course, the banks which would significantly increase the dollar amount of their modernization loan business.[98]

---

[96] 1935 Senate Hearings, pp. 54 & 57.
[97] 1935 Senate Hearings, p. 113.
[98] 1935 Senate Hearings, pp. 114-15. Sanders also presented detailed plans, along with before and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Once the hearings concluded, the Senate called for a joint conference committee to work out remaining legislative differences with the House over S. 1771 and H.R. 6021. When President Roosevelt signed the bill two months later on May 28th 1935, Title I of the National Housing Act had been amended in five important ways. First, it allowed the $50,000 loan limit; second, it stipulated the exclusive application of loans up to $50,000 to "apartment or multi-family houses, hotels, office, business, or other commercial buildings, hospitals, orphanages, colleges, schools, churches, or manufacturing or industrial plants"; third, it eased the property owner restriction to allow tenants or lessees to secure modernization loans for residential or commercial properties; fourth, it allowed a liberal interpretation of "improvements on real property" (so as not to restrict new construction in the form of garages and additions) and also allowed conversion of existing buildings from residential to commercial, vice versa, or to a combination of both; and fifth, it extend Title I by an additional three months, until April 1st 1936, so the MCP would not expire when Congress was out of session.[99] These amendments, which became Public Law 486 in June of 1935, gave new life to the federal modernization program as it entered its second year, further encouraging the nationwide publicity campaign for "Better Housing" and, most important to the present study, inducing the FHA to launch an off-shoot campaign to "Modernize Main Street," directed at owners and renters of commercial properties (see Chapter 5). However much Public Law 486 contributed to the continued success of the MCP--in terms of a stimulated building industry and economy--the liberalizing amendments it contained represented the first and last Depression-era expansion of Title I. All subsequent amendments were restrictive in nature.

---

after photographs, for a series of demonstration projects his group had undertaken: modernization schemes in which formerly run-down tenements were transformed into "modern, presentable, homelike houses" with $6,000 investments in renovation work consisting of the installation of new plumbing, private bathrooms, hot water, steam heat, and electrical fixtures. Even before the Subcommittee hearings these four potential benefits were stated publicly by diverse factions in the New York real estate and building industries, including local trade boards, construction companies and property management agencies. See "Sees Bronx Factory Aid," New York Times, 14 March 1935, p. 40. "Urges Higher Loan for Home Repairs" and "Renovating Work Paid," New York Times, 17 February 1935, IX & X, p. 3.

[99] National Housing Act as Amended, p. 2. See also 1935 Senate Hearings, pp. 63-64 for a

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

More Amendments: From Depression to War

In anticipation of the April expiration of Title I, Congress turned its attention to the modernization program in early March 1936. This time hearings, floor debates, conferences, and votes took less than a month: the Senate passed the bill (S. 4212) on March 30th; the House houses passed it (H.R.11689) the next day; the President signed it on April 4th. In the nearly twelve months since its expansion of 1935 the MCP had proven "an increasingly powerful stimulus to industry" and an even greater fiscal success--one which, according to the FHA's new administrator Stewart McDonald, "gave new heart to the whole recovery movement by unlocking sources of credit in practically every city, town, and county...generating total modernization work estimated at $1.5 billion."[100] Given that Congress generally regarded this record of accomplishment as impressive, the newest amendments to Title I sought not so much to curtail the MCP but rather to fine-tune its operation. First, Title I was extended for another year with a definite expiration date of April 1, 1937. While this further prolongation perhaps indicated that the modernization program was no longer regarded strictly as an emergency measure it was still, at least within the FHA itself, viewed as temporary. During hearings before the House and Senate Banking Committees, Administrator McDonald likened the current Title I extension to "a cane" which "a patient who was ill a long time"--the building industry--might use until he could get around without any added support. Once the patient was well, the cane, like the MCP, could be discarded. Metaphors aside, McDonald also candidly admitted that the extension was due in no small part to "a great deal of pressure from the lumber interests and other commercial interests."[101]

---

detailed explanation of point four.

[100] This figure includes modernization work paid for in cash as well as credit. The total for insured modernization loans by March 1936 was approximately $325 million. Federal Housing Administration Second Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936), p. v. Achievements of the Federal Housing Administration (Washington: GPO, 1936), pp. 1-2.

[101] U.S. House of Representatives, 74th Congress, 2nd Session, Extending Title I of the National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936), p. 17 and U.S. Senate, Amendment of National Housing Act: Hearing Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936), p. 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Having extended the program's life, Congress next restricted its operation, limiting *who* could borrow and *how* the borrowed funds were spent.[102] Eligibility requirements were tightened to exclude short-term or monthly renters who were considered unpredictable and difficult to track, especially in economically uncertain times when they might be expected to vacate a home or business without notice. Instead, only commercial or residential tenants holding long-term leases, set to expire not less than six months beyond the maturity of credit, would qualify for modernization loans.[103] The final two amendments applied only to loans of $2,000 or less secured for residential improvements. Both served to clarify or explicate the exact nature of residential improvements, specifically proscribing the use of federally-insured modernization funds for new construction and certain types of household equipment. As emerged in the Banking Committee hearings, during the first two years of the MCP an undisclosed, but supposedly significant amount of modernization money had been used to build entirely new structures such as garages, equipment sheds, even small cottages or bungalows. These were not additions, but totally detached buildings, often erected on empty, unimproved lots as the principal structure, even the principal residence.[104] According to Frank Carnahan of the National Retail Lumber Dealers Association, members of his organization were taking full advantage of the National Housing Act to build such small houses,

---

[102] Two other amendments did not affect the operation of Title I. Section 3, which enabled the FHA to advance funds to banks to cover their modernization loans, was repealed because, as explained on the Senate floor it was rendered obsolete by the proper functioning of the free market and, in addition, only two institutions had borrowed funds under this section (Congressional Record, Senate 80 (part 3, 9 March 1936), p. 3413). Federal insurance was cut in half, reducing the coverage rate for losses to 10% of the total amount of an institution's modernization loans. Experience in the first two years of the MCP had shown that losses were running at only .5% of total loans insured, with projections for losses over the life of the program put at 3% or 4%. These rates made the original 20% seem an excessive safeguard and an unnecessary precaution. However, the FHA was not willing to risk too low an insurance rate, arguing that 10% was still required, and justified, as "an encouragement" to financial institutions to continue their modernization business (1936 House Hearings, p. 20). Accompanying the lowered insurance rate was a corollary reduction in the government's maximum liability which was now capped at $100 million.

[103] Thomas G. Grace, the FHA's New York State Director, explained the new renter provision in a statement issued shortly after passage of the 1936 amendments. See "Explains Changes under Housing Act," New York Times, 12 April 1936, XI, p. 1.

[104] In most parts of the country in the mid-1930s $2,000 would purchase little more than a one-story, one or two room dwelling, a decent enough house perhaps, given how bad much of the housing stock was, but hardly representing that elevation of American living standards which Roosevelt

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

citing several examples of housing developments with 50 or more units, each built for under $2000.[105] However, by their own admission, they were using Title I to avoid the stricter requirements of Title II which specified building standards regarding construction methods, location, and type, and fixed mortgages for the new construction it financed. Thus, as the FHA saw it, such builders were engaged in precisely the kind of unregulated, jerrybuilt (yet often expensive to buy) residential construction which Title II had been designed to avoid–and they were doing it with federal approval.[106] Congress agreed with the FHA, supporting its position that new house construction should only be insured under the title which provided "some control over the character of the building, the character of the location and the protection of the poorer classes of people who buy small [less than $2,000] houses," in other words, Title II.[107] As amended, Title I disallowed new construction on empty lots, limiting additions, alterations and repairs to already *improved* real property, be it residential or commercial.

With the new construction issue settled, one final aspect of property "improvements" remained in dispute, specifically the allowance for household equipment which was regarded as Title I's most abused provision. Prior to the 1936 amendments it was permissible for homeowners and renters to secure modernization loans for the purchase of a variety of machinery and equipment including furnaces, hot water heaters, and oil burners, as well as major appliances like refrigerators, ranges, and washing machines. In fact, so many appliances were being sold under Title I that the controllers of the leading department store chains declared the MCP "one of the soundest programs ever offered," noting that retailers like Gimbel's and Bamberger's were moving units at an

---

envisioned.

[105] 1936 House Hearings, p. 52-4.

[106] The lumber dealers argued they were providing a real solution to "the small-house problem" and marshaled formidable support from 18 national building associations to forestall the elimination of new construction under Title I. These organizations (representing numerous building material manufacturers–brick, asphalt shingle, paint, electrical equipment, cement, steel, etc.) adopted a joint resolution calling for the extension of Title I without amendment. See 1936 House Hearings, pp. 49-50.

[107] 1936 House Hearings, pp. 7-9. FHA General Counsel A.H. Ferguson explained the agency's position.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

unprecedented rate. The National Retail Dry Goods Association verified such statements, estimating that 25% of all Title I loans under $2,000 were used to purchase household appliances.[108] It was not the purchase of such appliances *per se* to which the FHA objected--indeed at this time the government was actively promoting the use of electricity and electrical appliances through the RFC's Electric Home and Farm Authority and the Rural Electrification Administration[109]--rather, it was the manner in which such purchases were commonly arranged under Title I, typically through the credit finance corporations run by manufacturers such as General Electric, Westinghouse, Sears-Roebuck, and General Motors (which owned Frigidaire). With this type of financing, as the National Electrical Manufacturing Association freely admitted, consumers were usually charged a higher list price which, with the addition of assessed service fees, made the appliance more expensive, potentially 15%-25% higher than if the consumer paid cash. On a mid-priced refrigerator costing around $200 in 1936, paying an additional $30 or $50 was not insignificant. Even if the consumer could not afford to pay cash out of pocket, he or she could take out a federally-insured modernization loan directly from a bank and *then* pay cash for the appliance. Since bank rates under the MCP were generally around 6%, the consumer could save at least 9% when financing the purchase of a major appliance this way, rather than buying it on terms from a dealer.[110] The problem, as the FHA and its Congressional supporters saw it, was that companies like General Electric and Sears with their huge promotional budgets, "high-pressure salesmanship," fast loan approvals, and, of course, government tie-ins--encouraged by the FHA itself--were misrepresenting the MCP and for all intents and purposes, fleecing or "gyping" consumers. It was this practice of charging excess fees which the new provision of Title I sought to end by excluding

---

[108] "Trade Found Aided by Housing Plan," New York Times, 20 February 1936, p. 28 and 1936 House Hearings, p. 26. Of the 25% cited by the NRDGA, most loans were well below $500.
[109] 1936 Senate Hearing, pp. 6-7. For detailed discussion of the federal government's role in promoting the use of electrical appliances see Ronald C. Tobey, Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
[110] 1936 House Hearings, pp. 37-9 and 1936 Senate Hearing, p. 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

from modernization loans all household equipment that was not permanently installed. Though the electrical manufacturers begged Congress not to "freeze [them] out" of the MCP, claiming that they had cooperated with the FHA at every step of the modernization movement to aid the building industry and the national recovery, the exclusion became law in April 1936.[111] After two years of profitable modernization financing, the electrical manufacturers--and the Coldspots with them--were shut out of Title I. The exclusionary provision had one additional pecuniary purpose which had less to do with protecting consumers than with protecting the government. If the record of installment lending/buying was any indication, the FHA knew it would sustain its heaviest losses in relation to household equipment. Desiring to avoid, to as great an extent as possible, paying off lenders' claims for equipment, collecting delinquent payments from scofflaw consumers, and repossessing refrigerators or ranges in arrears, the FHA removed itself from the field for all loans made after April 1936.[112]

The subsequent legislative history of the MCP was fairly straightforward. Title I was further amended in late April of 1936 in response to the disastrous floods in Johnstown, Pennsylvania: Congress passed a special provision (Section 6) allowing federally-insured credit to repair and rebuild houses and commercial structures and replace equipment damaged or destroyed by natural disasters, including floods, fires, hurricanes, and tornadoes. It was this provision which allowed, for example, the town of Gainesville, Georgia to rebuild its business district after a devastating tornado, transforming its Main Street from "drab" to "modern," according to Architectural Forum [Figs. 10 & 11].[113] The catastrophe provision expired on January 1st 1937, but was reinstated in April at the urging of President Roosevelt, following the ruinous flooding of the Mississippi River Valley during the winter of 1936-37. Section 6 would now expire on July 1st

---

[111] 1936 House Hearings, pp. 36 & 40 and 1936 Senate Hearing, p. 22-3.
[112] The extent to which the FHA remained in this situation for equipment loans insured prior to April 1936 is described in FHA, Fifth Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1939), pp. 50-1.
[113] "Tornado over Gainseville," Architectural Forum 66 (February 1937): 157.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

1939.[114] As the extension to the catastrophe provision was moving through Congress in early 1937 the clock was ticking on the rest of Title I which was set to expire on April 1st. Throughout February bills were introduced in both the House and the Senate to extend Title I without amendment for additional periods or to extend it with further restrictions on the loan insurance percentage. Despite numerous resolutions sent to Congress by trade groups urging the MCP's continuation, all of these measures failed--mainly because the FHA had no interest in Title I's extension. As Stewart McDonald commented to the New York Times upon Title I's expiration, in what was at the time hardly front page news, "the emergency phase has ended"--or so the Administrator thought.[115]

Given the state of the economy in the spring of 1937, the suspension of a three-year old emergency measure was not surprising. As Marriner Eccles recalled later in the year, in the midst of a severe economic downturn: "It was discontinued at a time when business was going at a much more rapid pace than it is today. It seemed at the time that it was neither necessary nor desirable to have the impetus that was given to the activity promoted under Title I."[116] During the period Eccles described, national industrial production had, for the first time since the Depression hit, climbed back to its pre-crash level, just surpassing that of 1929. As a result, many New Deal relief and pump-priming efforts were curtailed including, in addition to the MCP, both the WPA and the PWA. Though the building industry was still sluggish and unemployment was still severe, in Washington at least there was a general feeling of confidence and a sense that prosperity was in the air. Such optimism was misguided: in August the economy nose-dived along with industrial

---

[114] FHA, Third Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1937), pp. 21-2. See also "Hopkins to Head Flood Survey of Needs for Rehabilitation," New York Times, 30 January 1937, p. 7 and National Housing Act as Amended, pp. 4-5.

[115] Congressional Record 81(part 11, 5 January-27 August 1937), pp. 875, 1179, 1195, 3213. "Title I of Housing Act Expires," New York Times, 1 April 1937, p. 43. McDonald later acknowledged that Title I was suspended at his recommendation. See 1937 Senate Hearings, pp. 25-6.

[116] U.S. House of Representatives, 75th Congress, 2nd Session, Amendments to the National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency (Washington, DC: GPO, 1937), p. 106.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

activity. By the end of the year two million additional people were out of work and total unemployment climbed back to between 10 and 11 million, comparable to when Roosevelt first took office. Once again, the vast majority of the unemployed were workers from the building trades.[117] Once again, building modernization was recognized as a way to stimulate immediate activity and put tradesmen back to work. As McDonald commented in his House testimony, "pressure [was] put upon us, both outside and inside of Washington, for the reopening of Title I...it is felt by a great many that this amendment will have a pronounced effect in stimulating reemployment" [Fig. 12].[118] Indeed, the President himself called for Title I's reinstatement in the message he delivered to Congress in late November during special House and Senate sessions convened to deal with the current economic crisis. Immediately following the delivery of the President's message, bills were introduced in the House (H.R. 8520/8730) and in the Senate (S. 3055/3316) to restore Title I with certain amendments. A week of hearings took place in early December and by February 3rd 1938 the restoration was enacted. Title I was back in operation after a ten-month lapse.[119]

The amendments of 1938 had two main provisions. First, the insurable loan limit for modernization of existing structures was set at $10,000 for both residential and commercial property, representing a liberalization for the former and a restriction for the latter. Second, loans of up to $2500 were allowed for new construction (newly-built structures).[120] This reinstatement of new construction under Title I, after it had been specifically proscribed by the amendments of 1936, was obviously intended to fill deliberate gaps in Title II coverage.[121] In addition, though the insured

---

[117] For a general sketch of the recession of 1937-38 see Leuchtenburg, pp. 243-51.
[118] 1937 House Hearings, p. 17.
[119] The hearings concluded on 10 December but no more action was taken on the bills until after the New Year. When the 75th Congress reconvened in January in its 3rd Session the bills were reintroduced. Reports were delivered on 20 January 1938. After debate and conference both houses passed the bill on 1 February and the President signed it on the 3rd. See House Journal (25 November 1937), pp. 24-6 and Senate Journal (29 November 1937), pp. 20-2. See also Conference Report No. 1705 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1938).
[120] See National Housing Act as Amended, pp. 2-3.
[121] Since the strict locational requirements of Title II made it difficult, if not impossible, to build a

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

percentage rate remained at its pre-expiration level of 10%, the maximum insurance period was fixed at five years. Maximum federal liability stayed at $100 million. The restored Title I was set to expire on 1 July 1939, at which time, according to Administrator McDonald, the FHA would "drop out of existing construction."[122]

Once again, McDonald had spoken too soon. Though the bill prepared with FHA assistance and introduced in the House in January of 1939 dealt only with amendments to Title II of the National Housing Act, on the very first day of hearings members of the Banking Committee questioned the Administrator about the omission of a Title I extension. McDonald argued that the MCP "should be dropped" because, after five years of experience, government guarantees were no longer necessary to induce private financial institutions to make modernization loans based on character rather than collateral. He was certain that the lending practice would continue without federal insurance backing it up and was equally confident that Title I's new construction provision could easily be administered under Title II (a contention with which the committee strongly disagreed). McDonald argued that to continue the modernization program now represented the government "coddling one sort of an industry against another," especially since those coddled industries had already "developed a tremendous volume of business [because of the MCP] which to date has cost them no money."[123] To make his case McDonald compared modernization loans to car loans, noting that since the auto industry did not ask the government to guarantee installment purchases of its products neither should the building industry. Ironically, this was the same analogy that had been used five years earlier to make the case for the establishment of the MCP in the first

---

house in areas the FHA considered marginal–both rural and urban–a whole class of potential homeowners, mostly working poor, had been unable to secure federally-insured mortgages. McDonald acknowledged this difficulty before the Banking Committee and offered the $2500 construction provision of Title I to partially alleviate the situation. U.S. Senate, 75th Congress, 2nd Session, To Amend the National Housing Act: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency (Washington, DC: GPO, 1937), p. 13.

[122] 1937 House Hearings, p. 17. Here McDonald refers to both Title I insurance and Title II mortgage refinancing for existing houses.

[123] U.S. House of Representatives, 76th Congress, 1st Session, Amendments of 1939 to the National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency (Washington,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

place. To further undermine Title I, McDonald argued that combined liability claims and promotional and operating expenses, supposedly based purely on estimates since the Administrator claimed that detailed break-downs for each FHA program were not kept (in fact separate Title I expenses were kept for the first three years of the program), made the MCP too costly for the government to continue, though for five years he had argued just the opposite, that its associated costs were negligible. Indeed, some members of the committee felt that the expenses the FHA now attributed to Title I had been deliberately inflated to make the program look bad now that the agency sought its elimination.[124]

McDonald's attempts to eliminate Title I seems to have arisen from his desire to commit all FHA resources to new housing, especially the financing of large-scale rental projects [Fig. 13]. Despite the vigor of his objections, it became clear as the hearings dragged on for nearly four weeks that the committee was disposed to extend Title I, especially after representatives of the Producers' Council demonstrated not only that the program still had the full support of the building industry, but also that there was "still a very definite need" for modernization work throughout the country, proof of which was offered in the form of surveys undertaken by the government itself which indicated that some 60% of all urban homes still required improvements and repairs and that the need for commercial modernization was just as intense.[125] Even HOLC Chairman John Fahey, a longtime Title I critic, came before the committee to support the MCP's extension in order to encourage employment and keep the nation's existing housing stock competitive with new construction. Though Fahey's reasons for this late-in-the-game support were never clear, when the Title I renewal debate reached the floor of the House, the Republican opposition presented it as a conflict between the two housing agency heads: McDonald of the FHA vs. Fahey of the HOLC, a

---

DC: GPO, 1939), pp. 7 & 28.

[124] 1939 House Hearings, pp. 4-6, 67-71. Expenses associated with Title I are discussed in Chapter 2.

[125] 1939 House Hearings, pp. 50-52. This survey was reported in the WPA's Urban Housing: A Summary of Real Property Inventories Conducted as Work Projects, 1934-1936.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

dispute which, however rancorous it became, could never hope to rival the legendary New Deal battles between Harry Hopkins and Harold Ickes to control public works. In the present instance, Fahey prevailed, despite Republican outrage that the opinion on Title I's suspension held by McDonald--"the very man who knows most about it, who has operated it, who is responsible for it"--was so utterly disregarded.[126] Ultimately because of its popularity with property owners and the building industry, Congress extended Title I for another two years until July 1941. Accepting the FHA's reluctant recommendations for continuance, Congress lowered the loan limit to $2500 for improvements to all types of properties and added a premium charge of .75% for every loan insured in order to make the MCP at least partially self-sustaining.

At one point during the 1939 hearings Stewart McDonald posed an exasperated question to the Banking Committee: "If you are going to continue Title I for another year or two, why not continue it forever?"[127] Though he was speaking rhetorically, if not a little sarcastically, someone on the committee took McDonald at his word and in 1941, in anticipation of Title I's expiration, a bill reported favorably on the House and Senate floors attempted to do just this: it removed all termination dates, effectively extending Title I indefinitely. Though this provision was subsequently replaced with a 1943 expiration, Congress continued to renew Title I throughout the 1940s. As the Depression gave way to World War II, as the war gave way to peace, Title I was amended and reinterpreted according to the nation's changing needs. In 1943, in response to the defense housing emergency the loan limit was raised to $5,000 for multiple dwellings or conversions into multiple dwellings. In addition, a change in regulations implemented by the Administrator, excluded all non-residential properties from Title I, store modernization deemed "unessential" to the war effort.[128] In 1947, with war-material restrictions lifted and American manufacturers retooling for peacetime, the insurance of commercial buildings was again allowed.

---

[126] Congressional Record 84 (part 4, 11 April 1939), pp.4123-5.
[127] 1939 House Hearings, p. 28.
[128] FHA, Tenth Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1944), p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

With Title I itself recognized as "one of the best instruments that has ever been devised to put people to work quickly in large numbers without much expense to the government, the modernization of Main Street was again encouraged in the hope of offsetting widespread unemployment caused by the elimination of defense jobs.[129] In 1948, in response to the growing housing shortage precipitated by the return of the GIs, the loan limit was raised to $10,000 to encourage further multiple dwelling conversion, especially additions to single-family homes. However, the amendments of 1948 also permanently excluded from Title I all non-residential or commercial properties, at which point Title I of the National Housing Act finally became a true housing program.

Born of the grave economic crisis of the Depression, as a "temporary device for loosening the log jam of credit" Title I of the National Housing Act was now, in the midst of post-war prosperity, looking like "a device which could well become a permanent part of the Nation's credit and trade structure."[130] Indeed, it was renewed for home modernization throughout the 1950s, finally becoming permanent at the end of the decade. If the Modernization Credit Plan had functioned as a kind of national economic barometer, with each new amendment--an altered loan limit, insurance percentage, or eligibility requirement--registering a subtle, or sometimes obvious, shift in unemployment, industrial production, or purchasing power, one aspect of the MCP remained constant throughout every legislative permutation. This constant was the MCP's aggressive promotion by the FHA through a high-profile national campaign known as the Better Housing Program--a program which in its popular, and populist appeal, was as far removed from federal legislation and credit markets as Washington's lawmakers and lobbyists were from Main Street America.

---

[129] Federal Housing Administrator Abner H. Ferguson was describing the post-war potential of Title I in 1943 Senate hearings. U.S. Senate, 78th Congress, 1st Session, Defense Housing Insurance: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency (Washington, DC: GPO, 1943), p. 10.

[130] FHA Title I Lending Operations (Washington, DC: GPO, 1946), pp. 3 & 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter 2 Organizing for Modernization: The Better Housing Program

As John P. Powers walked down Main Street in Cloquet, Minnesota on August 10th 1934, a large poster in the window of the First National Bank might have caught his eye. Not the one with the Blue Eagle and the "We Do Our Part" slogan emblazoned across it; that one, having been there since the great NRA summer of 1933, was already fading in the sun. Perhaps there was a new poster hanging in the window, one with an image of an iconic American house--with pitched roof, clapboards, dormers, shutters, and a chimney [Figs. 14 & 15]. Curls of smoke might have risen out of the chimney had the house not been so obviously an emblem or a logo, rendered as it was, a side elevation in thick, bold, graphic lines, with sans-serif letters spelling out "Federal Housing Administration" as a foundation and "Better Housing Program" in an encircling, target-like banner. Or perhaps there was another poster hanging in the window, one with an image of an iconic American family--white, middle-class, with father, mother, son, daughter, grandmother, and dog happily arranged in a domestic tableaux within a comfortably appointed parlor [Fig. 16]. Pushing into the foreground was a house, indeed the same house depicted in the logo, but here in ¾ perspective with softer lines and more details. Beneath this "Cape Cod" house was a single word in large serif type and quotation marks, "HOME", an obvious reference to the household shown, the family and the dwelling. In smaller type below, the following was announced: "Property Improvement Credit Now Available Through Local Financial Institutions."

Intrigued, John Powers might have entered the First National Bank to inquire about those posters, to find out what this "Better Housing Program" was or what credit was *now* available. A bank employee, wearing a lapel pin bearing that same house logo, would have explained to John Powers that the Better Housing Program was a new U.S. Government initiative designed to enable him to make home repairs he may have been considering, but did not think he could

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

afford: "You can have a modernized home NOW; and as much as 5 years in which to pay for it."[1] If he would take a seat and look through this informational brochure, "14 Answers to Your Questions about Modernization Credit," a loan officer would be with him shortly to explain the details of the program and to help him with the necessary paperwork which, upon completion, would secure for John Powers the first government-insured modernization loan extended under the National Housing Act.

A National Campaign

All of the modernization information John Powers would have encountered that day, from the posters (Form No. FHA 202 or Form No. FHA 205) to the brochure (FHE-8) to the loan application (Form FHE-3), emanated from the Federal Housing Administration in Washington and was distributed through a network of field organizations and community groups in a national/local, public/private partnership which would prove a crucial component of Better Housing Program's eventual success. The FHA began cultivating this multilateral cooperation from the moment of its official establishment in June 1934, as it sprang into feverish activity to implement the provisions of the National Housing Act--especially the Title I emergency phase--through the newly initiated Better Housing Program (BHP) which began as a public-awareness campaign, but quickly became something more significant: a populist mass movement, seemingly grass-root, yet sponsored and controlled by the federal government itself. Throughout that summer, the development and promotion of the BHP was the FHA's primary occupation, with most of the agency's efforts concentrated on putting the Modernization Credit Plan (MCP) into operation as quickly as possible in order to maximize the MCP's potential for immediate relief and recovery.[2] By mid-July the FHA was installed in headquarters in the Federal Triangle; by

---

[1] This promotional pitch is from FHA, Portfolio of Publicity for Use of Community Campaign Committees (Washington: GPO, 1934), p. 9.

[2] Though the FHA promoted both Title I (modernization credit) and Title II (mortgage finance) through the Better Housing Program (BHP), for the period June 1934-December 1935 the BHP was devoted almost exclusively to promoting Title I's Modernization Credit Plan (MCP).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

mid-August, thanks to the cooperation of the National Emergency Council, twelve regional divisions and fifty state (or territorial) offices were organized and staffed, along with a dozen district field offices serving larger states like New York, Texas, and California. By mid-September over one thousand cities--"from New York with its population of 7,000,000 people to the small hamlet of Sholes, Nebraska, population 90"--had opened local BHP offices and organized community campaigns, enlisting individual businesses and businessmen (banks, builders and contractors, supply dealers, architectural firms, and assorted other salesmen) in the campaign to convince property owners to modernize. By the end of 1934, the number of organized local campaigns had nearly quadrupled to 3,822, a figure which included most American towns with populations over 5,000, as well as the ten largest cities in every state [Fig. 17].[3] Thus, did the FHA confidently proclaim "Modernization Drive Sweeps Nation."[4]

Months before the BHP was organized, even before Congress passed the National Housing Act, Frank Walker of the National Emergency Council cautioned that if the program to revive the building industry was to achieve any sustained economic stimulation, a nationwide promotional campaign was of the utmost necessity. To this end, Walker suggested the model of the hugely successful Liberty Loan Drives of World War I which, through the sale of government bonds, raised over $20 billion from the public to fund the war effort. Now, in the midst of the Depression, Walker proposed a similar "national machine with state and local committees to use publicity, posters, speeches, movies, and other instruments of persuasion to convince and encourage home owners to borrow, and lending agencies to lend."[5] As the BHP emerged in the

---

Throughout this chapter "BHP" will refer to efforts related to the modernization program.

[3] According to the 1930 census, there were 1,841 towns in the United States with a population over 5,000. Only Delaware, Idaho, Nevada, and Wyoming had towns with a population under 5,000 among their ten largest largest cities. See FHA, Division of Research and Statistics, General Economic Data, Volume A, 1934-35 [NA RG 207, Records of Housing & Home Finance Agencies, Volume 1].

[4] Better Housing, 15 October 1934, p. 1.

[5] "Plan $1,500,000,000 for Home Repairs," New York Times, 20 April 1934, p. 23. The FHA acknowledged the Liberty Loan Drives as a model for its campaign in its First Annual Report (Washington: GPO, 1935), p. 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

summer of 1934, it was organized largely along the lines Walker outlined; but there was another national campaign after which the modernization effort was also patterned, one closer in chronology and presumably in philosophy, given its origins in the current economic crisis. This was the massive publicity drive of the NRA which, as orchestrated by Hugh Johnson beginning in the summer of 1933, had succeeded in generating an unprecedented amount of national hoopla and organizational frenzy, even though its material results were difficult to quantify beyond a growing number of code committees, public rallies, and posters.[6] In the spring of 1934 there was even talk in the Capitol that President Roosevelt would name Johnson himself to head the FHA, since his proficiency at stirring public sentiment and marshaling public support (he had organized the WWI draft) from a demoralized populace would undoubtedly have benefited the promotional campaign then being contemplated.[7]

When army general Johnson was passed over in favor of oil executive James Moffett as the FHA chief, the tenor of incipient BHP was decisively altered.[8] Instead of rouse-the-troops exhortation, the BHP would utilize only slightly more subtle methods of persuasion borrowed from sales and marketing. Instead of relying solely on the motivation of "We Do Our Part" commonality, although this would remain an important aspect of the program, collective national interest shared the stage with, and was occasionally eclipsed by, incentives of self-interest and individual profit. In this respect, the BHP may have had more in common with the campaign of 1917-18 than with that of 1933, for the Liberty Loan drives were successful precisely because they managed to commingle a national or public desire--winning the war--with fiscally-remunerative enticements which were nothing if not personal--profitable, interest-bearing

---

[6] For a contemporary description of the NRA summer see Frederick Lewis Allen, Since Yesterday (1939; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 102.
[7] See "Wide Housing Plan Awaits Approval," New York Times, 30 March 1934, p. 23.
[8] That Roosevelt selected Moffett over Johnson probably had as much to do with the business basis of the FHA as with the fact that by the spring of 1934 Johnson was perceived as a loose cannon. See William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 64-5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

government bonds. But during the 1930s, economic recovery, however crucial to the nation as a whole, was a more abstract goal than victory in Europe, and the Depression itself, however often Wall Street was demonized into its evil personification, was a more abstract enemy than Kaiser Wilhelm and the Germans. Throughout the life of the BHP, a critical issue would be the concretization and reaffirmation of the identity of the enemy and the means of that enemy's defeat. Though in a general sense the chief adversary remained the Depression, within the specific context of the BHP the true antagonist emerged as building *obsolescence*, no less abstract a foe perhaps, but one with a more quantifiable set of physical characteristics. Simultaneously, and not surprisingly, building *modernization* was cast as the ultimate obsolescence-and-Depression-fighting weapon (see Chapter 6). Before the latter might vanquish the former, however, it was necessary to prepare the battlefield, the location of which, in the opinion of FHA strategists, was every community in the nation. As a result, community organizing for local BHPs became the first order of attack in this particular "war-time" campaign.

Good Business

However apt the military metaphor--and indeed "war" did become a primary analogy for describing the fight against the Depression--it should not be pushed too far in relation to the BHP.[9] Though the FHA would sometimes resort to unabashed patriotic rhetoric in promoting modernization, the BHP itself resembled less a mobilization of troops than some sort of entrepreneurial business expansion. Perhaps, though, the Depression obviated such a distinction between military and business campaigning. Popular economist Stuart Chase--who, incidentally, brought Title I's architect Marinner Eccles into the New Deal fold--observed at the end of the decade of prosperity that the businessman had become "the dictator of our destinies," replacing

[9] The application of a war analogy to the Depression probably began with President Hoover, but it was utilized throughout the 1930s by conservatives and liberals alike, including Roosevelt himself on more than one occasion. See Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr., Ideologies and Utopias: The Impact of the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"the statesman, the priest, the philosopher" of yore as "the creator of standards of ethics and behavior" and the "final authority on the conduct of American society."[10] This *dictatorship* did not really change with the shift from prosperity to Depression, notwithstanding the hopeful attitudes of liberal thinkers like Charles and Mary Beard, Bertrand Russell, Walter Lippmann, and New Dealers like Rex Tugwell, who all predicted that the economic collapse would spell the end of the business hegemony which had come to so dominate the nation. If anything, the collapse served to valorize the privileged position of the American businessman. The federal government had been only too willing to come to his aid when it became obvious that capsized business enterprises would be unable to right themselves without outside assistance. When that aid came, in the form of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation begun by Hoover and continued by Roosevelt, it was a straightforward bailout which sought the preservation of the business status quo and through it, nothing less than the salvation of capitalism and democracy.[11]

Certainly in 1934, at least within the purview of the National Housing Act, the Federal Housing Administration, and the Modernization Credit Plan, the businessman along with the private capital he represented was in a position to dictate the terms of national recovery--through increased sales--and, with government backing, to seek the further indoctrination of the American populace into his preferred ethos of selling. From within this context, the BHP may be accurately discerned as an effort, zealously carried out during the second half of 1934, resembling the establishment of a nationwide chain of offices, bureaus, or showrooms whose managers used chummy social appeals to win the approval of the local business fraternity. Set up makeshift-style, often in abandoned Main Street storefronts (though occasionally at a prestigious address, as in San Diego where the BHP was installed in the stately U.S. Grant

---

New Deal on American Thought (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p. 49-52.
[10] Stuart Chase, "Prosperity--Believe it or Not," The Nation 129 (23 October 1929), pp. 460-2. See also Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday (1931; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 133.
[11] For this interpretation of the RFC see James Stuart Olson, Saving Capitalism : the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the New Deal, 1933-1940 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hotel), these BHP offices existed solely for the purpose of "selling modernization," not merely as an antidote to the Depression, but as a slick business proposition which knowingly blended civic boosterism and political populism with a bit of snake oil and revivalist preaching, substituting, à la Bruce Barton, the word of the salesman for the word of the Lord. As the FHA put it in an oft-repeated slogan coined for the MCP, "Ask 'em to Buy!" [Figs. 18, 19 & 20].[12]

Demonstrating the degree to which a business and sales ethic pervaded the Better Housing Program is not to imply that the BHP was somehow unregulated or lacking in federally-administered controls. In fact, the opposite was true. With local community participation in the BHP continuing its exponential growth in the fall of 1934, the FHA worked to carefully orchestrate this self-described "vast movement" through a deft combination of laissez-faire and micro-management which allowed, indeed encouraged, individual latitude in program promotion, even as it rigorously enforced program and procedural implementation. In employing this simultaneous corporate and bureaucratic administrative style during the life of the BHP the FHA assumed a far more active and substantive role than the "limited" one the agency modestly claimed in its first annual report:

> The Administration's role has been essentially to present a need and a program to leaders of local and national groups; to act as a coordinator; and to furnish limited quantities of circulars and pamphlets having a Nation-wide appeal.[13]

Here, the FHA intentionally underplayed its participation in the organization of local BHPs mainly in response to Congressional concerns about the program's expense and its seeming endorsement of certain building products and manufacturers (see Chapter 1). Elsewhere in the report the FHA further minimized the extent of the agency's activities by claiming that they "represent[ed] only a small fraction of the total expenditures of time and money furnished by

---

University Press, 1988).

[12] FHA, Selling Better Housing (Washington: GPO, 1935), p. 1. See also Bruce Barton, The Man Nobody Knows (1925; rpt. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962). The book, a bestseller in 1926, depicted Jesus as an advertising executive.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

private groups."[14] The agency's equivocation regarding its role in the BHP is most evident in the reference, cited above, to the FHA's modernization publications. Though they are dismissed in this annual report as merely a few flyers or handbills, the printed materials the FHA produced for the BHP were hardly so insignificant, either in quantity or in content [Fig. 21]. By the fall of 1934 there were already over five dozen bulletins, booklets, brochures, checklists, application forms, posters, and printer's mats, as well as buttons, transparencies, metal signs, and billboards available free-of-charge for communities participating in the Better Housing Program [Figs. 22 & 23]. And the quantities of these materials which the FHA suggested for cities and towns to order could hardly be construed as limited. For the basic, explanatory, 23-page publication How Owners of Homes & Business Property Can Secure the Benefit of the National Housing Act (FHA-101) the FHA advised that the smallest towns, with populations under 2,500, order between 100 and 250 copies and the largest cities, with populations over one million, order between 30,000 and 75,000 copies. In New York, the New York Central Railroad alone ordered 60,000 copies of FHA-101 for distribution to its employees and passengers on its commuter lines serving Westchester County and Connecticut out of Grand Central Terminal.[15] By October 1934, the FHA claimed that it was sending out 30,000 booklets a day.[16] Aside from this impressive volume, taken together the FHA publications amounted to a two-tiered promotional blitz targeted, on a national level, toward those who would buy building modernization, owners and long-term lessees of residential and business property, and on a local level toward those who would sell it, including municipal employees, volunteers, relief workers, business people, and assorted building tradesmen. Among the publications aimed at this latter group were a series of

---

[13] First Annual Report, p. 12.
[14] First Annual Report, p. 12.
[15] "Gets 60,000 Booklets," Better Housing, 20 September 1934, p. 3.
[16] See "Order Form for Publicity Materials" and "Suggested Maximum Quantities of Publicity Material" in Portfolio of Publicity, pp. 103-4. For calculating order quantities, the FHA dividing the nation's cities into ten size ranges and assigned each range with a minimum and a maximum. See also "Last Minute News from the States," Better Housing, 8 October 1934, p. 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

technical bulletins and training manuals which, in step-by-step procedures, rules, and regulations, addressed every aspect of the modernization program, beginning with opening a community Better Housing office, moving on to conducting door-to-door canvassing, and ending with filing a loan report on money lent under the MCP.

Even as the FHA was closely administering the BHP, it was attempting to give the program the public appearance of a free-wheeling, free-market enterprise existing quite apart from government intervention or emotional appeals: "it is not charity--it is not patriotism--it is good business."[17] As its legislative history has shown, a by-business-for-business agenda had been present from the earliest conception of the modernization drive and once the program was operational the FHA continually pushed this agenda to the foreground. One agency official acknowledged in October 1934 in a nationally-broadcast radio address that "the program ha[d] been laid out from the start to finish as a profitable business program--for business men and women."[18] Even earlier, at an FHA-sponsored conference to explain the workings of the MCP, bankers from all 48 states heard agency officials take pains to make it clear that the program was neither "a government drive" nor "an ordinary sales campaign" (though it was actually an amalgam of both), but rather "a business instrumentality through which private finance and industry [could] resume their normal growth."[19] At that same conference, government officials further claimed that this agenda even informed the structure of the Administration itself, which was called "first of all, a business organization"--one run not by politicians or bureaucrats, but by businessmen, including, in addition to oil executive Moffett as Administrator, Albert Deane, MCP co-creator now on long-term leave from General Motors, as Deputy Administrator in charge of Title I; Roger Steffan, a Vice President of the National City Bank of New York and a

---

[17] "Speech by Ward Canady at Home Furnishing Industries' Dinner, Chicago," FHA Press Release No. 168 (10 January 1935), p. 15 [NA RG 287, box y748].
[18] "Speech by Ward M. Canaday at the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, Broadcast over A.B.S.," FHA Press Release No. 85 (9 October 1934), p. 4 [NA RG 287, box y748].
[19] "Proceeds of National Conference of American Bankers Association Liaison Officers," FHA

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

personal loan specialist, as Director of the Division of Modernization Credits; and Ward M. Canaday, an Ohio advertising and car company executive and time-payment/credit finance pioneer, as Director of the Division of Public Relations [Fig. 24].[20]

It was Canaday's PR Division which was responsible for "the selling end of the business" and for devising a publicity program which, according to the Director, managed to create a "ground swell of public opinion" to increase demand for modernization while carefully avoiding any semblance of promotional "ballyhoo." This, the FHA would accomplish by providing, through the nationwide distribution of its publications, a stream of modernization information flowing, as if in "a city waterworks," from Washington to the states, to the local BHPs and then to the individual property owner.[21] One of the earliest FHA publications provided "a suggested plan" for organizing a local BHP campaign which, if "aggressively followed," would enable "your city to get the greatest benefit from the National Housing Act."[22] This 34-page booklet was supplied through each State Director to local civic leaders whom the FHA hoped to enlist in the modernization cause. The manual commenced with an explanation of the purpose of the modernization program, beginning with an account of the depressed state of the building industry. This account was accompanied by a bar graph, supplied by the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics, depicting the rise and fall of building activity from 1921 to 1933 and demonstrating in visually dramatic and unequivocal terms the shift from prosperity to depression. No data was supplied for the current year of 1934, only a large

---

Offices, Washington, DC, 14 August 1934, pp. 12, 5, 3 [NA RG 287, box 737].

[20] "Proceeds of National Conference...," p. 6. Canaday was advertising director for the Willys-Overland Motor Company until he started his own ad agency in the 1920s. Concurrently he organized a car finance corporation and lobbied for the passage of the NHA. In the late 1930s, he returned to Willys-Overland, overseeing the development of the Jeep for the military during WWII.

[21] "Proceeds of National Conference...," pp. 12-13.

[22] FHA, Community Campaign (Washington: GPO, 1934), pp. 1 & 3. The FHA used the term "city" to refer to communities of all sizes.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

question mark asking, indicated in the text, "How can we use this [National Housing] Act to improve business conditions?"[23]

Though the text and graph established a direct connection between building activity and prosperity, thus rendering the economic abstraction of the Depression legible and comprehensible, this visualization lacked local relevance. Thus, the campaign manual further sought to enumerate the concrete local advantages of community-based promotion of building modernization, a practice labeled "the quickest way to get reemployment in private enterprise." A local modernization campaign, the FHA claimed, would benefit a community in three material ways. First, by bringing money "out of hiding" and "back into the channels of retail trade" it stimulated all types of business, not only those which were building-related, a point PR Director Canaday stressed when the booklet was first released, insisting that the BHP was "not simply a builder's program."[24] Second, by putting people back to work it reduced relief expenditures thereby "lessening the public burden." Third, by encouraging long-deferred repairs it improved the "usefulness and value" of real property, adding to "the beauty and appearance of a city" as a whole.[25] Here, significantly, the FHA added a civic incentive to its primary business-creating inducements, a strategic motivational coupling designed to appeal to that endemic "community spirit" so well-documented by sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd in their Middletown studies.[26]

Organization Men

To assist communities in establishing local modernization campaigns, the FHA's Field Division supplied a typical organization chart to serve as a guide for recruiting personnel and staffing a BHP headquarters, a process overseen by the State Directors. This chart, reproduced

---

[23] Community Campaign, pp. 2-3.
[24] Community Campaign, pp. 3 & 5. "Proceeds of National Conference...," p. 11.
[25] Community Campaign, p. 6.
[26] See Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture (1929; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), pp. 285-309. See also Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1937), pp. 402-86.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in several FHA publications, featured a top-down hierarchical management structure reflective of the so-called classic model of the corporation in the era of industrial capitalism [Fig. 25].[27] Following the arrangement of a typical American business enterprise, the ideal local BHP consisted of four-tiers: upper, middle, and lower management and a bottom echelon of supervisors or workers. Upper management consisted of the General Chairman, Advisory Committee, and Executive Committee. Middle management consisted of eight special interest committees drawn from across the building industry, the business community, and civic organizations. Lower management consisted of a Field Campaign Manager and Division Managers for different types of properties. Finally, the Follow-Up Sections for each division consisted of field workers to conduct the door-to-door canvasses and property surveys which the FHA considered the crucial components of every successful campaign. This organizational arrangement was deliberately top-heavy in the upper and middle tiers in order to involve as many people as possible in each community.[28]

The use of such a business organization chart for the BHP served a purpose at once federally and locally beneficial. From the government's point of view, by prescribing strict adherence to the chart in every community, thereby dictating the BHP's local structure, the FHA could at least partially guide the implementation of the program, the rapid expansion of which would soon, logistically, be beyond the agency's administrative control. Field Division Director W.D. Flanders made this point clear as he was releasing the chart into general circulation: "[if] five or ten thousand cities start local campaigns within the next thirty days...we shall not be able to handle it properly and shall not be able to secure maximum results."[29] From the local point of view, the organization chart, along with the other economically-oriented visual aids the BHP also

---

[27] Community Campaign, p. 9 and Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and Other Merchants... (Washington: GPO, 1934), p. 7. For an analysis of this model see Susan Buck-Morss, "Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display" in Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances, eds. Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), pp. 111-41.
[28] "Proceedings of National Conference...," p. 14. W.D. Flanders was the Field Division Director.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

employed, had an important psychological function in putting the purely voluntary BHP on a business basis. With the exception of a small percentage of paid field and office workers, the majority of BHP participants, especially those staffing the middle management strata, were volunteers drawn from the ranks of unemployed or under-employed architects, contractors, building suppliers and dealers. By fitting these mostly white-collar workers into a clear business hierarchy with titled positions and job responsibilities the BHP enabled them to regain at least a semblance of full-time, active occupation which, though not financially remunerative in itself, held the promise of monetary reward through increased (modernization) business. Thus, during a time when the situation was so bad in the building industry that, according to contemporary chronicler Frederick Lewis Allen, it was "inevitably embarrassing to ask an architect what he was doing these days," the business-like organization of the BHP served as a crucial morale booster.[30]

Within the organization of the local BHP, the FHA considered the appointment of the General Chairman the crucial first step in launching a community campaign. Indeed, the agency regularly included a tally of such appointments when calculating community participation, especially during the first year of the program, since this figure was generally higher than the number representing campaigns fully organized with promotional activities underway. In January 1935, for example, there were 4,931 local chairman in place, but only 3,822 active campaigns. Chairman tallies for each state were also updated weekly and published in Better Housing, the FHA Field Division's weekly newsletter which as house organ for the local BHPs.[31] Through its extensive field organization the FHA worked directly with local civic leaders to assist in the selection of each General Chairman who would preferably be the "leading citizen of the city"--a businessman, occasionally a politician, possessing a high profile, immediate name-

---

[29] "Proceedings of National Conference...," p. 14.
[30] Allen, Since Yesterday, p. 182.
[31] See for example "Committee Chairmen at Close of Week," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, p. 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

recognition, and "the respect and confidence of the people."[32] The PR Division regularly released to the press updated lists of these local chairs in the hope that the participation of prominent citizens would garner media attention for the BHP, as in New York where the appointment of Manhattan Borough President Samuel Levy and real estate attorney Peter Grimm as the co-chairs of the Manhattan campaign was announced in the New York Times.[33] Far from being a mere figurehead, the Chairman was expected to actively participate in the local campaign, giving speeches, attending luncheons and banquets, raising funds, and generally soliciting the endorsement and support of other prominent businessmen, some of whom would be enlisted to participate in the campaign themselves, especially on the Advisory Committee.

Within the BHP organization the Advisory Committee had responsibility for the general oversight of the local campaign. This committee ideally consisted of leaders from a broad spectrum of industries and organizations in a given community. In some local campaigns, even municipal departments such as police, fire, and public health participated in an advisory capacity, as in San Diego, or set up their own municipal committees, as in Baltimore where the Mayor appointed a Committee on Home and Industry Modernization in 1936.[34] For the most part however, the committee included representatives from those businesses which stood to gain most immediately from the modernization program--banking and building. Other members were drawn from local real estate boards, and civic, fraternal, and veterans organizations such as the Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis Clubs and the American Legion, whose members FHA officials regularly addressed at national banquets and conventions. The American Legion passed a national resolution in October 1934 in support of the BHP encouraging its 10,000 local Posts to

---

[32] Community Campaign, p. 9.
[33] See Local Chairmen of Better Housing Program Committees, Released 2 November 1934 [NA RG 287 box y749]. See also "Group to Aid Housing Program, Borough President Levy Head Committee," New York Times, 10 September 1934, p. 32.
[34] See San Diego Sells an Idea: Results in Graphic Form, No. 1 (Washington: GPO, 1935), p. 3 and "Striking Display in Baltimore," Better Housing, 17 March 1936, p. 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

actively participate in their community campaigns. Later the Legion assisted the FHA in a direct mail campaign which asked vets to modernize their homes.[35]

BHP advisory committees were typically well represented by members of local Chambers of Commerce whose merchant and business associates had a crucial stake in the outcome of the community campaign. For local Chambers the promotional work of the BHP was a logical extension of the community boosting, business building, and civic-pride agendas that had been their organizational mainstay throughout the 1920s (and even earlier during the City Beautiful era). Thus, even if the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and its President Henry Harriman had not wholeheartedly endorsed the Title I program and encouraged local organizations to do the same, it is likely that local Chambers would still have actively participated in the BHP.[36] Throughout the 1930s the Chambers readily assumed active leadership roles in the local campaigns, sometimes offering complete campaign sponsorship, but more often lending office space for campaign headquarters, encouraging members to serve as committee chairs, promoting building modernization in house organs, and placing its extensive local network of business contacts at the disposal of the BHP.[37] Given the high social regard in which Chambers of Commerce were usually held during the period, and the degree of influence they exerted over civic affairs, the involvement of the local Chamber almost guaranteed a successful modernization drive. At the very least, the Chamber would insure the cooperation of nearly the entire business community since, as the Lynds observed in Middletown, Chamber of Commerce membership

---

[35] The American Legion was especially supportive of the MCP's re-employment aspect, since so many WWI veterans were out of work--a situation which gave rise to the 1932 Bonus Army encampment on the Anacostia Flats (and led to the popularization of the Forgotten Man as a war vet). After payment of the veterans' bonus was enacted by Congress in the spring of 1936, the FHA secured the cooperation of the Legion to encourage vets to invest bonuses in modernization or new construction. See "Veterans Back Building Plan," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 1. FHA, "Dear Veteran" Direct Mail Piece (undated) [NA RG 287 box y741] and "New Program for Veterans is Launched," Better Housing, 13 May 1936, p. 1.

[36] See "Pass Housing Bill, H.I. Harriman Asks," New York Times, 19 May 1934, p. 5 and "H.I. Harriman Urges Program," New York Times, 1 January 1935, p. 45. For Harriman's Congressional testimony in support of Title I see 1934 House Hearings, pp. 122-48 and 1934 Senate Hearings, pp. 107-19.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was a virtually obligatory, a professional necessity for any businessman who wanted "to get ahead."[38]

The individual members of BHP advisory committees supervised any special campaign programs related to their business interests or professional concerns: a committee member in Dallas, Texas, who also served on the Dallas Real Estate Board directed a vacancy survey of the city's residential and business property.[39] The size of this committee varied from town to town, depending on the needs of the community, the extent of its civic network, and the persuasive powers of the General Chairman who selected its members. The FHA placed no limit on the number of advisory members and in Los Angeles they formed a Committee of One Hundred, "important Californians, not peewee industrialists," including such Hollywood notables as Louis B. Mayer, Jack Warner, and Harold Lloyd, publishers William Randolph Hearst and Harry Chandler, airplane magnate Donald Douglas, Bullock's President P.G. Winnett, and U.S. Senator William Gibbs McAdoo, a Democrat and early supporter of the Modernization Credit Plan who served on the Senate Banking and Currency Committee.[40] So impressive was this advisory group that Administrator James Moffett himself addressed their first meeting in January 1935.[41] Federal officials also attended the inaugural meeting-cum-fundraising banquet of Chicago's BHP advisory committee, which counted among its members the scions of such prominent Midwest families as Armour, Cummings, and Pirie. The FHA's Title I triumvirate (Canaday, Deane, and Steffan) also attended the opening conference of the New York City (Manhattan) BHP held at the Hotel Roosevelt where they addressed, among other advisory committee members, the

---

[37] "Chambers of Commerce Active," Better Housing, 20 September 1934, p. 4.
[38] On the importance of Chambers of Commerce in the 1920s and 1930s see Middletown, pp. 306-08 and Middletown in Transition, p. 439.
[39] "Vacancy Survey," Better Housing, 20 September 1934, p. 2.
[40] "Los Angeles' $100,000,000," Architectural Forum 65 (September 1936): 244. Though the Forum found it worthy of comment that the advisory committee included among its members no real estate men, contractors, "or others who might benefit directly from a boom," the Committee of One Hundred had, in fact, been established by two bankers who would presumably benefit from a modernization boom.
[41] FHA Press Release No. 192 (31 January 1935), pp. 1-7 [NA RG 287, box y748].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

presidents of RCA, American Radiator, Johns-Manville and the Emigrant, Manufacturers Trust, and Morris Plan banks, as well as Broadway's George M. Cohan and parade organizer Grover Whalen.[42]

However large a local advisory committee might grow, the Executive Committee was to be "a compact, workable group" of approximately one dozen people who would manage the campaign and oversee its actual day-to-day operation. It was typically comprised of the General Chairman and in some cases a Vice-Chairman, the Field Campaign Manager, and the chairs of the special industry committees. Only the Campaign Manager was a full-time paid employee with a salary underwritten by private campaign contributions. The FHA recommended the appointment of at least eight special committees: finance, publicity, loans, building industry, general industry, women's, planning, and consultation. Though these eight could be supplemented with other committees or, if necessary, combined into joint committees, in no instance were any of them to be left out of the organization, since to each the FHA assigned a specific function in carrying out the "heavy work" of the campaign.[43] In San Diego, the local BHP added a special architects' committee separate from the building industry committee and also consolidated the loan and consultation committees under one chair. In Colorado, several BHPs set up modern merchandising committees to organize building product expositions.[44] Additional special committees were appointed in cities in towns throughout the southern states, though it is unclear whether these "colored committees" resulted from Jim Crow or a desire among middle-class African-Americans to have their own needs represented within their local BHPs. In either case, the FHA observed late in 1934 that such committees, especially in

---

[42] "Chicago Launches Spirited Campaign," Better Housing, 27 September 1934, p. 1. "Campaign to Spur FHA Program Here," New York Times, 17 October 1934, p. 25.
[43] Community Campaign, pp. 9 & 10.
[44] San Diego Sells an Idea, p. 3 and "Special Bulletin Promotes Campaign," Better Housing, 27 September 1934, p. 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Alabama and Georgia, were creating "effective drives" to stimulate participation and "contributions by members of their race."[45]

BHP Finances

Though the FHA viewed the work of the publicity and building industry committees as the most important with respect to the long-term success of the local campaign, the work of the finance and loan committees was a crucial prerequisite. The finance committee, whose chair served as campaign treasurer, was responsible for preparing a campaign budget and raising all funds to underwrite the campaign, the actual cost of which the FHA never explicitly stated.[46] If the FHA was vague about overall campaign costs, it did make one specific suggestion regarding the funding of a necessary budgetary item: "it may be possible to secure relief workers to handle the clerical and part of the field canvass work."[47] In fact it *was* possible to secure relief workers for local BHP campaigns: from New York to Cleveland to Los Angeles, BHP finance committees were more than willing to apply for relief funds to advance the work of their campaigns. The use of relief workers alleviated what would have otherwise been a major fundraising task for local finance committees, given the number of field workers required by even a small campaign--workers who were not expected to volunteer their time, as the BHP "managers" were, since the majority of them had no direct financial incentive to do so. It may seem contradictory that the FHA encouraged the use of relief workers in local BHPs at the same time it claimed that one goal of the modernization drive was to reduce the relief rolls and relief expenditures, but it did this

---

[45] "Colored Citizens are Enthusiastic," Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 7 and "Colored Committees Have Effective Drives," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, p. 3.

[46] The FHA was always reticent about the actual costs of operating a local BHP. Though it cautioned finance committees to "set up in advance a detailed budget adequate to do the job," it offered little guidance as to how large a budget was adequate, claiming instead that "local conditions" were so variable that appropriate expenditures were impossible to suggest. The only specific budgetary figures it offered were for a pre-Title I campaign mounted in Pawtucket, Rhode Island in 1932 for around $7,000. Even in this the FHA failed to specify how long that campaign was in operation, the extent of its promotional activities, and its success in stimulating modernization business. See Community Campaign, p. 12-13.

[47] Community Campaign, pp. 12-13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

nonetheless in FHA publications and in the national press.[48] The agency must have viewed this relief continuance as a temporary but necessary evil for the greater good of economic recovery through business stimulation. By 1936 critics of the BHP would come to sharply disagree with this assertion as the use of relief workers for canvassing in the field came under increasing attack (see Chapter 3).

The FHA recommended two main types of fund-raising activities: direct personal solicitation by the treasurer and other members of the finance committee and community subscription. In both cases the goal was to secure contributions from those businesses, organizations, and individuals who stood to profit financially from a successful BHP campaign. According to the FHA, particularly effective finance committees might even be able to convince the local Chamber of Commerce, Real Estate Board, or even the municipal government to underwrite the entire cost of the community campaign or a significant portion of it.[49] Local finance committees were free to carry out solicitations and subscriptions as they saw fit and these were typically handled like any community fund or charity drive of the period.[50] In Albuquerque, New Mexico, the committee developed a system of proration for building industry businesses with contributions amounts, ranging from $400 to $5, determined by firm size and current fiscal viability. In Atlanta, Georgia, once the finance committee estimated the total cost of the campaign, it developed a quota system for every sector of the local construction industry--from lumber dealers to architects. Here, contribution amounts were determined by the number of firms in each sector and the potential volume of business those firms could expect to receive from the modernization drive.[51] In addition to cash contributions, the FHA also encouraged

---

[48] See "Canaday Says FHA Plan Will End Relief," New York Times, 28 September 1934, p. 32.
[49] Community Campaign, p. 12. Though the FHA claimed that full subsidies did occur, it does not name any such campaigns and my own research has failed to uncover any examples of complete financing.
[50] See Middletown, p. 464 and Middletown in Transition, p. 131.
[51] "Albuquerque Simplified Work" and "Atlanta Sets Quota for Building Trades," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, pp. 2 & 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

finance committees to obtain as many in-kind donations as possible, including office space, advertising space, radio air time, office equipment and supplies, and printing of letter head stationery and promotional materials (in addition to those supplied by the FHA). In towns across the country, a campaign contribution in cash or in-kind benefited businesses in several ways, enabling a contributing firm to display a BHP logo in its window, to use the BHP logo in advertising, to tie in its promotional activities with those of the local campaign, and, perhaps most important, to secure a place on the list of participating firms prepared by the local BHP and distributed to property owners considering modernization. Contributions also allowed businesses to boost their community standing, as the president of the Industrial Bank of St. Louis, which gave $450 to the local BHP, declared in a public statement: "We have subscribed to many civic and welfare movements in the past, but I can't remember one that has given us more satisfaction to support."[52] In addition to generating good will, of course, this particular movement also offered supporters concrete financial advantages which undoubtedly enhanced contributors' satisfaction.

Loans & Lenders

Once campaign finances were in order, the FHA suggested that the work of the Loan Committee begin immediately, as its success was considered the "primary and a most important factor in a campaign." The function of the loan committee was straightforward, "to secure the cooperation of local financial institutions."[53] As with appointments of local BHP chairmen, the FHA kept a regular tally of bank participation which was updated weekly and published frequently as "an impressive testimonial to the cooperation of financial institutions throughout the country.[54] By the end of 1934 there were 4,000 participating banks; by the end of 1935 there

---

[52] The statement of Arthur A. Blumeyer was reprinted in Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 4.
[53] Community Campaign, p. 10.
[54] See for example "Revised List of Accepted Institutions as of 24 August 1934," [NA RG 287 box y737]; "National Housing Act--Title I Financial Institutions as of 29 June 1935 [NA RG 287 box y740]; FHA, Financial Institutions that are Extending Modernization Credit, Form FHE 61

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were 6,000 banks plus 5,000 additional financial institutions. According to Roger Steffan, the FHA's Director of Modernization Credits, this level of participation represented a "democratization of credit" which had arrived "on a vast scale, almost overnight" and been made available "for the first time in banking history" not only to "gilt-edged individual borrowers" but almost to every "man in the street." If this rhetoric was overblown, it was nonetheless genuine, for prior to the MCP it had been extremely difficult for individuals lacking significant collateral to obtain loans (see Chapter 1). In addition, within the emerging American consumer culture between the two world wars, and certainly within the New Deal ethos of spending one's way out of the Depression, what could have been more *democratic* than what Steffan called "the broadening of the credit base in this country."[55]

The government suggested a three-step program for accomplishing institutional cooperation: contact every eligible financial institution in the community, from commercial banks to building and loan associations to installment lenders, and explain the potential benefits of cooperation; prepare lists of cooperating institutions for distribution to property owners; and, help local banks et al., promote their cooperation through advertising and window displays. In every instance the FHA stressed the importance of personal contact, noting that if the loan committee was persuasive enough a bank might even agree to participate beyond just extending modernization credit to the active solicitation of modernization business. In New Jersey, a bank with branches throughout Essex County sent direct mail letters and made follow-up phone calls to nearly 1,700 licensed building contractors offering to collaborate in modernization promotion. In Kansas City, the Union National Bank assigned one of its loan officers to go outside the bank into the community to solicit customers for modernization loans. It also entered into partnership

---

(Washington: GPO, September 1935) [RG 287 box y 740]. See also "Bank Support is 100% in Lexington," Better Housing, 8 October 1934, p. 1 and "Nebraska Reports Gain in Loan Banks," Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 1.

[55] "Speech of Roger Steffan before the Convention of the Ohio Building Association League, Cincinnati," FHA Press Release No. 73 (3 October 1934), p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

with the local dealer/supplier of a national manufacturer of plumbing and bathroom fixtures hoping to finance through this connection a large number of new loans. Similarly, another bank in Kansas offered to pay $10 in cash to lumber or supply dealers for every loan prospect subsequently approved for modernization credit whom they brought in to the bank.[56]

As always, the FHA provided a barrage of promotional information to assist local loan committees in convincing banks to cooperate with the BHP, including excerpts of speeches given by Roosevelt and other government officials which might be used to lend a certain authority to a loan committee's bank pitch or details of recent campaign successes published in Better Housing: how advertising paid off for a bank in North Dakota, how a bank in South Dakota persuaded a farmer to take out a loan of $1,000 instead of $175 as he had originally intended.[57] The FHA also armed the loan committees with more substantial publicity materials, including a suite of sample bank advertisements. Some of these were available as camera-ready mats requiring only the addition of a specific bank's name and address [Fig. 26]. Others, already used by local banks across the country, were offered as samples which had FHA approval and acceptable tie-in ad copy [Fig. 27].[58] The purpose of these ads was to make it as simple as possible for financial institutions to fully support and promote the Modernization Credit Plan, so that even the most disinterested bank could participate with an absolute minimum of effort.

To have arrived at the advertising stage presupposes that the loan committee had already secured a bank's cooperation. However, if this had not yet been obtained the committee member could supplement his (given the FHA's insistence that loan committee members be "financial men" it is safe to assume that he was a *he*) arts of persuasion with a series of real-life banking

---

[56] "Director for Idaho Gets Wide Support," and "New Jersey Bank Opens Campaign," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, pp. 9 & 7. "Bank Campaign," Better Housing, 26 August 1936, p. 3. "Banker Offers Dealers Cash," Clip Sheet 6 (no. 3, 1936), n.p.

[57] "FHA Commended to Banks by Roosevelt," Better Housing, 1 November 1934, p. 1. "Advertising Gets Loans," Better Housing, 15 October 1934, p. 2. "South Dakota Banker Proves Good Salesman," Better Housing, 12 December 1934, p. 8.

[58] FHA, Sample Better Housing Program Advertisements (Washington: GPO, 1936) [NA RG 287 box y 738]. The content of these advertisements is analyzed in Chapter 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

testimonials offered "not in a spirit of advertising," but as "practical working plans [that] may contribute to the 'good of the cause.'" In these articles, commissioned by the FHA and published as "Banks Tell How and Why They Make Modernization Loans," bank presidents, managers, and cashiers in cities and towns varying in size from 2,000 (East Islip, Long Island) to 780,000 (Boston, MA) recounted their first-hand experiences with MCP lending, accompanied by reproductions of their bank's advertisements, applications, modernization notes, payment passbooks, and ledger cards.[59] In tone, the testimonials mixed Rotarian conviviality ("any such knockers [refused loan applicants] would undo the work of a dozen boosters") with no-nonsense business; in content, they mixed customer anecdotes with lending procedures:

> Before we ask a man to fill out an application, we put a few direct but pleasantly phrased questions: "Let's get a little picture of your fixed expenses, Mr. Jones...Now, your gross income is __" (we make it easy for him to tell us, without embarrassment)...In explaining this ruling (that a borrower's income must be at least five times the amount of his proposed annual payments) to any applicant we made it clear that we were acting chiefly to save the customer from becoming involved in any obligation that might prove burdensome, rather than through any selfish motive of our own.[60]

In this manner, the testimonials managed to address, and dismiss, seemingly every possible objection to extending modernization credit: the time and expense of handling small loans (negligible on both counts); the risk involved ("losses have been small," customers have "proven capacity to discharge financial obligations without difficulty"); the potential red tape of government involvement ("system is not complicated," MCP is "designed for simplicity,"); the "class" of loan applicants (rarely "chiselers," most of "high-type," "90% accepted," "average people with average incomes and average problems"); dealing with people wary of being duped

---

[59] FHA, Seven More Banks Tell How and Why They Make Modernization Loans (Washington: GPO, 1934). This issue (Form FHE 18D) was the fourth in the series and included banks in Springfield, MA; Glen Falls, NY; Binghamton, NY; Pittsburgh, PA; and Hartford, CT, as well as East Islip and Boston.

[60] L.H. Gethoefer, "In a City of 670,000...Pittsburgh, Pa" in Seven More Banks, p. 11. The author was the President of the Peoples-Pittsburgh Trust Company.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by bankers and banks ("we talk to him in very plain yet friendly language," "we do not sell him anything--we answer his questions and permit him to buy").[61] The bankers' stories also heralded the particular benefits of participation in the MCP, noting especially that modernization loans offered "real" and "brilliant" opportunities since they were profitable, safe, liquid, and "not at all troublesome."[62] Finally, the testimonials explained the particulars of each bank's character assessments, credit checks, payment schedules, bookkeeping systems, and promotional activities including advertising and partnering with contractors and building supply dealers--in other words, precisely the information a bank thinking about joining the Better Housing Program would want in order to make an informed decision--presented, not in the form of dry government regulations, as found in a publication like Important Rulings on Modernization Loans by Three Federal Agencies of Banking Supervision, but with folksy informality, banker to banker, much as each loan committee member might approach the managers of his own home-town financial institutions.[63]

The loan committee also provided participating financial institutions with varying amounts of what might be called technical support, assisting credit investigations and loan closures and pre-screening loan applicants.[64] At the recommendation of Albert Deane, Deputy Administrator for Title I, many loan committees set up special bureaus to review the financial qualifications of modernization loan applicants before they were referred to a lender, a process which "materially facilitates the work of the bank."[65] The seven-person bureau of the Kansas City BHP, which included bankers, B&L managers, and the head of the loan committee, vetted

---

[61] Seven More Banks, pp. 4, 14, 12, 15, 11, 5, 6.
[62] Seven More Banks, pp. 4 & 7.
[63] FHA, Important Rulings on Modernization Loans (Washington: GPO, 1934). This publication explained that the Comptroller of the Currency, the Federal Reserve Board (on which Marriner Eccles served), and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation were all disposed to look favorably on financial institutions making modernization loans under Title I.
[64] Community Campaign, p. 18. Before the MCP loan limit was increased to $50,000 in 1935, the FHA even suggested that committees work with financial institutions to arrange "supplementary credit" beyond $2,000 to provide for modernization of large commercial or industrial properties.
[65] "Assists the Bankers," Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

all applications and functioned as a complete loan intermediary. The bureau helped potential borrowers choose lending institutions and sent their financial statements to those banks on a daily basis. The banks determined which applicants were worthy of further consideration and sent the statements of those to whom they did not want to lend back to the bureau to be stamped "rejected" and kept on file for future reference "if that applicant should again apply" for a modernization loan.[66] The work of such bureaus was intended to expedite the whole loan procedure, significantly shortening the time between application and approval--in one case the FHA claimed that a modernization loan was applied for at 12:00 noon, approved at 2:00, and used to purchase building materials at 3:00--to the presumed benefit of both lender and borrower.[67] Such bureaus surely *did* serve financial institutions, saving them from dealing with unqualified applicants. They may also have been a disservice to potential borrowers, who could be rejected without even entering a bank and have that rejection retained on file for the duration of the BHP without consideration of mitigating circumstances which so often influenced personal finances during the economic uncertainties of the Depression. Rejection solely on the basis of a credit statement showed a clear disregard for the borrower's "character," the assessment of which, in lieu of collateral, co-makers, or endorsers, was to be the primary basis for the extension of modernization credit under the supposedly liberalizing terms of Title I and the government insurance it provided.[68]

These terms were explained in detail in the technical bulletins the FHA issued to all participating financial institutions. As a group, these explanatory materials, which included payment schedules, interest rate tables, and FHA forms for credit statements, notes, insurance

---

[66] "Central Offices Assist Bankers," Better Housing, 19 November 1934, p. 4.
[67] "Put on the Rush Act," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 5.
[68] See Chapter 1. In the testimonials, several bankers explained how they chose to overlook the unsatisfactory credit statements of potential borrowers because of the economic crisis. See Seven More Banks, pp. 5 & 15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contracts, and reports, were described by bankers as explicit and practical.[69] While these bulletins include much information that is of a fiscal specificity beyond the scope of the present discussion, they do contain certain relevant clarifications of how modernization loans were handled, including the FHA's use of borrower occupation classifications (professional, semi-professional, technical, sales, crafts, and clerical, service, and industrial workers) to evaluate loan repayments and defaults for the purpose of regulating future lending practices.[70] As explained in the bulletins, the FHA authorized three basic lending scenarios. In the first scenario, a potential borrower went directly to an approved bank or BHP lending bureau and filled out a credit statement. If the borrower's application was approved, he or she signed a promissory note and received the proceeds of the loan in cash to be used exclusively for the purchase of eligible property improvements, relying solely on the good faith of the borrower since there was no regulated follow-up except in the case of payment default. The second scenario was the same, but the proceeds of the loan were dispersed as a cashier's check made out to a specific contractor or dealer already engaged by the borrower, and accepted by that person as cash. These two "direct" lending situations, which were usually the most advantageous to the borrower in terms of rates and fees, combined the best features of time payment (monthly installments) with the benefits of cash purchase (lower price).

In the third scenario, the modernization loan was transacted through a building industry middleman.[71] This could be either a building contractor, who submitted the borrower's credit

---

[69] Seven More Banks, pp. 6-7. These publications were also relatively free of the promotional rhetoric which informed most FHA Title I publications; nonetheless, even here, in a publication devoted to outlining the procedural regulations of Title I, the FHA explained modernization as "a national need," modernization credit as a service of "the greatest community and social value," and modernization lending as "an opportunity and a challenge" for the financial institutions of the country. See for example, Modernization Credit Plan, Bulletin No. 1 (Washington: GPO, 1934), p. 3. This bulletin provided regulations for banks and finance companies. Bulletin No. 2 provided regulations for B&Ls, S&Ls, and insurance companies.

[70] FHA, Division of Economic and Statistics, "Special Occupation Code to be Used for Coding Occupation of Borrower on Title I Claim Audit Sheets," 30 December 1935 [NA RG 287 box y738].

[71] In all three lending scenarios the loan applicant was required to provide the particulars of the property to be modernized, including building location, value, rent or mortgage payment amounts,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

statement to a bank with whom he had entered into a BHP partnership, or a supply or appliance dealer, who submitted the credit statement to a finance company operated by the manufacturer whose products he represented, such as Johns-Manville or Sears-Roebuck.[72] The FHA encouraged commercial banks in the larger cities to handle this type of "indirect" loan in order to "build up their volume of Title I business" and suggested that banks actively cultivate "working arrangements" with contractors, dealers, suppliers, department stores, utilities, architects, and real estate agents to whom the bank would offer volume discounts when purchasing the paper they held on modernization loans.[73] Through the lending mechanism enabled by the NHA, the country's financial institutions were gradually able to resume normal, and then increased activity, moving gradually toward industry recovery. Once local institutions were making modernization loans from $100 to $2,000 (to the presumed satisfaction of their customers), the dire panic days of the 1932-33 winter of despair--when bank runs and bank holidays were everyday occurrences and "the word *loan* was only a word in the dictionary"--gradually receded in memory.[74]

Community Planning

As local BHP loan committees were working with financial institutions to commence their individual Modernization Credit Plans--educating their loan officers and tellers, placing advertisements, installing window and lobby displays, and laying in a stock of blank credit statements and informational brochures--other BHP committees were working to insure that the

---

and building type (single or multiple-family, store, factory, farm, etc.). In addition, the potential borrower was required to itemize on the application the modernization work he or she wished to undertake, having already secured estimates for materials (supplies and equipment), labor, or both. The financial institution then checked the proposed modernization work against the FHA's continually-revised lists of eligible equipment and alterations, being careful to distinguish between "built-ins" and "movables" and "improvements" and "new construction"--depending on which MCP regulations, as dictated by the successive amendments to the National Housing Act, were in effect at that time. See Bulletin No. 1, pp. 23-24. See also FHA, Eligible Improvements to Property Financed Under Title I, National Housing Act Amendments of 1938 (Washington: GPO, 1938).

[72] Bulletin No. 1, pp. 4-5.

[73] FHA Circular, "How Banks Can Increase Their Title I Business," (31 August 1936), n.p. [NA RG 287 box y740] Though "profitability" was the first reason given here for increasing Title I business, also included were good will, re-employment, and community improvement.

[74] "Editorial from *Memphis Press Scimitar*," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

preparations of the banks, B&Ls, etc. were not in vain. In this respect, the activities of the publicity and building industry committees were certainly the most crucial, since the former promoted the campaign as widely as possible throughout a given community, while the latter enlisted and directed the participation of those firms and individuals who would supply the materials and labor to carry out the modernization and repair work the campaign was designed to stimulate. The work of these two committees was over-arching and all-encompassing, engaging every segment of the local campaign and the local community, but the terms of this engagement were specialized and compartmentalized because the publicity and building industry committees tended to view a community according to its constituent groups. Only the Planning Committee viewed the community as a whole and was dedicated to "making plans for [a community's] long-range development and improvement." Though the FHA believed this committee should consist of housing and planning specialists, its members, especially in small towns, were more often drawn from the local real estate industry and assorted civic improvement groups.[75]

Community planning, as the FHA envisioned it within the modernization phase of the BHP, was a nebulous proposition at best. Never properly defined within the context of Title I, we must turn to its definition within the context of Title II in order to make sense of the broad range of modernization activities that fell under this general rubric: "planning...means the process of adapting a specific area of land to the economic, social, and physical factors which determine its ultimate value."[76] Within the planning work carried out by local BHPs those three factors may be easily discerned as the motivations for community-wide initiatives. In its Community Planning manual, made available to BHP planning committees as well as municipal

---

[75] Community Campaign, p. 20.

[76] FHA, Planning Neighborhoods for Small Houses, Technical Bulletin No. 5 (Washington: GPO, 1936), p. 1. Though planning was defined under Title II, it was not any more successfully implemented; by 1941 few measures had been carried out beyond the adoption of site plans for FHA financed subdivisions–site plans which became notorious for their monotony as they were replicated across the country. See Peter G. Rowe, Making a Middle Landscape (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 197-207.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

planning officials and "semi-public" planning associations, the FHA articulated the economic motivation for wide-spread modernization:

> The restoration of the value and earning power of neighborhoods means also the restored ability to pay taxes. The community can lose only through the depreciation of property. It should plan broadly for avoiding this costly loss through sound and far-seeing restoration.[77]

As interpreted on the local level this directive did not yield the fiscal boost to the tax base which the FHA had clearly anticipated--at least not during the first few years of the MCP--because the BHPs chose to promote, and governing bodies to enact, only the spirit and not the letter of the measure.

Beginning in Texas in September of 1934, and then spreading east and west across the country, tax assessors announced that modernizations and repairs which increased the property valuation of buildings would be exempt from taxation. In practice, this meant that improved home and business properties would not be assessed at higher values and that, as a result, a property owner's tax bill from the state, county, or city would remain static, at least for the year in which the improvements were made and possibly for an extended subsequent period depending on the jurisdiction. New York City adopted a three-year waiver designed to especially encourage modernization of those properties, often tenements owned by savings banks and title companies, which had been allowed to fall into disrepair to escape increased taxation--a common Depression-related phenomenon in many large American cities [Figs. 28 & 29].[78] In some places exemption eligibility stipulated that the property owner secure a federally-insured modernization loan; in other places it was applied unilaterally to all improved properties, whether owners paid for their modernization in cash or on credit.[79] In deciding to exempt from taxation increased

---

[77] FHA, Community Planning in Relation to the Modernization Phase of the National Housing Act (Washington: GPO, 1934), p. 5.
[78] "City Seeks to Spur Repairs," New York Times, 3 April 1935, p. 19.
[79] The FHA added its own quasi tax-incentive to the exemption drive, easing the Title I regulations which had prevented owners of home and business properties from securing modernization loans

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

property valuations due to modernization, property assessors apparently saw no negative implications in the postponement of those increased revenues which the FHA had promised would result from the MCP. Rather, postponement caused by the exemptions represented the tax collectors' participation in the BHP and contribution to national recovery.[80] By January 1935, modernization tax exemptions were on the books in Georgia, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming and planning committees were lobbying for exemptions in all remaining states where the BHP was active.[81] Though local modernization campaigns strongly advocated the tax exemption, it was hardly a promotional gimmick on the part of the BHP, requiring in every case a formal ruling by the state, county, or municipal assessor or assessment board. This is not to imply, however, that once the modernization tax exemption gained ground, the FHA did not exploit its potential for rousing Main Street Rotarians into partisan support, attempting to spur through local BHP campaigns a "no-tax movement" akin to those contemporaneous and popular movements of the Townsend Plan and the Share-Our-Wealth Drive.[82]

---

if their property tax payments were delinquent. "FHA Eases Rules," New York Times, 18 September 1934, p. 19.

[80] Concurrent with the tax-exemption effort, a few BHP planning committees also attempted to convince municipalities to suspend building permit fees for the duration of the modernization campaign as an added incentive to property owners considering major improvements. The argument was the same used to win exemptions: though cities would not collect immediate revenues from fees generated by the increased demand for caused by the stimulated building activity, they would contribute to the greater good of their communities. However, because building permit fees were not excessively high to begin with and were already an acceptable modernization loan expense under FHA regulations, most cities were unwilling to give up this revenue. "Townships Suspend Fee Costs," Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 5.

[81] Among the many articles covering the tax exemption in Better Housing see especially "Texas Repairs Tax Exempt," Better Housing, 20 September 1934, p. 4. "'No-Tax' on Repairs Movement Growing," Better Housing, 8 October 1934, 2. "Tax Collectors Continue to Help," Better Housing, 1 November 1934, p. 4. "Tax Exempt Ruling Proves Boon the Building Plan," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 4.

[82] Dr. Francis Townsend's Townsend Plan promoted a revolving pension fund designed to end mass unemployment and financed by a business tax. Sen. Huey P. Long's Share-Our-Wealth promoted the liquidation of all personal fortune with the proceeds divided equally among the American populace. For more on these popular fiscally-related movements see Leuchtenburg, pp. 98-106. For a contemporary analysis see Raymond Swing, Forerunners of American Fascism

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The majority of planning committees dedicated themselves to promoting what the FHA would have called the social and physical factors of planning, working to "lay the groundwork of civic aspiration...for the general beautification of the city" and "study the matter of slum clearance and rehabilitation of blighted areas."[83] In practice, this led to the development and promotion of group modernization projects, which the FHA identified as "the most immediate opportunity for action" in large-scale planning under Title I. In general, a "group" project called for the improvement of all buildings on at least one side of a city block, though improvements on both sides of a block were obviously preferred and multi-block sites were more desirable still. The goal was to stabilize property values, restore rentals to profitability, and counteract creeping blight not merely in individual buildings--though appeals to individualist self-interest were crucial to the group project--but in assemblages of buildings in which the physical and fiscal disposition of each affected the whole. According to FHA logic, modernization had a kind of reverse domino effect in a given district: if one unrenovated building would eventually bring a block down, then one modernized building would eventually pull it back up. To maximize the impact of this effect, the FHA stressed the benefits of collective modernization: "When area standards are raised--your own property naturally becomes more valuable."[84]

It was the task of the BHP planning committee to select those areas which might benefit most from a group project. After this selection the committee enlisted volunteer architects to prepare renderings and detailed drawings of proposed improvements to the corridor or district, usually accompanied by before and after views of the selected block(s), as in Minneapolis, MN where several commercial blocks of Nicollet Avenue which had "become obsolete" were selected for group modernization in the winter of 1935 [Figs. 30 & 31].[85] The designated blocks

---

(New York: J. Messner Inc., 1935).
[83] Community Campaign, p. 20.
[84] FHA, How Owners of Home and Business Property Can Secure the Benefit of the National Housing Act (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), p. 5.
[85] In the 1930s Nicollet Avenue, a street rising from the banks of the Mississippi River and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were re-designed to create "a pleasing and harmonious appearance" which avoided monotony across the corridor by treating each side of the street as an autonomous unit, thus producing four separate building ensembles, each in the guise of a newly built block-long structure.[86] The most important element of the modernization scheme with respect to Nicollet Avenue's retail profitability was its accommodation of the automobile in off-street parking reached through a mid-block alley and advertised with a large neon sign on a two-story stepped pylon. The intention was not simply to make the modernized blocks look "new and improved," but to make them appear as a modern shopping center, with as many shopping center amenities as could be fashioned out of the existing agglomeration of buildings (see Chapter 4).[87]

After such group modernization schemes were prepared, the BHP planning committee would make public presentations to convince property owners to accept the proposed improvements. In outlining this general procedure, the FHA stressed the importance of soliciting and securing the participation of all building owners: "they must be made clearly to see the advantage to be gained from common action." At the same time, however, the FHA noted that no formal or legal "mutual bind" was necessary, only "a simple form of agreement among property owners to join in a group enterprise."[88] Such was the case in Oakland, CA where

---

traversing the downtown core, was considered the city's principal business artery, the location of its largest department stores and best office buildings. As the city's commercial development shifted inland the oldest blocks of Nicollet Avenue (closest to the river), faced declining sales and property values and increased vacancies. The corridor would later be redesigned as a pedestrian mall (Lawrence Halprin, 1967) and as a shopping mall which took the place of the street (Johnson/Burgee, IDS Center, 1973).

[86] "Minneapolis Business Men to Modernize Four Blocks," p. 2. Within each unit uniformity was achieved by adjusting building heights, regularizing fenestration, and reconfiguring the elevations to reduce the apparent number of buildings per block. For visual coherence extraneous architectural detailing was removed and pre-cast stone cladding was installed across the facades. Signage was coordinated with free standing block letters. To protect shoppers from Minneapolis's climatic extremes, continuous canopies were installed across the length of each block.

[87] These amenities included parking; clustering stores in a compact area; stores planned as complementary units visually and in terms of services and products sold. "Minneapolis Business Men to Modernize Four Blocks," p. 2.

[88] To further encourage group participation, especially in blighted or marginal districts, the FHA suggested informing property owners that lending institutions would look more favorably on joint modernization projects than on individual property improvements. Community Planning, pp. 8 & 10.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

downtown property owners participated in a "cooperative modernization campaign" to fight declining rents and increased vacancies in the oldest section of the city with a goal of simultaneous improvement rather than visual coordination.[89] Throughout the life of the BHP, but especially after the loan limit increase of 1935, group modernization projects were launched in a number of communities where they were credited with not only increasing the value of all properties, but also, as the FHA put it, with halting the "exodus from older sections" of those cities.[90] As collective (if limited) responses to commercial decline, BHP group modernization projects anticipated subsequent developments in American urban renewal, especially undertakings such as Business Improvement Districts and the National Trust's Main Street program.[91]

General Industry, Mailers & Movies

To promote group modernization projects, especially along commercial corridors, it was necessary for planning committees to enlist the cooperation of BHP general industry committees, since the majority of properties within any district demarcated for improvement were occupied by businesses outside the building or real estate industries. As its regular function, the general industry committee worked to gain broad-based BHP support among such commercial (non-building related) firms and establishments. The committee's goal was to swell public opinion in favor of modernization by convincing local businesses that they would "derive substantial and immediate benefit from the BHP"--as soon as building tradesmen were back at work, drawing

---

[89] "Cooperative Modernization Campaign Rebuilds Values in Downtown Oakland," National Real Estate Journal, March 1936, p. 50. Dudley W. Frost, "Today Vacancies are Not a Problem," American City, August 1939, p. 77.

[90] "Profit Follows Baltimore Loans," Better Housing, 19 November 1934, p. 1.

[91] A business improvement district (BID) is an organizing and financing mechanism based on state and local law which permits property owners and merchants to band together to use the city's tax collection powers to assess (i.e., tax) themselves. These funds are collected by the city and returned in entirety to the BID and are used for purchasing supplemental services such as sanitation and promotions and capital improvement such as street furniture and lighting, beyond those already provided by the city. The National Trust's Main Street program, begun in 1980, provides technical assistance to small towns attempting to restore economic health to downtown districts devastated by the loss of manufacturing jobs, continued suburban expansion, and, more recently, the arrival of big box/category killer stores such as Wal-Mart. A national Main Street Center assists communities in developing legislative policy and design guidelines.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

pay checks and purchasing goods and services.[92] The general industry committee sought cooperation by encouraging businesses to distribute home modernization information to their employees, to place modernization exhibits in their lobbies, and to modernize their own physical plants, be they stores, offices, or other commercial establishments. Federal Shipbuilding and Drydock, one of the largest shipbuilders in the Northeast, not only set up a special modernization office in conjunction with a local bank to assist its employees in securing loans, it even went so far as to arrange for payroll deductions to allow employees to repay their loans as easily and painlessly as possible, a practice which, at the time, was commonly associated with community fund drives.[93] The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin not only launched a special modernization supplement to its daily newspaper (in addition to editorials in support of the FHA), it launched plans to modernize its 1908 office building which eventually resulted in new lighting and ventilation systems and a new black granite and glass block facade designed by George Howe [Figs. 32 & 33].[94]

To aid local general industry committees in their work, the FHA organized a series of national direct mail campaigns with industry specific letters ("Dear Hospital Administrator" or "Dear Retailer") to be coordinated with locally-conducted telephone or in-person follow-up contact. Some local BHPs then initiated their own direct mail campaigns. In Essex County, New Jersey, the BHP set up a separate Circularization Committee which sent over 100,000 pieces of direct mail in its first year of operation. Similarly, the Prudential Life Insurance Company sent out letters to its 140,000 mortgagors nation-wide urging them to modernize their properties through the MCP.[95] In another national campaign of October 1934, 15,000 letters were sent out

---

[92] Community Campaign, pp. 11 & 19.
[93] "News from the Front," Better Housing, 19 November 1934, p. 7. See also Middletown in Transition, p. 131.
[94] FHA, Press Digest, August-October 1934 [NA RG 287 Box y748]. See also "Planning the Newspaper Office," Architectural Record 82 (November 1937): 75.
[95] FHA, "Dear Hospital Administrator," and "Dear Retailer," Direct Mail Pieces (no date, 1935?) [NA RG 287 box y740]. State of New Jersey BHP, "1936 Report of Better Housing Headquarters (WPA Project #S 5059)," p. 4 [NA RG 287 box y741]. "Insurance Company Gives Effective Aid,"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

from Washington to movie theater owners and operators across the country. These letters, with Administrator James Moffett's signature affixed to them, requested full cooperation in permitting lobby displays for literature distribution. These were simple displays, typically consisting of a table arranged with pamphlets, BHP posters, and often a flag-draped photograph of the Capitol, the White House, or the President [Fig. 34].[96] The direct mail letter also requested that local BHP committee members be allowed to make audience appeals at the start of every feature, followed by the showing of the first Better Housing newsreel, produced by Movie-tone for the FHA and featuring Sara Delano Roosevelt, the President's mother, discussing the BHP while celebrating her 80th birthday.[97]

In the spring of 1935, the FHA established a Motion Picture Section and launched a series of newsreels known as the *Better Housing News Flashes*, along with an additional series of technical films for builders. The *News Flashes*, eventually numbering nine, were produced jointly by the FHA and Pathé and distributed free, but for a small shipping fee, to the nation's movie theaters in the hope of "carry[ing] the message of modernization, repair, and new construction in graphic terms."[98] Designed for "education with a touch of humor," each *Flash* was a talking short feature, running approximately 5-6 minutes.[99] Though hardly the "most unique series of motion picture shorts ever placed before the American public" as the FHA first claimed, the *Flashes* were doubtlessly "entertaining, timely, and newsy" with such subjects as "A Come-Back for Key West" in which "America's tropical city stages a dramatic bit of modernization magic" and "Miracle in the Attic" in which "ugly wasted space is transformed into livable, attractive rooms."[100] Other releases featured dramatizations of every phase of modernization, from

---

Better Housing, 30 November 1934, p. 4.
[96] See for example "Theaters Conduct Exhibits," Better Housing, 1 November 1934, p. 4.
[97] "Motion Picture Men Experts on Housing," Better Housing, 15 October 1934, p. 8.
[98] Better Housing News Flashes, Nos. 1-9 (FHA and Pathé, 1935-1938?) [NA RG 031 items 31.1-31.9]. FHA, Better Housing News Flashes Here Now (Washington: GPO, 1935), p. 3.
[99] "Record Set by Housing News Reels," Better Housing, 31 March 1936, p. 1.
[100] FHA, Ready Now a New Release, Better Housing News Flashes (Washington: GPO, 1936), n.p.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

negotiating for a loan to examining buildings for deterioration, with sonorous voice-overs provided by bankers, builders and architects. By the early summer of 1935 the *Flashes* had been booked in over 10,000 movie theaters, including such high-profile, first-run houses as Grauman's Egyptian in Hollywood and Radio City and the Paramount in New York. At the conclusion of their cinematic runs the FHA made the *Flashes* available for private screenings to trade groups, civic organizations, and schools. In 1936 the FHA estimated that over 40 million Americans had viewed the *News Flashes* during one of their approximately 150,000 scheduled showings.[101]

Women's Work

While the Better Housing newsreels were playing at the local cinema, BHP women's committees were busy "arousing interest" in modernization among this largest group of the general American populace. Distaff support, the FHA had determined, was crucial to the success of the national and local campaigns, for women were key both as customers of modernization, especially in the home, and as boosters.[102] Since a vast number of women--specifically middle-class women--did not work outside the home, they were viewed by the FHA as a potential volunteer force which could be enlisted "to devote their time exclusively to selling modernization and repair." Indeed, many such volunteer groups were organized under the auspices of local women's committees in Buffalo, Portland, Hartford, Boston, Detroit, and Racine, to name but a few locales. Here and elsewhere, they staffed information booths at fairs and expositions and conducted door-to-door canvassing alongside the other BHP field workers. The FHA believed women to be especially successful canvassers for both house and store modernization, approaching other women as fellow homemakers and merchants as their best customers.[103]

---

[101] Figures cited in FHA broadside stamped 18 January 1936 [NA RG 287 y742].
[102] Community Campaign, p. 11.
[103] "Women and Youth Contribute to Success of Housing Drive," Better Housing, 12 December 1934, p. 4 and "Women Organize Housing Drives," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 8. See also FHA, Ways for Women to Participate in the BHP (Washington: GPO, 1935), n.p. The

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

For the most part women's committees worked with members of the local chapters of such national organizations as the League of Women Voters, the Junior League, the D.A.R., the Federated Garden Clubs of America, and the Ladies' Auxiliaries of the Kiwis, Elks, etc., along with local clubs, churches, schools, and children's groups including PTAs and Boy and Girl Scout troops. The BHP eventually reported the participation of 26,000 local chapters of some 700 organizations and clubs.[104] Women's committees organized social events, such as informational luncheons and teas, set up special exhibitions for schools and libraries, and ran educational classes in "home beautification and social welfare." These classes, usually held under the auspices of local garden clubs or community centers, had clear socio-economic delineations: middle class women were offered tips on interior design; working class women were offered lessons on improving health through home improvements (adding or upgrading plumbing, hot water, electricity) and were cautioned that "run-down housing may mean run-down health."[105] Some very active women's committees even organized Better Housing conferences, as the Washington, DC committee did in 1936, scheduling presentations by FHA officials and arranging for field trips to modernized or soon-to-be modernized buildings.[106]

Women's committees were also responsible for establishing the women's section of local BHP Speakers' Bureaus. These bureaus, which had a national counterpart run out of Washington, coordinated volunteers whom the FHA or the local committees qualified to speak on select aspects of the BHP. The FHA itself retained a staff of four full-time speakers to address large groups and national radio audiences. Qualified volunteer orators, who were given training sessions and suggestions for preparing speeches, were assigned to events as requests for

---

implications of gender and building modernization are discussed in chapter 5. The use of women as canvassers is discussed in Chapter 3.

[104] "Clubs, National Bodies Support Women's Division," Women's Page Clip Sheet 1 (July 1935), n.p.

[105] Community Campaign, p. 20 and FHA, "Suggested Speaker's Bureau Address No. 31" in Portfolio of Publicity for Use of Community Campaign Committees (Washington: GPO, 1934), p. 10.

[106] See "Internal Memorandum to Members of Washington Committee on Housing, Re: Housing

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Better Housing speakers came into the bureaus and female speakers were, not surprisingly, usually called upon to address women's clubs.[107] Women's committees were also responsible for conducting Better Housing contests in their local grade schools and high schools. Most of these took the form of essay, poster, or slogan contests designed to "make children modernization conscious." In San Antonio, prizes were awarded for the best posters encouraging modernization and winning entries were displayed at local BHP headquarters. In Baltimore, Better Housing essays were made a compulsory assignment in public school English composition classes and a contest was held to determine the best one. In Boston, parochial school children were required to participate in Better Housing essay contests in which suggested titles included, "FHA--the Backbone Recovery," "How My City can Benefit from the National Housing Act," "Modernization," and "Better Housing and Better Living." Other schools actually added building modernization to the curriculum. In public high schools in Springfield, Missouri, Oakland, California, Muncie, Indiana, Chattanooga, Tennessee, modernization was taught in shop, trade, home-economics, and government classes.[108] The point of competitions and classes was to stimulate interest in modernization among school students who would, it was presumed, discuss the BHP at home with their parents who, in turn, would take this discussion seriously since it was authorized or sanctioned by the school itself. The children, having been properly armed with BHP pamphlets, stickers, and buttons distributed by the women's committee and taught the selling points of modernization by the women's committee school presentations would become effective catalysts for parental participation. As a member of the women's committee of the East Rutherford, New Jersey, BHP explained it, "Naturally, the young folks interest their parents."[109]

Conference," 6 November 1935 [NA RG 207 box 13].

[107] "Trained Speakers Join Housing Drives," Better Housing, 15 October 1934, p. 2 and "Appeals to Women to Better Homes," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 5.

[108] Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 8. "Trade Schools Study Modernization Plans," Better Housing, 8 October 1934, p. 1. "Housing Will be Taught in Schools," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 4.

[109] Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 7. "Children Make Posters," Better Housing, 15 October 1934, p. 3. "First Schools to Study Housing," Better Housing, 27 September 1934, p. 4. "Boston

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

As with every other special interest committee, the FHA supplemented the women's committee's activities with targeted promotional materials. Some brochures simply enumerated ways for women to participate in the BHP, but with a definite emphasis on home modernization; women were counseled to first "solve your own housing problem" before participating in other BHP activities: "This is the most important contribution you can make." Other brochures used fictionalized testimonials, a typical advertising strategy of the period, carefully scripted to touch upon those aspects of the modernization drive which the FHA considered the most important in relation to women. Woman's Opportunity in the Better Housing Program related the saga of middle-class homemaker Margaret Stone and her neighbors, whose houses were "looking run down" after years of neglect due to Depression privations since everyone on the block was "just managing to scrape by." Though Margaret had heard about the National Housing Act on the radio and learned about modernization loans at her bank, her husband Joe was skeptical about "going into debt to make the house look pretty." Explaining the difference between good debt and bad debt, Margaret convinced Joe that they should take out a loan to "have the roof repaired and the kitchen modernized" and could even hire their neighbor Bill, an under-employed painter, to paint their house. Once this was accomplished, Margaret "turned out to be a real salesman for modernization." She encouraged her neighbors to follow her example and then continued her efforts on Main Street until her local merchants "caught the idea" and modernized their establishments.[110]

As we might expect, this tale of modernization--a "story [which] can be told of every community in the land"--enunciated all of the usual benefits of BHP participation (re-employment, improved property values and appearances), but its most important message was one that the FHA would continually emphasize throughout the BHP, namely that the onus of modernization fell upon

---

Essay Contest" and "Youths Join Drive," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, pp. 4 & 2.
[110] FHA, Woman's Opportunity in the Better Housing Program (Washington: GPO, 1935), pp. 4-6 [NA RG 287 box y743].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

women (see chapter 6). This message was reiterated in many publicity efforts, most especially in the joint national/local drive for radio and newspaper modernization coverage. For this, the FHA's PR Division prepared extensive portfolios of radio spots and newspaper articles which included not just advertising, but editorial content as well. Local radio stations agreed to broadcast, in donated daytime programming slots (which were cheaper and generally had a female audience), FHA-produced public service announcements that combined BHP promotions with women's interest features, such as "The Trend of Color in Homes" and "The Best Way to Get the Most for One's Money." Stations also broadcast the FHA's "human interest playlets"—short dramas (10 minutes) designed, like pamphlet testimonials, to personalize the need for modernization. In one playlet several residents of a poorly-heated boarding house convince the landlady to use modernization credit to install a modern heating system. In another, a couple who have inherited a run-down hotel from an uncle take out a loan to give the place "a thorough going-over."[111] Nationally, the American Broadcast System agreed to pick up a 12-week series called "The Women's Hour" which aired in the winter of 1934-35 and CBS broadcast the series "Your Home and Mine" in which "the flying microphone" of Better Housing Reporter Miss Martha Holmes visited "representative Americans" who told their "true, spontaneous stories of how they have modernized."[112] With their underlying consumerism and utter valorization of middle class ideals and aspirations these modernization radio programs (which eventually totalled 18,000 broadcasts), like the entire BHP, were in ideological opposition to the social critique and reformist agendas of most other government-sponsored entertainments, such as the "Living Newspapers" produced by the Federal Theater under the auspices of the WPA.[113]

---

[111] FHA, "Supplement No. 3-A" and "Supplement No. 3-C" in Radio Portfolio (Washington: GPO, 1936), n.p.

[112] "Radio Used Effectively in Chicago" and "Women's Division Activities at Station WCOP," Better Housing, 13 May 1936, p. 4. "Unique Radio Program Takes Housing Message to Nation," Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 6. "Radio Broadcast Schedule," stamped 22 January 1935 [NA RG 287 box y742].

[113] For an analysis of the Federal Theater see Barbara Melosh, Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The FHA Clip Sheet

In the spring of 1935 the FHA began providing the nation's newspapers with copy and artwork for inclusion on their daily or weekly "Women's Pages"--those standard features of American newspapers which became increasingly popular in the 1920s and 1930s (even the august New York Times added one in 1935). The FHA's women's page articles were mostly standard home decorating fare, covering topics like kitchen and bathroom renovations, built-in conveniences, paint color harmony, and new wallpaper designs. They also offered recurring features that newspapers could run as regular columns including "Housing Hints"; "Tips on How and What to Improve"; and "Modernization Question & Answer."[114] Eventually the women's page was subsumed into the FHA's regular Modernization Clip Sheet, one of its most successful national publicity endeavors.

The Clip Sheet, which began publication in the fall of 1934, was an 8-column broadside sent weekly to 2,000 daily newspapers and semi-monthly to 12,000 weekly newspapers. [115] It functioned as a kind of FHA wire service, providing regular dispatches of editorial copy, as well as camera-ready illustrations, which could be used without restriction. Though originally intended to provide content for special Modernization and Better Housing pull-out sections, which the FHA promoted nationally through a direct mail campaign to the nation's newspaper editors, the Clip Sheet eventually became source material primarily for real estate, building, and home pages, with additional material appropriate for editorial pages and local or metro news coverage. Between 1934 and 1937 the FHA issued thirteen volumes of the Clip Sheet containing articles that covered seemingly every potential topic related to the Better Housing Program and the practice of modernization. Articles about the BHP, with bylines from Washington and the field, included straight news items like statistics on re-employment, lending volume, and industrial production, as

---

1991).
[114] See FHA, Women's Clip Sheet 1 (Nos. 1-10, March -December 1935) [NA RG 287 box y751].
[115] "Clip Sheet Popular," Better Housing, 20 September 1934, p. 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

well as real estate and finance coverage with an optimistic slant intended to show that economic conditions were improving and that national recovery was on the way. This bias is clearly revealed not only in the titles of Clip Sheet articles like "Railroad Car Loadings Gain All Over U.S.," "Deposit Gains Laid to Plan," and "Survey Shows Marked Gains in Construction," but was also made explicit by the FHA itself, which stated that such stories were "designed to create confidence" in real property and industry. While the Clip Sheet was obviously intended for self-promotion, at times the articles were excessively self-congratulatory: "FHA Business Aid, Expert Says" and "FHA Credited with Increased Employment."[116] The Clip Sheet also regularly printed articles based on speeches made by FHA officials, the content of which had already been made available in agency Press Releases.[117]

Other BHP coverage included articles with local bylines on individual community campaign successes: from New Orleans, "Improvements Made through FHA Financing: Living Conditions of 74 Families Raised when Buildings are Modernized"; from Newark, ""Old Tenement Transformed by Aid of FHA Loan: 26 Families now Housed in Comfortable Quarters."[118] Recycling government statistics, especially those collected by the FHA's Division of Economics and Statistics, was a typical way of creating Clip Sheet copy and often a single analysis appeared in several articles with a different emphasis in each. "Clubs, Hotels Alter Buildings" and "2,408 Churches Benefited by FHA Insurance" used the same analysis of modernization loans by building type which appeared in the FHA's multi-volume series of construction and real estate data. "Many Stores in Need of Repair" relied on a Department of Commerce survey completed in 1936 to which the FHA frequently turned in its promotion of commercial building modernization (see Chapter

---

[116] See Clip Sheet 3 (no. 6, 1935). Clip Sheet 5 (no. 11, 1935). Clip Sheet 9 (no. 8 ,1936). Community Campaign, p. 15. Clip Sheet 5 (no.9, 1935). Clip Sheet 9 (no. 2, 1936).

[117] For example, the address Administrator James Moffett made at Radio City in November 1934, which was broadcast nationally over NBC, was offered to the media first in transcript form as Press Release No. 110 and then within a month as a fully digested Clip Sheet article titled "Neglect of Home is False Thrift" which quoted from the speech extensively, but placed it in the broad context of what the Clip Sheet copy writer called that "movement of tremendous force"--the Better Housing Program. FHA Press Release No. 110 (11 November 1934) [NA RG 287 box y749].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

4).[119] The Clip Sheet also featured editorials and cartoons in support of the MCP, canned interviews with committee chairmen and state directors which left blanks for the insertion of appropriate local names, and human interest stories about, for example, the first modernization loan made, the first modernization loan paid back, or the modernization of "the oldest apartment house in the U.S.A.–the Taos Pueblo," in which Chief Looking Elk, the pueblo's governor, took out $112 of FHA-insured credit to improve "his five-century old kitchen," replacing an open hearth with a gas range [Fig. 35].[120]

Building modernization coverage in the Clip Sheet was just as extensive, putting at the disposal of local newspaper editors a broad range of articles dealing with style changes and physical plant improvements, some written as if reporting national trends ("Modern Tourist Camps Demanded," "Public Now Demands Up-to-Date Store" and "Shutters, Outmoded 30 Years Ago, Again in Style"), others practical tips ("Refrigerator Needs Space Above for Air," "Time Needed for Drying of Plaster" and "Glass Panels Effective").[121] Still others stressed the more "technical" aspects of modernization, offering advice on upgrading wiring and plumbing, installing new appliances, and fireproofing and winterizing with asbestos shingles and insulation.[122] Many of these articles were released in the Clip Sheet to coincide with specialized modernization promotions the FHA undertook at various times. The most prominent were fireproofing (held in conjunction with National Fire Protection Week in 1935) and winterizing campaigns in which the FHA sent out, via the local BHPs, direct mailers and pamphlets with titles such as How You Can Eliminate Fire Hazards by Modernization (Form FHA 701) and You Can Modernize this Winter (FHA Form

---

[118] Both articles appeared in Clip Sheet 9 (no. 9, 1936).
[119] Clip Sheet 11 (no. 1, 1934) and Clip Sheet 11 (no. 10, 1936). Clip Sheet 11 (no. 1, 1936.)
[120] "Lo, and Behold," Clip Sheet 7 (no. 3, 1936).
[121] Clip Sheet 2 (no. 5, 1935). Clip Sheet 11 (no. 6, 1937). Clip Sheet 1 (no. 12, 1935). Clip Sheet 11 (no. 6, 1937). Clip Sheet 11 (no. 11, 1937). Clip Sheet 9 (no. 10, 1936).
[122] See for example "Fire Hazards Deserve Consideration" and "Repair for Colder Days," Clip Sheet 10 (no. 3, 1937).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

708).[123] These mini-campaigns within the FHA's larger modernization drive demonstrate clearly the degree of interconnectedness of all elements--activities and publications--of the BHP.

In addition to specialized theme coverage, the Clip Sheet also ran a continuous series of before and after photographs of exterior and interior modernizations, both commercial and residential, for which camera-ready mats were available free-of-charge for ease of reproduction by local media. Sometimes these were generic examples of the transformative possibilities of modernization [Fig. 36].[124] Other times they were graphic case studies which included the specifics of a project's location, cost, and the extent of modernization work. "Repaired with $12,500" detailed how the owners of a two-story commercial property in Riverside, California, a building occupied by a pharmacy and several offices, used FHA financing for exterior modernization which replaced the building's Romanesque revival facade with one that was Spanish Colonial [Fig. 37]. "Modernized on Main Street explained how the owners of the Block & Kuhl Department Store in Moline, IL spent $2,800 to install a new 70-foot long glass and metal storefront [Fig. 38].[125] Throughout the Clip Sheet photograph captions, as well as articles and short how-to items, invariably concluded by mentioning that such work could be financed with FHA-insured credit.

The Clip Sheet proved extremely popular with the American newspapers whose publishers saw it as a simple, but useful way of participating in the modernization drive, enabling newspapers to display the BHP House on the masthead, right next to the NRA eagle. Especially for small-town newspapers it was a time-saving device, providing feature material and up-to-date reporting from

---

[123] The winterization promotion was designed to offset seasonal unemployment in the building trades by convincing property owners to make improvements during the winter months. See "33 Northern Cities Break Deadlock in Winter Work," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, pp. 1-2. "Plans for FHA Campaign," New York Times 30 August 1934, XI, p. 12. "Winter Modernization Plan Launched," Better Housing, 26 August 1936, pp. 1-2. See also "Housing Groups Support Fire Prevention Week" Clip Sheet 5 (no. 10, 1935). "Modernize to Fight Fire, Plan Theme," Clip Sheet 5 (no. 9, 1935). "Housing Administration Backs Industry, Business, Civic Groups in Fire Prevention," Clip Sheet 5 (no. 11, 1935).

[124] Captions typically explained that "hundreds of homes such as shown in the 'before' picture here may be found throughout the United States." See for example "Transformation," Clip Sheet 9 (no. 11, 1937).

[125] "Repaired with $12,500," Clip Sheet 4 (no. 10, 1935). "Modernized on Main Street," Clip Sheet

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Washington to fill the space between revenue-producing modernization advertisements on the *Better Housing*, real estate, financial, and news pages--in other words, editorial content which served to further the interests of those local businesses renting space for modernization ads. By October 1934 the FHA's PR Division reported that its material was being used by the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Examiner, as well as dozens of smaller local papers, such as the Patterson Morning Call and the New Rochelle Morning Star. Even the foreign language press took advantage of the Clip Sheet, including Yiddish, Italian, German, Russian, Spanish and Magyar dailies.[126] During the first eighteen months of the program, newspaper coverage relating to modernization and the BHP, much of it derived from the Clip Sheet, amounted to a total of 17,300 printed pages, 11,200 special Better Housing sections, and nearly 3,000 regular (daily or weekly) Better Housing features. According to Ward Canaday, the nation's newspapers were even predicting that Better Housing sections would become the next "great new development" in newspaper features, having a similar long-term impact on advertising and sales as the "automobile section developed for the auto industry after the war."[127] Press coverage figures and Clip Sheet usage were closely monitored by the FHA, which required its field offices to gather and send to Washington press clippings from the local BHPs. Like any business-oriented organization, the FHA also contracted with Media Records, a private-sector clipping service, to handle national press collection and monitor tie-in advertising and newspaper cooperation.[128] In house, press coverage was summarized in a daily Press Digest prepared by the Newspaper Section and circulated throughout the agency. Special publicity concerns, most of them dealing with negative press reports, were examined in the Digest's "Confidential Supplement" made available only to the staff of Canaday's PR Division.

---

8 (no. 7, 1936).
[126] Confidential Supplement to FHA Press Digest #41, 2 October 1934 [NA RG 287 box y748].
[127] Ward Canaday, "Transcript of Speech to Sales Executives Club, New York City," 27 September 1934, p. 12 [NA RG 287 box y748].
[128] See the following tables prepared by Media Records: Daily and Weekly Newspapers in Active

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In supplying the Clip Sheet to newspapers the FHA hoped to achieve several goals: first, to generate publicity for the BHP through a certain amount of "reading material" which appeared to be community-based rather than produced in Washington (though the opposite was true); second, to balance this material with coverage of modernization practice that was standardized (and therefore FHA controlled) and functioned as a voice of authority on matters of architectural re/design and style; and finally, to secure the promotional cooperation of the nation's newspapers.[129] As always, the FHA argued for the profitability of participation, here through increased advertising linage which meant increased advertising revenues. "Newspapers can profit," the FHA claimed, since "the Better Housing Program opens an enormous field for the expansion of advertising."[130] The agency encouraged newspaper to aggressively seek out and expand its "potential markets" of "present and prospective advertisers"--those building suppliers, appliance dealers, department store, contractors, bankers, realtors, and property management companies who had never, or had not adequately, advertised before. To help newspapers attract new accounts the agency even supplied what they called "service material" in the form of ad copy and mats featuring the BHP logo, appropriate for dealers, contractors, and banks. After offering this service for two years the FHA reported that it had filled nearly 8,000 requests for prepared advertisements, sending a total of 92,000 mats to newspapers across the country.[131] After the BHP's first six months of operation, the FHA could point to impressive figures to back up their claims of profitability for newspapers. By January 1935 nearly 20 million agate lines of modernization advertising had been sold as a result of the BHP; by January 1936 this figure climbed to 67 million agate lines with 60% of every page representing linage sold at a profit. Six months later the figure stood at 90 million lines of

---

Cooperation and Distribution of Newspaper Advertising, 1935 [NA RG 287 box y 742].

[129] The FHA's interest in localized modernization coverage came at a time when the nation's newspapers had already lost much of their local flavor due to the rise of newspaper chains and syndicates.

[130] FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies, and Publishers (Washington: GPO, 1934), p. 18. The subtitle of this bulletin was "Explaining how you may PROFIT by helping the BHP."

[131] Figures cited in FHA, A Newspaper Campaign to Increase the Linage of Present and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

advertising, representing revenues of over $46 million, which included only direct tie-ins, ads mentioning the FHA by name or displaying its emblem.[132]

Publicity & the House Organ

Generating authentic local newspaper coverage, as opposed to merely encouraging use of the Clip Sheet, was one of the eight primary tasks which the FHA assigned to BHP publicity committees, with the desired content of local coverage being the activities of other special interest committees and newsworthy events staged by BHP publicists themselves. In San Diego the local BHP hired four full-time paid newspaper reporters who were assigned to write BHP articles and then use their press contacts to place the stories. These reporters also wrote human interest stories based on interviews with local modernizers whose names they secured from recorded building permits. However commendable the FHA would have regarded this type of local press, the agency still attempted to influence, if not outright control, the content of much community BHP coverage through its Portfolio of Publicity. The Portfolio, one of the first publicity materials local campaign chairmen received from the FHA after their appointments, contained not only a tear sheet of "Facts and Figures for Editorial Writers (unemployment statistics, explanation of the insurance mechanism, volume of work stimulated), but also a set of 22 dummies for "suggested" feature news stories about modernization and the BHP. Publicists were instructed to "feed" these stories to newspapers one at a time and to "localize where possible," dropping into the blank spaces in the text the appropriate name of a town or chairperson: "_____is to have a city-wide modernization and improvement campaign ...Mr. _____, prominent _____, was unanimously chosen to head the campaign." While it may seem deliberately fallacious for the FHA to have penned articles which included lengthy quotations of fictitious addresses delivered by BHP campaigners to their local communities, in fact this practice was merely anticipatory, for the

---

Prospective Advertisers Affected by Modernization (Washington: GPO, 1936), p. 3.

[132] The first figure is cited in First Annual Report, p. 1. The second figure is cited in an FHA broadside stamped 18 January 1936 [NA RG 287 box y742].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Portfolio also contained "sample speeches" for a variety of public meetings and local radio broadcasts, such as the 12-minute "Call for Leadership" or the 10-minute "How Businessmen Can Help the Better Housing Program."[133]

The publicity committee's other responsibilities included organizing radio coverage, advertising, and special events. While the Portfolio provided detailed assistance for handling at least the first three of these tasks, the FHA recommended that the committee chair, ideally a newspaper or advertising executive, appoint subcommittees to handle each promotional area and further stressed the importance of direct local contact, noting that "there is no more powerful appeal than personal appeal"--except perhaps national PR.[134] Local radio coverage was augmented on the national level by broadcasts on the three major networks, including not only the daytime women's programming discussed earlier, but also several nighttime series and "mixed-audience" special programs. "The Master Builder" featured a "pleasantly-voiced," but "experienced" building expert who explained modernization credit, offered practical modernization advice, answered listeners' letters, and even addressed "the fundamental, social, and spiritual values" of home and business modernization. "The Story of $1,000" featured a different "true modernization story" each week, focusing not on the improved property but, presumably to give the show a more masculine appeal, on the building tradesmen who did the repair work.[135] Most of these national broadcasts had corporate sponsors, including General Electric, Johns-Manville, and General Motors, all of whom stood to gain materially from the national success of the modernization drive. Additional radio sponsorship was provided by corporations not connected to the building industry, but who viewed BHP participation as good business since it cast the company in a positive, patriotic light, as a

---

[133] Portfolio of Publicity, p. 2. "Announce Plans for Staging City-wide Modernization Campaign," Portfolio, p. 43. Portfolio, pp. 15 & 29. See also "Publicity Folio Extensively Used," Better Housing, 27 September 1934, p. 1. BHP representatives were especially encouraged to utilize these speeches during the early stages of the campaign when, one assumes, they might not have yet mastered the FHA's rhetoric.

[134] Community Campaign, pp. 15-17.

[135] FHA, Radio Broadcast News of Better Housing (Washington: GPO, 1935), n.p.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contributor to national recovery. Thus did the Borden (dairy) Company devote several installments of its weekly CBS evening program "45 Minutes in Hollywood" to the Better Housing Program.[136]

In contrast to national broadcasts, interest-generating contests staged by publicity committees were always local events. As with most publicity stunts and gimmicks associated with the BHP, modernization contests demonstrated a remarkable degree of marketing acumen in their simultaneous appeal to property owners and service to the modernization drive. The Detroit BHP publicity committee held a city-wide slogan contest conducted in the local newspapers, which printed a clip-out questionnaire for entrants to submit along with their slogan proposals. The questionnaire asked building owners and qualified renters to describe what modernization work they desired for their home or business properties. The winners received free modernization jobs; the losers got nothing; the BHP obtained a pool of potential modernizers to contact for follow-up sales calls. In Middletown, Ohio, the BHP contest was similarly successful in producing modernization prospects. There, contestants competed to have their building named the property that would "benefit the most through modernization." While this was hardly a title of distinction, since the prize was $1,000 worth of free modernization work, over 300 entries were received. Judging for the contest was stacked against buildings in undesirable locations; no doubt from the BHP point of view, only a well-situated building would have promotional potential once it was modernized. In Knoxville, Tennessee, $250 in cash prizes were awarded for the best property modernized during the campaign. Entrants submited before and after photographs and an itemized account of the modernization work completed. Winners were selected based on the "excellence," not the extent of the improvement. While contestants had the chance to recoup a portion of their

[136] Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 1. See Chapter 5 for more on corporate involvement in the modernization effort. For a discussion of corporate responsibility in the 1930s see Roland Marchand, "Where Lie the Boundaries of the Corporation?" Business and Economic History 26 (Fall 1997): 80-100.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modernization expenses, the BHP had an opportunity to collect an unlimited number of real-life modernization case studies which could be used to further publicize the local campaign.[137]

In working to generate local publicity, the FHA instructed committees to use their own ideas and initiatives, and to draw on their first-hand knowledge of the social and economic realities in their own individual communities. Nonetheless, the FHA believed that local BHPs might still "profit by others' experience" and look to community campaigns in towns of comparable size to determine what promotional methods, events, and activities had proven most successful.[138] It was for this reason that the FHA began publishing the Better Housing newsletter, "designed to serve as a medium of exchange of helpful ideas" and, like any house organ, to boost morale and enthusiasm.[139] Much of the content of these newsletters consisted of small news items "from the front"--a few lines of copy sent in by local publicity directors to report that, for example, the campaign in Fulton, New York put the BHP logo on milk bottle caps; field crews in Lansing, Michigan stenciled the BHP logo and the word "modernize" in red paint on every street corner downtown (stencils were available from the FHA); the public utility company in Parkersburg, West Virginia stamped "Repair, Improve, Modernize" on its customers' water bills; the Department of Water and Power in Los Angeles adopted the slogan "When Boulder Dam comes, you'll be glad you modernized with electricity"; the publicity committee in Pittsburgh put a dilapidated house and a modernized house on a barge and floated them down the Allegheny river.[140] In reporting these and other local activities, the FHA cautioned committees that Better Housing was a confidential newsletter

---

[137] "Detroit Stages Slogan Contest," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 7. "Unique Contest Brings Prospects," Better Housing, 12 December 1934, p. 8. "Cash Prizes Reward Best Improvements," Better Housing, 15 October 1934, p. 4.

[138] Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and Other Merchants, p. 13.

[139] These helpful ideas would be "pass[ed] along to Community Campaign organizations throughout the Nation" in the hope that "the ideas successfully worked out in your locality may be just what your neighbor to the north, south, east or west has been looking for in order to put over the Better Housing Campaign in his home town." "Spread the News" and "What is Your Best Idea?" Better Housing, 20 September 1934, pp. 1-2.

[140] Cited in the following issues of Better Housing: 8 October 1934, p. 2; 22 October 1934, p. 4; 30 November 1934, p. 5; 12 December 1934, p. 3; 19 November 1934, p. 8.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

intended only for executive and special interest committees and not for circulation to the general public.[141]

Each week's edition of Better Housing provided a BHP publicity chair casting about for campaign-boosting promotional activities with a plethora of ideas for exhibitions, demonstrations, contests, parades and the like. Had he decided to follow any of these examples, he could have utilized FHA contact lists to consult with committee chairs across the country who, in the cooperative spirit of the BHP would have been happy to share their own hometown experiences, offering practical advice and inside organizational tips.[142] Stuart Ripley, executive manager and chair of the San Diego BHP, might have related his campaign's success with red, white, and blue "program seals" (window stickers) which San Diego distributed to all property owners who modernized their buildings with FHA-insured credit. Charles Williams, chair of the BHP in Westbury, New York, might have recounted his town's creation of an "honor roll" of all Westbury modernizers–MCP or cash customers–who were commended for their "distinct public service" in a listing "conspicuously displayed" before a centrally-located town bank. Ed Davidson, San Diego's publicity chair and head of a large advertising firm, could have explained how he put together a roving display crew to install Better Housing posters, emblems, and other visual materials in merchant's store windows and in vacant shopfronts.[143]

Other committee chairs, including those in Chicago and Atlanta, could have explained the effectiveness of official proclamations and special civic-spirit "celebration days," which, as Robert and Helen Lynd observed, often served as focal points and forced expressions of group solidarity and loyalty.[144] In Detroit, a mayoral proclamation in support of modernization opened the inaugural

---

[141] "House Organ," Better Housing, 13 May 1936, p. 1.
[142] See Local Chairmen of Better Housing Program. The contact information published in the booklets, introduced in 1934 and revised semi-annually, included campaign location, community population, names of committee chairmen, and their addresses.
[143] San Diego Sells an Idea, p. 8. "Honor Roll Lists Those who Repair," Better Housing, 19 November 1934, p 5.
[144] Middletown, pp. 490-1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

meeting of the motor city's BHP on 6 October 1934, an event held in the General Motors Auditorium with a keynote address by the FHA's Ward Canaday. In New York, Mayor La Guardia proclaimed "Better Housing Month" (November 1934) and requested that every New Yorker "who can be benefited by this worthy movement [act] as promptly as possible to modernize and improve his real estate and feel sure that he will find himself repaid many times in personal as well as community benefit."[145] In Madison, WI the mayor sent "an official letter" to every citizen urging participation in the modernization drive. The FHA stressed the importance of securing such public declarations of support from local elected official to ensure a strong start to a town's BHP. According to the Community Campaign manual, mayoral proclamations were job one for general chairs and publicity committees.[146]

Parading

Upon receiving official sanction for their modernization drives many BHPs, especially in smaller communities, staged a parade as "an effective opening gun" for the local campaign.[147] These parades had all of the expected trappings of a typical small town cavalcade in the 1930s, assembled with one part earnest enthusiasm and one part calculated hokum [Fig. 39]. As crowds of onlookers lined both sides of Main Street, a man dressed as Uncle Sam stepped off the parade, followed by a late model convertible decorated with flags, bunting, and signs bearing the BHP logo. The community campaign general chairman and perhaps the mayor, sat in the back seat waving to the crowds. Marching bands and fife-and-drum corps followed, as did school children wearing BHP buttons, waving flags, and carrying banners decorated with modernization slogans. They were followed by members of local civic, service, and social groups generally associated with middle-

---

[145] "City 'Housing Month' Declared by Mayor," New York Times, 20 November 1934, p. 12.
[146] Community Campaign, p. 14. Some BHPs even secured official imprimatur at the state level, as in Virginia, Georgia, South Carolina, Rhode Island, and New Mexico. See Better Housing, 15 October 1934, pp. 4-7. See also Better Housing, 8 October 1934, p. 3. Better Housing, 30 November 1934, p. 3.
[147] This description is based on parades held in Passaic, New Jersey; Jackson, Mississippi; Lewiston, Idaho; Dickinston, North Dakota; and Oakland, California. Community Campaign, pp. 17 & 9. See also Better Housing, 30 November 1934 and 12 December 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

class "All-American" business values: the Chamber of Commerce, Junior League, Rotary, the Ladies Auxiliary, the Boy and Girl Scouts.[148] After these groups had processed the heart of the parade passed by, for next came the bandwagons, floats, and miscellaneous capitalist *agitprop* vehicles of the local business community [Fig. 40]. All firms, even those with only a remote stake in the building industry, were encouraged to have a strong presence in the parade, but the most active support was expected from contractors, building material suppliers, national manufacturer dealers, architects, and retailers. Larger concerns, like the local department store, outfitted flatbeds to display wares eligible for purchase with modernization credit so refrigerators and other major appliances paraded down Main Street along with the flag-waving school children. Other businesses sent trucks mounted with multiple loudspeakers which made their way down Main Street blaring such messages as "modernize now" and "Let's Americanize; Let's modernize." Often, the attention-getting climax to the parade was the final float, a large flatbed truck decorated with signs and banners advertising local contractors and suppliers. Upon the truck, sitting like Santa Claus in the Macy's Parade, was a dilapidated building, usually a small house which had been jacked up and moved--every joist, window frame, and nail. The parade carried the "shabby shack" to its final destination on the town square or a vacant Main Street lot where the building was unloaded and a "modernization miracle" commenced as local building tradesmen began feverish work to transform the shack into a modern house "in full view of passing crowds" (see below).[149]

The Better Housing parades which took place across the country throughout the fall of 1934 were a hybrid pageant form reflective of the amalgamous nature of the BHP itself, freely mixing elements of patriotism, civicism, and commercialism. As kickoffs to local modernization

---

[148] Ranks of unemployed building tradesmen, many of whom were on relief but were "ready and waiting to go to work" as soon as the campaign was launched, would probably have marched down Main Street asking for the support and cooperation of the townspeople in the modernization drive but for the common perception that demonstrating workers, even benevolent, community-spirited ones, gave a parade the dangerous semblance of a labor rally with an attendant whiff of communism and anti-Americanism, something local boosters would have wished to avoid at all costs. For middle-class fears of communism and labor in the 1930s see Middletown in Transition, pp. 428-33.
[149] Better Housing News Flashes, p. 4. Community Campaign, p. 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

drives they functioned in much the same manner, though on a greatly reduced scale, as commercial parades of the 1920s which were staged by groups of merchants with the cooperation of city officials and the police. Though often promoted as celebrations of some civic advance or improvement (the 1926 electrification of Chicago's State Street or small town "white ways," for example), such parades were really just grand merchandising opportunities for the local retailers. The BHP parades offered building industry merchants a similar opportunity, but with the perquisite of official U.S. government approval. The BHP parades also closely paralleled those events William Leach identifies as the "spectacle parading" of the post-Word War I period, especially the "welcoming home of troops from Europe" which Leach argues "had all the earmarks of commercial, consumer-oriented promotions" because of their highly-visible retail sponsorship, but deftly masqueraded as productions of flag-waving, community-spirited nationalism.[150] In this respect, the NRA provided a more immediate precedent for the BHP parades, particularly in its use of Blue Eagle pageantry and showmanship to raise public awareness, arouse public interest, and stimulate public participation in a government program the success of which, like the BHP, depended on the complete cooperation of American business.[151]

Building Industry Cooperation & Modernization Demonstrations

---

[150] William Leach, Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), p. 327.

[151] Occasionally, victory, NRA, and modernization parades shared more than a common lineage; they shared a common organizational impresario. In New York City, parade master and former Wanamaker's general manager Grover Whalen was responsible for all three. In 1933, while Whalen was serving as chair of the city's official Welcoming Committee (staging such events as Charles Lindbergh's 1927 tickertape parade), he was chosen to direct the Greater New York Rehabilitation Campaign, one of the largest of the pre-New Deal modernization drives. This work, concurrent with his orchestration of the city's NRA hoopla, segued naturally into his participation in the local BHP the following year. While serving on the advisory committee, Whalen's major contribution was enlisting the cooperation of the city's leading commercial and manufacturing firms, work which itself segued naturally into his 1936 election to the presidency of the corporation sponsoring the 1939 World's Fair--that massive promotional enterprise which, like the BHP, was conceived as a response to the depressed business economy and preached a similar message of recovery through consumption. See "Whalen to Direct Modernizing Drive," New York Times, 4 February 1933, p. 7. Grover Whalen, Mr. New York (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1955).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The FHA had long understood that collaboration between local business and the BHP was fundamental to the success of the modernization drive; hence associationalism was inscribed into the organizational structure of the BHP campaign. This was especially apparent in the work of the building industry committee, usually chaired by a prominent contractor with membership drawn from every industry segment. As stipulated by the FHA, the function of this committee was to contact every member of the local building industry--manufacturers, distributors, architects, engineers, contractors, sub-contractors--"to enlist and direct their active support in the campaign."[152] The building industry was expected first, to provide direct financial support to the BHP, since its members stood to profit directly from a successful campaign; and second, to donate the time of salesmen, draftsmen, realtors and other workers to participate in the field canvass. Finally, building industry firms were encouraged to initiate their own modernization publicity efforts along BHP lines. Industry cooperation was secured mainly through personal contact by committee members who addressed meetings of local trade and professional groups and arranged for state, regional, and federal FHA officials to do the same, always making a targeted pitch for BHP participation. Thus, when PR Director Ward Canaday addressed the Sales Executive Club of New York City he emphasized the "great potential sales field" for building materials created by modernization credit, while Missouri State Director Paul Kendall stressed the importance of well-designed property improvements when he addressed the St. Louis Chapter of the AIA.[153] Once the building industry was "sold" on the idea of modernization and individual firms had undertaken promotional projects, the committee worked to organize special events to showcase industry participation.

Building industry committees especially favored the use of the "actual demonstration of a modernizing project" to attract early public attention to the local campaign and often staged them as

---

[152] Community Campaign, p. 11.
[153] Canaday, "Transcript of Speech to Sales Executives Club." "Missouri Director Says Loans Sound," Better Housing, 12 December 1934, p. 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

part of parades, county fairs, or other well-publicized happenings likely to have heavy attendance. At the same time, the BHPs hoped to make the demonstration itself a prime focus of attention by carrying it out on a high-profile site--the courthouse lawn, the village green, the fairgrounds, or a vacant lot in the business district--to which the building, invariably a single-family house, had been transported with great fanfare. The modernization demonstration did not originate with the BHP. In 1933, the pre-New Deal Renovize Washington campaign, co-sponsored by the D.C. Board of Trade and a group of local bankers, moved a shack to the Mall directly opposite the U.S. Commerce Department; during and after the shack's modernization, it was supposedly visited by 200,000 people [Fig. 41]. Also in 1933, the Renovize Portland (Oregon) Campaign undertook a similar demonstration in Portland's downtown business district. There, the renovation, which even included the installation of a white picket fence, attracted over 150,000 visitors, many of whom participated in a public auction to purchase the modernized house upon its completion. The FHA understood the potential of such demonstrations for promoting the BHP and (undesignated) photographs of these Washington and Portland examples appear in the Community Campaign manual as suggestions for local publicity events.[154]

One of the first modernization demonstrations carried out as part of the BHP was in Sacramento, California, where the renovation of a relocated house began on September 15th 1934 to coincide with the official national start date of the FHA initiative [Fig. 42]. The modernization of a small "gingerbread cottage" into a "colonial home" was fully underwritten by the Bank of America as a corporate donation from the bank's San Francisco headquarters.[155] The bank's involvement came at the instigation of Martin Bolts, a vice president at Bank of America's largest Sacramento branch and the general chairman of the local BHP. Bolts arranged to stage the demonstration outside the Bank of America branch in downtown Sacramento, a few blocks from the California

---

[154] Community Campaign, p. 14.
[155] Let Inspiration House Show You the Way (Sacramento: Sacramento BHP, 1934), p. 10. See also "New Idea from Sacramento," Better Housing, 8 October 1934, p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

State House. The building industry committee secured in-kind donations for every aspect of the modernization: four members of the local AIA chapter drew up plans for the redesign; a local draying company transported the house; local utilities supplied gas and electricity; and Sears Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, and Haywood Wakefield provided furnishings. Dubbed the "Inspiration House," the remodeling was intended "to dramatize modernization" and to encourage the use of the MCP through which "Uncle Sam now stands at your elbow ready to help you make dreams come true."[156] The Inspiration House was open to the public for two months following its completion and prior to its sale at a pre-Christmas public auction--proceeds to benefit the Sacramento BHP. Those interested in purchasing Inspiration House were encouraged to seek mortgage financing available under Title II of the National Housing Act.

The FHA singled out another California modernization demonstration of 1934 as an especially successful event which not only held local public interest but was worthy of emulation by other BHPs. In San Diego, the building industry and publicity committees convinced a local building and loan association to donate a repossessed, "ramshackle" shot-gun house from the 1880s [Fig. 43]. With the cooperation of the City Council and the Park Board the house was transported from the outskirts of town to the most central location in San Diego--the Plaza, a 2-acre public square laid out in the 1820s and the location of fiestas, rallies, and other significant urban events. The Plaza was chosen as the modernization site so that "the whole community might see the transformation taking place." The architect's subcommittee of the building industry committee prepared plans for a top-to-bottom renovation which would metamorphose the building into a

---

[156] In explaining the Inspiration House in a booklet the issued upon the project's completion, the Sacramento BHP employed rhetoric reminiscent of the NRA and its urging of public-spirited suspension of cut-throat business competition. Calling Inspiration House "a cooperative community enterprise unique in the history of Sacramento," the BHP observed that the project was a success only because "scores of individuals and firms, forgetting the rivalries of competition, have joined in giving freely of time and materials." The booklet also contained "a thousand and one" modernization ideas and provided detailed descriptions of every room in the house, much of it rendered in an *inspirational* prose style: the redecorated bedroom was pronounced "a fitting setting for happy dreams and cheerful awakenings" and the dining room "a background for leisurely breakfasts and gay dinner parties," while the modernized bathroom raised a question: "Does your present bathroom

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"House of Magic" [Fig. 44].[157] The local building industry committee worked to secure donations of all necessary materials, equipment, and furnishings and a special fund-raiser solicited cash contributions to cover estimated labor costs. Two full building crews were hired to work staggered shifts to complete the modernization as quickly as possible and to make the demonstration a non-stop show during the day and evening, whenever San Diegans passed by. Posted signs on the site explained the purpose of the modernization and BHP representatives were on hand to answer questions from the general public. As work was in progress, the San Diego Union declared, using typical rhetoric, that the demonstration was "giving material substance to the local campaign" by "dramatizing the story of modernization" and making it tangible for the general public.[158] The House of Magic took thirty days to complete and, as was typical with BHP modernization demonstrations, the transformation was so thorough--the house was so completely rebuilt--that to call it a renovation strains the limits of credibility. Upon completion the house was open to the public and served as a branch office of the BHP. In the spring of 1935 the House of Magic was moved across town to Balboa Park, the site of the California Pacific International Exposition. There, it occupied a prominent site on the Plaza de Panama, serving as a walk-through modernization display and a complement to the San Diego BHP's information center installed nearby in Bertram Goodhue's 1915 Casa de Balboa.

San Diego's was not the only BHP which staged a demonstration to share the limelight with a national exposition. In October 1934, during the final year of the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, the local BHP launched what the FHA called "a novel exhibition" in conjunction with "Modernization Day" at the fair [Fig. 45]. The Metropolitan Housing Council donated two identical early 19th century houses, really just two-room clapboard shacks declared "unfit for habitation" which were transported to the lakefront fairgrounds and deposited next to

---

stir you to song as much as this one?" Let Inspiration House Show You the Way, pp. I, 1-5.
[157] San Diego Sells an Idea, p. 5.
[158] Quoted in San Diego Sells an Idea, p. 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

each other. One house was to be completely modernized; the other was to be left in its run-down state, with the pair presenting "a good 'before and after' perspective" for viewer comparison.[159] At nine a.m. on October 24th Federal Housing Administrator James Moffett stepped up to the house slated for modernization and with crow bar in hand ripped a rotting piece of siding off the front facade, signaling the commencement of the renovation. Over 125 tradesman and laborers then set to work in a model of orchestrated Tayloristic efficiency. Carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, electricians, painters and others moved in rapid succession to complete the transformation of "the eyesore" into the "house of marvel" by three o'clock that afternoon--in a mere six hours.[160]

When Chicago BHP chairman H.J. White called the modernization at the fair a "strange enterprise" he was undoubtedly referring to the uniqueness of a "timed" renovation project, but his comment was more revealing than he realized. For in naming the demonstration's *strange*ness White underscored its gimmicky nature. The modernization demonstration was an obvious, unabashed publicity stunt, a novelty as worthy of a Tribune headline as the Century of Progress air show with which it shared newspaper space.[161] It was "an extraordinary performance" celebrating the manual skill of building workers and not, as was usually the case in lauded BHP events, the managerial or promotional skills of business men. The spectacularization of this performance was heightened by the camera crew filming it for the newsreels and by the live radio hook-up on NBC reporting on the modernization work in progress. If this play-by-play of hammers, saws, and paintbrushes was hardly as exciting as those publicity-worthy events and stunts of the previous decade--Floyd Collins trapped in a cave or Alvin Kelly sitting on a flag-pole--it was an acceptable Depression-era version in which standard ballyhoo was overlaid with a veneer of respectable, and often genuine, interest in national recovery. Most BHP modernization demonstrations

---

[159] "Chicago Stages Building Exhibit," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 4.
[160] "House Rebuilt in Six Hours before World's Fair Crowd," Better Housing, 1 November 1934, pp. 1-2.
[161] See Ancient House Will Get New Dress at Fair" and "Big Aerial Show Thrills Crowds at World's Fair," Chicago Daily Tribune, 24 October 1934, p. 11.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

followed the basic scheme outlined here: buildings were moved to prominent sites, assigned slogans or catch phrases ("tumbledown shack to model dwelling" or "shabby house to goodwill cottage"), modernized with the clock running and radio simulcast, opened to the public with strong attendance rates (Seattle claimed 1.1 million visitors in three weeks), used as BHP information bureaus, and then sold at auction [Fig. 46]. The FHA claimed that during the first two weeks of the national drive nearly thirty modernization demonstrations had commenced with dozens more in the planning stages.[162]

Exhibitions & Displays

Obviously, the goal of the modernization demonstration was to attract the attention of the general public, but demonstrations were one-shot events which could only hold public interest in the short term. To stimulate more sustained, long-term interest in modernization, local building industry committees turned to other promotional activities, especially modernization exhibitions. Initially these exhibitions consisted of small displays featuring individual building industry firms. Typically, local suppliers and organizations (roofing and furnace companies, suppliers of bath fixture and appliances, and chapters of the Plumbers Association, the AIA, etc.) paid a small fee to participate in an exhibition installed in local BHP headquarters, which itself already contained a variety of promotional displays of FHA-supplied posters and charts.[163] Though participants were encouraged to design displays with more visual interest and flair than a simple arrangement of

---

[162] See "This Picture Tells a Story," Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 8. "Goodwill Cottage," Clip Sheet 5 (no. 10, 1935). "Modernized in 4 Hours," Better Housing, p. 1 December 1934. "Thousands Visit Seattle Exhibit," Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 2. Variations on the standard demonstration did exist. In Stockton, CA, demonstration work was suspended with great fanfare because of building tradesmen labor shortages supposedly caused by the local drive. In other places, a *before-and-after* approach became a promotional gimmick: half of a run-down structure was renovated, while the other half was left in its dilapidated state, creating a startling contrast of old and new. See "Shortage of Labor Holds up Demonstration Home," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 3. "Half-Painted Home Attracts Throngs," Better Housing, 15 October 1934, p. 8.

[163] For exhibitors, fees were a negligible expense given the business a BHP display might generate. Following FHA advice, most firms probably viewed them as a regular advertising budget item, one having the added advantage of enhancing the firm's reputation for community spirit. For the BHP, collected fees defrayed rental expenses or supported other campaign

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

products and services--to create modernization showcases for "exhibit[ing] the newest of the new"--the exhibits often remained straightforward displays of sample materials or equipment with identifying banners and explanatory signs or posters, as in New Jersey where several local BHPs placed platforms against the walls of their offices and hung individual awnings, each bearing the name of a participating firm whose display was limited to the space beneath [Fig. 47].[164] However dull they might have been visually, such serial displays did function as a kind of multi-firm showroom which transformed the BHP headquarters into a complete selling environment--a sort of one-stop shopping center "making it easy" for the modernization consumer to purchase improvements.[165]

The building industry and publicity committees also arranged for the installation of exhibitions outside campaign headquarters, in donated office space (Washington, D.C.), hotel lobbies (New York City), civic center auditoriums (St. Louis), armories (Albany, New York), public plazas (Springfield, Massachusetts), or other expositions (Philadelphia Electric Show).[166] For these exhibitions, the FHA rented out animated information booths built of red, white, and blue anodized aluminum and equipped with flashing displays, bold graphics, and before-and-after photo murals [Figs. 48 & 49]. However appealing these flashy booths, even more modest displays could have a significant impact, as in Weslaco, TX, a small town on the Mexican border, where a modernization exhibition prompted merchants to "completely transform the appearance of Main Street" [Figs. 50 & 51]. The Weslaco Chamber of Commerce paid for an architect, R. Newell Waters, to prepare sketches of the town's business blocks which showed how the buildings (mostly one-story, false-front brick structures) might be remodeled to "fit into a definite architectural

---

activities. Community Campaign, p. 16.
[164] "Exhibit the Newest of the New," Better Housing, 20 September 1934, p. 2. "Exhibits A-C: Typical Better Housing Headquarters," Report of the BHP Headquarters for the State of New Jersey, n.p.
[165] Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and Other Merchants, p. 9.
[166] See "Expositions," Better Housing, 8 October 1934, p. 4. "30 Cities Open Campaigns with Better Housing Shows" and "Better Housing Displays Dot Country," Better Housing, 15 October 1934, pp. 1 & 8.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

pattern."[167] The sketches were turned into detailed water color renderings displayed in a storefront remodeled according to Water's scheme to serve itself as a graphic modernization display.

In contrast to most modernization schemes, which embraced the trappings of modernism, Waters proposal "dramatize[d] the romantic history of the region for tourist appeal" by making over the entire Main Street in the Spanish Mission style (perhaps modeled after Santa Barbara, CA where zoning regulations of the 1920s prescribed the Mission style for all buildings).[168] This entailed the installation of "distinctive Spanish features": white stuccoed facades studded with brightly colored tiles, red clay roof tiles, round arched openings with heavy piers, decorative projecting eaves, and uniform signage which used a vaguely Baroque typeface. The First National Bank of Weslaco provided $12,000 worth of FHA-insured modernization loans with repayment to be shared by building owners and merchant tenants. By the summer of 1936, nearly every structure on Weslaco's two-block Main Street (45 buildings total), had been altered according to Water's designs including the local gas station "eyesore" and the Piggly Wiggly, a chain grocery store which forsook its standard black and metallic front to fit in with the community.[169] To celebrate the modernization program's success (which reportedly generated a 50% increase in business) Weslaco held a street festival with Mexican singers whose presence was intended to complement the "air of old Spain" which, according to local boosters, Weslaco's modernized Main Street now possessed.[170]

Consultations

The building which housed Weslaco's successful modernization exhibition ultimately served as a consultation bureau of the type the FHA recommended every BHP committee establish.

---

[167] "Modernization of Main Street Starts in Texas," Better Housing, 29 April 1936, p. 3. See also Virginia Mae Moffett, "Face Lifting the Old Home Town," Nation's Business, December 1936, pp. 69-70. "Two Business Blocks," Architectural Forum 66 (March 1937): 60.
[168] "Main Street has Air of Old Spain," Better Housing, 29 September 1936, p. 1. The landscaping also contributed to the stylistic unity as palm trees were planted at intervals along Main Street.
[169] For a typical Piggly Wiggly see "Modernize Main Street," Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 61.
[170] "Weslaco Firms Benefit from Expenditures," Better Housing, 22 July 1936.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Such a bureau typically provided free advice to local property owners and qualified renters and was overseen by a "prominent architect or builder thoroughly familiar with the construction business" who served as chair of the BHP consultation committee.[171] Located in BHP headquarters or in a storefront specifically modernized for the purpose, supplied with a full range of FHA literature, and outfitted with as many small modernization displays as the space could accommodate, the bureau was ideally operated by a knowledgeable volunteer workforce of architects and contractors who handled in-person, telephone, and written consultations, as in New York City where members of the Architectural League staffed a midtown Manhattan bureau.[172] In some cities professional or trade groups organized independent advice centers modeled on the BHP bureau and offering similar information about modernization and the MCP, but emphasizing a particular line of work. In St. Louis, the local AIA chapter established an "Architects' Clinic" staffed by its members to dispense free modernization design advice and to provide a schedule of fees for architectural consultations on a variety of improvement projects.[173] Whether run directly by the BHP or as an auxiliary, consultation bureaus promoted themselves as consumer-friendly information centers and drop-in modernization clinics which attracted potential modernizers the way any other storefront establishment might--a soft-pedal marketing approach which was the antithesis of the field organization's hard-sell canvass (see Chapter 3). Despite these distintive sales styles, the bureau and the field organization operated in tandem, with the bureau acting in an advisory capacity to answer questions of a "technical" nature (dealing with structure, mechanics, or aesthetics) which arose in the field during property owner or tenant interviews. For this reason most bureaus kept a team of "expert volunteer field advisers" on call to respond to canvassers' telephone queries or to accompany them to on-site property inspections.[174]

---

[171] Community Campaign, p. 11.
[172] See "To Explain Housing Act," New York Times, 9 December 1934, XI & XII, p. 1. The bureau was located at 41st Street and Madison Avenue.
[173] "Architects' Clinic," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, p. 3.
[174] Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and Other Merchants, p. 13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In the bureaus, consultants advised property owners on the various types of repairs and improvements they might consider, gave rough estimates of such work, put them in contact with approved MCP lenders, and provided names of dealers, architects, and contractors drawn from lists furnished by the building industry committee. The FHA cautioned consultants to avoid the appearance of favoritism by supplying only lists of firms, rather than making actual recommendations. If a property owner pressed the consultant for a suggestion he was advised to select at least three names.[175] To the FHA, potential favoritism was a matter of no small consequence. Since the consultant himself would benefit materially from the modernization being considered by the property owner in the bureau, it would have been tempting indeed to suggest his own firm for the job at hand and given the FHA's continual emphasis on "aggressive sales" and "substantial profits," the message the consultant was receiving from Washington was at best conflictive, if not contradictory. Thus, he might perhaps be excused from giving in to what amounted to government-sanctioned cupidity. However, in explaining the building industry's *opportunity* in the BHP, the FHA was also explicit in explaining the building industry's *responsibility* in the BHP and was adamant that "no one must attempt to take unfair advantage of the BHP [since] such an attitude would of course alienate your entire community"--thus violating the underlying booster ethic of the local campaign.[176]

Boosters & the BHP

A telling observation appears in the letter of transmittal which accompanied the FHA's Second Annual Report when it was submitted to Congress in 1936:

---

[175] Community Campaign, p. 21.

[176] Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and Other Merchants, p. 9. The FHA applauded the extreme response of one regional director, calling a proposal to refer modernization customers to the local telephone book if they requested names of specific firms "a splendid method of avoiding headaches" and a means of insuring that there would be "no racketeering, no pressure, and no undue influence in awarding contracts for materials and work." It seems unlikely that the local BHPs substituted the phone book for the directories prepared by the building industry committees, especially given the charges of racketeering eventually leveled against the BHP despite the FHA's precautions. Some private firms avoided the whole issue by setting up their own consultation bureaus and supplying a single name--their own--in response to customer queries about firms

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> This [modernization] work has resulted from the activities of some 7,000 local better housing committees cooperating with the Federal Housing Administration and covering most of the cities and towns in the United States. In the main this has been carried on by voluntary workers and too much credit cannot be given to the public spirited citizens who have thus contributed their time, energy, and money in the interest of recovery.[177]

That the FHA was able to secure such widespread national cooperation without the use of coercive tactics or legal compulsion was one of the remarkable achievements of the BHP. Indeed, cooperation was even more extensive than the FHA indicated in the passage above. By January 1936 7,730 local campaigns were underway and an additional 1,487 were in the planning stages. However, this level of cooperation had not been achieved without incurring at least some expense on the part of the government: during the first 18 months of the program FHA headquarters in Washington spent approximately $1.1 million on what it called "the educational program" necessary to implement the Modernization Credit Plan, with considerable additional outlays by the 63 field offices.[178] This federal expenditure notwithstanding, the FHA's assessment of the voluntary and public-spirited character of BHP participation was largely accurate, if incomplete. What this assessment failed to acknowledge were the incentives real estate historian Marc Weiss has identified as the "carrot-on-the-stick" intrinsic to every successful FHA program. Weiss notes how carefully the FHA cultivated "an image of voluntarism" by dangling irresistible "carrots" before the depressed building and banking industries.[179] Loan insurance may have been the legal bait held out to obtain voluntary participation in the BHP, but the truly tempting lure was the promise of profits: "You may cooperate with the Better Housing Program sponsored by the United States Government with profit to yourself and to your country...[it] is *your* program. No

---

capable of carrying out improvement projects. See Better Housing, 27 September 1934, p. 3.
[177] FHA, Second Annual Report (Washington: GPO, 1936), p. v.
[178] Second Annual Report, pp. 46-47. This figure represents Title I expenses and the FHA's publicity budget which at that point was almost exclusively spent on Title I. The operating expenses of the field offices totaled $6.5 million, a large percentage of which must also be assigned to Title I.
[179] Marc A. Weiss, The Rise of the Community Builders (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 152-53.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

matter what your business, it will put money in your pocket if you accept the opportunity it presents you."[180]

If, as I have suggested, the BHP was promulgated and received as a sound business venture--a fiscally remunerative enterprise and not some community chest fund drive--this does not in any way diminish the public-spiritedness of BHP participation. For in the United States in the 1930s, and indeed during the whole period between the wars, business self-interest and community spirit were not antithetical propositions, especially in the Main Street communities where the BHP thrived [Figs. 52 & 53]. Rather, as diverse observers from a range of critical perspectives recognized at the time, the two had been conflated into the middlebrow, Rotarian culture of the booster, who sincerely believed that what was good for business was, without exception, good for the community. From the cynical novels of Sinclair Lewis, to the popular chronicles of Frederick Lewis Allen, to the sociological studies of Robert and Helen Lynd, this fusion of business values and civic virtues into the phenomenon of boosterism was disparaged as Babbittry, condoned as local pride, and analyzed as a quantifiable social trend.[181]

In Middletown the Lynds documented the astounding rise during the 1920s of clubs, associations, and movements which attracted legions of middle class Americans to such all-encompassing causes as "civic betterment" and "civic progress." Their support cultivated through what the Lynds called a method of "forced-draft diffusion" emanating from the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club, boosters participated in a range of activities which included improving the physical appearance of local buildings, generating local publicity to attract new businesses and residents, and holding a local "pep" rallies as an end in themselves.[182] Born of the war effort and nurtured during the prosperity decade, these community activities were expressions

---

[180] Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and Other Merchants..., pp. 1 & 3.
[181] Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1920) p. 416 and Babbitt (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1922), pp. 12 & 244. Allen, Only Yesterday, p. 189 and Since Yesterday, p. 127.
[182] Middletown, pp. 222 and 285-309.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of "group solidarity" which continued to flourish even in the economic crisis of the Depression, as the Lynds demonstrated in Middletown in Transition. If anything, during the 1930s such activities may have actually gained in popularity as the middle class, reeling from "the shock of sudden and sharp institutional breakdown," found increasing comfort in optimistic slogans, campaigns, and "the paraphernalia of social organizations searching for things to boost" to revive that civic spirit which the Depression had dampened.[183]

Within the FHA, boosterism was deftly exploited (with, I would argue, empathy and not condescension) to create in the BHP a genuine popular movement akin to the Townsendites, the Share-Our-Wealthers, or Frank Capra's fictionalized John Doe Clubs--a movement as earnest in its particular aspirations toward recovery through consumption as any of the other non-religious, social evangelist crusades of the decade. But among these other movements the BHP occupied a unique position. So clearly part of what the Brain Trust's Gardiner Means called the "élan, optimism, evangelism, and adventure" of the New Deal,[184] and enjoying full federal sponsorship, the BHP yet managed to attract precisely those middle-class Americans who distrusted both liberal thinkers and big government. This, the BHP accomplished through its use of knowing booster appeals, complete with appropriate lingo, exclamation points, and italics: "What an opportunity the Better Housing Program opens to Business! What a challenge to the initiative and energy of American genius for *doing*."[185] The Better Housing Program did not simply reflect booster culture, it *was* booster culture. From its lapel pins to its inspirational meetings to its celebratory "Better Housing Days," the BHP cultivated and extended that preexistent enthusiasm for community cooperation and organization in which the businessman/citizen was not merely a volunteer, but "a joiner"--"a booster, not a knocker."[186] Like Sinclair Lewis's fictitious, but all too real George

---

[183] Middletown in Transition, pp. 3,123 and 402-86.
[184] Quoted in Studs Terkel, Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression (1970; rpt. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p. 250.
[185] Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and Other Merchants, p. 1.
[186] Middletown, p. 492.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Babbitt, the middle-class BHP participant would have recognized the local modernization campaign as "a force for optimism, manly pleasantry, and good business," "an opportunity for real he-hustling, getting out and drumming up customers" and, of course, an expression of "that famous Zenith [read anytown] spirit."[187]

At the end of the rampant volunteerism that defined participation in the BHP campaign, and after all the publicity and promotion, the boosting and ballyhoo stirred up by local committees, came finally the hard work of selling modernization to property owners and qualified lessees–the hard work of "securing the final signature on the dotted line."[188] This difficult task was the responsibility of the field canvass, the results of which would, in the FHA's opinion, largely determine the outcome of the whole Better Housing Program. So crucial to the success of the BHP was the field campaign that the agency even went so far as to assert in its Community Campaign manual that the work of every BHP committee–finance, loan, building industry, general industry, women's, consultation, planning, and publicity–was preparatory and "should be regarded largely as paving the way and facilitating the work of the field force."[189] Thus, the parades, demonstrations, speeches, luncheons, advertisements, circularizations, radio shows, and newsreels were merely a prelude to that decisive, perhaps climactic moment, repeated again and again in nearly 10,000 participating communities across the United States, when the modernization salesman, a BHP button (FHA-212) affixed to his lapel, an MCP pledge card waiting in his briefcase, arrived at the front door of the neighborhood housewife or Main Street shopkeeper and prepared to make his pitch.

---

[187] Babbitt, pp. 307, 258, 222.
[188] Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and Other Merchants, p. 9.
[189] Community Campaign, p. 21.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter 3 Selling Modernization: The Field Campaign

In the fall of 1934 Title I Administrator Albert Deane and PR Director Ward Canaday made myriad public appearances before civic groups and trade associations to promote the Better Housing Program. Whether explicating the intricacies of the credit mechanism or expounding the virtues of modernization advertising, Deane and Canaday made it exceedingly clear that the BHP was, in their words, "essentially a sales effort" and that each community campaign should be considered "as aggressive a sales drive as possible" so that the potential modernization market--"a market so vast as to seem fantastic"--might be adequately tapped in the interest of economic recovery.[1] Envisioning a stimulation of this market that was locally-based, yet national in scope, Deane, Canaday, and the FHA proposed that every participating BHP community undertake a building-by-building canvass to encourage, cajole, or persuade property owners and renters to modernize their homes or businesses--to "ask 'em to buy" a paint job, a roof, a refrigerator, a furnace, or a facade. This amounted to a door-to-door, coast-to-coast, selling campaign in which the salesman's bag of wares contained, in the agency's view, nothing less than an end to the Depression. As a direct result of this federally-mandated selling campaign, the influence of American consumerism would be brought to bear upon building modernization, to such a degree that architecture and architectural practice in the United States would be drastically altered for the duration of the Depression.

For a campaign of such scale and significance to be effective, it would require a sales force itself nearly *so vast as to seem fantastic* and which was, in addition, both exceptionally organized and singularly motivated--factors of which the FHA was not only keenly aware, but for which the agency, with its typical business-oriented, market-savvy efficiency, had already

---

[1] "Speech by Albert Deane to National Paint and Varnish Association," FHA Press Release No. 102 (1 November 1934), p. 4. "Address of Ward M. Canaday before Rotary Club of Washington, DC," FHA Press Release No. 76 (3 October 1934), p. 2. Ward M. Canaday, "Great Potential Sales Field Created by National Housing Act," Transcript of Speech to Sales Executives Club in New York City, 27 September 1934, p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

provided. To the FHA, the sales force was the rank and file of the modernization drive, but this unexalted position in no way undermined the crucial role the sales force was to play in the community campaign, since, as I suggested at the end of the previous chapter, the FHA regarded the canvass as the most important determinant of the local BHP's success or failure. Though the agency tended to refer to this lower echelon of the BHP organizational hierarchy only as the "field force" and its work as the "field campaign" the FHA made its sales orientation explicit when it recommended as director of the field campaign the appointment of "a man of the sales manager type who has had wide experience in organizing and directing large groups of workers."[2] As a recognizable business type, the sales manager had proliferated after WWI with the increased specialization of production and especially distribution in American manufacturing, emerging during economic prosperity as the crucial "pivot man in the organization--the man held responsible for profits."[3] Though the sales manager was derided in the 1920s by the likes of Thorstein Veblen and H.L. Mencken as an egregious manifestation of the economy of "absentee ownership" and the culture of the "booboisie," to the U.S. government in the 1930s he possessed certain skills and enthusiasms which qualified him for the local BHP's "most important position" (field manager was the only full-time paid BHP position).[4] In fact, it was precisely those qualities which made him an object of highbrow scorn that recommended the sales manager to the FHA as a figure of middlebrow empathy. What Sinclair Lewis ridiculed the BHP would laud:

> The Romantic Hero was no longer the knight, the wandering poet, the cowpuncher, the aviator, nor the brave young district attorney, but the great sales-manager, who had an Analysis of

---

[2] FHA, Community Campaign (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), p. 22.

[3] John Cameron Aspley, Intensive Sales Management (Chicago: Dartnell Corporation, 1929), p. 27. See also Robert and Helen Lynd, Middletown: A Study in American Culture (1929; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), pp. 44-45. The sales manager's burgeoning importance in the business world was accompanied by an impressive body of business literature dedicated to his methods.

[4] Thorstein Veblen, Absentee Ownership and the Business Enterprise in Recent Times (1923; rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1964), especially pp. 284-325. Mencken's derisive term for "the vast herd of human blanks" is regarded as his most notable contribution to the American language. See Alfred Kazin, "H.L. Mencken and the Great American Boob," Menckeniana (Fall 1986), pp. 1-8.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Merchandizing Problems on his glass-topped desk, whose title of nobility was "Go-Getter," and who devoted himself and all his young samurai to the cosmic purpose of Selling--not of selling anything in particular, or to anybody in particular, but pure Selling.[5]

Such a single-minded devotion to selling, coupled with the ability to inspire such devotion in others, was a highly desirable, if not critical skill in the context of the modernization drive of the Depression-era. For in the 1930s, Lewis's sneering "cosmic purpose" was transformed into a national aspiration toward economic recovery which, if it did not imbue selling with a truly higher purpose, at least provided it with ennobling pretensions. Thus might the sales manager recruited for the BHP field campaign motivate his own young samurai--those volunteers and relief workers sent out into the local community to sell modernization.

The modernization campaign which the field manager supervised had two main components, each derived from standard, private sector sales management practice: the canvass and the follow-up. The purpose of the canvass was to contact every individual property owner and qualified lessee in a community and "urge [them] to support the campaign." Since the ultimate goal was to cultivate as many modernization prospects, and secure as many modernization pledges, as possible, the FHA advised that the canvass should contact not only those persons "who desire or are eligible to" borrow under the MCP, but also those who would pay cash or make other arrangements to finance property improvements. Even had the canvass been confined to MCP borrowers, given the liberal regulations for allowable improvements in effect during the first 20 months of the BHP, which permitted the purchase of major appliances with government-insured credit (see Chapter 1), the existence in any community of substantial numbers of promising modernization prospects was all but assured.[6] Once canvassers secured the names and desired home or business improvements of potential modernizers, these were delivered to the follow-up section which was responsible for turning prospects into committed modernizers by finalizing the sale. The follow-up section

---

[5] Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1922), p. 171.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contacted prospects again to confirm canvass pledges, provided firm estimates for property improvements, and secured signed contracts for pledged modernization work.

Creating a Sales Force

In organizing the canvass and follow-up, the BHP field manager, like any proper sales manager, concentrated first on assembling his sales force, which typically consisted of volunteer and paid canvassers enlisted by the local BHP organization, especially the building industry and women's committees [Fig. 54]. The most important factor was determining the number of field workers needed for the canvass, a figure which depended not only on the size of the community, but also on the intensity and duration of the campaign as fixed by the field manager. Though the FHA recommended that the field campaign be "as brief as possible," favoring a "short and intensive" canvass, lasting two weeks and extended if necessary, over what the agency called a "long drawn-out campaign," the local field manager, in coordination with the BHP executive committee, was free to set his own start and finish dates.[7] Despite the FHA's preference, both long and short field campaigns had certain merits. Since the canvass was essentially a pledge drive, there was a definite advantage to a short campaign mounted as a vigorous, all-out community effort in which large numbers of field workers fanned out across a community knocking on hundreds, even thousands of doors in a single day. In Atlanta, Georgia, for example, 2500 volunteer canvassers covered the local field on 30 October 1934, making 20,768 calls on property owners and tenants and producing $3.1 million in modernization pledges.[8] The strategy of running the canvass as a short-term, *participate now, don't delay* blitz--a tactic borrowed from contemporary sales and fundraising drives--was intended to bring time pressure

---

[6] Community Campaign, p. 22.
[7] Community Campaign, p. 23.
[8] "Cities in Georgia Set Fine Record," Better Housing, 12 December 1934, p. 2. "Calls on Tenants and Owners," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 3. The Atlanta canvass included a door-to-door survey of African-American property owners identified as the first of its kind in the country by the city's black newspaper. See "Housing Act is Boon to Atlantans," Atlanta Daily World, 31 October 1934, pp. 1 & 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to bear on property owners and lessees, compelling them to make a promise of home or business modernization before the field canvass ended.

The goal of the short canvass was to generate a boost of building activity, bringing immediate results and stimulating immediate spending and employment as pledges became follow-up contacts, contacts became signed contracts, and contracts became completed modernization work. The danger of the short canvass was that pledges might overwhelm the follow-up section, delaying pledge confirmation and creating a potential backlog of modernization work. Indeed, the FHA cautioned field managers that every effort should be made during the duration of the canvass to "spread the actual modernization work" to avert such an occurrence. In a number of communities, including San Antonio and Sacramento, canvasses actually had to be suspended until follow-up sections and local contractors could catch up with the pledges and contracted modernization jobs.[9] In San Diego, it was specifically "to spread out the modernization work over a longer time" and to avoid creating "a disturbance to the labor market and dissatisfaction from labor shortage" that the local BHP rejected the short canvass and opted for one conducted over a longer period of time with "a smaller force than is employed by some communities." With only 50 field workers San Diego's BHP conducted an initial canvass of residential properties over a two month period and a second canvass of commercial properties following the completion of the first. By contrast, 300 field workers conducted the short-term canvass in Kansas City, Kansas, a town then comparable in population and area to San Diego, covering all home and business properties in ten days.[10]

In San Diego, the BHP believed that its property canvasses would be more "thorough and effective" if the size of the field force was limited to the number of workers whom the campaign managers could adequately train and prepare. This training included screenings of the FHA

---

[9] Community Campaign, p. 23. See also "Improvements in San Antonio"; "Plenty of Work"; "Canvassers Take Jobs," Better Housing, 8 October 1934, pp. 2-3.
[10] FHA, San Diego Sells an Idea (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 6. "From House to House,"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

educational films *The Home Owner* and *The Contractor* and presentations by local bankers (on lending procedures), architects (on potential property improvements), and salesmen (on "what to say and what not to say").[11] According to the FHA, the preparation given San Diego's canvassers was a uniquely "intensive course of instruction," but in all community campaigns canvassers received some sort of training before they were given the BHP credentials which enabled them to make field calls. The FHA did not specify what form this training should take or how rigorous it should be, beyond suggesting that the BHPs stage "rallies of field workers" to offer "complete instructions" and "arouse enthusiasm."[12] In Georgia, most BHP communities held three-day seminars for canvassers. In New Jersey, instruction was even more intensive than in San Diego, as special training schools for field workers were set up in each of the state's 20 district offices. There, potential canvassers attended a two-week study course on the fundamentals of the National Housing Act which included reading assignments, discussion groups, and practical case studies. Course instructors were FHA field representatives, though agency officials from Washington were also brought in to address the trainees. At the conclusion of the course, students had to pass a 25 question written exam on Title I before they were given field assignments.[13] Few local BHPs appear to have trained their canvassers as thoroughly as those in the state of New Jersey, where the field campaigns were staffed almost entirely by state and federal relief workers being paid for the hours they spent in training during the course.

Relief Workers

The use of relief workers in BHP field campaigns would prove one of the more contentious issues the government's modernization effort faced, but in the fall of 1934 federal relief and the BHP seemed an ideal union. By then, the Federal Emergency Relief

---

Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 3.

[11] San Diego Sells an Idea, p. 7.

[12] "San Diego Drive Organized," Better Housing, 12 December 1934, p. 3. Community Campaign, p. 23.

[13] State of New Jersey BHP, "1936 Report of Better Housing Headquarters (WPA Project #S

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Administration (FERA) was the principal relief agency in the nation which, under the direction of Harry Hopkins, channeled federal money to the states and then to municipalities where local officials had latitude in deciding which work projects would receive relief funds. Though the FHA never explicitly stated that FERA workers should be employed as BHP canvassers, it was implied in the Community Campaign manual, in nearly every issue of Better Housing, and especially in San Diego Sells an Idea. In this "graphic case study" detailing "what to do to insure success in your local campaign" the FHA's position on the use of relief workers was clear: "to secure the maximum results from the aggressive publicity campaign an assignment of FERA workers was secured to completely cover the city." The booklet further explained how the San Diego BHP scheduled the work of its relief canvassers within strict FERA guidelines, even reproducing the time sheets and work assignment charts that all FERA workers completed under federal regulations.[14] Running a modernization canvass as a work relief project was such an obvious strategy that local BHP committees would have inevitably turned to it with or without the FHA's recommendation. Since such a high percentage of unemployed Americans were members of the building industry, it stood to reason that a similarly high percentage of the relief rolls were also building tradesmen, at least 33% according to Harry Hopkins (see Chapter 1). Putting these tradesmen to work in field canvasses was not, on the face of it, significantly different from numerous other work relief projects, including the real property inventories completed by the CWA.[15] Certainly within the purview of FERA-funded projects, which ranged from the valuable to the boondoggle, tradesmen canvassing was not wholly without merit. At least in theory, canvassing carried the possibility of job creation in that stimulating modernization work might get building tradesmen off the dole. Throughout the first six months

---

5059)," p. 2 [NA RG 287 box y 741].

[14] San Diego Sells an Idea, pp. 6-7.

[15] In 1934 the CWA undertook real property inventories in 64 cities collecting comprehensive statistical data on the existing building stock. The surveys, all work relief projects, were continued by the WPA after the CWA's demise. Inventory data is discussed in Chapter 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of the BHP, the FHA continually offered anecdotal evidence to this effect, citing community after community, from Baltimore to San Antonio to Oakland, in which building tradesman/canvassers were removed from the relief rolls after finding work through the BHP. Even reduction figures for small towns were considered worthy accomplishments to the FHA: in Winter Haven, Florida the modernization work stimulated by the local canvass cut the relief rolls from 610 to 167 in under two months.[16]

Since reducing the relief rolls and relief expenditures was one of the stated goals of the Better Housing Program, local BHP committees lost no time using this argument to convince local, state, and federal relief officials of the efficacy of canvassing as relief work. Not that these officials would have needed much convincing: even before the BHP commenced in the fall of 1934, FERA had already funded similar field canvasses undertaken as part of earlier *renovizing* and property clean-up campaigns, as in Cleveland, Ohio which received a FERA appropriation of $18,000 which it used to make 125,000 house calls in the spring of 1934.[17] The relief roll reduction argument was most convincing if the FERA-funded canvassers were building tradesmen, which was not always the case. Nonetheless, the FHA claimed that even reliefers from outside the building industry, most of whom were unskilled workers, "gained valuable selling experience" during their tenure as BHP canvassers and that "by virtue of this training many of these FERA workers were returned to gainful private employment in the building trades and allied lines"--as dealer field representatives and supply salesman.[18] The FHA's Arthur Walsh testified before Congress that 20% of these unskilled relief workers, whom he identified as the "poor unfortunates," had secured permanent sales jobs through the BHP canvass and were thus removed from the relief rolls, an accomplishment of which, according to Walsh, the FHA

---

[16] See "Reduces Relief Rolls" and "Canvasser Uncovers Big Repair Project," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, pp. 6 & 8. "Takes Men Off Relief," Better Housing, 8 October 1934, p. 2.
[17] See "Cleveland Off to Fine Start," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 6.
[18] FHA, Second Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936), p. 37.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was "rather proud."[19] Often these relief workers were brought in to supplant the volunteer canvassers whose ranks tended to diminish once the enthusiasm of the canvass kick-off waned, as in Atlanta where 2,500 initial volunteers were replaced with a regular field force of 100 reliefers. Not all FERA-funded BHP canvassers were on relief because they were unemployed. Some were college students, including those at the University of Delaware and Dennison University, who received FERA tuition assistance in exchange for what the relief agency called "socially useful work."[20] A group of students at Vassar participated in the Poughkeepsie canvass for college credit as well as federal relief, taking a social work course called "The Community," in which door-to-door modernization calls were a required class assignment.[21]

By the spring of 1936 critics of the BHP were skeptical of just how socially useful the field canvass was, and began to question its validity as federal work relief when the stated goal of the BHP, and of the Modernization Credit Plan, was to stimulate private sector work. The most vocal critics were a bi-partisan coalition of Congressmen who called attention to the use and, in their opinion, abuse of relief workers in the BHP when the House and Senate Banking Committees commenced hearings on extending Title I of the National Housing Act (see Chapter 1). At issue was whether "general selling by relief workers" was "a justifiable governmental function." The FHA claimed it was: according to Arthur Walsh, "it was assumed that a project under which unemployed persons rang doorbells in an effort to create employment was a wholly meritorious project"--one appropriately funded by FERA and, beginning in 1935, the WPA as well. Congressional opponents argued the contrary, claiming that the use of relief workers was at best an ethical violation which amounted to "an army of 3,000 WPA workers employed to ring

---

[19] U.S. House of Representatives, 74th Congress, 2nd Session, Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency on Extending Title I, N.H.A. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936), pp. 40-41.
[20] "Employs College Students in House-to-House Canvass," Better Housing, 12 December 1935, p. 1. See also "Speech by Ward Canaday before National Retail Furniture Association, Chicago," FHA Press Release No. 168 (10 January 1935), p. 10. Tuition assistance was a regular part of FERA's relief program.
[21] "28 Vassar Students Aid Housing Program," New York Times, 17 March 1935, II, p. 3. "Education on the March," Reader's Digest, June 1935, p. 43.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

doorbells and drum up trade for contractors" and to "the WPA promoting sales of appliances." At worst it was "an extremely evil thing" which not only discredited the BHP's supposedly voluntary basis, but was also evidence of the FHA's deliberate misrepresentation of the actual cost to the federal government and the American taxpayers of what was then the agency's largest program.[22] It is difficult to ascertain how many of the approximately 10,000 local BHPs utilized FERA and WPA relief workers in their field canvasses, but evidence suggests that it was a high percentage which included campaigns in all 48 states. In New Jersey alone, every local BHP in the state, and there were nearly 300, received an allotment of WPA workers and some campaigns were funded entirely by the WPA as work relief projects.[23]

The ethical questions raised by the issue of relief workers was never really resolved. A Republican measure in the House to force the FHA into civil service compliance, which would have prohibited the utilization of volunteer and relief workers, was ruled out of order and Title I was extended without any amendation regarding the field canvass and solicitation. For its part, the FHA claimed that this aspect of the field campaign would "very largely be allowed to die out," but this was hardly a concession to Congressional attacks. By the spring of 1936, when Administrator McDonald (appointed summer 1935) allowed that eventuality, the initial property canvasses were nearly complete and the need for relief workers was largely concluded. As canvasses gave way to follow-ups, the field campaigns relied more and more on a cadre of skilled volunteers whose participation was often just as problematic and raised just as many ethical questions as that of relief workers.

Professional Salesmen

In the opinion of the BHP's Congressional critics, the collusiveness between the FHA and private interests apparent in the use of relief workers in the field canvass (and in the

---

[22] 1936 House Hearings, pp. 33-41. See also "New Life for FHA," American Architect 148 (April 1936): 4.

[23] See 1936 House Hearings, p. 41. See also State of New Jersey BHP, "1936 Report of Better

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modernization movement as a whole) was heightened by the presence of a particular group of canvassers working along side the reliefers--canvassers whose participation in the BHP blurred the distinction between volunteer and paid employee and whose support was utterly motivated by private considerations of increased business and profits. Throughout the country, one of the primary activities for which the local BHP committees sought the cooperation of the building industry was the field campaign. In particular, suppliers and dealers of building materials and equipment--interpreted broadly to include everything from lumber to appliances to furniture--were enlisted to lend salesmen and field representatives to the BHP for the duration of the campaign. As FHA PR Director Canaday put it, "every employer can lend his own personal, aggressive, active support to the development of the campaign...he can call his salesmen in and tell them that they should give their support and their cooperation."[24] In one of the FHA's industry-specific bulletins the building supply merchant was not merely encouraged to "volunteer your sales force," but was instructed that it was his national responsibility to do so.[25]

These on-loan salesmen would participate not only in the follow-up, in which the BHP field worker finalized a modernization deal to which the property owner had already agreed, but in the initial canvass as well, in which the field worker first contacted the property owner and attempted to sell modernization. In fact, this participation in both phases of the field campaign was the first of the FHA's eight directives to local building industries: "Direct the sales efforts of your whole organization to secure business, plus full cooperation with the Building Industry Committee in all follow-up work." Since "building" was liberally interpreted within Title I regulations, in New York a force of 2,000 salesmen employed by the largest upstate nurseries mounted a campaign to sell landscape improvements financed through the MCP.[26] Most participating firms utilized their

---

Housing Headquarters (WPA Project #S 5059).
[24] FHA Press Release No. 76, p. 2.
[25] FHA, Architects, Contractors... (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), p. 7.
[26] Architects, Contractors..., pp. 10 & 25. "News From the Front: Nurseries," Better Housing, 12 November 1934, p. 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

existing sales force, but some augmented this with temporary "sales" workers at the FHA's suggestion, as in Colorado where a Denver-based lumber dealer hired unemployed carpenters to solicit modernization work across the state. The carpenters received a commission for every job they landed, assuming it included an order for lumber, and then, presumably, were contracted to do the actual improvement work.[27] Occasionally, even salesmen from outside the building industry contributed to BHP field campaigns by "mak[ing] a sales talk for modernization and repair" during the course of their daily field calls. Across the country, traveling insurance salesmen were said to be ready and willing to "sell a job of work on somebody's house or store regardless of their success in unloading their own merchandise." The FHA considered these salesmen-canvassers "volunteers" since they participated in the campaign at no cost to the local BHP or to the federal government. Their employers regarded them similarly, considering their BHP work as a sort of in-kind donation. In the opinion of the president of a roofing supply company with branches throughout the state of Georgia, who furnished a crew of 50 sales representatives devoted to selling $1 million worth of building improvements through the MCP, the field campaign offered the opportunity to put private resources to public use, rather than, as critics saw it, putting public resources to private use:

> We feel that we are rendering a public service as well as discharging a legitimate function of business to assist in every way to form a convenient point of contact between the property owner and the machinery set up by President Roosevelt's administration to satisfy the need.[28]

What he omitted was the increased demand for roofing supplies which resulted from the contact of property owner and credit machinery, especially when facilitated by the roofing supply salesman. This dissembling over business self-interest was exceptional in the BHP. Even before Congress, FHA officials acknowledged that "self-interest contributed greatly to the success of the program."[29]

---

[27] "News from the Front:: Carpenters," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 6. Architects, Contractors..., p. 22.
[28] "Salesmen Include 'Better Housing' in Bag of Wares," Better Housing, 15 October 1934, p. 4
[29] 1936 House Hearings, p. 41.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Building Workers as Field Workers

Perhaps the most self-interested of all participants in the field campaign were the independent sub-contractors, jobbers, and laborers who made up the majority of the volunteer field force. These were the carpenters, bricklayers, plumbers, electricians, painters, glaziers, etc. who were unemployed or under-employed as a result of the depressed state of the building industry. The BHP canvass must have had a certain appeal for self-respecting, independent building tradesmen as an honorable means of avoiding, or at least temporarily forestalling, the humiliation of the dole, a factor which should not be underestimated as an incentive to unpaid participation in the modernization drive. As anecdotal evidence suggested at the time, and period recollections have continued to testify, American workers in the Depression were willing to try anything and exhaust all possibilities for finding employment before giving up and seeking relief.[30] For building tradesmen, volunteering in the field canvass was akin to pounding the pavements looking for work. However, with the sponsorship of the federal government and the publicity efforts of the BHP, their job prospects, so they hoped, were somewhat better than before the arrival of the MCP. In fact they probably were, since property owners and qualified lessees could now contract building services on credit and pay for them in monthly installments like any other consumer product.

Furthermore, the opportunity the BHP presented for tradesmen to pitch their products had no small appeal in an era when the door-to-door salesman was a vaunted professional, an enterprising individualist whose success or failure was measured, in the popular imagination, by his own hard work and determination and not by the vagaries of an industrialized economic system beyond the worker's control--a system which appeared to have abandoned nearly one third of the country's building tradesmen. As Yip Harburg put it in 1932, in what would become anthemic lyrics for the decade: "I built a tower to the sun, bricks and rivet and lime; I built a tower now it's

---

[30] Worker attitudes toward relief in the 1930s are summarized in Leuchtenburg, pp. 118-20. See also Studs Terkel, Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression (1970; rpt. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), especially pp. 419-38.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

done, Brother can you spare a dime." Harburg later recalled that what the man in the song was really saying was "I made an investment in this country. Where the hell are my dividends?"[31] To that question the FHA might have replied, "in your own community...if you have goods or services to sell." The FHA had "oiled the credit machinery [and] set the wheels in motion. But the Administration cannot knock at your door and hand you business." The disillusioned building worker would have to knock on doors himself, but not without assistance. The FHA counseled the building industry committees of the local BHPs to hold weekly "sales clinics" for tradesmen to "train, develop, encourage and direct [their] selling of repair and property improvement work."[32]

Do-Gooder Canvassers

Despite the preponderance of self-interested field workers, there were canvassers who were unpaid and who lent their time and energies to the local BHP as a public service. These volunteers participated in the canvass for the good of the community and stood to accrue no personal financial gain as a result of the modernization drive. Such volunteers were usually middle-class women already active in civic affairs, whom the FHA particularly encouraged to "take an active part in the house-to-house survey." (Of course, these women might have had husbands working in the building industry which would betray self-interestedness after all.) The FHA claimed that women were often the best canvassers for residential properties, especially for daytime sales calls when the modernization prospect was most likely a housewife [Fig. 55]. In such cases, the agency believed that a female prospect would best respond to an empathetic female canvasser who understood and shared her needs and interests in home improvement. For this reason the agency also encouraged dealers and contractors to hire women as follow-up field workers.[33] The FHA was also of the opinion that housewives would be more likely to allow other women into their homes to make a modernization sales pitch than they would male

---

[31] Quoted in Hard Times, p. 21.
[32] Architects, Contractors..., pp. 4-5, 13.
[33] "Employ Women to Help You Sell" in FHA, Selling Better Housing (Washington, DC: GPO,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

canvassers.[34] It was not unwarranted for the FHA to assume that housewives would be wary of allowing unknown salesmen of a product qualitatively and quantitatively indistinct into their homes. After all, modernization was hardly as straightforward a sell, or as recognizable a product, as an Electrolux vacuum cleaner, a Singer sewing machine, a Fuller brush, or any of the hundreds of other items sold door-to-door in the 1930s.

The agency's suspicions proved well-founded. Within weeks of the commencement of the field canvasses in the fall of 1934 came reports of con artists and unscrupulous commercial salesmen falsely claiming to be BHP canvassers or FHA field representatives in order to gain admittance to a house to solicit fraudulent cash contributions or to push their own products.[35] By the fall of 1935 the problem of con men in the field had grown serious enough for the FHA to organize a drive against racketeering with a force of special agents improbably known as the H-men, after the Justice Department's G-men. Most arrests made by the H-men involved so-called "bogus agents" charged with impersonating federal officals and illegally collecting funds. In a typical racket, the grifter worked the area like any other BHP canvasser, selling modernization and even arranging credit through a local bank, but he charged his prospects a fee of between $3 and $5 per $1000 in credit, collected in cash up front.[36] To protect property owners from such harassment and also "to lend dignity to the canvasser," the FHA strenuously enjoined field campaign managers to supply their canvassers with BHP buttons, badges, and especially printed identification cards with the worker's name, the name of the local BHP chairman, and a note to the effect that the BHP was not a fund-raising campaign and that canvassers were not authorized to collect money [Figs. 56 & 57].[37]

1935), p. 15.
[34] Community Campaign, pp. 20 & 22.
[35] See "Unauthorized," Better Housing, 8 October 1934, p. 2 and "Look Out for Gents Like This," Better Housing, 19 November 1934, p. 7.
[36] See "H-Men Named to Jail Racketeers in Housing," New York Times, 5 November 1935, p. 29 and "Home Loan Racket Uncovered," New York Times, 21 December 1935, p. 1.
[37] Community Campaign, p. 24. "Introducing Mr._____," Better Housing, 20 September 1934, p. 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Not all community-spirit volunteers were women: equally dedicated to public service were the Boy Scouts of America, whose local troop members were active in canvasses across the country, motivated by patriotism and perhaps the pursuit of a merit badge [Fig. 58]. In New Jersey, nearly half of the eighty BHPs in the state used boy scouts as volunteer canvassers. Local chairmen reported that the scouts were "enthusiastic and energetic" workers whose canvassing efforts were "meeting with success" in every community.[38] However seriously the boy scouts took their canvassing work (probably very seriously since FHA officials told the scouts they were "the representatives of the President of the United States"), their participation in the canvass must be seen a promotional gimmick.[39] The modernization pitch of such guileless salesmen was designed to break down consumer resistance through broad emotional appeal centered on the identity of those salesmen--earnest, uniformed boy scouts doing their part to end the Depression.

The Sales Territory

While this diverse assortment of boy scouts, housewives, college students, salesmen, building tradesmen, and relief workers was being recruited and trained into a force of crackerjack modernization canvassers, the local field campaign manager was sizing up the territory to be covered by his direct selling campaign. As stipulated by the FHA, this area ideally extended beyond the municipal limits of the individual BHP community to include the broader "trading area of the city," specifically those outlying suburban and rural areas serviced by downtown suppliers and dealers as part of their local or regional districts. In effect, then, the physical boundaries of the field campaign were determined by established and tested sales and marketing territories. Indeed, the FHA encouraged the campaign manager to take full advantage of the "existing organization" of the field, referring specifically to those commercial networks already in place for the sale and distribution of manufactured goods, with which the manager would, in all likelihood, be well-acquainted having come to the BHP with local sales experience. It is thus not surprising to find that

[38] "New Jersey Drive Covers All Points," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, p. 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the typical modernization canvass closely resembles standardized field plans recommended by sales management experts in the 1930s.[40] Like any professional sales manager, the campaign manager was directed, once he fixed his campaign boundaries, to "map [his] field of selling effort" by dividing the territory into geographical districts, subdistricts, and sections to create small manageable canvass units. In addition to utilizing private sector resources in the task of field mapping, the campaign manager also sought assistance from the local city planning commission or a comparable municipal department. In Rhode Island, the office of the City Engineer in Providence supplied detailed district maps for the entire state, drawn specially for the BHP field campaign.[41] The size and number of mapped units were determined by the physical extent and density (of buildings and people) of the community.[42] In Boston, the campaign employed a system in which every city block was numbered and considered a separate canvassing unit. In New Rochelle, less than 15 square miles in area, 97 districts were created.[43] Regardless of unit size, canvass leaders were assigned to each district and section to supervise the selling effort in that immediate locale, to coordinate with adjoining areas, and to collect and submit modernization prospects to BHP headquarters.

In addition to mapping the sales territory, the field manager also plotted the properties within that territory. With the assistance of the local real estate board and tax assessor, or making use of CWA real property inventories where they were available, the manager categorized properties according to building type to determine how many separate canvassing efforts were required to adequately cover the field–the canvass within each district and section being carried out by type. In small communities the FHA recommended dividing properties into

---

[39] "Scouting for Better Housing," Better Housing, 15 October 1934, p. 5.
[40] See J. Russell Doubman, Sales Management Today (New York: Sears Publishing, 1933), pp. 27-30.
[41] "Rhode Island Active," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 5.
[42] Community Campaign, pp. 22-23. FHA, Selling Better Housing (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 8.
[43] "Canvassing Method," Better Housing, 19 November 1934, p. 5. "Canvassers Reach all Within Limits," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, p. 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

broad classifications or divisions, usually residential and non-residential, which could be covered effectively in only two canvasses. In larger towns and cities more property classifications were necessary, especially after the 1935 loan limit increase when greater numbers of commercial properties became realistic modernization prospects.[44] Depending on the condition of the local real estate market, the FHA advised that in some communities it might be necessary for the field manager to set up an additional classification for repossessed properties since these necessitated contacting insurance companies, banks, building & loan associations and other institutions to encourage to modernization of their holdings.[45] The field manager appointed a division manager for each property type, selecting individuals with relevant experience, usually building managing agents who specialized in residential, commercial, or industrial properties. These division managers supervised district and section leaders, trained canvassers on selling points for their property type and assisted in directing the canvass of these buildings within each unit of the sales territory.

Once a local field campaign was fully organized, a date for the initial canvass was selected which avoided conflict with any other community drive or major event, be it a charity fundraising campaign or the high school basketball championships. Once the canvass was scheduled the public was made aware of it in several ways, depending on the committee's success in securing free publicity. These included newspaper advertisements, radio announcements, and especially full-size billboards: "Modernize Morristown; Canvass Sept. 24 - Oct. 6; Repair and Improve Your Property NOW; Take Advantage of the National Housing Act' Put Morristown Men to Work!" [Fig. 59].[46] The FHA supplied such billboards (FHA 211) to the BHPs free of charge and display-ready.

---

[44] In communities with a significant stock of non-residential buildings the FHA suggested three divisions. "Residential property" covered single- and multi-family houses, individual apartments occupied by owners and long-term tenants, and other small buildings in residential neighborhoods. "Income property" or "business" covered apartment houses, hotels, offices, stores, restaurants, light manufacturing lofts, etc. "Industrial property" covered factories, warehouses, schools, hospitals and other institutional buildings.

[45] Community Campaign, pp. 9, 22-23.

[46] "Jersey Town Wants to Get Dressed Up," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 6. See also

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

requiring only the addition of the place and date of the local canvass. In encouraging the use of billboards to promote the BHP canvass the FHA demonstrated the degree to which the agency, not surprisingly, privileged the exigencies of sales and advertising over those of civic improvement to which the BHP was supposedly committed. Civic improvement groups had mounted anti-billboard crusades as a staple of their movement since at least the turn of the century.[47] Only rarely were property owners notified of the canvass directly and informed that they would be contacted by a BHP worker, though occasionally, canvasses were announced through direct-mail flyers, phone solicitations, or utility bill inserts. In Boston, the BHP convinced local gas, electricity, and phone companies to enclose canvass dates and informational pamphlets in nearly two million monthly bills, a promotional privilege supposedly granted only once before, to the American Red Cross, which either reflected the worthiness of the property canvass or indicated that utility company executives were members of the Boston BHP advisory committee.[48] Even without direct access to individual property owners and renters, if the BHP committees had done their job and promoted the modernization drive with the intensive, boosterish enthusiasm the FHA recommended, few property owners practicing everyday life in a given city or town--working, shopping, going to school, to club meetings, to the movies--could have failed to have been aware of that impending knock on the front door of their home or business.

The Sales Pitch

The canvasser knocked on that front door with a single-minded purpose driven home in training meetings, sales clinics, and rallies--to sell modernization. Yet, in its "General Instructions to Field Canvassers" the FHA adopted a restrained tone at odds with the "arouse their enthusiasm" tenor of its earlier pronouncements. Here, the agency cautioned canvassers that their primary

---

"Use Billboards," Better Housing, 1 November 1934, p. 2.
[47] See Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 294-95. See also Gabrielle Esperdy, Connecticut's Merritt Parkway: History and Design (LOC Microfilm, HABS/HAER CT-63), pp. 20-23.
[48] "Inserts in Utilities Bills Used in Boston," Better Housing, 1 November 1934, p. 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

purpose was merely "to give *information*" [emphasis theirs] and that this should be the guiding spirit of the call. Following this directive, the canvasser would have simply handed the property owner an FHA pamphlet, explained the rules and regulations of the MCP, thanked the prospect for his or her time, and concluded the interview. Had the FHA really envisioned the average modernization call as such a bloodless performance it would not have provided canvassers with a seven-point sales pitch the agency preferred to call "points to stress in urging property owners to modernize." Certainly, any semantic distinctions which the FHA might have argued existed between blatant *selling* and potentially more discreet *urging* are invalidated upon examination of these points, five of which, as the agency explained it, "appeal[ed] to the self-interest of the property owner." The self-interest angle exploited the financial advantages supposedly gained by immediate modernization: saving money in the present by capitalizing on the low prices of materials and labor caused by the depressed state of the industry; saving money in the long-run through preventive modernization to avoid costly repairs in the future; saving money on an on-going basis by installing "modern types of equipment" which were more efficient and less costly to operate; and making money through increased income in the form of sales and/or rents.[49] In each point the essential argument was the same: to save money or make money the property owner needed to first *spend* money on modernization. This argument was based on the so-called "reason-why" sales strategy which, long a part of the direct salesmen's standard repertoire, had also gained currency in advertising during 1910s and 1920s. The typical reason-why pitch, in evidence here, relied on "cold-blooded logic" and the presentation of seemingly undeniable facts which would speak for themselves as agents of consumer persuasion.[50] A Better Housing writer summed up this approach: "many prospects can be won over if intelligent presentation is made."[51] An insistence on

---

[49] Community Campaign, p. 28. The seven points also appear as "Here's How You Can Convince Owners" in Architects, Contractors..., p. 14.
[50] Chester A. Gauss and Lucius I. Wightman, Sales and Advertising: A Practical Treatise (Chicago: American Technical Society, 1935), p. 168. See also Lears, pp. 198-200.
[51] "Shown Wisdom of Alterations Owners Easily Persuaded," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

factual information did not, however, necessitate a dry, business-like tone: the modernization canvasser's prepared spiel combined the straightforward and matter-of-fact ("as business improves, prices rise") with knowing folk wisdom ("a stitch in time saves nine").[52]

The other points of the FHA's standard modernization pitch relied not on the facts of financial gain or other appeals to the intellect, but on less tangible, yet equally meaningful "dividends"--satisfaction in improving one's home, pride in improving one's business, and finally "appeal[ing] to the civic pride and conscience of the property owner," which translated into gratification in relieving unemployment, reducing relief, and improving business conditions.[53] Arguments such as these reflect a crucial shift in sales strategies, away from the fact-based reason-why approach toward psychologically-manipulative emotional appeals, which accompanied the increasing competitiveness of the consumer market of the 1920s, extending into the perhaps even more competitive sales arena of the Depression decade.[54] As the BHP and the drive it engendered progressed in the mid- and late 1930s, especially after the 1935 loan limit increase and the concomitant expansion of commercial building modernization, the tactics of persuasion utilized by the government and the private sector relied more and more on psychologically-driven inducements which attempted to break down consumer resistance to modernization through the careful exploitation of mass insecurities and national character. Eventually, a complex modernization ideology emerged which, accompanied by sophisticated rhetoric, transcended sales pitches and advertisements to become a highly developed, and sometimes highly theoretical, cultural and architectural discourse (see chapter 6).

6.
[52] Community Campaign, p. 28.
[53] Community Campaign, p. 28 and Architects, Contractors..., p. 14.
[54] This tactical shift in advertising and sales was recognized at the time. See Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday (1931; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 140. For a thorough explanation of these appeals from the salesman's perspective see Gauss and Wightman, pp. 163-71.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Presumably, since the FHA sought to avoid any semblance of "high-pressure or undignified methods of approach," the agency appended these final stress points lest its initial modernization pitch appear too crass and material. Despite such precautions, the BHP's sales ethos was so pervasive and so thoroughly inculcated in the field workers–especially those who were salesmen by profession–that the use of emotionally exploitative pitches and foot-in-the-door tactics, whether deliberate or unintentional depending on the skill of the canvasser, was virtually assured. That the FHA also equipped canvassers with a battery of "suggested approaches" designed to finesse all manner of brush-offs by the property owner served to further court the danger of engaging in what Congressional critics would eventually call the BHP's "abusive" sales practices "in which workers were told to solicit, and were assigned territory and given four days a week to visit every home and business and urge them to borrow or spend more money."[55]

If the canvasser made it inside the front door and successfully reeled off the rehearsed sales pitch, it remained to secure the property owner or qualified tenant as a modernization prospect for the follow-up campaign. The FHA offered two methods for prospect cultivation by the field organizations. In the "Pledge Card System" the owner/lessee was asked to commit to making property improvements within the coming year, specifying a dollar amount, a type of modernization, and a completion deadline. The canvasser made a duplicate of the pledge commitment, leaving the signed original with the property owner along with a pledge fulfillment card to be sent to the BHP upon completion of the modernization work. If these work completion cards were not returned before the stated date, the field organization would "recheck the pledge" until it was fulfilled.[56] The pledger had the option of requesting a follow-up call by an authorized contractor or dealer or simply a list of authorized contractors and dealers. Pledgers could also opt-out of any further contact, but the FHA urged canvassers to convince them to accept some form of

---

[55] Community Campaign, pp. 24, 29-31. 1936 House Hearings, p. 38.
[56] See "Rechecking of Pledges," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 8.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

follow-up in order to clinch the sale and expedite the modernization work to which the owner/lessee had committed.[57]

The "Information Card System" did not attempt to secure an immediate modernization pledge from the prospect. Instead, property owners were asked to complete a modernization questionnaire or survey. In the FHA's view, the crucial difference between the pledge card and the information card was that the latter did not require the property owner to specify a dollar amount to be spent on modernization. This was an important distinction, for both the canvasser and the canvassee. From the canvasser's perspective, especially if he or she had little or no experience in direct selling, it was probably easier to convince a building occupant to answer a few no-obligation questions about what kind of property improvements would be desirable at some point in the future, than to convince that person--in the midst of the Depression--to commit to as much as $2000 worth of building work. From the prospect's perspective, the questionnaire was a welcome soft-sell which, in presenting the modernization drive in an unthreatening manner, effectively smoothed the way for incremental cooperation: first, the prospect provided information; ultimately, the prospect spent money. In most cases the information card, which local BHPs designed and printed themselves, was a simple checklist of modernization eligible for MCP financing, arranged in broad categories (electrical, heating, alterations, additions, landscaping), or as specific items (air conditioning, lighting, stokers, radiators, facade work, porches and decks, trees and shrubs).[58] As in the pledge system property owners had the option of securing their own estimates for the potential work or having authorized firms provide estimates for them in a follow-up consultation. Once completed, the information cards rendered property owners and tenants "definite prospects for

---

[57] Community Campaign, pp. 25-6.

[58] The inclusion of air conditioning on the checklist undoubtedly reflects the FHA's optimism and the cooling industry's lobbying efforts. Though some commercial concerns (department stores and movie theaters) were retrofitting for air conditioning in the 1930s, it was still rare in residential buildings and small retail establishments. See Robert E. Keyes, "The Importance of Correct Air Conditioning," Stores, February 1935, pp. 159 & 166. See also Reyner Banham, The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment, 2nd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 184-94.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

direct sales effort by contractors, architects, and merchants in getting the job done."[59] Though couched in the affable guise of a hassle-free informational interview, the information card property canvass was as effectively a hard sell as the vacuum cleaner salesman throwing dirt on the carpet, for in merely agreeing to answer those questions, the mark was made, the property owner or tenant having admitted the possibility of modernization. Even an inexperienced salesperson--a relief worker or a boy scout--would have recognized the transformation underway from property owner to prospect to modernization customer.

Salesmanship at Work

Though the FHA would consistently deny the charge (leveled by Congress) that "high-pressure salesmanship" existed within the BHP field organization, evidence pointed to the contrary.[60] Not only did such salesmanship seem to exist, but it also seemed that the agency, or at least the PR Division, was partially responsible for fostering it. In enthusiastic articles on successful sales gimmicks and hypes published each week in the Better Housing newsletter--the house organ whose explicit purpose was to present campaign ideas the agency deemed worthy of emulation--the FHA appeared to support and endorse all manner of high-pressure selling. If the prospect was being pressured to modernize by the canvasser, this was because the canvasser was being pressured to sell modernization by the field manager who, as we have seen, was running the campaign, at the FHA's behest, as an aggressive sales drive. Like any sales drive in a competitive marketplace, the goal was to get results, and the best way to get results was to exert pressure on the sales force, in this case the field canvassers. In Congressional hearings, Representative Charles Gifford claimed that such pressure was in clear evidence in Massachusetts, where unemployed salesmen funded by federal relief to work as BHP canvassers were expressly required to "turn in business" and "show results"

---

[59] Community Campaign, pp. 26-7. "Kansas Using Forms," Better Housing, 1 November 1934, p. 5.

[60] House Members Charles Gifford of Massachusetts (Republican) and Frank Hancock of North Carolina (Democrat) led the charge of "high-pressure salesmanship." See 1936 House Hearings, pp. 37-41.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in addition to punching the clock.[61] Better Housing also reported on numerous local canvasses which were staged as competitive events in which field workers were divided into opposing teams with points, and occasionally prizes, awarded for securing the most prospects or pledges, or the greatest dollar amount of modernization work. Said one field manager explaining the effectiveness of canvassing teams, "rivalry keeps them on their toes."[62]

Rivalry which stimulated the field force at the local level had the same effect at the national level. To this end the FHA initiated an informal quota system with the object of improving field performance and increasing modernization business, both MCP and cash. [Fig. 60] Quotas for numbers of modernization jobs, dollar volume, and notes insured were established for each of the 48 states, determined by the FHA State Directors based on population, purchasing power, building age, and other marketing and so-called "business enterprise" factors.[63] Though modeled after sales quota systems utilized by many American businesses in the 1920s and 1930s, the FHA's system was somewhat different from private sector quota systems which evaluated salesman performance according to how well quotas were met, often to determine compensation and employment continuance or termination.[64] Because the BHP organization was largely volunteer, the FHA's quota system was significant mainly as a promotional device, one more way to boost local enthusiasm by encouraging BHPs to do their part toward reaching or surpassing the set modernization goal for their community and state. The effectiveness of the quota system in this regard is clear in reports from the state of Kansas which appeared in Better Housing in November 1934. With a state target of $16 million in modernization work by December 1935, the FHA State Director placed each of the 264 local BHPs and 100 counties in Kansas "on a quota basis" to help

---

[61] 1936 House Hearings, p. 41.
[62] "Campaign Teams Formed," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 2.
[63] See "Markets for Modernization" in FHA Division of Research and Statistics, Construction and Real Estate Data, Volume C, Section I (FHA Activities), 1935. "Modernization and Repair Notes Based on Quota," Confidential Report from L.R. Gignilliat, Jr., FHA Field Division Director, to Regional, State, and District Directors," 31 October 1935.
[64] See for example, Quota Plans of Notably Successful Concerns (Chicago: Dartnell Corporation, 1927).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reach this goal. The Director also published a weekly bulletin distributed to all BHP workers in Kansas to show where they were ahead or behind some rival county" according to the percentages of modernization pledges made and work accomplished.[65]

On the national level, the FHA carefully tracked quota percentages attained and ranked participating communities and states accordingly.[66] It made good business sense for the FHA to collect such data on the performance of the field organization in order to evaluate the relative success or failure of the BHP and the whole modernization drive. However, the agency also published these rankings on a regular basis in Better Housing, exploiting the quota system to contrive rivalries among communities, states, and the agency's twelve field regions. The top-ranked states overall were included in "The Big Ten" and all states worked toward winning "The Race between Regional Divisions" which often came down to a "nip-and-tuck fight for the lead."[67] Quotas, rankings, and inducements to field force rivalry were all typical sales strategies of the 1920s and 1930s, advocated in popular salesmanship manuals (which had widespread national readership according the Robert and Helen Lynd) and promoted by sales services and sales management publications, especially those of the Dartnell Corporation of Chicago, which had tens of thousands of business subscribers during this period.[68] That such close parallels exist between BHP sales methods and those of the typical American business is not surprising given the well-documented business basis of the FHA in general, and the sales ethos of the BHP in particular. In 1931, Frederick Lewis Allen observed that the high-pressure, hard-sell pitch, which quotas and rankings fomented, had become an accepted part of consumer culture in the 1920s. Allen

---

[65] Russell County went beyond its quota with a 156% success rate; Decatur County was at 62% of its goal; Wyandotte County had the poorest showing in the state with only 35% of its quota met. The bulletin's goal was obvious, to stimulate the local field forces across the state "in an effort to reach or pass the quota mark" for Kansas. See "Kansas is Making Splendid Showing" and "Quota Plan Succeeds in Kansas Campaign," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, pp. 1 & 5.

[66] These are explained in "Sure of Success, Chairmen Report," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, p. 1.

[67] Rankings were reported in "News from the Front." See Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 7.

[68] Middletown, p. 237. Allen, p. 141. The Dartnell Corporation, "publishers to sales managers," offered its subscribers a variety of special reports, surveys, magazines, and books covering all

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

concluded that "if you could get away with such exploits, it helped business, and good business helped prosperity, and prosperity was good for the country."[69] In the 1930s, the goal of helping business had not really changed. Substitute "fight the depression" for "prosperity" and Allen's statement is still unerringly valid, especially in the context of the FHA and the BHP field organization, where the drive to sell more and more modernization continued at a furious pace as the canvass gave way to the work of the follow-up section during the winter of 1934-35.

The Field Follow-Up

As conceived by the FHA, the function of the follow-up section was to arrange further contact with modernization prospects gathered during the canvass, overseeing the work of the local building industry in securing contracts for promised or potential modernization projects and collecting data on completed work for the use of the publicity committee. The follow-up was also responsible for initiating "diplomatic" contact with landlords and absentee owners of apartments, houses, and retail establishments whose tenants were unable or unwilling to modernize rental properties themselves.[70] In some communities, the follow-up section also mounted an entire second canvass, revisiting property owners who had previously refused to make pledges in the belief that repeated contact would sufficiently break down consumer resistance to modernization.[71] The primary activity of the follow-up section was the orchestration of contact between cultivated prospects and "sales representatives"--as the FHA referred to all architects, contractors, and material and equipment dealers involved in modernization work. First, prospects were segregated according to the job they wanted done; next, "job record cards," containing information gathered in the field canvass, were created to track progress on each prospective project. In the 1930s, such

---

aspects of sales practice and organization. Dartnell publications are cited throughout this chapter.

[69] Only Yesterday, p. 142.

[70] Community Campaign, p. 31.

[71] In St. Louis that sort of follow-up produced many new prospects: the first canvass had secured pledges from one of every six people; the second canvass ratio was one in four. In Denver the "re-check" canvass produced $15,000 in new pledges in a single day. "St Louis Prospects Show Good Gain," Better Housing, 12 December 1934, p. 5. "Follow-Up Canvass in Denver," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cards were standard "equipment" in direct selling, enabling "a salesman going into a field [to] get a picture of his prospects before he meets them."[72] After preparing job/prospect cards the follow-up section determined which type of *sales rep* was most appropriate to expedite the prospect's modernization project. There were a number possibilities, depending on the prospect's degree of interest in do-it-yourself work and insecurities about banks and credit. If interest was negligible and insecurities great, the follow-up section would turn the prospect over to a sales rep to handle the entire transaction--negotiating an MCP loan, securing work estimates, and filing building permits. The prospect was given to an architect when the project included structural work, additions, or changes in design; to a general contractor when the work consisted of several specialized jobs requiring, for example a plumber, painter, and electrician; to a sub-contractor when it involved only one type of specialized job; to a supply dealer when the prospect intended to do the work himself, and thus required only the purchase of materials.[73] If the improvement project was too small to necessitate follow-up from any of these reps, the prospect was given a list of approved building supply firms and referred to the local United States Employment Service office, a division of the Labor Department. Though the USES generally offered its labor pool only to businesses and government agencies, for the duration of the BHP it also opened it to individual property owners who required manual or semi-skilled (non-union) laborers for their modernization projects.[74]

At the FHA's insistence, prospects were allocated to appropriate firms on an alphabetical rotating basis, or by some other system deemed fair by the BHP executive committee.[75] Sometimes, the allocation of prospects was turned over to an appropriate trade association or professional group--the Chamber of Commerce, the local chapter of the AIA; other times it was handled internally by the local field organization, but regardless of who directed it, the prospect allocation system had two principal functions. First, it served to protect the prospect from over-solicitation by

---

[72] Doubman, p. 154.
[73] Community Campaign, pp. 25, 33-34.
[74] See "United States Employment Service," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

competing firms, as had sometimes occurred when local BHPs published weekly propsect lists which were distributed to contractors, architects, etc., with no safeguard for preventing repeated sales calls.[76] To avoid this, follow-up sections began releasing the prospect's name to only three firms, thus preventing abuse while still offering firms fair competition for work and prospects ample choice of modernizers. Second, and perhaps most important, prospect allocation, especially when carried out by a "neutral paid employee" appointed by the building industry committee, allowed the BHP to avoid the appearance of favoritism. Canvassers were cautioned "not to urge the purchase of any particular make of equipment or any particular type of building material or the employment of any particular tradesman or contractor," though during the actual course of the field canvass such warnings seem to have been disregarded, particularly by those self-interested canvassers who, as discussed above, were selling modernization on commission from their firms or in the hope of gaining employment for themselves.[77] The occurrence of such self-selling is evidenced by the frequency with which Better Housing reported that field workers quit canvasses having secured modernization work.[78] The whole question of BHP impartiality would become largely irrelevant early in 1935 when the follow-up campaign moved into a second, expanded phase and the FHA began advocating an alternative method of cultivating modernization prospects.

Once prospects were assigned to participating follow-up firms, "the sales effort [was] left to the individual initiative of dealers and contractors"--this, according to the FHA, in a statement which would seem, astonishingly, to imply that only qualified representatives, those who received prospects, were engaged in the actual work of selling modernization, as if BHP publicity and the field canvass did not already constitute a sales effort on a massive scale.[79] With the BHP's extensive promotional support and with hot prospects handed to them by the field canvass, follow-

---

[75] Community Campaign, pp. 26-27, 31.
[76] See "Protect Repair Prospects," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, p. 7.
[77] Community Campaign, p. 25.
[78] See for example "Canvassers Quit Survey to Do Repair Work," Better Housing, 1 November 1934, p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

up architects, contractors, and dealers were only too willing to "accept the opportunity" the modernization drive offered and they began the "aggressive sales effort" the FHA expected. 1935 found them actively undertaking the FHA's "new business program" with the hope that, as the FHA promised, follow-up prospects would continue to generate work "for months after the original canvass." To this end, architects were preparing modernization plans and estimates for their assigned prospects, often in cooperation with contractors and dealers. They were also acting as volunteer consultants to encourage home and business property owners to consider style and structural changes requiring architectural services. General contractors were hiring salesmen to solicit extra modernization work and were "spend[ing] more personal time in active selling." At the FHA's suggestion, they were also canvassing property owners and tenants in the vicinity of modernization jobs underway, effectively turning those jobs into ongoing demonstrations of the work they were doing. Finally, they were preparing unsolicited estimates for additional improvements at the current job site, demonstrating to the property owner the supposed economy of doing extra work with "tools and equipment [already] on the job."[80] Dealers, using their prospects' information cards as a guide, were inventorying products and maintaining adequate stocks in preparation for increased business once prospects placed orders. They were also developing "vigorous merchandising ideas" for those products which had been "growing dusty on the shelves for the last four or five years," taking to heart PR Director Canaday's advice that "a lot of these products can be brought out and turned around so that the unfaded side is forward, so that the public will look at them in a new light." Finally, dealers were working closely with their contractor customers "teach[ing them] to be salesmen" for their mutual benefit.[81]

The FHA always stressed the importance of architects, contractors, and dealers working together in the field campaign as "a close-knit organization." This cooperative spirit was crucial to

---

[79] Community Campaign, p. 25.
[80] Architects, Contractors..., pp. 3, 10, 21-23.
[81] Architects, Contractors..., pp. 9 & 24. FHA Press Release No. 76, p. 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

follow-up work, as the agency repeatedly illustrated through "success story" anecdotes of "good salesmanship" which it published in Better Housing and subsequently recounted at special modernization sales meetings (see below). In one detailed example, a Buffalo homeowner who, during the field canvass, had indicated a willingness to repair her front porch was assigned as a prospect to "an enterprising contractor" who visited her in a follow-up sales call to discuss the needed repairs. When the homeowner suggested that the contractor return in the evening to give her husband a firm estimate for the repair job, he decided to take a lumber dealer and an architect along with him when he returned to the house: "Between them they convinced the homeowner that more work was needed, so that instead of a $200 repair job they sold the owner a $1,900 modernization job."[82] Such were the potential benefits of joint initiative in the follow-up; as the FHA concluded, "the amount of business it brings *you* must depend on your *cooperation* and *effort*" [emphasis theirs]. Once follow-up interviews like the successful one in Buffalo were concluded, the sales reps completed the job record cards indicating whether the work cultivated in the canvass was contracted or resulted in a "no sale." If the former, the representative recorded the total cost of the job (labor and materials) and the payment method (cash or credit); if the latter, the rep was asked to supply "remarks indicating why no contract [was] let" and the prospect became a potential re-check candidate.[83]

In New Jersey, the state-wide BHP developed the follow-up into a detailed "survey-sales system" which was deemed especially useful when applied to Main Street's commercial properties. This system allowed field teams of specially-trained architects, contractors, and realtors to finalize modernization deals by providing interested merchants or property owners with complete store or building improvement plans that included designs and working drawings, specifications, outlays and payment schedules, and cost-profit analyses intended to demonstrate

---

[82] Architects, Contractors..., p. 6. "Good Salesmanship," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 4.

[83] Architects, Contractors..., pp. 4 & 10.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

how modernization would be amortized through increased sales–all this free-of-charge and with no obligation. The FHA singled out the New Jersey system for special praise as an "interesting form of [modernization] procedure" which resulted directly in "a flood of applications" for store modernization work.[84] These included the expansion and refurbishment of a 15-year old shoe store in Elizabeth, a series of new storefronts for a taxpayer strip in East Orange which replaced the original stone facing with black structural glass, and a new facade for the Brunner's jewelry store in Westfield which had not altered its appearance since 1900, but now "in keeping with jewelry store trends" installed a two-tone (light and dark grey) glass front with a curved bulkhead and shadow box display windows [Figs. 61 & 62] [Figs. 63 & 64].[85]

In the New Jersey system and elsewhere, one of the prime selling points during the successful follow-up (one which secured a work contract) was the Modernization Credit Plan itself. By promoting the MCP instead of cash payment, the reps could place the cost of a modernization project in a more favorable light, as a small monthly payment rather than one lump sum. "Quote [the job] as so much per month" the FHA advised its reps, since a large (pre-1935 loan limit) modernization job would appear more palatable to a home or business property owner if presented as $55 per month over the next three years (including the maximum total of $95 in charges), rather than as $1900 up front–especially in a culture which, as Robert and Helen Lynd noted, "lives by a credit economy."[86] Architects, contractors, and dealers not only arranged credit for their canvass-culled customers, they also accepted federally-insured modernization notes as payment for products

---

[84] "Main Street Plan Pushed by Business: Jersey Groups Develop Survey-Sales System," Better Housing, 13 May 1936, p. 3.

[85] "Modernization of Stores Made Possible by FHA," FHA Clip Sheet 10 (No. 5), n.p. Elizabeth, East Orange, and Westfield had all established BHP campaigns by September 1934. See FHA, Local Chairmen of BHP Committees (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), pp. 25-26. Re: jewelry store design, shadow boxes were commonly used to display small items. Conceived of as a "miniature stage," the shadow box was placed atop a raised bulkhead and was approximately half as high as the typical show window; it was also fairly shallow and contained direct lighting to focus attention on the merchandise. See "Retail Store Planning," Architectural Record 78 (July 1935), p. 56. Brunner's was modernized by William and Sylvia Wilde. See "Portfolio of Modernization Work," Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 104.

[86] Architects, Contractors..., p. 18. Middletown, p. 46.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and services. The modernization sales reps were easily induced to take the paper because local financial institutions offered to discount the notes without recourse--the banks' way of participating in the BHP. Sometimes, bankers even accompanied modernization reps on their follow-up calls, assisting in the arrangement of credit by making on-the-spot financial evaluations, thus enabling the architect, contractor or dealer to more easily secure the job. In California, Bank of America specifically instructed its branch managers to offer this type of field service as a way of increasing banking and building business.[87]

As with the collaborative sales calls of architect, contractor and dealer, the presence of the banker in the field was further testament to the reciprocal nature of the BHP, in which the profit-making, self-interest of one served the profit-making, self-interest of all, whether the motivation was a banker's interest earnings, an architect's commission, a contractor's fee, or a dealer's retail mark-up. So obvious were the benefits of participation in the follow-up--"it will put money in your pocket"--that during the first six months of the BHP the FHA saw little need for persuasive rhetoric or morale-boosting pep talks to encourage architects, contractors, and dealers to pursue the sales leads that would turn modernization prospects into modernization clients.[88] (At this point, persuasion was best left for those who really needed it, the property owner or tenant whose incentives to participation were always far more distant and abstract in terms of profitability.) However, by January 1935 the FHA was apparently less than satisfied with the participation of local follow-up firms, as reports came in from the field that architects, contractors, and dealers, far from being dedicated and enthusiastic participants, had been negligent in cultivating the prospects assigned to them by their local BHP.[89] Nonetheless, the FHA would continue to regard them as the primary, indeed, crucial representatives of the modernization sales effort. If anything, the agency placed renewed emphasis on their importance to the long-term success of the BHP, and hence to

---

[87] See item in "News from the Front," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 7. "The Contractor-Saleman Plan," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 7.
[88] Architects, Contractors..., p. 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

national recovery. Administrator James Moffett underscored their significance to the modernization drive in a speech to the Los Angeles BHP in late January in which he declared that the FHA had learned during the past six months that the best field force consisted of "the men and women who stand to profit from a modernization campaign. Architects, contractors, builders, dealers in building materials, real estate men, carpenters, painters, interior decorators, etc." Not only were these men and women knowledgeable about modernization, but, according to Moffett, their self-interest made them uniquely persuasive salesmen: "human nature being what it is, people become very eloquent and strangely moving when they recommend something by which they will profit financially."[90] These anointed modernization representatives may have possessed a remarkable ability to transform their self-interest into a convincing--and eloquent--sales appeal, but in the FHA's opinion they required, after all, some sort of programming, an indoctrination of sorts, which would convince them to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to the exhortation of such appeals--to devote themselves, in other words, to selling modernization. To this end, early in 1935 the FHA announced a plan designed for "the education of those involved in the sale of the merchandise, material, and service used in the repair and modernization of properties." Appropriately enough, this plan was called "Selling Better Housing."[91]

Selling Better Housing

When the FHA launched this new BHP initiative after the first six months of Title I activity, it was not because the field campaign had failed to produce what the agency considered impressive results. In fact, in its First Annual Report the FHA claimed that "truly country-wide progress in this great segment of the national recovery program" had been accomplished during the so-called "testing period" of the federal modernization drive.[92] The BHP was "in full swing"; 257

---

[89] See for example, "Follow-Up Canvass Gets Results," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 5.
[90] "Speech of James Moffett to Los Angeles Better Housing Campaign Committee," FHA Press Release No. 192 (31 January 1935), p. 7 [NA RG 287 box y749].
[91] FHA, Better Selling of Better Housing, Complete Program (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 1.
[92] FHA, First Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), pp. 4-5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

community property canvasses were completed; over three million door-to-door canvass calls had been made; $30.5 million worth of loans were insured; the total for cash and credit modernization work was estimated at $211 million; and an estimated 750,000 workers had been re-employed at a cost to the FHA of $2.32 per person [Fig. 65].[93] However substantial these figures were, the FHA regarded them as "but a forecast of the amount of modernization and the volume of business which should be stimulated by the full tide of the completely coordinated program." In 1935, there remained "a reservoir of work to be tapped...of immense volume, potentially running into many billions of dollars." To adequately tap this reservoir, the FHA determined it was necessary to effect a thorough transformation of members of the American building industry--to convert architects, contractors, and dealers from passive participants into "active salesmen and active cooperators in the Better Housing Program."[94]

The problem confronting the FHA was similar to that faced by countless sales-based American businesses: how to stimulate and encourage an apathetic sales force--or, in the language of the sales manager, "how to develop indifferent salesmen into fighting salesmen." Like any sales-based business, the FHA determined that a sales conference would help the organization achieve its desired (modernization) goals, which were themselves strictly in line with those recommended by contemporary sales experts:

> The conference may be used to stimulate sales and thus increase business; it may attempt to correct faults; it may educate the force; it may be used as a source of inspirational contact or as a forum for new ideas. Furthermore, it gives the salesman a wholesome respect and regard for the company which, in turn, generates enthusiasm and earnestness.[95]

---

[93] First Annual Report, p. 1. The actual figures were: 3,070,274 calls; $30,450,583 insured loans; $210,833,974 total modernization work. The employment figure was based on estimated average value of work with the assumption that 80% of amount spent went to labor. The per person average was based on total FHA expenses for Title I implementation and administration.
[94] First Annual Report, pp. 5 & 10. Better Selling of Better Housing, p. 1.
[95] Doubman, p. 194. See also Gauss and Wightman, pp. 159-61.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

That these results were indeed the goal of the FHA's sales conference was made clear in a statement by Deputy Administrator Arthur Walsh who claimed that purpose of the *Better Selling* program was to strengthen the "weakest link" in the building industry--"the point of sale"--by promoting one simple idea: "the fundamental message given in the sales schools [is] Go out and ring door bells, and ask prospects to buy."[96] Of course, the FHA had already been encouraging local building industries to do just this, recommending that BHPs hold "inspirational meetings" for the distribution of specialized literature and the screening of promotional films which would convince "every man in the the local building industry" that modernization would "bring first profits."[97] Now, however, the agency proposed meetings which were more intensive in nature and ambitious in their goals.

The FHA organized its "Selling Better Housing" conferences as a series of three evening sales meetings eventually held in every BHP community, beginning in the FHA's 60 "key" cities (where its insuring offices were located) during March and April of 1935 and in 500 other cities during the summer [Fig. 66].[98] As it did throughout every other phase of the BHP, the FHA orchestrated all aspects of these sales meetings, providing "a complete plan for [their] preparation and conduct." This included everything from advice on printing programs to drafting letters of invitation, scripting of appropriate opening and closing remarks, supplying rosters of acceptable speakers, and precisely timing every event on the meeting agenda.[99] Each of the three meetings had a different program focus: the first evening was dedicated to residential modernization and repair,

---

[96] Arthur Walsh, Typescript of Speech before National Industrial Advertisers Association Pittsburgh Conference, 19 September 1935 [NA RG 287 BOX Y 749].
[97] See Architects, Contractors..., p. 3. San Diego Sells and Idea, p. 2.
[98] Every state had at least one key city; the more populous states had several. For a complete list see Second Annual Report, p. 43.
[99] A typical opening agenda was as follows: 8:00--Call to order; 8:05--Introduction of State or Associate Director as Executive Chairman; 8:06--Message from the Administrator; 8:09--Announcement of Visomatic Demonstration; 8:10--The demonstration. Better Selling of Better Housing, pp. 7 & 10. The *visomatic* was an audio-visual machine used to screen a 15 minute FHA-produced program called "Dealer, Architect, Contractor." This type of "visual education" was recommended to "progressive sales managers" to augment the standard training offered at sales meetings. See Doubman, p. 131.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the second to commercial modernization, the third to new residential construction (Title II). Regardless of content, each program included speeches, sales clinics, and round-table discussions for sharpening the skills of "those involved in the 'point of sale' selling of Better Housing." Architects, general contractors, and dealers of equipment and supplies were the primary target audience, but the list of building industry invitees also included specialized (heating, electrical) contractors, sub-contractors and tradesmen, real estate agents, and wholesalers and retailers of home and business furnishings. The FHA's letter of invitation sought building industry attendance through a business appeal founded on both professional flattery and competition. The letter was a "special" invitation extended to that particular architect, contractor, or dealer to attend three "exclusive" meetings which invitees could "not afford to miss" lest their competitors be "two laps ahead." The letter promised that the meetings would "demonstrate better selling" and showcase "vital selling facts" of modernization and repair. Attendance at all three meetings was essential for architects, contractors, and dealers to "get [their] share of this business." Complimentary tickets were enclosed with the letter, courtesy of the local BHP. The FHA provided printed books of these 3-part tickets, emblazoned with the BHP logo, which required the bearer to supply his name, address, and place of employment to gain admission. The collected stubs were used to prepare attendance lists for local follow-up. Attendance at all three meetings entitled the architect, contractor, or dealer to receive a detailed sales manual, BHP credentials (buttons and cards), and a subscription to a new semi-monthly FHA publication called "Better Selling of Better Housing," a sales idea newsletter.[100]

Also invited to the *Better Selling* evenings were the advertising directors of the host city's major newspapers, whose presence was desired at the meetings to demonstrate to them the magnitude of the impending increase in advertising linage (above the 25 million already sold) which the FHA believed would occur once "the [building] industry put the entire weight of its

[100] Better Selling of Better Housing, pp. 3-4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

salesmanship behind the Better Housing Program." In the FHA-drafted letters sent to ad directors requesting their attendance, the local BHP chairman in whose name the invitation was issued, cautioned that his organization wished to avoid all publicity about the sales meetings. In addition to this admonition, the FHA further instructed BHP chairs to contact ad directors by phone or in person to re-emphasize this point, "amplifying the statement that no publicity is desired in respect to the meeting." Though the FHA claimed that the sales meetings were simply unworthy of publicity because they were "of no interest to the general public" the insistence on a PR black-out indicates the existence of a deeper reason for keeping the press at bay, especially given how anomalous this sudden media reticence was in the context of the BHP promotional blitz.[101] Indeed, it is fair to assume that, contrary to the FHA's assertion, the general public might have been very interested in the imminent arrival of a freshly stimulated sales campaign in which every owner or renter of a residential or commercial property--virtually every American adult--was considered a "live prospect" and in which "Ask 'em to Buy!" would become as familiar a refrain as "Reach for a Lucky!" [Fig. 67].[102] Nonetheless, in the spring of 1935 the agency had several reasons for wanting to hold these sales meetings *on the q.t.*

It is perhaps understandable that the FHA wished to avoid undue public scrutiny of a series of events which, more than any other activity, presented the BHP for what it was--an unabashed, nationwide sales campaign--undisguised during the course of those meetings by the rhetoric of patriotism or community-spirit. Undoubtedly, the FHA would not have wanted its critics--those who opposed its business basis and encouragement of private debt--privy to "straight from the shoulder" speeches on "modern salesmanship" and "imagination in selling" which were the keynote

---

[101] Better Selling of Better Housing, p. 5.

[102] The "ask 'em to buy" slogan was used throughout the sales meetings and in all the literature associated with the "Better Selling" campaign of 1935. "Reach for a Lucky instead of a Sweet" was one the most famous advertising slogans of the early 1930s. Introduced by American Tobacco for its Lucky Strike brand of cigarettes in 1928 it remained in use throughout the decade. See Roland Marchand, Advertising and the American Dream (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 98-101.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of every meeting. Delivered by professional salesmen using texts prepared by the FHA, those speeches contained sensationally boosteristic palaver which critics would have happily used to substantiate charges that the FHA encouraged high-pressure selling: "I am willing to wager dollars to doughnuts that there isn't a man in this room who doesn't want to sell more of the product he has to sell" or "Ring the doorbells and your cash register rings with them!" Even oblique references to Depression privations were translated into punchy sales lingo:

> I don't known how you men feel about it, but I think we have received a plate full of meat--a plate full of the food we have been hungry for. We have been told how we can do a selling job, and I know that we can do it. I'm asking you men now; Will we ask them to buy?[103]

In addition to the FHA's potential discomfort at so clear a revelation of the BHP's sales ethos, there were more substantive reasons for keeping the *Better Selling* initiative under wraps--reasons related to the politics and policies of recovery. Concurrent with the sales meetings scheduled for the key cities in March, two different branches of the federal government were considering matters related to the BHP--bureaucrats at the FHA and legislators in Congress. The FHA was revising Title I regulations to ease restrictions which had prevented renters from using modernization credit to purchase major equipment such as oil burners and refrigerators for installation in their houses or apartments. This new allowance, which would take effect in early April, would broaden the modernization market especially in the larger cities where there were high percentages of renters. The sales meetings were a preemptive strike at this market, enabling heating, gas, and electrical contractors and dealers to organize sales teams, advertising, and credit in advance to take advantage of the enlarged pool of modernization prospects at the earliest possible moment.

Meanwhile, the House and Senate were considering the amendment to the National Housing Act which would raise the insured loan limit to $50,000 for commercial and income-producing properties. The FHA, confident of the amendment's passage, clearly planned the sales

---

[103] Better Selling of Better Housing, pp. 12-13, 17, 23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

meetings in anticipation of this liberalization of the MCP which would effect a significant expansion of the modernization market. Though insured modernization credit in excess of $2,000 would not be available until June, architects, contractors, and dealers were already being directed to "go after this Main Street business," encouraged by the FHA with the agency's typically slick approach. First, came the hype: "Rub-a-dub-dub, three men in a tub. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker have come alive. They are now prospects for property modernization"; then the fact: "six out of every twelve stores on Main Street is in need of repair and improvement."[104] But while some members of the building industry were learning new ways to "sell the store owner," some members of Congress were criticizing this proposed loan limit increase as a re-direction of the MCP toward commercial buildings which served only to generate increased business for "the large companies to further the sale of their products." At the very moment they were being denounced in Congress, "nationally prominent manufacturing companies" were being invited by the FHA to address *Better Selling* meetings across the country.[105] Thus, it was only politic for the FHA to run the sales meetings as discreetly and as low-profile as possible, or else run the risk of giving the agency's critics ample proof not only that the BHP was an unqualified sales campaign, which the agency admitted, but that the FHA was now engaged in the active training of what amounted to a national sales force, which the agency denied. Instead, the FHA claimed that its field work was limited to educating the public on the value of modernization, and that the actual modernization selling was the work of individual private initiative and not coordinated government effort.[106]

Sales Training

Despite the FHA's denials, when the agency provided equations for calculating the local selling field, methods for hand picking modernization prospects, and tips for estimating the cost of a modernization job they were unequivocally *training* a national sales force of architects, contractors,

---

[104] Better Selling of Better Housing, p. 26.
[105] Congressional Record 79 (12 March 1935), pp. 3471. Better Selling of Better Housing, p. 13.
[106] For these FHA claims see for example, Second Annual Report, pp. 16-17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and dealers. The information conveyed about commercial modernization, especially the technical aspects of the MCP as it applied to Main Street, makes that very clear. The FHA defined two "classifications" of merchants--those who owned their store premises and those who rented them. Provided that merchants in the latter classification had "maintenance clauses" in their leases (which most apparently did) they were eligible to finance any modernization which related to current retail operations: the baker could finance new ovens, the grocer new refrigerated display cases, the clothier new fitting rooms, and all of them new facades. Merchants who were building owners were also eligible to finance general real property improvements including structural and mechanical upgrades such as air conditioning, heating, washroom facilities, and alarm systems, but the FHA instructed architects *et al.*, to discuss such improvements with all merchants--even lessees--and to propose that retailers and building owners undertake them as joint, mutally-profitable, financial ventures. Modernization sellers were further counselled to use their "professional expertise" to demonstrate how the small merchant could make a few thousand dollars worth of modernizing look like "an expensive job." Finally, and perhaps most usefully for convincing merchants to modernize, the FHA provided sellers with statistical evidence of modernization's supposed profitabilty as found in a Commerce Department survey which determined that "25 out of 26 stores that were modernized increased their business to such an extent that added profits soon paid the cost of the job."[107]

In the sales manual that architects took home from the *Better Selling* meetings the FHA tendered much the same advice for "selling Modernization to Main Street," but articulated even more explicitly its notion of Main Street as a profitable venue for a specialized type of modernization, as distinct from, for example, "selling property improvements on the Farm." That *modernization* and *improvement* had very different connotations in these contexts was not at

[107] FHA, Better Selling of Better Housing, pp. 25-6. I have not located the Commerce Department survey cited by the FHA. Other Commerce statistics relating to Main Street stores are discussed in Chapter 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

all accidental, for the FHA was dealing with two very different markets. According to the FHA, farmers were interested in "common-sense repairs" and conveniences that tended toward sewage disposal, running water, and electricity. Main Street merchants were more interested in intangibles like "desirabilty" and "customer appeal" which the architect could make concrete in the form of a new storefront or display. Here, the FHA explained what was really being sold on Main Street and promoted in the new modernization initiative: "You are now able to sell to merchants a way and means of protecting himself from the most relentless of all competition--obsolescence." The FHA advised architects and dealers to tour their local business districts, taking stock of Main Street's buildings and making careful notes on which properties were obsolete and required improvements and which were up-to-date, having already been improved. Architects and dealers could then use the data as the basis for personal modernization sales campaigns which would, ideally, begin with their own offices and showrooms as they became their own first modernization customers. If they truly wanted to be, as the FHA put it, "merchants for modernization" their places of business should "reflect that attitude."[108] It was for this reason that Tuttle Brothers in Cranford, NJ hired architects William and Sylvia Wilde to design a new storefront and a series of interior displays which transformed their combination hardware store and lumber and paint dealer into "a central bureau of information on building construction and equipment" [Figs. 68, 69 & 70].[109]

Given its public denials about the BHP's sales ethos, it is not surprising that the FHA played down the aggressive instructional aspects of *Better Selling* training, calling the lessons it provided on finance and prospecting (on Main Street and elsewhere) mere "constructive suggestions." In fact, there was certain appropriateness to the agency's minimization since the far

---

[108] FHA, Selling Better Housing (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), pp. 24-6.
[109] The Wildes' modernization scheme cost $500. The storefront used imitation stone facing and angled show windows visible from the sidewalk as one approached the store. For another Wilde & Wilde modernization see note 85 above. See "Portfolio," Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 168.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

greater part of the training consisted not of modernization's *how-tos* but of speechifying and sloganeering. But such was the nature of sales education in the 1930s and the FHA's stated sales "philosophy"--signified by these quasi-pedagogical "selling tools"--clearly hewed to the line.[110] For example, during a roundtable discussion on the subject "How big are you--How big do you want to be?," the speaker offered a confidence-building pep talk suggestive of Emile Coué or Dale Carnegie. Coué's mind-cure therapeutics, delivered at sold-out public appearances and Coué Institutes across the country, and Carnegie's guideposts to personal achievement, offered in a number of best-selling books had widespread popular appeal in the 1920s and 1930s, demonstrated to a generation of middle-class Americans the supposed power of self-motivation to attain success in life and in business.[111] In the FHA version, building industry members were counseled to:

> Look at yourself in the mirror. The man you see is supposed to be working for you. One of your salesmen. Maybe the only one you have. Tell that man you want so many sales. Tell him you want *action!* And see that you deliver the goods as a salesman to the *you* who are [sic] a proprietor of a business.[112]

The effectiveness of this particular entrepreneurial sales curative was obviously predicated on the authority of the speaker. As recommended by the FHA, that speaker was ideally a prominent businessman and BHP industry advisor who, because of his expertise at selling had "enjoyed remarkably increased business due to the National Housing Act." This business acumen rendered him a "qualified" and "high-caliber" speaker in the FHA's view--a recognized expert with the skills to "grasp the philosophy of our pattern and deliver a talk exactly in line with the purpose of the meeting." Such a speaker, standing on the rostrum at *Better Selling* meetings across the country, was a clear embodiment of the "group leader" type who emerged in the 1920s and 1930s using

---

[110] Better Selling of Better Housing, pp. 19, 23.
[111] Coué's mantra was "Day by day in every way I am getting better and better." See Ann Douglas, Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1995), p. 143. See also Only Yesterday, p. 69 and Allen, Since Yesterday (1939; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1965) p. 206. See also Dale Carnegie, Public Speaking and Influencing Men in Business (1926; rpt. New York: Association Press, 1939) and How to Win Friends and Influence People (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936).
[112] Better Selling of Better Housing, pp. 13-14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

specialized "scientific expertise" to move a group toward some appropriate or pre-ordained goal, here stepping architects, contractors, and dealers through the "ABCs of Better Selling of Better Housing."[113] As historian Jackson Lears has observed, this so-called "group process" method was often used in the 1930s, by Dale Carnegie and others, to promote effective salesmanship. It was a form of "democratic social engineering" which was skillfully manipulated throughout the BHP to influence not only the sellers of modernization, but the buyers as well (see Chapter 6).[114]

Though *Better Selling* group leaders utilized methods of so-called "modern scientific selling" to train their would-be modernization salesmen, as advocated by sales management experts, this scientific approach relied more on motivational anecdotes and testimonials than on any kind of analysis or interpretation of business results. Despite professional bluster to the contrary, "scientific" was just a fancy name for "telling a sales story" in a straightforward manner.[115] In general, there were two kinds of anecdotes presented at the sales meetings, the positive and inspirational or the negative and confessional. The inspirational anecdote was a first-person account of some great selling success achieved by a local building supplier or manufacturer who, as a *Better Selling* speaker, was encouraged to "quote from [his] own experience." The FHA also provided third-person accounts of better selling from inside and outside the building industry, even proffering a sales legend like Isaac Singer, who revolutionized door-to-door selling and installment-buying, as a realistic and practical model for the modernization salesman: "I am not giving you theories; have you heard of Singer sewing machines?" More generically, the life insurance salesman was singled out for praise. Not only did his industry conduct an enviable volume of business, but, as with modernization, the selling took place where the prospect lived or worked. As for the man selling the insurance, his infamous persistence was viewed as a model of good salesmanship: "Most of the selling is done to men who have said 'No' at least half a dozen times.

---

[113] Better Selling of Better Housing, pp. 1, 13, 19.
[114] Lears, p. 188.
[115] Doubman, p. 118. See also William E. Holler, Step Out and Sell! (Chicago: The Dartnell

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But the insurance salesman keeps on pointing out the advantages from this angle and that angle, and he continues to *ask them to buy!*"[116] In the FHA's view, modernization presented members of the building industry with a similar opportunity, assuming they possessed the tenaciously motivational energy of the stereotypical life insurance salesman.

The FHA's favorite real life model salesman, who appears frequently in the BHP literature, was an unnamed traveling huckster of automatic stokers working the field territory of South Dakota. In the fall of 1934 this salesman, characterized as "a live wire" by the writers of Better Housing, "cashed in on the housing act" by selling the unprecedented number of 53 stokers in a single month. Automatic coal firing stokers, such as those produced for residential, commercial, and industrial use by the Iron Fireman Manufacturing Company–which called its units "the very heart of modernization"–were designed to move coal from storage bin to fire in one continuous automated flow, rendering unnecessary regular human tending of a furnace [Fig. 71]. However clean and convenient the automatic stoker might have been, this one-ton piece of basement equipment was hardly a glamour item, which perhaps made the accomplishment of that anonymous South Dakota salesman all the more impressive. As the FHA put it, "Most people will agree that selling automatic stokers is a tough job anywhere." Though a *Better Selling* speaker regretted that the stoker salesman was not "here tonight to tell you in his own words what door-to-door selling means to him," his results spoke for themselves: he supposedly earned half a year's salary in that 30-day period and his 53 sales, every one financed with federally-insured modernization credit, represented one third of all modernization loans made in the state of South Dakota during the first year of the MCP.[117]

Corporation, 1939), pp. 51-55.

[116] Better Selling of Better Housing, pp. 16-17.

[117] If the stoker salesman's exploits lacked that larger-than-life quality which so burnished the reputations of such contemporary icons of the American Midwest as Paul Bunyan or even Gutzon Borglum, within the insular BHP world of modernization selling the FHA accorded him folk hero status akin to that of the legendary lumberman and the real-life sculptor, and his astounding record of 53 stoker sales was, in its own way, as rarefied and emblematic an achievement of triumphant will as single-handedly clearcutting the Dakota hills or carving the faces of Mount

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

At the opposite extreme from the heroic salesman story was the confessional sales story, modeled on the soul-baring (often moralistic) first-person tales of the popular women's magazine True Story, whose unvarying share-my-secret editorial format was so successful in the late 1920s that it was co-opted as a popular advertising technique throughout the 1930s.[118] Unlike its prototype, the confession recounted at the typical *Better Selling* evening was never a first-person account since it always revealed the salesman-as-schmuck--a dismal failure who was unwilling or too dull-witted to take advantage of the "unprecedented opportunity" offered through the MCP and who, had such a man been located, would probably have been too humiliated to stand before the assembled "conclave" of good fellows. Leaving behind True Story's lurid sex appeal as well as its narrative voice, the FHA nonetheless borrowed the magazine's well-known tag line "Truth is stranger than fiction" in its real-life account of a modernization sales debacle which involved not the poor performance of one salesman, but of dozens: a sales manager in Hartford, CT experienced in door-to-door selling organized a team of twenty FERA workers for a BHP field canvass of Hartford's homes and small businesses. The team's block-by-block property check uncovered hundreds of "hot" modernization prospects who were turned over to members of Hartford's building industry. Then, much to the disbelief of the *Better Selling* speaker, these architects, contractors, and dealers did not follow-up on the business handed to them. Clearly to their shame, "they did not sell all of these prospects!" The sales manager sent the FERA workers back into the

---

Rushmore. The concept of the heroic salesman as awe-inspiring figure was not particularly far-fetched or outlandish in the 1930s. Even Paul Bunyan himself, "a rustic Superman turned supersalesman," according to Karal Ann Marling, had, since the early 1920s, been pitching an eponymous brand of "Paul Bunyan Pine" as the registered trademark of the Red River Lumber Company of Minnesota, which also published his tall tales in house organs and promotional pamphlets written by a local advertising copywriter in a "Boosters' Club patois" resonant with the salesman's vernacular the FHA affected in its in-house BHP literature, promotional materials, and at the *Better Selling* meetings. On the stoker salesman see "News from the Front," Better Housing, 30 November 1934, p. 5. "Take a Tip from This Man" in Selling Better Housing, p. 15. Better Selling of Better Housing, pp. 13, 16. See also "Iron Fireman (advertisement)," Architectural Forum 65 (July 1936): 47. On Bunyan and Borglum see Karal Ann Marling, The Colossus of Roads: Myth and Symbol along the American Highway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 1-16, 82-89.

[118] See Marchand, pp. 53-63.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

field, equipped to close deals themselves; this time, "a sale usually resulted...Why? [because] the FERA workers talked about what was needed and what was wanted. They uncovered the desires–and then they *asked the people to buy!*" The moral of the story was clear to any self-respecting architect, contractor, or dealer in the *Better Selling* audience: even unskilled relief workers were successfully selling modernization, so "why can't you do that for yourselves?"[119]

In answer to that question, some members of the *Better Selling* audience might have replied, "Because we don't know how." Indeed, the FHA was well aware that certain marketing skills were lacking in the building industry, as one canned *Better Selling* speech made clear: "That's the trouble with most of us fellows in the building business. We have merely been buyers so long that we never learned how to sell."[120] It was precisely to teach these fellows how to sell that the FHA had organized the *Better Selling* meetings in the first place, but the lessons which needed teaching were not uniform across all of the industry's segments. Dealers of materials and equipment, whose principle business activity was to move their products, could hardly have been ignorant of effective salesmanship and selling techniques, though comments from the dealers themselves would indicate otherwise. For example, the president of the National Retail Lumber Dealers Association observed that American building material dealers were failing to exploit the merchandising opportunity which modernization presented, concluding that there was only one way for them to do "[their] part as retailer in this revival of building...we must become merchants rather than dealers.[121] We must become local selling headquarters for the building industry." Thus, what the FHA offered dealers were recommendations for taking advantage of the expanded merchandising opportunities offered by the modernization drive. In explaining the dealer's "place in the picture" the FHA counseled him to stop "being a dealer in whatever it is you sell [and] become an active salesman for modernization!" In other words, the FHA was proposing a new

[119] Better Selling of Better Housing, p. 15. One wonders how well this story played in Hartford itself, which was one of the key cities where the first round of *Better Selling* meetings were held.
[120] Better Selling of Better Housing, p. 24.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

sales angle in which the product was no longer pitched singly, but as part of "the whole job needed" with individual product identity secondary to larger benefits. The heroic stoker salesman had succeeded in unloading 53 units because, according to the FHA, "he didn't sell automatic stokers." Instead he sold what automatic stokers would do for the property owner--provide fuel savings, efficiency, automation, or climate control.[122] Obviously, not all members of the building industry had a specific product to sell or re-merchandize in the context of modernization. The only thing the architect, contractor, and tradesman had to sell, so they thought, were their individual services. Giving voice to such a complaint the FHA observed, "You are probably saying to yourself: 'Yes, but I'm just an electrical contractor' or "I'm just a bricklayer.'"[123] The sales lesson the FHA proposed to teach these men had a decidedly different emphasis. If the dealer was told to regard his line of lumber, paints, or even stokers less like a product and more like a service, his building industry confreres were told the opposite. The architect, contractor, and tradesman needed to pitch his *service* more like a *product* and then, as cited above, become his own best salesman for the product he had to sell--advertising, circularizing, knocking on doors and, of course, asking them to buy. This meant that the bricklayer, in an oft-repeated example, should sell a fireplace; the plumber, a bathroom; the carpenter, cabinetry; the electrical contractor, alarm systems, "hold-up apparatus," and display lighting. The general contractor might sell an addition to a house or restaurant.[124] In each case, the FHA and the BHP assisted in promoting these modernization "products" through Clip Sheets, exhibitions, and demonstrations (see Chapter 2).

And what of the architect? How was he to promote himself and his product to become an active salesman, cooperator, and agent for modernization? His relationship to the expanding modernization business was somewhat different from that of other members of the building industry. Most contractors, subcontractors, and tradesmen had already been actively involved in

---

[121] George Lapointe, "Speech to Building Industry Forum, 13 January 1936" [NA RG 287 Box y 748].
[122] Selling Better Housing, pp. 15-17.
[123] Selling Better Housing, p. 16.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

building repair and improvement prior to the Depression, and for some firms and sole practitioners small, individually-contracted jobs were an occupational and financial mainstay--the plumber fixing leaking sinks; the roofer fixing leaking roofs; the carpenter fixing the front porch. The door-to-door pitch and the self-merchandizing which the FHA advocated were largely new, but the necessity of hustling for even a modest job was not. For contractors and tradesmen, the changes in business practice wrought by the Depression and subsequently fostered by the modernization drive were largely a matter of degree. For architects, however, as the FHA recognized, the effect of these changes was "to broaden the scope of their service." Whether this broadening represented "a tremendous opportunity" or an unfortunate, if unavoidable, exigency depended entirely on the outlook of the individual architect.[125] Though the FHA, with characteristic optimism, was disposed to the former point of view, the agency recognized that the majority of the architectural profession were likely inclined to the latter. The agency even went so far as to imply that architects were actually biased against the kind of service this broadening entailed--against modernization and against selling.

The Architect Salesman

In the sales manual given to attendees of the *Better Selling* meetings the FHA offered a case study for architects designed to overcome their perceived professional prejudices. "A young architect in the South recently made a 'confession' which startled his less aggressive fellows," the FHA's account began, continuing that the architect's selling efforts had resulted in 252 signed modernization contracts which, though not substantially remunerative individually, collectively amounted to a year's worth of profitable work for himself and the five draftsmen it was necessary to hire to handle his increased load. "That's business building," the FHA concluded, "the sort of business open to every architect who wants to regain a profitable practice as a designer."[126] One

---

[124] Better Selling of Better Housing, p. 16. Selling Better Housing, pp. 17-22.
[125] Selling Better Housing, p. 23.
[126] Selling Better Housing, p. 23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

might wonder why it was necessary for this architect to *confess* his aggressive efforts to sell modernization, especially when these had resulted in an increased volume of business. What precisely were the professional prejudices which made this architect reluctant to broadcast his business success? In an article the FHA published in the AIA's monthly journal The Octagon in the spring of 1935, soon after the conclusion of the *Better Selling* meetings, the agency made explicit what it had only implied in the sales manual. James Dusenberry, director of the FHA's Underwriting and Realty Division, charged the architecture profession with possession of a "so-called ethical inhibition against straightforward selling which is so often a cloak for ordinary laziness"--here railing against the widespread belief that in advertising and self-promotion the architect sacrificed his dignity and professional standing. These may have been harsh words, but Dusenberry's article was intended as a wake-up call to the country's architects who, in the FHA's view, had not adequately responded to the "greatest single promotion ever given to this group."[127]

That promotion was, of course, the National Housing Act which, as enacted in 1934 ($2,000 loans) and amended in 1935 ($50,000 loans), had "throw[n] open a vast field of endeavor to the architect with imagination"--to the architect unafraid to become an "aggressive salesman." According to Dusenberry, the field of building modernization, though it was "a market made to order for the architect," had thus far "only been explored by the more hardy and venturesome of the profession." This general professional reticence, as the FHA had previously acknowledged, was due in part to the perception that modernization work offered architects only limited returns. This argument had been refuted several years earlier at the AIA's 65th annual convention when Arthur Holmes, director of the New Jersey Chapter, complained that architects were acting like highly-skilled but haughty surgeons "scorn[ing] work which dealt in small figures." As a result they were missing out on the "profitable and mutally worthwhile field of endeavor" offered by the "small

---

[127] James Dusenberry, "The Architect and Housing--Today," The Octagon 7 (May 1935): 3-4. On the general prohibition against architects' advertising their services see Walter J. Greenleaf, Careers: Architecture, Leaflet No. 10 (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, 1931), p. 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

consulting practice" dedicated to modernization and repair. Comparing his own small-town practice with that of a medical doctor who sustains a comfortable living by treating poison ivy and stomach aches, Holmes asked the assembled AIA membership, "have we not a parallel practice within our grasp which we are completely ignoring in our eagerness to realize on commissions of greater magnitude?"[128] The editors of Architectural Forum agreed, noting that most architects, "with noses tilted in the general direction of the Empire State's mooring mast," had remained "oblivious to the word 'remodeling' and its professional possibilities," but that the few architects who had "elected remodeling rather than 'retirement'...have been successful."[129] The FHA's Dusenberry, for his part, willingly conceded that commissions collected from modernization projects were not always large, but "in the aggregate they were worthwhile and much better than nothing," especially during the Depression when so many architects were collecting only the "dust on their drawing boards." At any rate, the fees architects collected from modernization projects would increase proportionately once the new $50,000 loan limit went into effect, as it did at the end of the month in which Dusenberry's article appeared, May 1935. Thus, for Dusenberry and the FHA, the question of profitability was merely a dodge to avoid the real issue of "selling architectural service and modernization." To this end Dusenberry offered a final provocation to the profession. Perhaps not all architects were up to the challenge presented by the modernization drive, for only "the architect who has kept abreast of his time is well fitted to undertake the analytical selling that must accompany this campaign." For such an architect, modernization was "an unlimited field," but for the architect who clung to old-fashioned ideas and proscriptions concerning his profession, modernization would prove only "a missed opportunity."[130]

The FHA's position on the current state of the architecture profession, made explicit in Dusenberry's article and in the *Better Selling* meetings, echoed many ideas which had been floated

---

[128] Arthur Holmes, "Plan to Create New Business for the Architect," American Architect 141 (June 1932): 14.
[129] "Remodeling Primer," Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 153.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in professional circles since the Crash of '29, most especially those repeated calls for a change in professional self-conception which sought to establish a nexus between architecture and salesmanship as a response to what the F.W. Dodge Corporation called the "continuous and unprecedented contraction in building activity" due to the Depression.[131] This contraction impacted the architecture profession in a significant way. First, although building activity had declined nearly 62%, according to Dodge statistics for 1932, the number of individuals in practice declined only 11%, a reduction in personnel considered negligible. However, of the 8,100 architecture firms active in 1932 (in states east of the Rockies), over 2,000 were newly established since 1929, with over half of these established in the first quarter of 1932 alone. [Fig. 72] This translated into an almost 25% increase in the total number of firms, an expansion generally received in the architecture community as a reflection of the down-sizing of the nation's largest offices. What this meant was that as architects were laid-off, they set up their own practices or partnerships in an effort to get their own slim share of the shrinking volume of work--so that there were more businesses vying for less business. Dodge concluded that this rate of turnover would effect "fundamental changes" in the profession.[132]

Architect Royal Barry Wills, a residential designer who wrote about the architecture profession throughout the 1930s, clearly grasped the nature of these changes when he identified several new professional realities: increased competition for work due to the presence of so many start-up firms, the necessity of accepting small jobs to "tide one over," and the need to "sell architectural service."[133] Wills expounded on these changes in a 1932 Pencil Points article which presages the reality-of-the-marketplace position the FHA would advocate for architects three years

---

[130] Dusenberry, pp. 3-4.
[131] Thomas S. Holden, "What Has Happened to Architects?" Architectural Record 71 (May 1932): 291. Holden was a vice president at F.W. Dodge, the building industry statistical research firm which also owned Architectural Record.
[132] Holden, p. 293.
[133] Royal Barry Wills, "How to Find a Job During a Depression," Pencil Points 13 (January 1932): 14-15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

later. As Wills makes clear in "How to Find a Job During a Depression," he did not regard any of these changes to the profession as necessarily bad. Though he overly romanticized the benefits of the school of hard knocks education the economic crisis afforded, his straightforward proposition that the architect "who is looking for work is a salesman" and that "the 'product' he is selling is his service" embodied a no-nonsense, business-oriented approach. Wills' advice for competing in the Depression-era architecture marketplace was unequivocal: the architect had no choice but to become a salesman, applying to architecture "the same principles of salesmanship that bring success in other business." Wills recognized that the client base had changed, and that myriad small, even minuscule clients, rather fewer large ones, would have to become the architect's bread and butter. Thus, he argued that it was crucial for architects to learn to cultivate and secure prospects, learning "how to win their interest and arouse their desire to buy." Concluding that "a professional man usually knows too little about business methods and selling," Wills he advised architects just opening their own offices to educate themselves on modern sales techniques by carefully studying the most recent books on salesmanship, such as William L. Fletcher's How to Get the Job You Want.[134] However helpful these books might have been, their utility was obviously limited by their lack of specifics on architectural practice. To fill the void, Wills wrote his own book on architecture and salesmanship which, though published in 1941, is clearly based on his professional experiences during the Depression.

In This Business of Architecture Wills set out to "infuse" the architect's "ancient lineage" as a "professional" with the "technic of a business man." This project--which had been the author's mission throughout the 1930s--was fraught with hazards, as Wills well knew, for it signified an assault upon certain sacred cows of architecture which the profession still idealized and viewed as inviolable:

---

[134] Wills, pp. 13 & 15. See also William L. Fletcher, How to Get the Job You Want (New York: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1929). This was a revised edition of Fletcher's 1922 book of the same title. Fletcher ran a successful employment agency in Boston.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Years ago, when the practice of architecture went into its professional phase, it created the architect as an unbiased defender of his client's interests, a role which is still one of his more important obligations. Simultaneously, it made him a priest of arty mysteries and a defender of traditional dogma, to the detriment of progressiveness and the cult of common sense.[135]

In the United States, the moment Wills described coincided with the establishment of the American Institute of Architects in 1857 when practitioners began to regard their professional status as equal to that of doctors and lawyers, effectively distancing themselves from the building trades. In the following decades this new professionalism was further elevated through the promotion of architecture as a fine art, which not only reflected the dominance of the École des Beaux-Arts, but also served to remove the architect to some higher ideal plane, away from the crass commercial realities of the marketplace on which he was, nonetheless, utterly dependent for his livelihood. The architect-artist, epitomized by Richard Morris Hunt or Stanford White, could thus imagine himself as an arbiter of taste, providing much-needed aesthetic guidance for the parvenu businessman and his dollar-driven values.[136] Of course, behind every Stanford White, stood a William Rutherford Mead, back at the office tending to business.

By 1900, the business imperatives of the expansionist era could not be ignored and the image of the architect-artist was largely relegated to a romanticized ideal. Nonetheless, it retained a tenacious hold on the popular conception of the profession. During World War I, American architects came to feel that this artistic image had cost them many war-related commissions which went instead to civil engineers.[137] After the war the artist image of the profession seemed to become a non-issue as architects fully participated in what critic Herbert Croly identified as the

---

[135] Wills, This Business of Architecture (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1941), pp. i & 3.

[136] See Andrew Saint, The Image of the Architect (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 72-95.

[137] See Richard Michael Levy, "The Professionalization of American Architects and Civil Engineers, 1865-1917," Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 1980, especially pp. 227-89.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"orgy of building" stimulated by Coolidge prosperity.[138] During the 1920s, with the ascendancy of the American businessman, many architects seemed to have accepted business values as their guiding principles. One thinks especially of Albert Kahn who reorganized his office to reflect values of pragmatic efficiency, abandoning the Beaux-arts atelier in favor of systematized American business.[139] But the profession never really lost its artistic aura even during the business and building boom that preceded the Depression. Outside the metropolitan centers, in Main Street towns across the country, an architect (unlike a builder or realtor) was even viewed with vague suspicion, only a shade more respectable than a poet or a musician.[140] At the beginning of the 1930s, a guide to careers published by the U.S. Department of the Interior identified architecture as "truly a fine art" whose practitioners were "distinguished mainly by aesthetic values." At the end of the 1930s, William Lescaze observed that businessmen and bankers thought all architects were "long-haired artists" insensible to financial bottom lines like expenses and profits.[141]

In between, numerous commentators on the state of the profession increasingly viewed this artistic image as a liability, especially during the austerities of the Depression. In a paper delivered at the 66th AIA convention in 1934, Electus Litchfield, a New York-based designer of apartment buildings and (eventually) housing projects, called for "the development in the architect of many of the characteristics of the so-called 'hard-headed' business man." It was, Litchfield argued, a

---

[138] Herbert Croly "A New Era of Building," Architectural Record 58 (1925): 290.

[139] Kahn's office operations, complete with detailed organizational charts, were published in Architectural Forum 69 (August 1938): 87-142. For an analysis of Kahn and business see Terry Smith, Making the Modern (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), especially pp. 57-92. In Europe, Le Corbusier had similarly adopted the habits of the businessman in the 1920s, but his espousal of Taylorization and Fordism remained a modernist conceit–an attempt to replace artistic individualism with universalization and standardization. For Kahn these were practical facts, not a theoretical ideas.

[140] See Lewis, Main Street (New York: P.F. Collier and Sons, 1920), pp. 64-5. Though Lewis's heroine attempts to bring an architect to town to lecture on the need for beautification in Gopher Prairie, her efforts are rebuffed and her interest in architecture is censured as an outsider's pretension which "knocked" Gopher Prairie by pointing out the ugliness of its buildings. As late as 1945, Thomas Creighton described how the alien artist/architect, so influenced by "the subtle, emasculating charm of the Beaux-Arts," was "to the culture of the Midwest." See Creighton, Planning to Build (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1945), p. 70. The book was a call to arms for modernist architects to organize for the post-war rebuilding effort.

[141] Greenleaf, p. 1. William Lescaze, On Being An Architect (New York: Putnam, 1942), p. 103.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Depression-era necessity for "business sense to [be] grafted upon the artistic stock," otherwise American architects would continue to struggle "helplessly and fruitlessly for work."[142] Architectural Forum, part of Henry Luce's business-oriented magazine empire, was characteristically more blunt, telling architects in August of 1934 that the time had come for "the practitioner [to] doff his smock and more appropriately assume gladiatorial garb" which, one hazards to guess, would most likely have consisted of grey flannels and a fedora.[143]

For Royal Barry Wills it was likewise essential that practitioners work to dispel the (mis)perception among clients and potential clients that architects were "arty and temperamental"--terms of utter opprobrium in the culture of the booster. This was not, Wills argued, an impossible task and the architect could "justify his existence" quite simply; all that was necessary was to "spread an aura of business accumen" (as a countervailing force to the aura of artistic sensiblity) through a few well-chosen words. Only one sort of language could be so persuasive as to change a client's opinion of the architect and his profession, to allay his fears and gain his confidences. That language, of course, was the "studied spiel" of the "successful sales talk" which architects in the 1930s had no choice but to master--as Wills, along with the FHA, clearly understood. "Ethical purities" which restrained the architect from "direct or semi-direct selling" were "obsolete and unsafe" in the altered architecture profession world of the Depression-era. When thousands of new firms were in competition with each other, clients were to be "stalked and captured."[144] The architect, like any good salesman, could do it by rote if he was willing to adhere to Wills' 23-point sales plan which included such counsel to the architect as attending church more often than

---

[142] Litchfield sent a copy of his address to President Roosevelt with a letter requesting an Executive Order stipulating the active involvement of architects in the federal recovery effort. He subsequently undertook a personal lobbying effort on behalf of his profession, turning up in PWA and FERA offices in "a highly emotional state" much to the embarrasment of AIA President Edward Russell who apologized for his colleague's "special pleading." See "The Case for the Architect, Address by Electus Litchfield before the AIA Convention in Washington," typescript, 17 May 1934, p. 2 and related correspondence in Central Housing Committee files [NA RG 207, Recs of the HHFA, Recs of the CHC, Gen Recs of the Exec Sec, box 9].

[143] "Recovery through Remodeling," Architectural Forum 61 (August 1934): 81.

[144] This Business of Architecture, pp. 8-9, 3, 33.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Christmas and Easter, having a wife active in club and civic work, joining fraternal organizations, getting his name in print as "John Brown, Architect," and "never avoiding a friendly conversation with an apparently solvent person, even though he be a stranger."[145] These proposals, guaranteed to attract customers, closely parallel the modernization sales strategies the FHA recommended to architects through the Better Housing Program and both are thoroughly informed by the cultural prescriptions and proscriptions of the Rotarian. This paradigmatic shift from artistry to Babbittry, from elite professional to booster salesman, signifies the economic exigencies of the Depression-era marketplace in which American architects were forced to seek out new business wherever they could find it. The FHA's James Dusenberry challenged the AIA membership to do just this, beginning in their own communities:

> Main Street is lined with potential projects. Any architect, sitting at his office window, is looking down on many buildings crying for modernization.[146]

Throughout 1935, with considerable additional prodding by the FHA, American architects would begin to heed Dusenberry's call. Whether seeking to do their part for the modernization movement or merely to get their share of the modernization business, architects would turn increasingly toward Main Street, viewing anew its run-down, vacant, or perhaps just old-fashioned commercial buildings--seeing them, as if for the first time, with the appraising eye of a modernization salesman sizing up his territory and his prospects.

---

[145] This Business of Architecture, pp. 37-38.
[146] Dusenberry, p. 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter 4 Main Street in the 1930s

> Did you ever sit at the window of the Commercial House in some forlorn town and look down on its Main Street, the treeless stretch lined with buildings of every shape and description (but not one of them by any happy accident either attractive in itself or as part of the ensemble) and imagine what you would do if you were God, or even a first class architect with a bankroll like Rockefeller's?

Prominent New York advertising executive Earnest Elmo Calkins posed this question to readers of The Rotarian in March 1935, at the same moment the FHA was challenging architects attending its *Better Selling* meetings to begin aggressively promoting building modernization on those same Main Streets of forlorn towns across the country. Answering his own question, Calkins related the story of an architect who "redesigned the facades of Main Street" with such transformative success that "a miracle was wrought" and concluded optimistically that this sort of commercial property improvement would become a frequent occurrence once "business and professional men learn[ed] what nature knew long ago, that beauty pays."[1] Proposing modernization as a basis for "town betterment," Calkins sought to combine the interests of business, building, and beauty into a mutually beneficial prescription for genuine civic improvement which the Depression had rendered all the more necessary. While this might seem an uncharacteristically noble goal for a member of the profession often denigrated in the 1920s and 1930s as a cynical racket, for ad man Calkins it was merely a logical extension of his long-standing advocacy of design reform through the union of art and commerce. Calkins had promoted his reformist agenda tirelessly since the turn-of-the-century in his firm's artistic or fine-art advertising campaigns, including the well-known Arrow Collar Man, and in books and articles which championed beauty as "the new business tool." Though in private Calkins was apparently an elitist who derided Babbittry and middle-brow taste, in public he was a democratizing booster who claimed a keen social responsibility to bring art and beauty to the

---

[1] Earnest Elmo Calkins, "Give Your Town a Personality," The Rotarian, March 1935, p. 11. The

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

masses. His proposal to the Rotarians was essentially his aesthetic beliefs writ large as an architectural remedy for what he perceived to be the ugliness of the everyday American environment embodied by the "heterogeneous hodgepodge" of the commercial core which too often, Calkins believed, lacked aesthetic merit or visual order.[2] As the monthly magazine of the Rotary Club International, The Rotarian was an ideal outlet for Calkins' populist aesthetic agenda since its readership consisted of precisely those Babbitt-Rotarians whose taste, in his opinion, needed uplifting and whose Depression-blighted communities needed improving. This was the same constituency the FHA sought to reach through the Better Housing Program. While Calkins did not mention the BHP by name in his article and refers to the FHA only obliquely, he was undoubtedly cognizant of the ongoing federal mandate since members of his firm, notably Egmont Arens, head of Calkins & Holden's Industrial Styling Division, had been involved in the government's modernization effort since the previous fall (see Chapter 6).

Though Calkins' proposal for community-based, locally-organized property improvement campaigns resembled the BHP in general, it also possessed two specific correspondences with the federal program. The first was his designation of building modernization as a socially and economically curative practice; the second was his designation of a primary building modernization site: "The place to begin is Main Street."[3] It was not by chance that Calkins selected this particular locale for his program of therapeutic modernization. For in the spring and summer of 1935, in conjunction with the *Better Selling* education plan and the expansion of modernization credit in excess of $2,000, the FHA launched a new BHP initiative targeting the commercial cores of American cities and towns. Through this initiative the FHA coordinated a series of national publicity campaigns which were expressly intended to

---

article was reprinted in condensed form in Reader's Digest, June 1935, pp. 45-46.
[2] See Calkins, "Beauty the New Business Tool," Atlantic Monthly, August 1927, pp. 150-56. For an analysis of Calkins' role in American advertising see Michele H. Bogart, Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 207-12 and Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 308-16.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"Modernize Main Street" [Fig. 73]. Following the pattern established successfully the previous year, the FHA undertook a new promotional blitz dedicated to providing "better housing for American business" and responding directly to the social, economic, and physical state of Main Street in the 1930s.[4]

The agency released a range of commercially-focused literature intended for local distribution including its principal promotional piece, Modernize for Profit (FHA 180), subtitled "a manual for merchants," which was introduced in the summer of 1935. With an initial distribution of 300,000 pieces, Modernize for Profit explained the liberalized ($50,000) terms of government-insured credit and procedures for securing modernization funds and offered polemics concerning the efficacy of store modernization in which the FHA pronounced that the merchant "must modernize to hold his trade."[5] The FHA also released a series of direct mail letters, each having distributions of approximately 500,000 pieces, addressed to the "the Merchants of America," to "Retail Store Owners and Managers," and to "Mr. Retailer."[6] In content, these letters ranged from simple explanations of the MCP to detailed store improvement checklists and always included, as did Modernize for Profit, before and after case studies to illustrate modernization's potential for architectural change and building improvement [Fig. 74].[7]

Charged with following-up on the government's mass mailings, participating BHP communities--even ones which had already concluded door-to-door canvasses--organized new store-to-store surveys intended to familiarize merchants with the Main Street program. In New

---

[3] Calkins, "Give Your Town a Personality," p. 24.
[4] FHA, Modernize for Profit (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), inside back cover.
[5] Modernize for Profit, p. 2.
[6] FHA, To the Merchants of America (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935). FHA, Direct Mail Piece to Service Stations and Garages (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935). FHA, To Mr. Retailer (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936). FHA, To Owners and Management of Income Property (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935) [NA RG 287 box y 743]. See also "Renewal of Effort Title I Urged, Better Housing, 8 July 1936, p. 1.
[7] The checklist contained 39 items for improvement including facade changes, alterations to display windows, awnings, canopies, entrances, loading platforms, electric signs, vending equipment (gas pumps, juke boxes), etc. See FHA, Checklist for Modernizing Stores and Shops (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Jersey, the state BHP appointed a "special state-wide Modernize Main Street committee," composed of prominent business and industrial executives [Fig. 75]. This committee hosted more than three dozen "Modernize Main Street" dinners across the state, including a banquet for 500 in Newark, attended by local businessmen and chamber of commerce members with special invitations extended to small merchants and large retailers alike.[8] Concurrently, paid "interviewers" swept through the business districts of Newark, Jersey City, Paterson, Trenton, Camden and 64 other locales to cultivate Main Street modernization prospects in a campaign which, according to its organizers, "was in no sense a canvass but was presented as a business service."[9] In Missouri, the State Chamber of Commerce promoted modernization among merchants and owners of commercial property through special "Main Street" meetings held in cities and towns with a history of organizing for town improvement. At each meeting an architect retained by the Chamber as a modernization advisor provided free design advice to those in attendance.[10]

In San Francisco, a three-phase "Modernize Main Street for Profit" campaign sponsored jointly by the local BHP and the city's three merchants' associations. In the first phase, begun in the fall of 1935, unemployed and underemployed members of the San Francisco Architects' Association photographed the city's principal and secondary commercial blocks and prepared sketches and cost estimates for modernizing the buildings which lined them. The second phase was a series of merchants' meetings with slide shows featuring before and after views of modernized San Francisco buildings and before and after sales figures intended to prove modernization's profitability. A merchant canvass commenced in the spring of 1936 beginning

---

[8] "Main Street Plan Pushed by Business," Better Housing, 13 May 1936, p. 3. "Business Groups Launch Program in New Jersey," Better Housing, 15 April 1936, p. 1. West Orange Review, 27 March 1936, p. 1.

[9] Report of Better Housing Headquarters (WPA Project #S 5059) of the State of New Jersey, p. 4 [NA RG 287 box y741]. The other communities included Princeton, Elizabeth, Hackensack, and Atlantic City. See also "Banks Cooperate," Better Housing, 8 July 1936, p. 4.

[10] "Main Street Plan Tried in Missouri," Better Housing, 9 September 1936, p. 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in the Presidio and the Marina and continuing in two dozen San Francisco retail districts roughly equivalent to its traditional neighborhoods, with great successes recorded in Market Street, the city's historic, but already run-down commercial core, and in Union Square, the city's destination shopping center in the 1930s. During the canvass merchants were given copies of Modernize for Profit and renderings of design possibilities and were informed that if they modernized their establishments, the California Institute of Cabinet Manufacturers would paint, free of charge, any nearby empty buildings which might detract from the appearance of newly improved stores.[11] A sampling of stores modernized in downtown San Francisco demonstrates not only the success of the local Main Street campaign, but also the range of styles, materials, and techniques which became standard to modernization practice in the 1930s [Figs. 76-80].[12] These styles included modernistic step-form, streamlined moderne, and International Style modernism--often in exuberant compositional combinations; materials included glass blocks, colored structural glass and porcelain enamel sheets, aluminum, stainless steel, and chrome, along with more traditional materials rendered in new forms: granite in curving bulkheads, bronze in extruded canopies; techniques included emphasizing the store exterior, removing older ornament and decoration, and cladding the facade with thin veneers. By the end of the decade, these styles, materials, and techniques would be a familiar part of the American commercial landscape, not only in major cities but in small towns as well--"from New York with its

[11] "Modernize for Profit Council Opens Campaign," Better Housing, 31 March 1936, p. 3.
[12] Between October 1935 and May 1936 when the SF Main Street campaign was in full swing the FHA's San Francisco office reported insured loans in excess of $15 million. See L.R. Gignilliat, Jr., "Modernization and Repair Notes Insured...to Close of Business 31 October 1935," Confidential Memo dated 21 November 1935 [NA RG 287 box y742] and "Northern California, Arizona Lead Nation," Better Housing, 31 May 1936, p. 3. See also Talbot Hamlin, "Some Restaurants and Recent Shops," Pencil Points 20 (August 1939): 500. Owens-Illinois, The New Story in Pictures: Owens-Illinois Insulux Glass Block (Toledo, OH: Owens-Illinois, 1937), n.p. "Some Recent "Portfolio of Current Modernization Work," Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 106. "Portfolio," Architectural Record 81 (January 1937): 35. "From Red into Black," Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 216-17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

population of 7,000,000 people to the small hamlet of Sholes, Nebraska, population 90"--due primarily, if not exclusively, to the federally-sponsored movement to "modernize Main Street."[13]

Main Street as a Physical and Cultural Type

That the federal government, through the FHA, named "Main Street" as the designated site for its national program of commercial modernization demonstrates the degree to which this was already a recognizable morphology in the 1930s--a ubiquitous, central feature of what historian J.B. Jackson called the "classical American town," immediately discernible in virtually every community from coast to coast [Fig. 81].[14] Indeed, most American cities and towns did possess a principal commercial corridor or district identified either literally or figuratively as Main Street--a phrase which, according to journalist John Gunther's inter-war, continental travel log Inside U.S.A., "embedded itself into the language" following the publication of Sinclair Lewis' best-selling novel of 1920.[15] For Lewis, Main Street was an iconic locale which carried a burden of meaning transcending specificities of site and place to represent the collective mind and body of the nation: "Main Street with its two-story brick shops...[was] not only the heart of a place called Gopher Prairie, but ten thousand towns from Albany to San Diego."[16] In Babbitt, Lewis similarly, though more trenchantly, observed that "a stranger suddenly dropped into the business-center of Zenith could not have told whether he was in a city of Oregon or Georgia, Ohio or Maine, Oklahoma or Manitoba."[17] Though Lewis' assessment of Main Street was ultimately pejorative, his delineation of its everyday representativeness resonated throughout the 1930s. In 1937, American critic Douglas Haskell, writing in the British journal Architectural Review, noted the common perception that "this country is a series of dreadful Main Streets" passing through "ugly little towns [which]

---

[13] "Modernization Drive Sweeps Nation," Better Housing, 15 October 1934, p. 1.
[14] J.B. Jackson, "Agoraphilia, or the Love of Horizontal Spaces," in Discovering the Vernacular Landscape (New Haven: Yale University, 1984), p. 67.
[15] John Gunther, Inside U.S.A. (New York: Harper & Brothers 1946), p. 315.
[16] Sinclair Lewis, Main Street (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1920), pp. 33-34.
[17] Lewis, Babbitt (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1922), p. 61.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

bob up on the horizon regularly every nine or ten miles."[18] In 1939, when Architectural Forum published a study of Main Street as "a real estate phenomenon, a customer of building, and as a design problem" the sameness and standardization Lewis had decried was now celebrated as "Main Street, USA" [Fig. 82]. Thus, across the country, Main Streets possessed an "essential homogeneity" as evidenced by the fact that, regardless of size and location, "Breakfast Number Three" consisted of "the same orange juice, toast, and coffee in New York, N.Y. as in New Albany, Ind., and the drug store in which it is served is sure to be as nearly like its big-city prototype as the proprietor can make it."[19] Strung out along arterial highways from Maine to Florida (U.S. 1), from Washington, DC to San Francisco (U.S. 40), and from Chicago to Los Angeles (U.S. 66), this *Main Street*, whether praised or condemned, was a signifying landscape both physically and culturally constructed. It was defined by the buildings and establishments which lined it and by the image of community or individual it projected. Together, building and image created a collective identity which traversed local or regional domains to reach a destination of national consequence. This was especially true during the Depression when Main Street, through the eponymous initiative within the FHA's massively organized Better Housing Program, became a crossroads for modernization, economic recovery, and, at the intersection of the two, a modern American culture.

The Main Street upon which the FHA focused its promotional energies in 1935 was at a critical juncture--some would say state of crisis--in its morphological evolution due to transformative pressures brought to bear not only by the Depression, though these were considerable in themselves, but also by certain pre-existent social and economic conditions which the Depression merely exacerbated. These were cultural agents powerful enough to significantly impact Main Street's established physical pattern or spatial matrix, which was largely in place by 1900. That pattern was a linearly-developed, densely-built strip in which commercial

---

[18] Douglas Haskell, "Architecture on Routes U.S. 40 and 66," Architectural Review 81 (February 1937): 101. Haskell attempted to dispel this perception in his article.
[19] "Main Street, U.S.A," Architectural Forum, 70 (February 1939), 74.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

establishments clustered together to form a business and retail zone occupying contiguous, intersecting, or parallel blocks [Fig. 83]. Larger cities and towns might possess several such zones or multiple strips, depending on the population and the concentration of real-estate development. A typical strip consisted of two- or three-story buildings arranged in continuous, often block-long, rows punctuated by additional structures whose heights might vary from four to ten stories depending on the size of the town and the value of the land [Figs. 84 & 85].[20] Much of Main Street's built fabric dated to the era of rapid economic expansion in the late 19th century and thus possessed a formal organization largely determined by commercial and/or speculative real estate exigencies--small-scale versions of what Carol Willis calls the "vernaculars of capitalism."[21] Programmatically, this organization was bipartite with a principal street-level retail space of standardized frontage (larger concerns occupied two or more standard lots) and secondary upper stories leased for office, light manufacturing, or residential purposes. In configuration, these buildings were usually narrow, since excessive street frontage added to the cost of the land, and deep to make up for square footage lost in store width. Stylistically, this organization was tripartite with a range of Victorian decorative motifs disposed across cast iron and plate glass storefronts, intermediary stories of flat brick or stone accented with picturesque window surrounds, and finally a terminating, often outsized, ornamental cornice [Figs. 86 & 87]. As historians of commercial architecture have noted, this standard two-part/three-part building format was a roadside constant, always discernible beneath the shifting fashions of the Italianate, Romanesque, or Beaux-Arts Classicism to which it was continually subjected.[22] By the turn of the century, this building type

---

[20] This description is derived from the work of cultural geographers and historians of commercial architecture. See especially Richard V. Francaviglia, Main Street Revisited: Time, Space and Image Building in Small-Town America (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996) and Richard Longstreth, The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture (Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1987).

[21] See Carol Willis, Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), p. 7.

[22] See Chester H. Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture (1985; rpt. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995) and John A. Jakle, The American Small Town: Twentieth Century Place Images (Hamden, CT: Shoestring Press, 1980).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

provided a small degree of formal coherence to a Main Street assemblage all but overwhelmed by the visual cacophony of market-driven architectural eclecticism (Calkins' heterogeneous hodgepodge). By the eve of World War I, any semblance of organizational order which Main Street possessed was further obscured by a burgeoning advertising superstructure of painted windows, hanging signs, and billboards, all of which proliferated with increasing intensity well into the 1920s [Fig. 88].

By that decade, the characteristic buildings of Main Street were occupied by a wide range of commercial establishments, almost always including, as Architectural Record observed, "at least the food store, the drug store, the apparel shop, and the automotive sales-and-service station."[23] These four retail types represented a large portion of the 1.5 million stores which the U.S. Commerce Department estimated were operating on Main Street in 1929. Of this number, the majority (89%) were small, independently-owned shops with annual sales of less than $12,000.[24] Though economically inconsequential individually, taken together these independent Main Street stores formed a powerful center for a community's commercial activity--the retail zone with the highest concentration of businesses, pedestrians, customers, and, most crucially, profits. The economic efficacy of these autonomous establishments had remained constant through over half a century of boom and bust cycles from the Civil War to World War I, but this situation changed during the extended economic expansion of the 1920s which, though initially beneficial, proved ultimately detrimental to traditional Main Street's fiscal and physical health.

Though local chambers of commerce and merchant associations worked hard to promote Main Street's collective business interests throughout the prosperity decade, these trade groups were unable either to regulate the opening of too many rival independents who continually drove

---

[23] Kenneth K. Stowell, "Modernize Main Street Competition Program," Architectural Record 78 (July 1935, Supplement), 1.

[24] The actual count of stores was 1,543,158. Significantly, in terms of the marginal existence of many small retailers, the under $12,000 per year merchants were placed in the $75,000 or less sales volume category. See Survey of Current Business 10 (1930), p. 230.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

each other out of business or, even more significantly, to forestall the precipitous rise of two new forms of retailing which offered serious competition for the independent Main Street establishment. As the chain store and the neighborhood shopping center became familiar fixtures of the commercial landscape, they impacted Main Street each as a distinctive economic and architectural presence--both on and off the older business strip. (This is not to imply that the chain store and shopping center were mutually exclusive or unrelated phenomena; chains frequently occupied the crucial anchor position in shopping centers.) In the late 1920s, facing new retail competition operating out of new retail buildings, in addition to new independents moving in and out of older store buildings, traditional Main Streets entered a period of slow decline which the federal modernization effort, responding directly to the encroachment of the chain and the shopping center, would eventually seek to reverse. By the time the stock market crashed, classical Main Street had already been so seriously menaced by this double-edged retail threat that the onset of the Depression was regarded by many economists, industry analysts, planners, and social commentators as merely the long-awaited coup de grâce.

Competing Retail Forms

To Main Street observers, there was little question as to how the shift to chain and shopping center retailing--so profound as to put Main Street in dire straits even before the Depression--had been effectuated. In the period after World War I, real estate developers had begun to successfully lure retail tenants, and hence customers, away from older shopping districts to new centers located outside the downtown core, on the urban periphery or in the suburbs where land values were lower and rents were cheaper. The size and quality of these centers varied greatly, from carefully planned plazas to cheap taxpayer strips.[25] The latter were usually single-story, rapidly-built commercial blocks located along major roads leading out of town and away from Main

[25] See Liebs, pp. 10-16. "Taxpayer" is a real estate term for an inexpensive and temporary structure erected solely to produce rental income to pay taxes on a given piece of land. See also Central Housing Committee, Glossary of Housing Terms (Washington, DC: GPO, 1937), p. 77.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Street [Figs. 89 & 90]. "Taxpayers" had been around since the turn-of-the-century when their construction was precipitated by the proliferation of street car and railway lines and suburban residential communities, but it was the rise of the automobile, in conjunction with the free-wheeling real estate speculation of the 1920s, which stimulated construction of mile after mile of ex-urban taxpayers. Long and low, they responded to the horizontal spread of the highway and, increasingly, to the imperatives of the automobile, as builders set taxpayer strips back from the road to provide easy-in/easy-out perpendicular or diagonal parking for passing vehicles. When traffic threatened to overwhelm curb-side parking, adjacent vacant lots, usually to the rear of the strip, were paved-over to accommodate a continually growing number of customers arriving by car. Eventually, taxpayer developers even provided direct access from parking lots to stores through rear entrances. This represented a crucial step away from the established Main Street pattern in which the street facade was always privileged. Despite these somewhat thoughtful responses to the needs of driver/patrons, taxpayers were generally more responsive to the imperatives of the real estate market since they were intended primarily as stop-gap buildings generating modest income from land which would be more profitably developed in the future. Thus, they were not true shopping "centers" in the sense of destination retailing. Instead, taxpayer strips offered what might more appropriately be called convenience retailing, serving those newly developed residential neighborhoods which increasingly sprawled out from the downtown cores and old Main Streets in the 1920s. Eventually though, as urban and metropolitan populations grew and residential developments became denser, these strips became, for all intents and purposes, full-service secondary Main Streets which would thrive in prosperity and suffer in depression just as much their older downtown counterparts.

Also located on the urban periphery, but distinct from spec-built taxpayer strips, were the so-called community or neighborhood shopping centers which, according to Richard Longstreth, represented a new commercial paradigm.[26] The taxpayer, though it did make concessions to the car,

---

[26] See Richard Longstreth, "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-1941,"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was still essentially as a linear commercial corridor designed, in the words of Chester Liebs, as a kind of "Main Street by extension."[27] The shopping center type in contrast was consciously planned in opposition to the strictly linear Main Street pattern. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the shopping center was promoted in theory and practice as a workable commercial model which offered retailers and their customers an enticing alternative to older Main Streets. Advocates of the planned shopping center, who were often proponents of decentralization as well, criticized Main Street as haphazard, chaotic, and poorly planned. Indeed, Main Street was all of these things and such conditions were only exacerbated by the presence of cars on densely-built corridors conceived before to the age of the automobile and ill-equipped to deal with its onset. In 1946, a House Beautiful article calling for the construction of decentralized "up-to-date shopping centers" to serve communities across the country, looked back on the old Main Street form and concluded that it represented "a chronic shopping problem that [had] been with us long before the war," unsurprisingly pinpointing the car as the source of Main Street's historic and contemporary troubles: "Most of us do our shopping by automobiles on Main Streets designed for the horse and buggy."[28] As automobile usage increased exponentially after World War I, Main Street's traffic congestion reached dangerous densities: grid-lock, parking, and injuries and fatalities due to pedestrian/auto collisions became serious, wide-spread problems. In Connecticut, as early as 1923 the highway department was taking steps to relieve the congestion--and maintain the commercial viability--of the most car-clogged Main Streets in the state, those of Fairfield County towns running north along U.S. Route 1 from Greenwich to Bridgeport. According to the New England Regional Planning Commission, a succession of improvement projects to install stop lights, widen roadways,

---

Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 51 (March 1992): 5-34 and "The Diffusion of the Community Shopping Center Concept during the Inter-war Decades, JSAH 36 (September 1997): 268-91. Longstreth distinguishes between "neighborhood" and "community" shopping centers according to the extent of the populations they served and the number and kind of stores they accommodated. I use the terms for both ex-urban types distinct from downtown Main Streets.

[27] Liebs, p. 10.

[28] Dorothy Ducas, "Is Your Daily Shopping Work?" House Beautiful 88 (August 1946), p. 39.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

provide shopper parking, and construct through-traffic by-passes were ultimately in vain, and these Main Streets were in danger of becoming obsolete as traffic arteries and retail corridors.[29]

Similar conclusions were reached by Catherine Bauer and Clarence Stein in their 1934 study "Store Buildings and Neighborhood Shopping Centers." Best known as theorists and designers of modern housing, Bauer and Stein always approached their work from a broad planning perspective which placed public facilities, transportation, and commercial services on a par with housing as crucial elements of a vital community. In their shopping center study they used market and formal analysis as bases for "a scientific method" of economic and architectural planning of local retail facilities. With Stein and Wright's Radburn model and Clarence Perry's neighborhood-unit as their ideals, the authors held up the traditional commercial corridor (Huntington, Long Island was their illustrative example) as a consummate failure, arguing that Main Streets were "hang-overs from the past" which failed to recognize that "the automobile has been one of the dominating features of American life for more than twenty years."[30] It was toward this supposed disregard for the needs and conveniences of car-driving customers--as well as pedestrians forced to confront the car--that Bauer and Stein directed much of their criticism of Main Street [Fig. 91]. Not only did the typical Main Street environment lack adequate provisions for parking or smooth flow of traffic, but the buildings themselves were wholly unsatisfactory in their strict frontality and flat displays. "Show windows," noted the authors, "are of little use to people driving by in automobiles." Of course, Bauer and Stein were also quick to condemn the more recent phenomenon of taxpayers, "strung out in miserable rows, unrelated to the needs or the form of the community which they pretend to serve."[31]

---

[29] These improvements are detailed in Warren M. Creamer, Report of a Preliminary Study for the Construction of a Relief Highway to Alleviate Congestion on U.S. Route 1 (Hartford: State Highway Department, 1923), pp. 60-8. See also New England Regional Planning Commission, The Problem of the Roadside, Publication No. 56 (Boston: National Resources Committee, 1939).
[30] Clarence S. Stein and Catherine Bauer, "Store Buildings and Neighborhood Shopping Centers," Pamphlet reprinted with addenda from Architectural Record 77 (February 1934), pp. 1-13.
[31] Stein and Bauer, pp. 3 & 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The authors argued that these problems could be easily overcome when retail services were accommodated in shopping centers properly designed "for the Motor Age" as cohesive assemblages with stylistic unity, regulated signage, covered pedestrian walkways, off-street parking, and planned traffic patterns--all of which were lacking in the typical Main Street, an uncoordinated series of individual stores they characterized as "a monotonous eyesore." Though Bauer and Stein singled out the drive-in (food) markets of Southern California, a predecessor of the supermarket developed in the mid-1920s, as the existing retail type which best met "the functional requirements of a modern shopping center," by 1934, the year of their study, there were many other shopping centers which, in providing a more diverse complement of retail services, offered more fully realized reinterpretations of Main Street for the motor age.[32] Notable examples include Country Club Plaza in Kansas City (begun 1922), Westwood Village in Los Angeles (begun 1928), Suburban Square outside Philadelphia (1929-30), and the Park and Shop in Washington, D.C. (1930) [Fig. 92].[33] This last complex was designed by Arthur B. Heaton, a District of Columbia architect who directed the Commerce Department's 1933 "Renovize Washington Campaign" and was chair of the Modernization and Planning Committee of the Washington BHP during 1934 and 1935.[34]

Too Many Stores

Bauer and Stein had reasons for criticizing Main Street's physical form which went beyond its incompatibility with modern shoppers and their cars. For them, Main Street was also an egregious example of unregulated zoning and the worst kind of laissez-faire planning policies. In particular, they found fault with a distinctly American approach to real estate development, in small towns and large cities alike, in which property fronting main thoroughfares was automatically zoned for business or commercial use producing an excess of business frontage and property. As an

---

[32] Stein and Bauer, pp. 8 & 13.
[33] These projects are discussed in Longstreth, "The Diffusion of the Community Shopping Center during the Inter-war Decades."
[34] See E. Philip Schreier, "Better Housing--The Washington, D.C. Chapter," The Octagon 7 (January 1935), pp. 12-13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

illustration of the land-use condition this created the authors cited the extreme example of Los Angeles (hardly a traditional Main Street community) where over-zoning resulting from the ordinance of 1921 had created a quantity of business property which Bauer and Stein (erroneously) claimed was capable of serving the needs of the entire population of the United States.[35] Though the impact was less dramatic elsewhere, this long-standing zoning practice--archaic and wrongheaded in their opinion--had not only dictated Main Street's original form, but had remained an active agent in Main Street's speculative development during prosperity and depression.

This practice had also informed Main Street's guiding real estate and retail principles: "the more stores the more profit; the more passers-by the more business, therefore the higher property values." The authors believed that, as a result, Main Street's store buildings had been "measured by the foot, not by use...turned out like sausages, long strips of them, all alike, no matter how different might be the requirements of site, special use, or of grouping." Thus, they concluded, the average Main Street was over-supplied with commercial buildings and commercial establishments, a situation the authors decried as "a mad condition of a surfeit of stores."[36] In other words, there were simply too many food stores, drug stores, clothing stores, and gas stations to serve the needs of any one community, as defined by its population and purchasing power. Bauer and Stein's identification of ineffectual zoning practice as the root cause of this surplus of stores--a manifestation of what they called Main Street's "chaotic waste"--served to clarify a difficult situation which the federal government and the retail industry had already recognized. As the editor of one retail trade journal put it: "We have too many stores now, and we shall continue to have too many until the common hazards of retailing are more widely understood."[37]

---

[35] Stein and Bauer, p. 15. Although the overzoning in L.A. did create a business property surplus, this assertion (credited to Carol Aronovici) is a gross exaggeration. According to Marc Weiss, the 600 miles of business frontage would have actually served 14 million people at a time when L.A.'s population was 1.2 million and the population of the U.S. was approximately 120 million. See Weiss, The Rise of the Community Builders (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 96.
[36] Stein and Bauer, pp. 14-15, 2.
[37] Godfrey M. Lebhar, "As We See It," Chain Store Age, July 1934, p. 84.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The most hazardous aspect of American retailing was a direct consequence of this surplus of stores: the ubiquitously cut-throat competition which, even in a healthy economy, threatened to put many merchants out of business, store closure being the ultimate risk the retailer faced when entering the profitable, but dog-eat-dog Main Street marketplace. As Bauer and Stein noted, during "those good old days of so-called 'normalcy'" in the 1920s, the majority of smaller independent stores managed only a marginal business performance, with average annual sales of $5,500--barely enough to net their proprietors a living wage once salaries, rent, and other overhead were paid out.[38] Adding to that bleak picture were government statistics culled from the Commerce Department's Census of Distribution for the supposedly prosperous years 1926-29 which indicated that, as a national average, between 10% and 15% of all Main Street businesses failed each year and between 30% and 60% of all *new* Main Street businesses failed during their first year of operation due to untoward competition.[39] With the onset of the Depression the situation worsened: competition for scarce consumer dollars became exceptionally fierce since the amount the public was willing and/or able to spend on retail dropped 50% between 1929 and 1933.[40] This had a direct bearing on Main Street's so-called store mortality rate. Bauer and Stein suggested that the rate of store closures during the Depression was so bad that it was best left to the imagination, speculating only that it was "about the same as that among mosquitoes with winter coming on"--in other words, grim.[41] Though the actual number of stores forced out of business by increased competition and decreased spending during the first four years of the Depression was difficult to calculate because

---

[38] This was the average store volume in the Commerce Department's *under $12,000* category.
[39] Stein and Bauer, pp. 1-2. The Census of Distribution was a retail survey of eleven representative cities undertaken in 1926-29 as a joint public/private venture supervised by Herbert Hoover's Commerce Department and funded by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Also known as the Consumption Census, the survey provided business with market research and statistics on the sale and distribution of consumer goods during the final years of prosperity. During the Depression, the census was used to forecast trends on recovery through consumption. The FHA's Division of Economics used census data to track buying power and markets for modernization. For an analysis of the Census see William Leach, Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture (New York: Pantheon, 1993), pp. 364-5.
[40] See Survey of Current Business 15 (January 1935), p. 35.
[41] Stein and Bauer, p. 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Commerce Department had incomplete statistics for independent retailers, estimates put the annual mortality rate at 25%.[42] Other retail industry observers suggested that this percentage was too small and that the "deathroll" itself was probably much higher than the estimated 375,000 stores implied by this figure, especially if it was adjusted to include not just the *dead* but the *mortally wounded* as well--those thousands of other retailers whom Clarence Darrow, reporting on the progress of the NRA, identified as "struggling desperately for bare existence."[43]

Complicating the situation and rendering the numbers even less meaningful was a concomitant store "birthrate." For every store that shut down, another opened up to take its place, as in the archetypal Main Street community of *Middletown*, where Robert and Helen Lynd observed "a considerable shuffling of retail stores into and out of business," concluding that this was a natural condition of "the free-for-all merchandising system of a laissez-faire economy" which merely worsened during the Depression as competition intensified [Fig. 93].[44] Retail analysts concurred, recognizing this condition as endemic to Main Street's unregulated economic planning and regarding it as a factor in Main Street's over-supply of commercial establishments (and resultant unhealthy competition). Even during the first four years of the Depression, store openings almost kept pace with store closings, so that by 1933 the aggregate number of independent retailers had declined only 2%. In the context of declining sales brought on by the economic crisis--in Middletown net retail sales had fallen 57% on average--this meant that just as many stores as in 1929 were competing in 1933 for half as much business. This further raised the stakes of competition and, in all probability, placed the majority of these newest stores into that broad and

---

[42] See Lebhar, p. 17. Only in 1933 with the commencement of the American Business Census did the Commerce Department begin collecting new data on independent stores. Even then the accuracy of the store mortality rate was uncertain because it was calculated by comparing yearly totals for all independent stores in operation which did not indicate the degree to which store closures were offset by store openings. See Edward L. Lloyd, "Development of Retail Sales Indexes," Survey of Current Business, 16 (February 1936), pp. 16-18.

[43] Lebhar, p. 84. Darrow was head of the National Recovery Review Board. See William Leuchtenburg, Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 67-68.

[44] Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1937), pp. 9, 11-12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ever growing retail category of minimal profitability and marginal existence. Taking the birth/death metaphor one step further, it is fair to say that the majority of independent stores opening in those years were virtually stillborn. Yet, in that same cycle of retail mortality and store turnover on Main Street one could discern, as the Lynds did in Middletown, another trend equally reflective of national commercial developments--a trend which had the potential to transform the economic structure and the architectural appearance of the traditional commercial core and which would become a critical factor in Main Street's subsequent modernization.

The Rise of the Chain Store

What the Lynds observed in Middletown was that Main Street had become extremely vulnerable to the incursion of chain retailers. This was not a new phenomenon in 1933, but rather one renewed with vigor after a brief caesura following the Crash of '29. The decade which preceded the Depression had already witnessed the escalating presence of chain stores on and off Main Streets across the country, affecting nearly every aspect of American retail: there were, among many other types, chain candy stores (Loft's), tobacco stores (United Cigar), restaurants (Childs), shoe stores (Regal), drug stores (Walgreen), bookstores (Doubleday), clothing stores (Mangel's), and movie theaters (Loew's).[45] The most famous and ubiquitous of all were the chain variety stores, the success of which laid the foundation for the expansion of other multiple unit retailers. Variety chains, both the general merchandise type and the limited-price five & dimes, had been multiplying gradually since before the turn of the century when Woolworth's (founded 1879), Kress (1887), and J.C. Penney (1902) developed almost in tandem with Main Street itself [Fig. 94].[46] Usually occupying two commercial plots joined behind a single standardized facade with standardized signage and displays, these chains quickly became "All-American institutions"--

---

[45] For a history of chains see Godfrey M. Lebhar, Chain Stores in America, 1859-1962 (New York: CS Publishing, 1962). Lebhar was the editor of Chain Store Age. See also Leach, pp. 272-75.
[46] See Alan R. Raucher, "Dime Store Chains: The Making of Organization Men," Business History Review 65 (Spring 1995): 130-63. For one chain's architectural history see Bernice L. Thomas, America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

community fixtures immediately recognizable in towns coast to coast, but especially in small towns.[47] More than half of all J.C. Penney stores, for example, were in towns of under 5,000 people. Once five & dime chains like Kresge's, McCrory's, J.J. Newbury's, and W.T. Grant's joined the field, often competing with each other on the same Main Streets, it was only a matter of time before chains dominated the variety segment of the retail market.

By the early 1920s, the chains had proliferated sufficiently for writers and critics to refer to them nonchalantly, using familiar chain names as descriptive literary shorthand. In Sinclair Lewis's Main Street (1920) when heroine Carol Kennicott visited Minneapolis/St. Paul she and her husband "dined extravagantly at their hotel at night, and the next morning sneaked around the corner to economize at a Childs." It was unnecessary for Lewis to explain to his readers that Childs was a self-service chain founded in 1889 which had nearly 50 restaurants nationwide by 1920 and had an established reputation for offering affordable, home-style fare in clean, white-tiled interiors.[48] Similarly, in Manhattan Transfer (1925) it was unnecessary for John Dos Passos to explain that Child's outlets in New York City were equally well-known as late night/early morning hangouts for slumming denizens and tourists alike:

> The steam of cooking wrenched at his knotted stomach as he passed Childs. Dawn was sifting fine grey dust over the black, iron-cast city. Dutch Robertson despondently crossed Union Square.

Or "the pancakes were comfortably furry against his gin-bitten tongue, Jimmy Herf sat in Childs in the middle of a noisy drunken company...The clock over the cashier's desk said three o'clock."[49] Returning to the work of Lewis, we find that in Babbitt (1922) an oblique reference to chain stores is more pointed, as the eponymous protagonist declares that he is "darn glad" the chains have come

---

[47] So they were described in 1924 by retail expert Walter Hayward. Cited in Raucher, p. 131.
[48] Lewis, Main Street, p. 213.
[49] John Dos Passos, Manhattan Transfer (1925; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), pp. 316 & 369. According to historian George Chauncey, New York City's Childs restaurants were also well-known as "fairy hangouts"--late night congregation spots for gay men which the chain not only tolerated but encouraged as a tourist attraction. See Chauncey, "The Policed" in Inventing

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to town, bringing with them an "extraordinary, growing, and sane standardization of stores" which caused his hometown Main Street to resemble that of "other burgs" across the country. To real estate man George Babbitt there was no truer indication that the country was producing "a new type of civilization" than the presence of national or regional chains on Main Street.[50] Though readers of the novel were meant to dismiss Babbitt and his ideas as boobish and low-brow, his recognition of the growing importance of the chains to the commercial life of the country was largely accurate and prescient of a trend which would continue unabated until the onset of the Depression.

A Chain Store Age

America, it seemed, had entered the *Chain Store Age*, at least according to the publishers of a trade journal of that name which commenced publication in 1925 with separate druggist, grocery, and general merchandise editions, indicating the degree to which chains had increased their share of these respective markets through the multiplication of retail units. While chain expansion hardly rivaled the merger mania that characterized other industries during the prosperity decade, it was a notable enough development, at the time and in retrospect, for John Kenneth Galbraith to observe that "the chains were at least as symbolic of the era."[51] Even those venerable chains well established prior to the 1920s experienced a tremendous spurt of growth during the boom years: by 1927 there were nearly 1,600 Woolworth stores and J.C. Penney outlets had grown from 371 to more than 1,000 between 1923 and 1927 alone. By 1930, chains were so pervasive that a reporter for The Nation observed that "in a comparatively short time--within the past five or six years to be exact--the chain store has completely altered the economic life of the American community." This, according to The Nation, amounted to a virtual economic revolution pitting the small, independent merchant against the large, corporate chain in a David and Goliath battle in which, this time, the giant would claim victory. As it turned out, the independents were not quite ready to surrender the

---

Times Square, ed. William R. Taylor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1991), pp. 323-24.

[50] Lewis, Babbitt, p. 222.

[51] John Kenneth Galbraith, The Great Crash, 1929 (1954; rpt. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1988), p.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Main Street field: in 1935 with the help of the FHA and its Main Street initiative they began to fight the chains, modernizing their buildings as a defensive strategy in the heated retail wars of the Depression era. In the early 1930s, however, before the FHA intervened with its modernization program, the chains appeared dominant and indomitable to many observers. Citing figures for Louisville, KY (one of the eleven cities included in the Census of Distribution), but claiming them to be representative of "every fair-sized city or town," The Nation noted that chains now controlled between 85-90% of all retail business conducted on the local Main Street. In 1925 the situation had been nearly the reverse with the lion's share of business going to locally-owned independent establishments.[52] Though in actuality Louisville's business ratio of chain to independent was much higher than the nation as a whole, the volume of business conducted in chain five & dimes, drugstores, cigar shops, food markets, and clothing stores *did* increase markedly during the 1920s. By the decade's end this volume was double, triple, and in some cases quadruple what it had been in 1919, an increase achieved through rapid chain expansion--opening new stores and acquiring existing ones.

By 1929 chain sales accounted for only 22% of the country's $50 billion retail business, but the fact that the chains had gained this market share so quickly, and seemed to be heading toward exponential growth, caused genuine concern among their independent competitors and the federal government as well. In 1928, at the request of the Senate, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) launched what would become a six-year investigation of the nation's estimated 20,000 retail chains to uncover potentially monopolistic practices and unfair methods of competition in relation to independent retailers. The FTC was especially concerned about the expansion of chains in the grocery field which was not only the largest of the four major retail groups, accounting for 20% of all retail sales in the country, but was also the field where the chains had made their greatest

---

45.
[52] Harry W. Schacter, "War on the Chain Store," The Nation 130 (7 May 1930), p. 544.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

progress.[53] The largest grocery chain in the country, the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P) grew from fewer than 400 stores in 1920 to over 15,100 in 1929.[54] Many of these new A&Ps, along with Krogers, American Stores, and Piggly Wigglys, were self-service combination food stores selling produce, meats, breads and cakes, canned and packaged goods under one roof [Figs. 95, 96 & 97]. These were *super*markets requiring large selling floors (4,000-6,000 square feet) which were difficult to accommodate in typically narrow Main Street buildings. Combined frontage was one possibility: for example, in 1927 when A&P Unit No. 820, which opened in a double storefront on Main Street in Fairfield, CT in 1914, wanted to expand its premises it annexed an adjacent site, buying out the lease of the butcher who occupied it and knocking down the party wall to create a triple width combination store.[55] However, this was not always practical in terms of cost or size. The new combination supermarkets were thus more often housed in taxpayer strips or shopping centers removed from the old business district, where cheap retail space and large commercial buildings were easier to obtain than on Main Street proper.

So many of these chain supermarkets opened *off* Main Street that by 1931 Frederick Lewis Allen wryly commented that "Mrs. Smith no longer patronized her 'naborhood' store; she climbed into her $2000 car to drive to the red-fronted chain grocery and save twenty-seven cents on her daily purchases."[56] As a chain store customer this *Mrs. Smith* was like an increasing number of American consumers across the nation's socio-economic spectrum: as Fortune put it, "whether the customer's income is $2,000 or $30,000...the chains are capitalizing on Main Street, not only from the extremely rich and the extremely poor, but from middle incomes of $5,000 or so."[57] She put her faith in a recognizable chain store brand name—at the expense of her local, independent Main Street

---

[53] Chain was defined by single ownership of four or more store units. The other major retail groups were general merchandise, automotive, and apparel. See "Chain Store Growth Analyzed in Trade Commission Report," Chain Store Age, July 1932, pp. 426-7.
[54] "The A&P from A to Z," Business Week, 30 November 1932, p. 9. A&P was the world's largest grocer in the 1920s and 1930s.
[55] See "The A&P in Fairfield, Conn," Fortune, July 1930, pp. 41-45. For a general analysis of combination supermarkets see Liebs, pp. 117-30.
[56] Allen, Only Yesterday (1931; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 138.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

retailer--because of the growing reputation for dependability (of merchandise), efficiency (of operations), and especially economy (of volume buying) which the chains commanded. Indeed, these were the consumer-friendly store attributes which analysts inside and outside the retail industry, including Bauer and Stein, identified as most responsible for the expanding volume of chain business, not only in the grocery trade, but in all sectors of American retail.[58] When the full force of the Depression hit in 1932-3, the potential savings offered by the chains went beyond practical thriftiness, becoming a critical necessity in maintaining a middle-class standard of living. As a Chain Store Age editorial accurately observed in 1933, the "prevailing conditions" of the Depression had created a "need for economy which...now touches many to whom thrift was formerly little more than a Sunday-school word."[59] As a result, while retail sales plummeted 50% overall, the chains found that their sales had declined by only 15%, a retention of business which could only be explained by an increase in unit sales, meaning that more customers were making more purchases at the chains.

An overall trend toward economizing as the Depression set in helps explain the tremendous popularity in the early 1930s of the so-called "price wreckers" or "cheapies"--chains like King Kullen and Big Bear--which presented a further threat to independent Main Street's economic stability. The cheapies, a Depression-induced phenomenon described as "a retail sensation" by the Lynds, were the rough equivalent of wholesale liquidators, opportunistically, though with sharp business acumen, purchasing all manner of surplus food stuffs (fresh and packaged) and dry goods at bargain prices, usually from merchants or suppliers whose businesses had failed because of the economic downturn. The cheapies were invariably established in flimsy warehouse-style buildings far off Main Street, even out beyond the taxpayer strips, in what Business Week called "low-rent locations on the fringe of thickly populated sections." There they managed to attract belt-tightening

---

[57] "The A&P in Fairfield, Conn," p. 43.
[58] Stein and Bauer, pp. 5-6. See also "As We See It: Lower Selling Price," Chain Store Age, February 1935, p. 107.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

shoppers willing to travel a great distance or to an inconvenient area because of the deep discounts being offered.[60] In *Middletown* a cheapy "situated in a slum district" was so successful that it was continually expanded and renovated until it occupied a 100' frontage in 1936. While the upstart cheapies thrived in the economic downturn and the established chains remained profitable, Main Street's 1.3 million independent traders were fighting for their survival.

Even before the Depression, the single stores on Main Street had suffered the ill effects of burgeoning chain loyalty. The individual butcher, baker, Mom and Pop grocer, clothier or druggist, like all independent merchants, were simply unable to match the ready capital, marketing data, and economies of scale which the chains possessed and utilized effectively to attract customers. Chain managers, who saw these factors not as unfair advantages, but simply as the constructive benefits of large-scale trade, claimed they were raising business standards in the communities in which they operated, compelling independent merchants to follow their lead in lowering costs, improving service and quality, and passing savings on to the consumer. The independents could try to keep up, but they could not really compete--not when chains could make as little as 2.5 cents per dollar of sales and still stay in the black.[61] By the late 1920s the nation's independent merchants were growing restive in the face of this expanding chain competition. Those merchants who remained on Main Street because they owned their buildings, had long-term leases, or were simply committed to their respective communities, watched helplessly as their sales and profits dropped while those of chain stores in taxpayers, shopping centers, or even on Main Street itself, rose precipitously. As already noted, once the Depression set in the decampment to the chains intensified and the erosion of the independents' customer base steadily worsened. As the independents--"their backs to the wall in the depression"--struggled to keep their doors open amid drastic consumer belt-tightening,

---

[59] "Looking Ahead with the Chains," Chain Store Age, January 1933, p. 76.
[60] "The Cheapy Thrives," Business Week, 8 February 1933, p. 11.
[61] Don Mowry, "How National Chain Benefits the Community," Chain Store Age, August 1932, p. 5. Mowry was a field executive with Sears. See also "The A&P Company as a Whole," Fortune, July 1930, p. 45.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the encroachment of large-scale retailing continued with renewed vigor as the chains exploited the economic situation to further establish themselves on Main Street's across the country.[62]

Expansion & Modernization during the Depression

Though the chains were initially buffeted by the stock market crash, for them the event did not herald a catastrophic business disaster; rather, the Depression presented the chains with a singular opportunity for business expansion. By the fall of 1932 the chains had recovered sufficiently--by conserving cash outlays, closing marginally profitable stores, and generally consolidating operations--to undertake new expansion campaigns. Though some chain store executives claimed they had never stopped expanding even during the "three lean years" which followed the Crash, an examination of the monthly real estate postings in Chain Store Age for 1932 and 1933 indicates that the five & dimes, supermarkets, drugstores, and shoe and clothing retailers were once again aggressively establishing new outlets after the 1930-32 period of near inactivity.[63] These announcements of store openings, signed leases, construction and modernization also reveal the extent to which many chains were targeting Main Street which, despite its current travails of slackened customers and increased vacancies, was obviously still regarded as a prime business location in small towns and large cities alike. During the economic prosperity of the 1920s, chain operators scouting potential store sites in the central business district generally found themselves in bidding wars with other chains over the most desirable Main Street locations. Though such bidding tended to inflate property values, as the president of one drugstore group recalled, most chains were more than willing to sign "long-term leases at prohibitive rentals" because of the concentrated customer base a Main Street location assured. However, once the Depression set in chains which had previously been priced out of Main Street or merely put off by its "exorbitant rentals" saw that

---

[62] So the Lynds characterized the situation of local independents. Middletown in Transition, p. 12.
[63] See "Chain Store Expansion and Construction," appearing monthly in Chain Store Age. These listings are not comprehensive since they were submitted by the chains themselves.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the real estate situation there had largely reversed itself: "Now the most desirable locations can be had almost on the lessee's own terms."[64]

The chains, quick to seize the opportunity presented by the economic crisis, eagerly leased empty Main Street storefronts for bargain rents: "We've profited by the times," the director of the National Tea Company proudly declared in November 1932, explaining his chain's expansion into "downtown centers where conditions seemed most favorable." This Chicago-based grocery chain, with over 300 stores in the Midwest, had "profitably taken advantage of low rentals" to move into "the most desirable locations" a proposition which, as was often noted, would not be possible after business conditions returned to normal. While expanding chains encouraged their multi-unit retail confreres to adopt a similar *carpe diem* attitude--"we repeat, now is the time to expand"--they were at least mildly anxious, in the midst of the ongoing FTC investigation, as well as burgeoning anti-chain sentiment (see below), lest they should appear too opportunistic in taking advantage of the depressed real estate market. Thus was expansionist zeal tempered with declarations of concern for Main Street's economic recovery with, in this case, National Tea intimating that renting store space--at hugely discounted rates--from "tax burdened landlords who were haunted by the possibility of liquidation and receivership" almost qualified as a public service.[65]

The chains also recognized as a public service the building activity (and hence economic stimulation) they were generating through store improvement efforts underway as early as 1932, recognized at the time as the worst year in the history of American retailing. That year, when Chain Store Age conducted its first store modernization survey, the trade publication found that the nation's largest chains, encompassing over 50,000 stores and six major retail groups, including groceries, 5&10s, restaurants, drug, shoe, and clothing stores, had all adopted "almost without

---

[64] Nate S. Shapero, "Full Speed Ahead! is Our Slogan," Chain Store Age, January 1933, p. 71. Shapero was president of Cunningnham-Economical Drug Stores, a Detroit-based regional chain with over 100 stores in Michigan. For more on chains and high rents see Raucher, pp. 154-55.
[65] R.V. Rasmussen, "We've Profited by the Times," Chain Store Age, November 1932, pp. 644, 698.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

exception" active modernization programs designed to "stimulate sales" during the current "period of reduced public buying-power."[66] By 1933, Chain Store Age estimated that American chains had spent $33 million to modernize stores that year, a figure representing nearly 15% of total commercial construction. In 1934, the annual chain modernization expenditure was estimated at $37 million; in 1935 it nearly doubled to $70 million [Fig. 98].[67] Thus, Godfrey Lebhar, editor of Chain Store Age, confidently declared that chain store modernization was playing an important part in building industry recovery and contributing favorably to "the country at large."[68] Though Lebhar misguidedly complained that the chain retailer was the real forgotten man of the era, he accurately characterized the growing prevalence, indeed ubiquity, of chain modernization in the early 1930s, noting that the closer the nation came to turning the long-sought "corner" of the Depression, "the more certain it becomes that we shall find [that corner] occupied by a modernized chain store."[69]

The chains undertook these multi-million modernization programs for a variety of reasons, but most basically, they were carrying out a declared "prime objective" to keep their stores up-to-date. For many chains, store modernization in the early 1930s was merely a continuance of a standard practice of design "evolution" which accepted visual change as an end in itself, a virtual requirement for any going concern in the commercial marketplace. For example, the Melville Corporation, which owned the Thom McAn and Rival shoe store chains developed seven different storefronts during its first decade in existence (1922-32), installing them successively throughout the years with a goal of "converting all existing stores to the latest type as rapidly as possible" [Figs.

---

[66] "Chain Store Modernization Active, Survey Reveals," Chain Store Age, November 1932, pp. 635, 667.

[67] "Chains Spend $33,000,000 to Modernize Stores," Chain Store Age, November 1933, pp. 66-8. Of this total, the amount being spent per chain unit varied greatly. The G.C. Murphy variety chain estimated that gut renovations cost $5,000 on average. More modest exterior modernizations ranged from $500 to $2,000. See E.M. Mack, "Our Store Must be Modern; If Not, We Make Them So," Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 639.

[68] Lebhar even sent a telegram to President Roosevelt to this effect, attempting to dispel notions that the chains were self-interested, non-community minded corporations by demonstrating their patriotism, manifest in their willingness to fight the Depression. Lebhar, "As We See It," Chain Store Age, November 1933, pp. 65 & 76. The telegram is reprinted on page 66.

[69] Lebhar, "Why This Special Issue?" Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 633. See also "The

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

99, 100 & 101].[70] The company implemented these conversions, a practice which continued throughout the 1930s, not because it considered the extant fronts "obsolete," but because it considered them "passé" and believed that changing them would bring increased business. Though the company failed to specify precisely what semantic distinctions it perceived between "obsolete" and "passé," it is clear that neither term referred to physical disrepair, implying instead a formal quality of *out-of-dateness* and an implicit desire to modernize, as the chain articulated it, "for the sake of change itself." Change was necessary, according to chain executives, because storefronts, even when well-maintained, began losing aesthetic and fiscal value from the moment they were installed until, after a certain period of time (the duration depended on market conditions), the front no longer possessed "the ability to win attention from pedestrians"[71] It was this enervation of the storefront's so-called pulling power that modernization would counteract by creating a new image for an existing store, adding the "up-to-the-minute appeal" which the chains believed had a direct bearing on additional sales.[72]

In retailing, a simple axiom always operated, regardless of the state of the market or the status of the merchant: "a store which looks best usually fares best"--attracting the most customers, transacting the greatest volume of business, generating the highest profits.[73] If most chains engaged in some level of modernization activity even in prosperous times, always budgeting at least modest capital appropriations to improve store appearance, when overall sales and profits were down they

---

Forgotten Man Seems to be the Retailer," Chain Store Age, November 1933, p. 65.

[70] The out-of-date Rival storefront featured a recessed, centrally-placed arched entrance and an un-illuminated sign flanked by faceted display windows, trapezoidal in shape and canted in profile. The new Rival storefront featured an off-center entrance and one primary display window articulated as a single expanse of plate glass and topped by a broad flat frieze area with a neon sign inscribed in a zigzag frame. The new front also had a taller bulkhead which raised the display platform giving the shoes more visual prominence. The changes to the "white front" Thom McAn models were less noticeable, but tended toward the simplification and eventual elimination of decorative detailing. See Frank E. Landau, "Keeping Melville Stores Up-to-Date is Standard Practice," Chain Store Age, November 1932, pp. 654-5. "Melville Remodels 100 Stores," Chain Store Age November 1934, pp. 97-98.

[71] Landau, p. 655.

[72] Landau, p. 654.

[73] "The Way to More Profit," Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 634.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

felt the obligation to modernize even more keenly since such declines were usually accompanied by intensified competition for limited consumer spending. An A.S. Beck (shoe) Store on Fulton Street in downtown Brooklyn demonstrates this type of competitive chain modernization. Prior to its remodeling, the Fulton Street store was a typical "conservative" Beck's unit from the early 1920s [Fig. 102]. A standard type with an arched opening and classical molding, the chain deemed the front "satisfactory" because it was similar in size and appearance to the other stores on the block, none of which sold competing merchandise. However, when a rival shoe chain moved into an adjoining storefront in 1932 and began syphoning off Beck's business the chain determined that "resuscitation" was necessary and hired architect Vahan Hagopian to design a new front that, in the company's words "would totally dominate the competitor."[74]

For the Fulton Street modernization, Hagopian modified the exuberant modernistic design he had recently executed (1929) for Beck's flagship store on Fifth Avenue at 45th Street using less expensive materials to create a down-scale version that was still highly effective, and eventually received a "best store" award from a Brooklyn merchant's association.[75] Extending the vestibule of the existing store by four feet, Hagopian created a deep (20') arcade entrance with the show windows arranged in four angled setbacks with the final pair tightly flanking the door to create a forced perspective that focused sight lines, and hence shopper attention, on the entrance. This directional pull was heightened by the patterning of the arcade's tiled ceiling as a series of boldly graphic arrows and chevrons pointing toward the door. Hagopian designed the storefront's upper level, now extended a full story above the street, to add further directional emphasis, inscribing it with an inverted ziggurat stepping down toward the entrance and an arrow pointing to the door. These attention-getting devices were augmented by a similarly motivated color scheme for the tile

---

[74] "How Beck Alters Store Fronts to Dominate Districts," Chain Store Age, October 1932, pp. 599-600.

[75] On the Fifth Avenue store see "The A.S. Beck Shoe Store," Architectural Record 65 (June 1929): 543-53. On the Fulton Street store see "Store Modernized for the A.S. Beck Shoe Corporation, Fulton Street, Brooklyn, New York," Architectural Forum 58 (January 1933): 70-71.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

facing: the stepped panels were ochre, silver, and gold with rows of semi-circles outlined in black; frame and bulkhead were purple and gold with a checkered motif. Purposefully erected "to give the store an advantage over its competitor" by "present[ing] something different," Hagopian's design did its job: the competing Forsythe Shoes was forced out of business within months of the completion of the Beck modernization. Because of its success at drawing business away from the competition, the Beck executives regarded Hagopian's modernization work on Fulton Street as a design that was "not merely decorative," but "functional"–a term which implied a use value that could be translated directly into dollars, the increased business credited to the modernization.[76]

However much a modernization like the Fulton Street A.S. Beck Store was regarded as a competitive necessity in the Depression-era marketplace, it was also recognized as an investment in anticipated recovery: "the chain which keeps its stores up-to-date [was] going to be the first to reap the benefit of improved conditions."[77] The implication here was that newly flush consumers, with money in their pockets from a relief check or a long-deferred pay check, would automatically be pulled toward modernized storefronts. The Depression also offered another incentive to modernization. As the chains saw it, the low interest rates and reduced material and labor costs induced by the stagnant economy "offered an advantage too great to be ignored." In addition, modernizing existing units to maximize sales volume was cheaper than opening new stores, but for most chains an improvement policy of "better stores" was usually implemented in conjunction with an expansion policy of "more stores."[78] However, as building modernization became increasingly popular at mid-decade, distinctions between chain store improvement and chain store expansion would rarely be observed. As long as the opening of the new unit involved, not the construction of

---

See also Robert A.M. Stern, et al, New York 1930 (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), p. 301.
[76] "How Beck Alters Store Fronts to Dominate Districts," p. 606.
[77] "Chain Store Modernization Active, Survey Reveals," p. 635.
[78] "Chains Spend $37,000,000," p. 128.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a *new* building, but the renovation of (at least the first floor of) an *existing* building, regardless of its former occupancy, it was considered a store modernization [see Fig. 101].[79]

Adding another dimension to the concept of *better stores* in the early 1930s--and of crucial importance in the subsequent co-opting and promotion of modernization by the federal government--was the recognition of a "psychological effect" which modernization had upon the buying public. While the storefront always sought to express the personality of the chain housed within, impressing upon passers-by some essential aspect of the chain's reputation (its commitment to service or the quality of its merchandise) prior to the Depression this expression was largely autonomous and hermetic, externalized in form but internalized in meaning, concerned only, as the chains' acknowledged, with a narrow retail sphere. But after 1929, this expression engaged the larger world and the social realities of contemporary America. As chain executives and managers interpreted it, a modernized storefront struck "a keynote of confidence" sending out a "strong" and "constructive" message that the chain was "getting ahead in spite of conditions" and was too busy "to have time to worry about the Depression." Across the spectrum of chain retailing, an emphasis on the storefront was regarded as crucial if modernization was to achieve "maximum effectiveness" with the general public, eliciting a positive response regarding business optimism from the general public.[80] Thus, as early as 1932, the chains dedicated themselves to storefront improvement policies intended to "make our stores modern;" to "transform an ordinary store into one of striking modernity;" and to "depart from the standard type in favor of complete 'modernism'."[81] Though modern, modernity, and modernism were liberally interpreted by the chains and their designers, producing modernized storefronts of considerable stylistic variety the goal of modernization was

---

[79] The chains were following FHA guidelines about what qualified as modernization. This definition was applied to independent stores as well, whether they were newly installed or newly improved they were all modernizations. See "Melville Remodels 100 Stores," p. 97. "Modernization Re-Creates Store," FHA Clip Sheet 5 (No. 1), n.p. and PPG, "Increased Profits Usually Pay the Bill," Chain Store Age, July 1935, p. 73.

[80] Shapero, p. 72. Rasmussen, p. 644. "Grand Union Spends $300,000 on New Equipment," Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 652.

[81] Mack, p. 639. Landau, p. 654. "The Trend in Store Fronts," Chain Store Age, November 1932,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

always the same, to render in built form an institutional self-conception and a convincing public perception of the corporate chain as a "modern business" run by a "progressive merchant" [Fig. 103]. Since the chains were already regarded as "exponents of modernism," this was not an unrealistic desire.[82] In emphasizing their own modernity, signified by the modernized storefront, the chains sought to further distinguish themselves from traditional, unmodernized, independent retailers who had "worried themselves out of existence by standing still and shivering in their boots" and by "wasting time in self-pity" rather than embracing modernization.[83] In contrast, the chains, by their own somewhat self-aggrandizing account, had been "setting the pace for good-looking stores" by "raising the standards of store appearance and store maintenance throughout the entire retail world" and "adding attractiveness in store architecture and the beautification of Main Street."[84]

In his autobiography, architect Morris Lapidus, a prolific store re/designer in the 1930s and 1940s, looked back nostalgically on this wave of Depression-induced chain expansion and modernization circa 1933 as "a new era on Main Street." Lapidus also recalled how the retail chains which were then his principal clients expanded into new territories by scouting store locations in states slated to receive large allocations of federal funds for work relief projects, anticipating the employment and, more specifically, the consumer spending these projects would create. Mangel Clothing Stores, for example, bought out independent dry goods establishments across Tennessee following the authorization of the TVA in 1933 [Figs. 104 & 105].[85] This sort of chain take-over was a common practice at the time as chains took advantage of bargain or bankruptcy prices to buy out struggling independent merchants who, though possibly relieved to

---

p. 84.
[82] S.J. Besthoff, "Making the New Store Fit Its Location," Chain Store Age, January 1932, p. 31. Harry W. Schacter, "War on the Chain Store," The Nation 130 (7 May 1930), p. 544.
[83] "We Can Be Thankful," Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 698.
[84] "Why This Special Issue?" p. 633. "Chains Spend $70,000,000 on Store Modernization," p. 143.
[85] Morris Lapidus, Too Much is Never Enough (New York: Rizzoli, 1996), p. 94.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

unload failing establishments, may have been understandably bitter about relinquishing them to chain rivals whose competition had been at least partially responsible for driving them out of business. Out of concern for public perception of their seeming exploitation of the depressed independent retail market (which, however weakened, was still the cornerstone of Main Street's economic foundation), the chains downplayed their acquisitions of existing independents and minimized the role these buyouts played in chain expansion strategies both before and after 1929. Nonetheless, the FTC found that in many retail groups, especially limited-price varieties, shoes, and dry goods and apparel, such acquisitions represented a significant percentage, as high as 40% according to government estimates, of all chain store openings in the first three years after the Crash. Though the FTC stopped short of accusing the chains of predatory practices in independent buyouts, the Commission did ask Congress to extend its powers, granting it the authority to block chain store monopolies before they developed.[86]

As far as the chains were concerned, the FTC findings, released in preliminary form beginning in 1932, amounted to a complete exoneration and offered proof that they engaged only in legal retail practices. Dismissing the so-called "plight of the small retailer" as the sour grapes of business rivals, the chains claimed that Main Street's independents were simply ill-equipped to handle the fair, market-driven competition presented by multi-unit retailers.[87] Taking this dismissal of independent retail practices a step further in a 1933 editorial, Chain Store Age's Godfrey Lebhar sought to assert the chains' implicit modernity by vividly criticizing as retardataire, anachronistic, and even unsanitary, the mantle of nostalgia in which the independents cloaked themselves:

> I have an affectionate memory of the old time merchant and his place in the community...I have fond recollections, too, of the horse and buggy, but I think I would prefer a 1933 automobile or

---

[86] See Federal Trade Commission, Growth and Development of Chain Stores, Report to the U.S. Senate, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, DC: GPO, 14 December 1934).

[87] "Chain Store Probe Ends," Chain Store Age, July 1934, p. 84. The independents, not surprisingly, took an oppositional stance. As far as *they* were concerned the FTC's findings were immaterial and largely inconsequential, the independents having been long convinced that the chains were actively preying on them, attempting to drive them out of business.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> one of our air-conditioned de luxe trains. I don't believe many of us yearn for the days of the cat-in-the-cracker-barrel, the flies-and-the-molasses-barrel, and the sawdust floors. Retailing has changed. The oldtime store is as much out of date as the first movie theater, the kerosene lamp, the mustache cup, Congress gaiters, and the flint firing musket...If the independent couldn't hold on to his business against honest competition he would not deserve to hold it, from the point of view of consumer economics.[88]

One might wonder, if the chains were so convinced of their superiority, why they felt the need to disparage the independents, but Lebhar, as a leading chain lobbyist and apologist, was simply fighting polemic with polemic, responding defensively to lingering anti-chain sentiments which had gained in popularity in the late 1920s. Though he observed that attacks against the chains were "not so frequent as they used to be" (the Depression had "given people so many new problems to think about, they haven't time to worry about the 'big bad wolf of yesterday'"), Lebhar must have understood that as the economic crisis worsened such sentiments were bound to return.[89] How could they not given the sheer number of independent retailers (1.3 million) whose businesses and buildings were so obviously suffering from chain retail competition and chain modernization programs. How could they not given the degree to which independent store failure and chain store success were inextricably linked, not only in the minds of the independent retailers but in popular conception as well. In the late 1920s, the resentment of independents toward the chains swelled, reaching a public breaking point as early as 1929 when it coalesced into a anti-chain backlash. Though short-lived, this backlash was nonetheless significant to Main Street's subsequent evolution in the 1930s when the traditional business corridor attempted, with federal help, to recover from the dual onslaught of Depression and chain retailer. In other words, the backlash created a receptive

---

[88] Lebhar, "As I See It," Chain Store Age, November 1933, p. 76.

[89] Here Lebhar made a timely reference to Frank Churchill's popular song "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf" from Disney's animated short *The Three Little Pigs*, released in the spring of 1933 and understood as a metaphor for the Depression by many moviegoers at the time. Lebhar, p. 78.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

environment for the commercial modernization effort which arrived via the FHA's Main Street program.[90]

In the Cause of the Independents

The reaction against the chains was fomented late in 1929 by a Shreveport, Louisiana business man, part-time radio announcer, and seeming Father Coughlin aspirant named William Kennon Henderson who declared war on the chain store as his own personal crusade and, as it turned out, his own profitable business venture. From a do-it-yourself radio station which he owned and operated (KWKH), Henderson began a regular evening program in which he scathingly attacked chain stores as "damnable thieves from Wall Street" and "dirty, low-down daylight burglars" whose only community interests were stealing local money and destroying local livelihoods.[91] These broadcasts, which appear to have consisted mainly of vituperative, obscenity-laced, anti-chain tirades, were heard across the South and eventually nationwide since Henderson regularly usurped frequencies and exceeded his licensed power. By the spring of 1930 his program had attracted so much public attention from enthusiastic supporters and vociferous detractors alike, that Fortune declared "the Chain Store Issue" the mostly hotly debated topic in the nation after Prohibition.[92] To sustain this public interest Henderson organized an off-shoot field campaign known as the Merchants' Minute Men. Though this upstart retail militia bore some vague resemblance to a trade association for independent store owners, in reality it was little more than an anti-chain propaganda machine--and a money maker for Henderson who collected a $12 membership fee from each member. By 1931, Henderson claimed that the Minute Men were

---

[90] The anti-chain movement of the early 1930s foreshadowed by six decades the small town vs. superstore battles of the early 1990s. See Constance Beaumont, How Superstore Sprawl can Harm Communities (Washington: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994).

[91] Quoted in C. Joseph Pusateri, "Radio Industry," in Charles Regan Wilson and William Ferris, eds., The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 938. See also Carl Ryan, "The South and the Movement Against the Chain Stores," Journal of Southern History 39 (May 1973): 207-22. Henderson began his attacks after hearing an anti-chain speech delivered by a local independent retailer at a Chamber of Commerce dinner.

[92] "The A&P Company as a Whole," p. 45. Fortune compares Henderson's invective to that of the Ku Klux Klan. See also Schacter, pp. 544-45.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

35,000 strong and active in 4,000 towns across the country--a number which rivalled the subsequent BHP committees--organizing store boycotts (which often involved harassing women who shopped at chains) and lobbying state law-makers to pass anti-chain legislation. Both activities were successful. A grocery chain in Birmingham, Alabama claimed it lost one-third of its business as a result of a Minute Men boycott and several southern states, including Kentucky and West Virginia, passed bills instituting a graduated sales tax based on store volume specifically intended to impact the chains. Though 1931 marked the height of the movement, Henderson managed to keep it alive for two more years until he sold the radio station in 1933 to avoid government scrutiny of his personal finances. As a result of its initial success, over the next few years the Merchants' Minute Men spawned a number of similar campaigns which, though sometimes differing in their methods, goals, and degrees of sincerity, all sought to organize independent merchants across the country "to fight the menacing octopus of the chain store system."[93]

Given the social and economic climate of the United States during those early years of the Depression, it is not surprising that the anti-chain campaigns of Henderson and his imitators managed to sustain some degree of public interest, particularly because Henderson, beneath his blustering profanities, clearly understood the terms of rhetorical debate appropriate to a country in crisis. At a time when middle-class Americans were casting about for someone to blame, Henderson fixed upon recognizable protagonists whose sympathies and loyalties were unmistakable and whose local (retail) features, easily sketched by consumers across the country, made it simple for the general public to distinguish the victims from the perpetrators--notwithstanding the fact that the consuming public itself was complicit in the perceived victimization of the independents. In

---

[93] Quoted in "Chain Stores are an Asset," Chain Store Age, December 1936, p. 114. This article describes anti-chain campaigns launched in New England and the Pacific Northwest. Many independents went on to organize themselves into so-called voluntary chains in which merchants worked as national or regional groups for purchasing, distribution, even advertising and marketing, seeking the volume discounts on goods and shipping which had given regular chains their competitive advantage. Voluntary chains occurred frequently in the grocery field; the Independent Grocery Association (IGA) was one of the largest.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

valorizing independent merchants and demonizing corporate chains, Henderson created tangible personifications of the cultural opposition Warren Susman viewed as one of the fundamental conflicts of twentieth century America, in which the "older producer-capitalist culture" was confronted with the "newly emerging culture of abundance." For Susman, the 1920s and 1930s witnessed "the crucial and perhaps climactic stage of that battle" as a "profound clash between different moral orders" and "rival perceptions of the world" played itself out across the decades of prosperity and Depression.[94] Thus, the battle between the independents and the chains, though obviously a confrontation of old and new forms of retailing, represented something more significant than profit margins and sales volumes. Expressive of Susman's oppositional cultures, it was emblematic of a conflict between supposedly enduring values of old-fashioned American individualism and the collective imperatives of modernity; between the archetype of small business and the stereotype of Big Business; between Main Street and Wall Street.

Even before the Depression, these symbolic thoroughfares were already understood to represent antithetical social and economic positions as William Z. Ripley, a Harvard political economist, made clear in his pre-crash 1929 book Main Street and Wall Street. Ripley offered an account of what he viewed as a significant structural change to the "American democratic polity" which had taken place since the end of World War I, namely the shift from "personal businesses" to "corporate enterprises" embodied in the extremes of his title. Though Ripley sounded a mild cautionary note, his book was not intended as an institutional critique of big business. Rather, aimed at a general audience, it was intended merely as an explanation of what the author called "the constructive forces" at work in the United States "during this present prolonged period of prosperity." Nonetheless, Ripley hoped that by increasing popular comprehension of the current business situation, Wall Street might be made to better serve "the common good" which for the

[94] Warren Susman, "Toward a History of the Culture of Abundance," in Culture as History (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. xx. This essay introduces Susman's collected writings.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

author was historically lodged on Main Street.[95] A few years later, no such rapprochement would be possible, for in the 1930s, as the example of Middletown once again demonstrates, predicating the differing moral orders (to use Susman's terms) of Main Street and Wall Street helped the middle class make sense of the Depression and offered a psychological salve for the social and economic wounds it had inflicted. The Lynds observed that Middletown, though it counted several prominent industrialists among its leading citizens, regarded itself as a community of "small businessmen." Carefully distinguished from "Wall Street gamblers"--outsiders on whose shoulders blame for the Depression was placed--these "little fellows" represented for Middletown "the purest strain of our American democratic economy." In Middletown's own battle between the independents and the chains, local merchants exploited these distinct identities in their accusations that the chains were "impersonal [and] unneighborly," financed by "outside capital," and responsible for "taking money out of the community."[96] In the Main Street America which Middletown embodied, where business values and social values were routinely conflated, this was the worst possible kind of censure.

By mid-decade such allegations were leveled against the chains so routinely that Chain Store Age was compelled to publish a series of articles, written by its editor Godfrey Lebhar, which were designed not only to refute these charges, but to offer a counter-proposition that chain stores were, in fact, "in the public interest." In doing this, these articles also reveal prevailing Depression-era attitudes toward the chains and the independents, in particular, the negative perception of the former as "absentee-owned big business" and the positive perception of the latter as "locally-owned small business." These contrary perceptions, which Lebhar admitted were not wholly fallacious, created two very different "pictures in the public mind." While the chains were seen as anonymous retail "machines" or "giant enterprises...ruling over thousands of stores scattered over a widespread area from remote headquarters located invariably in Wall Street," the independent was viewed as a

---

[95] William Z. Ripley, Main Street and Wall Street (1929; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1973), pp. vi-v.
[96] Middletown in Transition, pp. 12, 14, 20, 244. Though Middletown's independents did succeed in engendering animus toward the chains, they were unable to forestall the arrival of additional units of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"good citizen...doing his part for the common good."[97] The implications were clear: since the chains lacked established ties to the communities in which they operated and had no long-term material stake in their welfare, they lacked the hometown sentiment, civic-spirit, and social obligation which the independents presumably possessed as a natural result of their local orientation. Though Lebhar considered these assessments unfair and untrue, he knew that taken together they constituted a belief regarding the independents widely-held by the general public, a belief the upheavals of the Depression would make difficult, if not impossible, to expose as flawed: "the independent merchant is an important part of our business setup and it would be a national calamity if he were eliminated."[98]

Certainly, such a "national calamity" must have seemed a distinct possibility to the merchants themselves and even to some retail analysts since, as discussed above, independent retailers were regularly being eliminated on the country's Main Streets. In truth, however, even the elimination of all 1.3 million independent stores in the United States would not have been a total economic calamity (the loss of the independents as a *social* calamity was a different matter). Though the American "business setup" would be significantly altered, it would survive, as other retail classes absorbed the independents' merchandise, sales volume, and at least a portion of their work force, a trend already apparent as the market share of non-independents increased in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The degree to which Americans viewed this shift as fiscally calamitous to the country depended entirely on one's economic philosophy, assuming, of course, one *had* an economic philosophy or any outlook more thoughtful than a simple belief in capitalism.

---

chain grocers, filling stations, and especially women's clothiers between 1932 and 1934.

[97] Godfrey Lebhar, "How to Meet Unfair Charges Against Chain Stores--1," Chain Store Age, November 1935, pp. 106, 142. "How to Meet...--4," Chain Store Age, February 1936, pp. 122, 148. The language employed here reflects a Wilsonian/Brandeisian tradition of an ideal economy driven by small units. In a 1910 speech Woodrow Wilson, then Governor of New Jersey, observed that "modern business [had] submerged the individual within the [corporate] organization," rendering him "a mere cog in a machine which has men for its parts." See Woodrow Wilson, "Annual Address," American Bar Association Reports (1910), p. 426. The relationship of this tradition to the independents vs. chains debates is analyzed below.

[98] "How to Meet...--1," p. 106.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Nonetheless, the movement toward the elimination of the independents which seemed to be underway did, as Lebhar predicted it would, elicit expressions of concern and alarm from many Americans.

That this development was understood to have implications for the national, or at least local, "business setup" was made clear by the reaction of Middletown to the closing of the town's leading department store and largest independent retailer. When the store finally succumbed to chain competition and declared bankruptcy in April 1934, community leaders and residents alike viewed the event as an ominous portend of a "general collapse" to come.[99] By that time, especially in the country's smaller cities and towns, the closing of a leading retail establishment had become one of the accepted, and expected, misfortunes of the Depression, as sadly routine as unemployment, nervous breakdowns, and malnutrition. This attitude is evident in "Main Street Ten Years After," the 1933 New Republic article cited earlier, which describes the collapse of a third-generation furniture store in a quintessential small town. As important a community landmark as the courthouse and the town hall, the furniture store had occupied one of the most prominent buildings on Main Street before the road was even paved. Like the local bank, the store had always been regarded as "a Gibraltar of stability" in the economic and social life of the town; like the bank, the store inevitably failed.[100] Then, in what the author saw as a final insult to the town's remaining independent retailers and a final affront to the town's collective self-esteem, the furniture store's landmark building was taken over by a chain—an event greeted on Main Street with a mixture of resentment and resignation. Missing from the public sentiment in both cases was any sense of culpability on the part of the buying public concerning the stores' demise. This, despite the fact that in Middletown, for example, the Lynds' field research revealed that local consumers had, with few qualms, abandoned the old department store for new specialty merchandise chains. This reveals a characteristic ambivalence from Main Street's customers who, though giving lip service to the

[99] Middletown in Transition, p. 23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

importance of independent retailers in the nation's business setup, were unwilling to alter buying habits--patronizing the chains--which were the most damaging to those merchants. Fortune had observed this contradictory consumer position as early as 1930, when it found that A&P customers in Fairfield, though concerned that the store's profits and the salaries of its two managers were taken out of town, continued to shop there because of the savings it afforded.[101] It was understandable that during the Depression such civic concerns would be made, perforce, even more subordinate to the exigencies of consumers' pocketbooks than they had been during prosperity. But if the public, in its purchasing, was willing to forsake the independents for economic expediency, why did the public, in its opinions, remain steadfast to them? If, in willingly shopping at the chains, Americans were contributing to the elimination of the independents, why did they view that elimination as a local or national calamity?

Business historian Mansel Blackford provides a partial answer, "twentieth century Americans have frequently differentiated between small businesses, which they have seen as inefficient and backward, and small business people, whom they have come to admire...as bastions of political as well as of economic democracy."[102] As Blackford and numerous others historians have suggested, the small business person symbolized, since at least Jefferson's day, the self-reliant entrepreneurship and pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps individualism on which the American way of life was mythically founded. This symbolism grew more powerful the more capitalism and democracy, business values and community values, became inextricably linked. Even when the small business faltered in reality, as it sometimes did in the competitive marketplace, the mythical image of the small business person remained reassuringly intact. As small businesses faced the take-overs, mergers, and bankruptcies which marked the hegemony of Wall Street and the large,

---

[100] Childs, p. 264.
[101] "The A&P in Fairfield, Conn.," p. 42.
[102] Mansel G. Blackford, "Small Business in America: A Historiographic Survey," Business History Review 65 (Spring 1995): 8. The article usefully summarizes many views on the symbolism of the small businessman.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modern corporation in the early decades of the twentieth century, the small business person became a cherished icon of dogged perseverance and hard-scrabble determination. In the 1930s, the independent Main Street retailer was one of the most familiar and constant personifications of that iconic small business person. Though the chains, the Depression, and consumer disregard seemed to have brought the independent store to the brink of extinction, the independent store owner endured both as an embodiment of America's increasingly erroneous and thus ever more desirable self-conception as a nation of small, autonomous, privately-owned businesses and as a repository of the admirable cultural values of democracy and individualism associated with that deluded self-conception.

Even the routinely cynical Sinclair Lewis came to discern these values in the figure of the independent retailer in his 1935 dystopian novel (and subsequent play) It Can't Happen Here, which chronicles a fascist takeover of the United States beginning in a New England town. In Fort Beulah, Vermont a small independent grocer rather obviously named Clarence Little becomes a member of the underground resistance, defending democracy against the ruling political elite, the also obviously named National Council of Corporations (Corpos), long after the town's banker, manufacturer, doctor, journalist, and other members of the professional middle class (Lewis' standard Rotarian/booster targets) have capitulated. Little heroically stands up to the Corpos, displaying posters supporting the resistance in his shop windows and refusing to extend credit to Corpos members. When he rejects a Corpos plan to take control of his store and make it part of a centralized business conglomerate, Little pays the ultimate price for his defiant independence: he is beaten to death by the Corpos paramilitary thugs.[103] Though Lewis intended It Can't Happen Here to be read primarily as a warning against American complacency in the face of the growing German

[103] Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935). Lewis turned the novel into a play for the Federal Theater Project which mounted several touring productions. The stage version of It Can't Happen Here became one of the Federal Theater's most successful productions. See Barbara Melosh, Engendering Culture (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), chapter 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and Italian dictatorships, some saw it as an indictment of the political movement of Huey Long and even of Roosevelt, since the novel's president/dictator, a former U.S. Senator, uses populist, common man rhetoric aid to his ascent to power. To these interpretations still another may be added. In making the character of the small independent grocer a model of liberal individualism Lewis enables It Can't Happen Here to be read as a commentary on another domestic situation of the 1930s, the one which brought the small retailers of Main Street into conflict with the corporate chains of Wall Street in, as in Lewis's fictionalized version, a highly politicized confrontation.

The New Deal & Main Street

As I have already suggested, one reason the conflict between independent and chain became so politicized was that it seemed, like the Depression itself, to strike at the foundation of the modern capitalist democracy. Thus, also like the Depression, finding a resolution to this highly significant conflict was placed in the hands of New Deal policy makers. But within the New Deal there were two distinct theoretical positions concerning the economic structures manifest in the independents and chains respectively, positions which would seemingly preclude any straightforward resolution to the current retail debates. For though these positions were not wholly antithetical in practice, they were based on dynamically oppositional conceptions of, respectively, a *traditional* American economy and a *modern* American economy. On one side, were the Brandeisian New Dealers who embraced a progressivist tradition stemming from Louis Brandeis's Supreme Court trust-busting and the anti-monopoly policies of Woodrow Wilson's New Freedom. The Brandeisians, denouncing big business as "economically inefficient and socially dangerous," called for, in the words of Brandeis himself, "a return to the little unit" and a return to a classical society of small competitors participating in a free market regulated only to prevent profiteering and monopoly.[104] On the other side, the Brain Trust New Dealers rejected this view as unrealistic and out-of-date, disagreeing, according to Raymond Moley, with the "traditional Wilson-Brandeis

[104] Quoted in Leuchtenburg, p.148.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

philosophy that if America could once more become a nation of small proprietors, of corner grocers and smithies under spreading chestnut trees, we should have solved the problems of American life."[105] To the members of the Brain Trust it was Brandeis's little unit which was economically inefficient (though not socially dangerous), while big business was, by contrast, efficient and ruthlessly so. Big business was also, they argued, an unavoidable fact of modern life: since the monopolies and oligopolies which large corporations engendered were the rule and not the exception of the modern American economy, any attempt to eliminate big business was both naïve and impractical. Instead, the Brain Trust sought to bring about government cooperation with big business, regulating it only through mutually beneficial prescriptions such as the economic planning of the NRA (which the Brandeisians viewed simultaneously as too regulatory and as a tool of big business). Despite their differences, beginning in 1935, after the invalidation of the NRA and the shift toward the Second New Deal, these two opposing camps came together to work on policies which managed to protect small retailers (satisfying the Brandeisians) without punishing corporations or corporate chains (satisfying the Brain Trust). The best known of these compromise policies emerged from the Robinson-Patman Act of 1936 which forbade wholesalers and manufacturers to give preferential discounts or rebates to chain stores and other large buyers and also established the now familiar "suggested retail price."[106] While it surely represented a step toward leveling the retail playing field, enabling the independents to compete more effectively with the chains, it is questionable how much the independents ultimately benefited from Robinson-Patman. Because the chains possessed so many other economies of scale beyond wholesale discounts, they were still able to undercut independent store prices even after Robinson-Patman was passed. In addition, even if the legislation resulted in somewhat higher chain prices, it did nothing

---

[105] Raymond Moley, After Seven Years (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), p. 24.
[106] Ironically, this form of manufacturer-based price control had previously been enacted by the industrial codes of the NRA. Additional fair pricing legislation was passed in the Miller-Tydings Act of 1937. See Richard Posner, The Robinson-Patman Act: Federal Regulation of Price Differences (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1976).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

directly to help the independents regain the customers they had already lost to the chains before and after the onset of the Depression. However, even while Robinson-Patman was still being debated in Congress, the government had already provided the independents with a way to fight the chains--Title I of the National Housing Act. Though the Title I programs of the Federal Housing Administration were seemingly far removed from the work of the Commerce Department and the Federal Trade Commission, agencies whose policies and investigations were discernibly germane to the retail industry, they were just as relevant to the nation's retailers, especially the independents toward whom the FHA's Main Street initiative was most directed.

In announcing the Modernize Main Street program in March 1935, the FHA declared that "because of their numerical importance the smaller stores are being encouraged to modernize their premises" and that, furthermore, the agency itself was "particularly concerned with the stimulation of this type of modernization."[107] The FHA noted that the majority of the nation's 1.5 million retailers had been forced to defer capital investments since at least 1932 due to a lack of available funds or a lack of available financing: "many merchants have delayed plans for modernization because of a desire to conserve resources and keep their working capital free for operations."[108] Data collected by the National Retail Dry Goods Association (NRDGA) supported the FHA's claim, the trade group having found that retailers in the under $75,000 volume class, which included most non-department store independents, had been unable to finance even an "average program" of modernization, estimated to be $2,384, because their "surplus fund accounts [had] taken it on the chin," although 75% would have modernized had sufficient financing been available. In addition, in a special modernization section of its trade publication Stores appearing in February 1935, the NRDGA noted that while $2,000 worth of government-insured credit might have been sufficient for at least "modest alterations" to the exteriors of the "smallest retail establishments," many such

[107] "Administration Urges Nationwide Modernize Main Street Campaign," FHA Press Release No. 203 (8 March 1935), p. 1 [NA RG 287, box y748]. See also Thomas F. Conroy, "Retailers in Move to Improve Stores," New York Times, 10 March 1935, sec. 11, p. 19.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

concerns had not availed themselves of this credit because they were unaware of its "commercial usage." Thus, the NRDGA welcomed the "effort now being made [to create] a wider market for store modernization."[109]

In contrast to the situation of small retailers, "the larger [department] stores, chains and variety stores" either possessed ready cash surpluses or "encountered no obstacle in arranging necessary financing" and, as a result, had been investing in capital improvements so regularly since 1929 that store modernization was recognized, according to the FHA, as "the strongest trend" in retail. Since the independents had been virtually shut out of participation in this trend, the FHA committed itself through the Main Street initiative to "offering government aid to smaller merchants" through insured Title I loans which would enable them to modernize their stores, as the chains had, while building costs (labor and materials) "were still on an attractive basis." Beyond the fact that current economic conditions were conducive to capital improvements, the FHA sought to provide small retailers with the means to modernize because, as they put it, "competition [was] forcing this type of improvement, as it is the modernized shops which attract neighborhood trade, and when one merchant makes improvements his competitors are literally forced to do so."[110] As the FHA saw it, without government assistance independent retailers would be unable to modernize and, hence, unable to compete in the fierce Depression marketplace, especially against the chains; if they were unable to compete, independent retailers would be forced out of business at an even higher rate than were currently--an occurrence which, given the independents' recognized numerical importance, represented, in the government's view, a social and economic catastrophe. And the FHA had the hard data it needed to give credence to its concerns about the future of independent retailing (however much this was ultimately an expedient toward stimulating the building industry): its Division of Research and Statistics had been collecting regular information

---

[108] FHA, Modernize for Profit (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 7.
[109] "Active Modernization Program Laid Down by Stores," Stores, July 1935, p. 77. George L. Plant, "How Retail Stores are Modernizing," Stores, February 1935, p. 163.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

on the sales volumes and mortality rates of chain stores and independents merchants since the agency's inception in the summer of 1934.[111]

As the government explained it to retail merchants, the MCP presented a "clear-cut opportunity to modernize without any burden on present cash resources," thus allowing independents to regain some of the competitive ground they had lost to the chains.[112] However, for the majority of small retailers, unlike for the chains, any modernization program they wished to undertake had to first deal with much-needed, but long-deferred maintenance and repairs. This was a necessary first step not only for existing independents, but also for those newly arrived on Main Street, the optimistic would-be retailers who rushed in to take over the storefronts left behind by merchants forced out of business by the chains, the Depression or both during that rapid cycle of store turnover which characterized the 1930s. The impact of this cycle on Main Street was swift and deleterious, affecting not just the individual merchant, but the business district as a whole. The economic impact had a domino effect: the store keeper went bankrupt; his employees were thrown out of work; his wholesaler or distributor took a loss on unpaid merchandise; his landlord on back rent. The physical impact was no less significant and perhaps more obvious. As Catherine Bauer and Clarence Stein noted, failed stores created empty storefronts; empty storefronts created "unsightly vacancies"; vacancies created "blight"--a situation the opening of new stores did not necessarily counteract since they were often fly-by-night, low-rent operations which in themselves constituted a blighting presence [Fig. 106]. For planners in the 1930s, blight was an infectious pathogen, the first symptom of that full-blown disease known as the slum. If continued unchecked this blight would drive down rents and property values and could eventually destroy the commercial viability of the historic Main Street corridor--especially when accompanied by the continued

---

[110] "Administration Urges Nationwide Modernize Main Street Campaign," p. 2.
[111] See FHA, Division of Research and Statistics, "Chain Store Sales" and "Commercial Failures" in Economic Data (volume B, sections VII & XI) [NA RG 207 Box 1].
[112] Modernize for Profit, p. 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

development of peripherally located shopping centers.[113] By 1935 Real Estate Record observed that the ubiquitous Main Street type--with street-level retail shops and upper-level business offices, light manufacturing lofts, or apartments--had been especially hard hit by the Depression, noting that in addition to vacant storefronts it was not uncommon to find such buildings vacant and shuttered above the first floor. For those buildings still occupied at street-level, it was a battle to stave off total dereliction.[114] Often, once a struggling merchant finally shut his doors, the landlord utterly abandoned the building and arson sometimes followed on the nation's most stricken Main Streets.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that in their blighting presence, empty Main Street storefronts were regarded, like breadlines, as one of the more conspicuous signs of the Depression [Figs. 107 & 108]. In January 1933, for example, during that winter of despair which preceded Roosevelt's inauguration, an article appeared in the The New Republic chronicling the downward social and economic spiral of a typical American small town. "Main Street Ten Years After" began with an account of those changes the "casual visitor" would encounter upon viewing Main Street for the first time in four years: "There are the current phenomena of the depression, empty stores, For Rent signs, smokeless factories, closing-out sales."[115] In Since Yesterday, Frederick Lewis Allen made a similar observation: "walking through an American city...you might notice that a great many shops were untenanted, with dusty plate glass windows and signs indicating that they were ready to lease."[116] In Middletown the situation was the same: "vacant stores became more noticeable along the main business street." At the same time, however, the Chamber of Commerce there worked to persuade landlords not to board up their vacant buildings because of the debilitating effect it would have on "local business morale"--a recognition of a direct correspondence between Main Street's

---

[113] Bauer and Stein, p. 2. See also John M. Gries and James Ford, Slums, Large-Scale Housing, and Decentralization (Washington: President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, 1932) and National Resources Committee, Our Cities: Their Role in the National Economy (Washington, DC: GPO, 1937).
[114] "FHA Modernization Loans," Real Estate Record, 19 October 1935, p. 8.
[115] Marquis Childs, "Main Street Ten Years After," The New Republic, 18 January 1933, p. 263.
[116] Frederick Lewis Allen, Since Yesterday (1939; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 46.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

physical appearance and Main Street's psychological outlook of which New Dealers were themselves keenly aware.[117] The empty storefronts of those first Depression years functioned as a kind of reality check for flâneurs of the commercial marketplace, an unavoidable confrontation with the national trauma which was being otherwise systematically denied by national advertisers whose products were normally displayed and sold out of now vacant storefronts. Advertisers in the pages of Good Housekeeping and the Saturday Evening Post had been keeping alive the spectacle of consumption so crucial to the mythology of prosperity, even though the optimism of their message, as consumers and lawmakers were well aware, was now undeniably false: "Wall Street may sell stocks, but Main Street is still buying goods."[118] Main Street's independent merchants would also have begged to differ as they eked out a marginal retail existence, reducing overhead as much as possible, cutting back even on routine upkeep and repair.

As the impact of the Depression worsened--as the bread lines got longer and consumers' belts got tighter--neglect and abandonment spread across Main Street to the dismay and frustration of its independent shopkeepers. If this situation was not bad enough, the independents were made to suffer the added indignity of watching the chains continue their retail entrenchment through methodical modernization programs comprised of the installation of updated storefronts, the enlargement of premises, and the complete interior and exterior renovation of buildings for the opening of new stores. The average Main Street independent had enough market-savvy to know that he had to keep up appearances to continue to attract customers, especially in the face of chain modernization. Unfortunately, keeping up appearances required cash the merchant did not have because his shabby store, not to mention his higher prices, was not attracting customers anyway. The more the customers stayed away, the more run-down the store became. It was a miserable scenario, but a familiar one. From the vantage point of numerous social, political, urban, and architectural commentators Main Street, despite the modernizing presence of the chains, was in

---

[117] Middletown in Transition, p. 18.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

unmistakable decline. It was, according to architect and modernization proponent Arthur C. Holden, "a frazzled district" suffering from "blight, depreciation, congestion and obsolescence," and was on the verge of becoming a "vicious plague spot" in the "ordinary American city" (at least 10,000 inhabitants). Though Holden was obviously dramatizing Main Street's decay for polemical purposes, his ultimate conclusion paralleled the attitudes of Main Street retailers, industry analysts, and the federal government: the nation's "tawdry business streets...are economic and social liabilities that cry aloud for modernization."[119]

Government statistics, generated by the Commerce Department and analyzed by other agencies, including the FHA, offered corroborating evidence of Main Street's decline. Most of this came from the Real Property Inventory (RPI) carried out in 1934 as a CWA work relief project under the auspices of the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce (BFDC). The overarching purpose of the 64-city inventory was to obtain an accurate picture of national real estate conditions by assembling comprehensive data on the physical and financial state of the country's building stock.[120] Though the focus was on housing, since such buildings represented over 90% of the estimated 30 million structures in the United States at the time, the RPI included commercial structures as well because of their crucial relationship to land use and property values in residential districts. The Commerce Department, as a long-time ally of American business, hoped the data would serve as "a guide and stimulus for [the building] industry." In particular,

---

[118] Quoted in Allen, p. 21. On advertising's denial of the Depression see Lears, pp. 236-38.
[119] Arthur C. Holden, "Stabilized Modernization," American Architect 147 (September 1935), 37-8. Holden was a New York architect affiliated with the Regional Plan Association. Principally a designer of high-rise apartment buildings, he also collaborated with Lescaze and Shreve on the Williamsburg Houses (1937) and proposed slum clearance projects throughout the 1930s.
[120] The selection of the 64 representative cities was determined by population, geographical extent, and level of economic development. Inventoried cities ranged from Santa Fe, NM with 11,000 inhabitants to metropolitan Cleveland, OH with 1.2 million, though the majority, places such as Atlanta, Seattle, San Diego, and Syracuse, had populations over 50,000 and under 300,000. The largest cities were excluded from the initial survey because their size rendered them unrepresentative of the nation's typical urban areas. However, many large cities were surveyed as part of separate, locally-initiated, but still government-funded inventories, the data of which was incorporated into the national statistics. New York City, for example was enumerated concurrently with the nationwide inventory from February to May 1934. A total of 203 locales were

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the BFDC hoped to replace "the old hit-and-miss method of building and development," based on hunches and speculation, with a fact-based approach that would enable architects, contractors, realtors, manufacturers, dealers, and bankers (all of whom apparently supported the project) to more accurately predict and plan for building markets and trends. To demonstrate the RPI's relevance to practitioners across the building industry, the BFDC cited an example with particular currency in 1934 and 1935: "All persons interested in these different activities should find the figures valuable from the standpoint of the potential markets afforded for modernization and renovation."[121]

These *valuable* figures were compiled from data classified as either structural or financial which included number, type, and age of buildings; materials and method of construction; building condition, categorized as in good condition, in need of minor or major repairs, and unfit for use; duration of current occupancy and vacancy rates; levels of rents and property values and their market fluctuations since 1929.[122] The most detailed information was collected on those buildings designated as "dwellings," meaning they contained at least one residential unit with "unit" being broadly defined to include any space with "sleeping quarters" regardless of principal use. Thus, the standard Main Street type was fully studied: even though it was "primarily used for commercial purposes" and was "principally a store building," it almost always had "flats above or behind," especially during the Depression when, as the Inventory revealed, economic necessity had driven many small retailers to take up residence in the back of their stores, resulting in a category of "partially converted structures" with a mix of business and residential units at variance from the original configuration. Even exclusively commercial retail

---

eventually inventoried between 1934 and 1936 with data collected through door-to-door canvassing and direct-mailed landlord surveys.

[121] Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Real Property Inventory 1934, Cleveland, OH (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), n.p. The results of the inventory were collected into 64 individual city portfolios, each of which was published upon completion of the survey in that locale.

[122] Data was divided into structural and financial classifications for purposes of analysis and, in fact, were collected in two separate, but fully coordinated inventories. See BFDC, Financial Survey of Urban Housing (Washington, DC: GPO, 1937).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

buildings--those with no dwelling units (typically newer taxpayer strips)--were inventoried since field enumerators were instructed to record every structure in a given territory. A follow-up BFDC survey in 23 RPI cities concentrated solely on retail buildings which were categorized according to location (central shopping district, business subcenters, or neighborhoods) and evaluated according to exterior and interior appearance on a good, fair, or poor basis.[123]

Even as the Real Property Inventory was still underway, the FHA's Research and Statistics Division began utilizing preliminary and partial inventory findings to compile reports relevant to Title I (modernization credit) and Title II (housing mortgage finance). These ranged from simple fact sheets which presented data in a digested manner for use in FHA publicity materials, to in-depth studies of city growth and structure which analyzed data, to study the impact of changes to business and residential districts in urban centers to detailed case studies of select inventory cities which, among other things, examined retail trade in relation to a community's economic stability. Data from the inventory was also used to prepare marketing studies which estimated potential modernization work, utilizing the newly available statistics on building condition and vacancy rates.[124] As these reports make clear, the FHA reached a number of conclusions based on the inventory which confirmed anecdotal evidence of Main Street's decline and validated the need for an organized program of commercial property improvement as proposed by the Modernize Main Street initiative launched in 1935. Most importantly, the FHA determined that the spread of peripherally-located residential areas, the increase in automobile usage, and the growth of the chain store had all led to the "rise of the outlying business center" and the concomitant "deterioration of the central business nucleus" to such an extent that by

---

[123] See "Definition of Terms" in Peyton Stapp, Urban Housing: A Summary of the Real Property Inventories Conducted as Work Projects, 1934-1936 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1938), pp. 315-17. See also "Real Property Inventory General Schedule" reprinted on p. 48. This summary report was prepared by the WPA's Division of Social Research.

[124] Second Annual Report, pp. 40-1. See also FHA, Housing Fact Series No. 2 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935). FHA, Analysis of the Real Property Inventory and Financial Survey for Peoria, Illinois (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935). FHA, "Markets for Modernization" in Construction and Real Estate Data (volume c, section 1), 9 February 1935.FHA, Structure and Growth of Residential

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

1934, in all but the smallest American cities and towns, the volume of retail sales made by stores *outside* the central area exceeded those *inside* it by 25% and that there was every indication that this gap would continue to widen.[125] The RPI data revealed the serious physical consequences caused by this outward movement of people and retail--consequences which impacted not only the downtown core, but the outlying areas themselves. FHA analysts determined that the growth of peripheral residential areas had been accompanied by the infiltration of those same areas by commercial uses, noting in particular the encroachment into neighborhoods of isolated single stores, "store clusters," and what they called "grocery-drug store combinations," referring to the "cheapy" supermarkets which thrived in the early years of the Depression (see above). The FHA found that such intra-block retail development was having "an unstabilizing effect upon property values." While further encroachment could be controlled by zoning, to effectively stabilize and improve property values it was also necessary to maintain the viability of commercial development outside the residential neighborhoods since the FHA had found that "as the distance from the commercial uses increases, the average value of the residential property and the average rents have a tendency to increase." Thus, in the FHA's view, to preserve residential areas and prevent the development of neighborhood blight, it was crucial to also preserve the "traditional retail nucleus" of the distant, downtown core--this, in other words, meant preserving Main Street and its 1.5 million stores.[126]

When attempting to draw a retail/real estate profile of Main Street's buildings, the FHA coordinated its analysis of RPI data with statistics taken from the Commerce Department's Census of Distribution, its Survey of Current Business (see note 39 above), and the administration's own random store survey conducted by its Industrial Division. All these combined data revealed a great deal about the correspondence between a store's physical state

---

Neighborhoods in American Cities(Washington, DC: GPO, 1939).
[125] Structure and Growth of Residential Neighborhoods in American Cities, pp. 108-109.
[126] Analysis of the Real Property Inventory and Financial Survey for Peoria, Illinois, p. 103.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and its sales volume, location, and the income level of its customer base--the FHA having found that "the decline in both the number and purchasing power of people living near the main business center" was a crucial factor in Main Street's decline.[127] More specifically, the data also revealed the extent of that decline in terms of the physical condition of Main Street's buildings, or more precisely it provided the means for estimating the extent of Main Street's physical dilapidation. In January 1935, FHA analysts determined that 62.5% of Main Street's 1.5 million retail buildings were "in need of immediate repairs" and that this need was "urgent" in 80% of these cases, meaning 750,000 stores or approximately 50% of the country's retail total.[128] Though the nature of this disrepair varied widely, a 1936 follow-up survey by the Commerce Department found that most stores suffered from "a generally unsatisfactory appearance of storefronts, outside signs, display windows, entrances" and in "store interiors of layout, lighting, and equipment"--in other words, nearly every aspect of store condition was evaluated and found lacking.[129]

Of the 750,000 stores which the FHA considered in need of urgent repairs in 1935, the agency estimated that between 10% and 15%, or between 75,000 and 112,500 stores, would modernize during the coming year.[130] The FHA further predicted that given the continued availability of easy term modernization credit, it was reasonable to expect a regular annual retail modernization rate of 5% of all stores or 77,500 retail units. Based on an average expenditure of at least $1,000 per store--only enough to purchase of a new storefront of modest size and design--

---

[127] Structure and Growth of Residential Neighborhoods in American Cities, p. 108.
[128] These figures are cited in FHA, "Markets for Modernization."
[129] "Survey Shows Many Stores in Need of Repairs," FHA Clip Sheet 11 (no. 1), n.p. "Store Modernization Survey of Department of Commerce Brings Interesting Conclusions," Building and Modernization, November 1936, pp. 10-11.
[130] According to the FHA, the low figure of 75,000 stores was based on a 5% depreciation rate that was typical of normal, non-Depression, conditions and that normally yielded an equivalent repair and improvement rate. However, because the Depression had caused the deferment of normal property repairs, the FHA conjectured that the depreciation rate itself was somewhat higher and that the improvement rate in this first year of the Modernize Main Street initiative would be as well. After the initial boost in repair work caused by the FHA's promotion of modernization and retailers' simultaneous need to regain and surpass a level of pre-Depression building

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the FHA estimated that this market would generate a volume of modernization work somewhere between $75 and $100 million annually.[131] Perhaps not surprisingly, the government's figures were considerably more conservative than those of the private industry. The Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, a leading manufacturer of storefront building products, estimated a potential modernization business of over $1 billion. The National Retail Dry Goods Association estimated that 75% of all stores needed modernization, but since this figure was based on an extremely small sample it had a far greater margin of error than the government's. Nonetheless, these two figures were widely circulated, appearing in the NRDGA's own publication Stores, in the New York Times, and even in the FHA's Clip Sheet.[132] When Architectural Forum published figures on retail building disrepair in July 1935 it reported an even higher percentage. Though it claimed to be citing FHA and BFDC findings, the Forum stated that between 75% and 90% of all stores were in need of "surface or structural improvements"--figures unsubstantiated by government statistics. Though the low-end percentage was probably taken from the well-publicized NRDGA store survey, the unverifiable high-end figure--indicating that more than 1.3 million stores needed some form of improvement--would seem to have arisen from a clearly articulated desire to advance the cause of modernization within the architecture profession, moving the practice well beyond, as the Forum put it, being merely an "instigator of bread and butter business for architects" to the more important "manna category." According to the Forum, the professional nourishment modernization would provide translated into a staggering, and greatly exaggerated, volume of work valued at between $7.5 and $9 billion.[133]

---

maintenance, the standard depreciation and improvement rates would be back in effect.

[131] The FHA was confident that actual per store modernization expenditures would exceed $1,000, predicting that stores would undertake more "thorough" modernizations extending to the interior and including the installation of new floors, lighting systems, display cases, and mechanical equipment, especially air conditioning which was projected to rival storefronts in total expenditures. "Store Repairs May Surpass Billion Mark," Modernization Clip Sheet 1 (no. 12), n.p.

[132] See "Active Modernization Program Laid Down by Stores," Stores, July 1935, p. 77. "Retailers in Move to Improve Stores, New York Times, 10 March 1935, p. 19. "Department Stores May Utilize Plan," FHA Clip Sheet 5 (no. 7), n.p.

[133] "Modernize Main Street," Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935), 51. The Forum supposedly

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

While the other major architecture journals, Architectural Record and American Architect (which were consistently less brash than the aesthetically avant-garde Forum), cited the FHA's more modest estimates concerning the percentage of stores in need of repair (50-65%) and the potential volume of generated work ($100 million), both acknowledged that modernization represented, as the FHA always maintained, a significant boon to the profession. Especially in light of the $50,000 loan limit increase--welcomed as "news of encouraging significance" in the spring and summer of 1935--the journals were certain that modernization would now "inaugurate a general revival in architectural practice" and give "architects...an equal chance with builders and building material manufacturers to advance their opportunities along the newest highway to building recovery."[134] As the FHA knew it would, the building industry, especially architects and material manufacturers, immediately recognized the expanded opportunities for increased business and profits presented by the liberalization of modernization credit and thus immediately offered its active cooperation with the Modernize Main Street initiative. So it was in the spring and summer of 1935 that the building industry turned its collective promotional energies toward Main Street, following the FHA's lead and taking advantage of the groundwork laid by the local BHPs. From that moment until the United States entered World War II, the commercial core of the American city entered a period of rapid visual transformation as the chains and the independents, swayed by a massive government-sponsored marketing effort, modernized their stores to provide the nation's depressed Main Streets with a deliberate, self-conscious image of modernity [Fig. 109].

---

based this figure on an average of $500 to be spent on every store requiring improvement, but in fact to arrive at $7.5 billion, stores would have to have spent an (unrealistic) average of between $5,300 and $6,300. It seems likely that the Forum simply misprinted the FHA projection of $75 million worth of modernization work.

[134] "Remodeling, Modernization, Repair," American Architect, 146 (April 1935), 10. "Retail Store Planning," Architectural Record, 78 (July 1935), 72. For a general discussion of Architectural Forum in the 1930s see Peter Blake, No Place Like Utopia (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), pp. 20-4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter 5 The Main Street Initiative

"Modernize Main Street for Profit!" the FHA declared in 1935 as it announced the new Title I initiative conceived in response to "a national need" for repairing and improving "America's business properties."[1] As indicated in the previous chapter, in addressing this need through the financial mechanism of federally-insured credit, the Main Street initiative was simply a continuation of the Better Housing program launched the previous year. However, though it did not represent a wholly new direction in the FHA's work, it was nonetheless significant because it represented a purposeful shift of promotional emphasis away from the modernization of residential buildings (i.e., single-family houses), toward the modernization of commercial buildings.[2] After the first six months of the BHP's operation, its so-called "testing period," the promotion of commercial modernization through the Main Street initiative dominated the FHA's efforts to publicize the Title I Credit Plan. The agency had several reasons--concerned with what I will term marketing, policy, and persuasion--for attempting to effect a shift in public interest away from residential improvements toward commercial modernization, and each reason must be viewed as an underlying motivation for the Main Street campaign.

First, in terms of marketing, the FHA formulated Modernize Main Street to rectify a simple, but serious problem in program nomenclature which had hindered borrowing for commercial property improvements. Despite the FHA's efforts to promote the modernization of both residential and commercial buildings, the Modernization Credit Plan was largely perceived as a housing plan, an understandable misperception given that the MCP was sponsored by the Federal *Housing* Administration and promoted by the Better *Housing* Program. As a result, in

---

[1] FHA, Modernize for Profit (Washington: GPO, 1935), pp. 2-3.

[2] Following FHA usage, "residential" is narrowly defined in this chapter. Multiple-family residential buildings like tenements and apartment houses were excluded from this definition because they were income producing and/or had commercial establishments occupying their first or second floors. See Central Housing Committee, A Glossary of Housing Terms (Washington: GPO, 1937).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the first year of the program, loans for commercial modernization represented only 11% of total modernization funds advanced. This was problematic, as far as the agency was concerned, since statistical data first collected under Hoover indicated that a significant percentage of the nation's commercial buildings were in a state of genuine disrepair due to nearly five years of deferred maintenance, neglect, and even abandonment. Left unchecked, this physical decline represented a serious threat to the nation's real property, its tax base, and by extension to the national wealth. After the commencement of the Main Street initiative, carefully promoted as "better housing for American business," modernization loans for commercial property eventually increased to 47% of total funds advanced.[3] The initiative also functioned as a sales stimulant, the kind recommended by contemporary marketing experts, serving to reinvigorate the whole modernization effort.[4] According to the FHA's statistics, though the number and value of government-insured modernization loans rose steadily throughout the summer and fall of 1934, they peaked in November and then declined until March when the Main Street campaign succeeded in sparking the first increase in four months, initiating a steady advance for the rest of the year [Fig. 110].[5] It was the imminent availability of insured credit up to $50,000 for commercial improvements which gave added impetus to this increase in modernization work. Indeed, it was the anticipation of the new loan limit which led the FHA to formulate *Modernize Main Street* as a specialized sales campaign, one which proved highly successful, to promote more extensive (and more expensive) modernization projects than had previously been economically feasible--thus leading to an increase in store construction activity. Essentially, the

---

[3] FHA, Second Annual Report (Washington: GPO, 1936), pp. 4-5. See also Central Housing Committee, "Activities of the Housing Agencies," 2 January 1937 [NA RG 207, Box 1]. This internal memorandum provides break downs for commercial and residential loans up to July 1936.

[4] See for example John Aspley Cameron, Intensive Sales Management (Chicago: Dartnell Corporation, 1929), pp. 193-200.

[5] See Chart II, Modernization & Repair Notes Insured, 1934-1935 in FHA, Second Annual Report (Washington: GPO, 1936), p. 9. F.W. Dodge Corporation figures for modernization construction contracts awarded during the same period substantiate this cycle of advancement, retreat, and resurgence. See FHA Division of Research and Statistics, "Contracts Awarded: Dodge Statistics on Alterations and Improvements, 37 Eastern States, 1932-6" in Economic Data: Contracts

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

higher loan limit was the equivalent of an exponential expansion in the modernization market, meaning that owners or long-term tenants of stores, office buildings, and apartment houses and hotels (along with institutional and industrial buildings) would be able to make significant capital improvements. Testifying before the Senate Banking Committee in March 1935, Administrator James Moffett noted that the FHA's economic analysts estimated that millions of dollars worth of modernization work would be generated as a direct result of the higher loan limit, and concluded that "[the commercial field] is a very big market."[6] The goal of the Main Street initiative was to tap this potential market, not only convincing commercial property owners and eligible tenants that improvements were necessary, but, once property owners were sold on modernization, providing financial, architectural, and building services through the marshaled resources of private industry.

In terms of policy, this expansion in the promotion of commercial modernization and concomitant de-emphasis of residential modernization was in keeping with the housing agency's long-term goals in the sphere of home finance, signaling a conscious move away from the short-term or emergency improvement of existing homes to the construction of new ones. Finally, in terms of persuasion, in actively promoting the modernization of Main Street the FHA recognized not only the economic importance of the commercial core to the life of American communities, but its social importance as well. The FHA understood the physical revitalization of the commercial core as a crucial, public symbol of recovery during the continued trauma of the Depression--one necessary, as the FHA put it, "for the stability of the nation." However, for this symbolism to be most effective, it was necessary for the FHA to promote building improvements which transcended routine repairs and were instead imbued with the expressive potential of modernization:

Awarded (volume F), 29 May 1936 [NA RG 207 Box 6].
[6] U.S. Senate, 74rd Congress, 1st Session, National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 63.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> No longer need Main Street remain a row of antiquated and uninviting structures, offensive to the eye of every citizen who has pride in his home town, and unfitted to the requirements of those who tenant them. The old burg may put on a new front and a show of beauty and utility.[7]

It was the tenants and landlords of those antiquated and univiting rows who were charged with the physical and symbolic renewal of Main Street and it was toward them that the FHA emphatically directed the new commercial modernization initiative in March 1935.[8]

The initial promotional angle the FHA used to reach these Main Streeters exploited the ongoing conflict between the nation's chain and independent retailers, evident in the 5 March 1935 issue of Better Housing as the FHA explained the new initiative to the 6,000 local BHPs. Stressing that "the small merchant particularly is affected when buying shifts into other channels and when sales volume that he has enjoyed is directed to other stores," the FHA directed local BHPs "to help merchants keep in step with Main Street"--a Main Street presumably lined with modernized chains, those *other channels* absorbing the small merchant's sales volume. The existence of "relentless competition" made the small merchant a likely prospect for modernization and it was the job of each BHP to make him realize that since "modernized stores had taken his trade away from him," only modernizing his own premises would enable him to recapture that lost trade. Store modernization would not only allow the merchant "to hold his trade" but, again making oblique reference to the operation of the chains, "to keep in step with modern production methods and equipment and modern organization for profit."[9]

In such statements the FHA avoided explicitly blaming the chains for the predicament in which small retailers found themselves during the Depression. Obviously, the agency would not

---

[7] FHA, Untitled typescript statement, stamp dated 15 April 1936, p. 4 [NA RG 287 Box Y739].
[8] Modernization credit was available to current merchants upgrading their existing facilities, to future merchants renovating prior to opening a new store; and to landlords modernizing vacant stores to attract retail tenants or accommodate tenants already signed.
[9] "Retail Merchants Urged to Renovize," Better Housing, 5 March 1935, p. 3. These same sales arguments are repeated in Modernize for Profit and in FHA Clip Sheets released throughout 1935-36: "Because of the highly competitive nature of small business today, wise business owners realize in many cases that modernization helps them to keep abreast of the times." See "Modernized Shop

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

have wished to give offense to the very retailers whose early and comprehensive modernization programs gave credence to the FHA's beneficial claims for capital improvements--programs which would continue under the liberalization of Title I [Fig. 111]. In addition, the FHA recognized that the presence of modernized chain stores on Main Street served as a primary compulsion, a competitive example, for the modernization of independent retail establishments the agency was now promoting. Thus, the FHA realized that it would be counter-productive to criticize too assiduously the formal model--the modernized chain store--which the agency hoped the independents would begin to emulate. If there was a certain irony in encouraging the independents to make themselves over in the image of the chains, on whom the blame for the present endangered state of the small retailer was popularly placed, no one seemed to notice, except perhaps the chains themselves. But however much the chains may have savored the irony they did not do so in print.[10] Though they had frequently and publicly baited the independents about the unmodernized state of so many Main Street stores, now that government-insured credit would enable the independents to rectify that situation, the chains appeared to ignore the issue. Nonetheless, few readers of Chain Store Age could have been unaware of the burgeoning government-sponsored movement of independent store modernization, if only because of a series of advertisements the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company (PPG) ran there beginning the fall of 1934 [Fig. 112]. These ads capitalized on the well-known retail rivalry, attempting to goad the chains into further modernizing action:

> The National Housing Act will make it possible for many of your independent competitors, as well as yourself, to obtain money

---

Attracts Sales," FHA Clip Sheet, 7 (no. 9, 1936), n.p.

[10] The chains, having propounded the virtues of store modernization, challenged the independents to follow their lead in this area, and proclaimed the contribution modernization was making to national recovery and community preservation, embraced the MCP lest they appear insincere in their public statements and actions of the previous three years (the appearance of sincerity being a crucial factor in ongoing efforts to convince the public that they were civic-minded and not predatory). Chain Store Age called the modernization program "the soundest feature of the whole recovery plan." Significantly, when urging its readers to support the BHP, the journal endorsed only the promotion of residential modernization, choosing, in what could hardly have been an oversight, to remain silent about the modernization to be undertaken by the independents. See Lebhar, "A Drive the Chains Should Help," Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 76. Fred B. Barton, "Why the Chains Should Support the Federal Housing Plan," Chain Store Age, December 1934, p. 84.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> easily for remodeling their stores. That is why now is the time for you to remodel your stores with Pittsburgh Store Fronts to keep pace with the increased competition which the benefits of the NHA create in your markets.[11]

PPG was right of course: the NHA would make it possible for the independents to obtain money easily for store remodeling. As the government hoped they would, the chains responded to this presumptive threat to their own competitive advantage with newly intensified modernization programs through which all manner of American chains, from shoe stores like Regal to gas stations like Texaco, continued to update their standard units with new architectural expressions of their continued self-image as the most modern institutions in American retail [Figs. 113-117].[12]

Marketing Modernization

It was not coincidental that PPG referred explicitly to the National Housing Act in its Chain Store Age advertisements, for the nation's largest glass manufacturer was following one of

---

[11] PPG advertisement, "New Customers...Better Satisfied Customers," Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 103.

[12] For the Regal Shoes modernization program architect Morris Lapidus retained the company's trademarks (a two-tone palette of Paris green and gold, a logotype of Renaissance/Old Modern letters and logo symbol, a Cavalier boot), but distilled them into a single signboard with large painted gold letters affixed to a green porcelain enamel background, and bulkheads and frames in either green or gold--a composition which gave the shops their "characteristic brightness." For Regal's first Fifth Avenue store, Lapidus toned-down the standard front through a judicious deployment of the color scheme (gold became bronze, green porcelain enamel became green granite) and logo (bronze casts of the Regal boot, a 25 x 3' bronze shadow box sign). The vestibule, which became standard, had three curving displays arranged almost like pinball bumpers, to shunt the shopper from side to side ever closer to the door which Lapidus deliberately placed off-axis from the vestibule entrance. See Frank E. Landau, "Store Fronts: Chains Adapt Family Types to Suit Specific Locations," Chain Store Age, June 1936, p. 111. "Stores," Architectural Forum 65 (October 1936): 316. "Portfolio of Current Modernization Work," Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 94-5.

Texaco inaugurated a chain-wide improvement campaign in 1934 under the guidance of Walter Dorwin Teague to overhaul its (40,000) existing units and to establish design guidelines for the construction of new units. Through this program the service station would become the largest and most visible element of Texaco's corporate identity program and a stylish purveyor of Fire Chief gasoline and Havoline Wax Free Motor Oil.[12] Teague's modernization scheme replaced the picturesque "house with canopy" of the typical Texaco station with a flat-roofed box whose vague factory aesthetic was deemed appropriate to that most modern of machines in the 1930s--the automobile. The architectural trademarking system Teague developed consisted of white porcelain enamel cladding with green bulkheads, three green enamel bands running around the parapet of the station building and canopy, bright red five-point stars placed at regular intervals above the bands, bright red sign lettering, and a "banjo" curbside sign emblazoned with the red Texaco star. Teague's work for Texaco is included in most studies of roadside architecture and commercial design in the 1930s. See especially Charles Dalton Olson, "Sign of the Star: Walter

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the twelve prime directives issued by the FHA's Industrial Division explaining how manufacturers, especially those in the building industry, could "further the successful operation of the Better Housing Program" through a publicity campaign.[13] The FHA had been actively working to obtain industrial cooperation since the commencement of the BHP in the summer of 1934, reaching small manufacturers through publications such as Building Supply News, Building Material Merchandising Digest and Plumbing and Heating Trade Journal and reaching large manufacturers through invitation-only conferences.[14] At the FHA's second such parley in late September definitive plans were laid for "a huge advertising campaign [to] give momentum to the program." Confident that such momentum would soon be achieved FHA head James Moffett declared after the conference that "industry understood that it would have to take the lead in modernizing."[15] To underscore this message, FHA officials, including Public Relations Director Ward Canaday and members of his senior staff, visited trade group meetings and businessmen's luncheons addressing, among others, the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Industrial Advertisers Association. In his speeches Canaday made it clear that he was not seeking the altruistic participation of American industry in some "educational campaign," but rather their participation for profit in "a market greater in size and volume than any the world has seen before."[16] For manufacturers of building materials who had watched the demand for their

---

Dorwin Teague and the Texas Company, 1934-37," Master's Thesis, Cornell University, 1987.

[13] FHA, "What a Manufacturer Can Do to Further the Successful Operation of the Better Housing Program," broadside, FHA 128, 1934-35 [NA RG 287 Box y742]. The Industrial Division was actually a special committee of "leading industrialists" who were assigned the task of securing the support of trade associations and the major manufacturers of the building industries. See FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies, & Publishers (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), p. 8. I have been unable to locate any list of committee membership but it seems likely that it included the heads of the first group of manufacturers to support the MCP. See below.

[14] Each of these journals devoted an entire issue to the FHA's modernization program. See Building Supply News, September 1934; Building Material Merchandising Digest, October 1934; Plumbing and Heating Trade Journal, October 1934. See also FHA Press Digest, 1934-1937. On the first conference see "To Aid Huge Housing Program," New York Times, 21 July 1934, p. 2.

[15] "Industries Spur Housing Program," New York Times, 26 September 1934, p. 10.

[16] "Speech by Ward Canaday before National Association of Manufacturers at Waldorf-Astoria, New York City," FHA Press Release No. 131 (5 December 1934), p. 1 [NA RG 287 Box y748]. See also "Speech by Arthur Walsh before the National Industrial Advertisers Association Pittsburgh Conference," typescript (19 September 1935) [NA RG 287 BOX Y 749].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

products shrink steadily since 1929, the FHA's promise of market expansion had no small appeal.[17] By the end of 1934 that promise had convinced over 4,600 manufacturers to "actively cooperate" with the BHP. While this number certainly included small firms, some of whom were not a part of the building industry, it also included "scores of companies doing a Nation-wide business, both in building and in related lines." It was this latter group's "sales promotion" which the FHA deemed crucial to the effort to modernize Main Street.[18]

Most of the initial group of leading manufacturers whom the FHA enlisted in the modernization drive had already demonstrated a public commitment to economic recovery by serving on or cooperating with President Hoover's 1932 National Committee on Industrial Rehabilitation which sought "an end to the prostration suffered by the capital goods industries [by] promoting a nation-wide movement" to modernize the industries' factories, plants, and related retail establishments. A number of manufacturers had also demonstrated an active interest in finding greater markets for their products by organizing, in the same year, the Rehabilitation Corporation, a credit finance company specializing in the modernization of income-producing buildings.[19] Even more recently, in the spring and summer 1934, as the modernization credit plan itself was in formation, a number of these manufacturers had met with the Brain Trust's Raymond Moley to formulate their own approach to ending the Depression "by promoting cooperation between government and business." They eventually incorporated as the Committee for Economic Recovery, a sort of industrial think tank which sponsored non-partisan

---

[17] Building material manufacturers represented 10% of all American manufacturers. For a general discussion of Depression's impact on building material markets see Michael A. Tomlan, "Building Modern America," in Twentieth Century Building Materials, ed. Thomas C. Jester (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995), pp. 38-40.

[18] This figure is cited in FHA, First Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 11. The FHA does not appear to have compiled a list of manufacturers comparable to those of participating financial institutions.

[19] A.W. Robertson, CEO of Westinghouse, quoted in "70,875,000 Outlay set to Spur Trade," New York Times, 6 November 1932, p. 19 and "Modernizing Work to Cost $105,266,429," New York Times, 19 December 1932, p. 2. On the Rehabilitation Corporation see "Big Companies Join in Rehabilitation," New York Times, 2 October 1932, sec. IV, p. 8. See also Chapter 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

studies of national economic problems, including the depressed state of the building industry.[20] Since the pro-business/for profit goals of the MCP and the Main Street initiative were utterly sympathetic to these various enterprises, it is not surprising that the FHA found its earliest industrial supporters from within those ranks, including such blue-chip firms as American Radiator and Standard Sanitary, General Electric, Johns-Manville, Libbey-Owens-Ford, Pittsburgh Plate Glass, Ruberoid, U.S. Steel, Westinghouse, and Weyerhaeuser.

The FHA expected this impressive group of building material manufacturers to carry out the marketing and selling of modernization, for which the agency had laid the groundwork when it created a "wave of public interest" beginning in the fall 1934. As FHA officials frequently noted, while the agency could, and did, "make the market" and "drum up business for industry," it could not in the end "sell the products." This, American manufacturers had to do for themselves, utilizing their considerable promotional capabilities and, with FHA PR guidance, "rallying [their] publicity into more effective channels, through the press, radio, and motion picture [sic]," in order to secure the building material sales which would positively impact the company's, the industry's, the nation's bottom line. The FHA was not simply asking manufacturers to "revive [their pre-Depression] selling efforts," it was asking them to *expand* those efforts until building material manufacturers were engaged in a range of promotional activities far more extensive than any the industry had previously undertaken.[21] By 1937, such expanded activities had become common enough for Architectural Forum to remark that the "building industry was becoming aware of major advertising trends" as indicated by the adoption of "promotion methods customarily used to bolster sales of cigarettes, cosmetics, and breakfast foods"--in other words,

---

[20] Allie Freed of Paramount Motors quoted in "New Group Set Up to Help Recovery," New York Times, 6 November 1934, p. 8. The committee also included lawyers, financiers, and advertisers Bruce Barton of Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn and Chester McCall of U.S. Advertising Corp.
[21] FHA, Second Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936), p. 3. See for example "Address by George D. Buckley at a Breakfast Meeting of the National Conference of Business Paper Editors at the National Press Club," typescript (22 November 1934), p. 3 [NA RG 287, Box y748].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

gimmicks.[22] The advantage of modernization as a sales gimmick was that it could be deployed effectively upon two particular market segments: architects and merchants whose joint interest in modernization as a building practice, a credit plan, and a putative business booster would, the FHA believed, "bring about a re-birth of sales and production activity in the building and building materials industries" after five years of Depression-induced stagnation.[23] The double appeal to architects and merchants was a sales necessity for building material manufacturers who, unlike manufacturers of consumer goods, had to approach their market by what one analyst called "a devious route." Since orders for building products did not come directly from the consumer, but rather from the architect who functioned as a middleman, it was necessary for the manufacturer to sell the consumer and the middleman--the merchant and the architect--on the company's products.[24]

While asserting that product sales were entirely the manufacturers' responsibility, the FHA was hardly suggesting that they go it alone. Rather, in what the agency repeatedly called the "golden opportunity" of the modernization program, the FHA offered manufacturers an unprecedented level of government assistance to stimulate building material sales through expeditious product marketing.[25] In order for a manufacturer to exploit this marketing opportunity, the FHA directed the "national advertiser [to] tie your company or your products in with the Federal Housing Administration program," declaring that "its objectives are your objectives." In other words, by "graphically promoting modernization" a company was, de facto, promoting its own products.[26] At the very least, this graphic promotion would take the form of a modernization-themed advertising campaign for architecture and retail trade journals. Such

---

[22] "Forum of Events: Promotion Pieces," Architectural Forum 66 (June 1937): 98.
[23] First Annual Report, p. 10.
[24] Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. Policy Holders Service Bureau, Merchandising and Advertising Practices in the Building Material and Equipment Field (New York: Met Life, 1931), p. 8.
[25] See "James Moffett before "Advertising Club of New York," FHA Press Release No. 145, (13 December 1934), p. 6 [NA RG 287, box y 749].
[26] "What a Manufacturer Can Do to Further the Successful Operation of the Better Housing Program," n.p.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

advertisements might include the BHP logo, and all manner of "modernization" copy featuring the FHA, the NHA, the MCP, and eventually Main Street.[27] A Weyerhaeuser ad for 4-Square Lumber appearing in Architectural Forum in December 1934 reproduced the BHP logo along with tied-in copy: "Architects cannot sidestep the obligation to select only the best materials for every modernizing and new construction job. The work must be done right and with the right materials if it is to qualify for a government-protected loan." One of PPG's Chain Store Age advertisements included a bold-faced headline: "NHA Makes NOW the Time to Remodel." Following an FHA directive, a U.S. Steel ad attempted to sell architects on modernization practice at the same time it cultivated interest in sheet metal for modernization work: "There's Money in Remodeling Store Fronts...this modernization movement has proved a profitable one to the architect, the engineer and the builder." Revere Copper and Brass promoted the FHA directive to "be your own first customer" with the headline "It Pays to Practice What you Preach" and an illustration of a Revere dealer's workshop modernized with sheet copper storefront to attract similar jobs.[28] Advertisements such as these ultimately became the most common type of FHA tie-in since they required little or no additional expenditures if a manufacturer was already engaged in national publicity. However, in the FHA's conception of the manufacturer's campaign, print advertisements, though admittedly successful, were just the beginning.

Ideally, modernization campaigns would encompass a varied program of *non-print* tie-ins as well, including nationally-sponsored special events, services for architects and retailers, or

---

[27] Though manufacturers were encouraged to mention the FHA, NHA, BHP, or MCP in promotional materials, the agency never recognized tie-ins as product endorsements. In its own publications, the FHA adopted a non-endorsement policy and avoided "recommending, either directly or by implication, the use of any particular type of building material, equipment, or service to the disadvantage of any other type of material, equipment or service." Modernize for Profit, cover.
[28] Weyerhaeuser advertisement, "7 Good Reasons Why Weyerhaeuser 4-Square Lumber," Architectural Forum 61 (December 1934): inside back cover. PPG advertisement, "New Customers...Better Satisfied Customers," Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 103. US Steel advertisement, "There's Money in Remodeling Store Fronts," American Architect 148 (February 1936): 99. Revere Copper & Brass advertisement, "It Pays to Practice What You Preach," Building Modernization, July 1935, p. 33.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

building material exhibitions and conferences.[29] Pragmatically, however, the FHA realized that only a select group of leading manufacturers were prepared to undertake such ambitious corporate promotions. Thus, the FHA also encouraged manufacturers to adapt their existing complements of printed promotional materials for program tie-in. In the mid-1930s, these materials included not only print advertising, but a considerable amount of so-called direct mail and specialized literature--letters, flyers, booklets, and portfolios, as well as A.I.A. Files--demonstrating the general, artistic, and technical aspects of a given product. Manufacturers sent these directly, either unsolicited or upon request, to architects and contractors (and to a lesser degree to retailers) and placed them, in abbreviated form, in Sweet's Catalogue File and in retail equipment directories.[30] Over the next few years an incredible volume of tied-in promotional literature appeared, from Ruberoid's Modernizing Money, explaining the company's FHA-approved "Easy-Payment Plan" to Kawneer's Book of Storefronts, illustrating "what hundreds of progressive merchants have done to boost profits." Sometimes these booklets were simply reissues of older publications updated for rhetorical currency by substituting "modernizing" or "modernization" for "remodeling" or "improvement" as in Formica's Formica for Store Modernization and Insulated Steel's Modernizing with Porcelain Enamel.[31] FHA tie-ins, whether they were print or non-print, new or retooled, were limited only, as Dorsey Newson (Special Assistant to P.R. Director Canaday) observed, by "the ingenuity of the Sales and Advertising

---

[29] Conferences were usually sponsored by a group of manufacturers or a trade association. The Producers' Council (a coalition of leading manufacturers affiliated with the AIA) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce organized yearly Construction Industry Conferences in which sessions on modernization and the Main Street initiative were regularly slated: architect Ralph Walker moderated a session on "Modernizing Commercial Buildings" and F.T. Brown, Chairman of the Kansas City BHP, chaired one on "Modernizing Main Street." See U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "Press Release: Construction Industry Conference," 10 October 1937. U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Program: Construction Industry Conference, 20-21 October 1938 and 16-17 November 1939 [NA RG 207 HHFA/CHC/Exec Sec, Box 5].

[30] Typical direct mail strategies are discussed in Merchandising and Advertising Practices in the Building Material and Equipment Field, pp. 8-12.

[31] Modernizing Money (New York: The Ruberoid Company, 1935). The Kawneer Book of Storefronts (Niles, MI: The Kawneer Company, 1936). Modernizing with Porcelain Enamel (New York: Insulated Steel Construction Company, 1935). Formica for Store Modernization (Cincinnati,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Departments of national advertisers."[32] Though probably intended as a throw-away line, Newson's comment was telling nonetheless, revealing the way advertising and its marketing strategies consistently drove the modernization program.

If the tie-in offered "great opportunities to those in the building material and building service industries," it also "placed upon [them] important responsibilities."[33] In practice, this became one of the tie-ins principal attractions, allowing manufacturers to aggressively market their products under a banner of corporate responsibility, good will, and patriotism--a strategy as appealing in the 1930s, during the fight against the Depression, as it would be in the 1940s, during World War II. An explicit nationalist emphasis is evident in a 1935 General Electric advertisement which tied GE wiring materials to the expansion of the MCP, building modernization, and the Main Street initiative under a boldly graphic, map-like image of the United States [Fig. 118].[34] Within the country's borders runs a white banner carrying GE's simultaneously civic-minded and self-interested message to "Modernize Main Street Electrically." Upon closer inspection the banner appears more as a coast-to-coast highway in the approximate geographic position of U.S. 40. This continuous, 3,000 mile Main Street is lined with the kinds of buildings GE hoped to sell on modernization--"apartment houses, commercial buildings and stores," as well as churches, factories, a state capitol, and several skyscrapers, most with flags flying on the roof the inclusion of which, though graphically discreet, nonetheless reinforces General Electric's *flag waving* intentions. To reinforce General Electric's selling intentions, the company showcased its wiring products using a visual cliché of contemporary

---

OH: Formica Insulation Company, 1935) was a reissue of Translucent Shatterproof Formica (Cincinnati, OH: Formica Insulation Company, 1933).

[32] "Speech by H. Dorsey Newson before the Tenth Annual Convention of Major Market Newspapers," FHA Press Release No. 88 (16 October 1934), p. 5 [NA RG 287 box y749].

[33] "The Building Industry can Profit," Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers, p. 11.

[34] A vaguely topographical silhouette of the United States, presented as an isolated (isolationist) land mass severed from Canada and Mexico, is set afloat in a wavy ocean amid jumping dolphins, spouting whales, and two sea-faring vessels--a Spanish galleon and an ocean liner, emblematic of the antiquated past and modernized future. The course between the two is charted

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

advertising. Wildly over-scaled and disembodied, a host of electrical outlets, switches, plates, and fuses appear to float in the celestial haze above Main Street, distributed across the country and, like all GE products, "available everywhere."[35]

General Electric continued to tie its advertising in with modernization and the National Housing Act throughout the 1930s, deeming, for example, the "electrical convenience" of its air conditioning and lighting systems especially useful for "Main Street establishments" since they were promised to "bring and keep tenants and customers," thus enabling building owners and merchants to "quickly pay for costs of modernization and show a profit."[36] Here, GE was borrowing one of the FHA's most familiar sales arguments, establishing that psychologically potent link between building improvement and business improvement which was so crucial to modernization's appeal.[37] One of General Electric's earliest tie-in promotions, which extended to both residential and commercial modernization, was the work of the GE Contracts Corporation, the company's credit finance subsidiary which, because it was in existence prior to 1934, allowed GE to get a jump on many of its competitors once the modernization credit plan went into effect. GE was one of several building material manufacturers who quickly shuffled their pre-existing credit subsidiaries into FHA-approved lenders in order to take advantage of the obvious promotional value which such an association held--much to the satisfaction of the FHA

---

by GE itself with the company's familiar signet logo emblazoned on a compass.

[35] Building Modernization, September 1935, p. 2.

[36] See for example General Electric, "Electrical Convenience," Building Modernization, March 1935. On the Main Street initiative and GE air conditioning see "Air Conditioning Gaining," New York Times, 10 March 1935, sec. II, p. 19 and GE advertisement, "For Remodeling or New Construction," Architectural Forum 61 (August 1937): 14.

[37] In addition to its modernization print ads, GE sponsored numerous promotional activities, including radio programs and design competitions, related to the National Housing Act, but which publicized the use of GE products in home modernization and Title II home construction rather than in commercial applications. These included four GE-sponsored "American Home" shows on the NBC Red Network (which GE owned) and several design competitions and model exhibitions featuring the "GE All-Electric House." See FHA Radio Broadcast Schedule, pamphlet, dated January 1935 [NA RG 287 box y742]. On General Electric's competitions see Richard Plunz, A History of Housing in New York City (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 231-33. See also Ronald C. Tobey, Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which published a list of these manufacturers cum lenders, lauding them as "impressive testimonials of cooperation."[38]

Two other manufactures included on this list who transformed their credit finance subsidiaries into modernization lenders for promotional purposes were Johns-Manville (J-M) and American Radiator and Standard Sanitary, both of whom had such great and early success in extending government-insured credit that they were consistently praised as industry leaders in the vanguard of recovery.[39] By December 1934, American Radiator had made its 5,000th modernization loan since the start of the MCP in August, a milestone achieved not through splashy marketing, but through an effective use of FHA tie-ins in the company's regular promotional channels.[40] American Radiator had launched its tie-ins in September 1934 announcing "the service this company is making available to all those participating in the BHP." That this *service* was nothing more than the company's normal attempts to sell its heating and plumbing products was beside the point. Indeed, this four-page spread was a model of marketing restraint, free of the sales rhetoric which characterized most modernization advertising. The first page was so understated, lacking photographs or other visuals, that it seemed almost a public service announcement about the availability of "Remodeling Dollars" in need of "proper direction":

---

[38] See FHA, Group II Lenders: Financial Institutions that are Extending Modernization Credit, Form FHE 61 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), n.p. [NA RG 287 BOX Y 740]. All credit finance subsidiaries were approved for government insurance provided they offered government rates. Becoming a modernization lender was a promotional tool which involved no regulatory or institutional change.
[39] The FHA put J-M and American Radiator on the front page of the 22 October 1934 edition of Better Housing with signed letters from their respective presidents attesting to the positive results of the 2-month old FHA program. J-M's Lewis Brown was "gratified by a substantial increase in volume of business" which he "attributed in a major degree to the program of the FHA." American Radiator's Rolland Hamilton reported a 563% increase in the dollar volume of his company's modernization notes (over the same period in 1933) and "[felt] justified in the belief that the Federal Housing Plan [was] responsible for the increase." In the general press, American Radiator's results were deemed impressive enough for New York World-Telegram to declare that the company was "selling the Depression out of existence" and Fortune drew much the same conclusion the following spring in its laudatory profile of the company. The statements of Brown and Hamilton were published under the headline "Program Bring Results," Better Housing, 22 October 1934, p. 1. The affiliated lending agencies were the John-Manville Credit Corporation and the Heating & Plumbing Finance Corporation. Both were subsidiaries of their parent companies. "American Radiator and Standard Sanitary," New York World-Telegram, 24 October 1934. "Heating Man," Fortune, April 1935.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> The Federal Housing Administration will induce thousands of inexperienced owners to improve their homes and business property. Obviously to you--but in many cases not to them--some improvements take priority over others. The proper direction of these remodeling dollars can be of great service to the owner, the lending institution and the U.S. Government.

The effectiveness of this copy was its subtle stroking of the Depression-bruised egos of architects and contractors, accomplished by emphasizing their professional expertise and sound judgment in decisions concerning building improvements, a maneuver which becomes apparent as the copy crescendos toward its pitch: "Men of the most successful and greatest building experience agree that in remodeling and repair check the heating first!" Thus assured of their superior ability to prioritize heating when modernizing, architects and contractors were invited to turn the page and examine American Radiator's "complete, properly priced line of modern heating appliances," presented in a factual manner that stressed technical data and specifications and was generally free of the so-called selfish selling copy which the building fraternity apparently deplored.[41] In its avoidance of the hard sell and acknowledgment of the necessity of expert contributions to the government's modernization program, American Radiator was attempting to generate professional good will and cultivate in architects and contractors a sense of responsibility to support the FHA program. A sophisticated selling strategy was at work here, one which backgrounded the product in order to make architects and contractors more receptive to the product, more favorably disposed to specify the American Radiator's fixtures for all of their modernization jobs. If the government's modernization program succeeded in restoring building activity to its pre-Depression levels, such backdoor marketing of so straightforward a product as heating equipment would no longer be necessary. But until that restoration was complete, selling tactics like this one would remain a virtual requirement of the intensely-competitive Depression-era marketplace.

---

[40] "American Radiator Makes 5,000th Loan," Better Housing, 21 December 1934, p. 8.
[41] American Radiator advertisement, "Properly Directed Remodeling Dollars," Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 21. On architects' attitudes toward ad copy see Merchandising and Advertising Practices, p. 12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Johns-Manville, the country's leading manufacturer of asbestos and asphalt building materials, had been attempting to alter sales strategies in the building industry long before the Depression set it. In October 1935, Atlantic Monthly even gave J-M credit for "modernizing the building industry."[42] This assessment stemmed as much from its current success with the modernization program as from its pioneering effort to bring installment buying and easy credit into the realm of durable goods, thus bringing this industry to the threshold of the consumer culture where it awaited only the groundswell of the modernization movement to push the industry, at least temporarily, over the edge. J-M was in a unique position to capitalize on the marketing opportunity of the FHA's modernization program: company president Lewis Brown had supported the National Housing Act long before it was written into law and he had joined the advisory committee of the New York City BHP as it was organized. Even more crucially, J-M's *Million Dollars to Lend* program, administered through 1,100 J-M agents nation-wide, had been one of the credit finance models for the Modernization Credit Plan itself (see Chapter 1). After the start of the BHP, J-M sponsored numerous FHA-related radio broadcasts, including high-profile speeches by officials James Moffett and Stewart McDonald, and organized a "motor caravan" which toured the country during 1935, stopping in over 600 cities and towns in order to "capitalize on the NHA at the point of sale" by bringing building products directly to Main Street towns.[43]

In the fall of 1935, J-M tied-in the commercial use of its products explicitly with the Main Street initiative, demonstrating in a Chain Store Age advertisement how "John-Mansville modernizes [the interior of] a Main Street Shop" [Fig. 119]. Prior to modernization, the illustrated shop had a pressed tin ceiling, plaster walls, a jumbled arrangement of over-stuffed

---

[42] "Modernizing the Building Industry," Atlantic Monthly, October 1935. Cited in FHA Press Digest.
[43] See "James Moffett over Johns-Manville Nation-wide Hookup," FHA Press Release: 15 September 1934 and "Stewart McDonald at Building Industry Forum," FHA Press Release: January 1936 [NA RG 287 Box y749]. See also "Motor Caravan to Tour Country," FHA Clip Sheet 2 (no. 11, 1935), n.p.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

furniture, and a checkerboard linoleum floor. J-M's design for modernizing the shop was an integrated scheme with a drop ceiling, resurfaced walls with continuous decorative bands, built-in combination display case/seats accented with a streamlined curve, and a lustrous striped floor--all fabricated with J-M products. In presenting its asbestos and asphalt products as a quartet of coordinated materials, J-M effectively *modernized* its product line for store installations, modifying the way it merchandised certain products to make them more appealing to retailers. Arguably, it was for this reason that J-M's wall cladding, Asbestos Wainscoting, was retooled into Asbestos Flexboard which, as the company announced the previous fall was "a product with amazing potentialities because it solves one of today's major building problems...the wall re-surfacing of existing structures that must be modernized on limited budgets."[44] In transforming Wainscoting into Flexboard, the product shed any potentially negative associations with stodgy, old-fashioned buildings and heavily-paneled interiors, replacing them with associations more appropriate to the fight-the-Depression ethic of the mid-1930s: flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness to change. Equally appropriate to this ethic was the emphasis J-M placed on affordability, stressing the "low cost of J-M materials [and] their economy of application," along with the availability of the company's government-rate deferred payment plan for Main Street store owners who wanted to modernize, but did not think they could afford it.[45]

In January 1936, a speaker at a building industry forum sponsored by Johns-Manville accurately explained what J-M and other building material manufacturers had begun to do in recent years, "to spur a definite revival in the building industry." Since the Depression had effectively ended the "self-generating demand" for building materials on which producers had, in the speaker's opinion, too long relied, it was now necessary to actively stimulate that demand by engaging in "creative merchandising." For this there was "tremendous opportunity" at present

---

[44] Flexboard was basically Wainscoting available in larger sizes for full wall surfaces. See Johns-Manville advertisement, "Important Announcement," Architectural Forum 61 (October 1934): 35.
[45] Johns-Manville advertisement, "Johns-Manville Modernizes a Main Street Shop," Chain Store

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

because of continually expanding interest in modernization, but creative merchandising involved more than increased advertising and distribution of promotional literature.[46] Creative merchandising also involved researching new uses and applications for materials already present in existing product lines which, once developed, could be used to reposition those materials in the building industry marketplace through advertising and promotion. Ideally, in the mid-1930s, those new applications would be compatible with the aesthetic and/or technical requirements of building modernization, thus allowing the market repositioning to tie-in with the FHA's Main Street Initiative. Of the numerous building materials subjected to varying degrees of creative merchandising to retain their market viability during the Depression, structural glass stands out as a compelling example of a product marketed expressly for modernizing buildings on Main Street America, an examination of which will serve to illustrate the way dozens of other products were similarly promoted in the 1930s.[47]

PPG, Structural Glass & Modernization: A Case Study

As a building material, structural glass had been available since the turn of the century when technological advances in the manufacture of flat glass made possible the development of opaque, pigmented, highly-polished vitreous slabs which, despite the name, were non-loadbearing.[48]

Age, November 1935, p. 96.

[46] "Speech by George Lapointe before Building Industry Forum," typescript, 13 January 1936, p. 1 [NA RG 287 Box y 748]. Lapointe was president of the National Retail Lumber Dealers Association. Like the FHA, he viewed modernization as a temporary expedient which would tied the industry over until new construction--especially house construction--was fully revived.

[47] These included, among many products, plastic laminates (Formica and Micarta) and porcelain enamels (Veribrite and Porceliron), glass blocks (Insulux and PC-Block) and extruded metals (Zouri and Brasco).

[48] Structural glass should not be confused with other glass products having apparent "structural" uses, including prismatic glass and glass blocks. Prismatic glass, better known by the popular brand name Luxfer Prism," refers to light-refracting ribbed glass tiles. Introduced in 1896, prismatic glass was often used in turn-of-the-century storefront installations, with the tiles set in transom panels above doors and display cases. Prismatic glass was popular on Main Street because it could refract light rays deep into the long narrow space of the typical store. By the 1930s, when improvements in electric lights rendered them functionally obsolete, prismatic glass transom panels were often removed or covered up during modernization. Glass blocks, introduced in 1936, are discussed below. See Dietrich Neumann, "Prismatic Glass" in Twentieth Century Building Materials, pp. 189-93 and Neumann, "'The Century's Triumph in Lighting': The Luxfer Prism Companies and their Contribution to Early Modern Architecture," Journal of the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Since its non-porous, hard finish made structural glass impervious to dirt and stains and supposedly to germs and odors as well, it was initially marketed as a substitute for marble under trade names like Sani-Onyx and Novus Sanitary and was utilized primarily in hospitals, lavatories, cafeterias and other environments in which cleanliness, sanitation, and hygiene were of central concern.[49] In such interiors, structural glass was applied to a variety of wall surfaces and fixtures, including wainscoting and baseboards, table and counter tops, and toilet and shower partitions. Though color options were limited to white and black, the antiseptic gave way to the glamorous during the 1920s, especially after the introduction of faux-stone effects and sand-blasted and inlaid decorative patterns. With the dual influence of the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Art Décoratifs* in Paris and Hollywood motion picture sets, especially Cedric Gibbons's work at M-G-M, American designers were soon using structural glass to panel the walls of chic foyers and voguish bathrooms [Fig. 120]. Though there were nearly a dozen manufacturers of structural glass by the mid-1920s, two brands dominated this market: Carrara, manufactured by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company and introduced in 1906, and Vitrolite, manufactured by the Vitrolite Company of Chicago and introduced in 1916. By the time the stock market crashed, U.S. production of structural glass was nearly five million square feet per year. This was less than 4% of the total plate glass output, but it was still significant enough for Glass Industry to boast that "structural glass [had] arrived," coming into its own "as a modern, efficient, economical material"–three characteristics which would make it especially compatible with storefront use.[50] The industry's enthusiasm for the material was

---

Society of Architectural Historians 54 (March 1995): 24-53. See also Janet Marinelli, "Architectural Glass and the Evolution of the Storefront," Old House Journal, July/August 1988, pp. 40-1.

[49] On the early history of structural glass see Glass: History, Manufacture and Its Universal Application (Pittsburgh: PPG Company, 1923), pp. 158-69. For recent preservation-oriented studies see Carol J. Dyson, "Structural Glass," in Twentieth Century Building Materials, pp. 200-5. "The Preservation of Historic Pigmented Structural Glass," Preservation Briefs, No. 12 (1984), pp. 1-12.

[50] Figures cited in W.E.S. Turner, "The North American Glass Industry in 1938," Journal of the Society of Glass Technology 24 (1940): 8 and U.S. Tariff Commission, Flat Glass and Related Glass Products, report no. 123, 2nd series (Washington, DC: GPO, 1937), p. 137. J.W. Wiley, "Structural Glass Has Arrived," Glass Industry 13 (September 1932): 148-9. Wiley was an

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

echoed by the design community. In 1930, furniture designer Paul Frankl regarded structural glass as one of the new industrial materials most "expressive of our own [modern] age." In 1932, industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague lauded structural glass as a material which "fit in particularly well with modern design trends," predicting that it would "figure prominently in buildings of the future."[51] Despite these positive critical assessments, as the Depression set in yearly structural glass production declined to one million square feet and the material's market prospects appeared as gloomy as those of every other building product when construction activity hit bottom in 1933.[52]

That year, as glass manufacturers regrouped after numerous bankruptcies, mergers, and acquisitions, PPG emerged as the industry's leader, dominating the (depressed) flat glass market with its Polished Plate and Carrara products. As the New Deal got underway, PPG president H.S. Wherrett was already implementing recovery measures initiated by Hoover's Commerce Department, carrying out the company's $350,000 pledge to modernize PPG's factories and equipment and its promise to promote building improvement with glass.[53] Though the latter effort was limited, it must have alerted PPG executives to the promotional possibilities of modernization to reverse the downward trend of glass sales. When the MCP went into effect in 1934 and the FHA sought the cooperation of leading manufacturers, PPG immediately threw its corporate weight behind the Title I initiative, agreeing to "gear [its] advertising and selling plans to the Housing Act to the fullest possible extent." That fall, the company initiated a promotional campaign which would expand in scope and intensity over the next several years, eventually reaching yearly

---

employee of the Vitrolite Company.

[51] Paul Frankl, Form and Re-form (New York: Harper & Co., 1930), p. 163. Walter Dorwin Teague, "Structural and Decorative Trends in Glass," American Architect 141 (May 1932): 112.

[52] Total flat glass production fell from a 1929 high of 150 million feet to a 1932 low of 52 million. Production climbed to 86 million in 1933 due to the continued demand for auto glass. See Turner, p. 8.

[53] PPG was cooperating with the National Industrial Rehabilitation Committee and the Committee on Reconditioning, Remodeling, and Modernizing. See above and Chapter 1. See also "Modernization Field Offers Many Business Tips to the Industry," Ceramic Industry 20 (March 1933): 145.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

expenditures in excess of $1 million.[54] Crucial to this campaign, was PPG's successful repositioning of Carrara structural glass, transforming it through strategic marketing from an interior paneling to an exterior facing easily applied to run-down Main Street storefronts. By the end of the decade, structural glass storefronts had become nearly ubiquitous, prompting Glass Industry, in an article about PPG's Carrara, to call it "practically a staple architectural item...familiar to the ordinary citizen."[55]

As noted above, structural glass had already been successfully repositioned once during its three decades on the market, when it shifted from a sanitary to a decorative material. Thus, it was not fantastic to think that the public would accept structural glass in another new context, as a wall surface on the outside of buildings, where the product had not generally appeared.[56] Already in 1932, when Teague praised the material, mentioning Carrara by name, he noted that the very same qualities which made it so advantageous in sanitary installations made it equally practical for "exterior purposes." Indeed, architects were already employing it on building facades, both new and modernized. Apparently, by late in 1933, the exterior use of black structural glass trimmed in chrome had become something of "a vogue" in urban centers [Figs. 121 & 122].[57] However, in 1932 and 1933, while PPG and the Vitrolite Company both acknowledged the potential use of structural glass for "refined exterior settings" and for "modern storefront work," as yet they were not marketing it for this purpose beyond these scant advertising references.[58] Though the 1933 Committee for Reconditioning had suggested "remodel[ing] store fronts in glass" as the "basis for a

---

[54] Cited in FHA Press Release No. 88, p. 6. See "Advertising News," New York Times, 25 December 1936, p. 29.
[55] "Manufacture of Structural Glass: Works No. 6 of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company," Glass Industry, 20 (June 1939): 215. Carrara was manufactured at this factory.
[56] In this context, structural glass served as a kind of curtain wall, existing independent of the structure of the building. Unlike a true curtain wall (as the term is commonly understood), structural glass required the presence of the actual wall surface beneath, to which the glass sheets were attached with mastic.
[57] Teague, p. 112. John W. Harrington, "More Profit Store Fronts," Building Modernization, December 1933, p. 10.
[58] Sweet's Architectural Catalogue (1933), pp. B2486 & B2471. See also PPG advertisement, "Our Organization is Particularly Well Qualified," Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 661.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

merchandising campaign," for PPG, this did not include structural glass.[59] When the company listed its products for storefront use in Chain Store Age's 1933 "Equipment and Construction Directory," PPG's Polished Plate and EasySet Metal–and not Carrara–were the "essential materials used in construction."[60]

One year later, however, PPG made Carrara the feature material of its storefronts, announcing in the 1934 directory that its metal settings were "new and improved...designed especially for use with Carrara Structural Glass"–a material which itself was now called "ideal for modern storefronts" and was available "for bulkheads" in black, white, jade, ivory, and gray. In the 1934 edition of Sweet's, it announced "Carrara for Storefronts," claiming that the material had "been developed to meet the requirements of outdoor uses." PPG also offered its first catalogue storefront designs with full size storefront details.[61] When the Main Street effort commenced in 1935, PPG began featuring what it called "outstanding installations of Pittco Store Fronts," chosen as much for their geographic distribution–a shoe store in Wisconsin, a grill room in Texas, a beauty salon in Connecticut–as for their quality of design.[62] Though PPG continued to market Carrara for interior use in commercial establishments and in the home, its storefront applications became increasingly important to the company's marketing strategies as it cooperated with the FHA's modernization program. PPG's market repositioning of Carrara was a shrewd maneuver since it allowed the company to increase sales of a material already in its product line, one which needed no retooling for its new application. While there were certainly compelling aesthetic reasons, namely its perceived modernity, for promoting structural glass as exterior facing (see Chapter 6), PPG was

---

[59] "Committee on Reconditioning, "Tentative Operating Manual for Conducting a Local Modernizing Campaign," cited in "Modernization Field Offers Many Business Tips to the Industry," p. 145.
[60] "Equipment and Construction Directory, Section 1, Store Fronts" Chain Store Age, November 1933, p. 109. PPG's marketing of Carrara was unchanged from nearly a decade before. See Glass, p. 97.
[61] "Equipment and Construction Directory," Chain Store Age, November 1934, pp. D3 & D7. Sweet's Catalogue File (1934), pp. C222-3. This was the first edition of Sweet's to place materials for storefronts together in a single catalogue section.
[62] See Sweet's Catalogue File (1936), 17/19 and Sweet's (1937), 19/25.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

counting on simple economics to win the day: structural glass was one of the cheapest facing materials on the market in terms of combined costs of purchasing and installation.[63]

There was a larger sales strategy at work as well. Prior to 1934, as PPG explained in a later storefront advertisement, "you bought your facing material from one source, your glass from another, your metal sash and paint and incidental materials from still others."[64] For PPG, this meant metal frames manufactured by Kawneer and, if the bulkhead was not metal, facings of stone, marble, tile, or brick--none of which PPG supplied or manufactured.[65] Though plate glass was arguably the most important storefront material, it was also the least expensive.[66] From the company viewpoint, it was losing out on 2/3 of the typical storefront at precisely that moment when a market for complete storefronts--frames, facings, and windows--was being readied through the efforts of the FHA. Thus, in the fall of 1934 when PPG introduced an extruded metal of the company's own design and manufacture to be used as a window setting with Carrara as a bulkhead facing, PPG was laying claim to the rest of the storefront [Fig. 123]. In March of 1935, when PPG officially announced this new line of metal settings, the company secured that claim, confidently declaring that it had "developed a new type of store front construction...that greatly broadens the possibilities for original and effective store front design."[67] PPG could now boast that its product

---

[63] Fabrication and installation for structural glass were the same for interior and exterior use. Costing between $.50 and $.70 per square foot, it was far less expensive than marble or granite. While brick and glazed terra cotta were cheaper to purchase than structural glass, they were more expensive to install requiring, like stonework, both a higher skill-level of labor and more man hours. By contrast, an entire storefront of structural glass could be very nearly "glued" to an existing facade in a matter of hours. Comparisons of material and installation costs see Flat Glass and Related Glass Products, p. 141. For a complete description of structural glass installation procedures see Dyson, p. 204.

[64] PPG advertisement, "Why Does a Pittco Store Front Make Your Chain Store Individual?" Chain Store Age, November 1936, p. 121.

[65] PPG introduced EasySet Metal in 1908. In 1910 Kawneer brought a patent infringement suit against the company. It was settled out of court and PPG became a distributor for Kawneer's reclaimed storefront setting system. See Thomas Stritch, The Kawneer Story (Niles, MI: Kawneer Company, 1956), p. 26.

[66] In 1935 plate glass was averaging approximately $.30 per square foot while structural glass typically cost between $.50 and $.70 per square foot (white was cheapest, colors the most expensive).

[67] The new line of extruded metal settings included sashes, sills, moldings, jambs, thresholds, and other vertical and horizontal members. See "Products and Practices: Metal Store Front

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

line included all three components of the standard storefront--Polished Plate Glass, Carrara Structural Glass, and Store Front Metal--now marketed under the single "Pittco" brand name. It was not by accident that the introduction of the Pittco Store Front coincided with the FHA's March announcement of the "Modernize Main Street" initiative. Indeed, in that context, PPG President Wherrett predicted "at least a 50% increase in the number of small stores and shops which [would] install new store fronts this year," estimating that the potential existed for one billion dollars of modernization work--knowing full well that his company was poised to capture this Main Street business with its trio of Pittco products.[68]

Beginning in 1935, PPG promoted its Pittco products with a campaign directed simultaneously to merchants and architects and built around storefront modernization tied-in with the FHA.[69] The largest component of this campaign was PPG's print advertising. This was handled by the Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborne, one of Madison Avenue's leading advertising firms, and employed a variety of advertising techniques current in the mid-1930s, including testimonials and editorial copy. Testimonial ads, which appeared in both design and retail magazines, featured personal statements from satisfied PPG customers, those merchants who had modernized their stores with Pittco fronts: "Mr. Muller, the optician, writes: 'we are very much pleased with the new store front...many people have complimented us on our beautiful new store and we feel sure it will be quite productive of increased business."[70] In editorial copy, the layout of the page resembled a magazine's editorial contents so that the reader might mistake the ad for an article and give it his or

---

Construction," Architectural Forum 62 (March 1935): 38. See also Sweet's (1935): 17/3, p. 18. PPG continued to distribute Easy Set metal for two more years but it no longer promoted it.

[68] "Pittco" was first used to identify only PPG's new metal settings but it was eventually adopted as the unifying label for all PPG storefront products. H.S. Wherrett is quoted in "Retailers in Move to Improve Stores," New York Times, 10 March 1935, sec. 11, p. 19. If one million merchants each spent $1,000 on modernization, it would generate $1 billion of business. See also "Modernization Market Analysis," Real Estate Record, 23 March 1935, p. 2.

[69] For in-house reports on this campaign see Pittsburgh Plate Products 44 (May-June 1935) and (July-August 1935). Concurrently, PPG promoted Carrara by itself for residential modernization, especially in kitchens and baths, also with FHA tie-ins.

[70] PPG advertisement, "For Perfect Execution of the Store Fronts You Design," American Architect 148 (March 1936): 15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

her full attention. With so many architecture and retail trade journals running articles and special features about modernization and the FHA program (see below), PPG ads with three column formats, densely-worded copy, and headlines like "When Designing New Fronts for Old Stores Under NHA" or "It Pays to 'Modernize Main Street'" had a definite editorial resemblance [Fig. 124]. PPG's typical editorial copy not only explained the MCP, but also deployed nearly every sales pitch in the FHA's considerable arsenal to convince merchants that a Pittco front "makes an outmoded store new and attractive...impresses potential customers...[and] results in jumping sales."[71] In architecture journals, the copy had a different, almost conspiratorial slant, revealing how PPG was cultivating merchants as modernization customers for itself and as modernization clients for architects:

> In furthering the 'Modernize Main Street' movement, we are helping you to get store remodeling jobs in your community. In our extensive advertising to your prospective clients, we recommend that they retain a local architect to design their storefronts.

But such assistance required a payback:

> When these prospects call you in, show them how Pittco Store Fronts can improve their business...and then to assure them a satisfactory, quality installation, specify Pittco Store Fronts."[72]

There were few other places in the vast discourse of modernization where the reciprocity necessary for the success of the FHA's program work was so explicitly articulated.

Advertising copy, regardless of its content was often accompanied by photographs depicting run-down or abandoned stores transformed with Pittco products [Fig. 125 & Fig. 126]. The FHA encouraged the use of such photographic pairs, since they enabled merchants "to quickly see the point" of modernization and enabled architects to see how products were being used in

---

[71] PPG advertisement, "When Designing New Fronts for Old Stores Under NHA," Architectural Forum 62 (April 1935): 65. PPG advertisement, "It Pays to Modernize Main Street," Chain Store Age, June 1935, p. 73.
[72] PPG advertisement, "Pittco Store Front Products Offer New Possibilities," Architectural Forum 63 (December 1935): 59.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modernization work.[73] PPG's before and after pairs often resembled, in subject and layout, the modernization case studies alongside which they appeared in Architectural Record, Building Modernization, Box Office, Progressive Grocer, or any of the other specialized trade journals which featured them after 1934-35. In PPG's ads, like those of so many other manufacturers, before and after pairs were accompanied by captions containing varying degrees of useful information: for the architecture press, the name of the designer and specification details; for the retail press, mostly sales copy: "The Ford Hopkins Drug Store today...modern, attractive, eye-appealing...which means bigger and better business."[74]

If PPG's modernization advertisements were carefully keyed to the needs and interests of merchants and architects, so too were its various customer service programs, noteably the *Pittsburgh Time Payment Plan*, introduced early in 1936. Though PPG distributors and sales representatives had already been assisting customers in securing modernization loans from private financial institutions, with the Pittsburgh Plan they were now in a position to make the loans themselves, conveniently speeding up the modernization transaction and adding corporate profits, since PPG now collected the 5% interest on the notes. When describing the Pittsburgh Plan in retail advertisements, PPG claimed that its purpose was to "make it easy for merchant or property owner to finance the *purchase of a new Pittco Store Front*"--a pre-designed, ready-to-install unit, presumably as easy to finance and purchase as a new refrigerator or car. Here was a manufacturer of producer goods thinking like a manufacturer of consumer goods, and engaging in a consumer-oriented merchandising of building materials which the FHA encouraged and the MCP itself engendered, since it was, for all intents and purposes, a consumer credit mechanism. Lest architects be concerned that the plan excluded them from the storefront transaction, PPG dispelled their fears

---

[73] FHA, Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and Other Merchants (Washington, DC: GPO), p. 23.

[74] The typical before and after layout consisted of a small inset image of the unmodernized building; a large image of the modernized building, usually cropped so that only the modernized street level facade was shown. PPG advertisement, "A Modern Pittco Store Front Builds Up Business," Chain

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by revealing that the Pittsburgh Plan contained a provision for the architect's fee and assuring them that PPG believed it was "the function of the architect [not the manufacturer] to design and plan."[75]

However, if a merchant was determined *not* to use an architect, PPG was not about to turn away the business. It was for this reason that the company maintained "a special staff of store front experts" available for field consultations. PPG claimed these experts where "perfectly equipped," with the assistance of PPG's nation-wide distribution system, to provide "instant and efficient service"--whether the customer was an independent merchant seeking the design and installation of a single "individualized" store or a corporate retailer seeking "identical store fronts for a chain all over the country at the same time!" In a different context, PPG's merchant-oriented storefront experts became "a staff of special architectural representatives [whose] whole duty...consists in rendering the architect every assistance within their power in connection with the use of glass."[76] These representatives were PPG's so-called missionary men, upon whom manufacturers increasingly relied in the competitive Depression-era marketplace to generate good will for the company by contacting architects and contractors to discuss and promote--but not sell--products in a relaxed professional dialogue. PPG's FHA cooperation provided the company's missionary men with an ideal opportunity to initiate contact and the growing interest in Main Street modernization may have influenced the company's decision to identify their field representatives as "Store Front Specialists."[77]

Store Age, September 1935, p. 127.

[75] Though PPG's version of the MCP required a 20% down payment, it did offer credit at FHA rates, enabling merchants to pay for store front remodeling and related expenses, per FHA propaganda "out of income, in easy monthly installments." See the following PPG advertisements: "Make Chain Store Sales Grow," Chain Store Age, June 1936, p. 127. "For the Perfect Execution of the Store Fronts You Design," American Architect 148 (March 1936): 15. "We Offer Architects," Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 45.

[76] See for example, PPG, "It Pays to Modernize Main Street," Chain Store Age, June 1935, p. 73. PPG, "A Pittco Store Front Says Come In," Chain Store Age, October 1935, p. 87. PPG, "Now Design Unified Store Fronts," Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 73.

[77] On the use of missionary men see Merchandising and Advertising Practices in the Building Material and Equipment Field, pp. 7-8. PPG advertisement, "We Offer Architects the Services of Our Staff of Store Front Specialists," Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 45.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

When PPG's missionary men took to the field, they were well-equipped with a range of promotional materials issued in connection with the Pittco/FHA modernization campaign, most of it fairly typical of the kinds of publications all building material manufacturers offered in the mid-1930s. In the fall of 1934, PPG introduced How Modern Store Fronts Work Profit Magic, "a helpful handbook of storefront facts," containing product information, price lists, before and after photographs, and "statistics on business improvement due to Pittco-remodeling."[78] Geared equally to merchants and architects, the booklet was promoted until 1937 when it was replaced with Producing Bigger Profits with Pittco Storefronts which was followed in 1938 with How to Get More Business with Pittco Store Fronts. Other publications were designed specifically for the architecture community. In the spring of 1935, in conjunction with the introduction of Pittco Store Front Metal, PPG expanded its AIA File Folders to include full and quarter-size detail drawings of the new line with examples of recommended applications for using extruded sashes with Carrara. The Folders were updated regularly as part of PPG's Glass Data Service each time the company brought out a new sashes to keep abreast of storefront design trends. For example, in 1938 PPG released a portfolio of ten "up-to-date" Pittco Metal details which moved away from molding profiles which obviously reproduced parts of the classical orders toward more abstracted forms which the company claimed offered "clean, sharp profiles" with "simplicity of line" [Fig. 127].[79]

In 1936, PPG introduced its Design of the Month, a series of twelve mailings intended, as all such merchandising gimmicks were, to bring Pittco Store Fronts to the attention of architects on a regular basis (and to create anticipation for each installment in the series) on the theory that repetition would lead to specification of Pittco products. Each month's mailing offered style suggestions, application recommendations, and construction advice, as well as sketches and plans

---

[78] PPG, How Modern Store Fronts Work Profit Magic (Pittsburgh: PPG, 1934). Nearly every advertisement from 1934 and 1935 promoted the booklet, see for example, PPG advertisement, "Send for Free Book," Chain Store Age, December 1935, p. 73. PPG advertisement, "Pittco Store Front Products Offer New Possibilities," Architectural Forum 63 (December 1935): 59.
[79] PPG advertisement, "10 New Detail Drawings of Pittco Store Front Metal Applications,"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for a new storefront design.[80] Though PPG credited these monthly designs to its team of Pittco Store Front experts, in fact they were prepared by Walter Dorwin Teague, whom PPG retained as a research and design consultant in 1935. Having earlier sung the praises of structural glass for facades, Teague now had the opportunity to explore its potential for himself. By March 1936, Teague and his staff had completed some three dozen designs for a variety of commercial establishments, including virtually every type of store along a typical Main Street. Twelve of these were selected for the Design of the Month mailings and others appeared in PPG product literature as representative examples of the "modern store front."[81]

In early September, Teague's Pittco Store Front designs were exhibited in New York (at the Architects Sample Corporation) and were about to be launched on a 50,000-mile tour which would travel for the next two years to "all the principal cities east of the Rockies" in order "to encourage retailers to modernize their establishments."[82] Thus, plans (but not specifications) of all exhibited stores were available to the public upon request. As usual, PPG was careful to point out that the aim of the show was not "to supplant the services of the local architect but rather to cooperate with him"--by cultivating general interest in Pittco Store Fronts and particular interest in twelve of the company's latest designs which architects could then duplicate from the Design of the Month portfolio.[83] For this exhibition, which PPG dubbed the "Store Front Caravan" because it was mounted Agitprop-style in the back of a truck, Teague and his staff turned their storefront designs

---

Architectural Record 84 (November 1938): 39. See also Sweet's (1939), 19/5.

[80] For Design of the Month promotion see PPG, "For the Perfect Execution of the Store Fronts You Design," American Architect, 148 (March 1936): 15. For a discussion of this type of repetitive merchandising see Merchandising and Advertising Practices in the Building Material and Equipment Field, p. 12.

[81] Sweet's (1936), 17/19. For a complete list of the PPG designs see Walter Dorwin Teague Associates Invoice for Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, Job No. P-100, Store Front Construction, Shipments #2 & #8, Walter Dorwin Teague Collection, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University [NXSV1044-A]. See also Jeffrey Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), pp. 117-21.

[82] All of PPG's 74 distribution warehouses were located east of the Rockies. "Model Store Fronts Exhibited," New York Times, 9 September 1936, p. 38. The text of this article appears verbatim in several other publications; it appear to be taken from a PPG press release.

[83] "Store Front Designs in the Modern Mode," Building and Modernization, November 1936, p. 12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

into scale models fabricated of actual Carrara, Polished Plate, and Pittco Metal and finished with a high-degree of detail. At 1/7 scale (approximately 3.5' wide), with fully-detailed interiors and displays stocked with miniature merchandise, these models resembled traveling salesmen's samples as well as doll-houses, though the standard Victorian mansion was replaced by the streamlined store of a modernized Main Street. [Fig. 128].[84]

According to PPG, the Teague models embodied "the latest developments" in store front design, construction, lighting and color, which was accurate enough, though the formal vocabulary they employed was fairly well-established by the time the Caravan left Manhattan in September 1936. Nonetheless, they were visually more interesting than many of the storefronts PPG had typically featured in its promotional materials and Architectural Forum was probably right when it concluded that the models would be of "considerable influence in stimulating further remodeling plans."[85] Each of Teague's designs was a legible composition of four basic storefront elements--entrance, bulkhead, window, signboard--arranged to meet the retail needs of the specifically designated store, but also intended for easy adaptation to a variety of uses by altering the color scheme, window size, or typeface. Most had had flat facades with flush, off-center entrances, though a few models had slightly recessed doorways accommodating curving bulkheads, two-sided display cases, or a shadow box signboard, as on the haberdashery, luggage store, and fabric store respectively. The goal of the storefront models was to show Pittco products to their best advantage and demonstrate their potential range for architectural effects. To this end, Teague and his staff utilized as much Carrara and Pittco Metal as possible, often reducing the size of the display

---

[84] The models included a bakery, grocery, gift shop, shoe store, drug store, 5&10, haberdasher, dress shop, jeweler, luggage store, fabric store, and cocktail lounge/bar. All of the models are lost, as are most of Teague's designs (only four original drawings survive). To date, I have located images of seven. In 1939, PPG introduced a new series of Pittco miniatures displayed at the New York World's Fair and San Francisco's Golden Gate International Exposition. In New York, the company also erected full-size Pittco fronts on the Street of Tomorrow in the Forward March of American Buildings. In 1948, the PPG sent another storefront caravan on tour (designed by architect E.A. Lundberg) to "promote store modernization of an intelligent type." See "12 Store Modernizations," Progressive Architecture 29 (October 1948): 81-88.

[85] The Forum found them "superlative in craftsmanship and extremely interesting in design." See

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

windows to provide a greater facing surface. This sometimes produced fussy detailing, notably on the jewelry store facade with its excess of extruded bronze trim, and on the bar facade with its stepped-in bulkhead fabricated as four overlapping bands. Teague appears to have employed triple-color schemes for most of the models with black, white, or ivory as the dominant facing color and other Carrara shades as decorative trim (the only way these colors were then marketed): jade bands, orange letters, red stars. Overall, though the Caravan models were more restrained than many of the modernized storefronts which appeared on the nation's Main Streets by the end of the decade, they were fairly representative in color, massing, and signage [Figs. 129 & 130].

Judging from the amount of press it generated, the Storefront Caravan was an unqualified success, with favorable write-ups and photographs of the models appearing in numerous publications inside and outside of the building industry. The FHA even featured the Store Front Caravan in its January 1937 Clip Sheet with two photographs and a self-serving caption ("planned in conjunction with the Modernize Main Street campaign") available in a free mat for easy reproduction.[86] If one of the nation's largest manufacturers, with one of the nation's leading advertising firms in its employ, could not create sufficient Pittco publicity, the federal government was ready to lend a hand, but such was the reciprocal nature of the modernization movement. That nature would be demonstrated again and again throughout the decade, especially after the nation's other leading glass manufacturer joined the FHA's effort to promote building modernization and national recovery on Main Street America, simultaneously stimulating a series of promotional reactions from PPG which make it necessary to examine more closely PPG's motivations for hiring the firm of Walter Dorwin Teague in the summer of 1935.

As PPG explained it, the company's decision to seek the advice of "noted designer" Teague was motivated by "the belief that the next few years will see glass more strongly emphasized in

---

"Store Front Caravan," Architectural Forum 65 (November 1936): 42.

[86] "Model Windows," FHA Clip Sheet 11 (No. 4, 29 December 1936), n.p. See also "Three Store Front Modernization Suggestions," Real Estate Record, 19 September 1936, p. 14. "Store Front

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

building and decoration."[87] While PPG's anticipation of architectural trends may have appeared part of a forward-looking public relations offensive, it was equally part of a defensive strategy with respect to the Main Street market–for PPG was actually acting to protect its market share. This, however, would not have been immediately obvious in the summer of 1935 when PPG dominated the field of storefront modernization and sales of commercial architectural glass. Its advertisements were everywhere; its press coverage was positive; and it had just released a series of films, co-produced with Westinghouse in conjunction with the FHA, which championed store modernization as the path to national economic recovery.[88] The promotional effort which PPG began tentatively in 1933 and transformed into an aggressive publicity campaign in 1934 had yielded impressive results, bringing a noticeable upturn in sales and a concomitant increase in the company's net profits. By the end of June 1935, PPG reported a sales record of 10,000 modernized storefronts fully specified with Pittco products. Largely as a result of PPG's achievement, production of structural glass had rebounded, and by the end of 1935 it had reached nearly 2 million square feet, double what it had been the previous year.[89] But PPG's leadership in storefront modernization, in structural glass sales, and even in FHA cooperation, was about to be challenged. For in creating a promotional campaign which had so successfully attracted public attention, PPG had also attracted the attention of others in the glass industry, notably the firm of Libbey-Owens-Ford. At that moment PPG's chief plate glass competitor and overall corporate rival for the title of America's leading glass manufacturer was poised to take the lead in the nationwide effort to modernize Main Street with glass.

Caravan Starts Tour to Show New Arrangements," The Economist, 12 September 1936, p. 6.

[87] "Trade Announcements: Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company," Architectural Record 78 (December 1935): 34. Though the industry announcement was not made until December Teague had been working for PPG since the summer.

[88] PPG and Westinghouse produced four short films (10 minutes each) which it made available, free of charge, to local groups (BHPs, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, etc.) interested in lighting and modernization. I have been unable to locate these films. See "News of the Field: Films on Store Modernization," Architectural Record 78 (July 1935): 8.

[89] Figures cited in "Profits Report: Pittsburgh Plate Glass," New York Times, 14 March 1935, p. 33. "The Month in Building: Modernization," Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 5. Flat Glass and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Libbey-Owens-Ford

In March of 1935, as the FHA commenced the Main Street initiative and PPG officially launched its newly-named Pittco line of store front products, rival glass manufacturer Libbey-Owens-Ford (LOF) established a New Uses Department at its Toledo, Ohio, headquarters charged with the task of "creating glass business." Neither a research nor a sales department, New Uses was something in between; it was a merchandising department, the company's first, made necessary by the economic stagnation of the Depression. The department's business-creating agenda was clear: "to develop new uses of glass, to offer new designs of glass products, to stimulate glass in architecture." With LOF's product line then limited to plate, window, and safety glass, the department faced a formidable challenge, but over the next several years it developed a number of "specialty products" which became integral to LOF manufacturing and sales. All of these were storefront products; structural glass was the first.[90]

The company which set out to add structural glass to its product line in the spring of 1935 was at that time still a relatively young enterprise, having incorporated only in 1930. Nonetheless, LOF was already the second largest glass manufacturer in the country, formed through the merger of two venerable American glass works, Libbey-Owens Sheet Glass and Edward Ford Plate Glass. LOF's size and heritage all but guaranteed that it would become a major player in the glass industry, but the new company did not fare well in the early years of the Depression: its profits declined every year after the crash, hitting bottom in 1934–the same year PPG posted a 44% increase in profits and, not coincidentally, also began promoting the FHA program.[91] According to its 1934 Annual Report, LOF had itself been promoting the FHA program in the belief that it would be "productive of increased benefits to general business and particularly the building industry

---

Related Glass Products, p. 137.

[90] Harold M. Alexander, "Creating Glass Business," The Batch, March 1939, p. 2. Alexander was head of the New Uses Department. The Batch was LOF's monthly house organ.

[91] LOF was affected by a combination of declining prices and sales, but it still managed to stay marginally in the black that year.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

during the coming year [1935]." Though the company claimed to be "cooperating in every practicable way with the FHA" their efforts seem to have consisted mainly of internal promotion in which LOF encouraged employees to volunteer with the BHP and modernize their homes.[92]

With rival PPG showing increased sales and profits apparently as a result of its FHA tie-ins, and giving every indication that its promotion of modernization with Pittco-Carrara storefronts, would intensify throughout 1935, LOF knew that to cash in on the FHA program, in-house cooperation was not enough. It too would have to undertake an aggressive, external effort to promote modernization on Main Street. LOF also knew that in its long-term potential for generating corporate good will cooperating with the FHA had a business value greater than its immediate potential for increased sales. And since LOF's president, John Biggers, was, like the heads of PPG, Westinghouse, and other early FHA partners, a founding member of the Committee for Economic Recovery (vice-chairman during 1934 and 1935), LOF's policies were bound to reflect that body's avowed interest in government/business interaction. LOF's decision to launch an intensive promotional program for modernization in 1935 may have also been influenced by the personal efforts of FHA PR Director Ward Canaday, whose home-town lobbying on behalf of his agency and its programs would have been too persuasive for Biggers or his company to ignore.[93]

---

[92] 18th Annual Report for Year Ending 31 December 1934 (Toldedo: Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1935), pp. 5-6.

[93] Canaday was a Toledo businessman who, prior to joining the FHA, was chairman of the board of Willys-Overland Motors, Toledo's principal industrial concern after Libbey-Owens-Ford. That Canaday and Biggers knew each other is certain: both men were active in the local Chamber of Commerce and appeared together at numerous Toledo business and social events during the 1930s. Their personal relationship extended to their companies as well, since LOF supplied auto safety glass for Willys-Overland cars. In addition, and even more significant in terms of the publicity program LOF was about to commence, the United States Advertising Corporation, an agency founded by Canaday before he went to Willys-Overland and in which he still had an interest, had the LOF advertising account throughout the decade. It seems likely that Canaday, through his PR Division, would have made certain that Biggers, through LOF's government liaison in Washington, was informed of FHA developments relevant to the glass maker, such as Congressional passage of the $50,000 amendment to Title I. See *Clipping File and Chronological List of Events and Articles in Toledo Blade and New York Times*, Ward M. Canaday Collection, Ward M. Canaday Center, University of Toledo [Collection No. 072, Folders 8-10]. Unfortunately, among the personal papers of Canaday and Biggers preserved in Toledo, no pre-1945 correspondence has survived.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In March of 1935, when LOF established the New Uses Department to expand building industry markets for its glass products, it did so fully aware of the FHA's own activities in this area, confident that "prospects of increased buildings and store front modernization" were as good as the agency promised and that if LOF, like PPG, could supply the storefront materials, the FHA could create the demand. But what LOF must have soon realized, through the research of its New Uses Department, was that the material which appeared most likely to "be in increased demand during the next few years"--structural glass--was precisely the material which LOF did not have in its current product line. Feeling that the company needed this "important product to round out the line of flat glass offered through its distributors," LOF acted in the spring of 1935 to develop a structural glass worthy of the LOF name.[94] This the company accomplished through a big business tactic typical of the Depression, when so many small industrial firms were failing or strapped for cash: LOF bought a factory, the one manufacturing the only structural glass currently on the market with enough brand recognition to seriously challenge PPG's Carrara. This was Vitrolite, manufactured in a Parkersburg, West Virginia factory by the Vitrolite Company of Chicago, which became a division of LOF in late May 1935.

Prior to being acquired by LOF, the Vitrolite Company had done its best to remain competitive during the Depression, in the face of declining sales and Carrara's increasing market presence. The company continued to advertise Vitrolite in the early 1930s, and had recognized, earlier than PPG, the potential for marketing structural glass for "the modern trend in design" and for exterior uses "for the facing of entire buildings." Calling its glass a facing material "greatly used for store fronts" in the 1934 Chain Store Age Equipment Directory, Vitrolite released a new 16-page booklet titled Vitrolite Storefronts and Building Exteriors in an attempt to capture that burgeoning market for "modern storefronts."[95] Even before the Depression, Vitrolite had

---

[94] Quoted in 19th Annual Report for Year Ending 31 December 1935 (Toledo: LOF, 1936), p. 5.
[95] Sweet's Architectural Catalogue (1932), p. B2479. "Equipment and Construction Directory," Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. D7. See also Sweet's Catalogue File (1934), p. C131.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

recognized the advantages of promoting what were perceived as structural glass' inherently modern characteristics, rather than the material's associations with traditional cladding, and color in particular became an important marketing tool. Having introduced a range of hues as early as 1922, Vitrolite was immediately promoted as "the colorful structural glass" at a time when PPG was still emphasizing Carrara's resemblance to marble and jet.[96] Color remained the Vitrolite Company's distinguishing feature for its product until the moment it was acquired by LOF, when it was already available in ten colors and six additional variations. This was the structural glass, with its "rainbow of colors from which to choose," which LOF added to its product line in the summer of 1935 as it prepared to cooperate with the government's recovery effort and challenge PPG's dominance in the storefront modernization field.[97]

LOF's Modernize Main Street Competition

In purchasing the Vitrolite Company, LOF's timing could hardly have been better: the sale was finalized on May 22nd and a mere six days later, on May 28th, President Roosevelt signed the amended National Housing Act into law.[98] Before the President's ink was dry, LOF had placed two-page advertisements in the June issues of the four major architecture journals announcing its sponsorship of an architectural competition timed to coincide with the expansion of government-insured modernization credit. Calculated to make the LOF name synonymous with the FHA's effort to stimulate commercial building modernization, of stores in particular, the competition was called "Modernize Main Street." Though PPG had already been using this FHA-coined slogan in its advertisements, LOF strategically co-opted it and upstaged its chief competitor. So obvious a program tie-in as LOF's Modernize Main Street Competition could hardly have escaped FHA

---

[96] The early history of Vitrolite is described in Earl Aiken, "LOF at Parkersburg," The Batch, October 1939, p. 12. In the 1920s a variety of American manufacturers recognized the usefulness of color as a distinctive merchandising strategy. See Chapter 6.

[97] The Vitrolite Company advertisement, "Find Out How little It Costs to Beautify with Vitrolite," American Architect 146 (June 1935), p. 97.

[98] See Contract of Sale, dated 22 May 1935. [LOF Mss-066, Box 6, Folder 23]. LOF purchased the Vitrolite Company for $470,000.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

notice and given the close relationship between Canaday and Biggers, it may even have been planned with FHA input. In either case, Federal Housing Administrator Stewart McDonald gave the competition the equivalent of the agency's official endorsement on June 1st when he sent a letter to Biggers congratulating LOF for its contribution to the implementation of the amended NHA:

> Your new "Modernize Main Street" Architectural Competition is a most constructive and timely development in the growing interest in modernization and reviving construction. Your plan will stimulate the interest of many architects and builders and will encourage the specific action of business property owners throughout the country.[99]

McDonald was right when he predicted that LOF's competition, conducted for the company by The Architectural Record, would *stimulate the interest of many architects*, because of its timeliness and the growing professional interest in modernization to be sure, but also because many drafting tables were nearly empty in studios across the country. But the Modernize Main Street Competition also stimulated the interest of architects because it had been carefully orchestrated to do so by Kenneth K. Stowell, A.I.A.

Stowell served as the Professional Advisor to the competition, scripting the program, coordinating the entries, and selecting the jury. His participation was particularly auspicious since he was, at that moment, a leading authority on building modernization, his own book on the subject having been published shortly before the competition was announced. Stowell's Modernizing Buildings for Profit, was intended as a practical manual for architects, building managers, commercial property owners, their long-term tenants, and home owners. A comprehensive treatise on the subject, it covered such topics as how to determine a property's feasibility for modernization, how to finance modernization (he endorsed the MCP), and how to modernize a building's structure, equipment, and architectural style. The book also contained *before-and-after* case histories arranged by building type—offices and hotels, restaurants and bars, and shops and stores. His

---

[99] Letter from Stewart McDonald to John D. Biggers, reprinted in "Retail Store Planning," Architectural Record 78 (July 1935): 72.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

analysis of the latter in particular displayed an acute understanding of merchandising requirements and the competitive retail environment of the 1930s, as well as an awareness of the growth potential of the store modernization field as an increasing number of merchants were made to recognize—through a battery of persuasive arguments focused on the theory of obsolescence (see Chapter 6)—that "the appearance of the store is the first line of attack in the competition for customer patronage."[100] On the basis of this book alone Stowell would have appeared uniquely qualified to guide LOF's modernization competition, but he had other credentials as well. Until only two months before he had served as the editor of Architectural Forum, the most progressive of the major architecture journals, a position he used effectively during the Depression to advance the role of the profession in the recovery effort, but also to force architects to assume some responsibility for their own professional plight during the economic crisis. Stowell was an early and vigorous supporter of the National Housing Act who repeatedly used the pages of the Forum to call attention to its "great potentialities of good for the architect."[101] It was a belief in the value of modernization to the architecture profession and the knowledge that architects needed to be convinced of that value which led Stowell to organize a series of remodeling competitions in the fall of 1934. These would serve as a model for the competition he organized for LOF and Architectural Record the following summer.

In announcing that first modernization competition in Architectural Forum, Stowell was unequivocal in explaining the necessity and usefulness of such architectural events in a manner sympathetic to FHA arguments: in the current economic climate the profession needed to involve itself in "minor as well as major building rehabilitation"; modernization was a design challenge for "ingenious" architects. In addition, submitted entries for the competitions would fill a void since "there [was] a dearth of attractive illustrative material suitable for publication and exhibition"

---

[100] Kenneth K. Stowell, Modernizing Buildings for Profit (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1935), p. 3.
[101] Stowell, "The Editor's Forum: The National Housing Act," Architectural Forum 60 (June 1934): 25. Coverage of modernization in the architecture journals is discussed below.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which urgently needed to be publicized as "good precedent" in order to "improve public standards of taste" in commercial and residential design.[102] This was an ambitious agenda, one which remained arguably unrealized at the close of the first competition in November when fewer than 250 entries had been submitted for "a modernized kitchen" in a "reasonably well-to-do" household designed for "a progressive housewife." It seems likely that the program requirements--a $1,500 budget and specifications limited to products supplied by sponsoring manufacturers--were too rigid and the competition prizes--$500 in total--too small to attract an more than middling attention from the profession.[103] While the competition was intended as a practical exercise in the kind of design work architects could reasonably expect to secure in the coming months, given the profession's much-discussed apathy toward modernization as fiscally unremunerative, aesthetically unrewarding, and, given its sales aspect, even professionally distasteful, the limited kitchen modernization competition did not pique architects' interest sufficiently to overcome their prejudices.

In writing the program for LOF's Modernize Main Street Competition Stowell avoided a number of mistakes which were all too apparent in the earlier program, noticeable first and foremost in the pay-out. When the Main Street Competition was announced in June, LOF was offering $11,000 in cash prizes for twelve major awards and forty honorable mentions. Included were four first prizes of $1,000 to be awarded to the best design solution to each of the competition's four (A-D) problems, requiring the modernization of a drug store, an apparel shop, a food store, and an automotive service station respectively. If the hypothetical modernization of Main Street retail units was less glamorous than designing skyscrapers, and less noble than planning public housing, it had more appeal than remodeling kitchens. Whether it was the prize money or

---

[102] "The Architectural Forum Remodeling Competitions," Architectural Forum 61 (October 1934): 9.

[103] "Competition for the Design of a Remodeled Kitchen," Architectural Forum 61 (October 1934: 11-12. See also "Remodeled Kitchen Competition: Report of the Jury," Architectural Forum 62 (March 1935): 236-40.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the program, by its August deadline LOF's competition had attracted the attention of more than 3,000 architects--nearly one third of all those registered in the United States in 1935--many of whom submitted multiple designs for more than one of the program's store categories.[104] That program, published in the July 1935 issue of Architectural Record, was designed by Stowell to allow competitors great latitude in approach and execution. It stipulated no fixed budget for the exterior and interior modernization of each store type and gave competitors "complete freedom [...] in regard to style, design, and the materials and methods of construction."[105] That stated, potential entrants were well aware that $50,000 insured loans were now allowable under the revised regulations of the MCP and that the competition was being prominently sponsored by Libbey-Owens-Ford to promote the use of Vitrolite and other plate glass products, in storefront modernization.[106] However much the desirabilty of using Vitrolite or plate glass may have been implied in the program, it was never explicitly stated. To have done so would have revealed the competition as merely self-serving in the short term, as an obvious LOF publicity gimmick, rather than as an altruistic attempt by the corporation to contribute to national recovery by cultivating in architects an interest in store modernization to benefit themselves, their merchant clients, and the communities in which they did business. But the result was the same regardless of the promotional spin: to create broader and sustainable markets for LOF products in order to increase their sales.

From the moment it announced the Modernize Main Street Competition, LOF sought to make clear that it was attempting not only to sell its glass products, but to foster an activity of national import: "The Main Street of every city, town, village and community has at least these four

---

[104] Records of the exact number of entries do not exist and the original entry drawings are not preserved in LOF's corporate archives.

[105] Stowell, "Modernize Main Street Competition Program," Architectural Record 78 (July 1935): supplement, 2.

[106] All entrants were required to submit an outline sheet detailing their design's storefront materials. This sheet contained twenty-one specifications for glass, including show windows, bulkheads, exterior facings, signboards, and doors all of which could be fabricated of products manufactured by LOF. The program assured designers that material specifications would not be a factor in jury decisions. Rather they would be used to augment publication of the winning designs by LOF who owned the all designs once they were submitted. See "Competition Program," pp. 7-8.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

[drug, apparel, food, auto service] business establishments. Better merchandising demands the modernization of thousands of them and better financing makes it possible." The purpose of this new demand for modernization was clear, to create in the customer "the urge to purchase"--an act that was, in itself, regarded in the mid-1930s nearly as a patriotic duty. That LOF was cognizant of the seriousness with which store modernization was then imbued was made clear when it addressed the design community: "On the architects, draftsmen and designers of the country rests the responsibility for the effectiveness of these modernizations both economically and aesthetically."[107] As further emphasis, the announcement carried two bands of photographs depicting those nation-wide Main Streets whose stores *demanded* modernization [Fig. 131]. Though a few vacant buildings appeared as a visible reminder of the Depression, the majority of the buildings were occupied and ordinary. They were not especially in disrepair; they were merely undistinguished and old-fashioned with painted valances, appended signs, and symmetrically-disposed facades. In Stowell's view they were thus emblematic of the architectural hodgepodge which characterized America's business streets (see Chapter 4).[108] If this unrarified tableaux of the everyday--the Uptown Pharmacist, the Downtown Market--was a startling presence on the as yet hidebound pages of Pencil Points and American Architect, where Neoclassical libraries and rustic Norman-style houses were more typical fare, it was merely a portend of things to come, as Main Street became, if only for a few years in the 1930s, increasingly prominent in the discourse of American architecture (see below).

The implied everydayness of the photographs accompanying the competition announcement was made explicit in Stowell's program which was worded to seem civic-minded and democratic and to appear to make a significant contribution to an architectural problem of which critics and planners were becoming increasingly aware: the redesign of Main Street. Thus,

---

[107] LOF, "'Modernize Main Street' Competition," announcement, Architectural Forum 62 (June 1935): 29.
[108] See Modernizing Buildings for Profit, p. 164.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Stowell directed competitors to assume that these stores were utterly typical, occupying standard 25' frontages and "serv[ing] an average American community rather than the luxury class." In addition, the design problems were not intended to address the concerns of "a particular existing store," rather, they were intended as "hypothetical" problems, representing a particular *type* of existing store.[109] This stipulation would insure that the modernizing schemes had broad, post-competition applicability–crucial, from the sponsor's point of view, to their post-competition marketability as promotions for LOF's Vitrolite and plate glass products. According to the program, the successful modernization scheme for each store category would place the requirements of merchandising above all other concerns, focusing in particular on the design of the facade to "establish the character of the store" in a manner "consistent with the quality of the merchandise." The goal, as Stowell explained it to architects potentially unfamiliar with the programmatic functions of the storefront, was to attract the attention of the public, "to make the passer *buy* (italics his), inviting him or her to stop and shop." Inside, the layout and appointments were required to "fulfill the promise of the front" in terms of its display of goods and services for sale, serving as a discreet architectural background for merchandise placed "in the foreground of the customers' consciousness."[110] Stowell was clearly seeking what might be called universal solutions to the store modernization problem, as evidenced by the generalized Main Street conditions with which competitors were presented and the freedom of design they were allowed. Nonetheless, Stowell appended a few design qualifications obviously calculated to insure that every submitted

---

[109] "Competition Program," pp. 4-6, 2. To a certain extent, this also meant that the submitted schemes would not be *modernizations* in any real sense, since they did not have to deal with the exigencies of an existing building–with, for example, an oddly-placed structural column or an inconvenient entrance to an upper story. Indeed, in the auto service station problem, it was even permissible for competitors to tear down the existing building in order to use the lot most effeciently. Thus, in a sense the submitted schemes were *new* store designs fitted to standard lots, identified as modernizations because it was politically and promotionally expedient to do so.

[110] "Competition Program," pp. 1-2. In addition, the schemes were required to meet the special merchandising needs and facilitate the particular selling activities of each store type, with drug store soda fountains and lunch counters, gas station service bays, apparel shop changing rooms, etc.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

scheme, regardless of individual quality, would at the very least serve as a corrective to what were regarded as some of Main Street's most eggregious visual afflictions.

First, signs were not permitted to extend more than 18" beyond the building line. This allowed narrow marquees and silhouette letters at the roof line, but eliminated projecting signs which, critics complained, plagued the typical Main Street. In terms of the competition, this requirement forced designers to consider more carefully the relationship between sign and facade, treating them as integrated, rather than independent, compositional units--a conscious integration of sign and facade which would characterize the best commercial design on Main Street in the 1930s. The second design qualification stipulated that show windows could not extend beyond the lot lines. This requirement eliminated a display strategy merchants and their designers sometimes used (when not prohibited by zoning regulations) to maximize the so-called power of the front by pushing the display windows one and even two feet into the pedestrian space of the sidewalk, attracting the attention of potential customers because they were literally forced to step around the protruding displays. This was undesirable, not only because it was an obnoxious form of retailing, but because it was visually disruptive, creating an irregular streetline. For Modernize Main Street competitors, this requirement meant that any window not flush with the facade, no matter how minimal its projection, necessitated a set back of the bulkheads equal to the projection of the windows.[111] These design qualifications represented an attempt to regulate Main Street's much criticized visual cacophony through self-imposed standards of commercial design as applied to the standard front, and however tentative and preliminary Stowell's attempt at architectural intervention, his larger purpose was not lost on the competition's jury. Indeed, in their report the jury went so far as to commend Stowell for the service he rendered "in the interest of raising the standard of public taste and comercial design."[112]

---

[111] "Competition Program," p. 2.

[112] J. André Fouilhoux, et al, "Jury Report for Modernize Main Street Competition," Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 209. The full text of the report appears in 52 Designs to Modernize

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

That jury, which met in late August and announced its decisions in October, was a seven-man committee whose general make-up of five architects and two merchandising experts clearly reflected the aspirations of the program and whose individual membership clearly reflected the prominence of the competition (or at least the good connections of advisor Kenneth Stowell) [Figs. 132 & 133]. Chaired by J. André Fouilhoux, the jury also included Albert Kahn, William Lescaze, John Wellborn Root, and Ralph Walker. Presumably each was selected for the particular expertise he would contribute to an evaluation of Main Street designs and it is tempting to speculate on the fittness of the jury to the task at hand. Was Kahn's utilitarian approach to architectural problems (in his factories) well-suited to judging whether the entries satisfied the functional requirements of selling, especially in terms of plan and equipment? Were Lescaze and Walker able to appraise the street-level showmanship of the designs in terms of the modernist brio they displayed? Most members of the jury were already involved in commercial modernization projects, noteably Lescaze, whose work for CBS included a bravura transformation of the interior of Herbert Krapp's Hammerstein Theater in which he inserted a sleek white broadcast studio into a gothic shell, left undisturbed and visible above the balcony, resulting in a startling contrast of old and new that was especially relevant to modernization on Main Street.[113] The other members of the jury brought specific knowledge of retail environments which the architects may have lacked. Kenneth C. Welch, for example, was a designer with the Grand Rapids Store Equipment Company, one of the country's largest manufacturers of store fixtures and furnishings and a frequent contributor to the architecture journals of articles in which he demystified the science of merchandising, revealing, for example, why some shops needed deep display windows and some shallow; why some needed low bulkheads and other high ones.[114]

Main Street with Glass (Toledo: Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company, 1935), pp. 2-6.

[113] On Lescaze at CBS see Robert A.M. Stern et al, New York 1930 (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), pp. 265-8. This is the studio now occupied by *The Late Show with David Letterman.*

[114] See for example, Kenneth C. Welch, "The Apparel Store," Architectural Record 78 (July 1935): 62-64.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It was most likely the input of the two merchandising experts which allowed the jury to quickly eliminate "many creditable designs" among the 3,000 submissions because they did not constitute "solution[s] for successful merchandising." This issue appears to have been the single most important factor in determining the winning entries. Indeed, the consideration the jury gave to a design's materials, colors, and style was based on its contribution to this major objective of the program: to attract attention and display goods to their best advantage. Thus, the jury evaluated how well the architect had "analyzed both the actions and reactions of the purchasers, and the psychology, methods, and routine of selling."[115] In other words, prizes were awarded to those 52 designs which would appeal most directly to Main Street merchants contemplating modernization.[116]

As a group these winning storefront designs were remarkably coherent in style and materials. Nearly all the designs made extensive use of plate glass and, since the competitors were mindful of their sponsors, of Vitrolite as well [Fig. 134]. Most were trimmed with extruded metal fittings of chrome, stainless steel, aluminum, or bronze. Signage typically complemented the metal

---

[115] "Jury Report," p. 209.

[116] The winning designers represented a cross-section of young architects in the United States in the mid-1930s and included a considerable number of ethnic professionals, which is not surprising in an era when architecture was still dominated by WASPs who generally received the largest and most prominent commissions, forcing Jews, Italians, and Turks, to base their practices on the infill, the buildings of everyday life. The majority of these designers, most of whom were based in New York City, had completed their architectural training (at places like MIT, Columbia, Pratt, Ohio State, and Georgia Tech) after 1929. This meant that the path to conventional practice would be circuitous at best due to the building slowdown. While a number of these young architects were working for firms such as Shreve, Lamb, & Harmon, Howe & Lescaze, and for store designer Vahan Hagopian, others had found employment in advertising and merchandising, working for department stores like B. Altman and Lord & Taylor. Still others were participating in New Deal-sponsored public works under the aegis of the Tennessee Valley Authority and the New York City Housing Authority. And others, finally, found themselves in "private practice" which too often at the time meant they were under- or un-employed. Not all of the winners were novices: Royal Barry Wills, whose keen sense of professional self-promotion was discussed in the last chapter, partnered with a young Hugh Stubbins to earn an Honorable Mention for a Food Store design. Alfred Clauss, who took first prize in the Automotive Service Station category, had already passed through the offices of Mies van der Rohe and Howe & Lescaze, where he assisted on such noteable projects as the Barcelona Pavilion and the PSFS Building. In addition he had co-designed a gas station prototype for the Standard Oil Company of Ohio which Hitchcock and Johnson selected for the International Style Show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1932. See "Prize Winners," Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 210.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

trim, frequently with the addition of neon, though cut Vitrolite letters were not uncommon. According to the jury, these materials were utilized with a high degree of "workmanship" in compositions distinguished by an overall "simplicity" rather than "extravagance" in design.[117] This was a crucial distinction in the Depression era when formal concerns, especially in the context of building modernization, were imbued with national social significance and the line between simplicity and extravagence was the line between a serious response to the economic crisis and a frivolous flouting of it. Circa 1935, a formal extravagance was synonymous with American commercial design of the late 1920s–those skyscrapers, department stores, movie palaces, and (luxury) shop fronts which boasted lavish decorative programs of repeated fields (floral, chevrons, frozen fountain), patterned tiling and brickwork, and embossed metal work, much of it custom detailed and hand finished. The winning Main Street entries must be set in opposition to these immediate commercial precedents in order to properly understand their so-called simplicity, which does not imply a visual austerity, but rather an effort to create visual interest more through the manipulation of the basic compositional elements of the storefront, rendered in a few basic building materials, than through additive decorative effects. Nonetheless, French-inflected modernistic elements redolent of the 1920s are apparent in more than one design, especially in the apparel shop schemes where vestigial fluting and stylized plant motifs, not to mention names like "Charliet" and "Chanel" which signified Parisian fashionability and stylishness for Main Street shops far removed from the Rue de la Paix.[118]

Such elements were simply part of the broadly-defined modern syntax in which all 52 winning entries were articulated. This syntax was inflected by other European modernisms as well, due to the slowly growing awareness of, and interest, in the International Style–as promulgated by

---

[117] "Jury Report" in 52 Designs, p. 2. The comments of the jury were largely confined to the storefronts since this was the principal vehicle for fulfilling the program mandate to "attract the public," the principle vehicle for promoting LOF products, and the store feature most likely to be modernized. The analysis which follows also focuses on the storefronts.

[118] See for example, the apparel shop schemes of John Hironimus and Donald Douglass in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hitchcock and Johnson, who included a number of commercial/retail buildings in their 1932 exhibition and book, but also as found in such publications as Frederick Kiesler's Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and its Display (1930) and Adolf Schuhmacher's Ladenbau (1934) [Figs. 135-139]. These profusely illustrated books were frequently cited in the American architectural press as references for store design and modernization, noteably in the guide to "Retail Store Planning" which Architectural Record published in July 1935 in conjunction with the competition program.[119] Though the individual winning designs varied, all of the storefronts borrowed from these diverse sources, filtered through publications and exhibitions, and modified by the requirements of competitive retailing into a series of identifiable features: flattened planes and poster-like facades, often highly-colored, asymmetrical compositions with strongly defined horizontals and verticals, curved bulkheads, signage expressed in bold graphics with contemporary typefaces [Figs. 140 & 141]. While many of these formal features were already gaining architectural currency in the United States, the Main Street entries surely fostered their further dissemination. By the end of the decade, these features, the ubiquity of which rendered them near clichés, would be codified as that uniquely American manifestation of architectural modernism known as the streamlined storefront.

In the Main Street competition, the winning entries which most dynamically embodied a modern architectural syntax were those of the Drug Store, the designers having perhaps been motivated by a desire to express laboratory-like efficiencey in their schemes. In addition, according to the jury, "the modern drug store represent[ed] the last word in up-to-date retailing." Of necessity, that up-to-dateness was legibly conveyed to the public through deliberate visual effects the use of which eventually became so common that the term "Drug Store Modern" entered the architectural

---

"Competition Awards" in 52 Designs, pp. 231 & 239.

[119] See "Retail Store Planning," 49-71. Both books are included on the reference bibliography on p. 58. In addition, illustrations from Ladenbau appear on pp. 53, 64-5. Lest architects not make the connection between the store planning guide and the Main Street competition, they are brought together in the editorial on page 72.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

lexicon.[120] M. Righton Swicegood's first prize drug store design achieved just the right balance according to the jury, being "entirely modern" and "original without being bizarre" [Fig. 142].[121] The principal facade of this corner drug store was a straightforward arrangement of entrance, windows, and signage, but through Swicegood's careful placement of storefront elements and accenting colors it became a striking graphic composition, recalling J.J.P. Oud's Café de Unie (which was published in Kiesler's book) or even one of Joost Schmidt's posters for the Weimar Bauhaus, translated (but just barely) into three-dimensions. Most of the facade was treated as a flat white field defined by the modular unit of a 2' x 2' Vitrolite panel. On the lower left side of this field, Swicegood introduced a strong horizontal element with the deep orange of the high bulkhead and the red trim of the elongated display window. Though a note of vertical tension occurred in the off-center, double-doors and shadow box display, the horizontality was further emphasized by the placement of the metal and neon sign letters, especially "prescriptions," stretched across the upper right of the facade as a balancing element.

Dominant horizontals defined by narrow ribbon-like windows, appropriate for the display of small merchandise, and accented by striated metal moldings, appear in almost every winning drug store scheme, but several share with Swicegood's what might loosely be called medical iconography, the use of which the jury particularly approved. Occurring in varying degrees of abstraction in each design, this icongography acknowledged the original pharmaceutical function of the modern drug store which was often overshadowed by fountain sodas, cigars, candies, and cosemetics, which contemporary druggists had to dispense in addition to prescriptions to stay in business.[122] In the first place design, the cleanly antiseptic whiteness of the Vitrolite facade signaled the pharmacy within; in the second place design (by G. Foster Harrell), two yellow

---

[120] This according to Henry-Russell Hitchcock in 1951, who credits William Wurster with the term's coinage. See Hitchcock, "The International Style Twenty Years After" in Architecture Culture, 1943-1968, ed. Joan Ockman (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), p. 139.
[121] 52 Designs, pp. 8 & 23.
[122] See Jury Report in 52 Designs, p. 24.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Vitrolite crosses set against a red Vitrolite background were evocative of the Red Cross symbol to the jury and "suggest[ed] the high professional standing of the establishment" [Fig. 143].[123]

Swicegood's curved bulkhead was also used to great effect in the majority of drug store schemes. A typical usage, which would become popular in the coming years, was to flank a recessed entrance with curved display units. Store designers and retailing experts alike believed this would guide pedestrians into the store in a fluid, frictionless pull--a psychological application of the physical dynamics of streamlining. If the store occupied a corner rather than mid-block site, the same retail logic required that curve to smoothly make the turn, as in Melvin Wolfson's scheme which, with its addition of metal "speed line" bands turning the corner with the glass and the juxtaposition of signage in radically differing scales, defined what would become a nearly iconic formulation of the streamlined storefront [Fig. 144].[124]

Wolfson's dynamically asymmetrical composition was far removed aesthetically from George Foster Harrell's statically symmetrical Food Store, which took first prize in that category. Harrell divided his storefront into two roughly equal horizontal registers [Fig. 145]. The lower area encompassed the centrally-placed entrance, recessed behind relatively low curved bulkheads and flanked by generously-sized display windows. The bulkheads and side panels were faced in "corregated terrazo [sic]"; the entrance was fitted with two brass-trimmed doors, one each for entrance and exit--a movement echoed in the placement of the monogram panels above. Harrell also used orange neon sign letters (an ultra-thin type adapted from the "Broadway" typographic series), resting on the slightly projecting awning box which divided the storefront's dark lower zone from the white Vitrolite upper zone. This was "a pleasing division" according to the jury, which successfully attracted attention through its chromatic contrast. Harrell's compositional directness and the "simple dignity" of his design reflected the public image the grocery trade consciously cultivated in the belief that a *nothing fancy, nothing flashy* approach to food retailing--with produce

[123] "Competition Awards, p. 211.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and canned goods simply and openly displayed--was most appealing to consumers.[125] This show-it-all merchandising impulse, largely related to the development of self-service, eventually led designers to open up the grocery facade with enlarged windows used as much to reveal the store interior as to display grocery merchandise.

The majority of Food Store winners moved even further in this direction than Harrell's design, toward facades with ever larger expanses of plate glass.[126] Though more open, these other Main Street Food Store designs were similar in many other respects to Harrell's scheme. H.K. Bieg attained a broad transparent extent by lowering his store's bulkheads [Fig. 146]. Into these tall windows he installed angled metal baskets for displays of produce. Suspended dramatically close to the glass front and filled with fruits and vegetables, these baskets functioned as a colorful tableaux to attract passers-by and as a modernized/sanitized equivalent of the traditional sidewalk produce display, which was increasingly condemned by food retailers as unsanitary and unattractive. Theodore Voyvodick and J.J. Pankuch also created a modern equivalent of the sidewalk display--one which was not only sanitary, but maintenance free [Fig. 147]. They faced the upper area of their storefront with an inlaid Vitrolite mural of fruits, vegetables, fish, meat, flour, and assorted packaged foods emblematic of the machine age cornucopia the modern grocery store increasingly represented, as improved shipping and distribution was improving the quality and quantity of food stuffs available year-round and across the country. This mural's colorful pattern, dominated by green, red, and yellow and repeated in densely packed fields across the storefront, recalls the fabrics of Ruth Reeves who incorporated elements of everyday life into her American

---

[124] "Competition Awards," p. 223. The color scheme was blue and orchid.
[125] "Competition Awards," p. 240. See also, 52 Designs, p. 8. Here the jury cites food retailing expert Carl Dipman, author of The Modern Grocery Store and editor of Progressive Grocer.
[126] Only one winning food store design deviated from this approach. Nowland van Powell used enlarged portholes for his grocery facade which the jury noted was "an unusual type of window treatment for a food market." It seems to have won a mention because the jury considered it a good design easily adaptable for other types of business. 52 Designs, p. 17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Scene textiles designs. The grocery mural met with the approval of the jury. Not only was it "unusually clever" and disctinctive, it "definitely stamps [the building] as a food store."[127]

The facades of several other winning grocery stores were less visually engaging than the mural front, but were more spatially compelling. These designs, including one by the team of Waldorf and Katz which took second prize, purposefully blurred the boundaries between exterior and interior in pursuit of better merchandising. Fitted with glass fronted doors which could be folded or slid out of sight, these facades permitted a completely open-fronted store when weather allowed. This removal of the final barrier between potential customer and the store interior would, it was hoped, increase foot traffic, and sales, as shoppers casually moved from sidewalk to store with the decision to shop rendered nearly unconscious.

The opposite effect was intentionally achieved by the elaborate window arrangements of the apparel shop designs, which drew upon a different set of merchandising necessities than the food store. The first prize winner in that category, by Suren Pilafian and Maurice Lubin, was sleekly sophisticated [Fig. 148]. A purposefully luxurious essay in black Vitrolite, it at once recalled the decorative schemes of the early 1930s and anticipated the formal arrangements of the decade's end. The entrance to the store was recessed beyond a bowed front which created a deep vestibule, semi-circular in plan, with faceted plate glass displays rising above a very low bulkhead. With a six foot clearance, these displays easily accomodated dresses and gowns, while smaller accessories were displayed in the raised shadow box cases flanking the vestibule. These Pilafian and Lubin created by eliminating the side panels and pushing the plate glass (and hence displayable space) to the extreme edges of the property, thus utilizing the full extent of the projected Main Street frontage. This had the added benefit of increasing potential sidewalk sight lines of displayed merchandise as pedestrians approached from either side. To further enhance merchandise visibility the architects backed the windows with mirrors. Such devices most likely led the jury to observe

---

[127] 52 Designs, p. 12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that the design "center[ed] attention on the merchandise rather than on the structure itself."[128] A uniform use of black Vitrolite across the entire facade, on the vestibule ceiling, and in the floors of the displays contributed to this effect since it allowed (window) shoppers to focus their attention on the apparel and accessories undistracted by other colors and materials. Even the signage was purposefully discreet so as not to overwhelm the merchandise: thin chromium steel letters affixed to the lintel area, flanked by four thin chrome bars extending horizontally to the edge of the principle displays. The architects dealt similarly with the necessary window settings, articulating the sashes to minimize the transition from black glass to clear glass, thus eliminating another element which would have called attention to itself rather than to the dresses on display. Few store designs built in the coming years would be so deferential.

Sincere deference toward the merchandise was coupled with calculated ingratiation toward the customer in the embracing configuration of the faceted vestibule which attempted to lure those customers into the store, as Lewis Mumford later put it, on "the same principle by which a pitcher plant captures flies or an old-style mousetrap catches mice."[129] Mumford's astute analysis of the retail function of the store vestibule came in 1939, in a critical piece discussing the newest storefronts of Fifth Avenue, in particular Morris Ketchum's design for Ciro Jewelers, which carried Pilafian/Lubin design to its logical conclusion, expressing the vestibule as a fully circular space, a generously proportioned outdoor room which also increased the display window area [Figs. 149 & 150]. In the four years that separate these two designs, the vestibule would become one of the principal sites for the architectural manipulation of the storefront. Indeed, its potential for spatial expressions of modernist scenography (especially in the hands of designers like Morris Lapidus) matched only by the graphic potential of the storefront's poster-like upper facade. A number of other prize winning designs in the apparel shop category of the Main Street competition serve as a

---

[128] "Jury Report," p. 224.
[129] Lewis Mumford, "The Sky Line: New Faces on the Avenue," New Yorker, 9 September 1939, p. 62.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

kind of preview of the vestibule plans which would become so popular in the mid to late 1930s, sometimes with simply massed forms, sometimes with almost baroque configurations of space, always with a defiant asymmetry intend to stamp the store as modern. The most striking in this regard are the third prize winner by Raoul DuBrul and Harry Trivisonno and an honorable mention by Joseph Hirschman.

In the DuBrul/Trivisonno design, the vestibule opened beyond a "horizontal keyhole" framing the facade's plate glass displays with an enlarged circular termination, the scale and shape of which, according to the jury, "automatically makes it the center of interest" [Fig. 151].[130] The vestibule itself was given a splayed configuration meant to draw customers toward the door and into an ancillary display area, giving them a rear view of the circular show window which traversed the depth of the vestibule. In Hirschman's design, the display unit providing directional pull from sidewalk to vestibule to door was even more acutely angled, its inward movement further emphasized, indeed exaggerated, by the installation of a triangular valance that created a kind of forced perspective carrying the eye toward the depth of the vestibule [Fig. 152]. Hirschman's design was a play of surface and depth full of such small visual manipulations: opposite the main display, he placed a raised shadow box flush with the facade, trimming its round corners in stainless steel which continued across the void of the vestibule only to be stopped in mid air when there was no window to receive it. Expectations were similarly defied when that shadow box entered the depth of the vestibule in an obtuse angle instead of a curve. The upper facade was less confounding, but still played with surface and depth. Articulated as inscribed rectangular fields of colored porcelain enamel (the rare winner that did not specify Vitrolite) which moved from royal blue to white to yellow and from flat facade to projecting frame to receding trough providing a backing for stainless steel silhouette letters. As with the keyhole front of the DuBrul & Trivisonno scheme, the detailed visual effects of Hirschman's facade surely fulfilled the functional requirement

[130] "Competition Awards," p. 224.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of attracting the public, but therein lay the danger, for it was a thin aesthetic line between attracting the public and distracting the public and, as the competition jury observed, these designs, however "well-studied," might have focused too much attention on themselves and not enough on the displays.[131] This would remain the dilemma for architects throughout the decade as they attempted to satisfy merchants who demanded the newest, boldest, most modern-looking shop on the street. As Main Street became increasingly modernized after 1935, meeting this demand meant continually pumping up the volume of the design and, as critics would later complain, loud designs only added to Main Street's existing visual chaos. Thus, modernized buildings may have looked new but, from a critical perspective, they were not always improved. However, in October of 1935, as these 52 winning designs were just beginning to circulate in the architectural profession, such problems were still largely in the future.

In its report, the jury was unequivocal about the impact these designs would have on the commercial landscape of the United States with Fouilhoux, Kahn, Lescaze, Walker, et al., concluding that the winners would have "a far-reaching effect on raising the standards of store design," on directing architects' interest in the modernization field, and on providing merchants with "a guide as to what an intelligent public taste will demand." Even more emphatically, they declared that the designs they had selected would "stimulate the interest and imagination of store owners throughout the country and induce them to bring their stores up to date," especially given the timeliness of the competion, "synchronize[d] with the government's extensive program to 'Modernize Main Street'."[132] This, they believed somewhat optimistically, would produce two inevitable results, both of them ultimately beneficial to the architecture profession. One was economic, the other was aesthetic:

> The results of the expenditures for these alterations on the building and allied industries should be tremendous. From a professional point of view it will be gratifying to see the gospel of

[131] "Competition Awards," p. 224.
[132] "Jury Report," p. 209.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> good design and good taste permeating through the thousands of Main Streets all over the country. Through such influence unconsciously the people at large will demand better standards of architecture in large as well as small building operations. [133]

If store building activity and the photographic record of modernized stores are any indication, the jury's predictions were not far wrong as these winning, and oft-published designs, and countless others they inspired, moved from paper to pavement and from colored pencil to colored glass along seemingly every Main Street in the country [Fig. 153 & Fig. 154].[134]

The jury also predicted that the winning designs would be widely circulated and much discussed which they were in the fall and winter of 1935-36. To the undoubted satisfaction of LOF and the FHA, the results of the Modernize Main Street Competition, including the jury's salutary comments, were exceptionally well-publicized in building industry and retail trade journals. In addition to the Architectural Record's comprehensive coverage, Pencil Points, Architectural Forum, and the National Real Estate Journal, as well as Drug Topics, Progressive Grocer, Apparel Arts, and Gasoline Retailer, all published a selection of prize-winning entries throughout the fall of 1935, usually with pro-modernization captions enjoining architects to design and merchants to commission similar schemes for commercial property improvements.[135] Building Modernization used its coverage of the winning designs to innaugurate a new monthly feature, a "Modernizing Main Street" column.[136] The competition was considered newsworthy even by the advertising

---

[133] "Jury Report" in 52 Designs, p. 2.

[134] As the competition came to a conclusion, its professional adviser Ken Stowell was himself convinced it would have its intended stimulating effect and that architects and manufacturers would throw themselves wholeheartedly into modernization, if only because they were still waiting for the government make good on various New Deal promises of large-scale housing projects. In a November letter to Frederic Delano, then chair of the Central Housing Committee and the National Resources Commmittee, Stowell predicted that since there would be a long wait for housing, in the meantime "the building industry would turn with renewed effort to Modernizing Main Street." Kenneth Stowell to Frederick Delano, Letter dated 5 November 1935. [NA RG 207, Recs of the HHFA, Recs of the CHC, Gen Recs of the Exec Sec, BOX 9].

[135] See, for example, "Modernizing Main Street: Selected Designs," Pencil Points 16 (October 1935): 501-19. "Forum of Events: Winners in Modernize Main Street Competition," Architectural Forum 63 (October 1935): 78, 81.

[136] "Modernizing Main Street: A Few Designs and Comments," Building Modernization, October 1935, pp. 9-15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

monthly Tide, which discussed the winning designs on its marketing page and hailed LOF's success in capitalizing on and fostering the public's interest in modernization.[137]

Not surprisingly, LOF itself extensively promoted the results of the competition in product literature and advertisements throughout the fall of 1935 and the spring of 1936 [Fig. 155]. Having sponsored the Main Street competition to "crystallize the most competent thought on the subject [of modernization]," LOF could confidently announce that the prize winning designs "represent[ed] the best architectural thinking that has been applied to modernizing for profit" and "the most authoritative thought yet put upon the problem." As testimony to that authority, LOF reported that "the architectural profession generally acclaims the Modernize Main Street Competition...as one of the most interesting and helpful efforts of its kind in many years." No ad was complete without a plug for LOF products, usually in copy made to seem as if it was a detached critical conclusion drawn from the results of the Main Street competion: "it is significant that the various kinds of flat glass dominate practically all designs" or "various kinds of glass, a comparatively inexpensive building material, dominate almost all current architectural treatments of the modernized store." Since LOF now owned all of the submitted entries, the company could back up these statements with graphic proof of their validity, offering illustrations of the winning designs themselves, appropriately captioned to draw attention to the "arresting effects produced by an intelligent combination of Vitrolite, modern metal trim and clear, sparkling Polished Plate Glass" (even if the architect had not originally specified LOF products or even structural glass).[138] The designs temporarily filled a serious void in the company's promotional portfolio, since LOF did not yet possess those mainstays of modernization advertising--before and after photographs of buildings remodeled using the manufacturers' products. Even after such images of Vitrolite installations

---

[137] "Boom," Tide, October 1935. Cited in FHA Press Digest.
[138] LOF advertisement, "To Keep in Step with Competition," Chain Store Age, December 1935, p. 79. LOF advertisement, [no headline], advertisement, Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 95. "52 Prize-Winning Designs," Building Modernization, November 1935, p. 3. LOF advertisement, "Glass Dominates Designs for Modernization," Architectural Forum 63 (December 1935): 50.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

became available LOF continued to use the Main Street designs for advertising and promotional purposes. Even as late as 1939, Main Street Competition designs appeared in a pamphlet prepared for distribution at LOF's "Glass Carnival" corporate pavilion at the Golden Gate International Exposition.[139]

However convincing the competition designs might have been as advertising illustrations, this was not the limit of their promotional use. In order "to make the results [of the competition] even more far reaching," the company intended to release the schemes as "prize-winning designs for modernizing building property and making it produce a profit with LOF products."[140] By November, LOF had prepared a full-color book reproducing every winning scheme with elevations, plans, sections, details, and specifications, but not working drawings, which would have rendered the services of an architect unnecessary. The book also included detailed descriptions of individual LOF products and concluded with a discussion of "FHA Financing" featuring a monthly payment calculation chart. 52 Designs for Modernizing Main Street with Glass was available through LOF dealers and was distributed to merchants, landlords, and all "logical prospects for modernizing."[141] For LOF, 52 Designs was simply a lavish promotional piece intended to increase sales of its building products, especially newly acquired Vitrolite. For merchants and architects it was a ready reference for effective modernizing ideas which, having been approved by leading retail and design authorities, could be consulted with confidence for solutions to merchandising or architectural problems. But 52 Designs also formed a coherent body of paper architecture for the commercial center of an idealized/modernized American town which, fully informed by the New Deal and the Depression, attempted to express in visual terms some of the deepest preoccupations of the era (see Chapter 6).

---

[139] See "Marvels in Glass," dated 3-39 [LOF MSS-066, Box 16, folder 32, Sales 7 Promotion]. The competition designs which appear are Orlo Heller's Apparel Shop and Charles du Bose's Service Station. Both have been slightly adapted to utilize LOF's expanded product line.
[140] "52 Prize-Winning Designs," p. 3.
[141] LOF, "Glass Dominates Designs for Modernization," Architectural Forum 63 (December 1935):

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

After the tremendous success of LOF's Modernize Main Street Competition, as measured by the number of entries it attracted and the publicity it garnered, several other manufacturers attempted to generate interest in their products by sponsoring architectural competitions with programs similarly focused on stores and modernization.[142] Of particular interest in connection with the subsequent development of LOF's storefront products and with Main Street design in general is the competition Owens-Illinois sponsored in 1939 to promote the use of Insulux Glass Block. The program called for the partial "remodeling of an obsolete block on Main Street" in the heart of "the women's shopping district" in a mid-sized, Midwestern city. The specific problem was to modernize three stores--an apparel shop, beauty salon, and restaurant--located in a single business property whose owner had been informed that his tenants planned to vacate their quarters unless they were "brought up to date." This property owner, according to the program, wished to use Insulux on the building's modernized store facades because it was equally effective day and night and "because it immediately suggests to the public a modern, up-to-date establishment."[143] That the program acknowledged a client and a commercial scenario indicates how much the climate for modernization had progressed since the LOF competition of 1935, from an abstraction to a fact, from a type of work generally eschewed by the profession at large to one regarded as "realistic" and "a problem of everyday practice."[144] In selecting the winning designs, it was the disposition of the "modern storefronts" with which the jury was most concerned. While some of the winning designs made extensive use of Insulux, rear-lit to create evenly glowing facades, most used it as a luminous accent, in multi-block panels of various sizes, and in combination with plate glass and structural

---

50.

[142] See for example the competition sponsored by the American Terra Cotta Company and conducted by the Chicago Architectural Club. "Terra Cotta Wall Block Competition," Pencil Points 16 (November 1935): 10. "Prize Winning Designs: Terra Cotta Wall Block Competition," Pencil Points 17 (January 1936): 49-52.

[143] "2nd Competition for Insulux Glass Block, A Group of Three Stores," Architectural Forum 70 (May 1939): 23.

[144] "4 Competitions for Insulux Glass Block," Architectural Forum 70 (April 1939): 31.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

glass as was standard for store design by 1939.[145] The 4th prize went to M. Righton Swicegood who had taken first prize for his drug store in the LOF competition, a fact noted in the biography published with his most recent winning entry. Swicegood's Owens-Illinois designs, particularly his restaurant--with its off-center entrance, glass block panels, structural glass signboard and bulkhead--were, as his drug store had been before, utterly representative of the currents of American commercial architecture in the late 1930s [Fig. 156]. But between Swicegood's Vitrolite Drug Store and his Insulux Restaurant there had passed four years of relentless promotion of storefront modernization by the building industry--by material manufacturers and the architecture profession alike--and we must pick up that story once more as LOF, flush with the success of the Modernize Main Street Competition, carried its promotional momentum into 1936, the end of which would see the company record its most profitable year ever, due, as President John D. Biggers noted, to increased demand for flat glass of all types which was stimulated, in no small part by interest in and sales of "that fine product, Vitrolite."[146]

The Colorful Storefront: Vitrolite & Vitrolux

That John Biggers could observe with satisfaction at the conclusion of LOF's 1936 fiscal year, that Vitrolite was "subject to growing demand" was largely due to the tremendous marketing effort the company had undertaken since the conclusion of the Main Street competition--an effort which represented a significant investment of corporate resources, not only in advertising and sales, but in product development continually measured against the activities of rival PPG.[147] After the success of the competition, LOF pressed its advantage in December 1935. Just as the company

---

[145] "Prize-Winning Designs in the Insulux Glass Block Competition No. 2," Architectural Forum 71 (November 1939): 19. The jury was based on the West Coast and included San Franciscans William Wurster and Timothy Pfueger and Los Angelenos Donald Parkinson and Stiles O. Clements.

[146] Quoted in 20th Annual Report for the Year Ending 31 December 1936 (Toledo: Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1937), p. 6.

[147] The promotional battle in which the two company's engaged over storefront modernization in the 1930s was undoubtedly all the more intense because they were simultaneously involved in litigation concerning licensing disagreements and patent infringements over the manufacture of safety glass. See Biggers & Wherrett Correspondence in Miscellaneous Company Documents,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

began circulating the winning entries in advertisements and in 52 Designs, it announced the commencement of the LOF Modernization Budget Plan designed "to take advantage of the provisions of the National Housing Act" and to allow time-payment purchases of LOF products for "modernization and commercial installation projects."[148] Concurrently, Harold Alexander and the staff of LOF's Architectural Service Department (formerly New Uses) were travelling the country as LOF missionary men, addressing groups of architects and merchants and meeting with the company's independent distributors and local jobbers to encourage the use of Vitrolite in modernization. They provided technical data and sales information as needed and supplied design ideas through "visual demonstrations" including displays of Main Street competition designs, and, once they became available, photographs of Vitrolite installations in modernized buildings across the country, examples of which LOF began compiling early in 1936.[149]

At the same time, Vitrolite Product Manager Frank Sohn was preparing another series of designs in conjunction with the LOF Art Department to illustrate the use of Vitrolite in ways the Main Street competition entries had not [Fig. 157]. Since Sohn was the man credited with turning Vitrolite into "the colorful structural glass" in 1922, it made sense that he would have been interested in demonstrating more fully the product's "color possibilities," emphasizing especially the veined agates--golden, orchid, jade, emerald, royal blue, and walnut--which were available in light, medium and dark.[150] One reason LOF sought to publicize Vitrolite's agates was that these colors distinguished the product from rival PPG's Carrara which, early in 1936, was only available

---

LOF MSS-066, Folder 23.

[148] "Credit Plan for Glass Purchases," New York Times, 23 December 1935, p. 27. See also "LOF Modernization Budget Plan" in LOF MSS-066, Box 6, Folder 23, Miscellaneous Company Documents. PPG responded immediately with its own Pittsburgh Time Payment Plan. See above.

[149] These activities are described in "Creating Glass Business" and "Your Company's Sales Department," The Batch, February 1939, p. 1. See also "Vitrolite Albums" in Sales and Promotion Files, LOF MSS-066, Box 19, Folder 10.

[150] Originally an architect in Chicago, Sohn had been with the Vitrolite Company for over a decade before it was acquired by LOF. In LOF's account of Vitrolite's development at the factory in Parkersburg, WV, the product's history is divided into pre-1922 and post-1922 to denote the arrival of Sohn and color. See Earl Aiken, "LOF at Parkersburg," The Batch, October 1939, p. 12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in five standard colors and four trim colors (i.e., sold only in small sizes). Vitrolite, by comparison was available in 16 colors all sized for facing and trim. Vitrolite's finishes, also emphasized in Sohn's series, similarly set LOF's product apart from Carrara. In addition to high-polish, the standard structural glass finish, Vitrolite was available in "shaded sandblast," the equivalent of a matte finish (PPG's "suede" Carrara would not appeared until 1939), a "dendric" or chipped finish, and a "mirror-like" finish.[151] LOF circulated Sohn's series of twelve storefront designs, which included drug, food, and apparel types as well as a restaraunt, a bar, men's store, and bakery, through normal promotional channels. They were featured in Sweet's, in advertisements, in portfolios for jobbers and LOF distributors (who were enouraged to use Vitrolite samples to demonstrate the color schemes of the designs), and in pamphlets and circulars made available to LOF representatives for distribution to anyone interested in using Vitrolite to "transform the obsolete, characterless store front into the New, Modern, Outstanding Front"--into what the company now called the Vitrolite Store Front.[152] Sohn's storefront designs had a decidely different look than the majority of the Main Street Competition winners.[153] One of the most striking differences was the conspicuous absence in the product manager's storefronts of the curved bulkheads and windows which were one of the principal design features of the winning entries. Present instead, were faceted bulkheads and windows which stepped back toward recessed entrances in angles right, acute and obtuse. While this lack of curved Vitrolite-faced bulkheads and

---

[151] LOF cautioned architects against using mirror finish Vitrolite for facing structural members since it apparently imparted "an effect of empty space and unreality." See "Vitrolite," in Sweet's Catalogue File (1936), sec. 17, catalogue 2. To compare Vitrolite and Carrara see, "Carrara Structural Glass," Sweet's Catalogue File (1936), sec. 17, catalogue 1.

[152] "Vitrolite for Store Fronts" and "Put on a New Front. It Pays!" in 1936 Advertising Scrapbook [LOF MSS-066, Box 25]. These materials were designed by the United States Advertising Agency under the direction of LOF's Advertising Manager North Wright. The use of obsolescence and character in the propaganda and discourse of building modernization is discussed in Chapter 6.

[153] Some of this difference was simply a result of presentation: a number of Sohn's storefronts were rendered in perspective rather than elevation and included full window displays, sidewalks, and significantly, a building context--a glimpse of the unmodernized store next door or story above street level. But this difference also resulted from the nature of the designs themselves because of Sohn's deliberate, sometimes exaggerated, use of agate Vitrolite particularly in the lightest shades of the various colors which displayed a profusion of white veining on bulkheads, side panels, and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

curved Polished Plate windows could have resulted from the designer's personal preference, it may also have been informed by the practical realities with which LOF employee Sohn had to concern himself as architects participating in the LOF competition did not. When Sohn was preparing his storefront designs in the winter of 1935-6 LOF had no facilities for bending structural glass.[154] The company's situation for bending plate glass was only marginally better. Though LOF had entered into a liscencing agreement with the Invisible Glass Company of America to begin bending glass for store installations, it remained impractical because of cost and limited distribution. But with 52 Designs in release across the country and including in its pages a great number of storefronts specifying curved architectural elements, it was only a matter of time before LOF jobbers would be called upon to deliver the goods. Responding to an apparent increased demand for bent glass, the company acted in the spring of 1936 to establish a glass bending department. By the summer, having passed through a successful experimental stage, that department was in commercial operation and LOF was supplying its customers with curving panels of Polished Plate and Vitrolite, as well as ribbed Blue Ridge Glass. A year later the department had proven such a success that LOF was forced to install two additional bending furnaces in order to meet increased demand, as the most ubiquitous formal element of the streamlined storefront found its way to Main Streets across the country [Fig. 158].[155]

Within LOF's corporate hierarchy, the responsibility for spotting a design trend like the use of curved glass on storefronts naturally fell to the Architectural Service Department, given its mandate to find new uses and new markets for the company's products in anticipation of, but also

---

signboards. This shade was riotous enough when applied singly or in combination with a solid color; when it was applied in combination with other agate colors, the effect was visually overwhelming.

[154] It was possible to achieve a nearly curved, but still faceted, profile by setting narrow vertical strips of Vitrolite on a curved substructure, this procedure involved greater expense in cutting, beveling, and, ultimately, installing small units and also held greater potential for damage and breakage. It also produced an unsatisfying appearance especially in conjunction with the streamlined profile of extruded metal trim--none of which was likely to appeal to merchants and their architects.

[155] See 20th Annual Report, p. 7. On the agreement with the Invisible Glass Company see 19th Annual Report, p. 6. 21st Annual Report for the Year Ending 31 December 1937 (Toledo: Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1938), p. 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in response to, growing demand. Having accurately gauged public interest in structural glass and bent glass, the department appears to have made two subsequent determinations in 1936, both related to the further development of the Vitrolite Strore Front and the further marketing of LOF products in store modernization. The first concerned the growing interest in storefront illumination which had evolved alongside the interest in storefront modernization, partially related to the development and popularization of lighted signage, of neon in particular. However, following the 1935 introduction of Owens-Illinois Insulux glass blocks, which achieved a glowing luminosity when lighted from behind, storefront illumination soon involved the development of modern architectural effects equally visible day and night, thus giving a storefront what advertising ad copywriters called "24-hour selling power," providing a maximum return on an investment in storefront modernization.[156] In 1936 LOF's Architectural Service Department determined that the company needed a material complimentary to the Vitrolite Store Front which could be used to create interesting lighting effects, to enhance nighttime visibility, and most importantly, to compete with Insulux. In less than a year the Vitrolite Store Front became the Luminous Store Front.

In developing a product to compete with Insulux, LOF was not interested in simply bringing out its own version of the glass block, as PPG was attempting to do in a partnership with Corning Glass.[157] Interested in replicating the effect of glass block rather than its look, LOF sought to develop the luminosity of one of its existing flat glass products. This, it was hoped, would prove more practical, minimizing the company's investment of capital and time and enabling LOF to get its luminous storefront product on the market as quickly as possible, before Insulux or some other product became fixed in the minds of architects and merchants as the luminous material of

---

[156] See also Owens-Illinois advertisement, "Merchandising by Day and by Night," Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 33. It is worth noting in this context that with the increased interest in luminosity in storefront design, the Day and Night photographic pairs became as important in modernization advertising as Before and After images.

[157] PPG and the Corning Glass Works entered a joint venture in 1937 to develop a glass block to compete with Insulux. PC-Block, introduced in 1938, was not marketed as part of the Pittco line. See "The Pittsburgh Corning Corporation," Pittsburgh Plate Products 47 (March-April 1938): 3-4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

choice.[158] Basically, LOF wanted to combine the facing capabilities and chromatic range of structural glass with the luminosity and brilliance of glass blocks, while exploiting the potential of a material pre-existing in its product line. This fusion of the properties of Vitrolite and rival Insulux eventually produced an ingenious hybrid–Vitrolux. This color-fused tempered plate glass was put on the market in the spring of 1937 as "the logical companion of Vitrolite...in achieving full realization of modern design possibilities in commercial fronts."[159] LOF had been tinting clear Polished Plate Glass in shades of blue, green, and peach to "keep pace with modern architectural and decorative trends" since 1935.[160] Vitrolux developed logically out of this colored product, broadening its storefront applications by providing a middle ground of light transmission. Neither transparent like tinted plate, nor opaque like structural glass, Vitrolux was instead transluscent, produced by fusing colored ceramic coatings to the plate substrate. Vitrolux was also tempered, making it stronger than ordinary plate glass and able to withstand breakage and the prolonged contact with lighting units that would occur in a typical rear-lit installation. In answer to an apparent architectural demand for a product providing "a more skillful, a more colorful use of light," Vitrolux, so the company claimed, offered "luminous color as an integral part of the

---

[158] This was a matter of no small concern because there were an increasing number of luminous materials from which to choose. In March 1936 for example, the Vermont Marble Company introduced "Lumar" to reposition marble in the marketplace since it had been losing out to glass, formica and other facing materials as a viable product for commercial work and modernization. Lumar was a thin marble facing, available in six shades with varying degrees of translucency, that could be used for illuminated installations to, according to the company, "provide a brilliant warmth and aesthetic appeal that exceeds that of glass or other luminous mediums" without producing glare or "depend[ing] upon brilliance or color to attract attention." Lumar was marketed as a two-in-one product, a modern material incognito: "By day Lumar is marble at its best" betraying that "natural beauty" which had satisfied the Greeks. "At night Lumar gives lighting effects which glass or synthetic products cannot simulate" utterly appropriate "at this time, when the trend is away from ornamentation." To demonstrate the material's commercial potential, Vermont Marble hired Vahan Hagopian to prepare sketches showing Lumar in storefronts, drug stores, movie theaters, and bars. See "Lumar: A New Marble Product," Architectural Record 79 (March 1936): 234-6. "Lumar, Luminous Vermont Marble," Architectural Forum 66 (June 1937): 104.

[159] "Vitrolux Color Fused Tempered Plate Glass," Sweet's Catalogue File (1938), sec. 18, cat. 3, p. 9. See also "Creating Glass Business," p. 2. "Products and Practice: Glass," Architectural Forum 67 (December 1937): 24 & 27. Unlike Vitrolite, Vitrolux had a promising future as a post-war building material. In the 1950s, LOF began marketing it as "spandrel glass" suitable for curtain wall construction and used in such iconic buildings of the period as the Lever House. See Robert W. McKinley, "Spandrel Glass" in Twentieth Century Building Materials, pp. 206-11.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

structure itself," a desirable characteristic in a product which aspired to meet the demands of modernism, that "sweeping new movement in architecture [in which] glass is being emphasized more and more."[161]

If Vitrolite added color to the modernized storefront; Vitrolux made that color glow. Available in 18 transluscent colors, ten of which matched Vitrolite's non-agate tones, Vitrolux was used for flush or panel-type illuminated areas (i.e., affixed to the front of a lighting unit), especially storefront signboards and upper facades, and the ceilings of display cases and vestibules.[162] When lit, at night, Vitrolux transmitted an even, diffused light, the intensity of which varied with the color; otherwise it had a soft luster akin to Vitrolite [Fig. 159]. Opaque Vitrolux was also available, used mainly for sign letters set in a transluscent Vitrolux field (the reverse was also possible). When used to form these various combinations, Vitrolux's colorful luminosity provided a striking counterpoint to Vitrolite facing and plate glass windows, giving the storefront "after-dark brilliance" which made "night brighter than day," as LOF's copy writers aptly put it.[163] Since Vitrolux had to be installed in conjunction with lighting units in order to take advantage of its luminosity, LOF marketed the product extensively to electrical contractors and utility companies, encouraging them to promote the sales of Luminous Storefronts in order "to increase the night time power load." Claiming that "American cities and towns [were] being kept years behind the times by thousands of shops and store with 'dead-pan' fronts," LOF offered a variety of electrically-oriented sales aids, including a new store modernization manual with illumination data supplied by General Electric and a Vitrolux Demonstration Kit that came with color samples and a miniature

---

[160] 19th Annual Report, p. 6.
[161] "Vitrolux," p. 9. "Glass in Architecture," Sweet's Catalogue File (1937), sec. 19, cat. 3, p. 1.
[162] Though LOF claimed that entire storefronts could be fitted with Vitrolux, the time and expense of installing lighting units on bulkheads, side panels, and upper facades generally prohibited such extensive usage, especially projects where budgetary concerns were paramount.
[163] LOF advertisement, "Storefronts that Have Maximum Display Both Night and Day," Architectural Record 84 (September 1938): 9. LOF advertisement, "Night is Brighter than Day," American Architect 151 (July 1937): 28. See also LOF Advertising Yearkbook (1937-1938) for Vitrolux/Vitrolite ads appearing in Apparel Arts, Motor Magazine, Dry Goods Journal, and Box Office.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

light box for convincing demonstrations of Vitrolux's luminosity and transluscency.[164] When combined with a Vitrolite facing, a Vitrolux signboard would "make any place of business appear modern and progressive"--precisely the goal of storefront modernization.

The Complete Storefront

In 1937 with Vitrolux firmly established in its product line, along with Vitrolite and Polished Plate, LOF caught up with and surpassed rival PPG in the marketing of glass for store modernization (PPG's own luminous product, PC Block, would not be available for another year). But PPG still had the lead on LOF in the realm of storefront metal since its Pittco sashes had already been on the market for two years. Of this LOF was well aware and, as the company became convinced that modernization activity would continue to increase, it determined that "LOF more than ever needed a distinctive, efficient metal trim to 'tie its store-front package together'." Following PPG's example, LOF began developing an extruded metal trim with a cushioned glass mounting system. By April 1937 designers Dean Lowry and Robert Pinney had perfected and patented a pressure-controlled, shock-absorbing extruded aluminum sash which was shortly introduced as Extrudalite [Fig. 160].[165] LOF heralded Extrudalite as "revolutionary" and "a radical step forward," referring not only to the "construction features" of its mounting mechanism, but to the "design features" of its sash profiles. These, LOF claimed, were responsive to "the new trend in design" which meant that Extrudalite's undulating "reeds" and flat "cascades" had been achieved "by 'streamlining' old classical design standards." This stylistic change in storefront metal was pronounced enough to prompt a response from PPG which reconfigured its own sash profiles along more modern lines in 1938 (see above and Fig. 127). Equally revolutionary in LOF's view was its merchandising of Extrudalite in three sizes (Nos. 150, 300, 500) and three price ranges, meaning

---

[164] "New LOF Plan Helps Utilities Sell More Luminous Storefronts," Electrical World, 30 July 1938, reprinted in LOF 1938 Advertising Yearbook [LOF MSS-066, Box 25].
[165] "Dean Lowry Ties Up a Package," The Batch, July 1940, p. 3. See also Frank Fraser, "More Dates in LOF History," The Batch, June 1939, pp. 14-15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that "even the most modest store front may now include the distinction of extruded metal" and that the company was once again pitching its products in response to economic realities.[166]

The introduction of metal sashes enabled LOF, like PPG before it, to market itself as a full service supplier of modern storefronts of colored glass and metal. But before LOF could undertake an all-encompassing promotional venture to make this known, the Depression intervened once more. The economy nose-dived in August bringing on the so-called "recession" of 1937 and causing LOF, like so many other American businesses that fall and winter, to experience "a substantial falling-off of sales."[167] Making matters worse for marketers of store modernization was the fact that Title I of the National Housing Act, in an stunning display of bad timing had expired in the spring. Though LOF was in a position to continue modernization financing through its Budget Plan, the government would no longer insure the loans it made, a disquieting thought as the most recent manifestation of the economic crisis worsened. For LOF and other manufacturers the situation improved in the late fall as soon as it became clear that Title I would be reinstated.[168] In anticipation of the MCP's renewal, LOF unveiled "the Complete Storefront" in November of 1937 at, of all places, the annual New York and Chicago automobile shows.[169]

At the two largest auto shows in the country, with combined attendance of over half a million, LOF announced that it now offered "EVERY material required in the construction of the modern storefront"--every material required to effect "the transformation of drab, uninteresting, uninviting fronts into areas that appeal with color and light." As a demonstration, LOF partnered with General Motors to produce an exhibition of model storefronts to serve as a setting for GM's

---

[166] "Libbey-Owens-Ford Announces Extrudalite," Sweet's Catalogue File (1938), sec. 19, cat. 8.
[167] 21st Annual Report, p. 7. The downturn of 1937 did not hit LOF's books until 1938 when the company recorded a 63% drop in profits and net profits were almost as low as they had been in 1934. See 22nd Annual Report for Year Ending 31 December 1938 (Toledo: Libbey Owens Ford Company, 1939), p. 1.
[168] Lobbying for Title I's reinstatement began in October; Roosevelt called for reinstatement in November; Congressional debates were held in December; Title I was back in operation on 3 February 1938 (see Chapter 1).
[169] With the start of this promotional program LOF adopted the compound noun "storefront" for use in its advertisements and literature.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

display of its new model year Chevrolets. This was no miniature caravan. It was a nearly full-scale (7/8) installation of five continguous store units, fabricated entirely of Complete Storefront products and forming a "Modern Shopping Center" [Figs. 161 & 162]. A decontextualized one-story strip containing a flower shop, food store, dry cleaner, bakery, and department store, the Modern Shopping Center was intended, as made clear in subsequent advertising, to be equally adaptable for Main Street modernizations or new construction on the urban periphery. Each store was designed, most likely by H. Creston Donner of the LOF Architectural Service Department, with an elevation simplified for legibility of parts and materials, yet still recognizable as the modern(ized) retail types which had become common since 1935: for example, broad, interior-revealing display windows and low bulkheads on the ivory (Vitrolite) and red (Vitrolux) Centre Food Store, round porthole displays fitted with plate glass shelves on the white (Vitrolite) Modern Baker.[170] LOF placed great stock in the marketing value of such exhibits, observing of similar Complete Storefront installation Donner designed for the Toledo showroom, that "a prospect who can leave without signing an order for a complete glass front most certainly has Herculean sales resistance."[171] Though it no doubt fulfilled this sales function quite well, it is questionable how successful the Modern Shopping Center was as a backdrop for the '38 Chevy, given that the stated goal of the LOF storefront was "to compel attention." Surely, bulkheads, side panels and signs of bright Vitrolite and glowing Vitrolux, trimmed in gleaming Extrudalite (as, for example in the Department Stores of the USA, with its interlocking L-shapes of red and yellow) were just as visually engaging as the Duco-lacquered teardrop fenders and chrome-plated, speed-lined radiator grilles of the Master De Luxe

---

[170] "LOF Colorful Storefronts are an Invitation to Stop and Shop" [LOF MSS-066, Box 16, folder 32]. This promotional piece was most likely distributed at the Modern Shopping Center display. It includes material specifications for each of the five storefronts.

[171] Bruce Miller, "Show 'Em...Sell 'Em," The Batch, May 1941, p. 11. Breaking down prospect resistance was also the motivation for LOF's modernization of its Chicago showroom which architect Bruce Goff redesigned early in 1938. Goff's customers' conference room and information booths were designed as a Complete Storefront displays with characteristic three-part elevations of curved elements: Vitrolite bulkheads, Polished Plate and Blue Ridge "display" windows, and Vitrolite and Vitrolux lintels/signboards. See "The Showroom as a Design Problem," Architectural Record 84 (July 1938): 75-6.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chevrolet. That the storefronts on display had the potential to outshine the cars on display is not surprising since both car and storefront had been repackaged to sell during the Depression with new streamlined models introduced each year, available for purchase on virtually identical time payment plans. That such formal and fiscal similarities existed was not coincidental, indeed the direct relationship between auto financing--GM auto financing--and government-insured modernization credit, such as that available through the LOF Budget Plan, has already been discussed (see Chapter 1). But the equally close connection between the appearance and aspiration of the streamlined car and those of the streamlined storefront still bears further analysis and this subject will be taken up again in Chapter 6.

Following its introduction at the auto shows, the Complete Storefront was announced to the architecture community in February of 1938 in simultaneous advertisements in the four principal professional journals, as well as in local architecture publications serving major markets like New York and Chicago. To architects, LOF offered the Complete Storefront as "a service of definite value" in which the company's four products--Vitrolite, Vitrolux, Extrudalite, Polished Plate--were brought together "in ensemble" for ease of design and specification and, one might add, for the company's ease of promotion as well: after 1938 LOF stopped advertising its storefront products separately. This ensemble, LOF explained was "pacing the vogue of modern merchandising" but it is unclear whether this referred to LOF's own sales techniques or those of its merchant customers.[172] In either case, the Complete Storefront was announced to those merchants beginning in March, the delay allowing architects to familiarize themselves with these latest "developments in metal and glass" in advance of their potential retail clients. LOF's promotional coverage in the retail field throughout the spring and summer was exceptionally thorough. Complete Storefront advertisements appeared in such publications as Baker's Weekly, FTD News, Meat Merchandizing,

---

[172] See "LOF Storefronts of Metal and Glass," in American Architect, Architectural Record, Pencil Points, Architectural Forum (February 1938), reprinted in 1938 Advertising Yearbook. Advertisement No. 4425, in New York Society of Architects Handbook and Illinois Society of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and Motor Monthly, each selling LOF's four-product line with what were, by then, routine pitches concerning increased patronage, reduced maintenance, and a guarantee to identify the store owner as "a progessive retail merchant."[173] All of these sales angles came together in a promotional piece explaining "why a new LOF Storefront [was] a business asset" which could "turn transient trade into...profitable patrons." The folder was lavishly illustrated with twenty "smart designs," photographs of Complete Storefronts installed coast-to-coast, from Daniels Hat Shop in New York City (Phillip Associates, designers) to Foster's Restaurant in San Francisco (Farr & Ward, architects) with chain and independent dry cleaners, bakeries, markets, gas stations, movie theaters and shoe stores at eighteen destinations in between, including some in Canada [Fig. 163].[174] As a group these modernized stores--with their curved bulkheads, off-center entrances, deep vestibules, portholes and shadow boxes, enlarged signboards, all fabricated of glass and metal in contrasting schemes of reds and whites, blues and blacks, greens and yellows--serve as a graphic testament to the legacy of LOF's architectural competition, illustrating the degree to which Main Street had been modernized since 1935. From the company's point of view, there was still much work to done. Three years after the FHA introduced the Modernize Main Street initiative, and three years after LOF began its campaign of promotional tie-ins, the company was still encouraging jobbers and architects to "look up and down Main Street in any metropolis...in any town [...] and right on Main Street--wherever you may be--is your opportunity for increased sales of glass with LOF Complete Storefronts."[175] Though by 1943, LOF had abandoned the "Complete Storefront" in favor of the "Visual Front" as it began marketing Tuf-Flex tempered plate glass to meet growing demand for "the open-faced architecture introduced pre-war," modernizing Main Street would remain a promotional touchstone well into the post-war era. In 1956, when LOF declared "Main Street open

---

Architects Handbook, reprinted in 1938 Advertising Yearbook [LOF MSS-066].

[173] See 1938 Advertising Yearbook for reprints of the advertisements which appeared in these magazines.

[174] "Why a New LOF Storefront is a Business Asset," 1938 [LOF MSS-066, Box 16, folder 32].

[175] Cited in Job No. 5238 and Job No. 5356, appearing in Glass Digest, March and September

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for business" it might easily have been 1936, so little had the promotional pitch changed. Merchants were still "discovering that attractive buildings are good business" and still seeking to replace "drab, uninspiring storefronts" with "the clean, uncluttered look of 20th century architecture."[176]

In the late 1930s, for Libbey-Owens-Ford, as for so many other American manufacturers of building materials, store modernization had not yet lost its viability as a sales angle, nor had Main Street lost its potential as a territory for sales prospects. And neither was likely to in the near future--at least not until another national crisis (World War II) prompted another coordinated response (advertising in support of the war effort) as the Depression had before--for as sales themes, these original FHA tie-ins had incredible longevity. Even if references to the FHA or the MCP were largely omitted by the end of the decade, modernization and Main Street had become apparently self-perpetuating, dominating building material merchandising until 1941 with nearly the same arguments and persuasions that were current circa 1935, though with varying degrees of intensity related to the life cycle of Title I. In 1939, Westinghouse introduced two new lighting units "designed for 'Main Street' Commercial Applications" and deemed appropriate there because they were "modernly-styled" and had a "low initial and operating cost." With equal confidence Johnson Service Company proclaimed that "when Johnson controls the temperature on Main Street customers shop there *more* and *more*" while below the headline two stylishly-dressed shoppers head toward a modernized Main Street, its buildings and its cars clearly streamlined.[177]

As for the glass manufacturers--LOF, PPG, and Owens-Illinois--though they had been using these themes longer and more consistently than any other marketers of storefront products,

---

1938, reprinted in 1938 Advertising Yearbook [LOF MSS-066].
[176] "Visual Fronts by the LOF Glass Company" (1943), p. 5. "Today's Main Street is Open For Business" (1956), p. 2. [LOF, MSS-066, Box 16, Folder 32].
[177] Johnson Service Company advertisement, "When Johnson Controls...," and Westinghouse advertisement, "2 New Luminaires," Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 34-5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

they were not about to tamper with such a successful formula--one that had spoken so effectively to architects and merchants that the glass-faced, modernized, streamlined storefront had already become a design cliché. But there was a sense in 1939, and in the years leading up to the wartime restrictions, that something had been achieved, that Main Street had been modernized. In 1939, though Owens-Illinois proclaimed that "Main Street now recognizes sound architecture as smart business," as if the goals of the movement were a *fait accompli*, the copy optimistically predicited that modernization would continue its work of "replacing those antiquated nightmares that are all too much in evidence on merchandising thoroughfares," here represented by before and after photographs of the Walker Brothers Dry Good Company in Wichita, Kansas [Fig. 164]. If Owens-Illinois appeared blissfully unaware that little more than the vicissitudes of architectural fashion separated the Luxfer Prism transoms of the old facade from the Insulux Glass Block windows of the new, such was the nature of storefront improvement for, as Architectural Forum observed, "modernization is only relative."[178] When PPG declared in 1940 that "Glass is Modernizing Main Street," it, too, noted that change had already been affected, that "glass products [had] widened the scope of design and helped architects to make Main Street more modern."[179]

Manufacturers helping architects--these few words of advertising copy deftly explicate the vast marketing enterprise that has been the subject of this chapter, though perhaps too succinctly. Every advertisement, publication, competition, exhibition and specialized customer service discussed here was intended to *help architects*, but that assistance was narrowly conceived, intended to help architects *to sell* modernization and its products to merchants and building owners. It was to insure the success of this sales effort that FHA Public Relations

---

[178] Owens-Illinois advertisement, "An Appreciation of Architecture Long Overdue," Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 125. "Modernity--Here Today...," Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 157.
[179] PPG advertisement, "Glass is Modernizing Main Street," Architectural Record 88 (October 1940): 131.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Director Ward Canaday sought the cooperation of building material manufacturers in the first place. I have already discussed the reasons those manufacturers chose to cooperate with the Main Street initiative, agreeing, with faith in the promise of modernization's profitability, to significantly expand their merchandising and promotional programs. It was those programs, carried out in the second half of the Depression decade, which had, as PPG put it, "widened the scope of design and helped architects to make Main Street more modern." But architects also helped manufacturers, and the profession itself cultivated the modernization market nearly as effectively as the government: the AIA gave the modernization effort its institutional support; individual architects like Kenneth Stowell gave it their personal support, and the major architecture journals gave it their editorial support. It was the cooperation of this last group which was perhaps most crucial to the success of the manufacturers tied-in promotional campaigns.

Modernization: The Keynote of Editorial Campaigns

In January 1937, Owens-Illinois ran an advertisement which, in an apparent display of insider's knowledge, explained how retail trade journals were cooperating with the FHA and what that cooperation meant to the building industry:

> Modernization! That is the keynote of the editorial campaigns about to be inaugurated by trade journals in the hotel, restaurant and drug store fields...campaigns with potentialities that must stir the imagination of every architect, builder, and building supply dealer. New and more attractive exteriors...remodeled interiors...new cocktail lounges...new soda fountains...countless opportunities for modernizing out-moded buildings, in part or in the whole, now present themselves.[180]

Such an explicit statement of slanted editorial coverage might well have given pause to astute readers of American Architect, perhaps stimulating a dawning realization that their own trade journals had likewise made modernization a "keynote" of editorial campaigns and that they, the

[180] Owens-Illinois advertisement, "They're Going Modern with Insulux Glass Block," American Architect 150 (January 1937): 120.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

nation's architects, were being sold every bit as much as merchants. Prompted by the FHA, architecture and building trade publications had embraced modernization as a journalistic enterprise with a zeal equal to that of building material manufacturers. Such editorial coverage was, in point of fact, the functional equivalent of the manufacturer's promotional tie-in, as the FHA made clear when it cultivated all such promotional cooperation in a single publication, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers.[181] Like all FHA promotional tie-ins, this too was undertaken for profit. Modernization articles in magazines attracted modernization advertisements from manufacturers, and those advertisements produced revenues. It was a simple equation, but a crucial one, upon which hinged modernization's successful promotion and, hence, the modernization movement's ability to jump-start depressed building activity. Thus, it becomes obvious that the editorial support of architecture journals was as important as the advertising support of manufacturers, one feeding the other in yet another demonstration of FHA-orchestrated reciprocity. But an acknowledgment of reciprocity is not necessarily an admission of complicity, and does not imply that the architecture journals generated a vast amount of modernization editorial coverage solely to generate a vast amount of advertising revenues though, with the FHA reporting that by the end of 1935 journals with national circulation had increased their business by 60% on average as a result of the modernization program, such an interpretation is not wholly inaccurate.[182] Nonetheless, as publications dedicated to architecture, American Architect, Architectural Forum, Architectural Record, and Pencil Points each had an editorial mission to report to the profession the latest developments in the field. In the 1930s, as the Depression deepened and new construction slowed, the field was dominated by building modernization, though each magazine pursued this subject with varying levels of journalistic commitment to currency. Architectural Forum and Architectural Record noticeably led the way, though by 1937 even the normally staid American

[181] See especially "Publishers Cooperation," Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers, pp. 17-18.
[182] "Building Journals See Improvement," FHA Clip Sheet 5 (No 2, 1935), n.p.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Architect placed a full-color rendering of sleekly streamlined storefronts on the cover of its June issue [Fig. 165].

Throughout the present and foregoing chapters there has already been some occasion to mention how the architectural press supported and fostered the modernization movement, rallying first around the National Housing Act, even before it was ratified, and then around the Modernization Credit Plan and the Better Housing Program when they commenced in the late summer of 1934. As the FHA's modernization activities expanded, so too did editorial coverage in the principal journals, especially in 1935 with the arrival of the Main Street initiative and the $50,000 loan limit. In examining the exhaustive coverage afforded modernization in the architecture journals of the 1930s, and in related building and real estate publications as well, notably Building Modernization and Real Estate Record, one can easily track its development as a news event, a design trend, and a practical architectural standard. Such a development of a given architectural subject was not at all unusual, being typical of the so-called chronological approach to reportage in which, with the passing of time, an event--say, the introduction of central air conditioning or the arrival of the International Style--was gradually codified, proving itself first as a trend, in which the event became recurrent among a limited number of practitioners, and ultimately, as a standard, applicable to the majority of the profession.[183] What was extraordinary about the coverage of modernization in the architecture journals was not the rapidity with modernization progressed from event to trend to standard, but that it burst onto the journals' pages as all three simultaneously. Here was journal coverage which represented a self-conscious, freely-admitted attempt to intervene in and influence architectural practice as a means to recovery even as it presented itself as unbiased reporting of a topical issue.[184] This issue would be of increasing

[183] See "Journalism is Catching Up with Architecture," Architectural Record 83 (January 1938): 103. This was the official announcement of Architectural Record's new format, consisting of "Building News," "Design Trends," and "Building Types," which was introduced in November 1937 and clearly modeled on Architectural Forum.
[184] Modernization does not appear as in the subject indices of the major journals before 1933.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

importance to the profession as the Depression wore on: the more architects began to modernize buildings, the more relevant building modernization became to the professional community.

The simultaneity of building modernization as event-trend-standard is obvious in the September 1934 issues of Architectural Forum and Architectural Record which both contain multiple articles on the subject, each with a different editorial slant: policy and finance, technique and practice, and case studies and building type analyses. Both issues featured modernization as, literally, front page news, with the Record offering an editorial in support of "Architects' Participation in the Modernization Program" and the Forum a "Remodeling Primer" explaining the value of this type of work and offering selling tips for wary readers.[185] The Forum also featured the BHP in its *Building Money* section, in a lengthy article detailing the regulations of the MCP and outlining the FHA's "nation-wide promotion plan," particularly emphasizing the part architects were to play. This was supplemented by a 30-page modernization portfolio, including before and after photographs, remodeling costs, and occasionally percentages of increased sales credited to building improvement.[186] The Record included a store modernization "check list" intended as a reference for architects new to the field, in addition to a portfolio of small shop modernizations which favored storefronts over interiors or plans [Fig. 166]. Three months later, the Record published another checklist and portfolio, both of which were significantly expanded and detailed, the former now including a lengthy bibliography and explanations of basic retailing practices and merchandising principles.[187]

Architectural Record ran several articles on remodeling for recovery beginning in 1932.

[185] "Architects' Participation in the Modernization Program," Architectural Record 76 (September 1934): 149-50. "Remodeling Primer," Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 153-6. The Forum gave its editorial support the month before. See "Recovery through Remodeling," Architectural Forum 61 (August 1934): 81-88.

[186] "Finding Spenders, Not Lenders," Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 218-222. "Repair, Replan, Rebuild," Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 157-90. "Portfolio of Rescued Buildings," Architectural Forum 61 (August 1934): 161-90.

[187] "Store Modernization," Architectural Record 76 (September 1934):188-90. "Portfolio: Modernization of Small Shops," Architectural Record 76 (September 1934): 155-82. "Checklist for New Construction and Modernization" and "Portfolio of Stores and Shops: New and Remodeled," Architectural Record 76 (December 1934): 435-54. This portfolio included stores both newly

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Though the basic format of these articles did not change after the March 1935 commencement of the Main Street initiative, nor after the July amendment to Title I, once "Modernize Main Street [became] more than a slogan," as the Forum put it, the frequency and depth of these articles increased significantly. Architectural Forum itself seized the occasion of the $50,000 amendment to inaugurate a series of articles and "plate sections" on commercial building modernization which continued throughout the summer and fall. In January of 1936, though modernization had "lost some of its front page news value," the magazine nonetheless introduced its "Remodeling for Profit" series addressing an architectural activity that had "become instead a staple product of the current building industry" [Fig. 167]. This periodic series offered practical "case histories" of buildings in which the modernizing solutions were both economic and of sound "architectural quality," as judged by Forum's editors.[188] The following year saw the addition of a "Planning Techniques" series for new and remodeled buildings typical of the research-based building type studies and time-saver standards which, concomitant with the effort to modernize Main Street, increasingly included commercial types in the 1930s. While more traditional publications like American Architect, dealt with "The Store" as a monolithic commercial planning problem, in its "Unit Planning" series, Architectural Forum published ten different studies each devoted to various retail environments including drug stores, food stores, shoe stores, men's stores, book stores, and gas stations.[189] These included case studies of the given type, but also its history,

---

constructed and modernized, here distinguishing between establishments occupying newly constructed buildings and those in remodeled buildings. Generally in the architecture press, the distinction between the two was blurred or subsumed under the similified categories of "store building" or "store construction," especially in articles dealing with building activity, such as those appearing regularly in the Architectural Record and Real Estate Record, based on statistics collected by the F.W. Dodge Corporation, the Record's publisher. See for example, "Business Pick-Up Brings Revival in Store Building," Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 33. "Review of Alteration Trends," Real Estate Record, October 1935, p. 6.

[188] "Remodeling for Profit," Architectural Forum 64 (January 1936): 69-74.

[189] See "Planning Techniques No. 1: Service Stations," Architectural Forum 66 (February 1937): 43-52. Reprints and expanded information on each type was available from the Forum's Editorial Research Department.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

data on typical trading areas, modern merchandising and display or store arrangement techniques, and information on the psychology of store fronts and their effect on shoppers.

While the Forum's type studies and related articles were generally prepared by the magazine's Editorial Research Department, Architectural Record often invited specialists to discuss particular aspects of commercial and/or retail design. Walter Dorwin Teague wrote on service stations while a consultant to Texaco; R.A. Fash, affiliated with the United Cigar and Whelan Drug chains and responsible for their exuberant Times Square stores, penned the study on drug stores; and an investigation of movie theaters was written by Ben Schlanger, an architect involved with the so-called Little Cinema movement who modernized a number of New York's old neighborhood (both stage and screen) theaters into art houses in the mid-1930s.[190] Even more than the Record, the magazine Building Modernization, with an editorial mission to "foster the building modernization movements [sic] as a step toward national recovery," regularly featured architects writing about their modernization and commercial design work. In articles such as "More Profit Store Fronts" and "Sales Psychology in Store Modernization," architects proffered practical advice based on their own modernizing experiences and endorsed specific building products.[191] In the fall of 1936 Building Modernization also sponsored a Store Modernization Conference at Pennsylvania State College to promote "good design on Main Street." Attended by architects and contractors, as well as retail executives and store proprietors--a rare event that included both sellers and buyers of modernization--the featured speakers were architect Ely Jacques Kahn and store planner Charles Swanson. The conference also included an exhibition of "successful store modernization work" which toured the state under the auspices of the American Federation of Art, an indication perhaps of how far the modernization of everyday commercial buildings had progressed in the interest of the

---

[190] Walter Dorwin Teague, "Standardized Service Stations," Architectural Record 82 (September 1937): 69-72. R.A. Fash, "Drugstore Planning," Architectural Record 83 (February 1938): 109-11. Ben Schlanger, "Motion Picture Theaters," Architectural Record 81 (February 1937): 17-24.
[191] "Editorial: Our Bow," Building Modernization, September 1933, p. 5. John W. Harrington, "More Profit Store Fronts," Building Modernization, December 1933, pp. 6-13. Harrington, "Sales

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

design profession, the retail field, and the general public in the short time since the national movement coalesced.[192]

By February of 1939, when Architectural Forum published its comprehensive study of Main Street, U.S.A., almost four years after the start of the FHA's Main Street initiative, there had accumulated in American architecture journals a staggering volume of modernization editorial content and modernization advertising. But by then, there had also accumulated an equally staggering volume of modernized buildings. Architectural Forum estimated that 75% of the nation's approximately 1.5 million retail stores (chains and independents) had modernized their premises between 1924 and 1938, with the majority of this activity having occurred since 1935 [Fig. 168]. Of this number, over half had modernized their stores more than once, with the installation of new storefronts the most frequent type of modernization during the Depression years. It was for this reason that the Forum identified Main Street as a repeat customer of buildings and a challenging design problem. It was because the typical American business thoroughfare possessed this dual identity that the architecture press and building material manufacturers had, from the beginning, evinced "a genuine enthusiasm for the drive [to Modernize Main Street]," thereby instigating the production of a vast modernization discourse embracing both the practice of modernization and its underlying social, economic, and aesthetic theory.[193] As architects and merchants engaged this discourse in the 1930s, with the help of the federal government, even the lowliest corner drugstore in the smallest Main Street town became a potential site for national recovery, the form and meaning of which are analyzed in the following chapter.

Psychology in Store Modernization," Building Modernization, September 1934, pp. 5-11.
[192] See "Store Modernization Conference," Building Modernization, September 1936, p. 47.
[193] "Main Street, U.S.A.," Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 74, 83. "Modernize Main Street," Architectural Forum 62 (April 1935): 422.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chapter 6 Consuming Architecture: Building Modernization in Theory & Practice

"No doubt the ten years beginning with 1930 will be referred to by future generations as the Streamlined Decade." So predicted the critic Emrich Nicholson in his 1945 book Contemporary Shops in the United States, a portfolio of mostly pre-war commercial work culled from the pages of Architectural Forum. Nicholson used the term "streamlined," in the broad sense of improved in appearance or modernized, to characterize that recent period when "progressive design" found widespread public acceptance in commercial buildings as merchants and architects turned increasingly to "modern developments" in materials, technology, and style.[1] Time has borne out Nicholson's prediction about the decade: subsequent generations have come to regard streamlining and its principal architectural forms–speed lines, rounded corners, curving bulkheads, banded windows, and sleek facades--as hallmarks of the visual culture of the 1930s [Fig. 169]. Beyond mere prognostication, however, Nicholson's comments also underscore certain basic assumptions about building modernization which, although alluded to in previous chapters, have not yet been considered in detail. In particular, his comments about commercial architecture highlight the crucial relationship which existed between building modernization and consumer culture--a relationship born of the Depression which brought to bear upon everyday American architecture such issues as advertising, obsolescence, gender, and fashion.

That Nicholson was aware of such a relationship is evident in his explanation of streamlining's arrival on the nation's Main Streets as "an outgrowth of design in other fields [due] ironically enough to the economic depression beginning in 1929." He implies that merchants, under increased competitive pressure, followed the lead of manufacturers in the "restyling of their product" to create "eye appeal and more sales," here referring specifically to those "styling jobs [which] aimed for the simplification of surface contour and the use of new

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

color schemes" to produce "modern autos, railway cars...practical kitchens and shiny bathrooms" [Figs. 170 & 171].[2] Looking back from the proximate vantage point of 1945, Nicholson discerned the emergence of a trend now recognized as a well-established historical fact: that the streamlining of vehicles and products appeared in the early years of the Depression under the aegis of corporate manufacturers to create demand for consumer goods glutting the marketplace in the wake of a 40% decline in consumer spending since 1929. Companies such as General Motors, General Electric, Hoover, and RCA brought in designers like Raymond Loewy and Henry Dreyfuss to streamline a wide range of durable goods and household appliances; simultaneously they retained advertising agencies such as Calkins and Holden and Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn to promote the new cars, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and radios--most of which had changed only in form or style and not in function or technology--by convincing the public that the appliances they currently owned were obsolete, out-of-date, and not modern.[3] For Nicholson, there was an obvious connection between these streamlined vehicles and products and streamlined commercial buildings:

> It is only natural that the buying public should expect our stores and shops to be as inviting, interesting, and up-to-date as the products on the shelves.[4]

In other words, the improved appearance of stores was a necessary correlate to the improved appearance of consumer goods. Thus, in Nicholson's conception, the linkage between streamlined products and streamlined buildings, and by extension between industrial design and architecture, was direct and causal. In this linkage, which Nicholson stated so matter-of-factly,

---

[1] Emrich Nicholson, Contemporary Stores in the United States (New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1945), pp. 12-13. Though Nicholson discusses streamlining in his introduction, he includes no examples of typical streamlined storefronts in the book.
[2] Nicholson, p. 12.
[3] For an indepth history of streamlining in industrial design as it emerged during the Depression see Jeffrey Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979). See also Donald J. Bush, The Streamlined Decade (New York: George Braziller, 1975). Claude Lichtenstein and Franz Engler, Streamlined: A Metaphor for Progress (Zurich: Lars Müller Publisher, [1993]).
[4] Nicholson, pp. 12-13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

lay the foundation of a theory of building modernization during the Depression--a theory codified and articulated in the 1930s by federal officials, corporate manufacturers, and architects.

Significantly, this theory was also articulated by industrial designers and advertisers. These "masters of publicity" grasped the implicit lessons of streamlining in advance of their contemporaries in government, business, and architecture and recognized the possibility of extending the restyling of individual products to the restyling of the broader environment.[5] Norman Bel Geddes, for example, refused any fixed boundaries between architecture and design, embracing both in his totalizing vision of a present and future in which streamlining functioned as a metaphor for progress, prosperity, and modernity. Geddes tirelessly promoted his vision throughout the decade, in his 1932 book Horizons, in his unrealized projects for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition, and ultimately in the Futurama, the pavilion and exhibition he designed for General Motors at the 1939 World's Fair. Equally exuberant in a promotion of streamlining beyond product design was Egmont Arens, head of Industrial Styling at the advertising firm of Calkins and Holden. In 1934 Arens mounted a one-man campaign to promote streamlining as a boosterish slogan and a business method for national recovery through increased consumption.[6] In Arens' view, streamlining was relevant to anyone engaged in the exchange of goods and services, meaning virtually all Americans, be they workers or managers of large corporations, small-town merchants, or members of the buying public. Determined to reach as many of these Americans as possible, Arens delivered slide lectures to civic groups across the country, and in November sent a telegram to President Roosevelt explaining how his "streamlining for recovery" effort had "captured American imagination." He also urged that streamlining be adopted by "all Alphabetical Divisions."[7]

---

[5] See Joseph D. Weiss, "Store Design Practice," New Pencil Points 24 (February 1943): 43.
[6] Arens' position was predicated on the commonly-held belief that underconsumption had not only caused the Depression but was responsible for its prolongation and severity. See Chapter 1.
[7] Quoted in Meikle, pp. 164-5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Among scores of recovery schemes sent to Washington during the New Deal, Arens' proposal was taken seriously enough to be forwarded to an appropriate agency, in this case the FHA. At that moment, with the Modernization Credit Plan in operation and the Better Housing Program largely in place, the FHA was in the midst of its own national campaign to promote *modernizing* as a slogan and method for recovery. That New Dealers would have immediately recognized an affinity between Arens' streamlining scheme and the FHA's modernizing effort is not surprising, if only because by mid-decade the two terms were closely allied in the public's mind.[8] For its part, the agency also saw a correspondence between its goals and Arens' and arranged for him to meet with the advisory committee of its Industrial Division, whose membership included representatives from General Electric, Johns-Manville, Pittsburgh Plate Glass, and Libbey-Owens-Ford. Eventually, he completed one project and a report for the committee, designing a motor caravan fitted with building product displays (see Chapter 5) and outlining a plan for the FHA to use "streamlining as a selling tool," thus transforming it "from a mere commercial enterprise into a movement of some national significance."[9]

Arens' conception of streamlining as "a selling tool," though lacking policy specifics, was virtually identical to the FHA's conception of modernization as a "sales effort"--one designed to improve the appearance of the nation's buildings in order to improve the nation's economy. Despite these similarities, advertising executive Arens regarded streamlining as superior to modernization from a marketing standpoint. In his report Arens explained that because of its apparent psychological associations with products that were viewed by the public as "modern, efficient, well-organized, sweep [sic] clean and beautiful," streamlining was the most evocative and thus appropriate term to express the goals and aspirations of the FHA's

---

[8] According to Meikle, as streamlining gained popularity for product restyling it came into general usuage having the same basic meaning as modernizing with only shades of difference between them. Both implied improved efficiency and appearance, but streamlining also implied speed while modernized implied newness. See Meikle p. 168.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modernization program, especially since these went beyond improving buildings, credit facilities availability and even the economy to improving the American standard of living.[10] Despite Arens' entreaties, the FHA never substituted streamlining for modernizing in its campaign slogans, promotional literature, and technical manuals, nor in its program nomenclature which was fixed by the mechanism of the *Modernization* Credit Plan. It did release a Clip Sheet article utilizing a generalized streamlining metaphor which likened the modernization movement to "a vast machine... moving forward at steadily increasing speed," but this hardly represented the adoption of his promotional concept.[11] Nonetheless, the streamlining of consumer goods was vitally important to the FHA's work and had been from the program's earliest conception in advance of Arens' involvement in 1934. The streamlining of consumer goods, a practice engendered by the Depression and conceived as a curative at once selfishly-motivated by business concerns and socially meaningful as a psychological panacea, provided something far more significant than a mere slogan; it provided a model for the modernization program as a whole.[12] In 1924, Lewis Mumford suggested that it was "this side of exaggeration to say that today a building is one kind of manufactured product on a counter of manufactured products."[13] A decade later, after the commencement of the modernization program, it was no exaggeration at all.

The Consumer Goods Model

In a general economic sense, consumer goods are a category of products including durables, like cars and refrigerators, and consumables, like food and clothing. They are distinguished from producer goods, those raw or processed materials and/or tools used to make durables and consumables. In a general cultural sense, while fulfilling certain basic needs or uses

---

[9] Arens' report to the FHA is cited in Meikle, p. 165. Meikle was unaware that Arens' work for the FHA was part of a larger promotional effort.
[10] Cited in Meikle, p. 165.
[11] "Modernization Work Records Huge Gains in all Parts of U.S.," FHA Clip Sheet 2 (No. 2), n.p.
[12] Marc Weiss has similarly argued for an understanding of "the production of homes as a manufacturing and merchandising process of high social significance." See Marc Weiss, Rise of the Community Builders (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 147.
[13] Lewis Mumford, Sticks & Stones (1924; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1955), pp. 100-1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

consumer goods also satisfy less tangible desires and represent a network of social meanings or values shaped by producers and consumers and mediated by advertising and marketing.[14] As a theoretical and practical model for the FHA's modernization program, consumer goods, and more specifically the streamlining of consumer goods, must be understood both economically and culturally: as a model for guiding the building industry in the creation of new markets and the cultivation of new consumers for its products and services and simultaneously as a model for educating the consuming public to comprehend in buildings and architecture a range of associations and images deemed necessary by the government to help alleviate the crisis of the Depression.

This consumer goods model is firmly embedded in the discourse of building modernization: in its rhetoric and propaganda (written by advertising and marketing specialists), in its procedural policies and fiscal structure (modeled on consumer credit practices), in its formal expressions (borrowed from the restyling methods of industrial designers), and in its distribution methods (influenced by door-to-door selling techniques). Within this discourse it is possible to chart the emergence of what might be called the *consumption constructs* of modernization, specifically analogies or paradigms which the corporate/ government publicity machine repeatedly employed to subsume architecture into the consumer culture. As we shall see, these constructs operated in two distinct ways, often concurrently: in building modernization as a consumption strategy and in the modernized building as a consumer product, both operations wholly informed by an instrument regarded as a crucial agency of modernity--advertising. Thus was building modernization, like industrial design with which it shared a theoretical basis and a practical methodology, marked, as Terry Smith would have it, by "the insertion of the priorities, values, and

---

[14] In this cultural definition of consumer goods, I am not denying the degree to which consumption habits were created or cultivated by corporate advertising, but, following the arguments of Jackson Lears, Roland Marchand, Richard Wightman Fox, and others, I believe that consumers, made (and make) conscious choices as much as they were (are) exploited or manipulated. This is a more moderate position than that of Stuart Ewen who critiques advertising as a form of social control enacted upon upon passive consumers, thus discounting any possibility of consumption as an empowering act. For Lears, Marchand, and Fox see below. See also Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

imagery of advertising deep into the productive process."[15] The conscious utilization of a consumer goods model by the FHA and corporate sponsors of the modernization program resulted in a commodification of architecture far beyond its inherent relationship to the market. Through modernization, buildings or parts of buildings were produced, packaged, advertised, and sold during the Depression to a willing and--through the assistance of the MCP--able American public. This was a public constituted of members of that expanding consumer culture who, as the Lynds noted in Middletown in Transition, were increasingly "hypnotized by the gorged stream of new things to buy." During the Depression, as Main Street's buildings were purposefully cast into that gorged stream, the purchase of those *new things* was charged with social urgency as never before.[16]

Historians of consumer culture have observed how the material abundance which resulted from the gradual improvement of factory production at the turn of the century, and especially after World War I, gave rise to new imperatives for creating consumer demand. If consumption was to keep pace with accelerated production, the stimulation of demand for goods would have to transcend utility and rely on other criteria. Increasingly, manufacturers and their publicist/apologists, the advertising agencies, began promoting a therapeutic social vision in which particular goods were explicitly associated with particular states of well-being, a not insignificant claim in the rapidly changing and uncertain modern world. Consumption became a palliative, assisting in the realization of aspirations or the assuagement of anxieties, be they personal, public, local, or national. Though the crisis of the Depression revealed consumption's social curatives as illusory and precipitated a popular distrust of promissory advertising, as aspirations went unfulfilled and anxieties became more acute in the years after 1929 the therapeutics of consumption became even more potent.[17] In fact, in 1934 Robert Lynd commented in President Hoover's report on

---

[15] Terry Smith, Making the Modern (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 357.
[16] Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd, Middletown in Transition (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1937), p. 46.
[17] See Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930" in The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

recent social trends that since 1929 "selling commercial products as substitutive reactions for more subtle forms of adjustment to job insecurity, social insecurity [etc.] had advanced to an effective fine art."[18] If consumption was recharged by the Depression, the producers themselves had not been idle: manufacturers, their advertising agencies, and their industrial designers facilely associated *restyled* consumer goods with a very specific state of well-being. Enter streamlining, with its evocations of a speeding machine, a smoothly-functioning society, and a prosperous future made available to consumers with an easily-purchased promise of modernity.

In 1934-35 the scope of that therapeutic promise widened as the government and its corporate partners promoted building modernization through an association with consumer goods:

> Now, for the first time in history, owners may repair, alter, and improve their properties on an even better basis than that upon which they have purchased automobiles, refrigerators, washing machines, and other accessories.[19]

If this seemed like preying on a consumer society already enthralled and over-extended with installment buying, the government's reassurance that modernization was a national need and a patriotic duty was intended to allay consumer suspicion and relieve consumer anxiety. Nonetheless, the intended effect was the same: to "telescope the future into the present," bringing prosperity into the Depression.[20] So it was without guilt that companies extending modernization credit deliberately repeated during the Depression the advertising mantras of the consumer credit craze of the 1920s: "easy payment"; "no money down"; "you don't need cash."[21] Modernization, requiring no mortgage, no collateral, and no downpayment, satisfied the supposed "get it now" desires of the

---

History, 1880-1980 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 18. See also Lears, Fables of Abundance (New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 239-40.

[18] Robert S. Lynd, "The People as Consumers" in Recent Social Trends in the U.S.: Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1934), pp. 867-68.

[19] FHA, Selling Better Housing (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 6. See also Roger Steffan, "Speech before American Bankers Association," FHA Press Release No. 97, 24 October 1934, p. 1 [NA RG Box y749].

[20] This was how the Lynds characterized the effect of installment buying. Lynd, Middletown, p. 46.

[21] See Ward Canaday, "Speech at Furnishing Industries Dinner," FHA Press Release No. 168, 10 January 1935, p. 1 [NA RG Box y749]. Selling Better Housing, p. 14; FHA Promotion Pointers 1(No. 9, 1935), n.p. "Modernizing Main Street," Building Modernization, October 1935, p. 15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

American consumer's restless "installment soul" and, at least in the government's view, proved unequivocally that "building owners like to buy improvements this way just as they do automobiles."[22] This satisfaction functioned on what might be called the micro and macro scales of consumption. At the micro-scale, the building was conceptually dismantled into its constituent parts as the modernization salesman, not infrequently an architect, proffered detailed checklists and diagrams for identifying and quantifying an extensive inventory of property improvements. The building, no longer a totality, becomes a random group of individual "selling points": a sign, a display case, a doorway, a floor--each in need of redesign and each available for immediate purchase. At the macro-scale, the building remained conceptually intact, one immense selling point upon which the "actual miracle" of modernization will be performed, transforming a building or a storefront so completely that it appeared as an entirely new edifice (at least at street level) as, for example, in Harry L. Mead's modernization of an abandoned Main Street building in Grand Rapids, Michigan [Figs. 172 & 173]. His design for the Hub Clothing Store transformed the existing brick facade with new fenestration and a cladding of Inch-Unit Macotta in ivory and light blue on the upper facade, deep blue on the bulkheads and trim, and stainless steel on the window spandrels.[23] In that transformation, modernization became therapeutic.

That the federal government so easily assimilated the therapeutic vision of consumption is not surprising: not only had manufacturers of consumer goods, including General Motors and General Electric, played a key role in the formulation of the modernization program, but many New Dealers, including officials of the FHA, subscribed to the belief that underconsumption could be

---

[22] Selling Better Housing, p. 15. On popular attitudes toward consmer credit see Christine Frederick, Selling Mrs. Consumer (New York: The Business Bourse, 1928), pp. 282 & 285. See also Lynd, "The People as Consumers," pp. 861-4.

[23] FHA, Portfolio of Radio Publicity (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935) p. 2. On the Hub see "From Red into Black," Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 12. See also Maul Macotta Corporation, "Macotta Installations," Sweet's Catalogue File (1937), sec. 16, cat. 9, p. 5. This modernization also included extensive structural work and interior redesign. The modernization was undertaken by a mortgage trust company to whom the property had reverted after foreclosure and it was in order to put the building on a paying basis to cover incurred debt and taxes that the company decided to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

blamed for many of the country's current economic and social problems. If underconsumption of the products and services of the building industry--implicit in deferred maintenance and repair--was responsible for the run-down state of the nation's buildings then it followed that renewed consumption through modernization would serve as an economic and social palliative. If modernized storefronts fulfilled this therapeutic function more convincingly than restyled consumer goods this was more a matter of its site (a public street) and scale (a building) than of a significant qualitative difference between the two, since both were products of the same corporate capitalist machine. Like the consumer good, the storefront's success or failure as a therapeutic image of prosperity hinged on its legibility to the American public. Thus, the storefront engaged those practices already working to educate that public, cultivating consumers' ability to read such images. These were the visual, linguistic, and psychological practices of advertising.

Even before investigating the operation of specific advertising practices in the formulation of legibility and consumer comprehension, it is obvious that at a basic level the modernized storefront *was* an advertisement, selling both a product (the store's actual merchandise) and also a promise of prosperity, progress, and modernity. As the FHA noted, "the front of a business house is its best advertisement," the modernization of which would not only "convert a building into an efficient salesman," but "display national spirit...and a commitment to broad recovery."[24] While the Depression engendered the explicit social content of the storefront's advertising message, the concept itself was already present in commercial architecture before the Crash. In 1929, the critic Shepard Vogelgesang wrote in Architectural Forum of "America's return to architecture as advertisement" after decades of suppressed commercialism when "commerce took refuge in palazzi or retired behind columned arcades." According to Vogelgesang, increased competition in the late 1920s led merchants and store designers to reconsider the storefront as a means of attracting public

---

modernize in 1937. Holding out the promise of a complete renovation, the trust company convinced a local men's clothing store to abandon the nearby building it had occupied for over two decades.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

attention. Influenced apparently by the 1925 *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris, they began to realize that attention could be directed to the store as much through distinctive architecture as through appended signage. This led to the emergence of so-called "advertising fronts."[25] In the 1930s, advertising fronts were often referred to as "billboard" types, both terms referring to a storefront's architectural expression, in which signage and facade were treated as an integrated whole, and to a storefront's promotional intent. According to Morris Lapidus, the billboard type facade had "the same principles as a poster" with displayed merchandise and sign letters instead of an image and text.[26] The poster-like qualities of the billboard front were enhanced when the modernization encompassed the building's full-facade, especially when the upper stories, the windows blocked by a new cladding or an infill, were treated as a 2-dimensional field for a graphic composition. The treatment could be as straightforward as Elias Rothchild's use of enlarged sign letters on a flat, colored background for a Wise Shoe Store on State Street in Chicago (next to the Carson, Pirie, Scott Store) or as elaborate as Lapidus' own abstract arrangement of rectangular forms for the Peggy Hale Clothing Store in Birmingham, Alabama [Fig. 174 & Fig. 175]. A particularly dramatic example of a store "frankly designed as a billboard" was Barney Gruzen's modernization of the Star Electical Supply Company in Newark, New Jersey [Figs. 176 & 177]. On a facade of light blue glazed terra cotta Gruzen created an asymmetrical composition of channel and incised sign letters letters in burnt orange (porcelain enamel) and ultramarine (enameled terra cotta).

---

[24] "Modern Store Fronts Merit Cash Outlays," FHA Clip Sheet 7 (No. 8, 1936), n.p. How Owners of Homes & Business Property..., p. 19.

[25] Shepard Vogelgesang, "Architecture and Trade Marks," Architectural Forum 50 (June 1929): 897. Vogelgesang observes this trend in stores in New York City, especially on Fifth Avenue, discussing Joseph Urban's redesigned facade for the Bedell Store at length. The changes implicit in the form and meaning of the *advertising front* parallel changes to advertising in the 1920s as ads shifted from the subtle to the sensational, from simply presenting product information to consciously attracting attention. See Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization," p. 18.

[26] Morris Lapidus defined the "billboard" type of the 1930s in "Store Design," Architectural Record 89 (February 1941): 124. See also the jury report (by Mies van der Rohe, Morris Ketchum and others) for a 1943 competition sponsored by Kawneer in anticipation of post-war construction. "Store Fronts of Tomorrow," New Pencil Points 24 (February 1943): 32. According to J.R. Von Sternberg, "the store front is a three-dimensional advertisement." See Von Sternberg, "Unit Planning No. VI: The Store" American Architect 150 (June 1937): 100.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

However striking this combination was during the day, at night it was literally electrifying as the entire facade became a flattened sign advertising Star's electrical supplies: neon tubes, including those of a custom-designed electric clock, rear-lit glass block panels, and, of course, electric light fixtures (lamps, torcheres, sconces, and chandeliers) in the display windows [Fig. 178].[27] In all three cases, the billboard front of the modernized facade was intended as "savvy advertising" that would, according to Building Modernization magazine, "act as the merchant's brass band" drawing in customers.[28] Lapidus used similar terms, noting the "pulling power of storefronts" and likening them to "circus barkers" and "ballyhoo artists" soliciting passers-by with the architectural equivalent of a loud sales talk.[29] In making such a pitch, the modernized storefront attempted to convey an essential message: "here is a progressive, up-to-date store."[30] While public comprehension of this message was undeniably related to public recognition of certain architectural forms as emblematic of progressiveness and up-to-dateness, legibility was equally predicated on comprehension and recognition of the opposite--architectural forms emblematic of the unprogressive and the out-of-date. This awareness had been cultivated by the most important practices building modernization borrowed from advertising. These practices were expressed by a single concept--obsolescence.

Obsolescence

Obsolescence lay at the foundation of the federal modernization program, a fact about which the FHA was unequivocal. In Modernize for Profit, the widely-distributed merchant's manual used to introduce the $50,000 loan limit in the summer of 1935, the agency declared, "Here, then, is opportunity for the business men of America to protect themselves against the

---

[27] "Winning Entries, Pittsburgh Glass Institute Competition," Architectural Forum 67 (August 1937): 103. See also "Portfolio of Commercial Work," Architectural Forum 64 (May 1936): 426-8.
[28] Warren F. Morgan, "Why Should I Modernize?" Building Modernization, September 1933, p. 8. John W. Harrington, "More Profit Store Fronts," Building Modernization, December 1933, p. 12.
[29] See Lapidus, "Store Design," p. 119. See also Lapidus, Too Much is Never Enough (New York: Rizzoli, 1996), p. 98. Here Lapidus describes his own storefront work of the 1930s.
[30] PPG advertisement, "Turn Passers-By into Profitable Customers," Chain Store Age, May 1935, p. 93.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

costly results of obsolescence."[31] While the dangers of obsolescence were specified in Modernize for Profit as a loss of customers, increased operating costs, and decreased profits and property values, the term's actual meaning remained obscure. Though the FHA specified the necessity of improving antiquated mechanical systems (heating, lighting, plumbing, etc.), this referred exclusively to *technological* obsolescence, which did not help to explain the broader concept of obsolescence as the agency promulgated it. Six months earlier, however, in January 1935, the FHA defined obsolescence in reference to real property as "the loss of value due to all causes except physical deterioration."[32] This was also confusing because the physical deterioration of buildings, induced by the Depression through outright neglect or slackened maintenance, had been one of the main justifications for the modernization effort as articulated in the fall of 1934. Indeed, physical deterioration was linked directly to the loss of property values. In Bulletin No. 1, for example, the FHA stated that the nation's buildings were suffering from "the ravages of five years of depreciation and obsolescence" with an implied distinction between the two terms.[33] The architect Arthur C. Holden clarified this distinction in the Survey Graphic. Arguing, like the FHA, that "depreciation and obsolescence [were] serious problems," Holden defined the former as "the physical wearing out of property" and the latter as "the psychological wearing out of property." Depreciation, Holden contended, was controllable and even avoidable through adequate maintenance and repair to offset deterioration, but obsolescence was more problematic because it introduced potentially more elusive criteria for evaluating whether a building was worn out: "obsolescence takes place because styles change."[34] Here then, the determinants for worn-out property seemed to move far away from a building's utility, or even state of repair, toward factors

---

[31] FHA, Modernize for Profit (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 2.
[32] Ernest M. Fisher, "The Research Program of the FHA, Address Delivered to Annual Meeting of National Association of Real Estate Boards," 11 January 1935 [NA RG 287 Box y748].
[33] FHA, Modernization Credit Plan, Bulletin No. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934),p. 3.
[34] Arthur C. Holden, "Modernization--Ballyhoo or Progress?" Survey Graphic 23 (July 1934): 335. The FHA may have actually borrowed some of its terminology from Holden. His article appeared prior to the release of Bulletin No. 1 and was included in the FHA's Press Digest. At that time,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which, in the words of Robert Lynd, were "less tangible [but] scarcely less potent" in the pressure they exerted on the building owner-cum-consumer.[35]

Within this concept of obsolescence, the power of style was largely psychological and lay in its very intangibility. Understood to be artificially created and socially controlled--produced by some complex of factors known as "public taste"--style was restless and changeable, accelerating in tempo with modern life and just as destabilizing to the individual consumer who barely had time to acknowledge the "style of today" before it became the "style of yesterday."[36] This is vividly represented in relation to commercial architecture in an LOF promotional pamphlet prepared for the 1939 Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco. Using an 1839-1939 timeline of shopkeeping similar to Raymond Loewy's product evolution charts, LOF depicted a "modern age characterized by fast tempo [with] every phase of life...stepped up to a new high" [Fig. 179 & Fig. 180].[37] Predicating a building's need for modernization on a style-based concept of obsolescence allowed government and corporate publicists to more easily manipulate merchants and property owners than if modernization was based simply on the necessity of physical repairs since, like most consumers, they were thought to be psychologically vulnerable on matters of taste. Adding a further level of complexity was the fact that merchants were not modernizing simply for themselves, but for their customers who, the FHA argued, would "ordinarily avoid stores of obsolete appearance."[38]

Utilizing this concept just as it was utilized in consumer goods, modernization publicists inculcated a fear of obsolescence--that "most relentless of all competition...applying to our greatest national asset--our real property"--in order to create a desire for its antidote, in this case

---

Holden was also serving as a consultant to the Research and Planning Division of the National Recovery Administration, and New Deal agencies often shared technical data with one another.

[35] Lynd, p. 864. See also p. 858.

[36] Paul Bonner, "Style and the Salesman," Talk No. 7 (April 1931), Industrial Institute of Art Center. Lynd, pp. 877-9. See also Kenneth Stowell, Modernizing Buildings for Profit (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1935), p. iii. "Modernity--Here Today...It May be Gone Tomorrow," Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 157.

[37] LOF, Marvels in Glass, 1939 [LOF MSS-066 Box 16, folder 32]. Loewy's charts appeared in Sheldon and Martha Cheney, Art and the Machine (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936).

[38] "Obsolete Appearance Detriment to Shop, Businessmen Claim," FHA Clip Sheet 10 (No. 11).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the modernized building.[39] Obsolescence applied to the nation's real property was evident throughout the FHA's promotional literature. Modernize for Profit in particular was profusely illustrated with photographs of buildings which seem calculated to scare merchants and business property owners into modernizing, lest they, too, fall victim to obsolescence. Some of these were unsurprising before and after case studies of typical Main Street stores (the majority reprinted from Architectural Forum), but the most evocative was a photomontage of twenty commercial buildings, obviously dating from the second half of the 19th century [Fig. 181 & Fig. 182]. Severed from their streetscapes, the buildings float disembodied like (given the stylistic proclivities of the moment) a spectral vision of obsolete architectural horrors: Italianate, Romanesque, Gothic, Sullivanesque, and Beaux-Arts. Purposefully placeless and nameless, the buildings were so intentionally familiar in the typical American townscape that they appeared utterly generic, thus exemplifying those stylistically obsolete buildings supposedly in need of modernization in virtually every community in the country.[40]

As Jeffrey Meikle has shown, style obsolescence emerged as a codified marketing strategy sometime around 1930, yet another attempt by manufacturers and advertisers to increase demand for surplus goods born of overproduction. As promoted by Earnest Elmo Calkins (see Chapter 4), "artificial obsolescence" was intended to encourage "new buying" through the redesign of products to make them look "markedly new"--exclusive of any technological improvements. These redesigns were intensely promoted through marketing which often cultivated contempt for a product's former appearance and attempted to convince consumers that

---

[39] Selling Better Housing, pp. 25 & 5.

[40] Some of these buildings can be identified as structures modernized prior to 1935: the J.W. Robinson Department Store in Los Angeles; the Glenn Building in Cincinnati, the Medinah Temple Building in Chicago; the Block & Kuhl Building in Decatur, Illinois. See "Remodeling, Modernization, Repair," American Architect 146 (April 1935), p. 18. "Modernizing the Store in 1935," Stores, February 1935, supplement, front cover. "Commercial Modernizations Profitable," Building Modernization, May 1935, pp. 10-12. "Modernize Main Street," Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 59. Republic Steel advertisement, "Modernize Main Street with New Faces," Architectural Forum 63 (June 1935): 45. "A Truncated Skyscraper," Architectural Forum 62

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

they could not be stylish without purchasing the different looking, but functionally unchanged object.[41] The degree of psychological conditioning inherent in artificial obsolescence gave rise to complaints from consumer advocates. Stuart Chase, for example, campaigned against mass psychology and urged consumers to resist artificial demand. Even Calkins himself was uncomfortable with the implications of artificial obsolescence and ultimately came to believe, like Chase, that the strategy was foisting unnecessary products on an unsuspecting, gullible public.[42] For its part, the FHA seems to have suffered no crisis of conscience with regard to its use of obsolescence, possibly because of the advertising and business backgrounds of FHA officials and their close relationships with corporate manufacturers.[43] Even so, was it not somewhat problematic for the federal government to borrow as potentially exploitative a marketing strategy as artificial obsolescence for a program intended as a sincerely civic-minded, grass-roots fight against the Depression?

In fact, by the time the government co-opted style obsolescence, the general concept had already been redirected away from the *artificial* toward an ideology known as *progressive* obsolescence which was promulgated as pro-active and consumer-oriented, though the end result was same. According to its chief apologist Christine Frederick--home economist, consumer advocate, and author of the influential Selling Mrs. Consumer--progressive obsolescence was the

---

(March 1935): 271-2. For the source of the Modernize for Profit case studies see "Repair, Replan, Rebuild," Architectural Forum 61 (August 1934): 85-124.

[41] Meikle, pp. 70-1. See also Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 158.

[42] They were right, of course, artificial obsolescence did attempt to strip consumers of agency with regard to personal taste and purchase decisions, creating need and desire out of a void. See Stuart Chase and F.J. Schlink, Your Money's Worth (New York: The Business Bourse, 1927). Chase founded a national consumer research organization which had 24,000 members in 1931. See also Marchand, p. 314.

[43] In the present context, some of those relationships bear repeating: Ward Canaday, head of Public Relations at the FHA, was the founder of the U.S. Advertising Agency, the firm which had the LOF account throughout the 1930s. Albert Deane, head of modernization credit at the FHA, was also head of consumer finance at General Motors, one of the first American manufacturers to successfully utilize style obsolescence to boost the sales of its cars and refrigerators. In his memoirs, GM Chairman Alfred Sloan noted that GM's credit finance innovations were as important to the corporations success as its model change/style program. See Alfred Sloan, My Years at General Motors (New York: McFadden Books, 1965), chapters 15 & 17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

consumers' "willingness to take hold of anything new either in the shape of a new invention or new designs or styles or ways of living"--a free acceptance of the new. For Frederick, the consumer, as much as the manufacturer, was controlling obsolescence and thus, in her conception, the consumer was not a passive object, but an active subject making deliberate choices and decisions. Frederick's use of the term *progressive* was particularly important since it suggested "progress," "speed," and "the modern world" while dispelling any negative associations with falseness and wastefulness which *artificial* obsolescence had connoted. The latter she defined as "a readiness to scrap or lay aside an article before its natural life of usefulness is completed" with the implication that this discarding or rejection was purely arbitrary.[44] The difference between the two forms of style obsolescence emerges principally as a matter of intent: artificial obsolescence lacks clear motivation, while progressive obsolescence is motivated by the dynamic impulses of modernity. Three aspects of progressive obsolescence as propounded by Frederick, and as understood in the 1930s, are especially relevant to building modernization. First, the whole-hearted acceptance of the new requisite in progressive obsolescence was thought endemic to the United States as a "a common-clay American trait." Second, style obsolescence was just as important as technological obsolescence and represented the "principal operative" in contemporary American consumer society. Third, progressive obsolescence was both a consumer practice *and* a producer gimmick since, according to Frederick, consumers were as eager to buy the new as producers were to sell it.[45]

Corporate and government modernization literature is rife with similar conclusions. Modernization supporters consistently posited the urge to fight obsolescence as a natural and national compulsion, part of a characteristically American anxiety complex. A writer for Building Modernization commented that "no one is more willing or anxious than the American to keep up with the times, to keep up with the Joneses"-- referring to Arthur Momand's popular comic strip of

---

[44] Christine Frederick, Selling Mrs. Consumer (New York: The Business Bourse, 1928), pp. 246-7. Frederick's ideology of progressive obsolescence is also analyzed in Marchand, pp. 156-9.
[45] Frederick, pp. 246-7, 250-55.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the 1920s in which the mere presence of the wealthy, but unseen Jones family compels their middle-class neighbors to excessive spending in order to rival their standard of living.[46] This desire to "keep up" manifested itself on a personal and communal level, in the individual merchant and the town as a whole, bound up with ideas of progress and betterment fundamental to the Main Street booster culture.[47] Since there was always someone or someplace that was bigger or more prosperous, the keeping-up mentality fueled the competitiveness on which the modernization movement was founded. "Rivalry," according to the FHA, was an "incentive to modernization" and "essential to successful trading."[48] In fact, in the overheated Main Street marketplace, keeping up with the store next door was the only way to survive. Ideally, modernization would enable the merchant not merely to keep up with a retail rival but also to surpass him, at least temporarily. It was for this reason, according to LOF, that the "sales-minded retailer" declared to the "modern architect": "I want the smartest store on the street!" [Fig. 183]. In another context, LOF promoted its Colorful Storefronts as "the one sure way of keeping a step ahead of the competition."[49] FHA radio publicity used the same arguments, but emphasized the common man angle typical of Depression-era advertising: "ordinary, average, run-of-the-mill, matter-of-fact American citizens," had no desire to be "the bob-tail and the fag-end of the procession." Rather, they desired "to be modern" which meant "keeping up-to-date."[50] Contemporary critics and consumers would have immediately recognized the marketing code words in each of these statements. By the end of the 1920s, a majority of Americans were familiar with, if not wholly literate in, such parlance and

---

[46] Morgan, p. 8.
[47] See Chapter 2. See also Lewis Atherton, Main Street on the Middle Border (1954; rpt. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966), p. 357. Architectural Forum illustrated this in its coverage of the group modernization of Main Street in Gainesville, Georgia as part of a rebuilding effort following a devastating tornado in April 1936. (See Chapter 1) Describing the pre-tornado town as "any and every old town in the U.S., haphazard, out-at-elbows, gray, disjointed," the Forum noted how modernization had so transformed the business section that Gainseville was able to "look down its nose at those unfortunate towns which were not wrecked by tornado." See "Tornado Over Gainseville," Architectural Forum 66 (February 1937): 154, 157.
[48] "Rivalry is Incentive," Clip Sheet 2 (No. 1, 1935), n.p.
[49] LOF, Vitrolite pamphlet, reprinted in 1936 Advertising Scrapbook. LOF advertisement, "Sell Your Store," IGA Grocergram, May 1940, reprinted in LOF, 1940 Advertising Yearbook.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

certainly by the mid-1930s phrases like *up-to-date* and *keeping up with the Joneses* were not only in common usage, but were understood as advertising slang for the aspirations of material modernity.[51]

Following the advertising stratagem of therapeutic consumption, modernization propagandists contended that this innate American up-to-dateness extended naturally, almost empathetically, from the individual to the building, with modernization itself posited as an obvious concomitant–a "cure for obsolescence." Architects Holabird and Root (the latter a member of the LOF Main Street competition jury) agreed with this assessment, commenting that building modernization was "to fall in line and keep step with the times" and was "a rather definite statement to the public of what he [the building owner] is." Likewise, LOF noted in an advertisement that "it is essential that your store be as modern in its appearance as you are yourself."[52] Evidently, up-to-date Americans required up-to-date buildings. The president of a Chicago-based grocery chain admitted as much when he accepted progressive obsolescence as the rationale for a corporation-wide store modernization program: because "people crave newness," R.V. Rasmussen explained, it was necessary to alter the store design every few years.[53] By the end of the 1930s even the F.W. Dodge Corporation took an "obsolescence factor" into account when compiling statistical data on commercial alterations and repairs, noting that the need to attract restless "public attention" was responsible for much minor building activity.[54] In the FHA's words, a "modernization-minded public [was] not likely to be attracted to an unprogressive-looking building." Hence, the FHA repeatedly advised merchants that "customers coolly pass by the stores that do not keep in step with the times and patronize those that do."[55] The title page of Modernize

---

[50] "Talk for General Audience," Portfolio of Radio Publicity, p. 2.
[51] Christine Frederick in Selling Mrs. Consumer, Frederick Lewis Allen in Only Yesterday, and Robert Lynd in "The People as Consumers" all use these phrases in this popular sense in their contemporary discussions of the emergent consumer culture. See Frederick, p. 246. Allen, pp. 92 & 142. Lynd, p. 878.
[52] Morgan, p. 8. Holabird and Root are quoted in Harrington, p. 12. LOF advertisement, "To Keep in Step with Competition," Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 95.
[53] R.V. Rasmussen, "We've Profited by the Times," Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 644.
[54] R.S. Sweeley, "Activities in Retail Store Design," Architectural Record 83 (February 1938): 102.
[55] "Public Demands Up-to-Date," FHA Clip Sheet 11 (No.1). Modernize for Profit, p. 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for Profit offered apparent photographic proof in an overhead shot of a shopping street crowded with women in cloche hats and fur-trimmed coats and men in fedoras and business suits: such smart and stylish consumers patronized only stores which were "as modern as tomorrow" and studiously avoided the unmodernized establishment, worn-out and obsolete. [Fig. 184].[56]

The FHA's most outright, yet eloquent defense of consumer-driven progressive obsolescence in architecture occurs in a five-minute speech prepared by the PR division in the spring of 1935 and released in a portfolio of radio publicity as a "Talk for Merchants." More than any other statement found in the broad literature of modernization, this speech reveals the movement's underlying ideology, demonstrating how fully modernization borrowed from the consumer culture:

> It is a matter of historic record that when buying is resumed after any period of depression, the buying public demand the new and the different in merchandise. They are not interested in old merchandise, dusted off and marked down. They are no longer interested in the old stores, unless the old stores feel the urge to newness and the call of a new day. When prosperity dawns after depression, we suddenly realize how utterly tired we are of the fashions of yesterday. We tire not only of last year's fashion in clothing. We tire of old packages. We tire of old architectural forms. We tire of old methods of doing business. And this is a form of restlessness that is absolutely right. It explains why tenants move from old buildings into modernized structures. It explains why obsolete stores lose patronage.[57]

Interspersed with advertising phraseology emphasizing up-to-dateness and contemporaneity, the speech also displays a calculated empathy with American consumers as it shifts pronouns from the distancing "they" to the inclusive "we." In addition, FHA speech writers are offering historical precedent (that unspecified but presumably authoritative "record"), as well as extenuating circumstances c. 1935 ("depression") as rationale for shifting consumer preferences and a reorientation of consumer demand from the old to the new. "Newness," that all-encompassing grail of consumption, we surmise from the speech, was denied the buying public during the austerities of

---

[56] Modernize for Profit, pp. 12 & 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the economic crisis, making the desire for it all the more acute. History bears this out, as Richard Wightman Fox has observed, "the Depression and the Second World War, far from undermining the consumer ethos, merely delayed for many the day of gratification. The ideal of fulfillment through consumption and leisure was if anything furthered by the experience of voluntary deprivation."[58] The FHA's reasoning was similar. After a period of deprivation, the desire for the new was so strong that building modernization was required perforce as a logical extension of Depression-induced consumer ennui. Furthermore, within the logic of progressive obsolescence being promulgated, the FHA's reasoning validated a nation growing tired of merchandise and, even more significantly of architecture, solely on the basis of style. This was hardly a startling development. Style has often been a basis for architectural restlessness, at least since the Renaissance, witness the stylistic shifts between the classical and gothic revivals of the 19th century or even the stylistic conflict between modernism and historicism at this particular moment in the 1930s. Within the modernization movement, however, style consciousness and the cultivation of mass taste in architecture were privileged as never before, to the near exclusion of other considerations whether functional or technological.

As is evident in the "Talk for Merchants," the government was using the economic hardships of the Depression to legitimize consumer demand for new merchandise and new architecture based on aesthetics and not necessities–thus simultaneously legitimizing the efforts of manufacturers to stimulate that demand. Arguably, the determination of necessities was entirely subjective. While some business leaders worried that style obsolescence (even when posited as *progressive*) engendered self-indulgent, luxury consumption, modernization experts argued the opposite because the nation's buildings needed some kind of repair and improvement after five years of deferred work. However, as already indicated, under the influence of obsolescence

---

[57] "Talk for Merchants," Portfolio of Radio Publicity, p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ideology modernization implied something more than paint and plaster, stimulating style-based renovations in which the visual trappings of modernity were far more important than efficiency of plan or equipment. In fact, it was in the presumed obsolescence of architectural style itself that one could argue for the necessity, since within the prescriptions of modernization, a building's obvious display of the "fashions of yesterday" and "old architectural forms" would lead to an inevitable decline in business, rent, or property values. With advertising *legerdemain*, building modernization's publicists neatly resolved the vexing moral dilemma of style obsolescence. Far from encouraging extravagant and wasteful consumption in Americans, modernization encouraged the kind of therapeutic consumption on which the dawning prosperity supposedly depended. For the merchant, as a consumer of architecture, the government's stamp of approval in the form of loan insurance transformed the purchase of a new storefront from a luxury into an economic exigency. But the style-based rationale articulated in the "Talk for Merchants" does more than simply disclose the operation of obsolescence in the creation of consumer demand for modernization. It also makes explicit analogies between architecture and consumer goods, implying, by extension, an analogous relationship between a consumer of modernization and a consumer of merchandise, clothing, and packages. This, then, implies a direct correspondence between the modernization consumer and the "typical consumer" as understood by manufacturers, advertisers, and designers in the 1930s.

Gendered Consumption

According to the marketing experts responsible for constructing *her* identity, the "typical consumer" of the 1930s was categorically assumed to be a woman because American women were understood to have enormous buying power, with some estimates attributing 85% of all consumer spending to them.[59] In the present analysis of the consumer goods model it is crucial to investigate how commercial building modernization, like the restyling of products, responded to this largest

---

[58] Richard Wightman Fox, "Epitaph for Middletown: Robert S. Lynd and the Analysis of Consumer Culture" in The Culture of Consumption, p. 103. See also "Depression Consumption" in Lynd, pp. 906-8.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and most powerful segment of the consuming public. A useful place to begin is with the assumption that women were thought to be the principal buyers of so-called style goods, products like those streamlined goods already discussed which were redesigned to make them beautiful and/or fashionable, thus appealing to the supposed changeability of the female sensibility. Indeed, American women were thought to possess a psychological love of change and a natural predisposition towards stylishness and up-to-dateness, an extreme manifestation of what was regarded as a characteristic American trait. This essentialist view, held by the majority of advertisers and marketing experts, and even some women's consumers advocates, assumed that women valued style and appearance above all else.[60]

The modernization program, driven by sales and preoccupied with appearance, could hardly overlook the female consumer, a fact of which participating manufacturers and prospective modernizing merchants were well aware. LOF and PPG consistently emphasized gender in their storefront advertisements, from straightforward declarations that "the modern market owner...realizes the vital importance of attracting women into his store" to more detailed shopping scenarios:

> A potential chain store customer walks down the street. She's going to buy merchandise somewhere. She sees your store. And in a split second she decides whether she'll come in and patronize you or seek further for a more inviting store.[61]

The government was also aware of the importance of the female consumer, as evident in FHA PR Director Ward Canaday's frank assessment: "The women of America control our spending, and because they do control our spending they have largely in their hands the ability to determine when

---

[59] Christine Frederick analyzes the typical/female consumer in Selling Mrs. Consumer, pp. 11-18.
[60] Frederick, pp. 53 & 245. See also Marchand, p. 131.
[61] PPG advertisement, "Split Seconds," Chain Store Age, September 1936, p. 123. LOF advertisement, "The Newest Idea in Luminous Storefronts," IGA Grocergram, October 1938, reprinted in LOF, 1938 Advertising Yearbook.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

this depression shall end."[62] Because consumption was marked as female, this statement seems to give women a critical, if momentary power to end the Depression, but following the causal theory of underconsumption, it also places responsibility, if not blame for the Depression upon female shoulders. Nonetheless, as Canaday makes clear, the government viewed women as important modernization consumers, but their actual consumption of modernizing products was largely limited to the home, since few women were in a position to make purchases for commercial buildings [Figs. 185 & 186]. This was the purview of men, as the nation's principal merchants and landlords. Despite their apparent exclusion, however, women were not uninvolved in commercial modernization; to the contrary, their influence was pervasive. Comprehending the logic of this influence in general terms, design historian Ellen Lupton has observed that "although the built environment is designed largely by men, much of it is constructed with female consumers in mind."[63] Controlling consumer spending enabled women to exert power in the commercial sphere, influencing not just style goods, but the physical space of the marketplace, sites of consumption which were now themselves designed and marketed for female appeal into modernized, *style*-ized buildings. However illusory this power may have been in reality, since the female appeal potentially embedded in those sites was itself largely a construct of male-dominated corporate marketing, it must, nonetheless, be taken into account in order to fully apprehend the architectural form and meaning of modernization in the commercial sphere

This female influence can be understood as a sexing of architecture which operated within the consumer goods model upon the modernized building and upon building modernization. I use the term "sexing" here for two reasons: first, to evoke recent gender-based critiques which have explored the relationship between women and the production of architecture; and second, to distinguish from Ann Douglas's notion of "feminization" to explain

---

[62] Ward Canaday, "Speech before the 24th Annual Convention of the National Retail Drygoods Association," FHA Press Release No. 173, 16 January 1935, p. 1 [NA RG 287 Box y 748].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

how American Victorian women (white, middle-class) seized the reigns of national culture--of the arts and literature--while having little impact on the larger industrial society.[64] Though it is an exaggeration to say that here women seized the reigns of national *commerce*, thereby dictating the terms of trade through their purchasing power and consumption habits, with respect to building modernization, female influence did effect certain forces of production and manufacturing, however indirectly. As we shall see, female consumption habits were seized and internalized by building modernization, producing a sexed commercial architecture in which the modernized building, in particular the storefront, bears the imprint of the female consumer, reflecting what Ward Canaday called her "needs and desires."[65] To understand how women's needs and desires contributed to this sexing of commercial architecture it is necessary to further explore the connection between consumer goods and building modernization, searching in particular for those formal and psychological elements occurring simultaneously in strategies of marketing and design which supplied the modernized building with a desired female charge.

In his 1935 book Modernizing Buildings for Profit, Kenneth Stowell, sometime architectural editor and organizer of LOF's Main Street competition, posited an especially evocative analogy between modernized buildings and style goods. He compares commercial buildings in need of modernization to automobiles, noting that "even Ford [Motor Company] found that it was not enough to produce a car which would run at a low price. It must also have eye

---

[63] Ellen Lupton, Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993), p. 12.

[64] See Diana Agrest et al, eds., The Sex of Architecture (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996). See especially Joan Ockman, "Mirror Images: Technology, Consumption and the Representation of Gender in American Architecture since World War II." See also Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (1977; rpt. London: Papermac, 1997), especially pp. 1-13.

[65] Canaday in FHA Press Release No. 173, p. 1. In searching for the specifically *female* imprint of this sexed commercial architecture, and in making a link between female consumption and architectural production, I am aware of the degree to which the gendered imprint of the modernized building was informed by styles and ideals created and manipulated by modernization's producers and publicists--manufacturers, advertising agencies, and government officials. While this certainly mitigates against female agency in shaping consumption choices and the consumption environment it does not completely invalidate it since, at the time, consumer advocates like Christine Frederick regarded the manipulation as working both ways. This was

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

appeal for the customer."[66] Stowell's choice of Ford as style exemplar was hardly accidental. The last of the big three automakers to introduce the yearly model change (following General Motor's 1924 lead), Ford finally succumbed to marketing pressure in 1927, offering color options and a new body design in the Model A. Stowell's analogy thus had a further implication: style consciousness, that perceived female trait, was such a force that even the great industrialist Henry Ford eventually capitulated. He did so only grudgingly however, with the complaint, quoted triumphantly by Christine Frederick, that "we are no longer in the automobile, but in the millinery business."[67] Ford's ultimate recognition of the necessity of appealing to women is the basis of Stowell's argument for the importance of gendered "eye appeal," especially as related to obsolescence ideology [Fig. 187]. While a new car model might possess a variety of technological improvements appealing to consumers, these were almost irrelevant if the car's styling had the appearance of last year's model. To sell these improvements (or to sell the car even if there were no improvements) it was necessary for the new model to possess some visual cue or hook--a change in color, an added compound curve--which canceled the perceived obsolescence and gave the car an aura of the new. Modernization was the functional equivalent of the model change, serving to transform an out-of-date building into one physically and psychologically in vogue. Modernization, like the model change, gave a building "new character and atmosphere through style and design" that was intended to lure customers and boost sales.[68] The FHA itself recognized the value of the restyled car analogy, counseling building material manufacturers to update their product lines and "bring forward any 'new models' with the latest improvements" that might attract modernization

---

especially true during the Depression: while fierce competition forced producers to intensify their efforts to shape consumption habits, it also forced them to be more responsive to consumers.

[66] Stowell, p. 11.

[67] Frederick, p. 6. Frederick Lewis Allen also noted Ford's capitulation "to style and beauty." See Allen, p. 134. Ford's struggle with style change and the Model A is recounted in detail in Smith, pp. 101-9. On General Motors and the style change see Meikle, pp. 12-13.

[68] Stowell, p. 11.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

consumers.[69] The building/car style construct was equally explicit in an LOF advertisement appearing in Motor Magazine: "a smart-looking modern LOF storefront is to an up-to-date place of business what the beautiful finish is to a modern motor car--a becoming dress that sells through the eye."[70] The added analogy to women's clothing underscores the gendering of style consumption in modernization (see below).

The transformation of an old model building into a new model building was achieved in modernization the same way it was achieved in car styling: by removing the visual appearance of obsolescence from the body of the object. Government officials and private sector experts agreed that what marked a building's exterior as obsolete was the manifestation of past architectural styles, what Stowell called "excrescences" and "superfluous ornaments and gimcracks." To a consuming public being educated to recognize heavy molding, pronounced cornices, jutting dormers, elaborate masonry, and cast iron storefronts as signifiers of age, these features rendered a building "an antiquated nightmare" and "an unwanted eyesore"--but not irrevocably. As the FHA put it, "buildings [could] be rescued from obsolescence by a few simple operations on their exteriors"--the operations of modernization-cum-streamlining.[71] The building, like any other consumer good, was

---

[69] FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising and Publishers (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), p. 17. Elsewhere, the FHA utilized the car analogy more explicitly in connection with home modernization, sometimes coming close to a Corbusian "machine for living" ideal. In a speech broadcast on NBC, FHA head Stewart McDonald compared the modern car to the modern house, noting that the efficiency and convenience of the former was now available in the latter and concluding that Americans would soon accept "revolutionary changes" in the home just as they did in the automobile. [Stewart McDonald, "New Era in Home Ownership," typescript of a speech, October 1934, n.p.]. Car/house comparisons turn up frequently in modernization advertisements and other promotional materials. One FHA cartoon depicted a streamlined sedan parked before a shabby, run-down house. The caption reads "The Necessity" [FHA Promotion Pointers 1 (No. 6), Matte 7314]. Another ad likens a turn-of-the-century house to an old jalopy, asking "how much money would be required to get you to ride down Main Street in this 1902 chariot? Why then use an 1898 house? A modern small car can be bought inexpensively now...so can a complete modernizing job." [FHA Promotion Pointers 1 (No. 5), n.p.].

[70] LOF advertisement, "Salesmanship in Metal and Glass," Motor Magazine, September 1938, reprinted in LOF, 1938 Advertising Yearbook. Fashion's implications for modernization are analyzed below.

[71] Stowell, p. 26. "Undesirable Features May be Removed," FHA Clip Sheet 10 (No. 1, 1936). "Apply Brick Siding," FHA Clip Sheet 2 (No. 2, 1934). "Survey Shows Many Stores in Need of Repairs," FHA Clip Sheet 11 (No. 1, 1936). "Obsolete Appearance Detriment," FHA Clip Sheet 10 (No. 11, 1936). "Rescued from Obsolescence," FHA Clip Sheet 2 (No. 6, 1935).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

stripped of ornament and details and *sheathed* in a veneer of materials perceived as modern: structural glass (Carrara and Vitrolite), laminated plastic (Formica and Micarta), or enameled steel (Enduro and Veribrite) [Figs. 188-191].[72] Manufacturers themselves also recognized this as a basic strategy of modernization: "Fussy details are discarded and clean lines and broad surfaces are the rule. Color, too, is playing an increasing part in outside decoration."[73] Such surface restyling had proved a workable strategy for cars and refrigerators: even if the gadgetry underneath the smooth streamlined shell was messy and the technology unchanged in years, this was inconsequential as long as the product's exterior was pristine and stylish. The typical (female) consumer, interested only in style, never went beneath the shiny new surface and willingly drew the conclusion that if it looked new, it was new. The surface restyling of the storefront would operate similarly as the effacement of obsolescence through stripping and sheathing branded the building with an emblematic visual newness which would stimulate a positive psychological reaction (or assert a psychological control) to influence the consumer's decision to enter the store.

The 1936 transformation of the Rialto Theater in Waukegan, Illinois is a case in point [Fig. 192]. Prior to modernization this small cinema had an arched entrance with classical molding topped by a grilled clerestory and a tiled roof projecting a half story above the flanking retail spaces terminated by decorative parapets above the transoms.[74] While this basic configuration was retained in the modernization, each of these individual age-marking elements was effaced by a cladding of black Veribrite (porcelain enamel) and stainless steel trim. An appended sign with attached guy wires was replaced by a cantilevered marquee, a stainless steel, round-cornered box horizontally wrapped in neon speed lines. The assertively modern thrust of the marquee's

---

[72] Stowell details the procedure: "Resurface all exterior walls...striking wall surfaces can be produced with the new types of non-corrosive metals, porcelain-enameled iron, colored opaque glass or sheet plastics." Stowell, p. 167.

[73] Armco advertisement, "Modernized...and Modern," Architectural Record 83 (February 1938): 148.

[74] Such triple front theater buildings were a common Main Street type. The flanking retail spaces were small and often included a tea room or ice cream parlor serving as a theater concession.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

seemingly unsupported projection was emphasized by the neon tracks underneath, especially the wide framing bands which extended outward from the building and around the front face of the marquee in an unbroken line. This new facade, designed in-house by the General Porcelain Enameling Company, was credited with increasing the Rialto's business--a claim which could certainly be construed as a sales pitch within the context of a General Porcelain advertisement, though trade publications like Better Theaters and Box Office made similar claims for the value of cinema modernization and its positive impact on box office receipts.[75] One might assume that for a movie theater, more than for any other commercial establishment, such increases would be so entirely predicated on the quality and price of the product for sale--the films being shown--that the appearance of the facade would be almost irrelevant, but the psychological power of visual obsolescence was apparently so all-embracing in the 1930s that its architectural antidote could single-handedly alter consumer habits. Such a conclusion was self-evident to General Porcelain which posed a rhetorical advertising question vis-a-vis the effectiveness of the Rialto's modernized facade: "Increased attendance? Of course!"[76]

Following the logic of surface, Kenneth Stowell argued that regardless of structure or mechanics, "exterior design and decorative changes that make the newness of the old building apparent" were most important for attracting style-conscious tenants and customers. Surface restyling was "the design that attracts the people that pay." This fact alone, Stowell believed, made exterior restyling of the facade the most important type of modernization and the one which should precede all others.[77] With this argument, storefront manufacturers and the government wholeheartedly agreed: the former because facade modernization offered the best opportunity for

---

[75] See, for example, "Modern Theater Remodeling Institute," Box Office, August 1935, pp. 10-15.
[76] Veribrite advertisement, "Resplendent!" Architectural Forum 66 (March 1937): 61.
[77] Stowell, p. 11. The fact that a commercial establishment could remain open for business while an exterior alteration was underway was probably of equal importance. Stowell urged architects to demonstrate for their potential clients the extent to which a building's appearance could be modified without disturbing the structure, inhabitants, or business at all. For Stowell, modernizing the facade served as a first step to subsequent interior renovations and equipment improvements.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

increasing sales of their products; the latter because through facade modernization a Main Street building might best function as a public symbol of recovery during the Depression.[78] Thus modernization willingly became facadism--"architecture as shelter with symbols on it" in Robert Venturi's famous formulation.[79] If somewhat anachronistic, this conception of facadism is nonetheless appropriate in the present context, for modernization's publicists and practitioners were well aware of the scenographic and symbolic potential of the restyled facade. This insistent emphasis on the architectural surface occasioned the most compelling implications of the consumer goods model as the modernized building became--in theory and in practice, in marketing and on Main Street--a colorful package, a streamlining skin job, and a stylish costume.

Facadist Strategies

The Packaged Facade

The storefront is facade by definition, representing exteriorly all advertising and architectural intentions. The storefront's facadist strategies during the Depression were simply the varied ways that exterior representation was conceptualized within the discourse of modernization, filtered through the consumer culture. As already suggested, within that culture women were thought to be especially responsive to the type of re/styling recommended for the modernized storefront, its experts apparently assuming that women would find colorful and shiny surfaces as appealing in a streamlined building as they did in a streamlined car or refrigerator. A basic equation of building sex in the marketplace emerges here: a product designed to visually appeal to women

---

[78] The FHA occasionally warned against exclusively exterior modernizations, cautioning merchants that although "the new storefront might attract customers and have excellent advertising value," it would become an "anticlimax" once customers realized that modernization "stopped at the front door," making the merchants themselves "guilty of false pretense." See "Obsolete Appearance Detriment," n.p. Given the expense of full interior/exterior modernization many merchants, especially independents, were willing to risk consumer disappointment by modernizing only their storefronts. Tables categorizing government-insured notes by type of modernization appear in every FHA Annual Report and provide statistical evidence of the frequency with which merchants modernized store exteriors rather than interiors. In 1939, the editors of Architectural Forum reached a similar conclusion. See FHA, 2nd Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1936), pp. 10-12. "Main Street, U.S.A.," Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 83.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

should be sold in a store possessing the same visual qualities. *Form follows merchandise* (though, by extension, form also followed *merchandising*, for many specifically female marketing strategies were also employed by manufacturers and the government to sell modernization). As noted above, this dictum, which Emrich Nicholson observed as characteristic of commercial architecture of the 1930s, recurs frequently in the modernization literature.

As early as 1928, Randolph Williams Sexton, a contributor to American Architect, wrote that "the architectural treatment of the shop [should be] as modern as the wares on sale." Creative advertising writer Ralph Richmond agreed, noting that the stylistic linking of the storefront and the goods on sale would announce to the prospective customer "here is modern merchandise, modernly offered for moderns."[80] This was also the rationale behind the FHA's repeated assertions, always directed at merchants, that "buyers demand not only the new and different in merchandise, but they instinctively purchase that merchandise in places of business that present a new and different appearance." Unless the store presented an "ultra-modern front" buyers would remain wary "that the latest and most up-to-date of anything could be found in such a building." As a pre-BHP modernization campaign had put it, "a shabby, old-fashioned front OUTSIDE suggests stale, outmoded merchandise INSIDE."[81] Industrial designers seeking to extend their sphere of influence, such as Raymond Loewy whose work is discussed below, had been making similar claims since the beginning of the decade. By 1940 Harold Van Doren argued, in his practical guide to the industrial

---

[79] Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, Learning from Las Vegas (1972; rpt. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), 8-9, 87-92.

[80] Randolph Williams Sexton, American Commercial Buildings of Today (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Company Inc., 1928), pp. 154-55. Ralph Richmond, "The Old Store Puts on a New Front," Stores, February 1935, p. 157.

[81] Modernize for Profit, p. 7. "Modern Elevators Aid Progressive Store Owners," FHA Clip Sheet 6 (no. 11), n.p. "Survey Shows Many Stores in Need of Repair," FHA Clip Sheet 11 (No. 1), n.p. National Clean Up and Paint Up Campaign materials reprinted in "Sprucing Up Main Street," Building Modernization, September 1934, p. 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

design profession, for a progressive modernizing process that started with the redesign of a package or a product, moved on to commercial fixtures and ultimately to the store or showroom itself.[82]

While the degree of stylistic correspondence between store and product ranged from a generalized affinity (the most typical approach) to a literal equivalence (a programatic packaging of the facade in the form of the goods sold within), this, as always, was invariably achieved through the use of those materials and forms comprehended as modern by the consuming public. The use of glass or metal veneers and plastic laminates, rounded edges and bold graphics, characteristic of any number of products found in Main Street stores of the 1930s, amounted to a visual re/packaging of the storefront as a deliberate replacement of the old packages/architectural forms decried in the "Talk for Merchants." It bears repeating that as a way of conceptualizing exterior modernization, the packaged storefront directly paralleled contemporaneous efforts to make a product look new and improved by changing the outward appearance, but not the contents of a given container–be it a restyled cereal box or refrigerator case. Such an idiom was sufficiently popularized in the coming years that by 1941 the editors of Architectural Record cautioned store designers against "the notion that all architecture is packaging."[83] That the Record felt obliged to make such an assertion merely underscores the degree to which a packaged (commercial) architecture had become commonplace. It even appeared in a non-architectural context, in an advertisement for transparent celluloid which could be used to give product packages the "plate glass pulling power" of storefronts [Fig. 193]. This ad, which appeared in Fortune in 1936, depicted a row of clear-fronted, colorful packages for hair brushes, cigars, and hot waterbottles. Over-scaled and lined up to create a commercial corridor, complete with shoppers, the packages have literally become the buildings.[84]

---

[82] Harold Van Doren, Industrial Design: A Practical Guide (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1940), p. 350. See also Meikle, pp. 116-19.
[83] "The Architect Working in Commerce," Architectural Record 89 (March 1941): 58. The point of the article was to remind architects that their training in "sizing up space relations" could be effectively utlized to help merchants replan selling floors for increased profitability.
[84] Celluloid Corporation advertisement, "Packages with Plate Glass Pulling Power," Fortune, October 1936, p. 73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In reality, of course, it was the buildings which became the packages. As early as 1928 Morris Lapidus designed a "modern drugstore" in New York City which, by his own admission, took its cue from the colorful packages of drugs and cosmetics sold within--packages which, as Christine Frederick noted, had themselves been restyled through "modernistic art" to specifically appeal to women (who made nearly 90% of all drug store purchases).[85] A few years later the designers of the flagship store for the Katz & Besthoff Drug chain sought a similar effect in which storefront, store fixtures, and stock would "form a consistently harmonious design...striking a modernistic, almost futuristic keynote" [Fig. 194 & Fig. 195].[86] Following a similar storefront correspondence, Horace Ginsbern designed a new front for a Chock Full o' Nuts coffeeshop/store which took its cue from the company's trademark, borrowing the immediately identifiable black, yellow and red color scheme and patterning. This decorative device, along with Ginsbern's composition, which broke up the facade into small display units, led Architectural Forum to favorably comment that the store's design reflected its function of vending "small packaged goods"--the familiar Chock Full o' Nuts coffee cans and vacuum bags [Figs. 196 & 197].[87]

When Cushman's Sons Bakers began modernizing its 300 nation-wide units in 1936, it too sought to establish a clear formal relationship between the storefront and its trademark package--a white bakery box with a blue script logo and a blue "Grade A" ribbon. In the earliest Cushman's modernizations, the facade was clad in white porcelain enamel, trimmed in blue at the base of the curving bulkhead, and given a signboard area treated as an enlargement of a bakery box top with the chain's logo type and ribbons set--at far too small a scale--against a white background [Figs. 198 & 199]. Eventually, Cushman's brought in Raymond Loewy to restyle the chain's already updated image and to provide a prototype for subsequent modernizations [Figs. 200-202]. Loewy redesigned and significantly enlarged the signboard logo

[85] This was the Theresa Pharmacy in the Ansonia at 2109 Broadway. See Lapidus, p. 87. See Frederick, pp. 193-4.
[86] S. J. Besthoff, "Making the New Store Fit its Location," Chain Store Age, January 1932, p. 31.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

(to approximately 10' x 4'), substituting large gold-finished brass letters in a modern cursive type (remniscent of Huxley Vertical) for the original old-fashioned script. He also altered the treatment of the standard display window, reducing it in size to more of a narrow band and terminating it in a semi-circle at the outer edge of the storefront. In conjunction with the white and blue cladding and curving bulkheads, which Loewy retained from the earlier modernizing schemes, his new display window gave the standard Cushman's storefront a more emphatic streamlining effect.[88]

Bruder's Creamery, a midwestern dairy chain, also conceptualized its modernized storefronts as large-scale representations of the company's trademark product--a bottle of milk with a maroon label and a "Dutch Maid" logo [Figs. 203 & 204]. At the same time, Bruder's sought a modernizing design which would give the chain's stores "a streamline effect." Thus, architect Wilbur Henry Adams abstracted the Bruder's milk bottle into a series of sleek design elements, as appeared on a store in Cleveland, Ohio: a cladding of white porcelain enamel accented with maroon on the bulkheads and silhouette sign letters with the Dutch milkmaid herself on an enlarged entrance plaque. While Adams' use of a predominantly white facade was obviously intended as a deliberate evocation of milk itself, it had the further psychological goal of convincing shoppers

---

[87] "Portfolio of Commercial Work," Architectural Forum 65 (October 1936): 317.

[88] Loewy probably borrowed this motif from his 1934 project for a model industrial designer's office from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Contemporary American Industrial Arts Exposition. Here, the motif carried the streamlined effect of the entrance curve across the storefront, allowing a smooth transition from the two-dimensional flattened facade to the three dimensional entrance and also repeating or reflecting (depending on the disposition of the facade) the large "C" of the logo above. Against the white cladding of the facade, the semi-circular ends, as well as the porthole windows of the entrance doors, appeared nautically modernist in the manner of André Lurcat and Rob Mallet-Stevens with whose work the Parisian-born Loewy was undoubtedly familiar. On Cushman's modernization program see "How Chains Modernized in 1936," Chain Store Age, November 1936, p. 116. On Loewy's work for Cushman's see "Portfolio," American Architect 150 (June 1937): 93-96. See also "Portfolio of Current Modernization Work," Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 105.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that the "clean, wholesome, and inviting" appearance of the Bruder's storefront was merely a reflection of the wholesome purity of Bruder's dairy products.[89]

Even without such obvious trademarking, a literal visual coordination of storefront to product was a common modernizing strategy. For a blueprint shop in Wilmington, Victorine and Samuel Homsey painted the existing brick facade deep blue with white trim in order to "simulate the building's principal product" [Figs. 205 & 206]. Even more programatically, in Boston an abandoned dry cleaners was renovated into a cocktail lounge with a display window shaped as a cocktail shaker (trimmed in extruded aluminum, the material of which shakers themselves were commonly fabricated) and the glass panes of the entrance door shaped as a martini glass [Figs. 207 & 208]. For the new facade of Pridham's Opticians a centrally placed entrance was flanked by octagonal shadow boxes linked by a metallic bridge to form a pair of granny glasses [Fig. 209]. On Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles, architect Marcus Miller inserted into the facade of the Darkroom camera shop an eight-foot tall *camera* of black Carrara, plate glass, and metal trim. In a general way this display unit resembled cameras restyled in the 1930s by designers such as Walter Dorwin Teague [Figs. 210 & 211].[90] As a conceptual strategy, the packaging of the storefront, like modernization's other facadisms, was concerned with the legible symbolism of the modernized facade. But in formulating that symbolism, the packaged storefront was less engaged with the critical issue that informed the other strategies, that of the surface. In fact, in modernization's other facadisms it is possible to identify three distinct metaphorical surfaces--the epidermal, the cosmetic, and the appareled--each laying atop the other on the restyled storefront.

---

[89] "Bruder Brings Color to Front," Chain Store Age, June 1935, p. 72. See also "Modernize Main Street," Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 60.

[90] These buildings appear in the following: PPG advertisement, "Design Unified Store Fronts," Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 73. "Portfolio of Current Modernization Work," Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 101. PPG advertisement, "New Freedom in Store Design," American Architect 149 (August 1936): 114. Brasco, "A Brilliant name in Storefronts," Sweet's Catalogue File (1939), section. 19, catalogue 1. On programatic commercial architecture see David Gebhard's introduction to Jim Heimann and Rip Georges, California Crazy (New York: Chronicle Books, 1980), pp. 11-25. The Darkroom appears on p. 48. It still stands today in slightly altered

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Youthful Facade

In the epidermal conception of surface, facade modernization may be considered a skin job, evoking a typical approach to product restyling in the 1930s.[91] Skin in that industrial design context is a sleek membrane stretched over the body of an object, but a building has a face as well, and in modernization that patch of skin--the anthropomorphized facade--was the most prominent. As the government noted, "The modern American store should have a clean, inviting, smiling face."[92] In June 1935, the FHA's promotional Clip Sheet announced the start of a trade-specific campaign to modernize the nation's 75,000 beauty salons with a headline reading "Beauty Shops Will Have 'Face Lifted'" [Figs. 212 & 213].[93] Given that the accompanying article was intended for publication in newspaper women's pages, the likening of facade modernization to face-lifting was probably intended as cute word play, a double-edged cosmetologist's pun. It would prove a potent neologism. Today, we commonly refer to a building's exterior restyling or refurbishment as a face-lift, but, as indicated here and in numerous other citations by the use of quotation marks, this was not the case in the 1930s when the cervico-facial rhytidectomy was still a relatively new procedure with still imperfect techniques in the burgeoning field of cosmetic surgery. However, as historian Elizabeth Haiken has shown, though the face-lift had not yet become popular as elective surgery (this would not occur until after World War II), the *idea* of the face-lift had already emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly for women, as "a rational response to the higher standards set by consumer culture and a way to achieve psychic balance."

---

form as an Indian restaurant. In 1995 The Darkroom was reproduced in its original form by Catherine Wagner on *Hollywood Boulevard* at Disney-MGM Studios, Orlando, Florida.

[91] Skin job also evokes Raymond Loewy's quip that Betty Grable's liver and kidney were "no doubt adorable" but he would rather have her "with skin than without." Cited in Richard Pommer, "Loewy and the Industrial Skin Game," Art in America, March/April 1976, p. 46.

[92] From modernization publicity posters reprinted in "Sprucing Up Main Street," Building Modernization, September 1934, p. 14.

[93] Women's Page Clip Sheet 1 (No. 3, 1935), n.p. This campaign was organized by the trade publications Beauty Shop News and Modern Beauty Shop in conjunction with the Main Street initiative. See "Uncle Sam will Help You Modernize Your Beauty Shop--Heres How," Modern Beauty Shop, July 1935. Writers especially liked using *face-lift* in relation to the beauty parlor. In 1936,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Further supported by a long-standing tradition of self-improvement and an ardent belief in the efficacy of scientific (i.e., medical) progress, the face-lift was viewed as an extreme, but acceptable form of therapeutic consumption.[94] Its purpose was obvious: to counteract the aging process and improve the appearance of the skin by removing age markers such as wrinkles and bags. The resulting face supposedly looked younger and more beautiful and the face-lifted person, typically a woman of a certain age, apparently regained her powers of physical attraction and was thus able to socially compete with those younger than she. In a nation already enthralled with ideals of youth and beauty, the face-lift was fraught with cultural significance in the 1930s--for women and for architecture.

Industry experts, government officials, and building material manufacturers all recognized the metaphorical power of the face-lift as a synonym for facade modernization. The suggestive potency of this metaphor clearly stemmed from its stability of meaning even when introduced into the seemingly disjunctive context of architecture, for the purpose of the building face-lift was basically the same as the human face-lift: to counteract the aging process and improve the appearance of the surface by removing age markers, specifically those architectural elements deemed obsolete. The resulting (modernized) facade supposedly looked youthful and beautiful, modern and up-to-date, enabling the face-lifted building to retain its power to attract customers and tenants and gamely compete with newer buildings--a recurring conclusion throughout the literature. Though Kenneth Stowell cautioned that "it would be foolish to think that all properties can be brought to the credit side of the ledger by a face-lifting treatment," he concluded that such a treatment would make "the old building as new and modern in design as

---

Architectural Forum noted that "Today's beauty shop, in the face of stiffening competition on all sides is having its face lifted." See "Portfolio of Commercial Work," p. 407.

[94] Elizabeth Haiken, Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 132. The face-lift procedure evolved from the reconstructive techniques of plastic surgery developed during World War I.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

any of its younger competitors," giving it "a new lease on life and a change of character."[95] The FHA concurred. Noting that at least 90% of all American stores were "drab and uninteresting in appearance," the agency concluded that "Main Street face-lifting" was a necessity and that it would do "more toward renewing the youthful appearance of a building than almost any other rejuvenating operations." Such cosmetic surgical characterizations appeared frequently in government publications, as in the description of a demonstration project in which exterior changes to a turn-of-the-century building were labeled "'face-lifting' operations" which made the building "lose years in appearance," allowing "exterior beauty" and a "modern effect to emerge."[96] Perhaps following the government's lead, a newspaper editorial in support of modernization credit cited by the Lynds in Middletown in Transition, noted that "If Middletown is not so improved pretty soon that she will not be able to recognize her 'lifted' face, it will not be the fault of good old Uncle Sam."[97] Though the use of a feminine pronoun to personify Middletown was not unusual, it surely gained rhetorical strength in the gendered context of cosmetic surgery.

Manufacturers of storefront products were equally enthusiastic about the face-lift as a cure for the blemishes of architectural old-age. PPG described how "attractive" the City Drug Store was after "it had its 'face lifted'." Republic Steel urged architects to "modernize Main Street with new faces for old buildings," noting that "there's a lot of plastic surgery going on all over the country today. Old buildings [weather-beaten, dilapidated] are having their faces lifted" [Fig. 214]. Here the standard before and after photographic pair was supplemented by a drawing of, an old man before and after his face-lift showing the renewal of his youthful appearance (a surprising image given the infrequency with which men elected to have cosmetic surgery in the

---

[95] Stowell, pp. 1, 11.
[96] "Stores Must Modernize," Better Housing, 24 June 1936. "Modern Elevators Aid Progressive Store Owner," n.p. Modernize Sacramento Campaign Committee, Let Inspiration House Show You the Way, (Sacramento, CA: 1934), p. 10.
[97] Middletown in Transition, p. 120.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

1930s). Maul Macotta Corporation claimed that its Inch-Unit Macotta (light weight concrete blocks faced in enamel or steel) was intended "to fill the constantly growing need for a wall covering for existing structures" and had been developed specifically for "architects contemplating 'face-lifting alterations'." At the opposite extreme, Chase Brass and Copper warned of "the penalty of 'skin-deep' modernization" which only covered flaws and did not correct them. Given that Chase manufactured pipes and interior fittings a less than celebratory attitude about storefront skin jobs was understandable.[98] Architect Henry Churchill also employed the metaphor negatively to condemn all modernization as ineffective, but his indictment that "facial uplift can no longer hide the wrinkles [of American cities]" was driven by larger ideological arguments about the need for comprehensive planning to forestall the spread of urban blight.[99] The existence of such dissenting advertising and architectural voices demonstrates how fully the face-lift was assimilated into the discourse of modernization. It was both a rhetorical expression of modernization's curative potential to fight the real and symbolic ravages of Depression and obsolescence and an architectural procedure—one which, ironically, was more prevalent in the 1930s than the surgical procedure whose signifying capacity it co-opted.

The Beautified Facade

Though face-lift served as a general analogue for exterior modernization, as an architectural procedure performed on the storefront's surface, it seemed to refer more to the first step in the modernization process, the stripping off of a building's age markers, than to the equally important second step, the surface sheathing or recladding in a veneer of new materials. This application of materials, also conceptualized as a facadist strategy, utilized a set of consumer culture referents

---

[98] PPG advertisement, "A Pittco Store Front Says Come In," Chain Store Age, October 1935, p. 87. Republic Steel advertisement, "Modernize Main Street," Architectural Forum 62 (June 1935): 45. Macotta Corporation, "The Inch Unit," Sweet's Catalogue File (1937), sec. 16, cat. 9, p. 4. Chase Brass & Copper Advertisement, "The Penalty of 'Skin-deep' Modernization," Architectural Record 63 (September 1935): 217.

[99] Henry Churchill, "No Mere Facial Uplift Can Cure the Wrinkles of Our Cities," American City, June 1935, p. 56. Churchill was responding to the FHA's promotion of modernization as a method of large-scale urban revitalization. See FHA, Community Planning (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

closely related to those of the face-lift. Concerned, like the face-lift, with youth-enhancing, beautifying effects–similarly gendered since women more than men were socially programmed to desire a youthful and beautiful surface appearance–these referents were, however, far more quotidian. They engaged not "that strange new form of surgery," as Frederick Lewis Allen labeled the face-lift in 1931, but rather what he called "the vogue of rouge and lipstick" and "facials...to restore the bloom of youth." In other words, they engaged cosmetics and the beauty culture [Figs. 215 & 216].[100] Thus, Vitrolite was marketed in terms not merely suggestive of lipstick, but worthy of Max Factor himself: "Beauty always Pays! For color–depth of color, choice of color, permanent color, sheer loveliness of color–there is nothing that holds a candle to Vitrolite." Applied to the surface of the building, Vitrolite was also analogous to a cold cream applied to the face of a woman: "It glows. It gleams." But it did not require continuous application, for unlike human skin, Vitrolite did not "grow dull with age." Offering "lifetime beauty" and "ageless beauty," it always retained "its sparkle, its clean, cheerful newness" without the use of elaborate facials: "a damp cloth is the only beauty treatment Vitrolite ever needs."[101] Such allusions to the products and services of the female-oriented beauty industry in advertisements for a building material directed at predominantly male architects and merchants clearly reflect the consumer culture's ever-widening sphere of influence. In addition, however, there existed an obvious correlation between modernizing products and beauty products–a correlation, recognized at the time, manifest not just in the marketing of these products, but in their meaning as well.

Consumption of personal care products in the United States, of which women purchased over 80%, had risen steadily since 1900 and even during the Depression fell off only slightly. With this increased consumption came a decided shift in the beauty culture, as women moved away from the use of soap and water with an occasional application of powder toward what

---

[100] Allen, p. 88.
[101] LOF advertisement, "Vitrolite, the Colorful Structural Glass," Chain Store Age (September 1935), p. 119; "Beauty Always Pays!" American Architect 146 (June 1935): 97.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

historian Kathy Peiss has called "everyday cosmetic practices," the regular, if not daily, use of facial preparations and make-up.[102] These practices, actively cultivated by beauty product manufacturers beginning in the 1920s, were explicitly tied to the therapeutic consumption of cosmetics as aids to the attainment of those same heightened standards of appearance which created desire for the face-lift, though cosmetics were obviously far more accessible, available for purchase at the corner drug store or the local beauty shop—sites which themselves, like their customers, were increasingly subject to these standards. Consider, for example, the modernization of the Lantieri Beauty Salon in New York which responded equally to heightened standards of appearance for women and stores [Figs. 217 & 218]. In 1935, what had formerly been a *parlor* for hair styling and manicures became a full-service *salon* for, in addition to hair and nail treatments, electrolysis, reducing, chiropody, and of course, facials and cosmetology. But in attempting to prove itself an "outstanding authority on beauty culture," Lantieri's had to look the part. Thus, as redesigned by Vahan Hagopian its low storefront with old-fashioned signs, painted transoms, and heavy framing was replaced by a tall and slender storefront with a heightened extent of plate glass, neon signs, and two-tone porcelain enamel facing that included a waved band across the curved and faceted bulkheads. To enter the salon customers passed beneath a secondary signboard projecting over the vestibule upon which floated a stylized woman's head, her hair colored and waved, her eyebrows plucked, her cheeks rouged, and her lips painted. Once inside, the customer could choose to have any of those "improvements" done to herself or she could proceed directly to a streamlined "powder bar" opposite the door to purchase customized beauty preparations.[103]

---

[102] Kathy Peiss, Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1998), pp. 167-201. Christine Frederick also discussed the increased usage of cosemetics and the growth of the beauty culture. See Frederick, pp. 188-9, 191. On the consumption of personal care products, which included the purchase of items and services in salons, see Stanley Lebergott, Consumer Expenditures: New Measures & Old Motives (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), Tables A3 & A4.

[103] "Remodeled Beauty Salon," Real Estate Record, 16 November 1935, pp. 19-21.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

While increased consumption of cosmetics was related to women's oft-stated interest in appearance and enthusiastic pursuit of youth and beauty, it was also related to the emergence by 1930 of the *made-up woman* as a female ideal. Dramatically reconceived in the post-World War I era, this ideal was explicitly tied to larger social concerns as women, however much their thinking was influenced by the sales efforts of beauty marketers, began to look upon the use of make-up as an emancipatory form of self-expression. In the 1920s, the lipstick, rouge, and mascara once associated exclusively with prostitutes and actresses were suddenly emblematic of social and sexual freedom and the painted face functioned as a highly-visible rejection of the past and a repudiation of Victorian manners and morals. In the 1930s, it was "a sign of the times" according to Kathy Peiss. No longer shocking and virtually the norm, color applied to the woman's skin had become an expression of the present, of a woman's up-to-dateness and glamour. The painted face was thus a mark of modernity--utterly intentional, freely displayed, and purposefully calling attention to itself.[104]

In relation to the beauty culture it is possible to understand building modernization as an architectural extension of everyday cosmetic practices. What was facade modernization if not color applied to the surface of the building to enhance appearance and make modernity visible? What were modern surfacing materials if not architectural cosmetics rendered accessible in the 1930s through the mass-marketing efforts of manufacturers? Indeed, in his 1930 book Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display, Frederick Kiesler had already referred to storefront materials as "decorative cosmetics."[105] Just as powders, rouge, and lipsticks were newly available in an astonishing variety of shades and colors ("28 shades to fit 28 types of skin") aiding in the transformation of the lily white complexion (the Victorian ideal) into the modern

---

[104] Peiss, p. 151. On the signification of the made-up woman see pp. 133-58. See also Allen, pp. 88-90.

[105] Frederick Kiesler, Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display (New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1930), p. i. For Kiesler, cosmetics was not a favorable designation.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

painted face, so storefront materials were increasingly varied in the 1930s.[106] Vitrolite came in 16 colors, including "suntan," a cosmetic shade which emerged circa 1929 reflecting the vogue for tanned skin [Figs. 219 & 220]. Kawneer porcelain enamel came in 27 (including five shades of blue and six shades of green), Formica and Micarta in nearly 40 each [Figs. 221 & 222]. Just as women supposedly needed expert advice in the application of make-up lest she "overdo her cosmetics," as Christine Frederick warned, so the merchant needed the advice of the architect who might, according to Kenneth Stowell, "use his materials and colors in producing designs that people cannot resist."[107] Of course, even the architect ran the risk of *overdoing* the modernized facade through applied colors. George Ketchum's redesign of the Kallet Movie Theater in Pulaski, New York, utilized seven shades of Vitrolite laid in a stepped-banded pattern on its broad facade: black, walnut agate, and red on the bulkheads; red, gray, princess blue, jade, ivory, and gray on the billboard like upper area. [Fig. 223] In the journal Architecture, W.F. Bartels warned against such potentially immoderate surface applications, offering the architect cosmetically-inflected design guidance which analyzed the storefront in terms analogous to the made-up face: the storefront should not be "garish" or "repellent," but "in good taste" and "attractive." It should not give the effect of "a Coney Island side show" (a reference to the bearded lady or the reptile girl?), but should instead possess "a sleek, clean-cut appearance." Not insignificantly, these latter terms were increasingly gendered as masculine in the advertising parlance of the day, utilized in the promotion of men's toiletries, especially shaving accessories such as Gillette safety razors and Williams Aqua Velva after shave [see Fig. 233]. For Bartels, the designer had to be ever mindful of applying his storefront materials, lest they create the wrong "psychological effect" which, in his conception seemed to range from the chastely demure to the whorish or freakish.[108] Here he seems to echo Frederick Kiesler's identical argument about the "psycho-function" of a storefront's materials and

[106] Peiss, pp. 150-1. Frederick, pp. 195 & 193.
[107] Frederick, p. 192. Stowell, p. 11.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

colors. Kiesler warned against their excessive use and asked, obviously glossing Adolf Loos, "how would the designers like their skins branded with 'beautiful' designs?"[109] Ultimately, the psychological goal was to achieve something in between Bartel's extremes as the architect, through the colorful application of surface materials, creates a storefront that, as PPG put it, "catches the eye, arouses interest, and issues a special invitation"--modernizing cosmetics enhancing the come-hither look of the store facade.[110]

The Fashionable Facade

The application of colored materials to the surface of a building, that most critical of modernizing actions, was metaphorically fluid: one architect's colored face paints became another's colored fabrics without any conceptual slippage. If, on a theoretical level, modernization was unconcerned with polemical distinctions between cosmetics and clothing, the latter undoubtedly provided the most crucial paradigm of surface--the facade as fashion.[111] The relationship between building modernization and fashion was essentially binary, best represented by the terms Paulette Singley and Deborah Fausch have used to define a general relationship between architecture and fashion: the "vestimentary" and the "transitory."[112] In the first term architecture clothes a building as fashion clothes a body. In the present context, the vestimentary can be understood as a literal analogy between architecture and clothing, or more specifically between the modernized building and stylish clothing--the old storefront clad in new materials. In advertising its Vitrenamel surface cladding, U.S. Steel claimed that it provided "good sheets to clothe modern buildings." The

---

[108] W.F. Bartels, "Better Practice: Store Fronts," Architecture 73 (March 1936): 159-61. See also Peiss, pp. 161-2.
[109] Kiesler, pp. 81 & 87.
[110] "A Pittco Store Fronts Says Come In," p. 87.
[111] In the analysis of fashion and architecture which follows certain parallels emerge between the discourse of building modernization and that of European modernism, especially in light of recent efforts to write fashion back into the history of the latter. See for example Mary McLeod, "Undressing Architecture: Fashion, Gender, and Modernity" in Paulette Singley and Deborah Fausch, eds., Architecture: In Fashion (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), pp. 38-123. See also Mark Wigley, White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).
[112] "Singley and Fausch, "Introduction," Architecture: In Fashion, p. 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

architect would design the clothes and the company would produce them "'tailormade'" to fit the front of a given building, in this case a drug store which reported an 80% increase in business after receiving its modernizing attire of multi-color, striped panels [Fig. 224].[113] LOF similarly posited modernization as the architectural equivalent of dressing for success, directing the merchant to "dress your store in modern selling clothes," and "dress up for bigger business with an LOF storefront" in advertisements accompanied by renderings of what LOF considered stylishly dressed commercial facades [Fig. 225].[114] In each case, modernization is fashioned as a dual (vestimentary) process in which the merchant and the architect participate equally.

The relationship between the storefront and clothing went deeper than simple advertising analogies. Indeed, the very concept of the modern storefront was, to a certain extent, dependent on a fashion strategy known as the ensemble. Promoted by makers of women's apparel and accessories beginning in the mid-1920s, the ensemble was a series of goods offered to the consumer as a complete, matched set. The appeal of the ensemble lay in the degree to which it over-rode consumer decisions regarding personal appearance and taste by pre-determining stylistic coordination. By the 1930s, the ensemble, especially the color coordinated ensemble, was a popular merchandising technique used to sell all manner of matching goods from clothing, handbags, shoes, and lipsticks to cameras, cars, home furnishings, and eventually storefronts.[115] As discussed in Chapter 5, prior to the organized modernization movement PPG, LOF and others companies marketed storefront materials individually, typically offering product lines of either facings, trims, or window glass. By the mid-1930s, however, many of these companies, especially glass manufacturers, were selling complete storefronts as fully accessorized ensembles for

---

[113] US Steel advertisement, "Modern Architects do Wonders," American Architect 150 (June 1937): 116.
[114] LOF direct mail piece, Red and White and Libbey-Owens-Ford Join Hands, 1937 [LOF MSS-066 Box 16, folder 32]. LOF advertisement, "Dress Up for Bigger Business," Apparel Arts, 1 March 1938, reprinted in LOF, 1938 Advertising Scrapbook. Though LOF may have used the "dressing" analogy as a pun in trade journals serving the apparel industry, it also appears in other retail contexts.
[115] Frederick, p. 206. See also Marchand, pp. 132-40.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modernizing buildings. LOF's "Complete Storefront" line featured products with evocative, coordinated names like Vitrolux, Vitrolite, and Extrudalite. Brasco's Modern Store Front line was "comprehensive and complete" with all products "in harmonious design." In addition, it included "such important complimentary items" as doors and frames, awning hoods and boxes, grilles and sign letters, and bulkheads.[116] PPG's Pittco Store Front, marketed to coincide with the company's introduction of metal trim as a complement to Carrara and Pittsburgh Plate, was promoted as the "first complete line ever to be designed deliberately, all at one time, with a pleasing harmony and relationship of appearance, a real *unity* of design."[117] In each case the language is clearly informed by coordinated merchandising, for stylistic unity and harmony were the primary lessons of the ensemble. As Christine Frederick observed in Selling Mrs. Consumer, "what building a complete costume ensemble has taught the American woman is to buy her clothing, not as unrelated units, but with a harmonious costume effect in mind."[118] Like a woman buying a harmonious costume, a merchant could purchase "a unified storefront of coordinated materials--products meant to be used together."[119] The facade was now as easily harmonized as a woman's outfit, from shoe to hat or, as Brasco advertised, "from sidewalk to coping, unified in character" [Fig. 226].[120]

When government modernization strategists turned to the idea of the ensemble, they were well aware of its impact on consumers and, by extension, of its consequences in the marketplace, where it was credited with encouraging increased consumption. Operating in tandem with style obsolescence, the ensemble trained the consumer, of clothing or modernization, to recognize potentially discordant elements within a given visual field and to re-conceptualize what had formerly been individual or periodic purchases as part of a unified whole. In this respect, the

---

[116] Brasco advertisement, "Bring it to Life with Brasco," Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 123.
[117] Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company, "Make the Store Fronts You Design Better Looking," American Architect 146 (April 1935), 102.
[118] Frederick, 205.
[119] Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company Advertisement, "Now...Design Unified Store Fronts," Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937), 73.
[120] Brasco Manufacturing Co. Advertisement, "In All Modern Metals and Finishes," Architectural Forum 66 (June 1937), 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ensemble was understood to have profoundly altered American purchasing habits, of women in particular, by expanding the definition of necessities as the FHA's Ward Canaday noted in 1935:

> The psychological fact is that American women do not stop with single item buying. When they reach the point of buying a new dress, nine times out of ten it means, new hat, new shoes, new gloves, in fact, a new outfit.[121]

According to Canaday, this female propensity for ensemble buying could be exploited to stimulate home modernization and, depending on the susceptibility or willingness of the woman, could lead to full-scale exterior and interior residential redesign. But it could also be exploited to stimulate commercial modernization by convincing the merchant that his ensemble-savvy customers would instantly identify and disapprove of any uncoordinated element in the storefront just as they recognized unmatched or out-of-date items of clothing or accessories. In the competitive world of Main Street, the improperly accessorized storefront would cause those customers to patronize other establishments. Thus, the merchant required a storefront in which signage, bulkheads, display windows, and entrances were consciously coordinated and just as the consumer turned to the expert stylist who was often employed by department stores in the 1930s to assist in the building of ensembles, so the merchant turned to the architect who would utilize matching storefront products to create appealing ensembles, putting together modernizing storefront outfits that would possess a stylistically correct harmony of facing materials, metal moldings, colors and textures.

A notion of modernization as fashionable clothing also informed a cartoon appearing in the FHA's Promotion Pointer series in which the Statue of Liberty converses with Uncle Sam, the latter dressed in a vaguely modern version of his traditional tails and striped trousers. Miss Liberty offers a compliment: "You look so much better in the New Suit, Sam." The FHA offers an explanation: "America [is] discarding its old clothes after years of neglect and putting on new raiment in the form of modernization and remodeling."[122] This presents a neat reversal of gender

---

[121] Canaday in FHA Press Release No. 173, p. 2.
[122] FHA Promotion Pointers 1(No. 9), Matte 7905.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

stereotypes. Instead of the woman as fashionplate displayed to an admiring man, it is the male national personification who is dressed in the modern/ized finery of a new suit, while the female national personification looks at and comments upon *his* stylish appearance. This reversal restates the imperatives of modernization consumption, vis-à-vis the position of women: modernization strategists encouraged women's putative interest in style and fashion hoping to extend their sphere of influence into the male domain of commercial buildings. The cartoon depicts the end result: the male (merchant) accepts female style-consciousness, improves his (store's) appearance, and meets with female (consumer) approval.

This objective, which circumscribed the relationship between fashion and modernization, was stated candidly by George D. Buckley of the FHA's public relations division: "before we are through, we hope to have everybody thinking about his own property the way every woman thinks about her clothes"--mindful of appearance, desirous of current styles, and aware that the latest architectural fashions were as easily purchased as the latest dress.[123] While obviously acknowledging the vestimentary notion of fashion, Buckley's statement also evokes its transitory quality: its inherent dynamism or "system of rapid change" which enables it to represent that which is the newest and most up-to-date, desired by at least some portion of the consuming public.[124] When FHA head James Moffett announced the necessity of "making modernization fashionable" it

---

[123] George D. Buckley, typescript of Address at Breakfast Meeting of the National Conference of Business Paper Editors, National Press Club, 22 November 1934, p. 4 [NA RG 287 Box y 748]. Implicit in Buckley's statement was the notion that men did not think about their clothes as women did, being disinclined to deal with issues of fashion, a point with which Architectural Forum agreed in a "Planning Techniques" article. According to the Forum's editors, it was for this reason that men's clothing shops--singular sites of consumption *mano a mano* which existed outside the sphere of female influence--tended to feature an extreme out-of-dateness: "Anything-but-Tudor is still considered rather bold in ready-to-wear [stores] and the number of custom tailors who have freshened up their shops can be counted on the fingers of a gray suede glove." This out-of-dateness may have been an architectural reflection of the resistance of men's fashion (vestimentary) to fashion (transitory), a phenomenon observed with mild sarcasm: "modern's arrival in the men's clothing field remains unpredictable...perhaps the zipper fly is a long awaited signal for revolution." Ultimately the Forum's editors were following the basic formulation of the consumer goods model, concluding that the architecture of the men's clothing store should be as modern as men's clothing itself. See "Planning Techniques No. 10, Men's Shops," Architectural Forum 68 (June 1939): 497.
[124] "Singley and Fausch, p. 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was this transitory sense of fashion which his words, like Buckley's, implied.[125] As an economic emergency measure, modernization could not wait for gradual acceptance by the public; to be successful it had to be in vogue, seized immediately as a fashion or the latest trend, thus motivating style-conscious, obsolescence-fearing Americans to modernize their buildings. The transitory, as evident in these statements, had a clear implication for the fashionability of Main Street's architecture. Recent critics have viewed the relationship of architecture and fashion as paradoxical because fashion's transitory nature is seemingly antithetical to architectural practice, in which factors such as size or scale, cost, and time lag from design to production appear to limit a building's capacity to respond to fashion's stylistic vicissitudes.[126] In the 1930s, however, largely as a result of government intervention and corporate cooperation, modernization practice obviated these factors, collapsing the time lag, reducing the scale of projects, and making cost less pertinent through the availability of insured credit. Modernization's *raison d'être* was to force architecture to respond to the pressures of fashion in order to stimulate the economy, creating, as FHA Deputy J. Howard Ardrey observed, "an interest in up-to-the-minute ideas on building materials, equipment [and] styles of architecture."[127]

Modernization's double fashion sense was explicitly demonstrated in a 1939 LOF advertisement which placed two gendered pairs of before and after contrasts in evocative opposition as "the Wallflower of Main Street becomes the Belle of the Avenue" following a complete make-over of woman and store, or woman-as-store [Fig. 227].[128] Verbally and visually, the wallflower and the belle represent the opposite extremes of the American woman as popularly understood within the consumer culture. At the same time, they represent the opposite extremes of the

---

[125] FHA Press Release No. 192, p. 1. FHA Press Release No. 110, p. 1.
[126] Val K. Warke, "'In' Architecture: Observing the Mechanisms of Fashion," in Architecture: In Fashion, pp. 125-6.
[127] J. Howard Ardrey, "Address before the National Association of Real Estate Boards," FHA Press Release No. 181, 25 January 1935, p. 1.
[128] LOF advertisement, "The Wallflower of Main Street," Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 17. The ad also appeared in Architectural Forum 70 (May 1939): 13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

American store—an architecture subsumed into the consumer culture. In both pairs, the old-fashioned and out-of-date becomes fashionable and up-to-date through the palliative of consumption. The wallflower, presumably unattractive and dowdy in her high-necked frock with ruffled sleeves, stands alone unable to attract the male gaze. Similarly, the unmodernized store is unable to attract the customer's gaze because it is negatively marked by the obsolete features of its front: scalloped-edged sign, cast iron lintel with decorative rosettes, right angle bulkheads, and display windows out of scale with the merchandise. The belle, by contrast, is good-looking and alluring in her revealing evening gown, able to solicit the attention of *three* men.[129] Simultaneously, the modernized store, sleekly *dressed* in green and blue Vitrolite and accessorized in Extrudalite trim with a yellow Vitrolux sign, attracts multiple shopping (female) customers.

The contrast between the wallflower and the belle becomes even more potent in the context of the specified loci: Main Street and the Avenue. The former is that ubiquitous commercial corridor identified as old-fashioned and obsolete by no less an authority than the federal government. The latter refers undoubtedly to Fifth Avenue, that exclusive commercial corridor regarded at the time as the epitome of style and up-to-dateness, the antithesis of Main Street. As it was understood in the 1930s, the oppositional pairing of Fifth Avenue and Main Street served to distinguish between the perceived extremes of American life, between the big city and the small town, between New York, NY and Sinclair Lewis' "ten thousand towns from Albany to San Diego."[130] In a broader cultural sense Fifth Avenue embodied change and modernity (the rapid tempo of modern life), while slow-moving Main Street was viewed as a

---

[129] This scenario appeared frequently in films of the era. See, for example, MGM's *Follow the Fleet*, 1936.

[130] See for example Republic Steel advertisement, "From Fifth Avenue to Main Street Alloy Steels have Changed the Driving Habits of America," Fortune, January 1936, p. 97. On another level the Main Street/ Fifth Avenue opposition exemplifies the "Democracy of Goods," identified by Roland Marchand as one of the most prevalent advertising parables of 1920s and 1930s. In this parable, democratic social equality (and in turn social stability) was achieved through equal access to consumer products. As related in advertisements, two extremes with an implied class distinction (Main Street and Fifth Avenue), were first contrasted and then the gulf between them was bridged with the particular product being sold (LOF storefront materials) [Marchand, pp. 217-22, 295].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

repository of tradition and old-time values. Between the two there existed a deliberate psychic distance and an implicit cultural lag, but in reality burgeoning consumerism was causing both to collapse, as advertising executive Paul Bonner observed in 1931: "go out to Oklahoma...everyone is just as much alive as the man who stands at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street" (the same corner Architectural Forum would eventually choose for the cover illustration of its "Main Street, U.S.A." report). That same year, Frederick Lewis Allen pinpointed the cause: "the conquest of the whole country by urban tastes and urban dress and urban ways of living...Girls in the villages of New Hampshire and Wyoming wore the same brief skirts and used the same lipsticks as their sisters in New York." By 1934 Robert Lynd had statistical evidence which supported this claim. He concluded that a movement of "style progression" had been underway in the United States since the 1920s causing "a speeding up of obsolescence" and, simultaneously, "[the marked speeding up of] the geographical spread of fashion from New York." What was true of clothing and cosmetics was also true of commercial architecture: building fashions appeared first in New York and then spread across the country. In both cases, the national chains played a significant part in the style progression and fashion acceleration, creating in Lynd's words, "a closer binding of Main Street to Fifth Avenue."[131]

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, as the chains engaged in expansion and modernization they developed new designs for their flagship stores in New York, on Fifth Avenue in particular. If these designs were deemed a success, as judged by public approval and sales volume, they would be utilized for new or modernized retail units elsewhere.[132] The storefront that served as the Wise Shoe Company's chain standard for nearly eight years was originally designed for a store Wise opened on Fifth Avenue in 1925. [Fig. 58] In its location and (modernistic) style, this store, the company's first in New York, was regarded as "the ultimate in storefront architecture"

---

[131] Bonner, " p. 8. Allen, Only Yesterday, p. 146. Lynd, "The People as Consumers," pp. 878-80. Middletown in Transition, p. 379.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and apparently had "distinct advertising value for the entire chain."[133] It was that Fifth Avenue *ultimate* to which Main Street aspired as fashion and modernization accelerated. Just as "small-town men [got] the big-city urge" and, according to Jesse Rainsford Sprague, looked to see how "Fifth Avenue correspond[ed] to Main Street back home," so the average store attempted, as Architectural Forum observed, "to be as nearly like its big city prototype as the proprietor can make it."[134] Such was the implication of the Forum's favorable comments of five years previous which noted that black glass and aluminum facade of the modernized Abraham (drug/smoke) Store would not have been out of place in the country's style centers: "Neither New York, nor Chicago, but Burlington, Vermont offers this shop of contemporary design" [Figs. 229 & 230].[135] It becomes apparent, then, that the architecture/fashion analogy implicit in the wallflower/belle opposition was not simply a marketing strategy or an advertising angle, but in fact the reflection of a contemporary trend in commercial architecture.

Main Street could aspire to Fifth Avenue, as the LOF advertisement implied echoing the zeitgeist, but the transformation from old-fashioned to fashionable could not be affected without the assistance of "an Architect" [see Fig. 227]. A modernizing stylist, at once dress designer and beautician, the architect has used "colorful, swanky" L-O-F products to make-over the wallflower into the belle. Through color the architect has given the modernized store *her* "looks" and made her "radiant with shopper-appeal, tenant-appeal and sales-appeal." As with a woman's painted face or modish dress, the application of surface color has apparently introduced into the storefront a

---

[132] It was for this reason that New York's storefronts were the best documented of the decade, appearing regularly in the architecture and retail trade journals in portfolios and advertisements.
[133] "Some Fall Ideas in Store Fronts," Chain Store Age, November 1933, p. 72. This article was the first in a series of Chain Store Age features in which the trade journal, recognizing the chains' role as commercial architectural trend-setter, showcased the latest fashions in modernized facades in multi-page photographic spreads. See Figs. 98 & 111.
[134] Jesse Rainsford Sprague, "New York is Where the Money Is!" Saturday Evening Post, 14 September 1935, p. 31. "Main Street, U.S.A.," Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 74. Sprague was a frequent contributor to Harper's who wrote on business and advertising for a popular readership.
[135] "Portfolio of Modernization," Architectural Forum 61 (August 1934): 116.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

pronounced sexual charge, here expressed euphemistically in text, but more blatantly in image.[136] In becoming a belle the modernized store has become "a profit maker," literally trading on her good looks to move merchandise--an architectural expression of the advertising adage that sex sells. Morris Lapidus eventually theorized the storefront's sexual charge in terms which were quite close to those presented in the LOF ad, though they were more explicitly scopophilial [Fig. 231]. In his conception, the storefront should attract and seduce by displaying both merchandise and itself as a woman in an evening gown displayed her décolletage to attract the male gaze, echoing Kiesler's assertion that the storefront must "stimulate desire." Alternately, Lapidus compared the displayed/displaying storefront to a woman modeling in a life drawing class who provocatively displayed her nudity by draping and undraping her body with a robe. In the modernized storefront it was the architect who would orchestrate the display by manipulating window and wall surface to attract and seduce the consumer.[137]

In both of Lapidus' analogies, and in that of the belle as well, the eroticized female body was displayed to attract the male gaze which may explain why a male figure, standing in the foreground in front of the modernized store, is given prominence in the predominantly female shopping/consuming tableau of the advertisement [see Fig. 227]. Whether he is the architect, the merchant, or simply a pedestrian, he looks toward the store, seeming to gaze less at the shoes on sale than at the shoe store itself. Actively looking, passively shopping, he is still consuming the other *goods* on display--the made-up face, the draped body of the modernized storefront--as the three men in the vignette above look at the belle. Ultimately, however, the male gaze was secondary to the modernized storefront. In the actual commercial sphere, the female gaze was far more critical. Fixing upon the storefront and its products, assessing the style and fashion being displayed in both, the female gaze was directly linked to the purchasing power of the female

---

[136] This interest in surface color brings to mind the theory of polychrome architecture Le Corbusier and Fernand Léger developed in the 1920s. See Wigley, pp. 273-4.
[137] Lapidus, Too Much is Never Enough, p. 98-9. Lapidus, "Store Design," p. 118. Kiesler, p. 79.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

consumer. She, too, is present in the LOF advertisement, standing close to the storefront, intimately engaged with the store's display, the shoes in the window. Her torso is reflected in the polished Vitrolite, garbing her, like the facade itself, in the fabric of modernity. Her head is not reflected; through transparent plate glass, the shoes appear in its stead. Woman, merchandise, and storefront merge on the modernized surface, each assuming and displaying characteristics of the other--youth, beauty, fashion, color. Down below, however, where the storefront meets the street, a strategically-placed mirrored baseboard displays the woman's own shoes. Sloping outward to improve her view, the mirror invites momentary reflection. As the woman stops, her shoes--potentially old, worn, and out of style--are revealed suddenly to herself and all passing shoppers with a critical clarity. Self-consciously, she examines them, judges them, and find them wanting. In that moment the storefront reveals how it has given architectural expression to a principal determinant in the consumer culture--a determinant so well-established by the 1930s that it produced a coherent marketing strategy of psychological manipulation which exploited recognized anxieties in the consumer to produce an increased desire for goods. This is the strategy at work in the LOF ad, manifest in the store's mirrored baseboard and the woman's inspection of her shoes. Significantly, however, this strategy was simultaneously at work upon the merchant. For however much he himself may have been a marketing expert, savy about such techniques, he was also a consumer (of modernization) and as a consumer he was increasingly subject to the same anxieties and the same psychological manipulations as his own customers.

Architectural Anxiety in the Modern World

Probing the nature of consumer anxiety in the 1930s will yield a greater comprehension of the facadist strategies just analyzed, allowing us to more fully understand why the facade became the principal bearer of meaning in the modernized building. Obviously, the critical role the modernized storefront played as a symbol of prosperity and modernity on Main Street informed this privileging of exterior appearance, but this does not help to locate precisely where in the larger

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

culture the discourse of modernization found the rhetorical strength required to convince merchants to train their fiscal resources and competitive energies upon the storefront. The government itself came close to identifying the source of that strength when the FHA, cautioning merchants to "consider first your store front," further advised them to "remember that even as the character of an individual is first judged by outward appearance, so does the public judge a store by its front."[138] Here, in emphasizing the importance of exterior appearance in an individual's relations with others, the FHA was deliberately referencing two crucial social impulses: the re-conceptualization of the self which emerged in American society after the turn of the century and the related trend of societal self-diagnosis it produced--both of which had, by the 1930s, become accepted facts of life in the modern consumer society.

In an oft-cited essay on American culture in the 20th century, Warren Susman characterized the development of consciousness of self (an awareness of one's own being and actions) as a critical aspect of the modern world, noting how changing visions of self and changing methods of presenting self to society have marked particular cultural moments within that modern world.[139] The decades after 1900, which not coincidently saw the rise of consumer society in the United States, represent one such moment, as the culture of *character* in which self-worth was based on one's intrinsic moral qualities was superseded by the culture of *personality* in which self-worth was based on one's ability to impress others through surface projections of comportment, manners, speech, and dress, which themselves were now understood as accurate indicators of inner character. It was this latter conception, popularized as the "personality ethic" by Dale Carnegie, to which the FHA referred in the statement cited above, but the government was hardly alone in articulating this cultural shift in the context of modernization. Advertising executive Earnest Elmo Calkins betrayed his awareness of the power of the surface when he admonished Main Street Rotarians to "give your

---

[138] FHA, How Owners of Home & Business Property can Secure the Benefits of the National Housing Act (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), p. 19; "Talk for Merchants," p. 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

town a personality" by improving its appearance through coordinated building modernization.[140] LOF, too, recognized the currency of the outer self, observing in 52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass that the storefront which "expresses the character of establishment to the buying public" was performing the same function as "the 'suit of clothes that makes the man' and stamps him as successful and progressive."[141] Even more explicitly, PPG asked merchants to scrutinize their storefronts as if they were scrutinizing prospective employees: "When you hire employees, why do you choose the ones you do? Past records being equal, isn't it because of personality and appearance?" The answer was obvious: "Personality and appearance...new Pittco Store Fronts give them to your chain stores immediately." While PPG used "personality" often in its advertisements, the term was never precisely defined, though it was linked to notions of attractiveness, stylishness, and eye appeal: "Pittco Fronts are modern, good looking, full of the personality that draws business and keeps it."[142] The emergence of this outer expression of self as a determinant of relative quality was evident even in the architecture journals. In a 1935 store design portfolio American Architect declared that "the personality of a store is stamped upon the front" and was indicated by an arrangement of its forms and materials to reveal the character of the establishment within.[143] Ultimately, as personality and character entered the discourse of architecture in the 1930s through the agency of modernization, 18th century notions of *caractère* were revived and updated with the

---

[139] See Warren I. Susman, "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture" in Culture as History (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp. 271-85.
[140] Earnest Elmo Calkins, "Give Your Town a Personality," The Rotarian, March 1935, p. 54.
[141] LOF, 52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass (Toledo: LOF, 1935), p. 70.
[142] See the following PPG advertisements: "When You Hire Employees," Chain Store Age, December 1935, p. 73. "Good Chain Store Locations," Chain Store Age, March 1935, p. 105. See also PPG, "Store Front Metal," Sweet's Catalogue File (1936), Section 17, Catalogue 19. "Glass is Modernizing Main Street," Architectural Record 88 (October 1940): 131. Throughout the 1930s these terms were the dual themes of a PPG advertising campaign centered on "personality bathrooms" and "character kitchens" and intended to stimulate use of Carrara in the home and featuring On personality's indeterminacy as a term see Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization," p. 21. Lear's notes how personality, subject to over-use has been "severed from any meaningful referent."
[143] "Store Fronts and Show Windows," American Architect 147 (December 1935): 65.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

rhetoric of the *Académie* replaced by the rhetoric of Madison Avenue, as the building culture assimilated the practices of the consumer society.

The importance attached to personality and the outer self, first in people and then in buildings, was predicated on a popular belief that in the competitive, fast-paced modern world superficial appearances--perceived in an initial, momentary appraising glance--would determine one's success or failure in all social interactions, whether personal or professional. This belief, simultaneously cultivated and exploited in American advertising, gave rise to one of the consumer culture's most potent narratives, identified by Roland Marchand as the parable of the First Impression which emerged in advertising in the late 1920s.[144] The First Impression was employed initially, and successfully, to sell products related to personal appearance, especially clothing, personal care items like toothpaste and mouthwash (noteably Listerine's famous halitosis campaign), cosmetics, and even plastic surgery. When the modernization effort got underway in 1934, its publicists seized the First Impression as a viable promotional theme. There was a certain logic to using the First Impression to sell modernization, one which even made it seem less manipulative than when it was used to sell other consumer goods. Even the most cynical person might hope that an individual would be judged on something more substantial than a dingy smile, bad breath, or an unfashionable garment, but how else would an unknown commercial establishment be judged if not by the appearance of its front, by the way it impressed shoppers as they passed it in the street--especially if it was an independent store lacking the name recognition of a national chain? Thus, it made sense for the National Retail Dry Goods Association to offer its merchant members this frank assessment of their potential customers: "Let us make no mistake. People are impressed by appearances--by first appearances." According to the Association, the only way a merchant could guarantee a favorable first impression was for "the old store [to] put on

[144] Marchand, pp. 208-10.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a new front" by participating in "this new movement in modernizing the exterior."[145] Similarly, in an LOF promotional pamphlet, the company reminded merchants that "your storefront is the first impression the passerby gets of your business." In another pamphlet, LOF graphically related the idea of an individual's personality and outer self to the storefront [Fig. 232]. An exhortation to "put on a good front" was accompanied by a pair of photographs that would not have been out of place in an advertisement for toothpaste or shaving cream: the first photograph depicts a frowning man with messy hair, slumped shoulders, and a wrinkled collar; the second shows the same man smiling, with his head up, his hair smoothed, and wearing a bright tie--presenting his "good front" to the world. The caption explains the result, "it pays!" As the smile and fresh appearance paid off for the man, so a "good Front with Vitrolite" would pay off for the store, "transform[ing] the obsolete characterless store front into the New, Modern Outstanding Front," thus winning public approval.[146]

The goal of the First Impression was to make the consumer desire an appearance that others would judge favorably, but there was a crucial intermediary step: the consumer had to first understand how others saw him or her and be aware of the impression his or her appearance was currently making [Fig. 233]. Thus, it was necessary to cultivate the consumer's self-consciousness and to encourage rigorous self-scrutiny which might allow the individual to look upon himself or herself objectively, as did those in the apparently captious outside world of appearances--members of what LOF's labelled "today's critical public."[147] Earnest Elmo Calkins regarded "a local self-consciousness...which will soon seek community pride" as a prerequisite for any Main Street modernization effort.[148] At the same time, the individual merchant-cum-consumer was repeatedly admonished to be self-aware: "look at your store through the casual eyes of the prospective customer"; "examine your establishment with the eye of a customer"; "look with the critical eye of

---

[145] Richmond, p. 157.
[146] LOF, The Storefront is a Step Toward Better Business, 1938 [LOF MSS-066 Box 16, folder 32]. LOF, Put on a Good Front, 1936 [LOF MSS-066, Box 25].
[147] LOF advertisement, "Dress Up for Bigger Business," reprinted in LOF, 1938 Advertising Scrapbook.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a stranger." According to PPG, only that store which "presents a modern inviting front to the eyes of prospective clients [would] draw more business." This, PPG explained, was "not theory, but fact...today the 'eyes' have it."[149] If, in cultivating an awareness of the stranger's critical eye, advertising ran the risk of producing in the individual an excessive self-consciousness and a pronounced sense of inadequacy and unease, such emotional disturbances had already been normalized, though not entirely neutralized, by wide-spread acceptance of the existence of a psychological state known as the inferiority complex.

Recognized first by Freud's early associate Alfred Adler, the idea of the inferiority complex was introduced in the United States in the mid-1920s through Adler's lectures and especially his best-selling book Understanding Human Nature. In the trend-driven 1920s discussing the inferiority complex became a fad, popularized as a justification for all manner of personal difficulties. In the Depression-ravaged 1930s, when self-confidence was profoundly shaken, both collectively and individually, the inferiority complex seemed to offer a genuine social salve and a reasonable explanation for a demoralized populace. In both decades, it turned up regularly in newspapers and magazine articles, and also in product advertisements since the tradition of therapeutic consumption was easily adapted as a confidence-building, anxiety-soothing palliative for feelings of inferiority and insecurity.[150] The success of the First Impression as an advertising parable lay precisely in its ability to exploit Americans' collective inferiority complex regarding social interaction and then offer a corrective through consumption of a particular appearance-enhancing product, be it toothpaste, Vitrolite, or modernization in general.

---

[148] Calkins, p. 54.
[149] "Talk for Merchants," p. 1. Promotion Pointers 1 (No. 6). Richmond, p. 157. PPG advertisement, "How a Modern Pittco Store Front Puts Money in your Pocket," Chain Store Age, October 1936, p. 117.
[150] The popularization of Adler's inferiority complex and its relationship to consumer culture (and cosmetic surgery) are discussed by Elizabeth Haiken in Venus Envy, pp. 91-130. See also Susman, p. 279.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In explaining the cultural power of the inferiority complex in the 1920s and 1930s and its relationship to the increasingly dominant outer self of personality, Warren Susman found that both were deeply rooted in certain anxiety-producing conditions of the modern world: fear of losing one's individual identity in the impersonal, anonymous crowd of mass society and fear of not fitting in with the crowd, of not being liked and thought well of by others. These fears, according to Susman, had correlate desires: a need to stand out from the crowd and express individuality and a need to be a part of the crowd, to conform and be appealing lest one stand out too much or call unfavorable attention to oneself.[151] Already present before the Crash, these anxieties were exacerbated by the Depression. As the social and economic crisis worsened and general insecurities (about one's job, one's family, the country, the future) increased, the need for the reassurance of the collective grew and the desire to belong intensified. At the same time, the necessity of millions of Americans having to accept charitable and government relief weakened the nation's mythic self-reliance, thus increasing the need to express autonomy and individuality—however bootless or purely symbolic.[152] Assimilating the psycho-social impulses of personality and inferiority, via the strategies of advertising, modernization also assimilated these anxieties which, in turn, engendered two approaches to the storefront: one stressed the distinction of the individual store; the other stressed the coordination of the commercial corridor as a group of stores. While both of these approaches were manifest on Main Street as it modernized during the Depression, by the late 1930s they occupied almost antithetical positions, expressive of an opposition between the Main Street corridor as a commercial reality and an architectural ideal.

To some degree, all efforts to encourage modernization on Main Street played off the anxiety of conformity and fitting in. Certainly, at a basic level the social urge to belong informed the competitive urge to keep up, serving as the underlying motivation of the FHA's repeated assertion that a single modernized property would "inspire others to do likewise" and that "when

---

[151] Susman, p. 280.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

one merchant makes improvements his competitors are literally forced to do so."[153] The psychological operation was obvious: the fear of not fitting in and being judged inadequate was so great that competitors would follow the modernizing lead of a nearby store. No Main Street merchant wished to stand out unfavorably as the only unmodernized (i.e., old-fashioned, uncivic-minded) establishment. As Architectural Forum noted in 1939, "as more and more stores on Main are improved, modernization tends to become not a question of choice but of survival."[154]

Some modernization advocates, including Arthur C. Holden of the American Institute of Architects and S.R. DeBoer of the American Planning and Civic Association, optimistically believed that the pressure to fit in might be exploited to spur group improvements, converting agglomerations of unmodernized Main Street buildings into coordinated assemblages of complimentary modernized units. However, while Holden was hoping to realize the "architect's dream for a modernized Main Street" and DeBoer was calling for "a harmonious whole" to be created with "a facade plan of the whole length of the street," both men overestimated the strength of the urge to fit in.[155] A willingness to participate in the modernizing trend was not the same as a willingness to foresake storefront identity to the "architectural control" of visual coordination. In other words, a desire to be a part of a modernized group was not the same as a desire to be part of a group modernization. The more Main Street's merchants felt compelled or required to modernize as a necessity of belonging, the less the simple determination to modernize as an act of therapeutic consumption offered adequate compensation for social and competitive insecurities. Modernizing to fit in was not enough; it was necessary to modernize in order to stand out. Thus, the modernized storefront, as responsive to the anxieties of the day as other consumer products, became a vehicle

---

[152] The effect of these anxieties on "Main Street" in particular are discussed in Atherton, p. 355.
[153] How Owners of Home and Business Property..., p. 5. "Administration Urges Nationwide Modernize Main Street Campaign," FHA Press Release No. 203 (8 March 1935), p. 2 [NA RG 287, box y748].
[154] "Main Street, U.S.A.," p. 86.
[155] S.R. DeBoer, Shopping Districts (Washington: American Planning and Civic Association, 1937): pp. 44-45. Arthur C. Holden, "Stabilized Modernization," American Architect 147 (September 1935): 38.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for the expression of individuality--an apparently unique projection of the outer self that would conquer anonymity and, to paraphrase Warren Susman, make a nobody a somebody.[156] As the urge to stand out from the Main Street crowd outstripped the urge to fit in, individuality asserted itself in the discourse of modernization as a promotional strategy and an architectural practice.

Individuality through Modernization

In 1936, PPG declared in a Chain Store Age advertisement that "individuality" in the storefront was the "most important of all qualities" since it enabled stores to "stand out from their competitors." Without it, PPG insisted, business would go elsewhere. Three years later "true individuality" and "striking individuality" were still a prerequisite for storefront success whether a particular design strove for a "simple" or "pretentious" architectural effect [Fig. 234].[157] When PPG, and numerous other storefront manufacturers including Brasco, Formica, and LOF, utilized individuality as an advertising theme, they were simply appropriating what had already become accepted storefront practice and a point of critical debate.[158] In 1936, Architectural Forum complained that the contemporary storefront was too often the embodiment of "a peculiarly obnoxious form of rugged individualism," but this was less a denigration of specific individualized designs than a commentary on the *standing out from the crowd* ethos which dominated Main Street during the 1930s.[159] As Depression-striken merchants desperately sought to distinguish themselves from neighboring retail premises, considered direct competition for consumer attention even when they offered dissimilar services or merchandise, individuality of

---

[156] Susman, p. 278.

[157] PPG advertisement, "Make Chain Store Sales Grow," Chain Store Age, June 1936, p. 127. PPG advertisement, "For Individuality in Store Fronts," Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 9. See also "Why Does a Pittco Front make your Chain Store Individual," Chain Store Age, November 1936, p. 121.

[158] Brasco claimed that its products made it possible to design fronts "possessing outstanding individuality." ["Brasco Modern Store Fronts," Sweet's Catalogue File (1936), sec. 17, cat. 14]. Formica issued a portfolio of "arresting designs" called Individualized Store Fronts [Formica advertisement, "12 Striking Store Front Suggestions," Architectural Forum 66 (June 1937): 13]. LOF stressed that its Complete Storefronts were "individually designed" and "personalized" [LOF advertisement, "To Attract the Crowd," Box Office, May 1938, reprinted in 1938 Advertising Yearbook].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

design and the unique storefront expression it implied became a virtual grail of modernization. This was true not only for independent Main Street merchants, but for chain retailers as well. Always alert to national changes in consumer attitudes and consumption habits, whether these changes involved shoppers buying consumer products or merchants buying modernization, the chains sought to adjust their storefronts accordingly.

Prior to the Depression, nearly all national chains adhered to a rigid architectural policy of "complete standardization" in which chain identity was established through the use of unvaried trademark fronts. By the early 1930s, in the face of deepening competition and mounting anti-chain sentiment some chains began to modify their trademark types in order to better respond to the demographics of specific markets and to better insinuate themselves into local communities, but the practice of "keying stores to locations" was not universally adopted. By the mid-1930s, however, as the chains expanded and intensified their improvement programs in reaction to the government-assisted entry of the independents into the store modernization arena, many chains allowed storefronts to be redesigned with "a reasonable degree of individuality," consciously risking a diminishment of chain identity to mediate against the corporate anonymity and outsider status now too closely associated with the standardized facade.[160] The modernization program of the Childs Restaurant chain is a case in point.

Until the mid 1930s, the white-tiled "dairy-room" fronts of Childs Restaurants were immediately recognizable across the country, "from Portland, Oregon to Portland, Maine" as the company claimed (see Chapter 4). Designed and built in the early 1890s, and standardized by 1900, the dairy rooms typically featured a double-width storefront clad in white glazed terra cotta with glass entrance doors flanking a large display window emblazoned with the chain's logo ("Childs" in a flowing script) [Fig. 235]. This open or transparent front provided unobstructed

---

[159] "Store Building," Architectural Forum 64 (May 1936): 403.
[160] Lawrence A. Schoen, "Keying Stores to Locations," Chain Store Age, January 1933, p. 72. "Chains Spend $70,000,000 on Store Modernization," Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 143.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

views inside the restaurant--a single open room with white tiled walls and floors and a long counter (topped with white glass) from which food was dispensed by white-uniformed servers. The purposeful whiteness and openness of both the exterior and interior provided Childs' patrons with "visible proof of sanitation," the foundation upon which the chain's success was based. According to Childs' executives "it was good business to subordinate decorative effect and even comfort to obvious cleanliness." From the chain's point of view, the standard dairy front was utterly utilitarian and it was precisely this quality which Lewis Mumford had praised as "the beginning of a real machine form."[161] Unimpressed with their own incipient modernism, Childs began to feel by the mid-1920s that the dairy rooms were antiseptic and out of step with the American public's taste in dining. However, though it introduced scenographic decor into newly-built restaurants, the chain continued to construct its standard white tile and glass dairy front feeling that it had become too widely recognized a "landmark" for alteration.

A decade later, these fronts were still in use throughout the chain and, from a marketing standpoint, still "signalized Childs" in the public's mind. Now, however, in the altered climate of the Depression, company executives regarded the standardized front as nothing more than a "stumbling block in its effort to keep up with the times." In 1934-35, the chain determined that "the old white tile places must be brought up to date," but in establishing modernization policy for its restaurants Childs did not merely "abolish the dairy room," it unilaterally abandoned the standardized unit, adopting a policy of "individualization" which rejected "duplication of style" in order to give each restaurant "its own distinctive atmosphere." Though the determination of that atmosphere was left to the discretion of the architect hired for each modernization job (this in itself guaranteed a degree of individuality), designers were instructed to examine the surroundings of each unit and select a "suitable" style. Among the first 25 units selected to "go

---

[161] Frank E. Landau, "Childs Remodels 25 Units in Drive for Modernization," Chain Store Age, April 1935, pp. 71-72. Lewis Mumford, "The Skyline: A Survivor of the Brown Decades," New Yorker, 19 March 1932, p. 71.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modern," as Childs put it, nearly half were located in New York City. These restaurants were chosen not only because they were were among the chain's oldest, but also because chain store executives regarded New York as the best place for trial-runs of the latest storefront fashions.

Ultimately, these modernized Childs encompassed an eclectic stylistic range which, significantly, the company regarded as entirely modern, though "modernity" was based less on the storefront's specific stylistic character than on the degree to which the modernization departed from the appearance of the standardized front.[162] Thus, the modernization of the 2-story unit at 196 Broadway in lower Manhattan was considered modern because it represented a "striking change from the old dairy-room front" even though that change was accomplished by sheathing the facade in a veneer of Tudor decorative forms with half-timbering, casement windows, a steep tiled roof, and a projecting gable above the broad center display window at street-level [Fig. 236]. This, along with the Childs' logo, was the only standard element retained from the dairy-room front. The logo itself was transformed into a thoroughly modern/ized sign panel, a shallow, round-cornered, porcelain enamel marquee that served as a base to the projecting bay. That this streamlined form could be accommodated within a neo-Tudor storefront indicates, perhaps, the depth of Childs' yearning for architectural individuality and the ease with which that yearning could slip into a kind of stylistic schizophrenia.

The first Childs to be modernized in Times Square represented an equally extreme departure from the classic dairy front and a radically different solution to the problem of individualization--one which, stylistically, was more obviously modern [Fig. 327; see also Fig. 328]. As redesigned by George Sweet in 1936 the Childs on Seventh Avenue and 42nd Street was visually too high-pitched for the conservative taste of critic Talbot Hamlin, but possessed a "vulgar vitality" which Lewis Mumford applauded as utterly in keeping with "the spirit of

---

[162] Landau, p. 72.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Broadway."[163] In fact, given the locale, with Rosario Candela's flamboyantly modernized Rialto Theater right next door, Sweet's facade was relatively low-key [Fig. 239].[164] Nonetheless, it was a dynamic composition unified through the architect's trebling of its principal formal elements. Three colors--white, black, and blue--were aligned with three cladding materials--porcelain enamel, structural glass, and mirrored glass--into an asymmetrical composition enhanced by three levels of surface reflectivity and tied together by an abundant use of aluminum trim and speed lines on the doors, bulkheads, vestibule ceiling, and projecting neon signs. For these, Sweet utilized three different typefaces in three different colors: a French-inspired sans serif type in five-tube channel letters, the same type condensed in double-tube channels, and Childs' traditional script in a single, unchanneled tube. By substituting modern flash for Childs' standard restraint, Sweet's modernization ably met the company's mandate for individualized, contextually appropriate schemes, here gleefully reflecting the "naughty, gaudy, bawdy, sporty"

---

[163] Talbot Hamlin, "Some Recent Shops and Restaurants," Pencil Points 20 (August 1939): 485. Lewis Mumford, "The Skyline: Concerning Glass Houses," New Yorker, 11 April 1936, p. 58. This Childs was located on the west side of 7th Avenue between 42nd and 43rd Street. Between 1927 and 1939 Sweet modernized two other Times Square Childs (49th & Broadway, 46th & Broadway) which were variations on the theme established here. Sweet's modernization, typical of Childs' desired program, included a full interior redesign and the installation of a bar.

[164] Though situated in a district of unsurpassed visual noise, on the northwest corner of 42nd Street and 7th Avenue, the modernized Rialto (designed originally by Thomas Lamb, 1915) was obstreperous even by Times Square's standards. No longer a premier movie house by the early 1930s, it was reprogrammed into a venue for second-run features. It was left to architect Rosario Candela to modernize the Rialto to reflect its transformation from palace to grind house. In addition to a new facade, he designed two income-generating advertising signs (a streamlined ribbon motograph wrapping around the cornice and a huge step-form obelisk on the roof, surmounted by a search light). In modernizing the Rialto's considerable frontage, Candela employed a two-tone color scheme of agate Vitrolite in royal blue and white which Lewis Mumford compared to "milk of magnesia" (no doubt equally referring to the trademark blue bottle of *Philip's* Milk of Magnesia). Candela designed the upper facades as a carnivalesque version of the landmark Venetian bridge with bulging engaged columns, protruding window sills nickel silver plaques as oversized, decorative keystones and (as if one was viewing the Rialto Bridge from the Grand Canal) a series of striped gondola mooring poles rendered as blue and white pilasters with decorative caps, metallic platters stacked up to form projecting units. If transposing the scenography of the Rialto Bridge into modern materials and stylized forms gave Candela's design an aura of lustrous kitsch, this was an utterly appropriate aesthetic response to the cut-rate reality of the reprogrammed Rialto and of 42nd Street itself. Located at the physical center of the metaphorical crossroads of the world and boasting flamboyant visual effects required to stand out from the crowd and attract the *hoi poloi*, the modernized Rialto was the perfect embodiment of individualized modernization and the honky-tonk playland that Times Square had become by 1935.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

atmosphere of the Times Square entertainment district in the 1930s.[165] Upon completion of the first phase of its chain-wide modernization program, the company ran newspaper advertisements asking readers, "Can this really be Childs?"[166] Through a tone of gentle self-mockery, the implications of the question were patently obvious. A nation-wide chain which had successfully established in its trademark white-tile dairy front the architectural equivalent of its "cleanly" reputation boldly dispensed with thirty years worth of accumulated brand identification by commissioning modernizations which were purposefully anti-trademark, un-standard, and highly individualized. But such was the nature of the American commercial corridor during the Depression, a high-pressure marketplace which drove chain retailers and independent merchants alike to the expressive visual extremes of the modernized storefront.

If those storefronts were too often characterized by "strident individuality," as George Nelson observed in his foreword to Emrich Nicholson's Contemporary Shops of Today (see above), this was largely the unavoidable consequence of the "strenuous--and frequently anti-social--competition" which had so marked the decade in trade, causing merchants and their designers "[to give] more and more attention to the exterior." Perhaps, as Nelson conceded, the storefronts of the 1930s did "try much to hard to catch the eye and what they [had] to say [was] sometimes said too loudly," but at least, as a result of those "periodic face-liftings" brought about by competition and the Depression "Main Street" had come to regard design "as a major weapon in its arsenal."[167] Here, in 1945, Nelson was reiterating what had already become in the 1930s the storefront critic's lament. Lewis Mumford, for example, while finding much to admire in the apple green porcelain enamel and molded steel facades of Horace Ginsbern's modernized Hanscom's Bake Shops (1934-38), complained of the "decibels of visual noise" they created. "What, he

---

[165] Lyrics from the song "42nd Street" written by Al Dubin and Harry Warren for the 1933 Busby Berkely musical of the same name.
[166] Quoted in Landau, p. 71.
[167] George Nelson, "Foreword" in Emrich Nicholson, Contemporary Shops in the United States (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Company, 1945), pp. 5-9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

wondered, "would a street of such shops sound like?" [Figs. 240-243].[168] By the end of the decade, thousands of cities and towns could have answered that question as modernized storefronts on Main Streets across the United States shouted to be heard above their competitors. If, in this visual cacophony of colored glass facings and curving bulkheads, of neon signs and metallic speed lines, the sales message of each individual store was all but drowned out by that of its neighbor, the collective social message was resoundingly clear. For in the midst of this architectural babble, the modernized storefront nonetheless emerged as a legible advertisement for a modernity and prosperity promised by consumption.

---

[168] Lewis Mumford, "The Sky Line: Old and New," New Yorker, 11 January 1936, p. 42. On Ginsburn's work for Hanscom see "Portfolio," Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 166-67. "The Trend in Store Fronts," Chain Store Age, November 1934, pp. 83-84. Republic Steel advertisement, "Our Volume in Remodeled Stores has Jumped 100 to 200%," Chain Store Age, November 1934, inside back cover. See also Robert Stern, et al, New York 1930 (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), p. 307. The original drawings are in the Horace Ginsbern Collection (1989.005), Avery Archives, Columbia University [Numbers A101.09-10, A101.12-14, A102.15].

According to Morris Gottfried, the company president, the goal of Hanscom's modernization program was "to make people realize that Hanscom's was no longer the old-fashioned, conventional bakery they had known for years." To create an architectural image for the new and improved Hanscom Bake Shops, Gottfried hired Ginsbern, charging him with redesigning the bake shops to "impress our existence on [the public] sensationally, and at the same time retain the dignity of a substantial business." Ginsbern established a series of formal elements which could be adapted for a variety of spatial conditions and individualized compositions. The most prominent element was an oversized (9-foot high) apple green signboard with neon-filled stainless steel channel letters. Ginsbern played with the spacing or the size of the letters to fit them onto a narrow frontage or side facade, even over-constricting the letters for deliberate effect. Reducing the size of the "o" in Hanscom and nestling inside the "c" also appears to have been a favorite device. Alternately he would trim the size of the sign field itself, thus perceptually constricting the letters. For an extended facade, Ginsbern would add projecting signs with the standard apple green enamel and the stainless steel trim or stretch a sign around a corner emphasizing the turn with neon strips and shifting planes. One panel of the signboard was a 4-foot wide strip extended in length and always placed over the slightly recessed store entrance and dropped down below the lower edge of the signboard, curving inward to meet the doorhead. This "rounded drop feature" was visually effective in tying the upper portion of the storefront with the lower, which was similarly clad in apple green porcelain enamel above the bulkheads. It was also regarded as one of the chief characteristics of the "advanced modern treatment" of Hanscom's architecture, which included curved stainless steel bulkheads with a matte finish (regarded as having more "distinction" than a flashier high polish finish, thus meeting Gottfried's requirement for "dignity") and stainless steel frames and trim used on every display window, regardless of size, to create a banded effect at either end and to accentuated the curves of the plate glass as it met the entrance. One of his most ingenious devices for turning a corner was the installation of a cylinder-like glass-fronted display case projecting out from the wall. Mimicking the show windows on the principle facade, the case had stainless steel trim, but Ginsbern continued the steel banding across the flanking walls creating a series of stripes which he clad, alternately, in standard apple green and a darker green. Ginsbern topped the display case with a crown of corrugated steel.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Conclusion

It is customary to view December 1941 as the symbolic end of the Great Depression, for the war mobilization which followed the attack on Pearl Harbor revived the economy through the stimulation of intensive industrial production and wide-spread building activity as the programs of the New Deal never had.[1] Thus did the war effort obviate the necessity of building modernization as an economic pump-primer and precipitate the legislative retooling of its federal credit mechanism in response to this latest national emergency. By 1943, when defense housing needs forced the exclusion of non-residential properties from the loan insurance program (MCP) made possible by Title I of the 1934 National Housing Act, the FHA's effort to Modernize Main Street officially came to an end. In truth, the critical material restrictions put in place the previous year had already made it difficult, if not impossible, for architects to satisfy Main Street's facadist modernizing impulses. Though structural glass was still available, the use of other key storefront materials such as metal (for frames and trim), plate glass (for display windows), and electrical fittings (for signage and show case illumination) was strictly prohibited.

In a 1942 Architectural Record article, "Store Modernizing without Metals," Morris Lapidus noted the difficulties these restrictions presented for storefront design. While he offered a few suggestions regarding effective wood and terrazzo facades, he recommended that modernization work now be directed toward store interiors which could be replanned and redecorated "without interfering with the war effort." It is not insignificant that Lapidus, who had designed some of the boldest store exteriors of the 1930s, here emphasized "efficiency" in the arrangement of the selling floor rather than modernity in the appearance of the storefront.[2] Though material prohibitions played a part, this shift in architectural emphasis indicates that the psychology of building modernization had itself changed to reflect the new austerity of wartime

---

[1] See William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1963), pp. 346-7. Donald Albrecht, ed., World War II and the American Dream (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), p. xvi.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

frugality. As popular opinion and patriotic consumption shifted from depression to war and from a return to prosperity to victory in Europe and Japan, the exhibitionist architectural strategies of building modernization in the 1930s confronted a perhaps inevitable marketing crisis: they became obsolete. Nonetheless, they had served their purpose well in the previous decade, creating an effective iconography of prosperity and a familiar everyday modernism which changed the face of Main Street America during the Depression.

Though supported by a massive public/private, national/local infrastructure and promoted with a grave, sometimes dire urgency, Main Street's modernization had not occurred overnight. Rather in the years between 1934 and 1943, a gradual transformation had taken place, town by town, block by block, building by building. It was neither a complete transformation, nor a final one--the commercial landscape is far too ephemeral--but as each $2,000 transaction was financed, each minor architectural commission secured, and each glass and metal storefront designed, fabricated, and installed, Main Street's appearance did change. How could it have not changed, when enough money was ultimately spent on commercial modernization during this period--an estimated $4 to 6 billion in MCP loans and cash payments--to have provided a new storefront for each of the 1.5 million retail establishments in the United States at this time.[3] If such figures are too abstract to enable us to comprehend modernization's everyday impact in the 1930s, a survey of local conditions on a single Main Street will render them more concrete.

---

[2] Morris Lapidus, "Store Modernizing without Metals," Architectural Record 92 (October 1942): 71.
[3] By 1943 the government had insured $1.7 billion of modernization credit. According to the FHA, this base figure represented only a fraction of the total amount spent on modernization since it did not include work paid for in cash or financed by non-MCP means which, according to the FHA's Division of Economics and Statistics (and corroborated by data of the F.W. Dodge Corporation), was between 4 and 7 times greater than the face value of the notes insured. This meant that cash and non-MCP modernization work stood somewhere between $6.8 and $11.9 billion by 1943, bringing the estimated total of ALL modernization work to between $8.5 and $13.6 billion. Of this figure approximately half ($4.25 - 6.8 billion) was spent on commercial building improvements. See FHA, 9th Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1944), p. 1. Calculations on the amount of modernization work generated or "developed" by the MCP appear in most FHA annual reports. See FHA, First Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935), p. 1 and FHA, Third Annual Report (Washington, DC: GPO, 1937), p. i

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

A Main Street Modernized

In the 1930s, Reading, Pennsylvania, was a typical Main Street town with a densely-built commercial corridor known as Penn Street whose main blocks, stretching east and west from its enlarged intersection with Fifth Street (called Penn Square), formed the downtown core of this manufacturing community [Fig. 244].[4] A medium-sized city of 110,000 inhabitants, Reading was, as Architectural Forum wrote of *Main Street, U.S.A.*, "big enough to have most of the features and most of the problems found on Main Streets the country over, small enough to retain the small-town atmosphere in which well over half the Nation's retail business is done."[5] Because of its proximity to Philadelphia--easily accessible by rail--Reading was subject to big city cultural influences which shaped its tastes and consumption habits. Because of its economic independence and autonomous historical heritage (the town was founded in 1748 by sons of William Penn and settled largely by Pennsylvania Germans), Reading was subject to a deep-rooted local pride which shaped a thriving middle-class booster culture in the first decades of the 20th century.[6] At its base, Reading was factory-dependent and, like many such towns in the 1930s, it was hit hard by the Depression, experiencing labor unrest and wide-spread unemployment. While Reading possessed a variety of industries, including over forty hosiery and textile mills, many of its largest employers were allied with the building trades--manufacturers of hardware and fittings, nuts and bolts, terra cotta and bricks.[7] Because of this,

---

[4] Much of the following analysis of Penn Street is based upon an invaluable set of real estate and insurance photographs taken in the late 1930s and preserved in the The Passing Scene, a series of historic picture books cited below.

[5] "Main Street, U.S.A.,"Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 75. Bridgeport, CT (pop. 149,000) was the representative town in the Forum's study. In the 1930s, Reading was Pennsylvania's fifth largest city. See 1930 Census data tabulated in FHA, Division of Research and Statistics, General Economic Data, Volume A, 1934-35 [NA RG 207, Records of Housing & Home Finance Agencies, Volume 1].

[6] In 1908, Reading's leading citizens formed a civic improvement association which raised enough money through subscription ($3300) to hire planner John Nolen to "come here and tell us what Reading needed and how it should be developed." Quoted in Reading Old and New (1909), reprinted in George M. and Gloria J. Meiser, The Passing Scene, 7 (Reading, PA: Historical Society of Berks County, 1991), p. 113.

[7] These firms included Reading Hardware Company and Penn Hardware Company,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reading was caught in the so-called vicious circle of the building industry depression which had a deleterious effect on the national economy, but was felt most keenly at the local level, in the shrinking purchasing power and decreased spending of Reading's under- and unemployed, be they factory workers, contractors, or architects.

Given the overall importance of building material manufacturing to its economic health, along with a tradition of civic organizing (from City Beautiful to Christian Temperance), it is not surprising that Reading enthusiastically participated in the federally-sponsored effort to revive the building industry and speed local recovery through the stimulation of modernization work. After the passage of the National Housing Act in the summer of 1934 and the establishment of the FHA's Better Housing Program that fall, Reading was one of the first communities in Pennsylvania to organize a local committee to generate interest in the building improvements and repairs made possible by the Modernization Credit Plan. Working with a Board of Trade long-dedicated to "fostering, protecting, and advancing the interests of the business community," and following those community campaign guidelines established by the FHA, the Reading BHP Committee staged "an electrical show" and parade to commence its local modernization campaign in October 1934.[8] Eight months later, Reading's leading financial institutions, the Berks County Trust Company and the Reading Trust Company, had collectively extended over $62,000 worth of modernization credit which, if FHA estimates concerning the eventual value of MCP pump-priming were correct, represented nearly $350,000 of private capital unlocked and modernization work undertaken.[9] Assuming, as indicated by FHA statistics, that only half of the

---

manufacturers of builders' hardware (hinges, doorknobs), Reading Terra Cotta and Brick Works, and Keystone Iron Works. The hosiery mills suffered a notorious wildcat strike in 1931. See Colin Gordon, New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America, 1920-1935 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 104.

[8] The Reading Board of Trade was founded in 1881. Its mission statement is cited in George M. and Gloria J. Meiser, The Passing Scene, 6 (Reading, PA: Historical Society of Berks County, 1988), p. 104. On the Reading BHP see "News from the Front," Better Housing 30 November 1934, p. 5.

[9] Loan totals are cited in entries #341 and #950, FHA, "Confidential Report: National Housing Act--Title I Financial Institutions which had Reported 25 or More Insured Modernization Loans or Notes

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

combined actual loan total and the projected figure was spent on commercial modernization, store improvement expenditures in Reading may have potentially reached between $31,000 and $125,000. With a modestly designed storefront costing around $1,500 in the 1930s, more than a few Penn Street merchants were modernizing their establishments after 1935.

By then Reading's principal commercial corridor had experienced the same fiscal and physical ills which plagued so many Main Streets during the Depression: a rotation of stores into and out of business, a cycle of storefront occupancy and abandonment. In Reading, the impact of the economic downturn was readily apparent by 1931 as signs announcing bankruptcies, expired leases, and merchandise reductions were gradually plastered over Penn Street shopfronts. Along the north side of the 600 block, seven out of fifteen stores had been forced out of business, including the well-established Victor Jewelry, whose "Pay Me Pay Day" sales slogan, spelled out on a two-story flashing marquee, must have seemed to Reading's jobless a bitter reminder of more prosperous times [Fig. 245].

Equally bitter to struggling Reading's merchants must have been watching the national chains thrive, apparently at their expense, in what had become an all too familiar insider vs. outsider retail conflict. In a single retail category, chain 5 & 10s like Woolworth's, Kresge's, and McCrory's (each actually having a long-time presence on Penn Street), expanded their market share to a commanding 89% of all variety store business in Reading while the five remaining independents attempted to stay open on the leftover 11%.[10] While this disproportion was due in large measure to the low prices the chains were able to offer because of the economies of scale in which they dealt, credit was also due to the ambitious store modernization programs the chains undertook hoping to keep their units up-to-date as a way of stimulating sales during the economic downturn. In Reading, the W.T. Grant dime/department store completely

---

Purchased as of 29 June 1935," [NA RG 287 box y740].

[10] Figures cited in "Where the Chains Stand," Chain Store Age, January 1932, p. 7. Woolworth's opened in 1883 at 530 Penn; Kresge's in 1920 at 648 Penn.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

remodeled its 19th century commercial palazzo on Penn Square. The sole occupant of its building during the Depression, it demolished the top floor and faced the remaining stories in a two-tone porcelain enamel veneer that wrapped around the corner in a seamless curve emphasized by a stainless steel canopy above the storefronts.[11] Other chains seized the opportunity presented by Penn Street's retail decline to seek out better locations, larger quarters, or more advantageous leasing terms, often moving in and modernizing after the failure of long-time local establishments. The Federal Furniture Store at 625 Penn had no sooner shut its doors than Thom McAn Shoes installed one of its 1932 Model F storefronts [Fig. 246].[12] When the Sondheim's Clothing Store at 700 Penn finally went under, A.S. Beck Shoes took over the street level of this Victorian Gothic structure and modernized it, despite the chain's usual flamboyance, with a restrained design in porcelain enamel by New York architect Horace Ginsbern [Fig. 247].[13] When the United States Hotel at 425 Penn quietly went out of business, Pep Boys, a regional auto supply chain, stepped into the former lobby, hanging a speed-banded neon sign across the facade and filling the transoms with decals of the chain's *Manny, Moe, and Jack* logo [Fig. 248].

As detrimental as the proliferation of the chains might have been to the stability of Penn Street's independent merchants during the Depression, the high mortality rate of local stores could not be ascribed solely to the perceived incursion of anonymous corporate outsiders. As in other American cities, Reading's real estate industry and property owners had to share the blame, having produced an over-supply of business frontage and retail space which resulted in that "mad condition" identified by planners (and Main Street critics) Catherine Bauer and Clarence Stein as an over-supply of retail establishments. What this meant on Penn Street was that there were

---

[11] For the specifics of W.T. Grant's modernization program see "Chain Store Expansion and Construction," Chain Store Age.

[12] On Thom McAn's modernization program see Frank E. Landau, "Keeping Melville Stores Up-to-Date is Standard Practice," Chain Store Age, November 1932, pp. 654-5. "Melville Remodels 100 Stores," Chain Store Age November 1934, pp. 97-98.

[13] This was one of six storefronts he executed for the Beck's shoe chain. See Horace Ginsbern Collection (1989.005), Avery Archives, Columbia University: drawing numbers A101.11, A37A.03-05.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

simply too many stores, especially in the shoe and dress categories, for Reading's financially-strapped populace to support.[14] Though much of this over-production of business frontage seems to have occurred during the boom years of the 1920s, it continued into the Depression as landlords attempted to restore properties to profitability the easiest way they could--by creating retail space. In 1937, for example, the Mansion House Hotel, where important visitors to Reading had stayed for nearly a century, was torn down and replaced by a streamlined taxpayer with three retail units, each occupied by a chain. When the stalwart Penn National Bank & Trust Company folded that same year after 54 years in business, its Georgian-style 1920s headquarters at 8th and Penn were summarily modernized for retail leasing [Fig. 249].[15] The banking hall was divided into two store spaces with deep vestibules, off-center curving displays, and glass block panels illuminating the second floor. Though faced in structural glass to the height of the third story stringcourse, the building's historical details were intact above--its balusters, oculus, and raking cornice contrasting sharply with the deliberate modernity of the facades below. If by 1937 there was nothing remarkable about the storefronts of the former bank--similar ones could be found throughout the United States and nearly identical ones were already in place on Penn Street itself (Sach's at 714, Gilman's at 660, Martin's at 658)--they were emblematic, nonetheless, of a relentless consumerism, fostered by the government itself, which arose in the wake of institutional failure (here brought on by the fiscal downturn of 1937) and appeared on Main Street as a soothing visual panacea.

On a more basic level, such modernized storefronts, and the newness they embodied, also had decided economic and architectural consequences: economic because they attracted the

---

[14] Clarence S. Stein and Catherine Bauer, "Store Buildings and Neighborhood Shopping Centers," Pamphlet reprinted with addenda from Architectural Record 77 (February 1934), p. 2.

[15] Though once heralded as "one of the staunchest and most important banking institutions in Reading," Penn National fell victim to Depression-induced insolvency. Quoted in Reading Old and New (1909), p. 147. During the heady days of prosperity before the Crash, when Penn National's future must have seemed an unquestioned certainty, the bank installed itself in spacious new quarters, replacing its small Beaux-Arts temple with a larger Georgian-style structure, a nostalgic nod to Reading's colonial past.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

attention of customers and tenants (and, the argument went, increased sales, profits, and/or rents) or, if the buildings were improved speculatively, retail tenants; architectural because, as the FHA claimed, a single modernized store would force competing merchants to respond in kind, seeking through modernization to convince a skeptical public that their establishments were equally up-to-date. These economic and architectural effects were evident on Penn Street in the 1930s. When A&P Super Markets modernized an abandoned taxpayer at 806-10 Penn Street and opened a combination grocery with an in-house butcher, it posed a serious threat to the independent Keystone Meats just four doors away. Though this threat was obviously economic in nature, presumably based on A&Ps low prices and retail conveniences, Keystone's response was architectural. It modernized with a simple glass and aluminum facade reminiscent of A&P's own standardized front [Figs. 250 & 251].

Of course, the pressure to modernize was not predicated solely on direct competition since, as the FHA argued, the average Main Street merchant was "competing for the customers' dollars, not only with the other merchants in your line of business, but with all merchants in all lines of business."[16] Making this pressure even more acute during the Depression were those recognized social anxieties--feelings of inferiority and competitiveness, and contradictory impulses to fit in with and stand out from the crowd--which were deliberately projected into an architectural dimension through the promotional prescriptions of the modernization movement. Thus, in Reading, businesses which had operated successfully for years were compelled to modernize in the 1930s. At the commercial crossroads of Penn and 5th, the Crystal Restaurant had occupied the same site since the 1890s and the same building with the same storefront since around 1905 [Fig. 252]. Nonetheless, in the late 1930s, though its only direct competition was a small lunch counter, the Crystal modernized, replacing its cast iron and leaded glass street-level facade with a sleek molded steel front possessing, ubiquitously, an off-center entrance, rounded

[16] FHA, "Talk for Merchants," FHA, Portfolio of Radio Publicity (Washington, DC: GPO, 1935)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

bulkheads, and neon signs, but given a distinctive note by its use of mirrored panels [Fig. 253]. When space became available two doors down, the Crystal expanded its operations, opening a bar (clearly after the 1933 repeal of Prohibition) with a glass and metal storefront notable for its gaping bull's eye window. That space had been vacated by Tri-plex Shoes, a long-time tenant who moved across the street into a building occupied until the Depression by the venerable drygoods store Kline, Eppihimer & Co, in business for over 50 years. All traces of Kline, Eppihimer were erased from the street-level frontage with a flashy modernization that included banded letters and speed lines remniscent of Raymond Hood's Mc-Graw Hill Building, but now a familiar motif on Main Streets across the United States [Fig. 254].

Located at the very pulse of trade (to use the sales jargon of the day), the stores on Penn Square were particularly susceptible to the pressures of competitive modernization and to the exigencies of the retail shuffle which brought progressive visual change to the commercial corridor through seemingly endless and anonymous iterations of the storefront. Despite often obvious similarities, each modernized storefront was nonetheless unique, the product of a singular coordination of architect, contractor, and manufacturer operating, however transparently, under the auspices of the federal government with the assistance of the local chamber of commerce as a *de facto* sales force dedicated to convincing merchants of the efficacy of building modernization. One such successful coordination occurred at 519 Penn Street in 1938 when a merchant named F.A. Iacone commissioned a local architect named Elmer Adams to design a new facade for his men's clothing store [Fig. 255].[17] Having expanded his store into an adjacent retail space vacated by a chain shoe store, Iacone wanted Adams to join the two spaces behind a single continuous front. Adams submitted plans and specifications for Iacone's storefront to a Reading building contractor named J.M. Kase who, in turn, placed an order with

[17] Like many of his architectural colleagues, Adams dealt with the slowing of building activity during the Depression by directing his skills into other channels, executing a series of watercolor renderings of Reading landmarks and scenes of local interest. See The Passing Scene, 7, pp.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Philadelphia Branch Sales Office of the Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company for products from LOF's "Complete Storefront" line.

Then one of the largest glass manufacturers in the country, LOF was also an active participant in the FHA's Main Street Initiative, a role which enabled the company to aggressively market its building products during the Depression under a patriotic banner of corporate responsibility and commitment to national recovery. With the FHA's encouragement, LOF and other building material manufacturers were in the midst of national promotional campaigns which targeted merchants, architects, and contractors like Iacone, Adams, and Kase through extensive trade journal advertising in publications like Apparel Arts, Architectural Record, and Building Reporter. As an incentive to purchase or specify LOF products, the company offered merchants a federally-insured time-payment option which allowed them to finance the complete cost of store modernization, including architect's and contractor's fees. Of course, merchant Iacone could also have chosen to finance his renovation locally, since the bank immediately adjacent to his Penn Street shop, the newly modernized Reading Trust Company, was the town's leading lender of FHA modernization credit.[18]

The design prepared by architect Adams had wide show windows flush with the street and a deep T-shaped vestibule which allowed the compartmentalization of the window space into separate display areas for suits, haberdashery, and furnishings. This was a standard arrangement for a double-frontage men's store in the 1930s, one well-publicized in those modernization articles, portfolios, and advertisements which appeared regularly in the decade's architecture journals as store re/design became increasingly important to American building culture.[19] For

---

256 & 263.

[18] Reading Trust modernized after taking over the 2nd National Bank and moving into its Richardsonian headquarters at 511-15 Penn which, along with No. 517, was given a flattened classical front.

[19] This arrangement was thought to respond to the psychology of male consumers, who supposedly disliked window shopping. The street display area was maximized with broad windows providing a continuous view of suits *en suite* across the frontage. The vestibule was disposed to allow male shoppers to engage in semi-private visual consumption. On the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

this particular men's store, Adams chose a rich, but subdued color scheme of the type deemed appropriately masculine by retail experts, cladding his facade in Cadet Blue Vitrolite (structural glass) with gleaming Extrudalite (extruded aluminum) trim.[20] The signboard, with inset letters in Cadet Blue Vitrolite, was fabricated of back-lit Vitrolux (color-fused tempered plate glass) used here in Suntan, a cosmetic-like shade which indicates the degree to which the marketing of building materials during the Depression had absorbed the lessons of a female-inflected consumer culture. It was flanked by two smaller badge-like signs featuring an Iacone "crest" and an H. Kuppenheimer logo (a knight in chain mail)--a brand designation of high quality menswear. Adams also specified Vitrolux for the top-lit ceiling panels of the vestibule and displays which, like the signs above, glowed dramatically at night giving the store what LOF would have called 24-hour selling power.

In its compositional arrangement of vestibule, show windows, signage, and materials, Adams' modernized storefront ably fulfilled his client's merchandising needs, but it simultaneously fulfilled his community's social imperatives, for as the appearance of the typical Main Street store changed, so too did its meaning. As the site of those crucial everyday practices of shopping and selling, Main Street was uniquely positioned to participate in a necessary Depression-era project which, by blurring the distinctions between private and public sectors, sought to collapse the boundaries between consumerism and civicism, between consumption and good citizenship in order to promote the fiscally-dubious, yet easy-to-swallow proposition that the nation could literally spend its way out of the economic crisis and buy its way into a prosperous future.[21] With building modernization as a requisite first step toward the completion of this project, the iconography of the modernized storefront was doubly consumed as shopping

---

psychology of of vestibule design see Morris Lapidus, "Basic Plans and Profiles of Store Front Construction," Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935), p. 53.

[20] For specifications see LOF, Vitrolite Photo Album, plate no. 1230 [LOF MSS-066 Box 46/folder 93].

[21] On the collapse of these boundaries see Jackson Lears, Fables of Abundance (New York:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and recovery, as marketplace *and* modernity--the real and metaphorical terms of which were well understood by men and women walking down Penn Street or any other Main Street in the 1930s.

Creating An Iconography of Prosperity

It is not surprising that an architectural manifestation as banal and quotidian as the Main Street storefront should have been imbued with such obvious representational power during the Depression. Indeed, in an era rife with the rhetoric of social and political populism the storefront's everydayness contributed to its agency, as New Dealers clearly recognized. These buildings were understood as carriers and transmitters of core cultural values, a signification that was evident from the earliest moments of the federal modernization movement. The FHA's Bulletin No. 1, although little more than a dry procedural manual for financial institutions, opened with an exhortation attaching unmistakable social good to the extension of modernization credit. The MCP was posited as a relief measure, not for the building industry, but for the buildings themselves, here identified as the "other victims" of the Depression. In this analogy, run-down buildings were "casualties" as seriously stricken by "the ravages of five years of depreciation and obsolescence" as the Depression's "human victims" were by unemployment and hunger.[22] In a nationwide radio address broadcast live from Radio City in November 1934, FHA head James Moffett rendered the social significance of Main Street's dilapidated buildings equally unmistakable, declaring that they represented the "break-down of the American living standard" and a destructive "comradeship of poverty" which had emerged during the Depression making it acceptable to "get along with the old and worn-out." At a public rally in Los Angeles two months later, Moffett further declared that worn-out buildings were "signs and reminders of hard times."[23]

Basic Books, 1994), p. 244.

[22] FHA, Modernization Credit Plan, Bulletin No. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934), p. 3.

[23] James Moffett, "Address Broadcast over NBC at Radio City," FHA Press Release No. 110, 11 November 1934, p. 1. Moffett, "Better Housing Campaign Rally in Los Angeles," FHA Press Release No. 192, 31 January 1935, p. 1 [NA RG 287 Box y749].

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In retrospect, Moffett's undoubtedly deliberate use of a familiar Depression-era locution allows these buildings to be understood as the architectural equivalent of the decade's "official" images of hard times--the photographs by Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans and others produced by the Historical Section of the Farm Security Administration beginning in 1935. Like the FSA photographs, run-down or untenanted buildings possessed a currency, "an objective social validity" as John Tagg has defined it, which enabled them to represent with apparent truthfulness the conditions of the Depression in American cities and towns.[24] However, this documentary truthfulness was somewhat distorted for, like the FSA photographs, run-down buildings were also subject to ideological construction which assigned to them a burden of meaning outweighing their actual economic status as symptoms of retail and real estate decline. Thus it was that Administrator Moffett, speaking with the authority of the New Deal state and backed by the corporate-bureaucratic publicity apparatus of the modernization movement, described these buildings as "a barrier between American people and prosperity." Moffett identified this barrier to prosperity as both physical and psychological, though he was aware of its fiscal dimension as well, challenging the American public that it would remain tauntingly impenetrable until there was "free spending in every community" to modernize Main Street's buildings.[25]

In its potential for modernization, the run-down storefront possessed the ability to transform its documentary significance. A testament to present hard times before modernization became an exposition on future good times after modernization--a conceptual dyad which had its own photographic representation in the before and after pairs which typically accompanied government publications, trade journal portfolios, and corporate advertisements. If the run-down storefront may be aligned with the FSA's iconic images of human despair (which only rarely depicted the commercial landscapes of Main Street), the modernized storefront finds a correlate in

[24] John Tagg, "The Currency of the Photograph," in The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 163.
[25] Moffett, "Better Housing Campaign Rally in Los Angeles," p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

other artifacts of New Deal visual culture, the murals produced under the auspices of the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration and the Section of Fine Arts of the Treasury Department. Whether these murals trafficked in nostalgia or progressivism, they possessed an underlying optimism which sought to suppress the traumas of the Depression through an inspirational iconography of historical persons and events, vignettes of small town life, heroic workers, or streamlined trains and airplanes.[26] Though architecture is, by its nature, abstract and is thus denied the easily comprehended narratives of this sort of figural painting, the iconography of the modernized storefront was just as legible as the typical WPA mural. And by virtue of its serial existence on Main Streets across the country and its realistic engagement with everyday life--at the most basic, and during the Depression, most anxiety-producing level of economic exchange--the modernized storefront possessed an even greater therapeutic potential as its architectural optimism became a psychological salve.

This potential was fully evident in a simple corollary, almost articulated by Administrator Moffet, which expressed the storefront's public meaning. If a run-down building betokened social and economic depression to the general public, then the opposite was also true: a modernized building could signify the positive outlook and revived prosperity of a commercial corridor, an entire town, or even the country as a whole, regardless of the actual state of the local or national economy. When presenting its building statistics for 1935 the F.W. Dodge Corporation observed that "the modernization of the main street of trade constitutes definite evidence that the recovery cycle is underway."[27] The government pointed out that while modernizing a single property surely served the individual owner, it was also a "definition of civic pride" that "benefit[ed] the whole community," generating "a new spirit of hopefulness...a feeling of confidence...[and the

[26] See for example, Karal Ann Marling, Wall-to-Wall America (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982).
[27] C.B. Louden, "Review of Alteration Trends," Real Estate Record, October 1935, p. 6.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

knowledge] that a brighter day is coming and coming fast."[28] Robert and Helen Lynd discovered similar optimism in *Middletown* following the "external improvement and sprucing up" of the business center. Modernizing Main Street's buildings was regarded as "a symbol of recovery" which seemed to revive Middletown's "civic spirit" and engender a jocular denial, at least in the middle-class: "What depression? We haven't had a depression here." This, despite the fact that in 1935 Middletown's industrial activity was still in decline, that retail volume on Main Street was half of what it had been in 1929, and that genuine civic improvements (to infrastructure, services, etc.) were "largely standing still." Noting this "paradox," the Lynds concluded that the Depression had made more urgent the "the need to 'put on a good show' to reassure the groundlings [and] to 'doctor up' the morale of the rank and file."[29]

In putting on a good show, assisted by the architectural masquerade of the new facade, the modernized storefront functioned to convince the public–to make Americans believe–that "the innate dynamism of the modern economy," in Marshall Berman's phrase, was proceeding apace, despite the rupture of the Depression.[30] By disguising or effacing the Depression's physical effects behind that new facade, modernization operated socially to minimize or even deny the rupture's psychological impact. But as the Lynds observed in Middletown in Transition, this impact had registered with the public as "an elemental shock" at once universal, prolonged, and nearly primal in its deeply-felt trauma.[31] Some critics have argued that in terms of image-making this trauma precipitated a nostalgic return to an idealized small town archetype which would forever remain, as Terry Smith has called it, "an obvious domain of the not-modern." For Smith, the small town was "crucial to the visualization of modern America" in the 1930s, but only as it stood in opposition to

---

[28] FHA Promotion Pointers 1 (No.13, 1935), n.p. "Real Money Getting Busy," Better Housing, 20 September 1934, p. 3.
[29] Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1937), pp. 7, 120, 471.
[30] Marshall Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air (1982; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 288.
[31] Lynd, p. 296.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the factory, the skyscraper city and other generally recognized landscapes of modernity—a last line of defense against the onslaught of inevitable cultural modernization that the Depression had barely halted. Smith claims that the small town, "the quiet look down Main Street," became a symbol of recovery within the decade's visual culture (principally photography) precisely because it appeared to resist external modernizing forces through a show of old-fashioned independence expressed in archaizing imagery.[32]

If, however, one's purview of visual culture is broad enough to include everyday architecture, a different Main Street emerges, one which became a symbol of recovery not through resistance to modernization, but through its acceptance as localized practice. On this Main Street the traumatic shock of the Depression was ameliorated not through a backward slippage toward a nostalgic haze, nor through a heroic leap forward toward a *tabula rasa* utopian future, but rather through a brisk walk toward the light of tomorrow as embodied in a gleaming modernized storefront. To signal the imminent return to prosperity, then, modernization required an architectural imagery that might serve as a counter-shock, unabashedly expressing progress and optimism, and boldly advertising an ever-brightening future. Modernization thus required the architectural imagery of modernism. But of those varied modernisms available to American architects in the mid-1930s, not all could satisfy the iconographic requirements of building-modernization-as-national-recovery. Stripped classicism was too closely associated with civic or institutional authority and timeless solemnity and its stone revetment and sculpture were too costly, and too staid, for average Main Street modernizations. The associations of modernistic design were exuberantly commercial and fashionably contemporary, but therein lay the fault: it was too close to the excesses of the 1920s with floral fields and zigzags that now seemed frivolously out of place.

---

[32] Terry Smith, Making the Modern (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 311. See also Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 261-2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

There was, of course, another modernism, one possessing sufficient simplicity, economy, and that crucial shock of the new to embody the architectural resuscitation of America's failing Main Streets. In 1934, just as the modernization program was getting underway, the Museum of Modern Art's "Modern Architecture" exhibition had just concluded an eleven city tour which had introduced the International Style of European modernism to such Main Street locales as Rochester, Cleveland, Toledo, and Milwaukee.[33] If the International Style's underlying architectural principles of volume and regularity, so insistently propounded by curators Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, remained inscrutable to the public-at-large, its more accessible, or at least more conspicuous, formal elements soon appeared on Main Street itself. Asymmetrical and unornamented facades, planar and curving forms, ribbon-like windows and boldly simplified graphics were taken up by architects who were either unconcerned with Hitchcock and Johnson's critical admonitions against appropriating only the surface features of the International Style or were unable to embrace anything but its surface features given the facade-orientation of so many modernization commissions. In 1935, Kenneth K. Stowell, architectural editor and modernization advocate, noted how American architects were beginning to "assimilate the philosophy of the early and radical modernists and interpreting it through their own individuality." Viewing this as a positive trend, Stowell came out in support of "this modern or international style" in his influential book Modernizing Buildings for Profit. With the approval of this store re/design expert, it was all but certain that "plain surfaces, geometric forms, and colorful simplicity" would proliferate on the nation's Main Streets as "public taste tend[ed] more and more to the new architecture," as "the present trend toward modernism in store design" continued unabated, and as the new architecture itself was codified into a reductive storefront formula.[34] Though this formula became clichéd, it

---

[33] See Richard Guy Wilson, "International Style: The MoMA Exhibition," Progressive Architecture 63 (February 1982): 97.

[34] Kenneth K. Stowell, Modernizing Buildings for Profit (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1935), p. 12. Republic Steel Corporation, "Store Fronts of Enduro," Sweet's Catalogue File (1937), sec. 16, cat. 10, p. 10..

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

remained distinctly legible as "an act of faith in the Pax Rooseveltiana," to borrow the terms Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co have used characterized the work of Norman Bel Geddes, which "fused the self-advertising implications of the Chrysler Building with the schematic simplifications of the International Style [and] out of the lacerating tensions of the New Deal salvaged the optimistic pole."[35] Thus, out of national trauma and local despair (the negative or pessimistic pole) there emerged an architecture of optimism on Main Street America embodied in the modernized storefront.

Modernization as Everyday Modernism

Prior to the appearance of modern on Main, as recently as 1930 according to the editors of House Beautiful, to the man-in-the-street "modern architecture mean[t] 'different architecture'–that is, architecture so unlike what he has been accustomed to that he feels strange in its presence and will have none of it."[36] By the end of the decade, while this assessment continued to hold sway in the domestic sphere, on Main Street's commercial corridors the opposite was true. As Architectural Forum observed in 1939: "there is no sentimental relationship between the owner and his store, which is one reason why today's shops are practically 100 per cent modern, while the house still breathes the spirit of 1776."[37] A restless consumer culture had given modernism a decidedly positive spin: what was strange and different was invariably eye-catching and sales-enhancing: "today's shopkeeper regards modernization as an essential part of his merchandising technique and employs the dramatic attention-getting qualities of modern architecture as an extra salesman of prime importance."[38] If modernist modernizing became a useful sales strategy it was because the corporate-government publicity machine had successfully interpreted in architectural terms the

---

[35] Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, Modern Architecture/1 (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), p. 216.
[36] "Our Home Builders Service Designs a Modern House," *House Beautiful*, January 1930, p. 80. Cited in Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The World of Tomorrow: The Future with a Past" in High Styles: Twentieth-Century American Design (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1985), p. 87.
[37] "Stores," Architectural Forum 71 (December 1939): 427.
[38] "Main Street, U.S.A.," p. 86.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

consuming public's long-cultivated desire "to be modern which mean[t] wrapping the past in moth balls...and realizing that we live in the year A.D. 1935."[39]

On Main Street the "past" of the old storefront was quite literally wrapped, with modern veneers used in a deliberative manner which, depending on one's point of view, could be seen as following the precepts of the International Style or industrial design. The storefront's emphasized surface appeared unbroken across the architectural volume like "a tight skin" or "a stretched textile" as Hitchcock and Johnson would have it. Though white stucco had been used most often to create the precise machine-like surfaces they preferred, Hitchcock and Johnson were confident that other materials would soon be available which were more durable, regular, and endowed with color that was "technically and psychologically permanent." Their description of the facing of the future corresponds closely to the properties of structural glass which, at the time of their writing, was being transformed through marketing into their very ideal of a modernist surface material: a "plate covering" available in nearly 30 colors made permanent during the manufacturing process by the fusion of oxides and silica; laid or installed with minimal joining (cement, cork tape, or felt) to become a smooth "sheathing" with "similarity in texture and scale to the glass planes of the windows," finally forming with the window glass a seamless continuity of surface which "reduc[ed] the contrast between the transparent and the opaque sections of the bounding wall."[40] In the modernized storefront the transition between the transparent and the opaque was seductively orchestrated, the juxtaposed window and sheathing sharing not only a highly polished finish but a vitreous substantiality, as plate glass met structural glass mediated only by the attenuated profile of an extruded metal frame.

If, in modernism, plate glass was fetishized into a totem of transparency, in modernization it was structural glass which received totemic, though oppositional, powers of

---

[39] FHA, "Talk for General Audience," in Portfolio of Radio Publicity, p. 1.
[40] Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, The International Style (1932; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966), pp. 45, 76, 50-1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

opacity. Light-trapping and densely, impenetrably colored, structural glass purposefully obscured that which lay beneath its surface--a brick wall, a rusting bulkhead, an obsolete architectural detail. This opacity also served to obscure the economic expedients which lay beneath the surface of modernization as recovery--a troubling reliance on consumer credit, a false promise of guaranteed profits, a disturbing incitement of cut-throat competition. To stress the darkness and the murkiness of this opaque surface is, however, to deny its sensual impact on Main Street during the Depression, for the modernized storefront did not merely adhere to the modernist principle of surface, it celebrated the principle of surface with glass that curved around bulkheads, slid over transoms, slipped across facades, each new movement transforming the old-fashioned building beneath into a stylishly modern one.

Purists like Hitchcock and Johnson would have denigrated such colorful facadism as a "tawdry" and "half-modern" parody, even though they acknowledged that in Europe in the 1920s "use of bright color had value in attracting attention to the new style."[41] In America in the 1930s that was the point of modernism on Main Street, to attract attention to the new style of the modernized storefront through a publicity-seeking, self-celebrating, even crassly commercial architecture. Ultimately, the critical assessments of MoMA polemicists are beside the point and sixty years after the fact it hardly matters how well the architecture of modernization measured up to the formal prescriptions of the International Style. And yet, at the time, there were those who sought to defend the storefront against accusations of modernist failure and stylistic opportunism, none more so than the editors of Architectural Forum (including George Nelson and Douglas Haskell) who argued that American commercial design--retail shops in particular--represented a "progressive" architectural development regardless of its lack of commitment to the International Style as officially promulgated. In 1938 they made this position clear:

> Today's modern is a reality. If the term "International Style" is not broad enough to include it, this is the fault of the term; not

[41] Ibid, pp. 65 & 76.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> the reality. And if streamlined storefronts are not precisely what the purist expected, let him closely check his arguments: extruded aluminum is clearly more a machine age product than the handicraft which went into most of his much-beloved Central European models. The question we must answer today is not "What is Modern?" but "Where is modern now?[42]

The question bears answering. With respect to the storefront, modern was everywhere. By the mid-1930s the modernized storefront had proliferated sufficiently for Lewis Mumford to acknowledge it as "a rather blatant form of modernism" which marked the emergence of "a modern vernacular."[43] The term has some validity with respect to the modernized storefront, designating immediacy and temporality, widespread occurrence, and a hierarchical position happily toward the low end of the architectural spectrum. If the modernized storefront emerged too quickly for the evolutionary conventions of typical vernacular forms, this was symptomatic of its modernity--it was keeping pace with the rapid tempo of modern life. Perhaps, though, the modernized storefront may be best understood as the product of an everyday modernism. Neither nostalgic, nor heroic, it was nonetheless a deliberative architectural response to the social and economic unpheavals of the Depression which navigated an engaged middle path through the specificities of the Main Street condition and the generalities of the national discourse. Reinscribed with a political intent erased from the aestheticized International Style, this everyday modernism produced a storefront architecture fully charged with a progressive agenda which attempted, through the vaguely leftist policies of the New Deal, to marshal the resources of the individualist capitalist economy for the collective public good of national recovery.

---

[42] "Where is Modern Now?" Architectural Forum 68 (June 1938): 467.
[43] Lewis Mumfod, "The Sky Line: New Facades," New Yorker, 20 November 1937, p. 85.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

MODERNIZING MAIN STREET: EVERYDAY ARCHITECTURE AND THE NEW DEAL

by

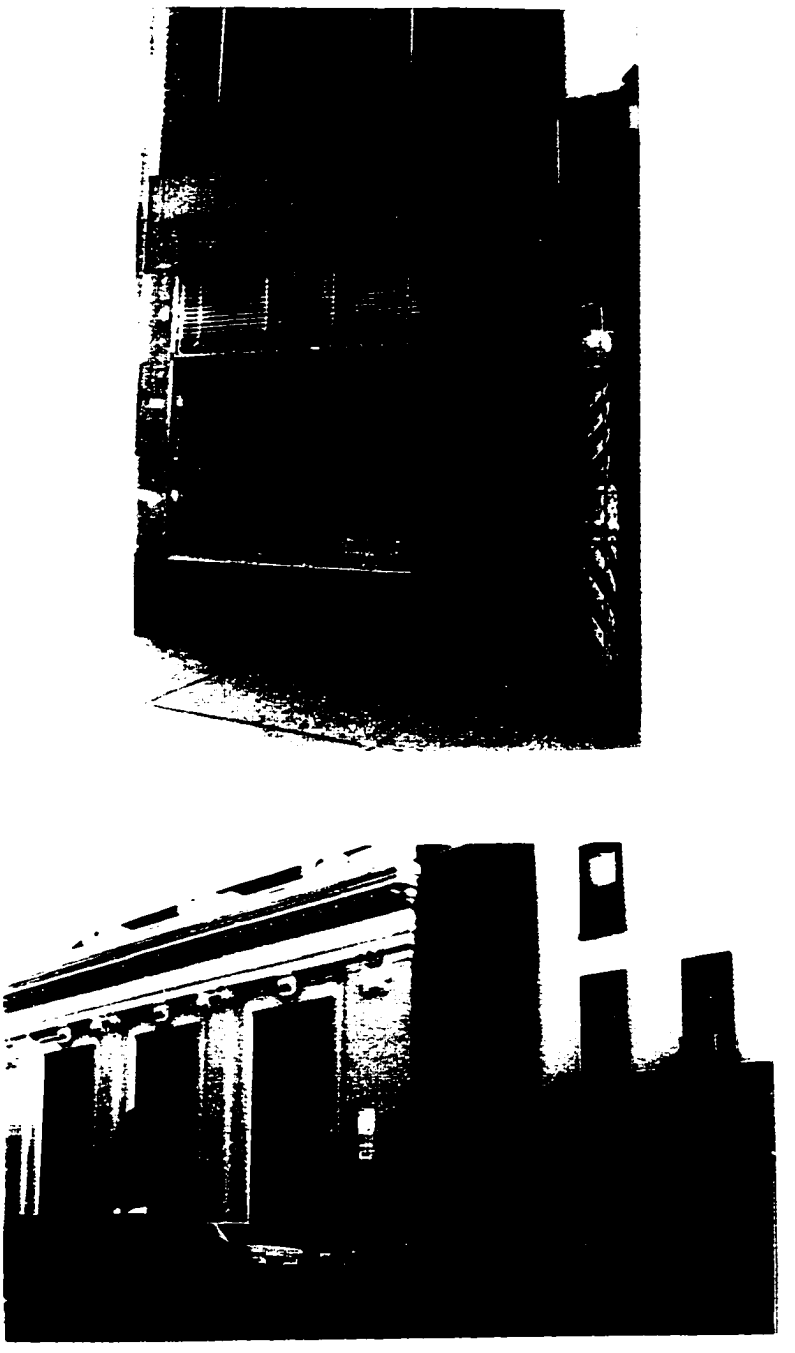
GABRIELLE ESPERDY

Volume II

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

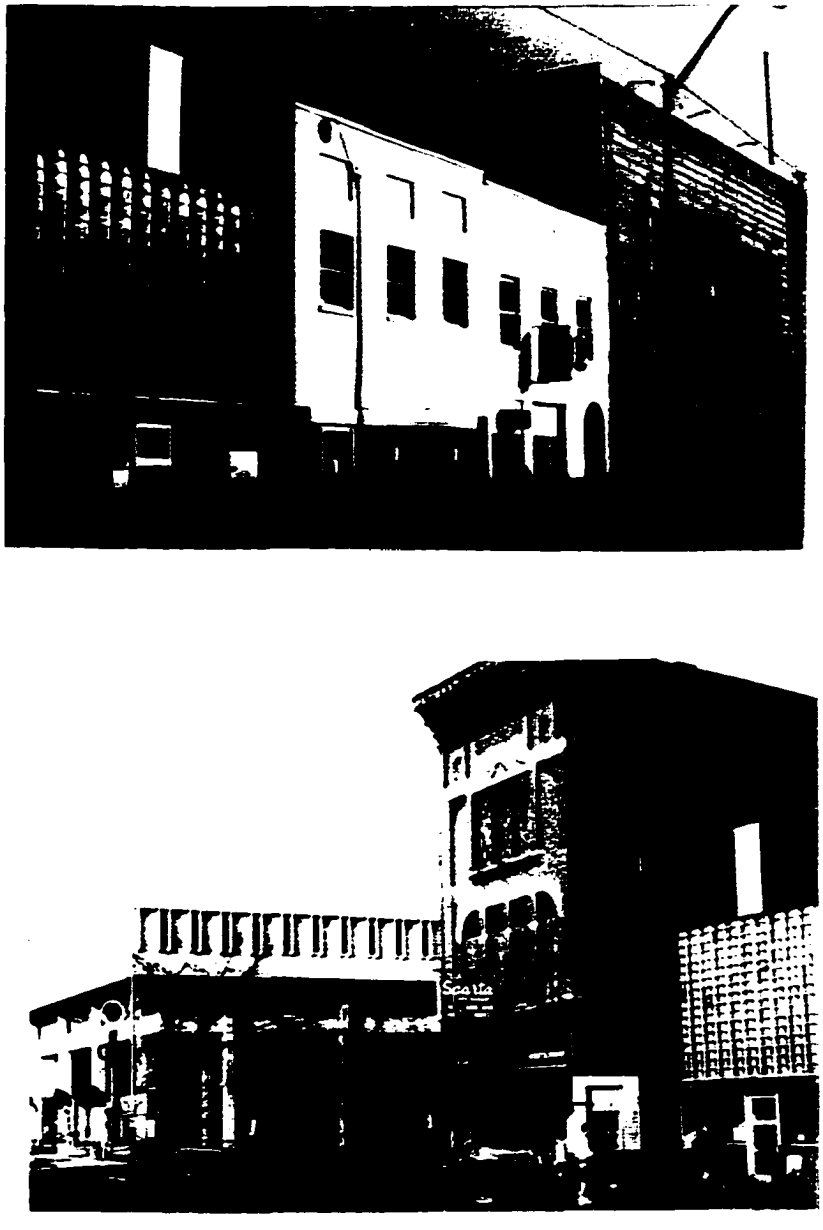
1999

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 1 & 2. Barber Shop on Main Street in Manayunk, Pennsylvania, circa. 1937: View of store and block. Source: author's photo.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 3 & 4. Newark Coin Exchange Jeweler and Sparta Restaurant on Main Street in Newark, Ohio. (Note Louis Sullivan's Home Building & Loan at far right of top image.) Source: author's photo.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 5. First Modernization Loan: John P. Powers standing before his home in Cloquet, Minnesota. Source: FHA Clip Sheet 9 (No. 8, 1936).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

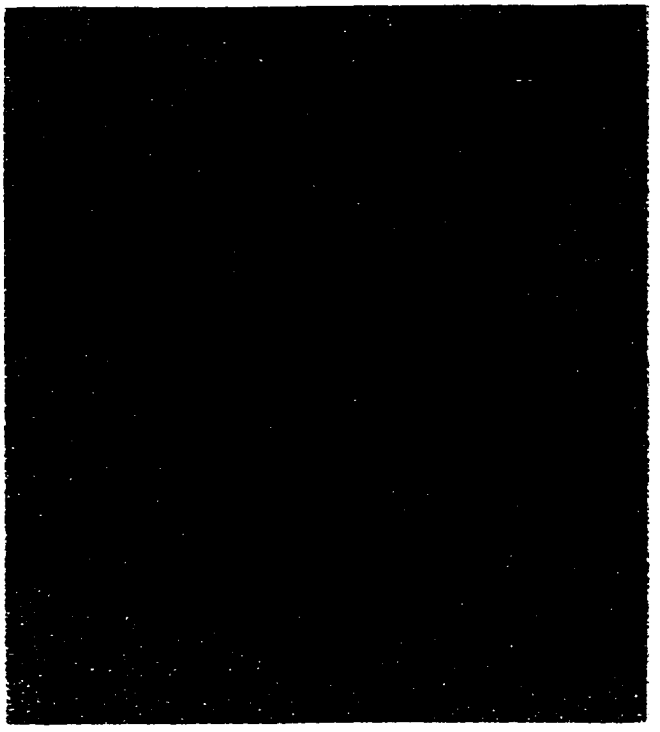


Figure 6. Chart showing commercial building trends, 1933-35. Source: Real Estate Record, October 1935, p. 6.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

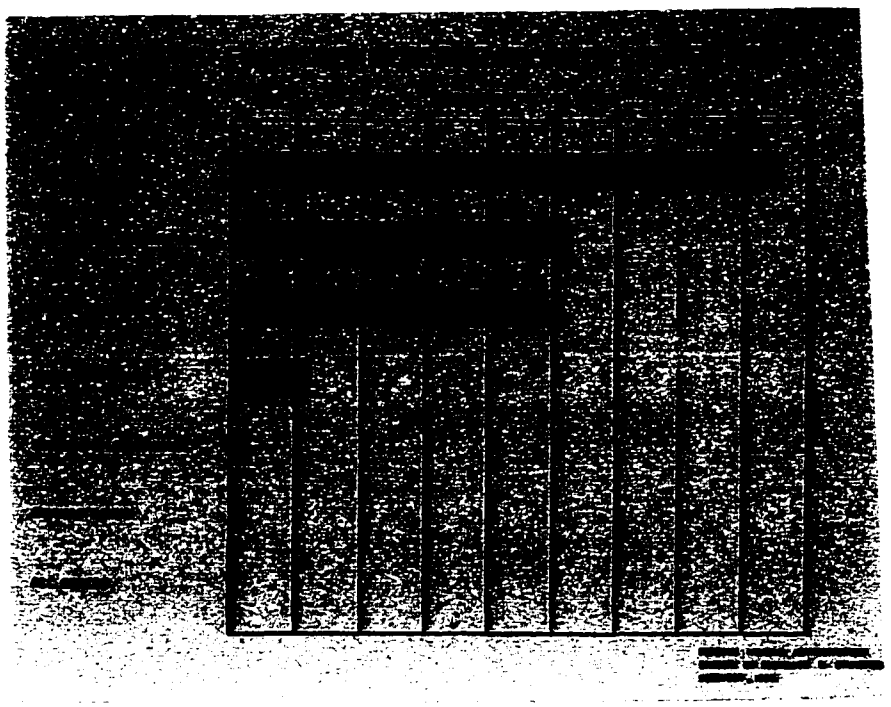


Figure 7. Institutions (by type) Financing Modernization & Repair Notes, 1935. Source: FHA, 2nd Annual Report (1936), p. 15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

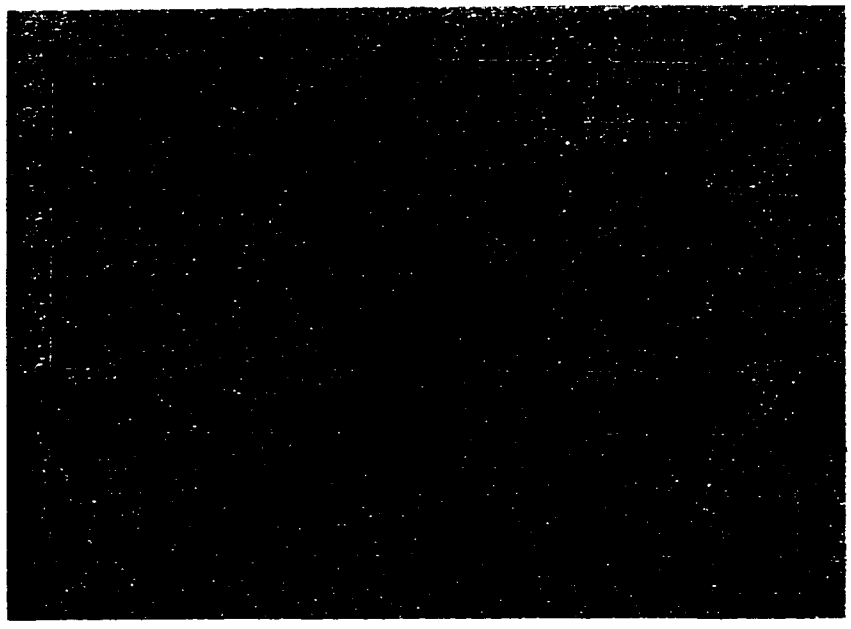


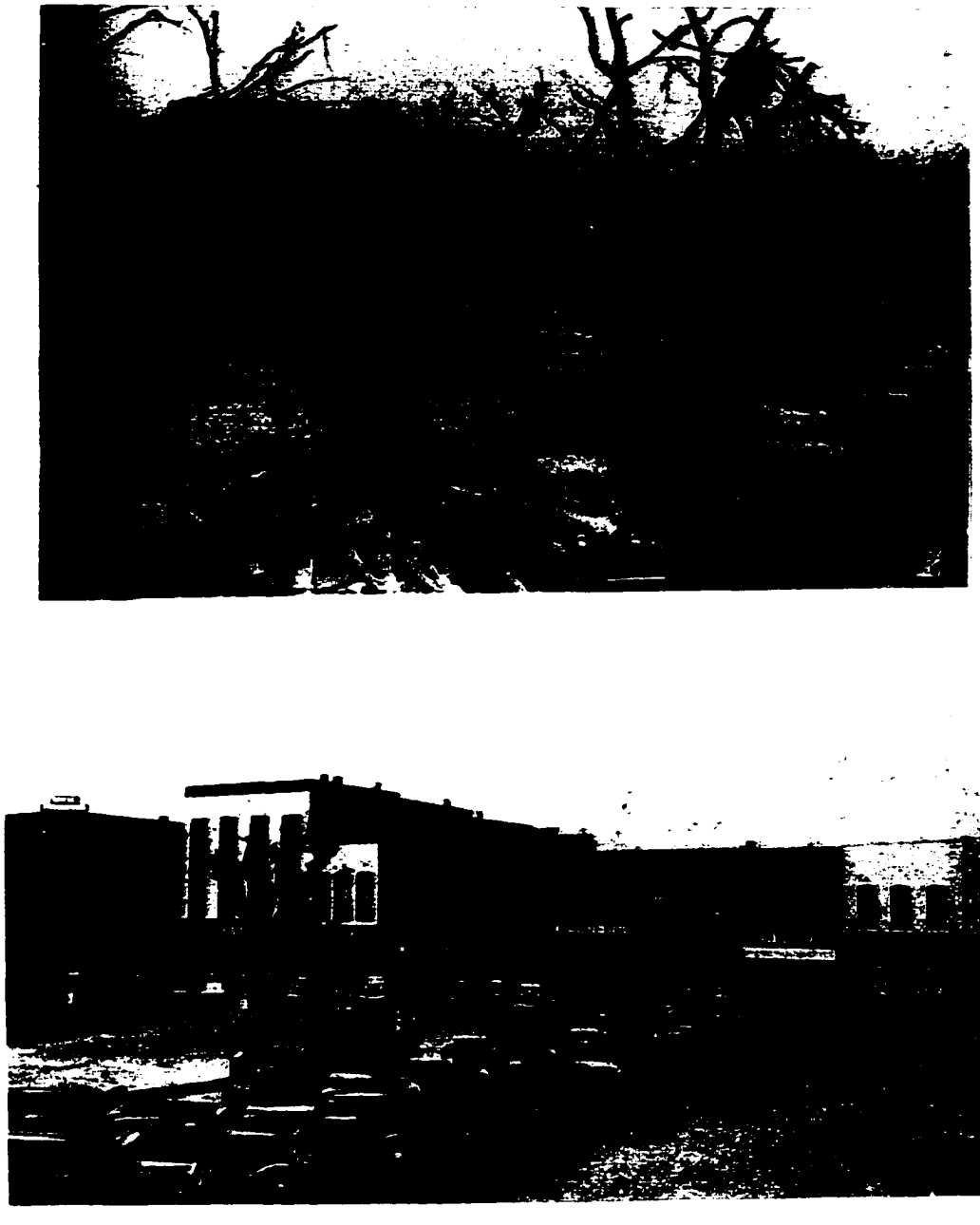
Figure 8. Value of Modernization Loans as of 31 December 1935. Source: FHA, 1st Annual Report (1935), p. 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 9. Estimated Value of Modernization Work Created as of 31 December 1935. Source: FHA, 2nd Annual Report (1936), p. 12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 10 & 11. *Main Street of Gainesville, Georgia:* BEFORE *repair (showing* destruction by tornado) & AFTER reconstruction/modernization, 1936. Source: Architectural Forum 66 (February 1937): 157.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

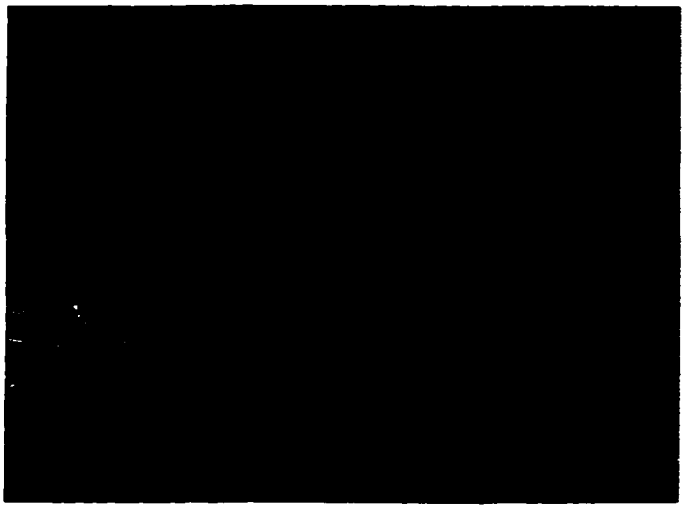


Figure 12. Federal Housing Administrator Stewart McDonald testifying before House Banking Committee, 1937. Source: Architectural Forum 69 (July 1938): 76.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

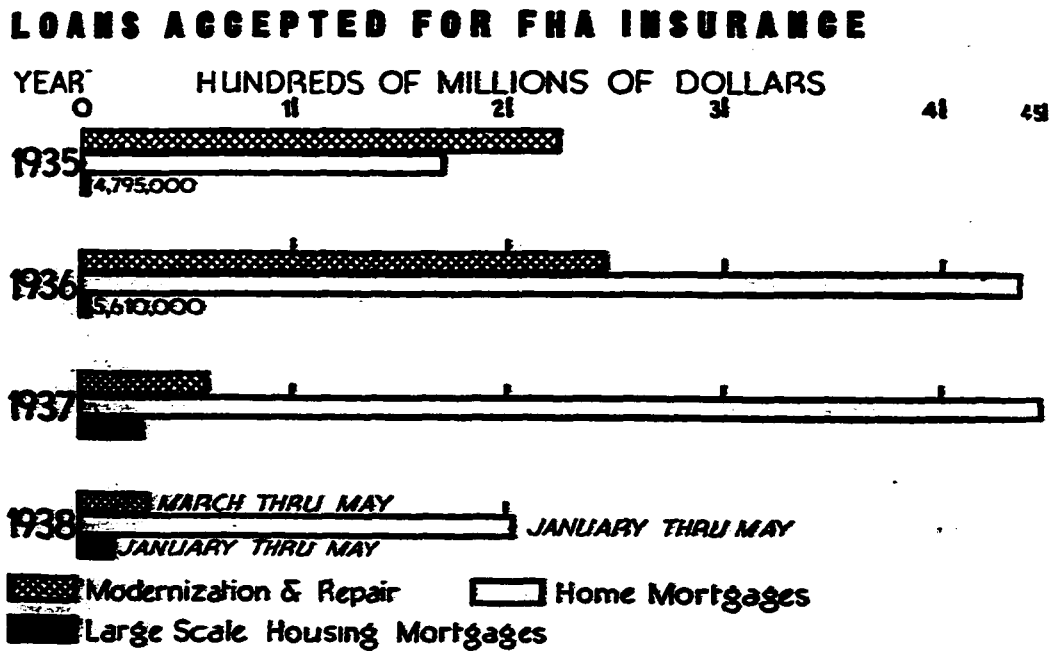
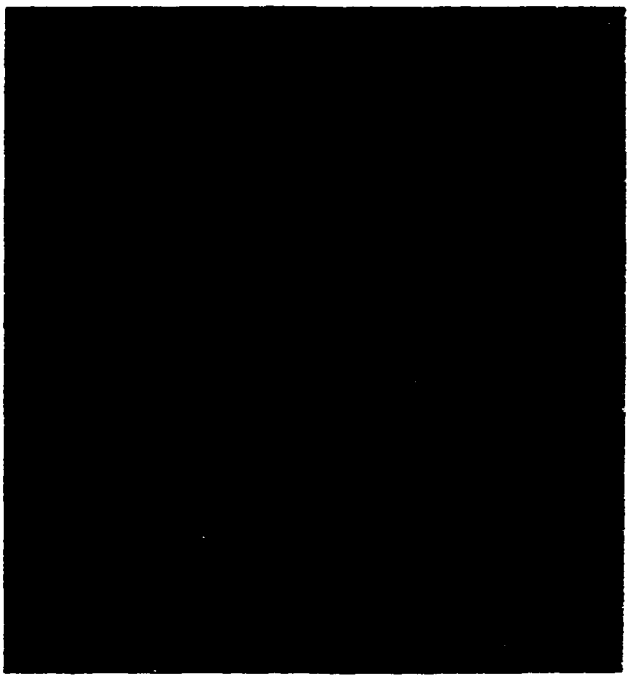


Figure 13. Loans Accepted for FHA Insurance through May 1938, including modernization, home mortgage and large-scale housing mortgage. Source: Architectural Forum 69 (July 1938): 76.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 14 & 15. BHP "House" Logo as Window or Advertising Emblem & Poster. Source: FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers (1934), p. 19.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 16. BHP "Home" Logo as Poster. Source: FHA, Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and other Merchants (1934), p. 27.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

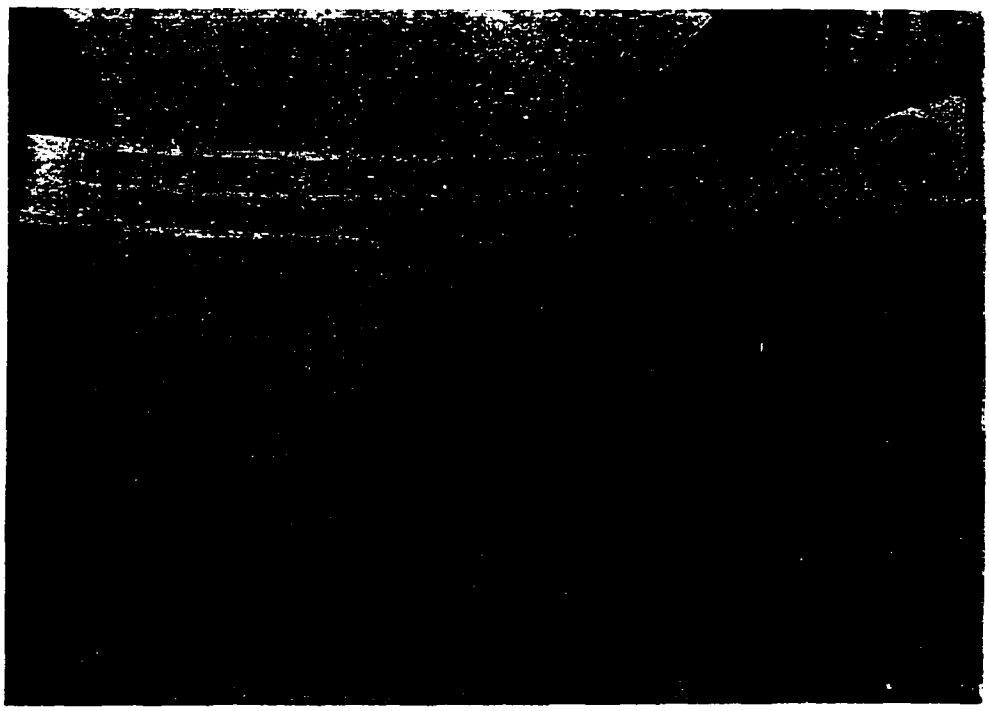
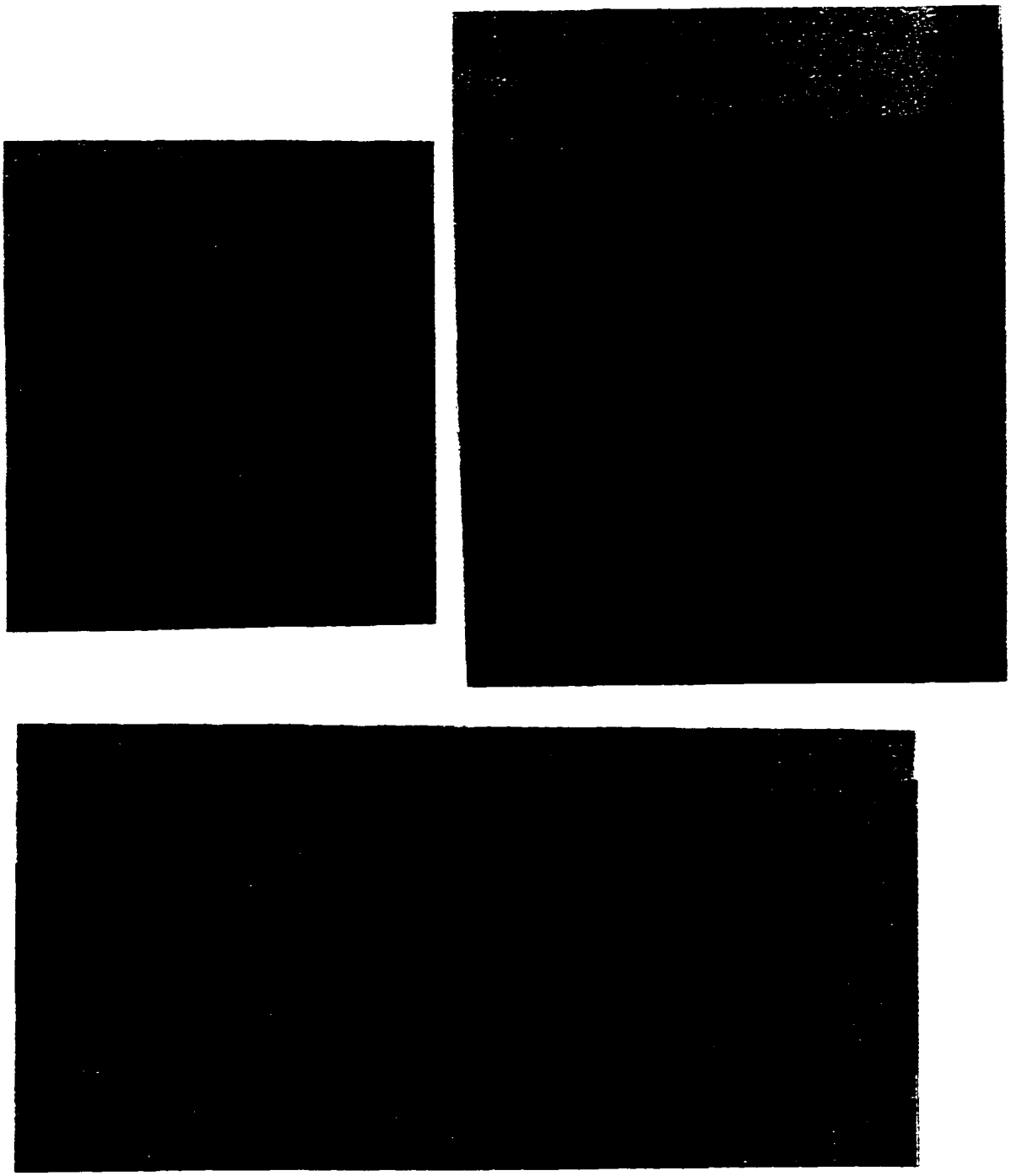


Figure 17. BHP banner on Main Street in Greenville, Alabama. Source: FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers (1934), p. 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 18, 19 & 20. BHP Campaign Headquarters in Jackson, Mississippi (in a storefront); in Akron, Ohio (in an abandoned bank building); in San Diego, California (in the U.S. Grant Hotel). Source: Better Housing, 20 September 1934; Better Housing, 21 December 1934; FHA, San Diego Sells and Idea (1935).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

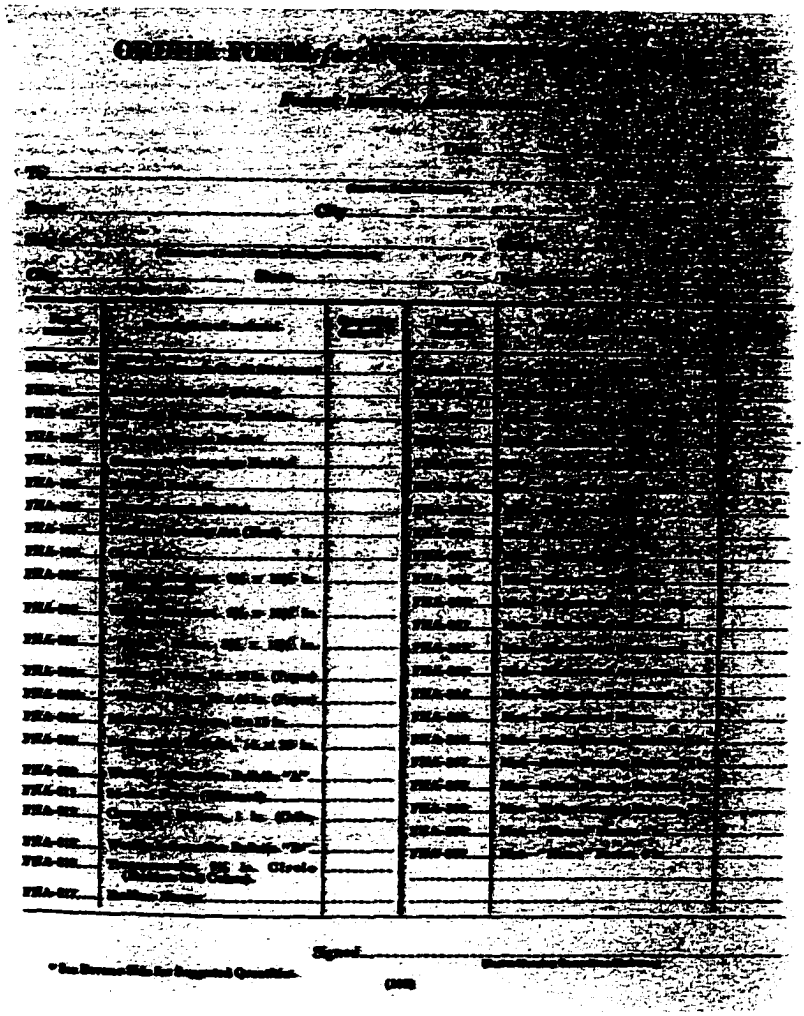
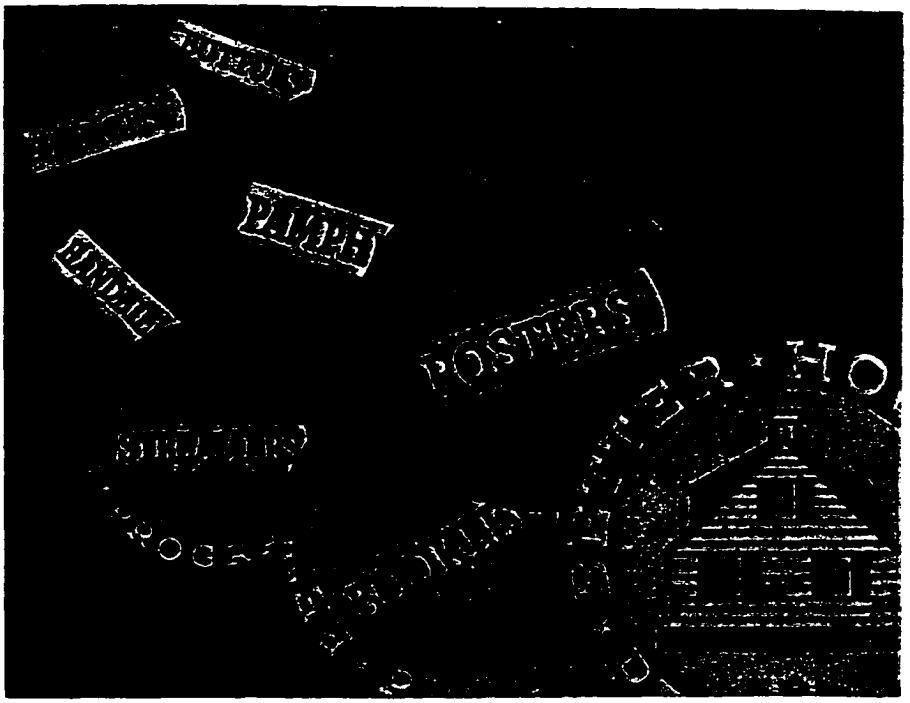


Figure 21. Order form for FHA publicity materials. Source: FHA, Portfolio of Publicity (1934) , p. 103.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 22 & 23. Sample FHA pamphlets & image showing extent of publicity materials available. Source: FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers (1934), pp. 14 & 15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

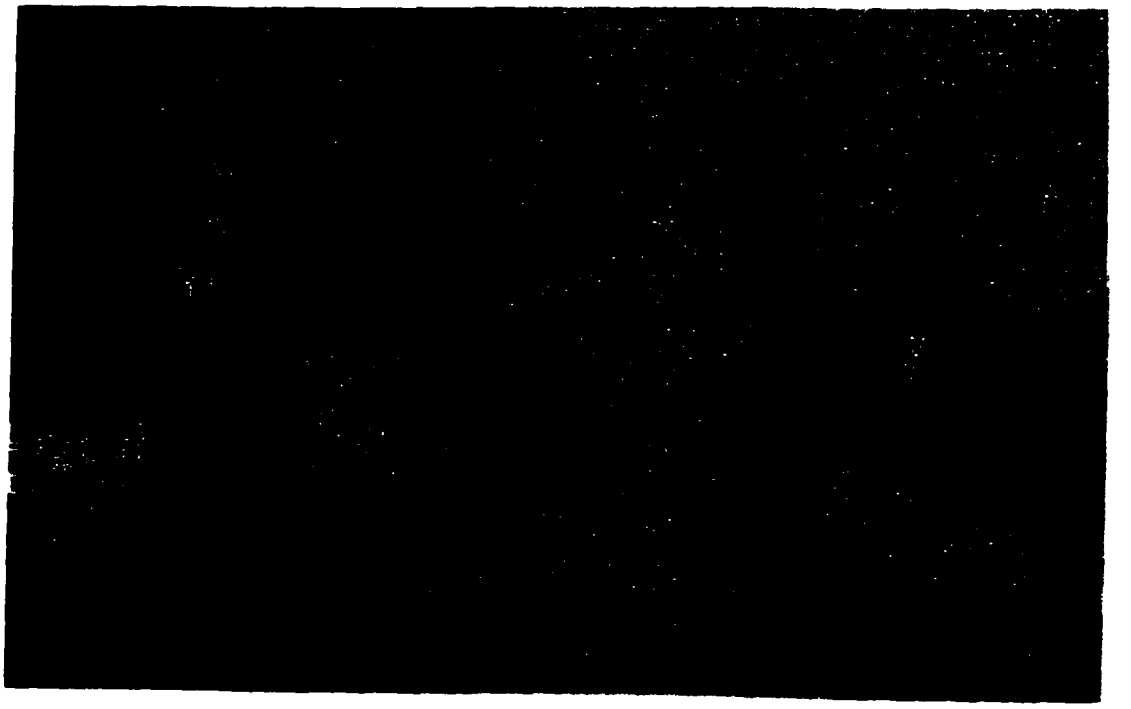


Figure 24. FHA Officials: Deputy Administrator for Title I Albert Deane, Administrator James Moffett, P.R. Director Ward Canaday. Source: Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 220.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 25. Organization Chart for Local BHP Campaign. Source: FHA, Community Campaign (1934), p. 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

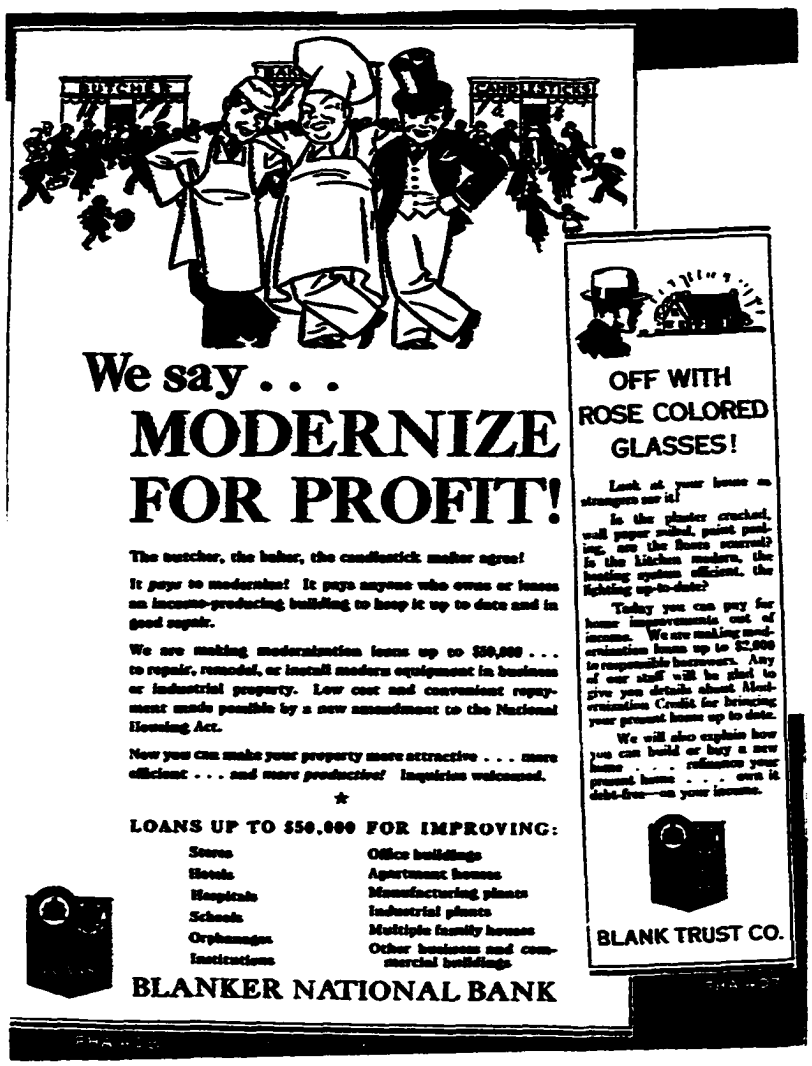


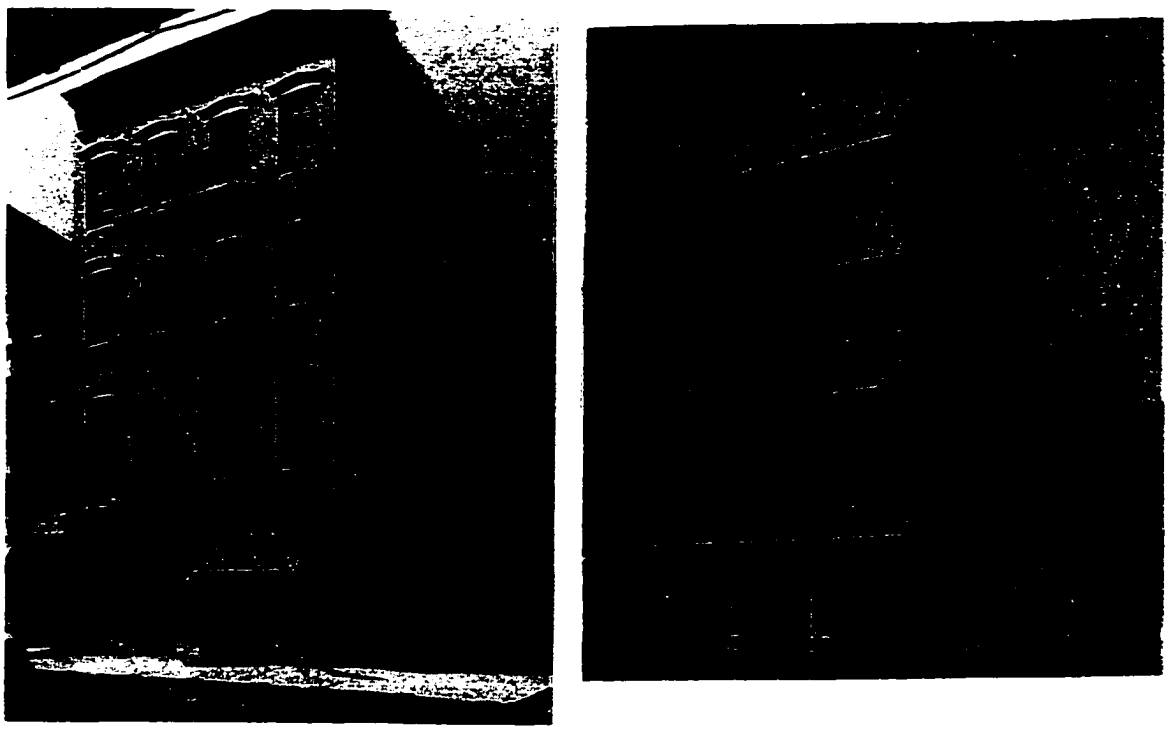
Figure 26. Sample BHP advertisement "blanks" prepared by FHA Public Relations Division. Source: FHA, Sample Better Housing Program Advertisements (1936).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



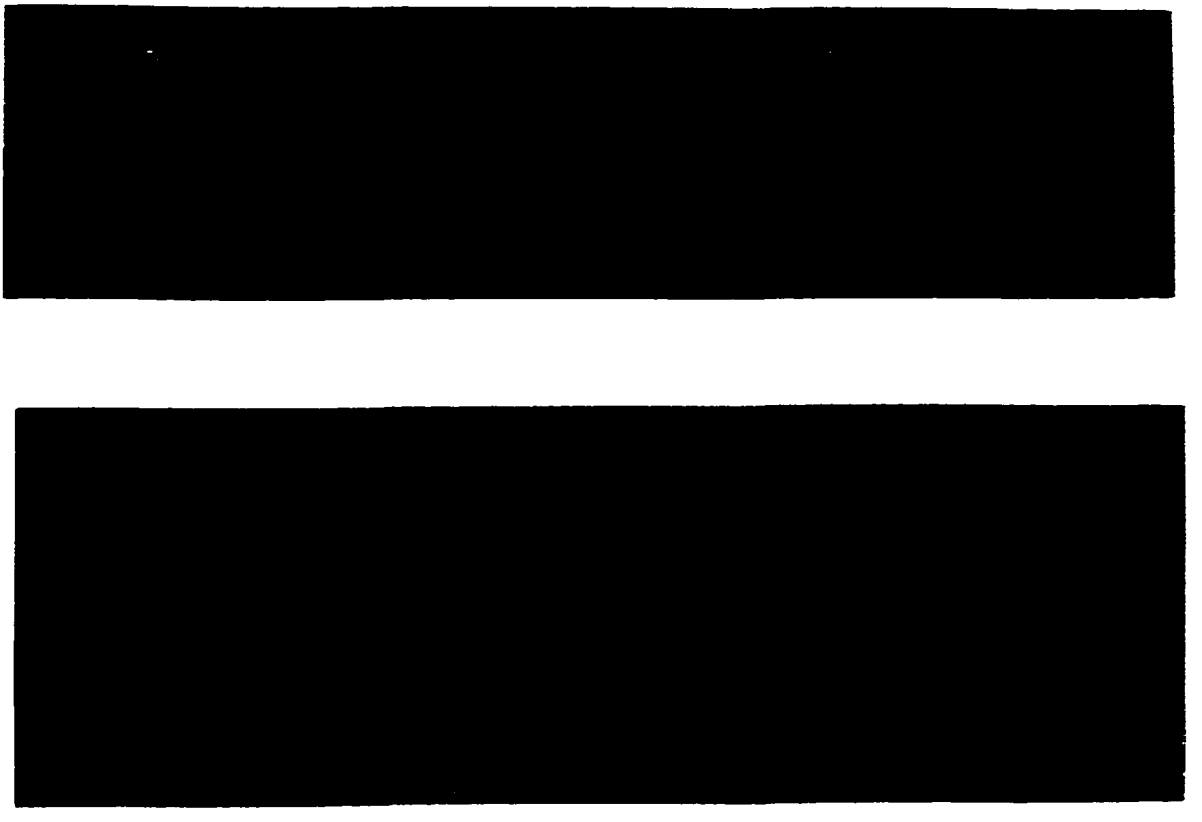
Figure 27. Actual BHP advertisements collected by FHA Public Relations Division. Source: FHA, Promotion Pointers 1 (no. 13, 1935).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



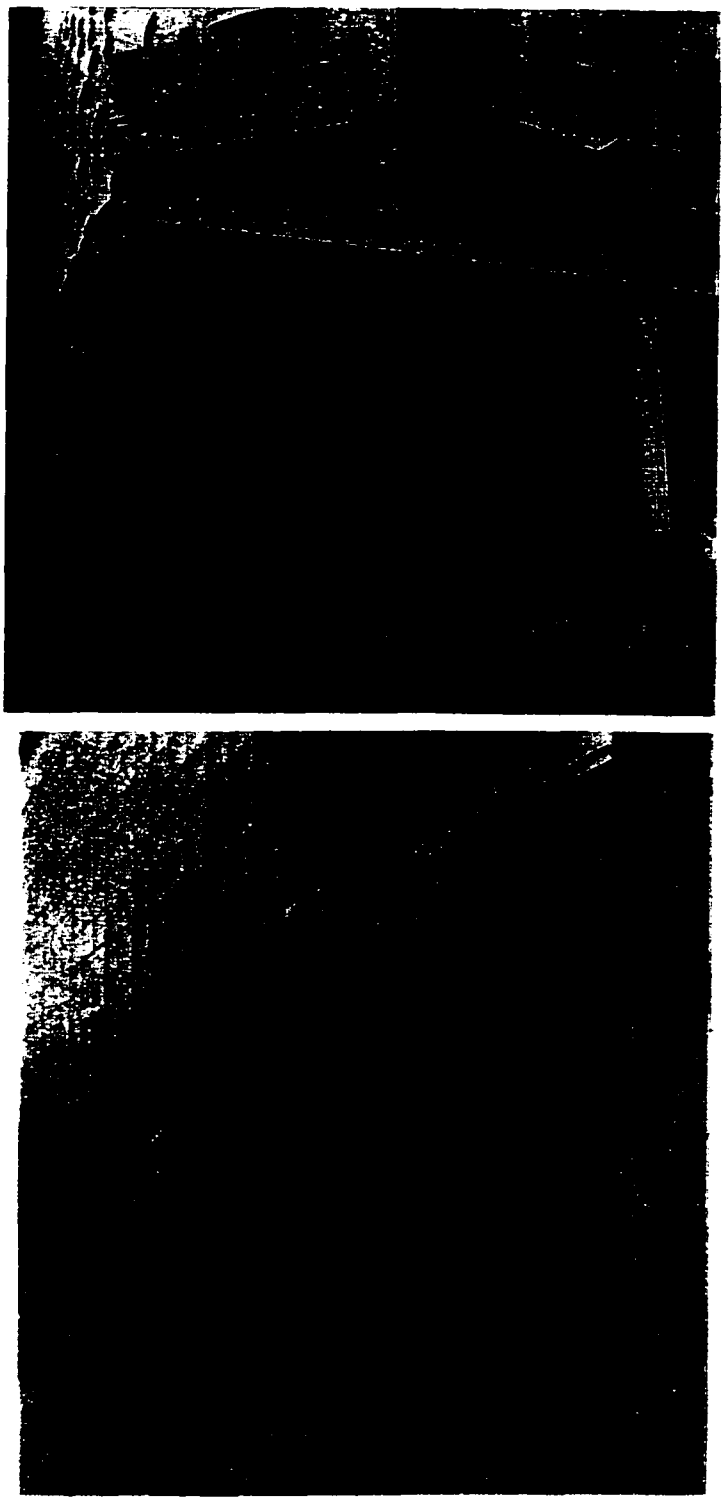
Figures 28 & 29. Typical New York tenement building BEFORE and AFTER modernization. Owned by Excelsior Savings Bank (by default); modernized by architect J.M. Berlinger. Source: Architectural Forum 65 (September 1936): 243.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 30 & 31. Nicollet Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota: photograph of block selected for group modernization & rendering of group modernization proposed for block. Source: Better Housing, 10 June 1936.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 32 & 33. Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Offices as modernized by George Howe in 1936. View of new street level facade and entrance. Source: Architectural Record 82 (November 1937): 75.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

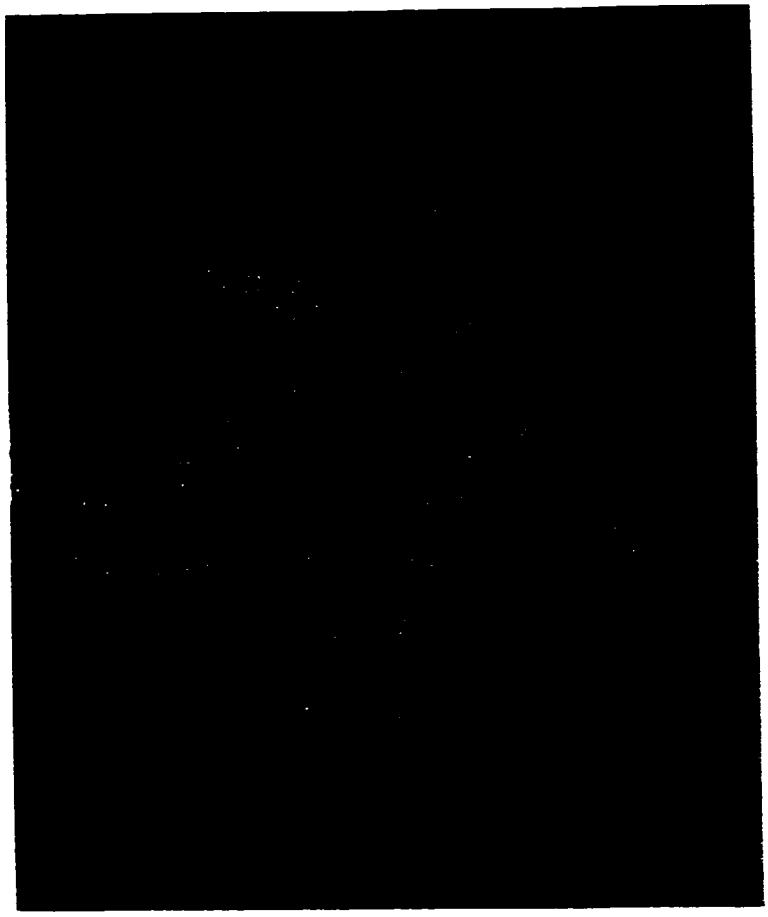


Figure 34. Typical BHP display in movie theater lobby. Source: Better Housing, 1 November 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

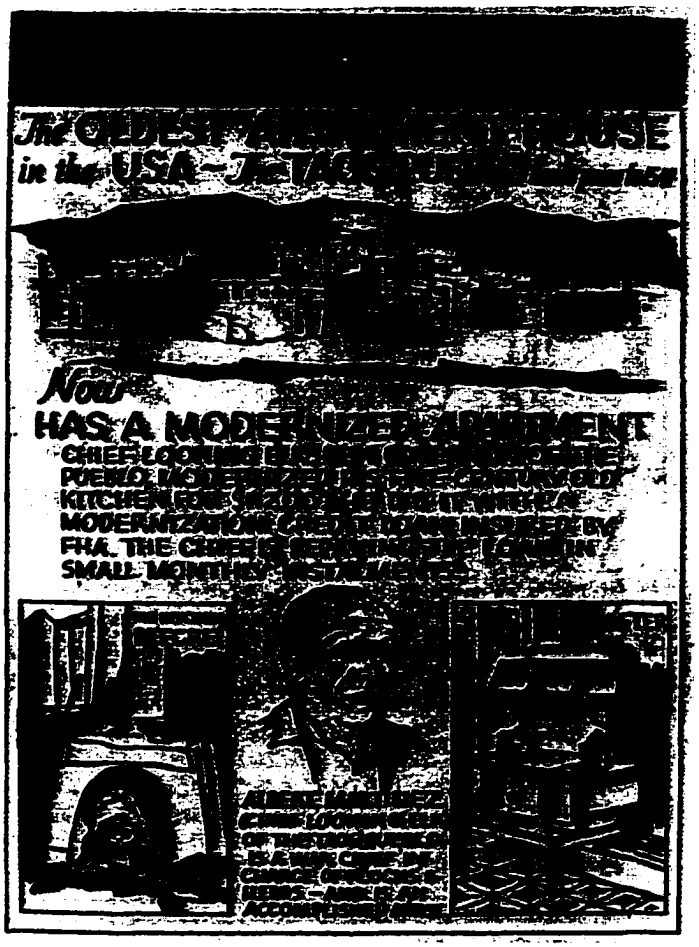
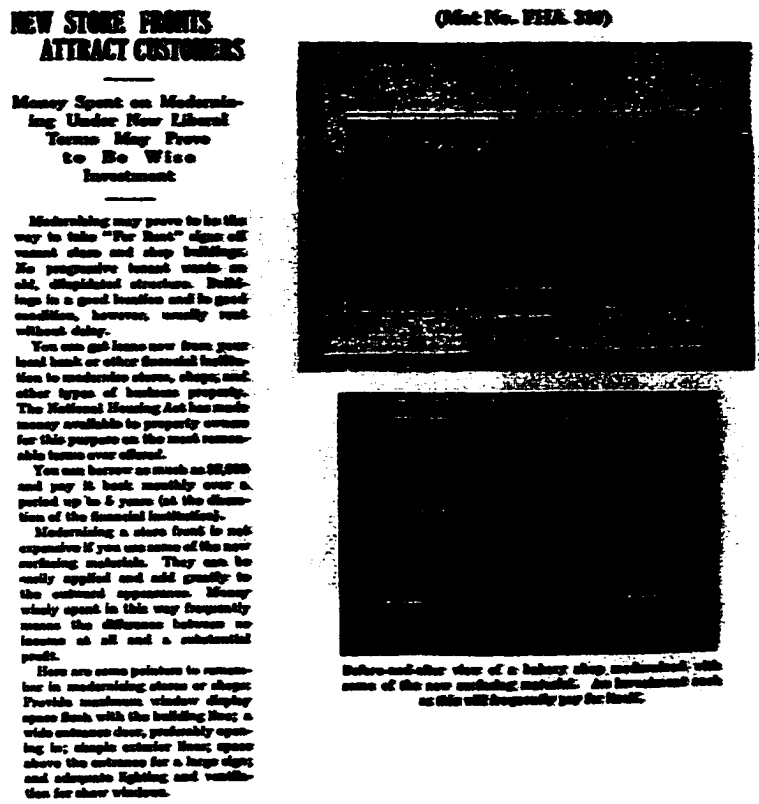


Figure 35. "Lo, and Behold!" BHP cartoon depicting modernization at Taos Pueblo. Source: FHA Clip Sheet 7 (no. 3, 1936).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



NEW STORE FRONTS ATTRACT CUSTOMERS

Money Spent on Modernizing Under New Liberal Terms May Prove to Be Wise Investment

Modernizing may prove to be the way to take "For Rent" signs off vacant store and shop buildings. No progressive tenant wants an old, dilapidated structure. Buildings in a good location and in good condition, however, usually rent without delay.

You can get loans now from your local bank or other financial institution to modernize stores, shops, and other types of business property. The National Housing Act has made money available to property owners for this purpose on the most reasonable terms ever offered.

You can borrow as much as $2,000 and pay it back monthly over a period up to 5 years (at the discretion of the financial institution).

Modernizing a store front is not expensive if you use some of the new enclosing materials. They can be easily applied and add greatly to the outward appearance. Money wisely spent in this way frequently means the difference between no income at all and a substantial profit.

Here are some pointers to remember in modernizing stores or shops: Provide maximum window display space flush with the building line; a wide entrance door, preferably opening in; simple exterior lines; space above the entrance for a large sign; and adequate lighting and ventilation for show windows.

(Mat No. FHA-380)

Before-and-after view of a bakery shop, modernized with some of the new enclosing materials. An investment such as this will frequently pay for itself.

Figure 36. Sample mat with generic feature article and BEFORE and AFTER photographs of typical storefront. Prepared by FHA Public Relations Division. Source: FHA, Portfolio of Publicity (1934), p. 77.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

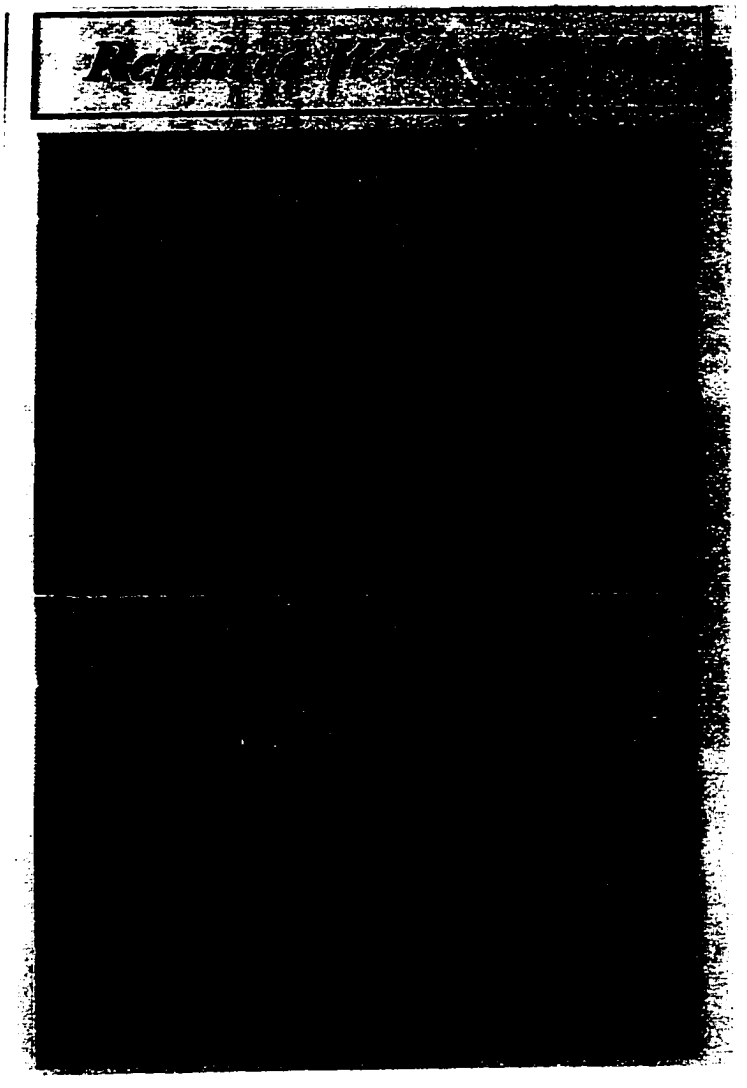


Figure 37. Clip Sheet feature: Repaired with $12,500, a commercial modernization in Riverside, California. Source: FHA Clip Sheet 4 (no. 5, 1935).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

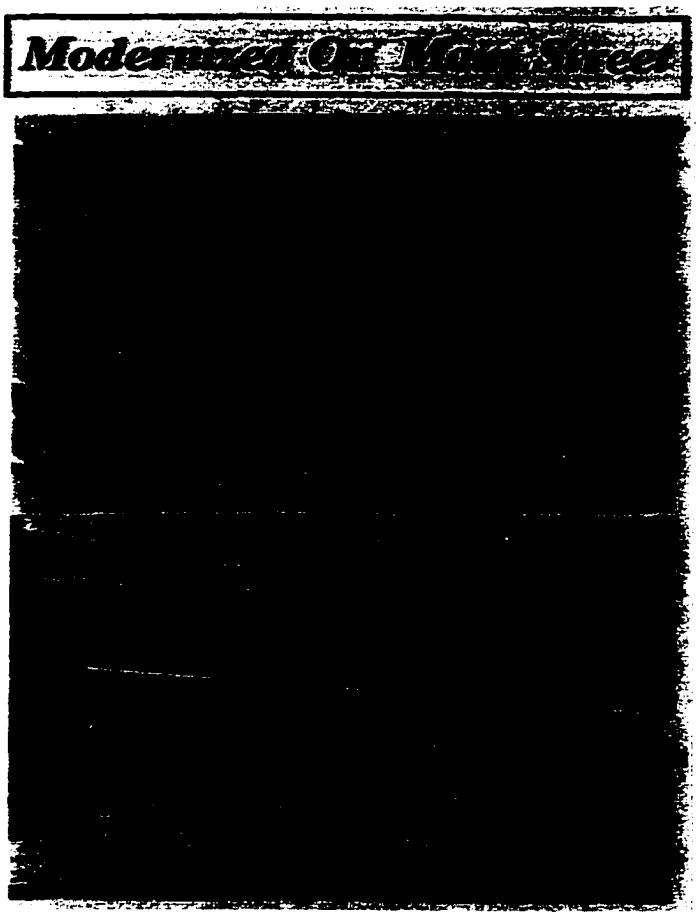


Figure 38. Clip Sheet feature: Modernized on Main Street, Block & Kuhl Store in Moline, Illinois. Source: FHA Clip Sheet 8 (no. 7, 1936).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

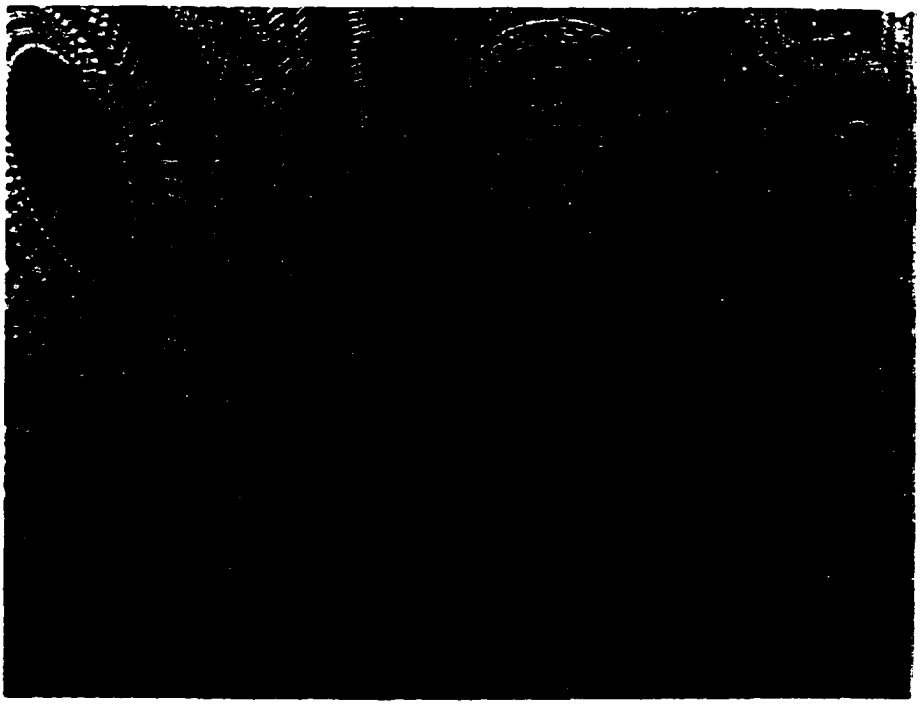


Figure 39. Photo-collage of BHP parades. Prepared by FHA Public Relations Division. Source: FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers (1934), p. 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

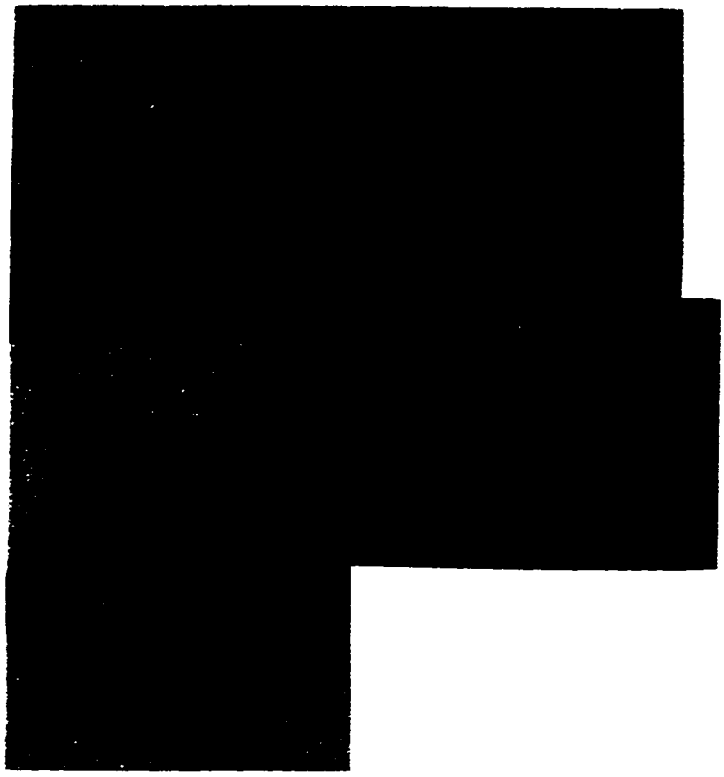


Figure 40. BHP parade in Lewiston, Idaho. Source: Better Housing, 22 October 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

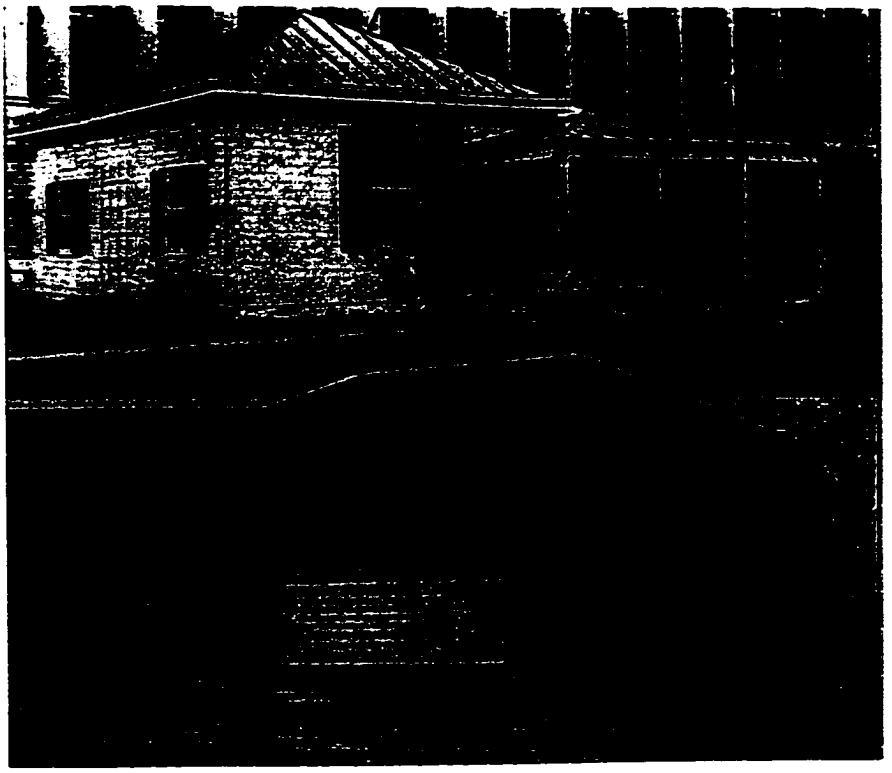


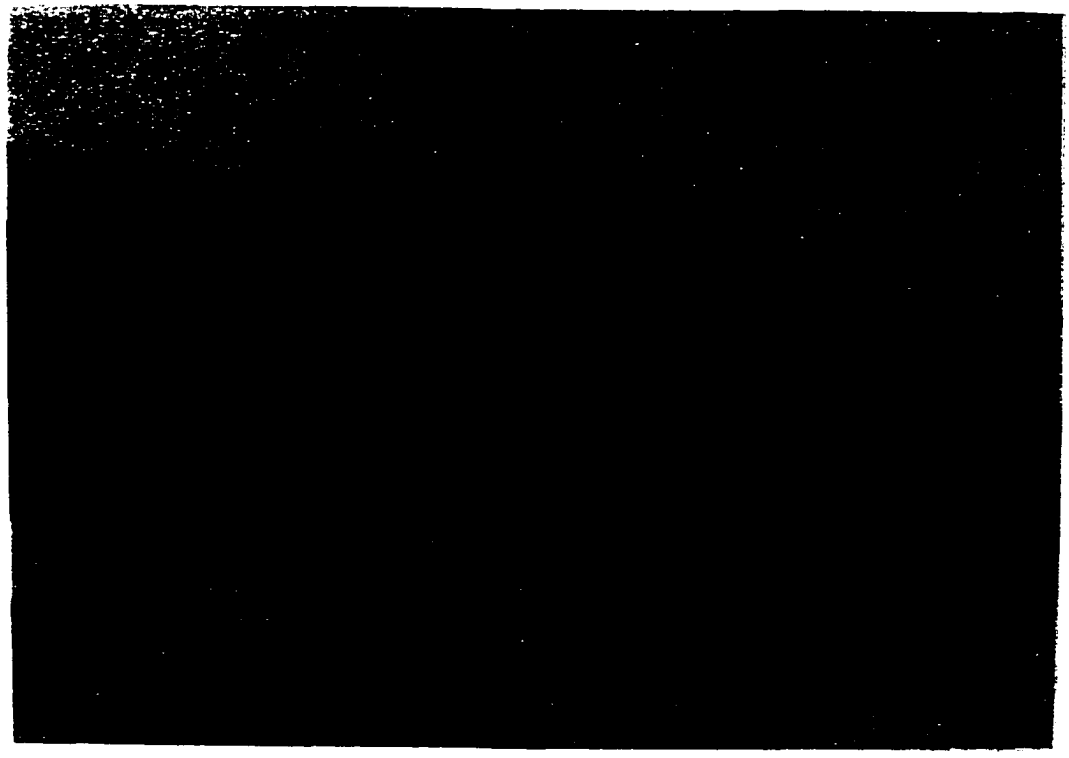
Figure 41. Modernization Demonstration from Renovize Washington Campaign showing house in front of Commerce Department BEFORE and AFTER modernization. Source: FHA, Community Campaign (1934), p. 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 42. Sacramento BHP's "Inspiration House" AFTER modernization. Let Inspiration House Show You the Way (1934), p. 11.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 43 & 44. San Diego BHP's "House of Magic" BEFORE modernization & volunteer architect explaining modernization plans. Source: FHA, San Diego Sells and Idea (1935).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

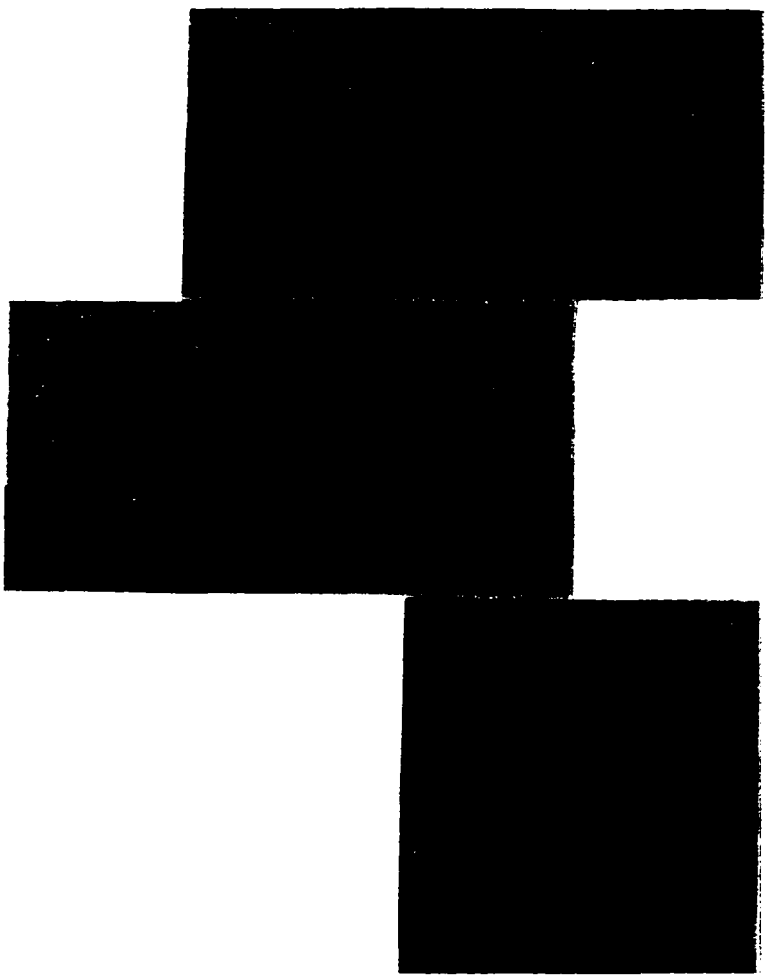


Figure 45. Modernization demonstration at Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago showing house AFTER modernization, BEFORE modernization & Administrator James Moffett pulling off rotten siding. Source: Better Housing, 1 November 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

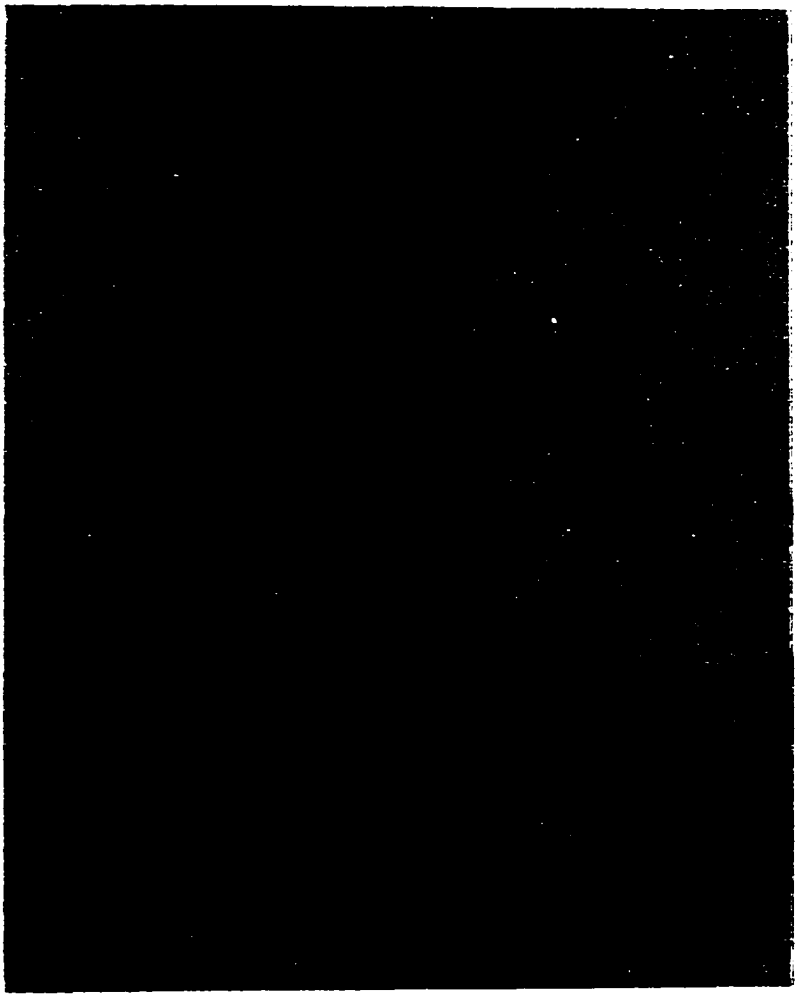


Figure 46. Oakland Demonstration House being moved to Memorial Plaza in front of City Hall. Source: Better Housing, 1 November 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

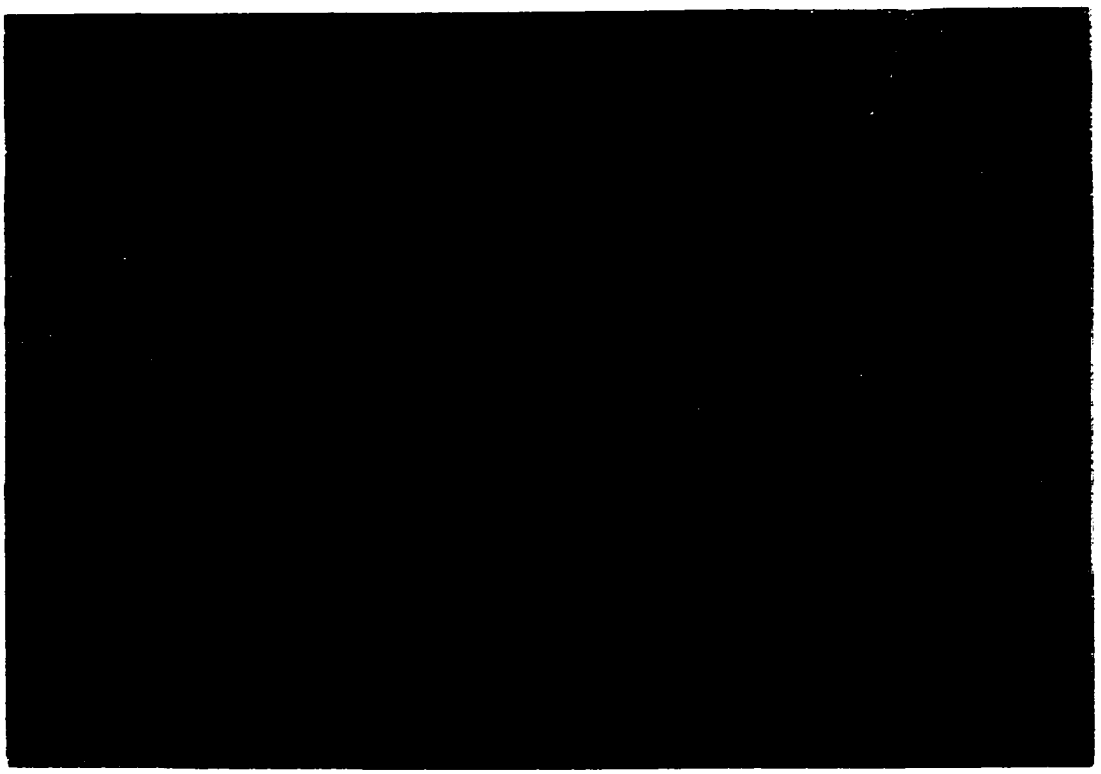


Figure 47. Typical building industry display installed at local BHP headquarters in New Jersey. Source: Report of the Better Housing Headquarters of the State of New Jersey (1936).

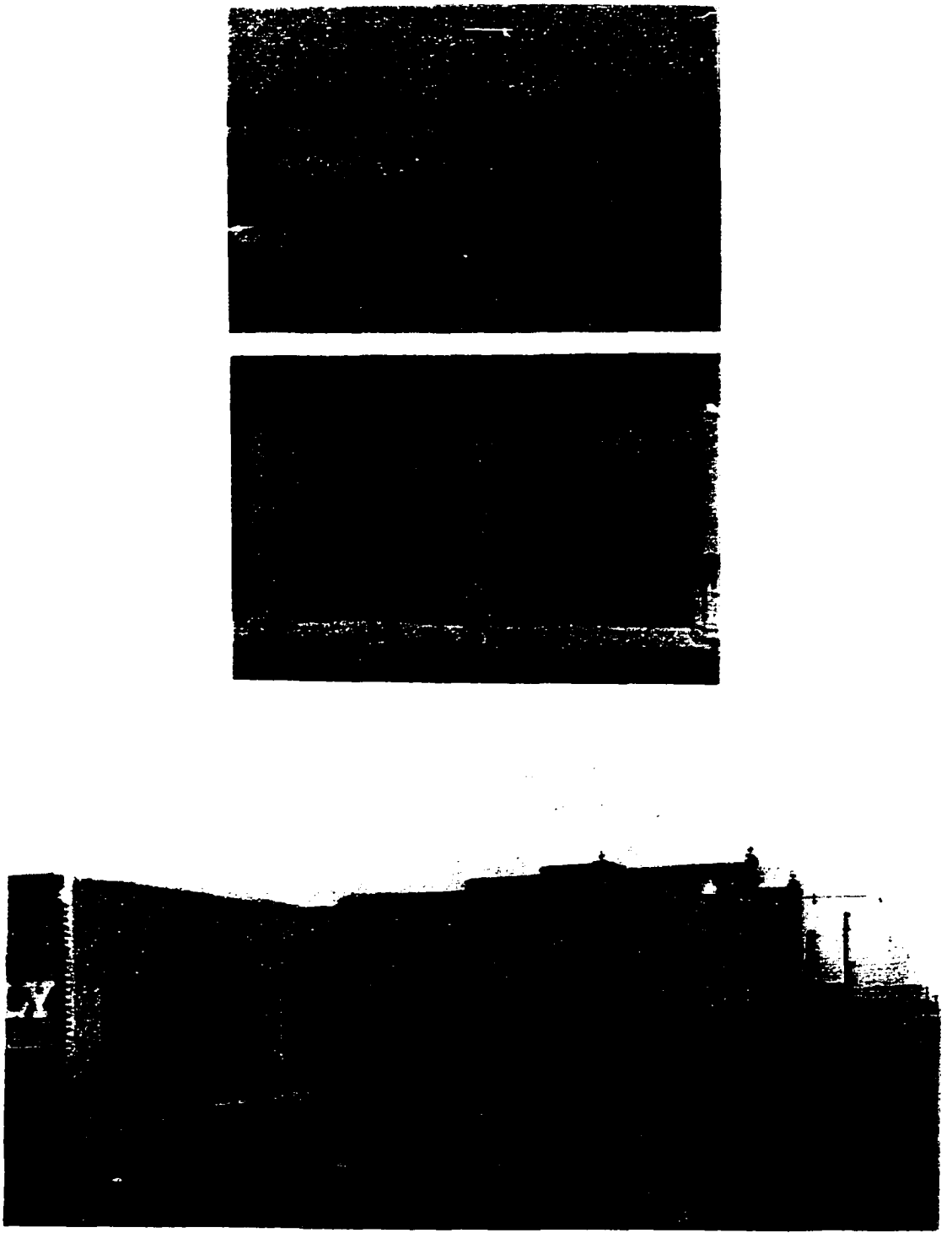
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





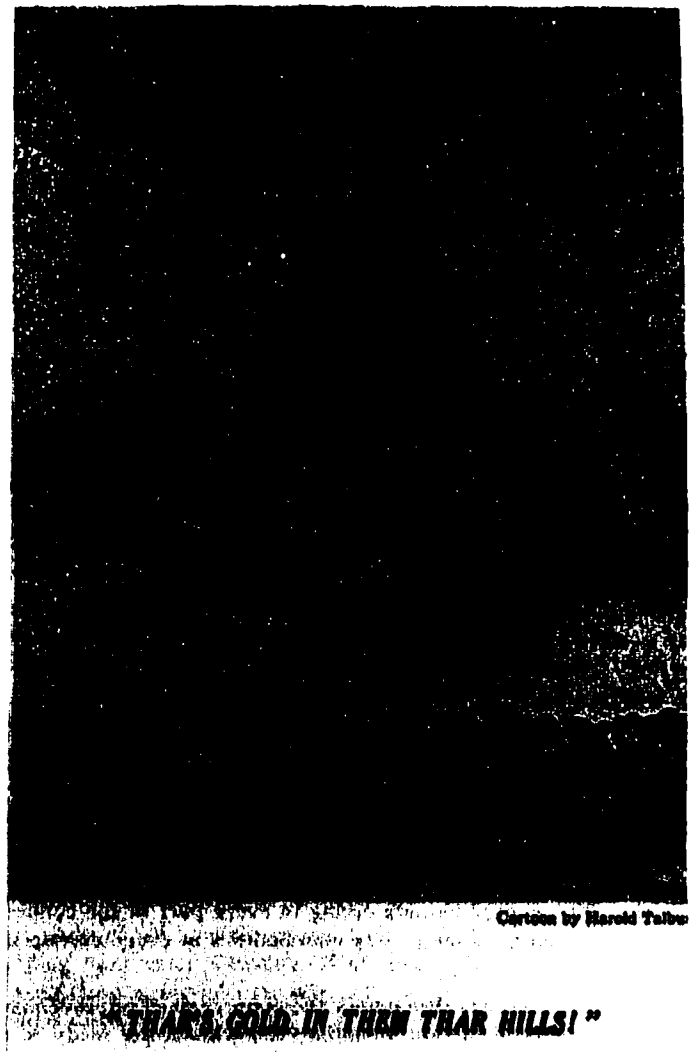
Figures 48 & 49. FHA Animated Information Booths: sketch showing single unit & combination displays. Source: FHA Form 801-8 & 801-9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 50 & 51. Main Street in Weslaco, Texas: store buildings BEFORE modernization & AFTER modernization into Mission style. Source: Architectural Forum 66 (March 1937): 60.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 52 & 53. Cartoons depicting the BHP's profitability for participants & the BHP's impact on civic spirit. Source: FHA, Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies & Publishers (1934), p. 3; Better Housing, 21 December 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

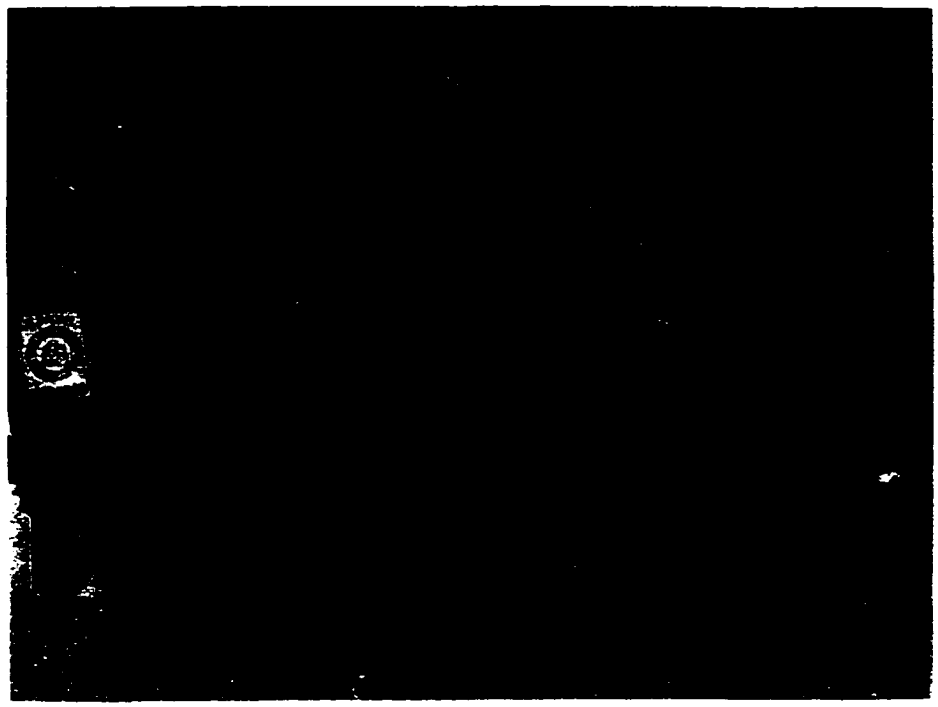


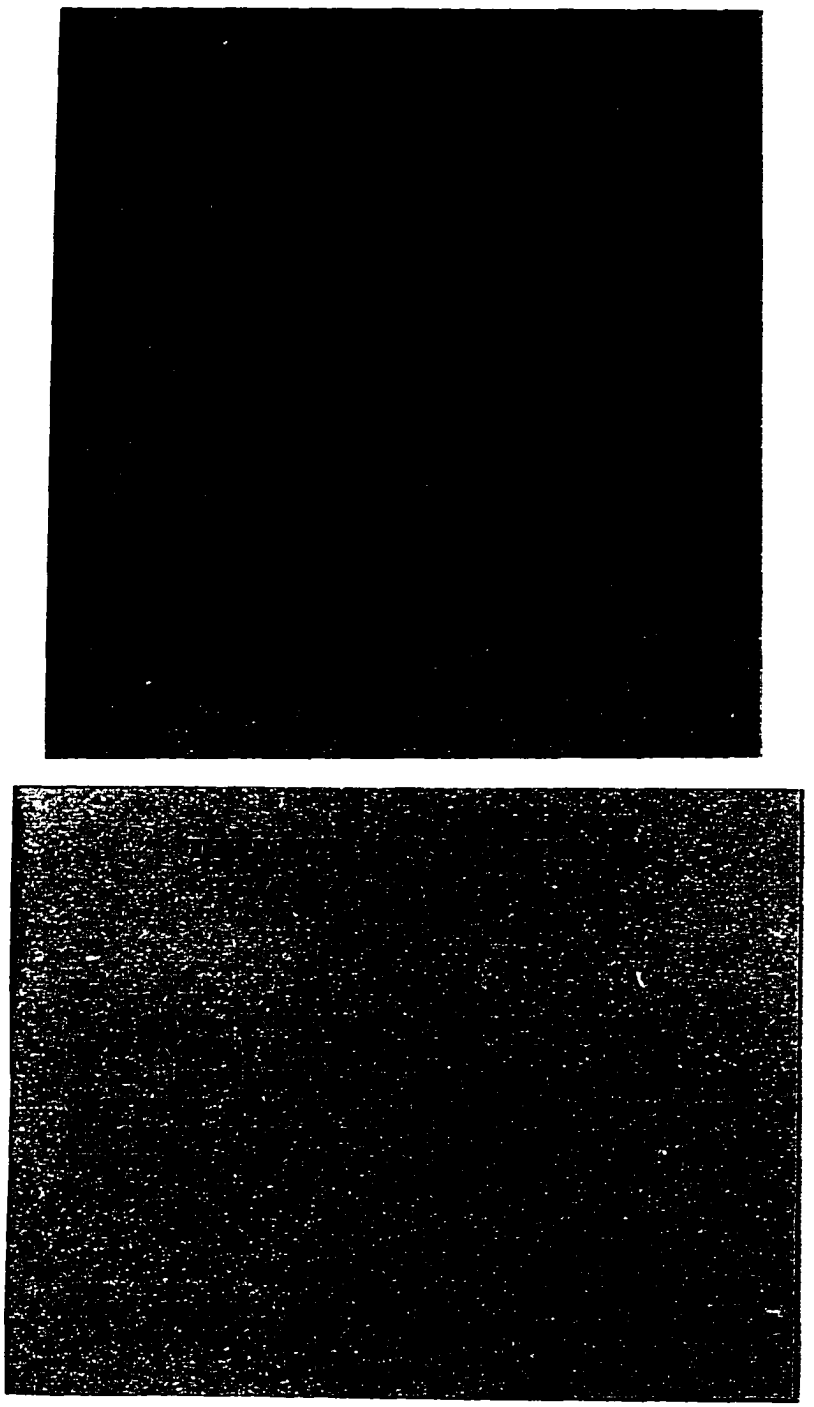
Figure 54. Field workers for the Elizabeth, New Jersey BHP canvass in January 1935. Source: Better Housing 6 February 1935.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 55. A woman canvasser delivering BHP information to a housewife. Source: FHA, Community Campaign (1934), p. 29.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 56 & 57. BHP Canvasser Button and Identification Card. Source: FHA, Selling Better Housing (1935), p. 11; FHA, Community Campaign (1934), p. 24.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

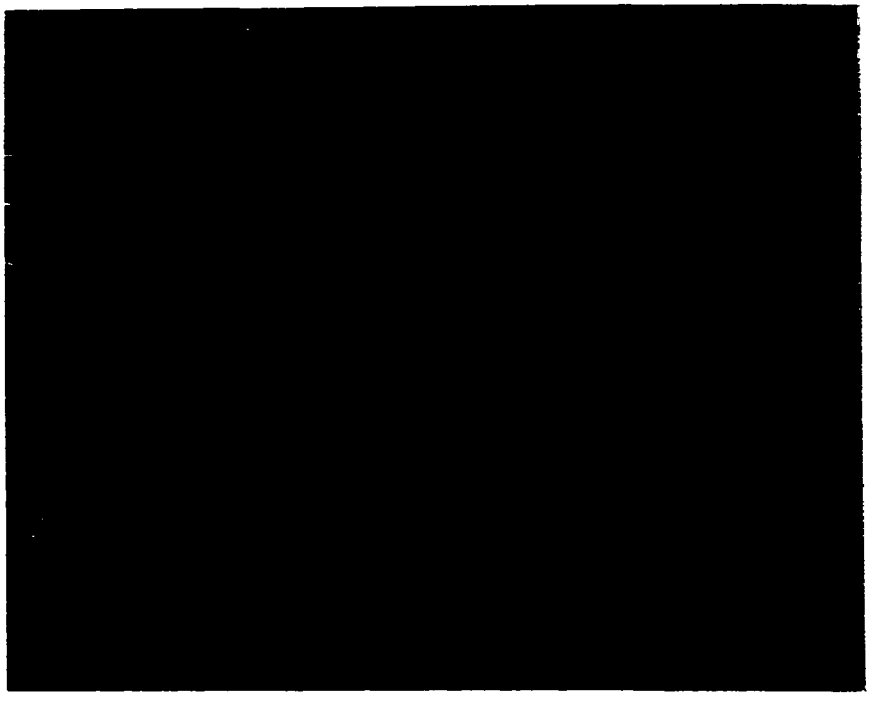


Figure 58. Boy Scout canvassers in Wilmington, Delaware. Source: Better Housing, 15 October 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 59. Billboard in Morristown, New Jersey announcing local property canvass held in September and October 1934. Source: Better Housing, 22 October 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

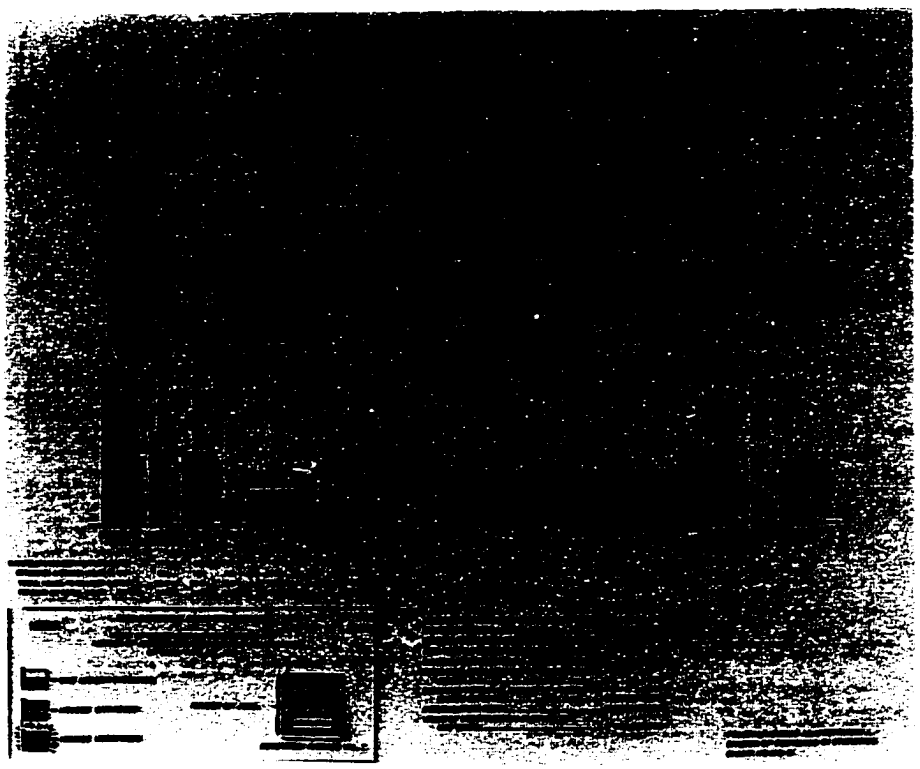
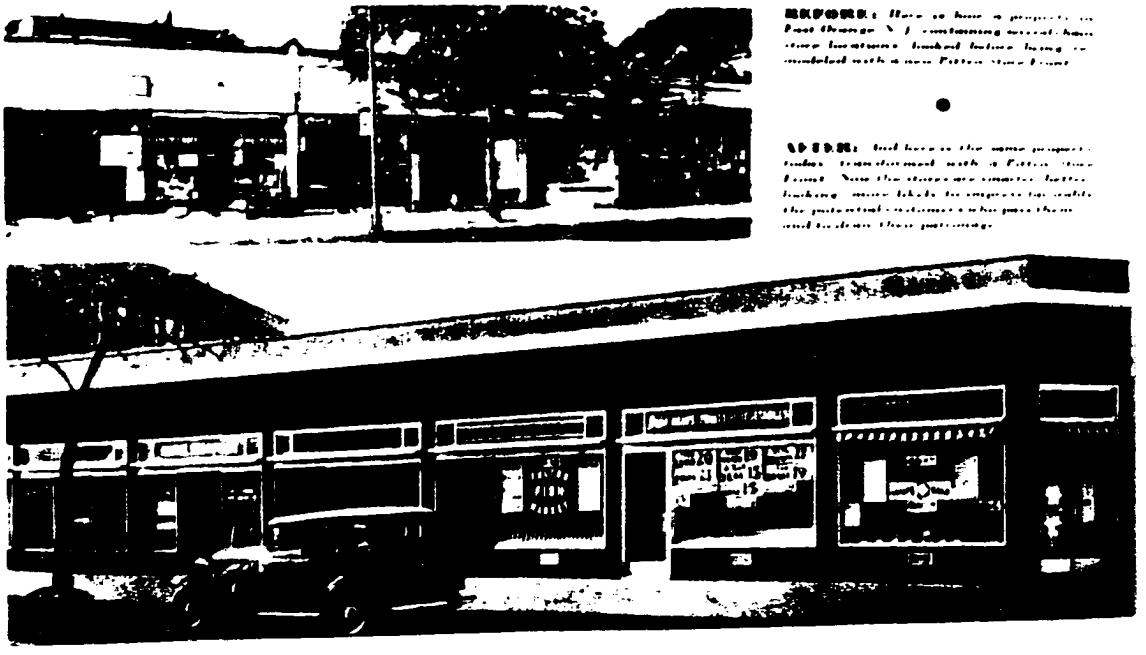


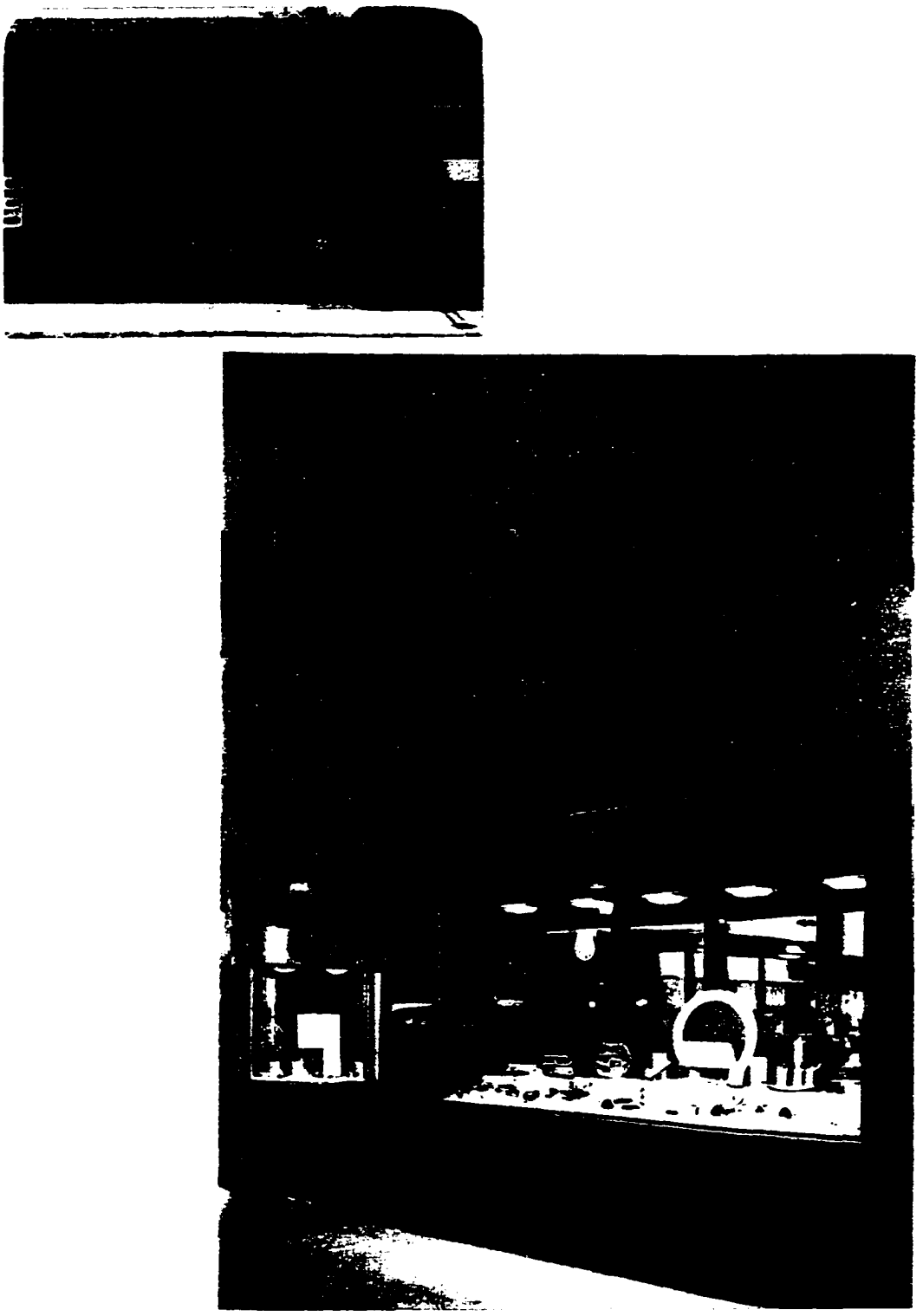
Figure 60. Chart showing PROGRESS OF MODERNIZATION with respect to canvassing and pledges, 1935. Prepared by FHA Division of Economics & Statistics. Source: FHA, Construction and Real Estate Data (1936), volume C, section I.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 61 & 62. Taxpayer strip in Elizabeth, New Jersey: BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Source: Chain Store Age, May 1935, p. 93.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 63 & 64. Brunner's Jewelry Store in Westfield, New Jersey: BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed by William and Sylvia Wilde. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 104.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

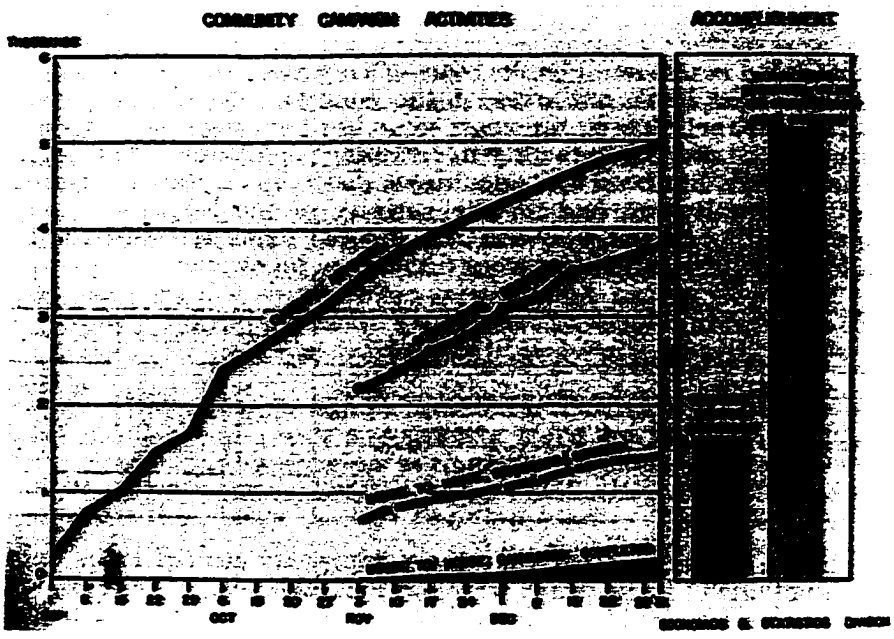


Figure 65. Chart of Community Campaign Activities showing progress of local property canvasses in 1934. Source: FHA, 1st Annual Report (1935), p. 10.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

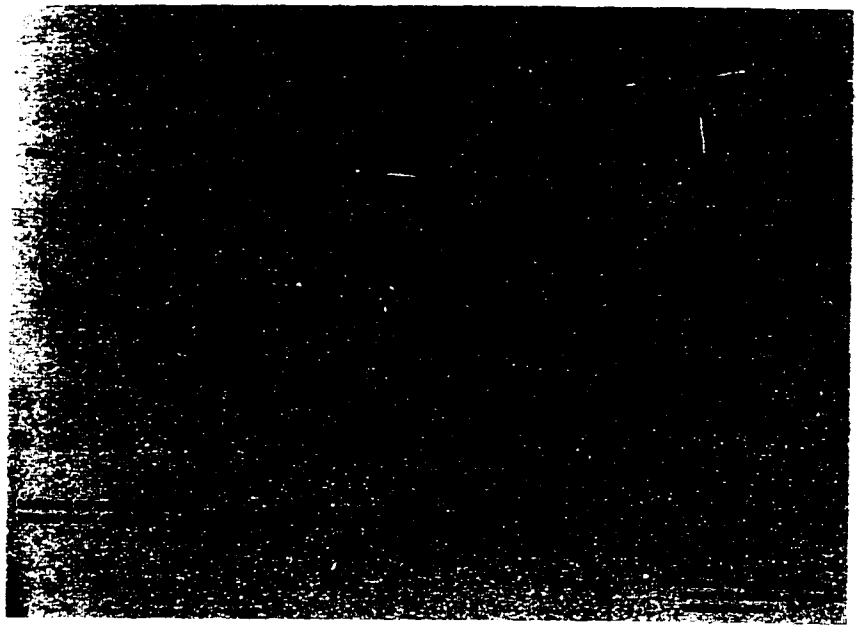


Figure 66. Map of United States showing locations of FHA Insuring Offices in every state. These cities hosted the first *Selling Better Housing* meetings in March 1935. Source: FHA, 2nd Annual Report (1936), p. 43.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

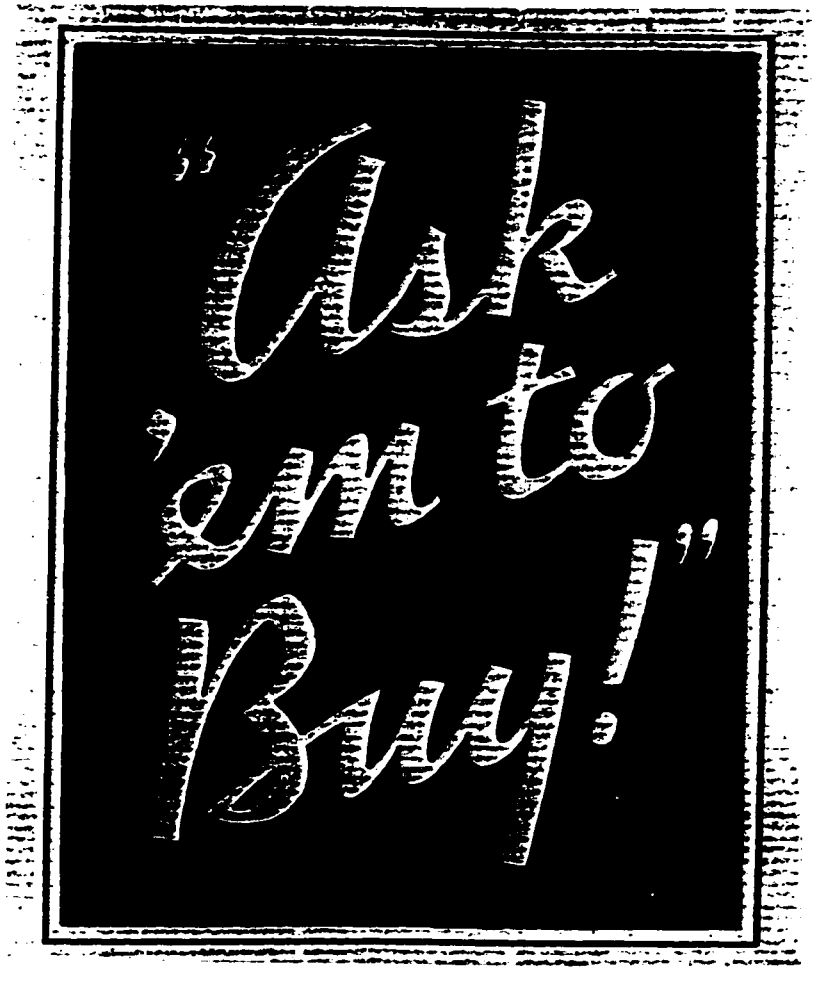
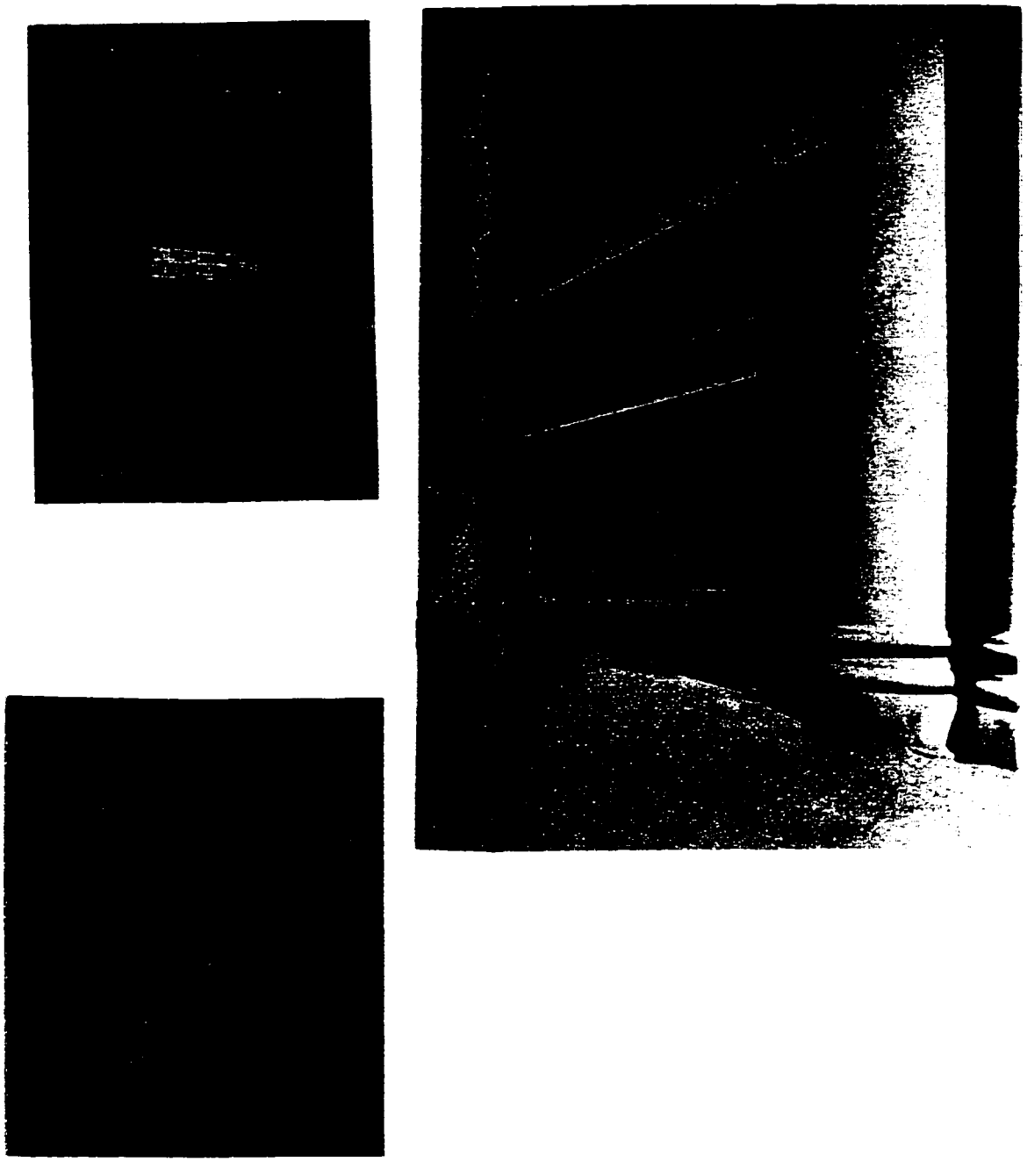


Figure 67. "Ask 'em to Buy!" logo for *Selling Better Housing* sales meetings, 1935. Source: FHA, Selling Better Housing (1935), inside back cover.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 68, 69 & 70. Tuttle Brothers Store, Cranford, New Jersey: BEFORE and AFTER modernization & interior building material displays. Designed by William and Sylvia Wilde. Source: Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 168.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 71. Modernization advertisement for Iron Fireman Automatic Coal Firing Stoker. Source: Architectural Forum 65 (July 1936): 47.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

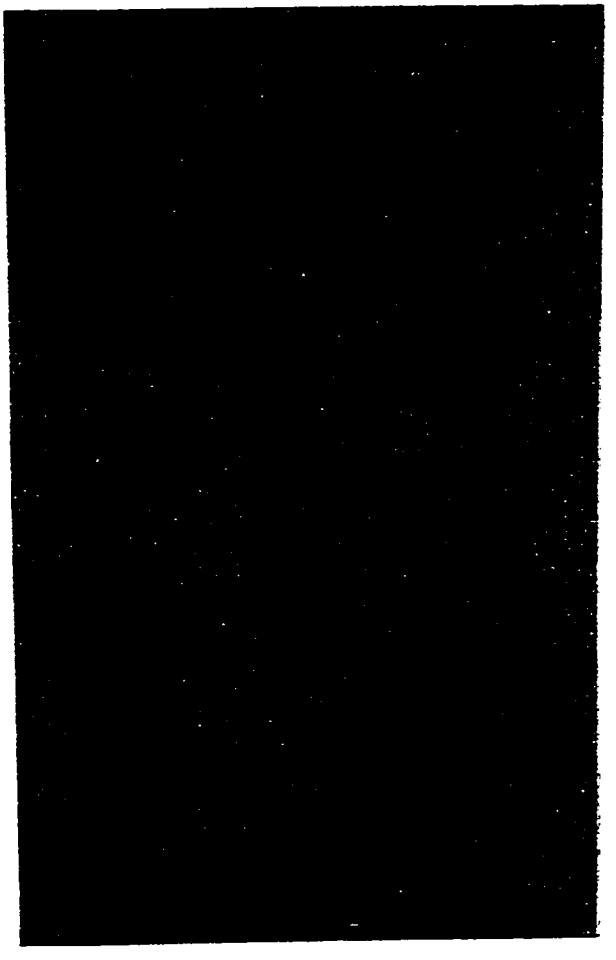


Figure 72. Chart showing changes in architectural practice since 1929, according to firms active in Eastern states. Source: Architectural Record 71 (May 1932): 293.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 73. Modernize Main Street logo, 1935. Source: FHA, Modernize for Profit (1935), inside back cover.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

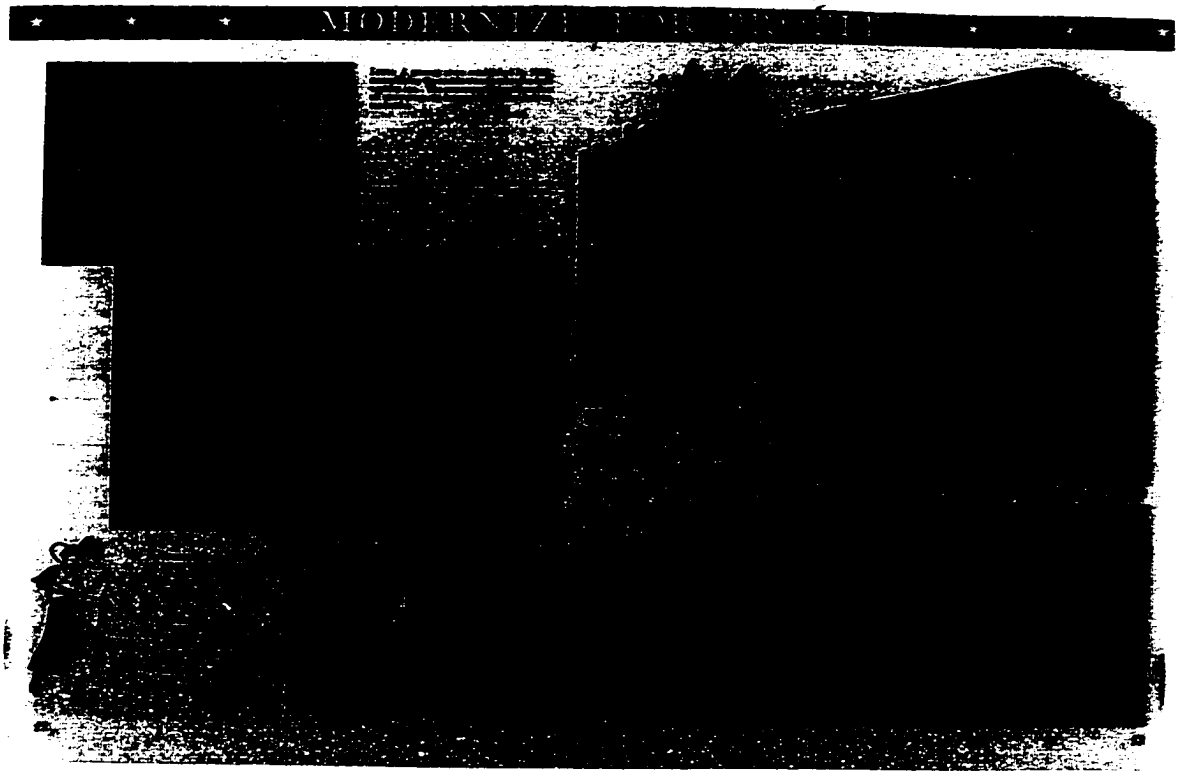


Figure 74. BEFORE & AFTER case studies appearing in FHA direct mail letters. Source: FHA, Modernize for Profit (1935), pp. 12-13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

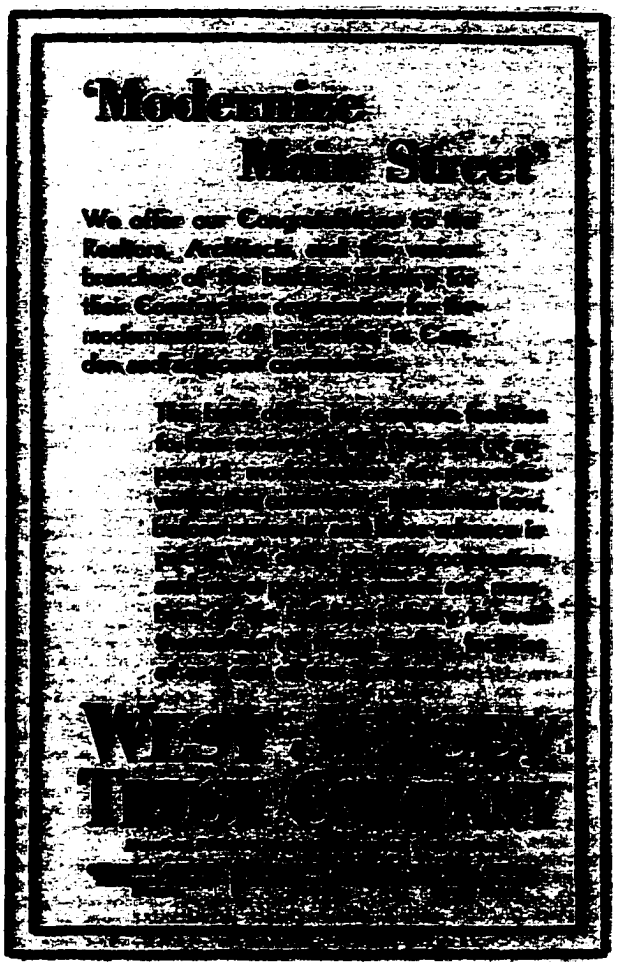


Figure 75. West Jersey Trust Company's "Modernize Main Street" advertisement, 1936. Source: Better Housing 8 July 1936.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 76. Foster's Restaurant, San Francisco, modernized by Farr & Ward. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

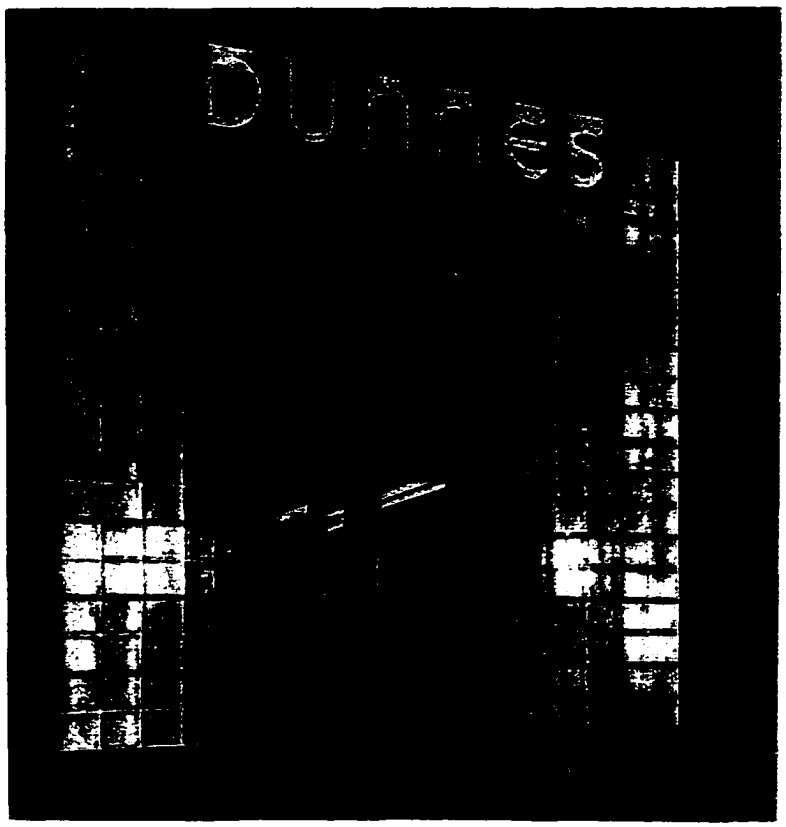


Figure 77. Dunn's "When the Day is Done" Cocktail Lounge, San Francisco, modernized by Edmund Dunne. Source: Pencil Points 20 (August 1939): 500.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 78 & 79. Restaurant La Buvette, San Francisco: BEFORE & AFTER views, modernized by Robert Stanton. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 106.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

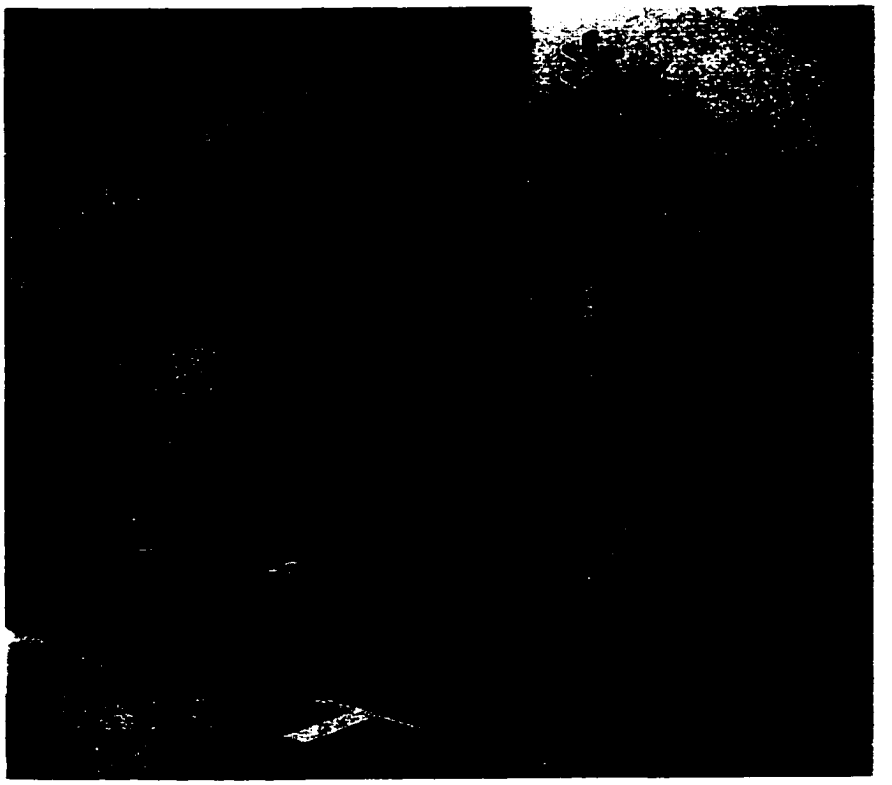


Figure 80. 500 Sutter Restaurant, San Francisco, modernized by Douglas Stone. Source: Pencil Points 20 (August 1939): 503.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

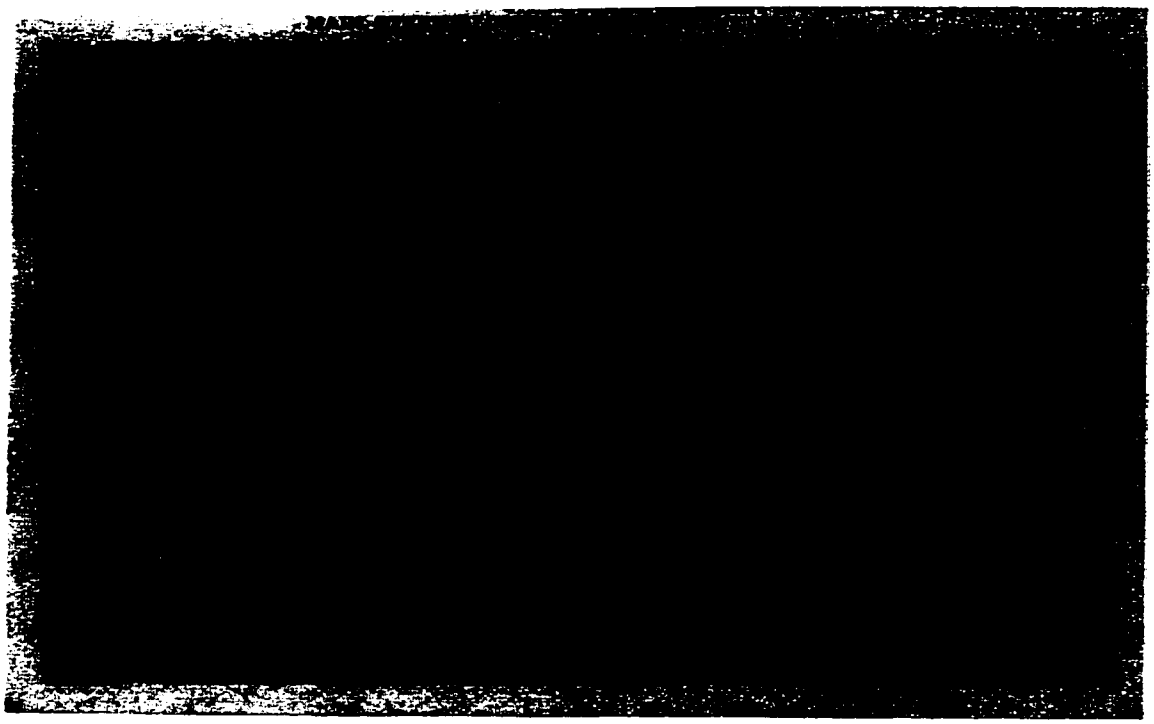


Figure 81. Postcard view of Main Street in Franklin, New Hampshire circa 1920. Source: Collection of the author.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

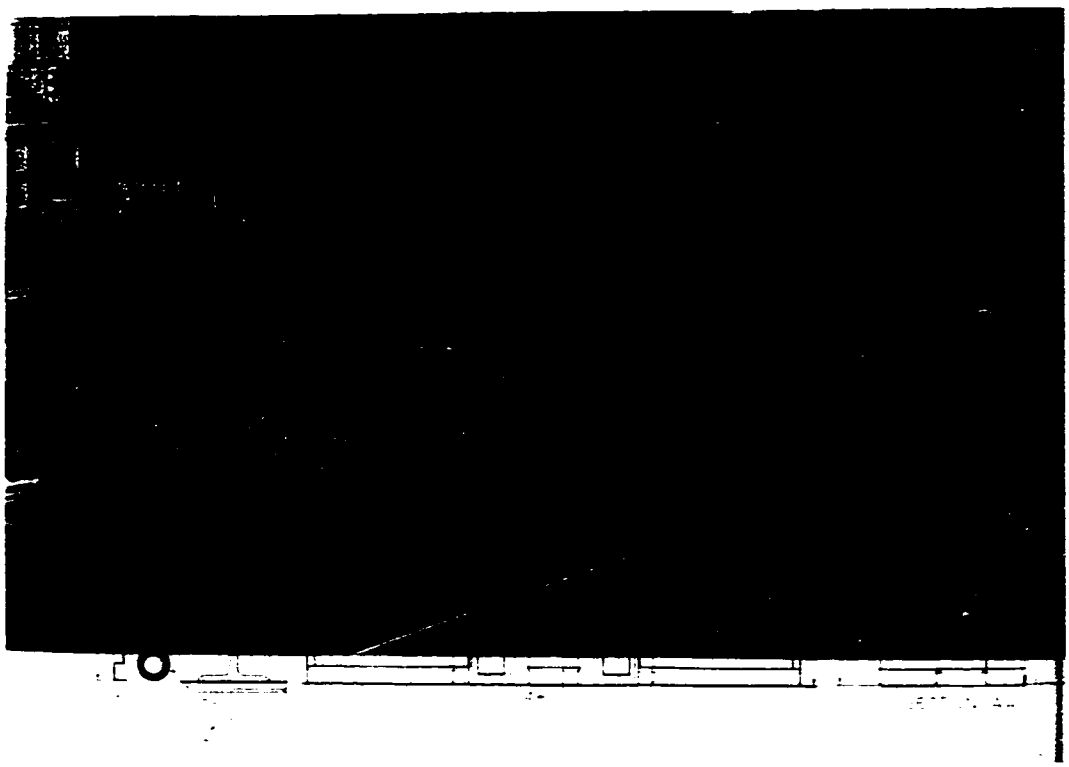


Figure 82. "Main Street...a design problem." Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 86.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

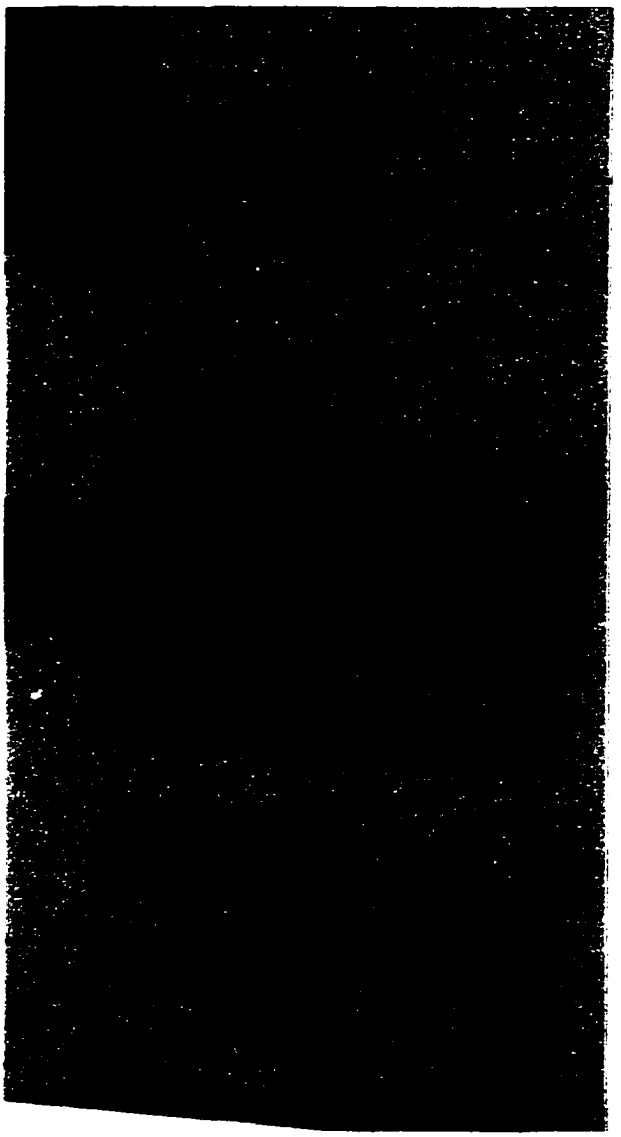


Figure 83. Retail patterns, shopping zones, and assessed valuations of a typical Main Street (Bridgeport, Connecticut). Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 77.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

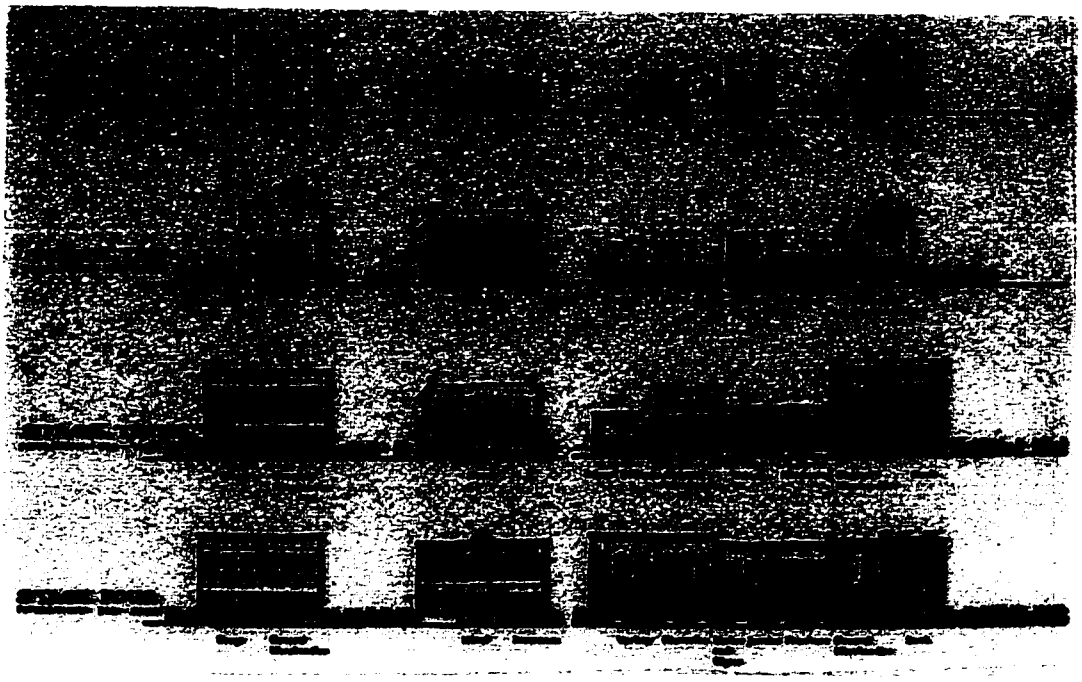


Figure 84. Chart showing evolution of typical Main Street corridor with respect to built fabric. Source: Richard Francaviglia, Main Street Revisited (1996), p. 60.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

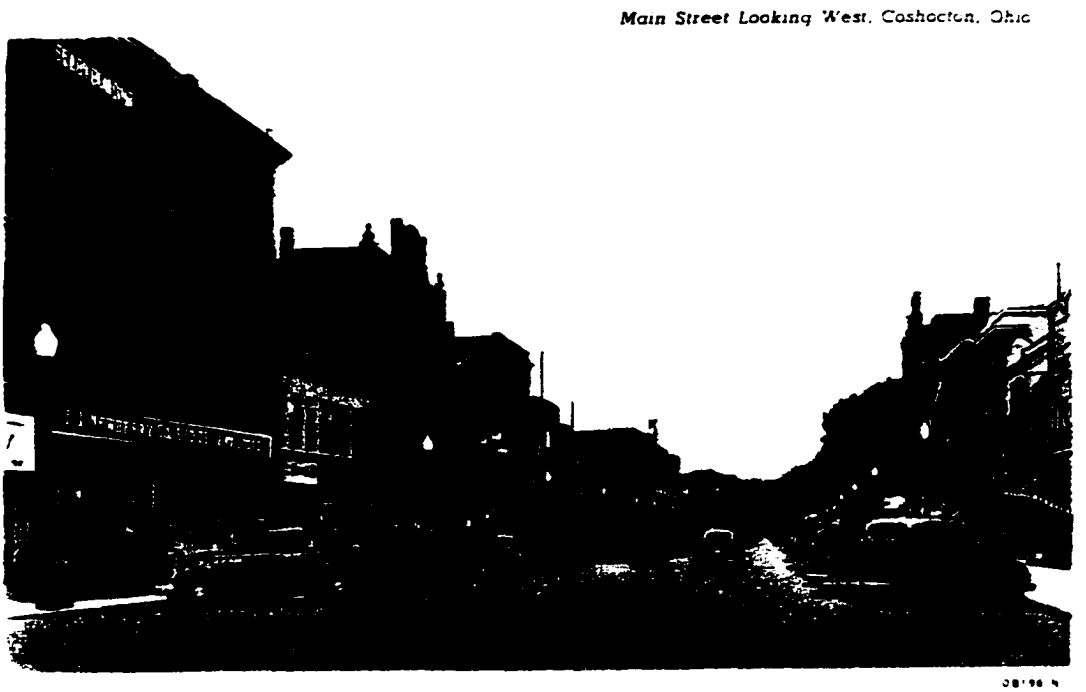
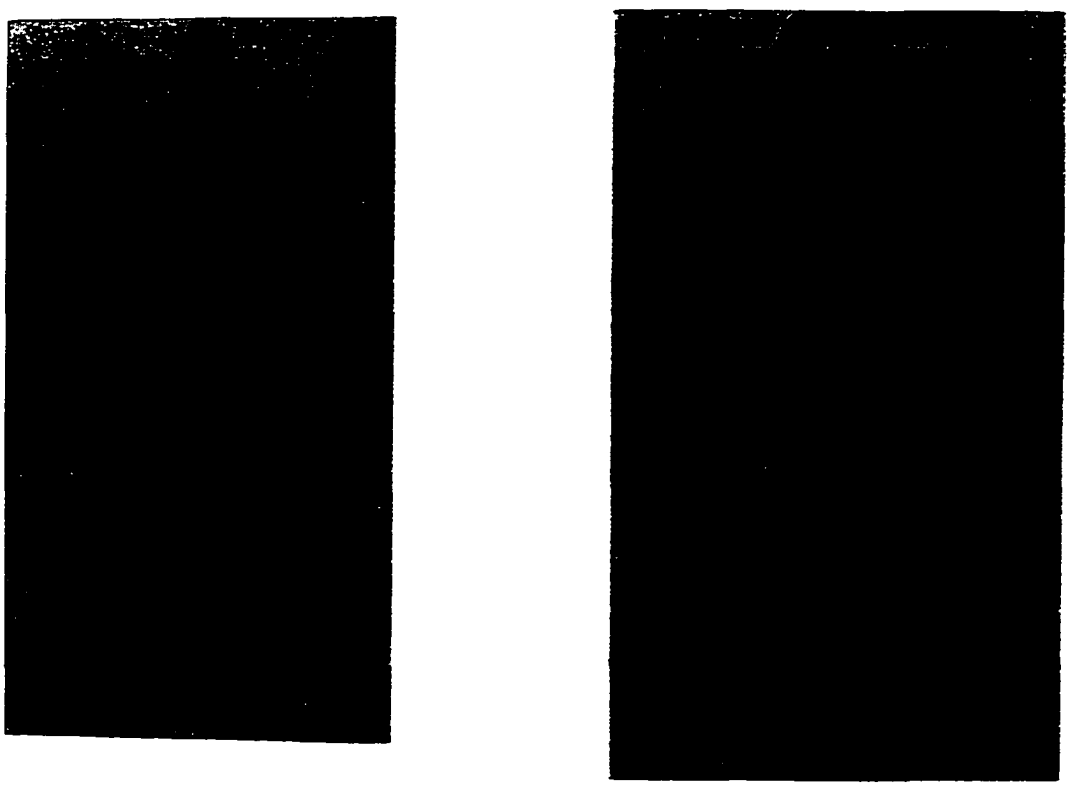


Figure 85. Postcard view of Main Street in Coshocton, Ohio showing typical corridor development. Source: Collection of the author.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 86 & 87. Typical Main Street buildings from late 19th century showing tripartite organization and ornamental detailing. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 7 (1991), p.136.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

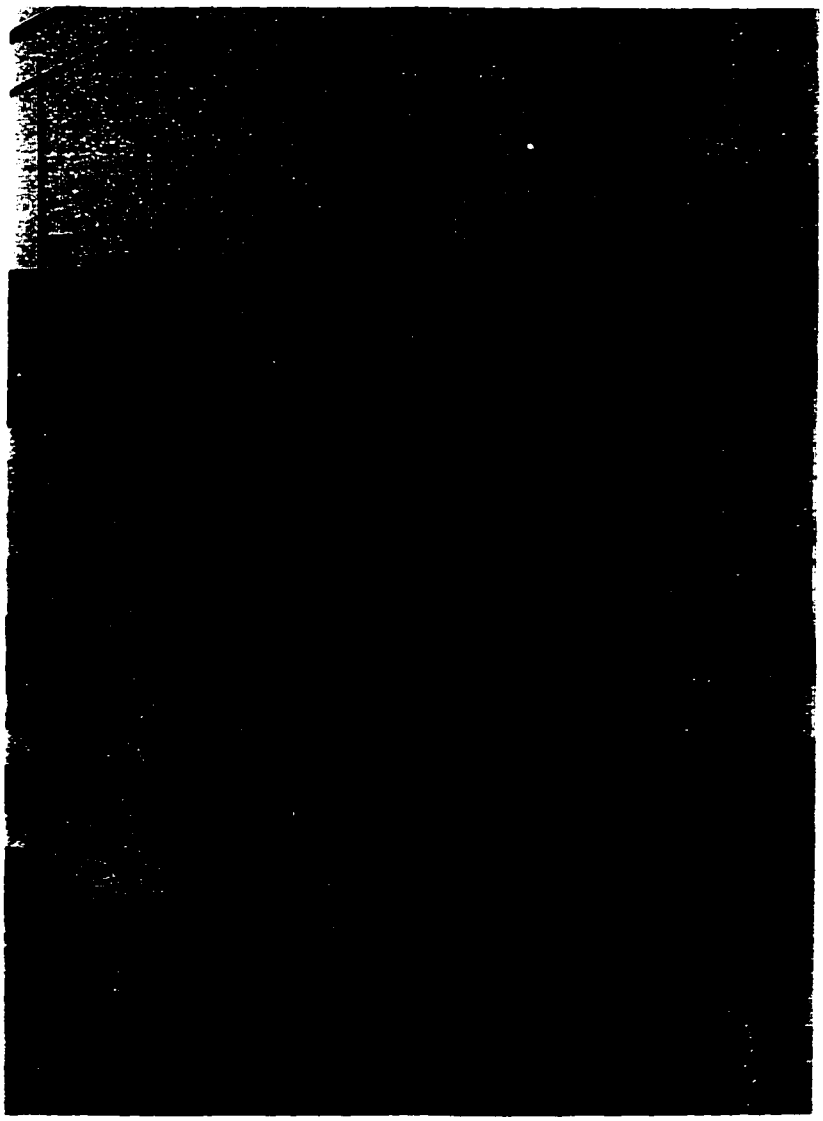
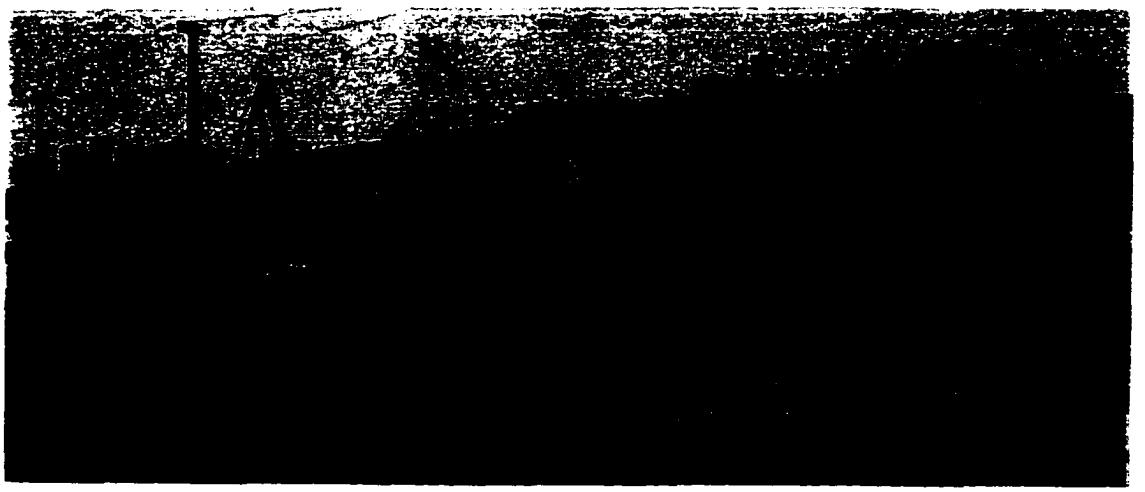


Figure 88. Typical Main Street (Reading, Pennsylvania) with advertising superstructure (and 4th of July bunting). Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), p. 31.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 89 & 90. Typical "taxpayer" commercial strips in Chicago, Illinois: one story with six retail units & two stories with five retail units. Source: American Architect 146 (April 1935): 20; Architectural Forum 62 (April 1935): 426.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

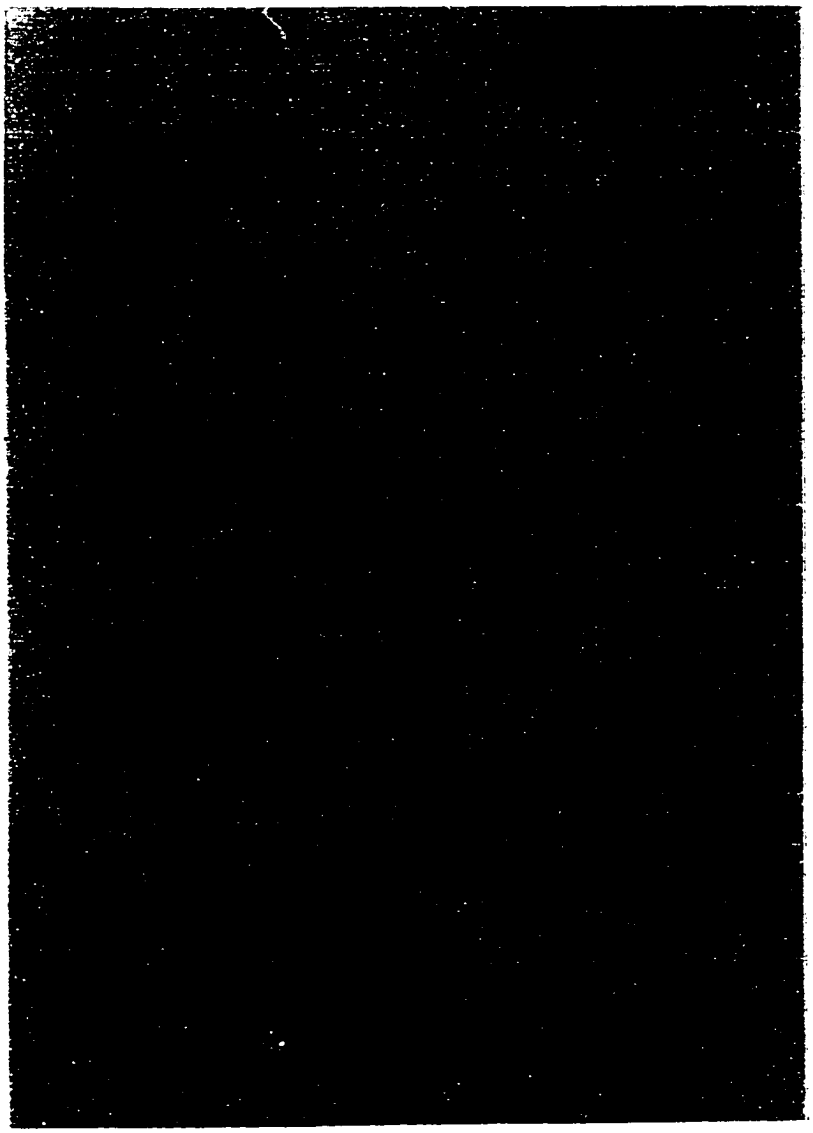


Figure 91. The Planning of Neighborhood Shopping Centers as Affected by the Use of the Automobile, Catherine Bauer & Clarence Stein, 1934. Source: Store Buildings & Neighborhood Shopping Centers (1934), p. 7.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 92. Neighborhood Shopping Center: Park & Shop in Washington, D.C., designed by Arthur B. Heaton, 1930. Source: Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 51 (March 1992): 12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

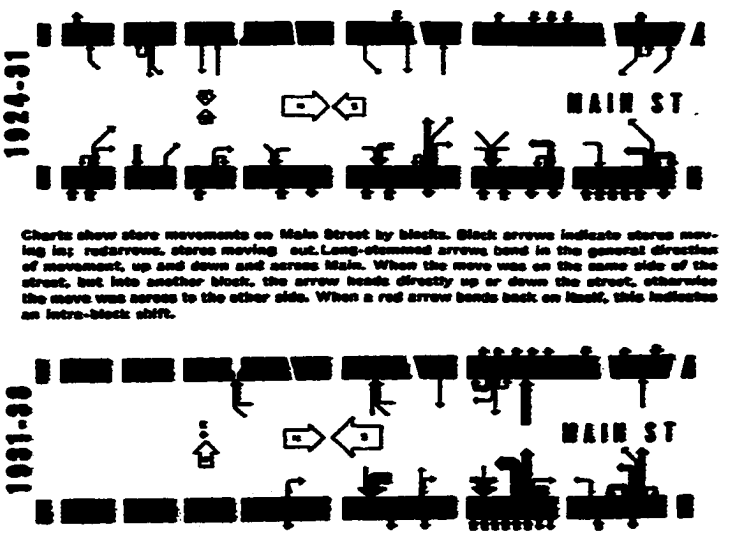


Figure 93. Charts showing store turnover rate for typical Main Street (Bridgeport, Connecticut), 1924-38. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 78.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 94. Main Street in Fort Smith, Arkansas with chain five & dimes (Woolworth and Kress). Source: Bernice L. Thomas, America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores (1997), p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 95. Atlantic & Pacific Grocery Store, Long Beach, California. Source: Charles Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile (1985), p. 123.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 96 & 97. Piggly Wiggly Grocery Store, Champaign, Illinois: BEFORE & AFTER views, modernization combining two retail frontages by George E. Ramey, 1935. Source: Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 61.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

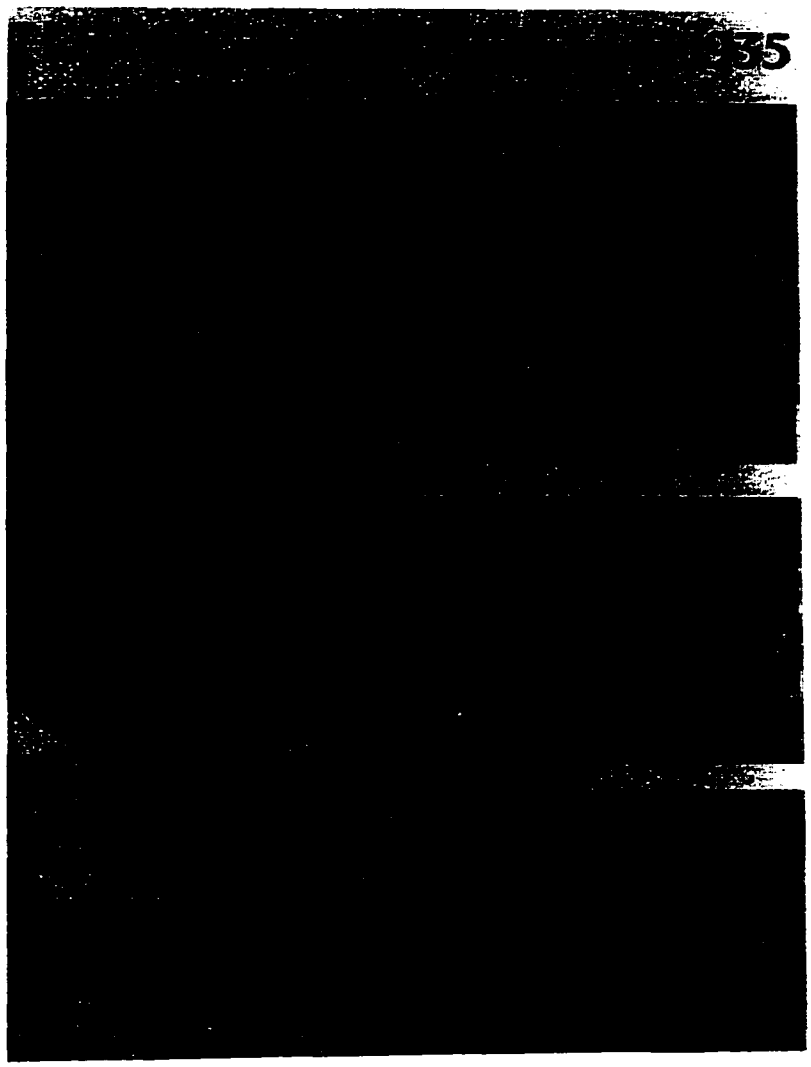


Figure 98. "How Chains Modernized in 1935." Source: Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 91.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

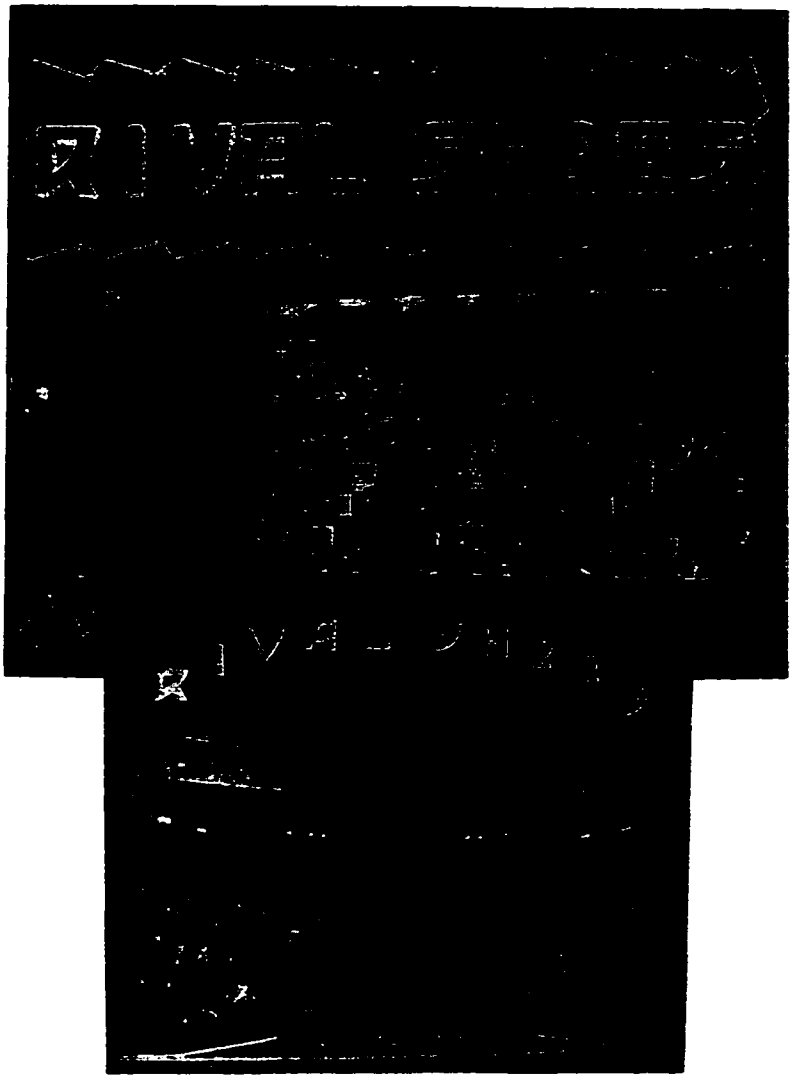


Figure 99. Rival Shoes in Newark, New Jersey BEFORE & AFTER modernization, 1932. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 654.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

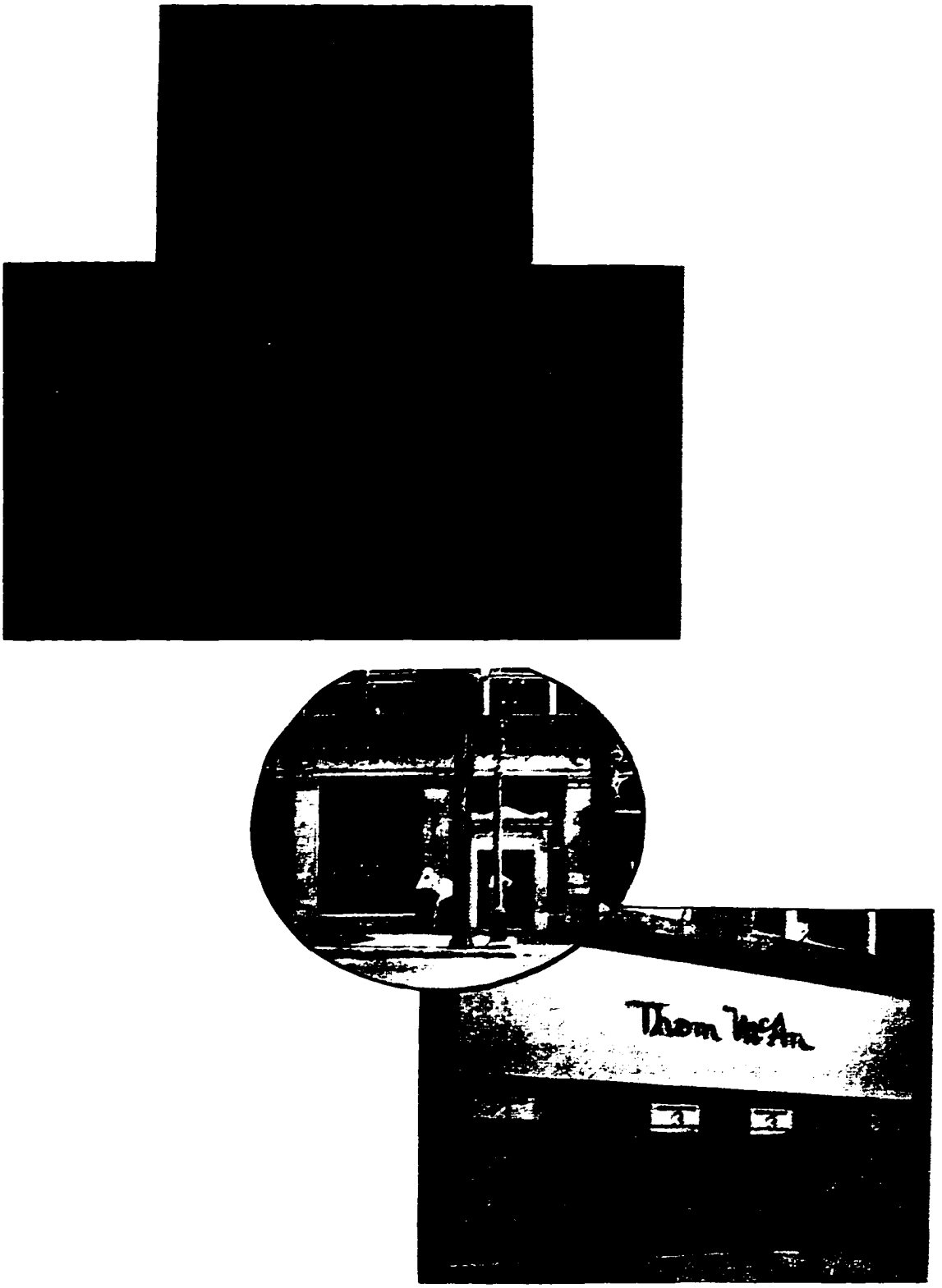


Figure 100 & 101. Thom McAn Shoes BEFORE & AFTER modernization: new model storefront in West Sommerville, Massachusetts, 1932 & new unit with new model in Dallas, Texas, 1934. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 655; Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 98.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

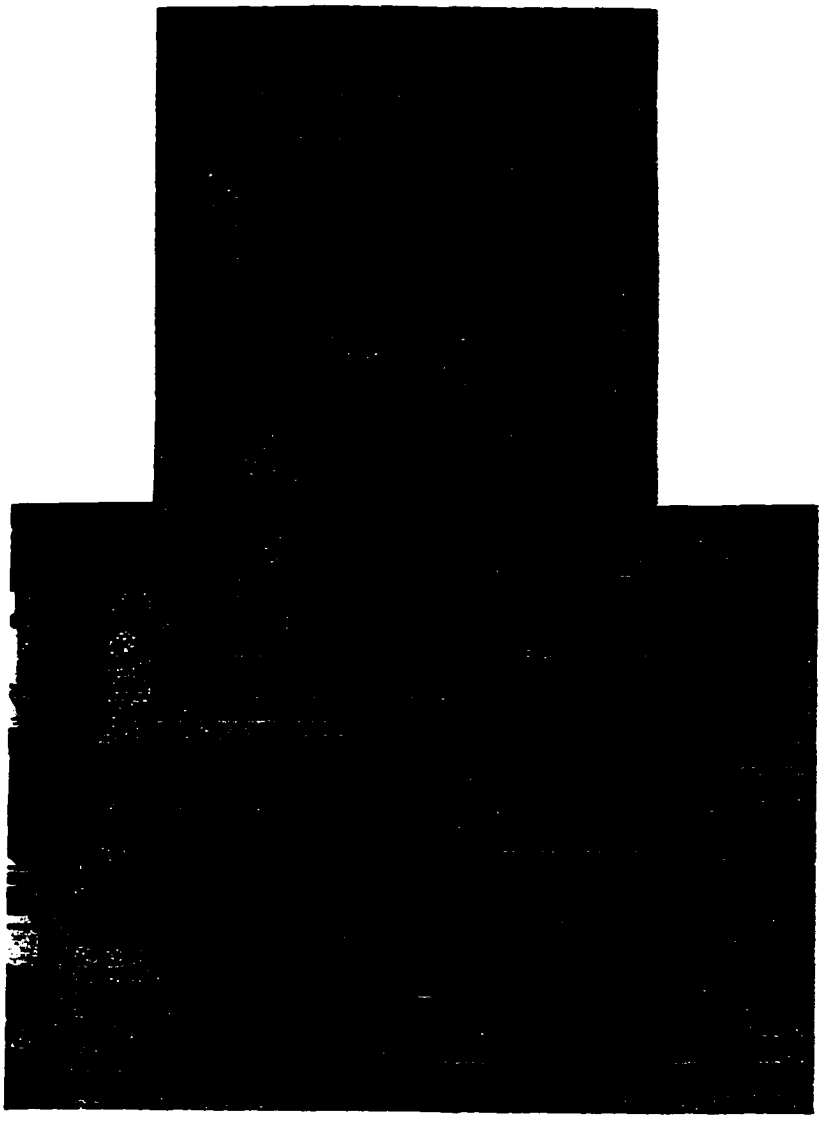


Figure 102. A.S. Beck Shoes in Brooklyn, New York BEFORE & AFTER modernization, 1932. Source: Chain Store Age, October 1932, p. 600.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

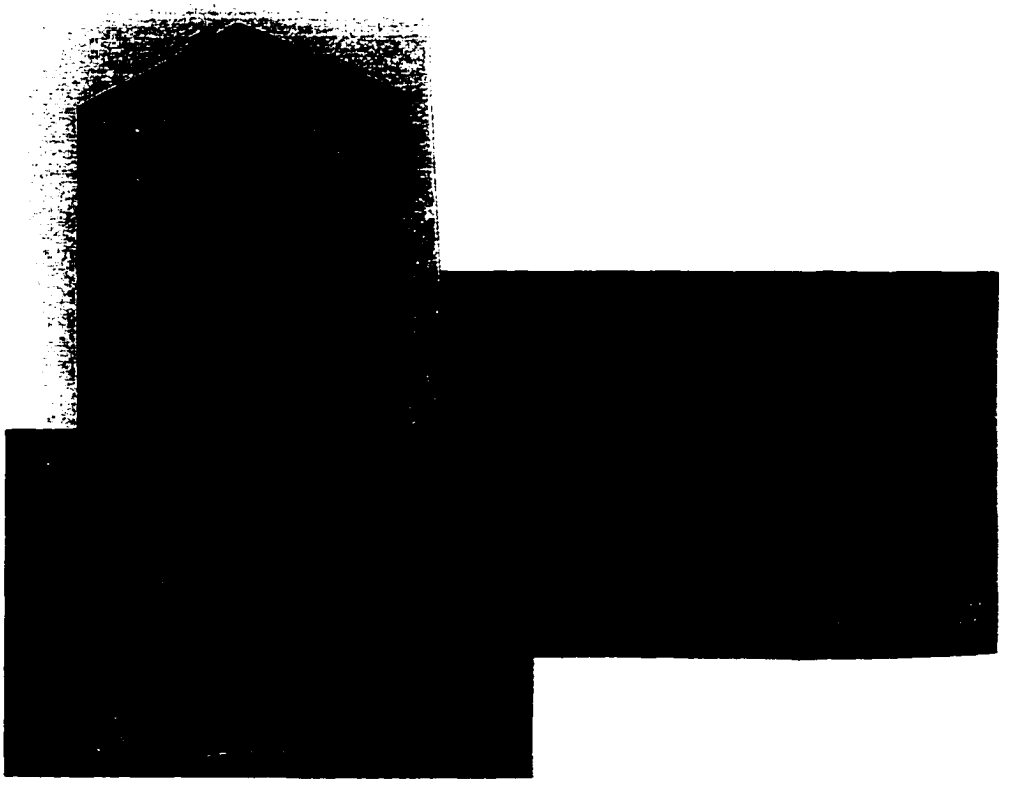


Figure 103. "Modern businesses run by progressive merchants," modernized chain stores in 1936: Kinsel Drugs, Davidson Bake Shop, Miles Shoes. Source: Chain Store Age, June 1936, p. 112.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

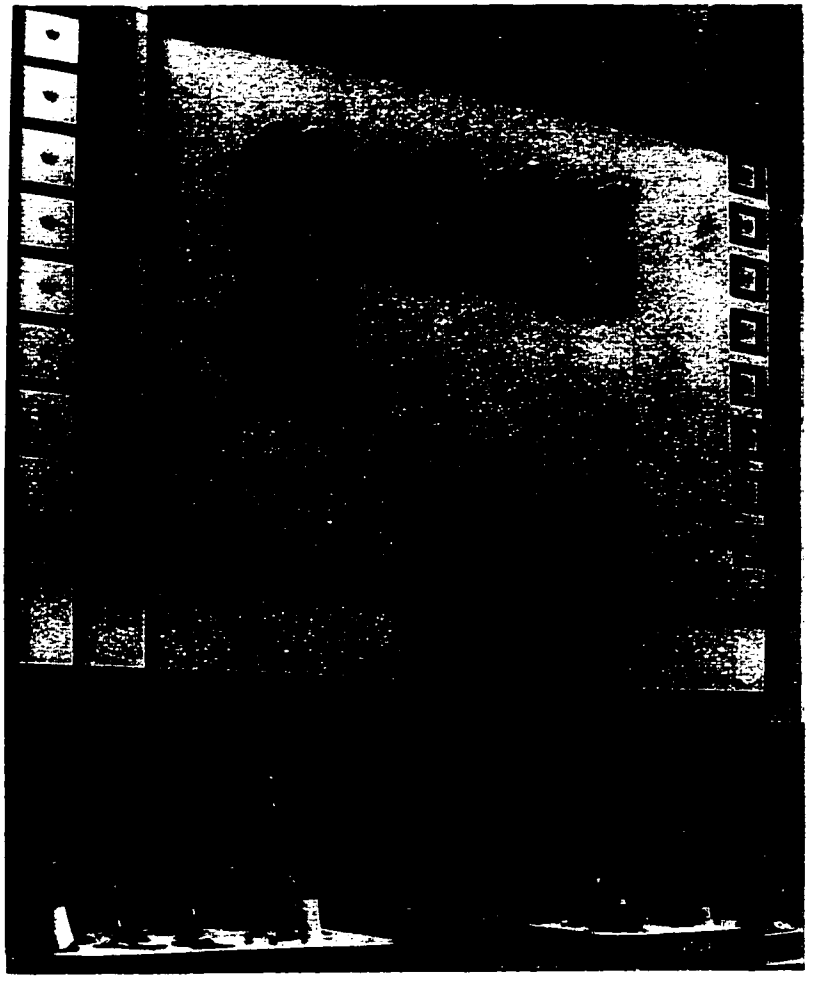


Figure 104. Mangel's Clothing Store, designed by Morris Lapidus circa 1935. Source: Lapidus, Too Much is Never Enough (1996), p. 106.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

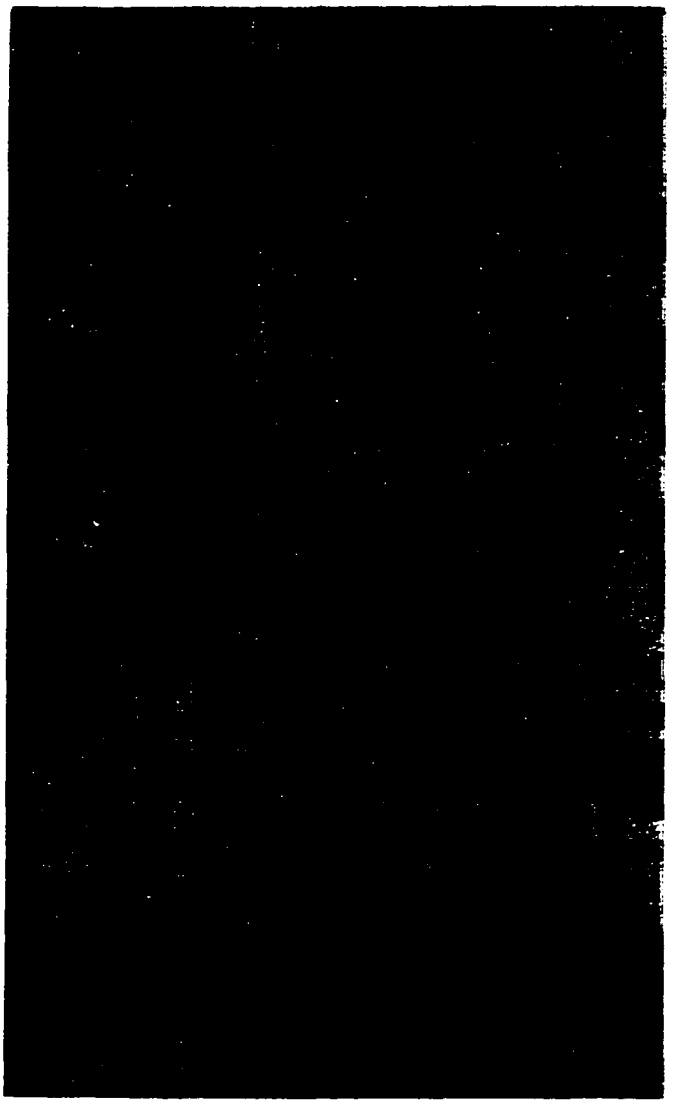


Figure 105. Mangel's Clothing Store, designed by Morris Lapidus circa 1935. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 93.

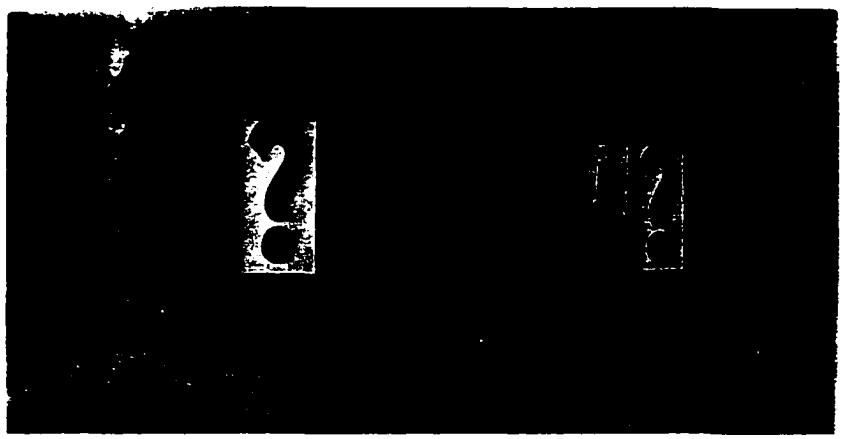
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 106. Typical "blighted" Main Street block (West Jefferson Street in Louisville, Kentucky) showing vacant storefronts and low-rent occupancy circa 1933. Source: Architectural Forum 65 (November 1936): 37.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 107 & 108. Abandoned Main Street storefronts circa 1933-35. Source: Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 60; Architectural Forum 65 (September 1936): 242.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 109. Postcard view of a modernized Main Street (Center Street in Goldsboro, North Carolina) circa 1940. Source: Collection of the author.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

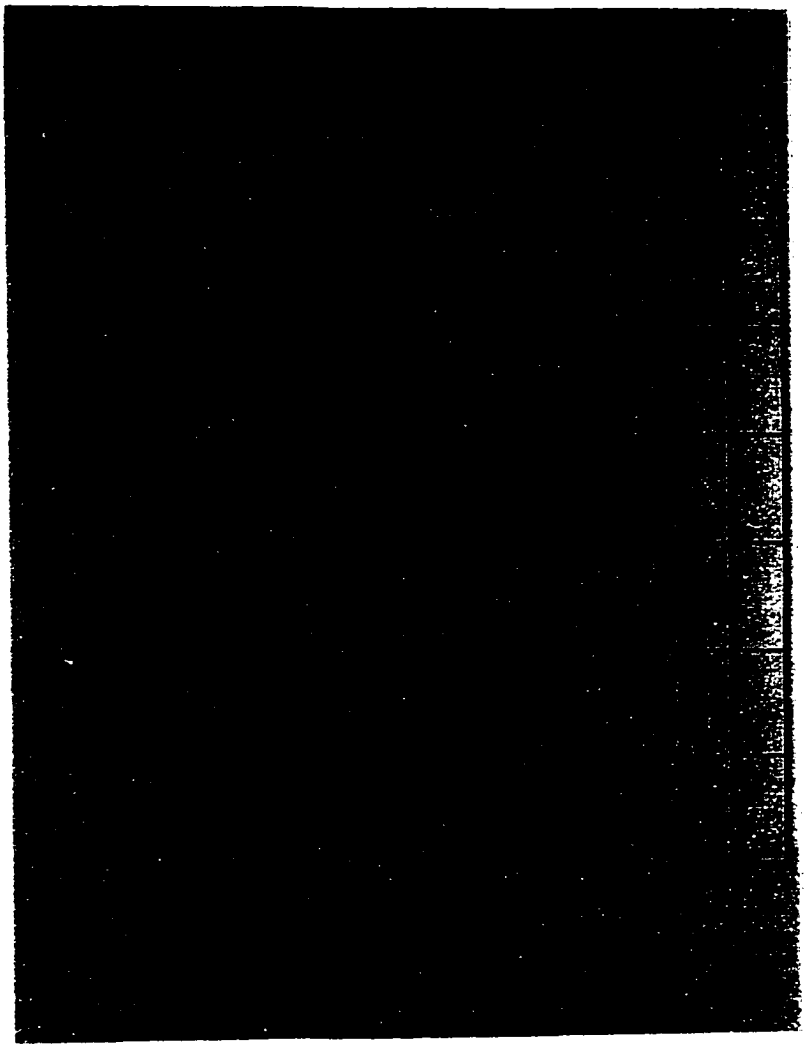


Figure 110. Store building activity: chart showing month by month progress in 1934 and 1935 with increased activity corresponding to introduction and expansion of FHA modernization program. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 33.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

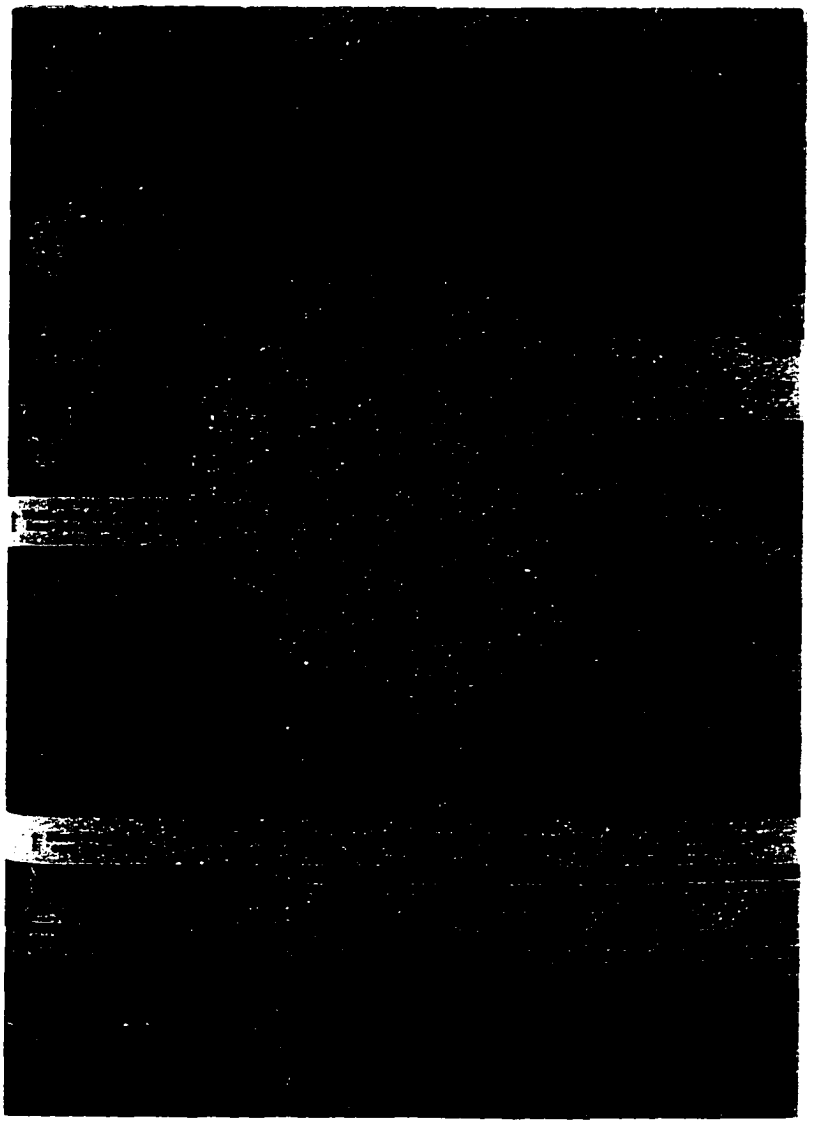


Figure 111. "How Chains Modernized in 1936." Source: Chain Store Age, November 1936, p. 79.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

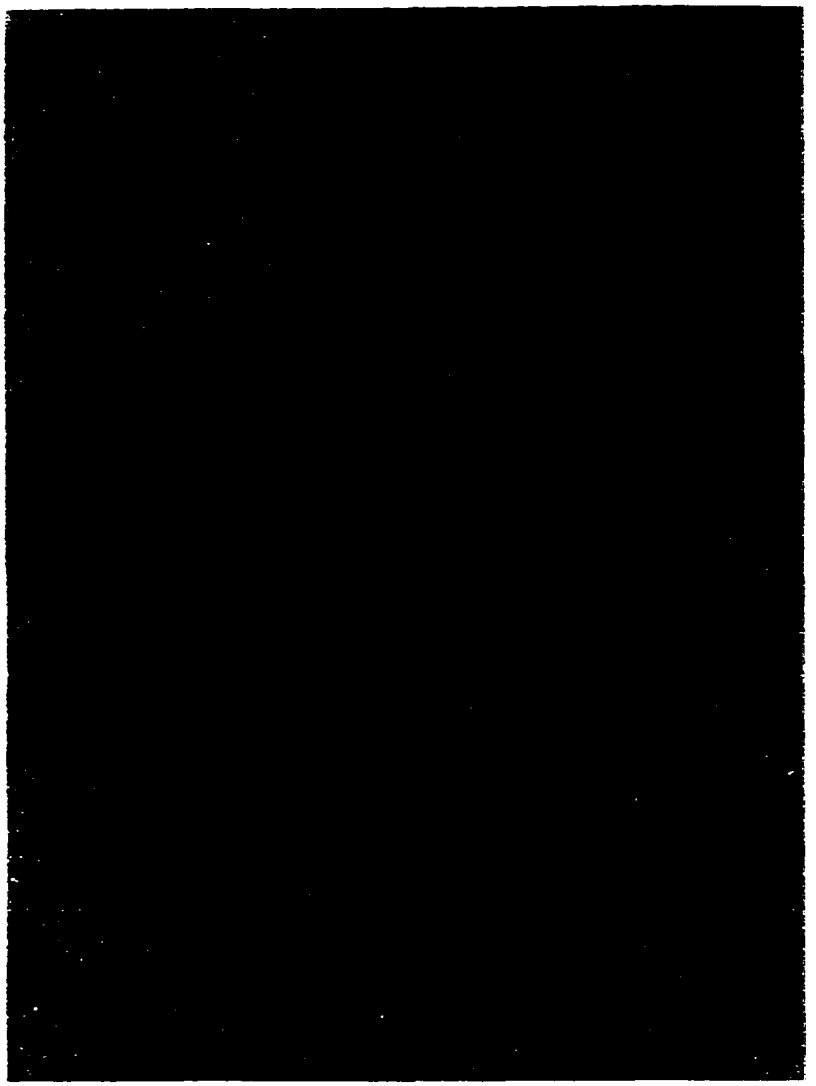
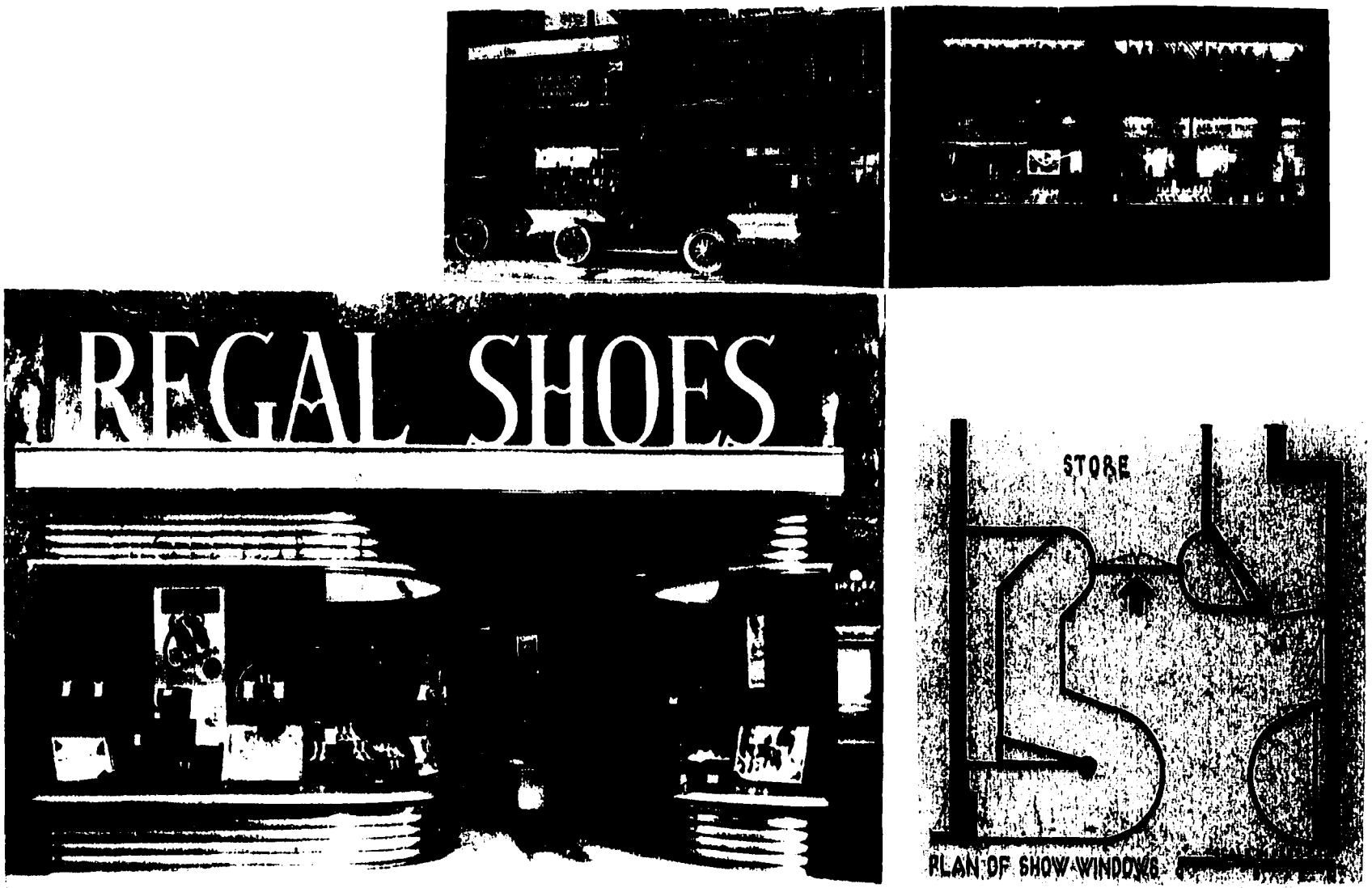


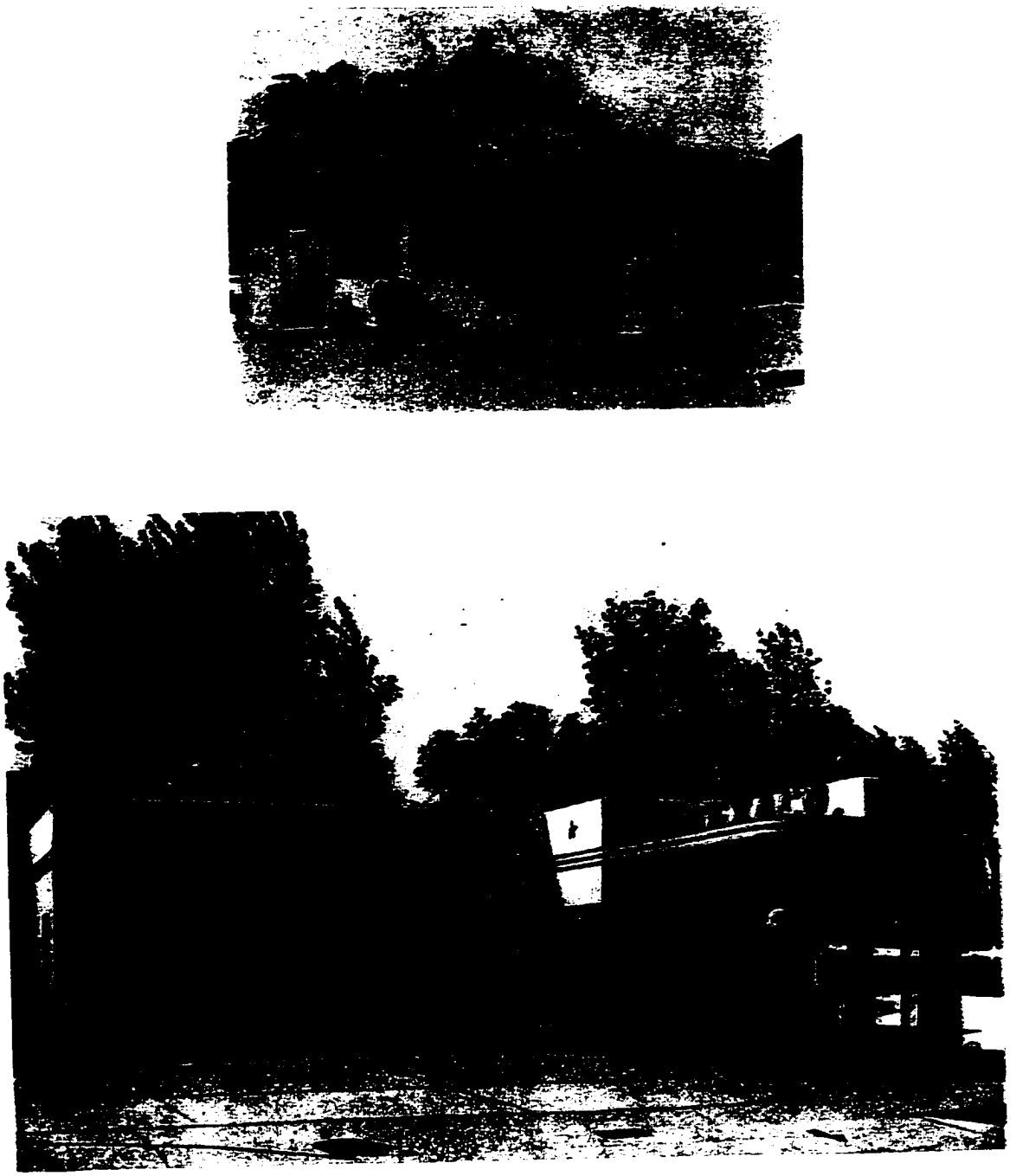
Figure 112. "New Customers...Better Satisfied Customers," PPG advertisement with early FHA tie-in including logo and copy. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 95.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 113, 114 & 115. Regal Shoes: Old model standard storefronts, 1936 model in New York City, plan of 1936 model vestibule. Designed by Morris Lapidus. Source: Architectural Forum70 (February 1939): 94-5; Architectural Forum 65 (October 1936): 316.



Figures 116 & 117. Texaco Service Station in Wenatchee, Washington: BEFORE & AFTER views of "house" type station modernized into Type "T" station according to guidelines established by by Walter Dorwin Teague, 1936. Source: Architectural Record 82 (September 1937): 69.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

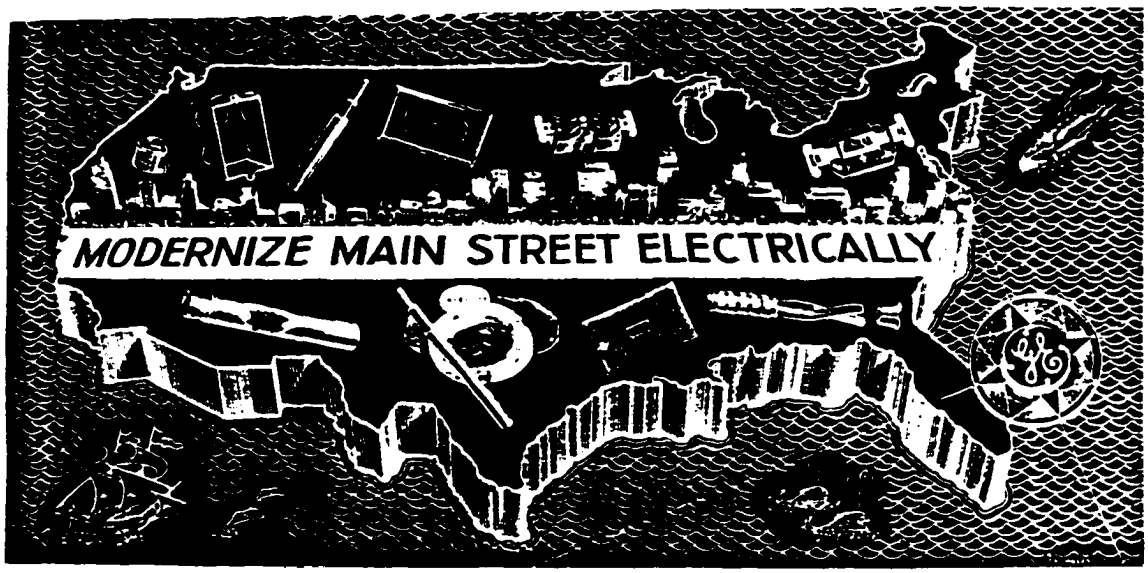


Figure 118. "Modernize Main Street Electrically," General Electric advertisement. Source: Building Modernization, March 1935.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

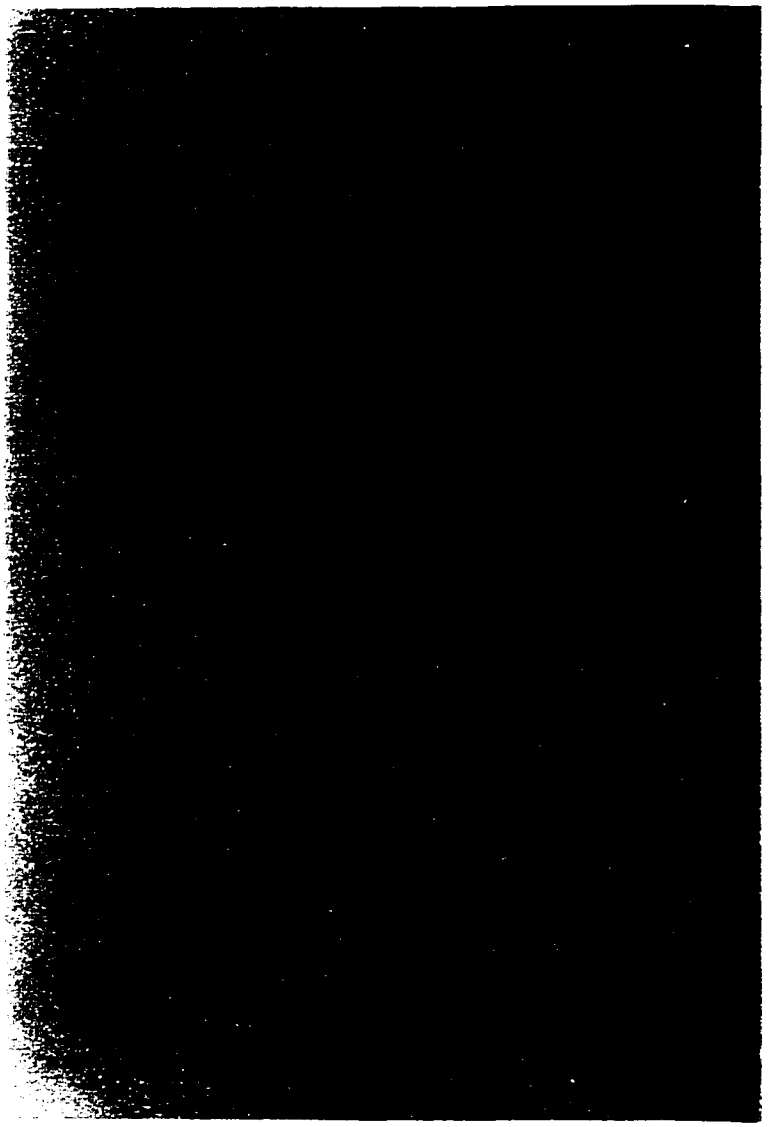


Figure 119. "Johns-Manville modernizes a Main Street Shop," Johns-Manville advertisement. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 96.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

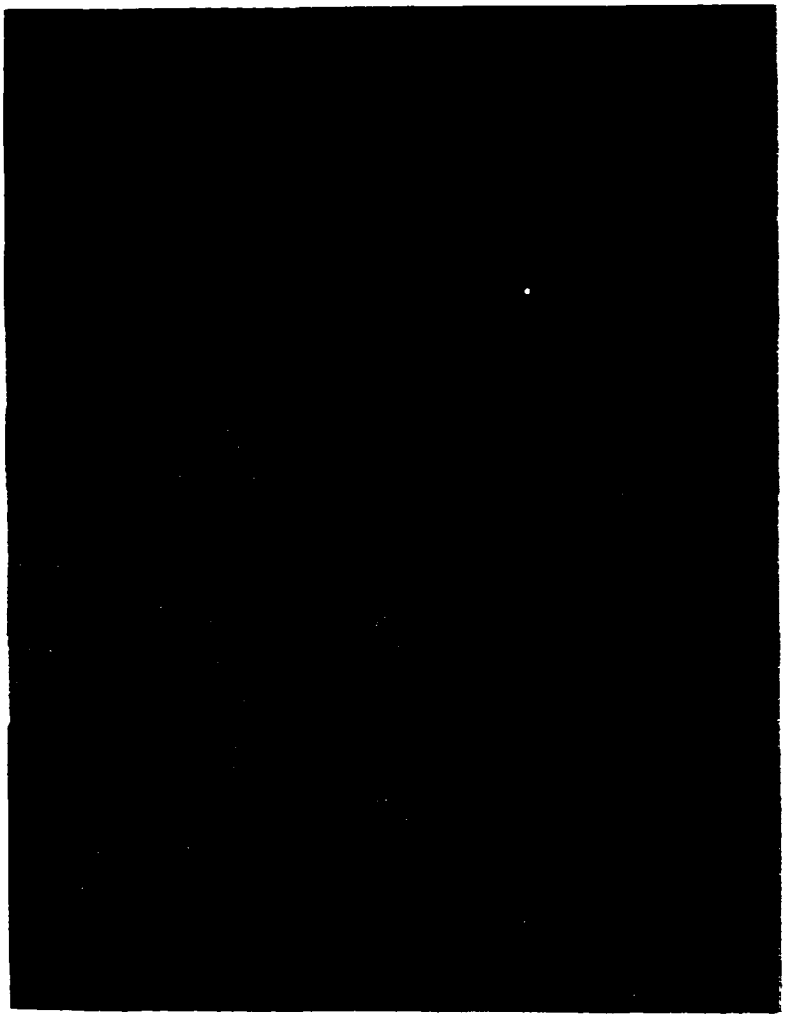
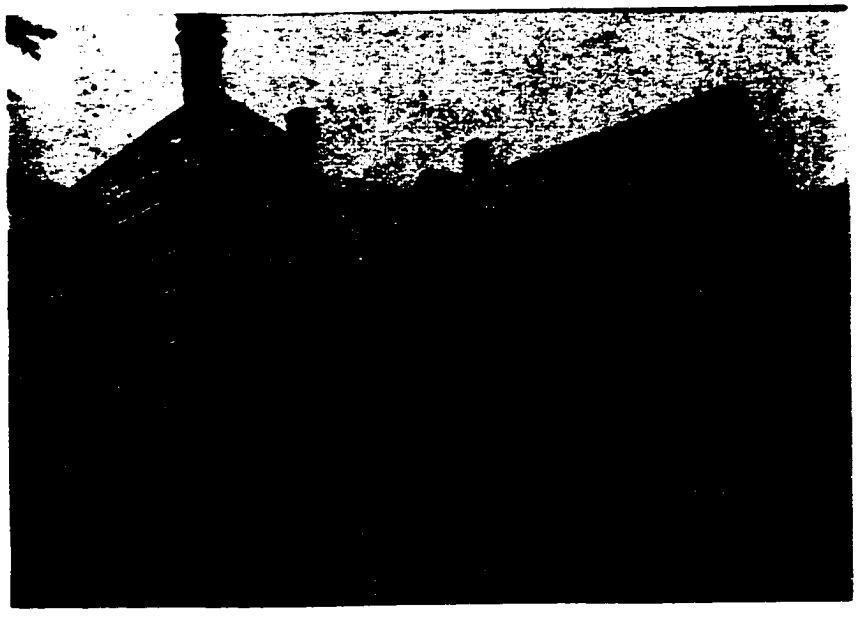


Figure 120. Structural glass for sanitation & fashion: Men's room of Southtown Theatre, Chicago. Designed by Rapp & Rapp, 1925. Source: American Architect 141 (May 1932): 42.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 121 & 122. Typical structural glass & chrome storefront circa 1933: Sullivan's Delicatessen (Chicago ?) BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Source: Libbey-Owens Ford, 1936 Advertising Scrapbook.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

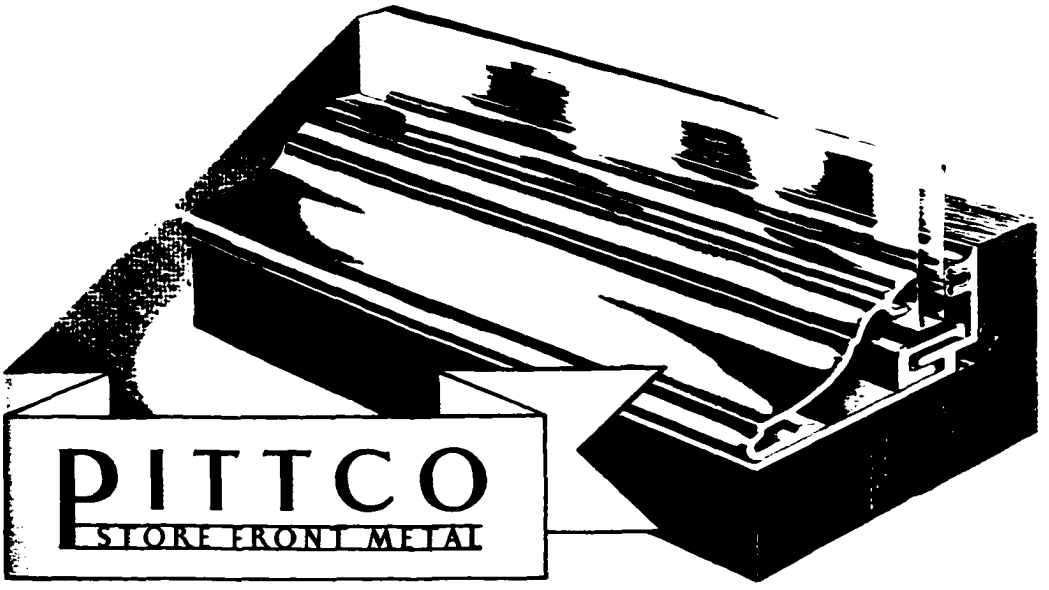


Figure 123. Pittco Store Front Metal, introduced March 1935. Extruded sash with cushion grip setting and contoured profile. Source: Architectural Forum 62 (March 1935): 49.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 124. "It Pays to *Modernize Main Street,*" PPG advertisement with editorial-style copy. Source: Chain Store Age, June 1935, p. 73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 125. "Pittco Store Front Products offer new possibilities," PPG advertisement with BEFORE & AFTER photographs. Pictured is an optometrist in Bethlehem, PA, modernized by Karl H. Synder. Source: Architectural Forum 63 (December 1935): 59.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

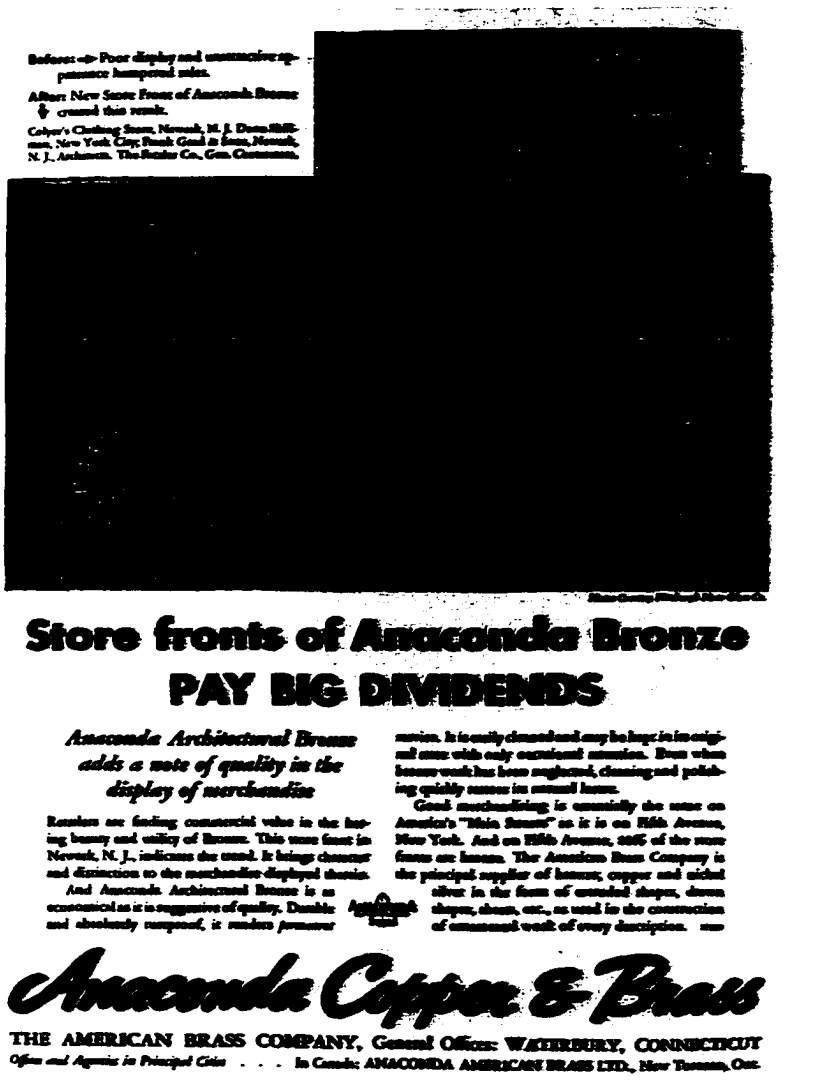


Figure 126. "Store fronts of Anaconda Bronze," American Brass advertisement with BEFORE & AFTER photographs. Pictured is Colyer's Clothing Store, Newark, N.J., modernized by Frank Grad with PPG products. Source: Architectural Record 81 (February 1937): inside front cover.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

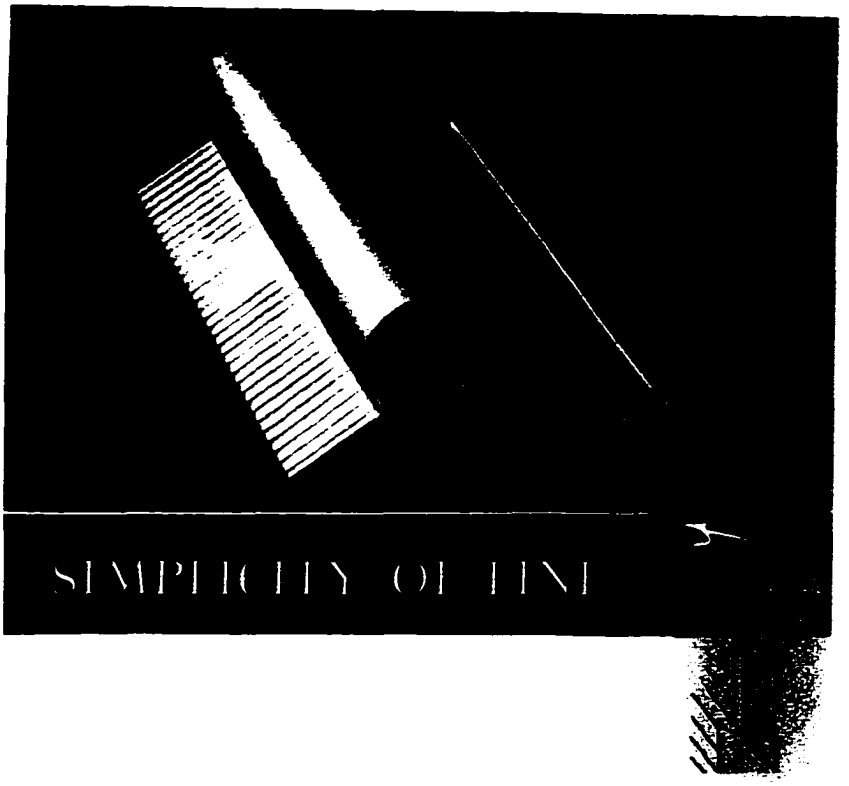


Figure 127. Pittco Store Front Metal, restyled in 1938 for "simplicity of line" to harmonize the visual transition from plate glass to facing material. Source: Architectural Record 88 (July 1940): 28.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

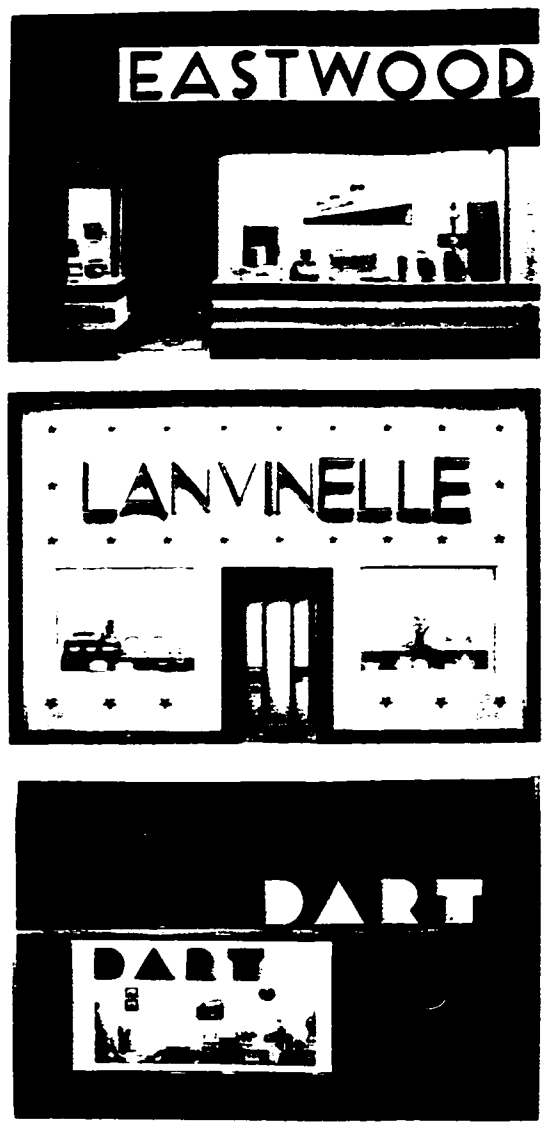
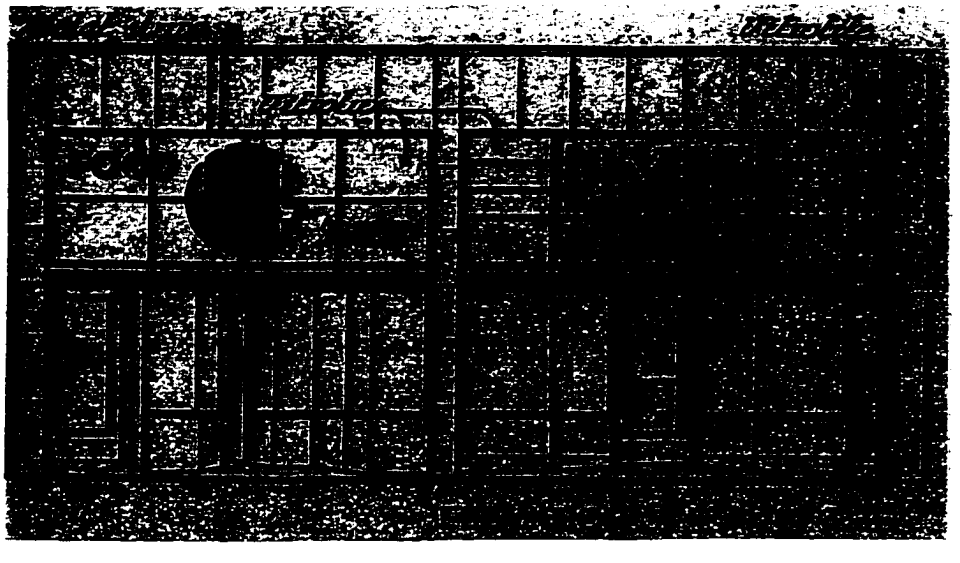


Figure 128. Pittco Store Front Models from Store Front Caravan: luggage, china, and gift shops. Designed by Walter Dorwin Teague, 1936. Source: Real Estate Record, 19 September 1936, p. 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 129 & 130. Typical modernized storefronts with similarity to Teague's Pittco models: general view and elevations of Goddes Food Shop & Dixie Market in Battle Creek, Michigan. Designed by P.H. Chute, 1937. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

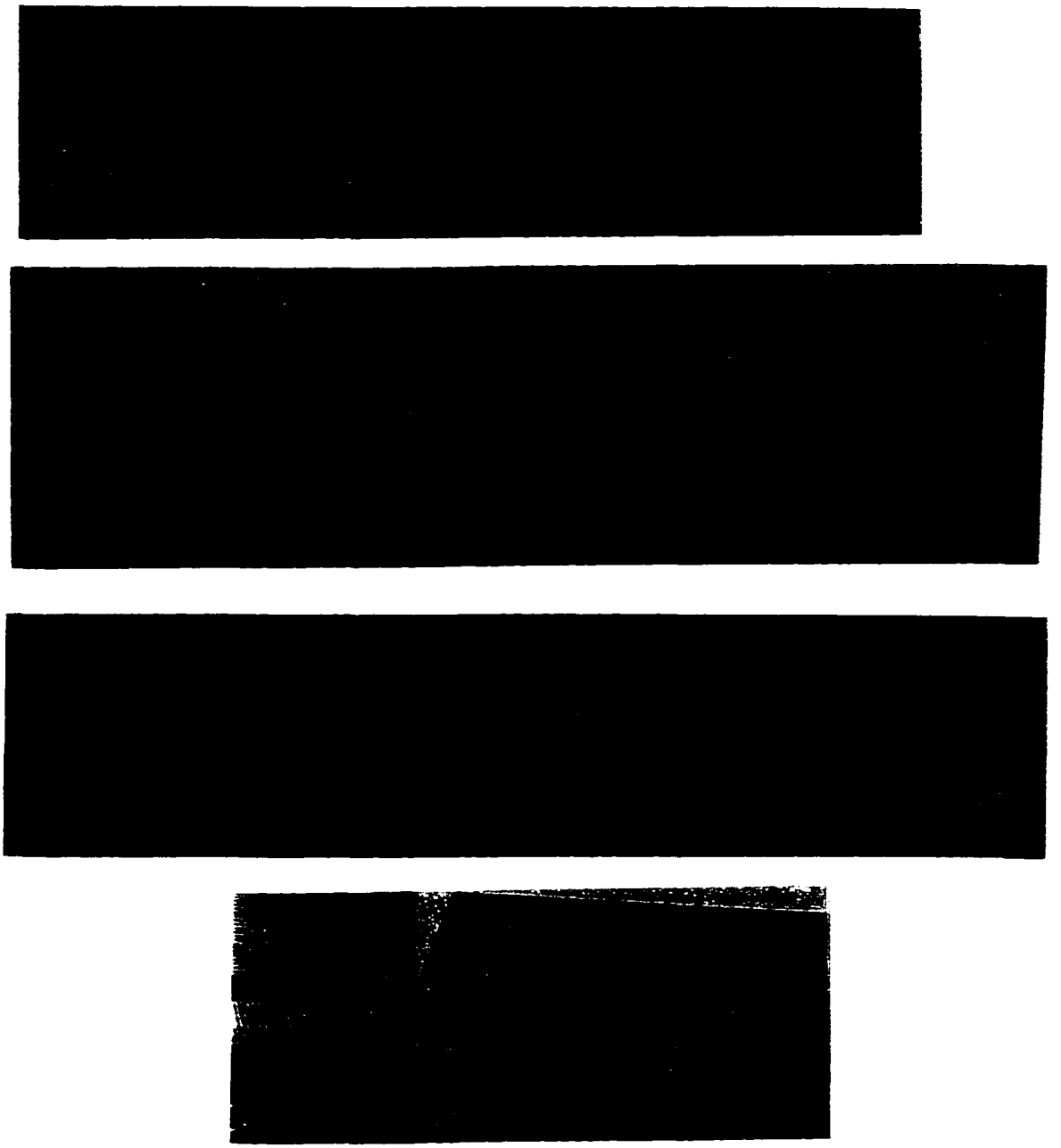
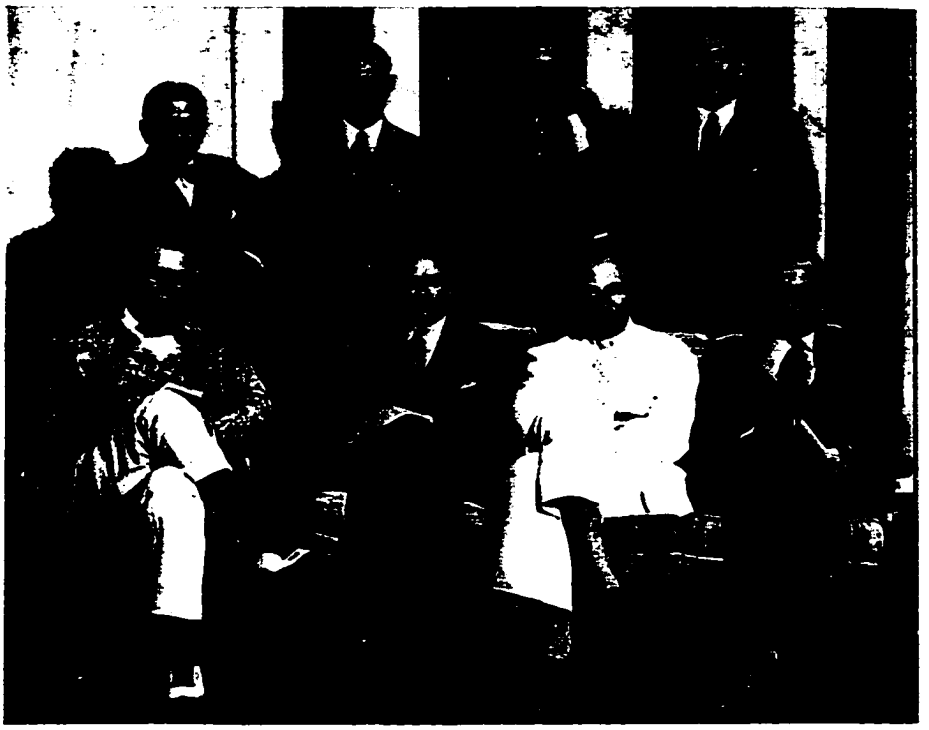
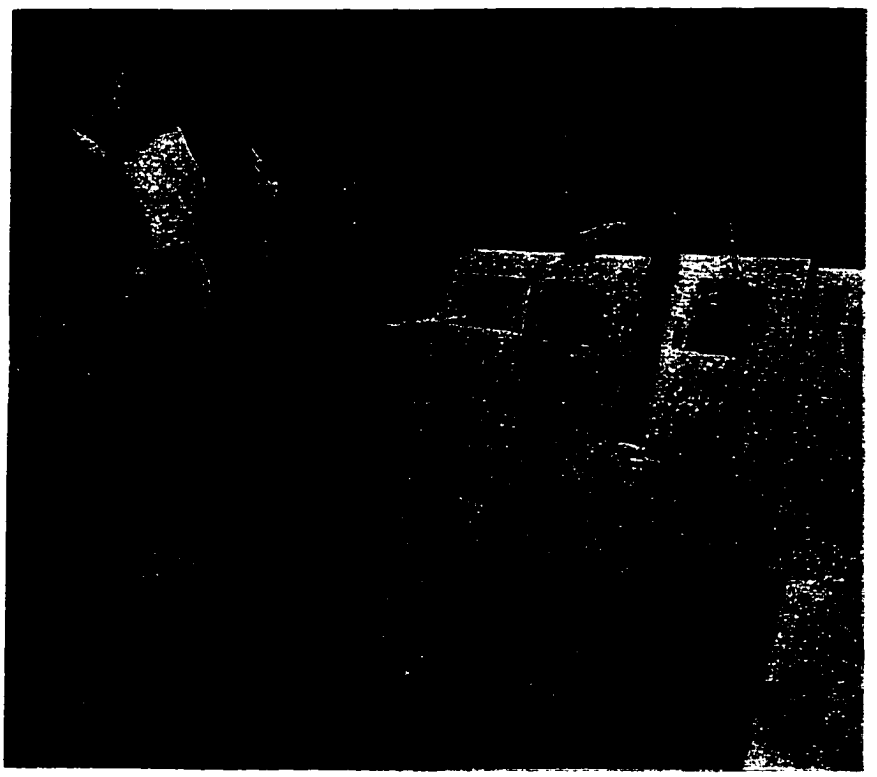


Figure 131. LOF Competition, Main Street photographs from *Modernize Main Street* announcement, June-July 1935. Source: Architectural Forum 62 (June 1935).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 132 & 133. LOF Competition Jury: (standing, left to right) Albert Kahn, Melvin Copeland, William Lescaze, John W. Root, (seated) F.R. Walker, Kenneth Stowell, J. André Fouilhoux, Kenneth Welch. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 209.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 134. LOF Competition, typical winning entry: Montgomery Ferar, Mentioned Drug Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 218.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

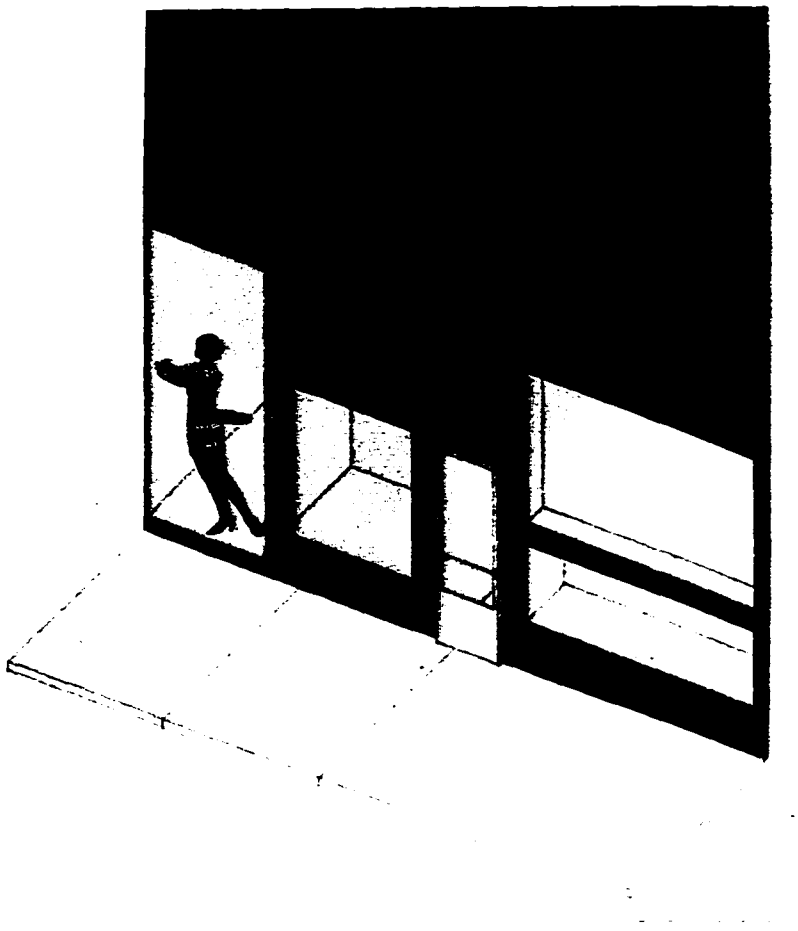


Figure 135. Frederick Kiesler, Asymmetrical Store Front Composition. Source: Kiesler, Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and its Display (1930), p. 83.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 136, 137 & 138. O.R. Salvisberg, Scherk Perfume Shop, Berlin. General view, storefront entrance, elevation & plan. Published in Ladenbau, 1934. Source: Moderne Ladenbauten (1929), p. 134; Architectural Record 78 (July 1935): 64.

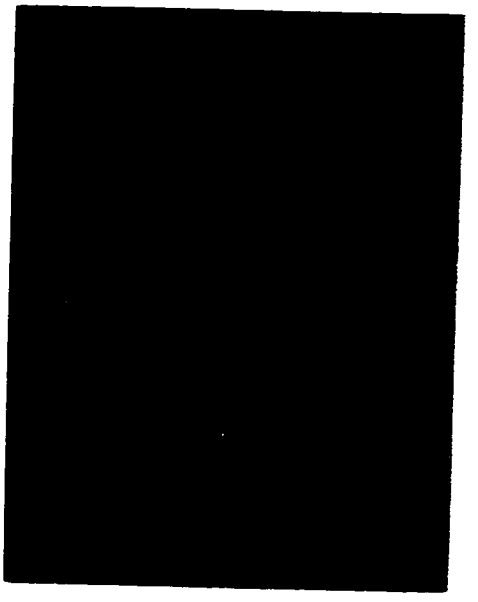


Figure 139. Wells Coates, Cresta Dress Shop, London. Source: Architectural Record 78 (July 1935): 51.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

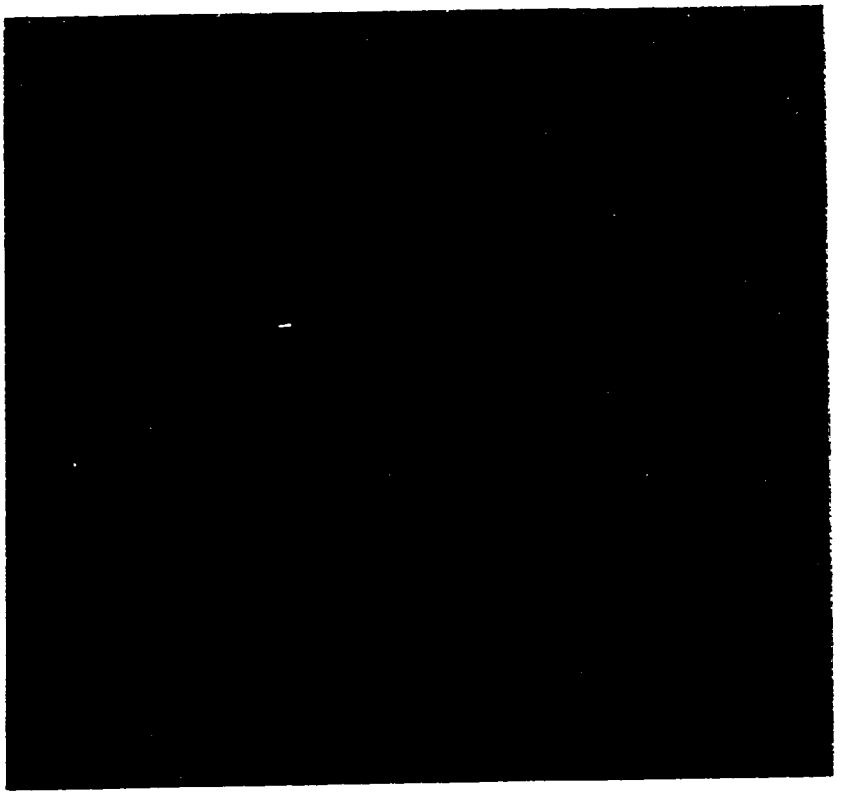


Figure 140. LOF Competition: Morrison Broun, Mentioned Drug Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 215.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

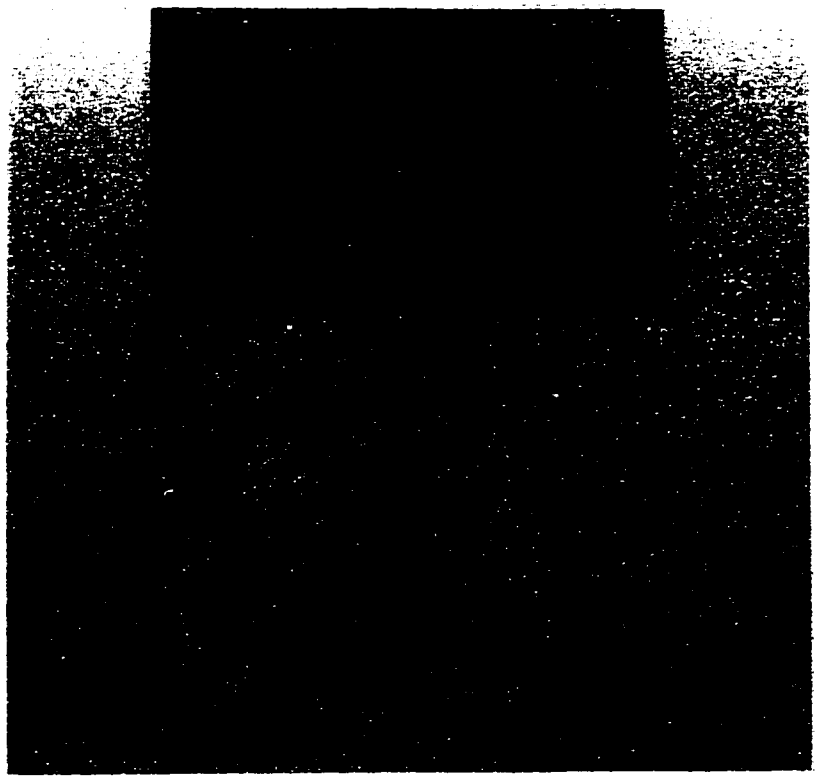


Figure 141. LOF Competition: Lester Cohn, 2nd Prize Apparel Shop. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 226.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 142. LOF Competition Winner: M. Righton Swicegood, 1st Prize Drug Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 212.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

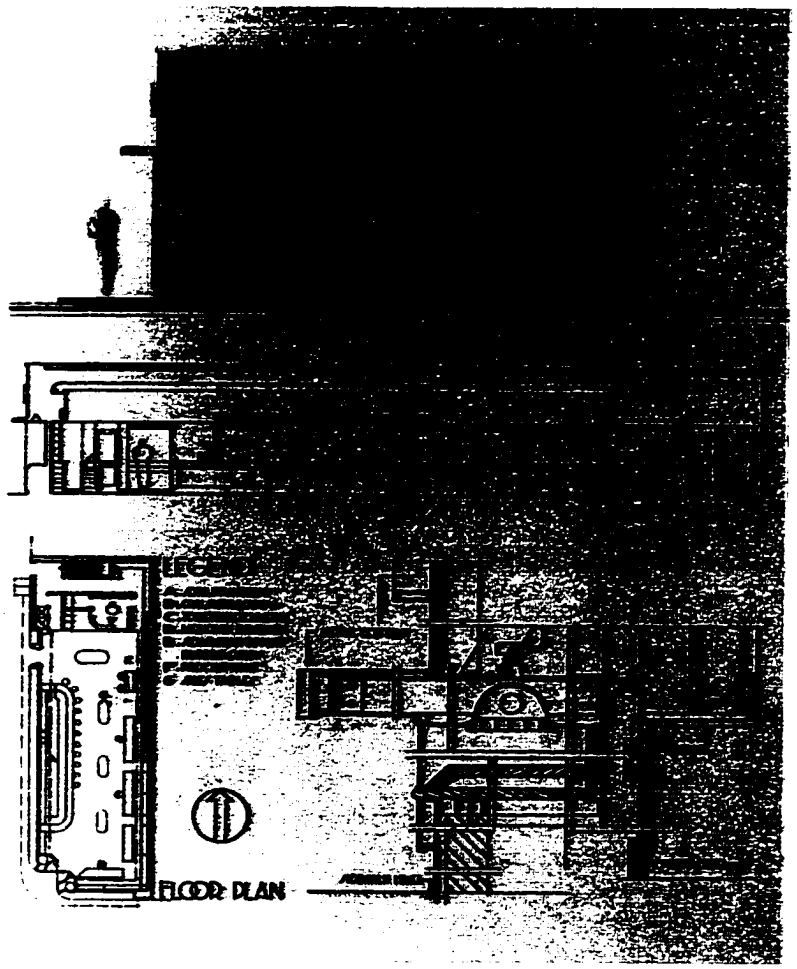


Figure 143. LOF Competition Winner: G. Foster Harrell, Jr., 2nd Prize Drug Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 213.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

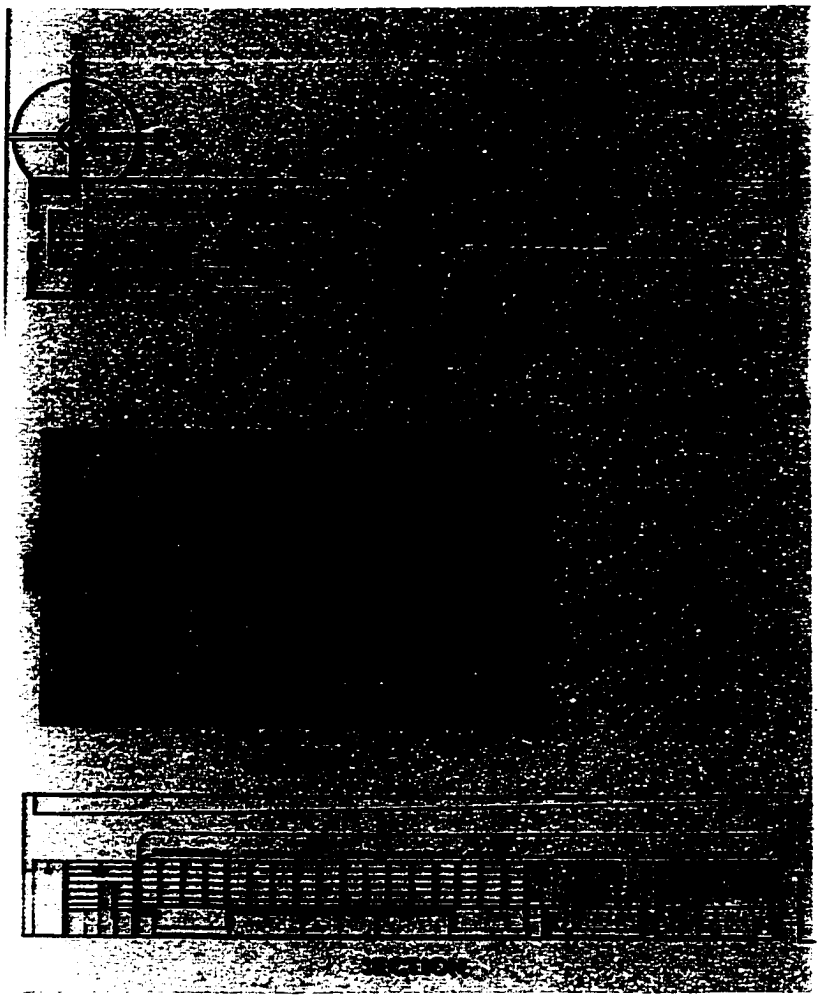


Figure 144. LOF Competition Winner: Melvin Wolfson, Mentioned Drug Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 223.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

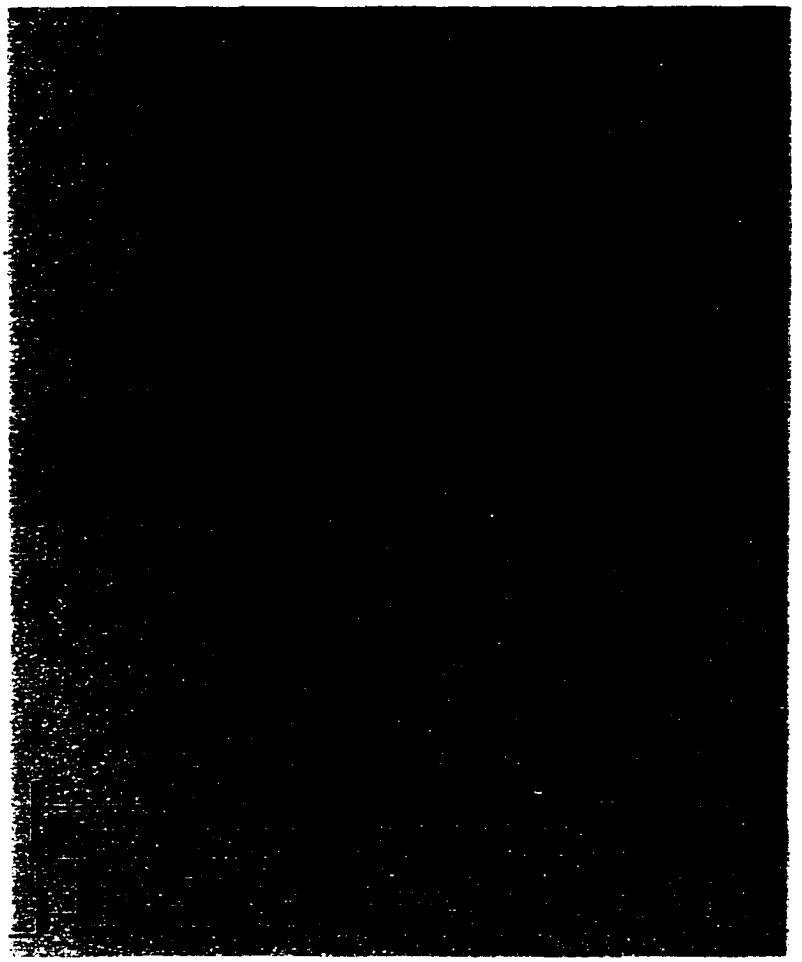


Figure 145. LOF Competition Winner: G. Foster Harrell, Jr., 1st Prize Food Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 41.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

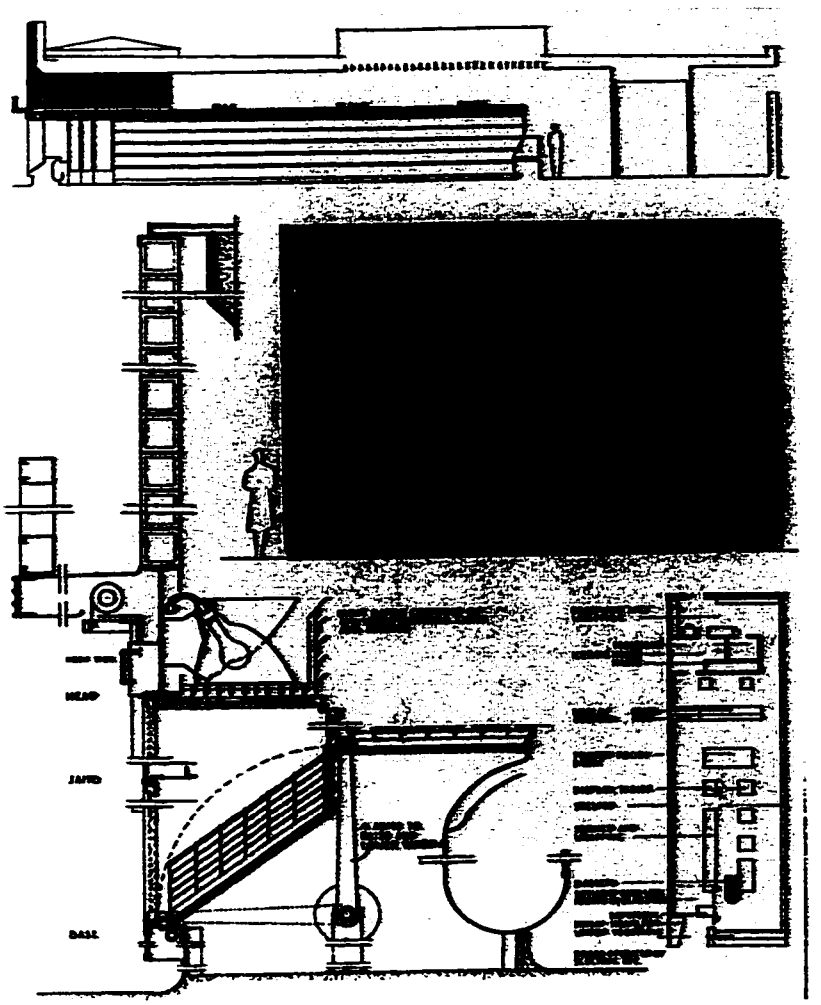


Figure 146. LOF Competition Winner: H.K. Bieg, Mentioned Food Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 249.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

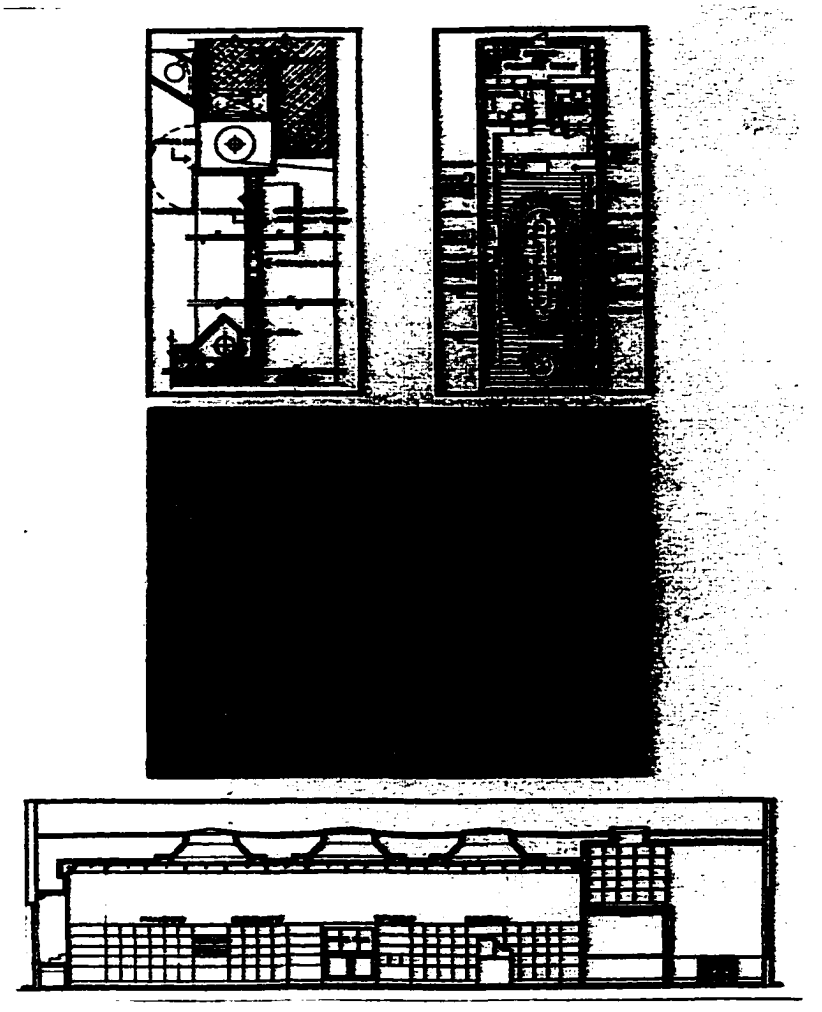


Figure 147. LOF Competition Winner: Theo Voyvodick & J.J. Pankuch, Mentioned Food Store. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 245.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

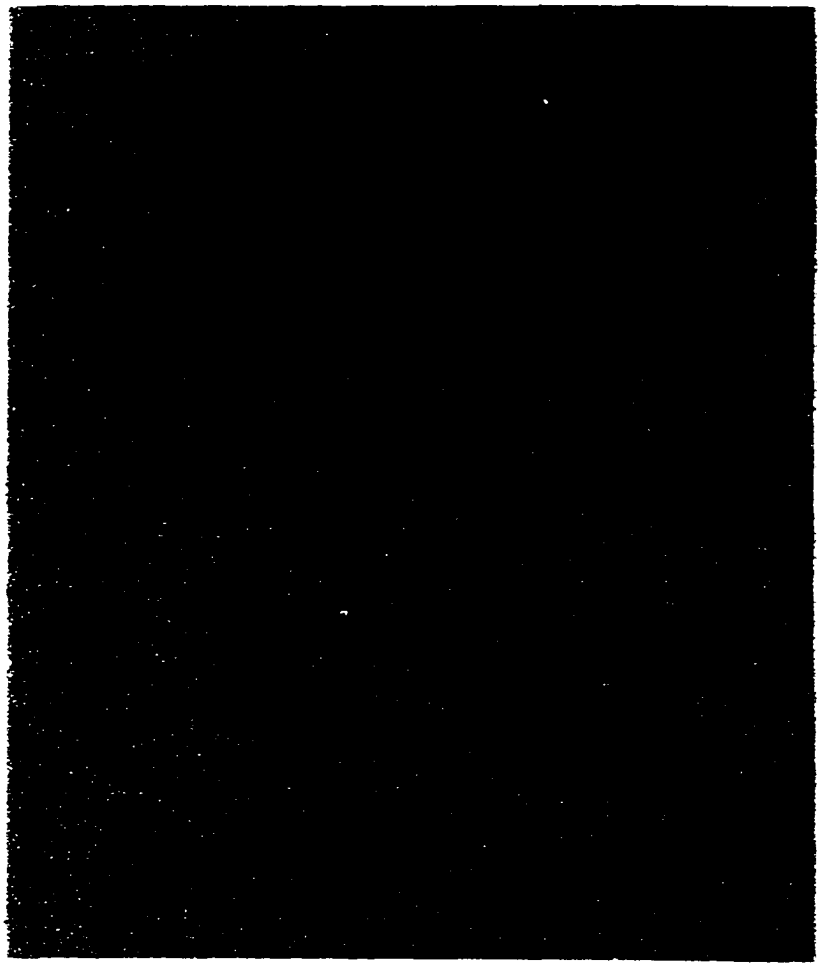
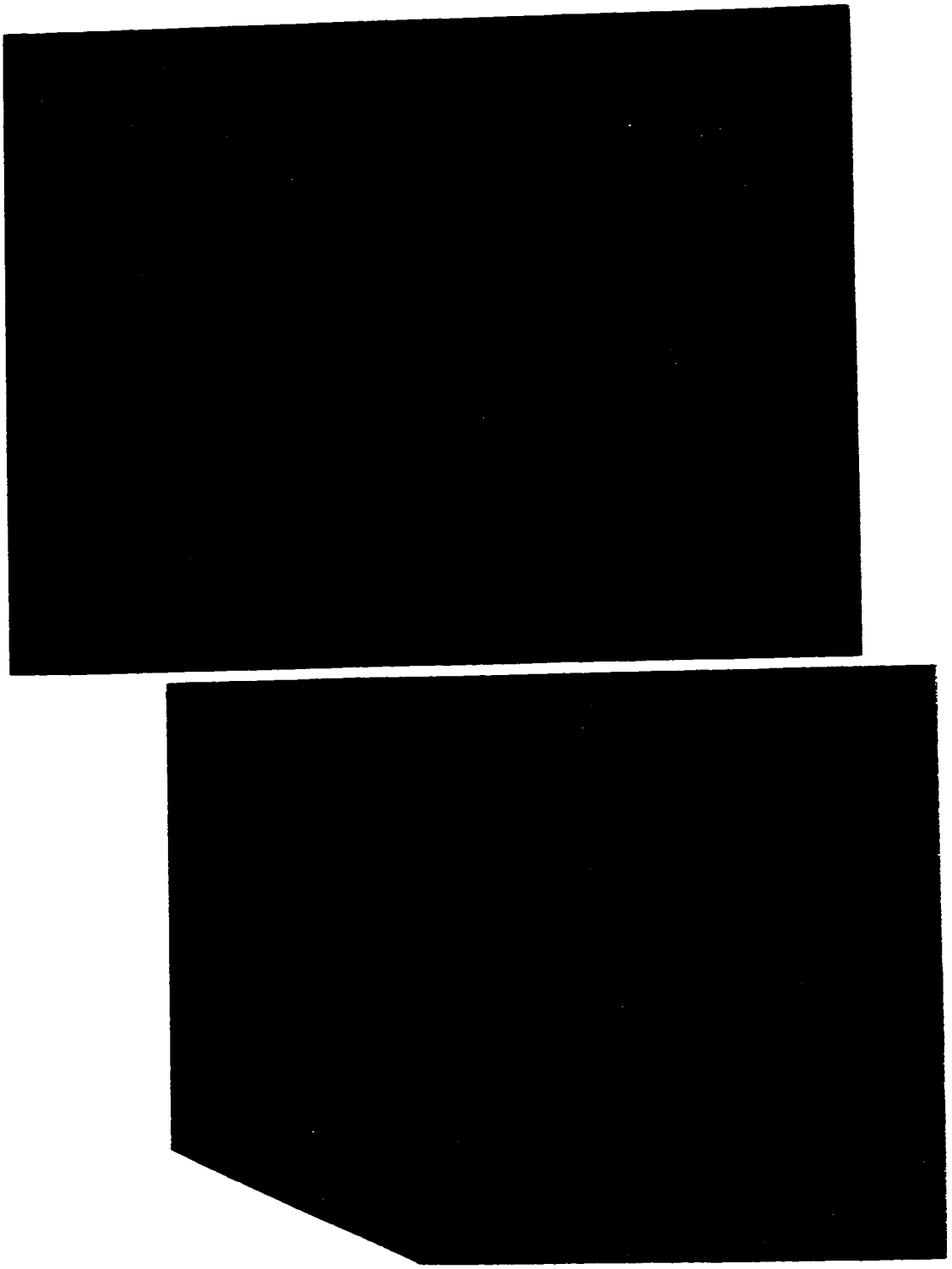


Figure 148. LOF Competition Winner: Suren Pilafian & Maurice Lubin, 1st Prize Apparel Shop. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 225.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 149 & 150. Morris Ketchum, Ciro Jewelers, New York City, 1939. Storefront and plan. Source: Pencil Points 20 (August 1939): 505.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

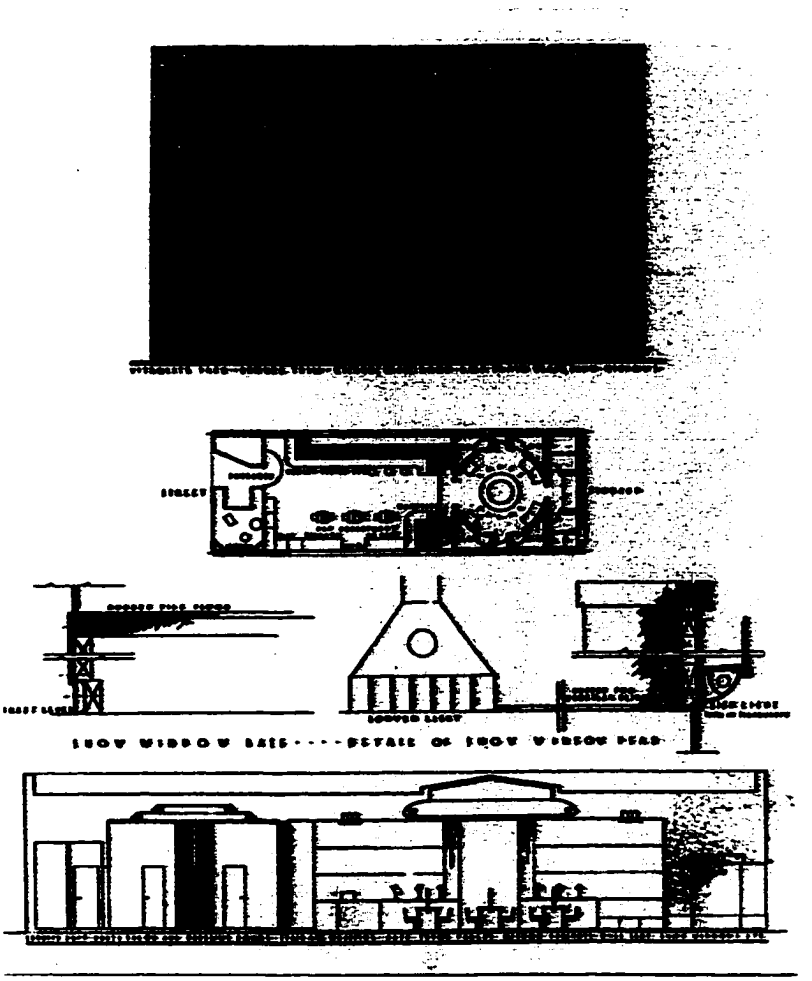


Figure 151. LOF Competition Winner: DuBrul & Trivisonno, 3rd Prize Apparel Shop. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 227.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

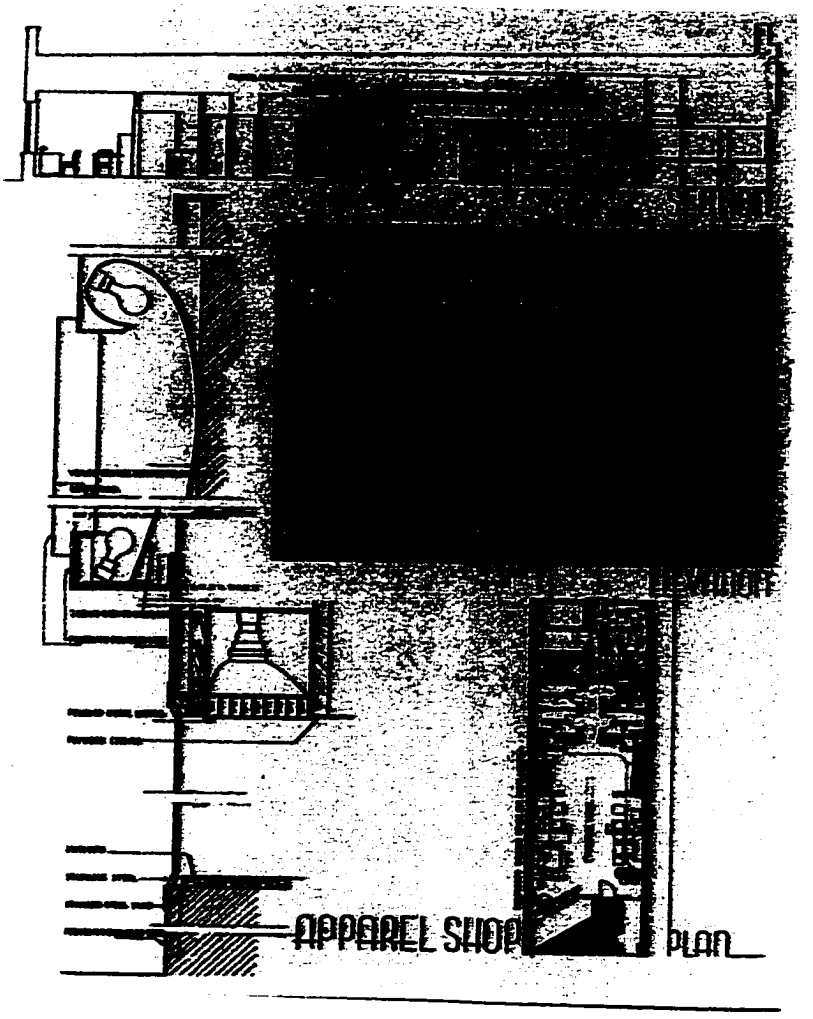


Figure 152. LOF Competition Winner: Joseph M. Hirschman, Mentioned Apparel Shop. Source: Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 233.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

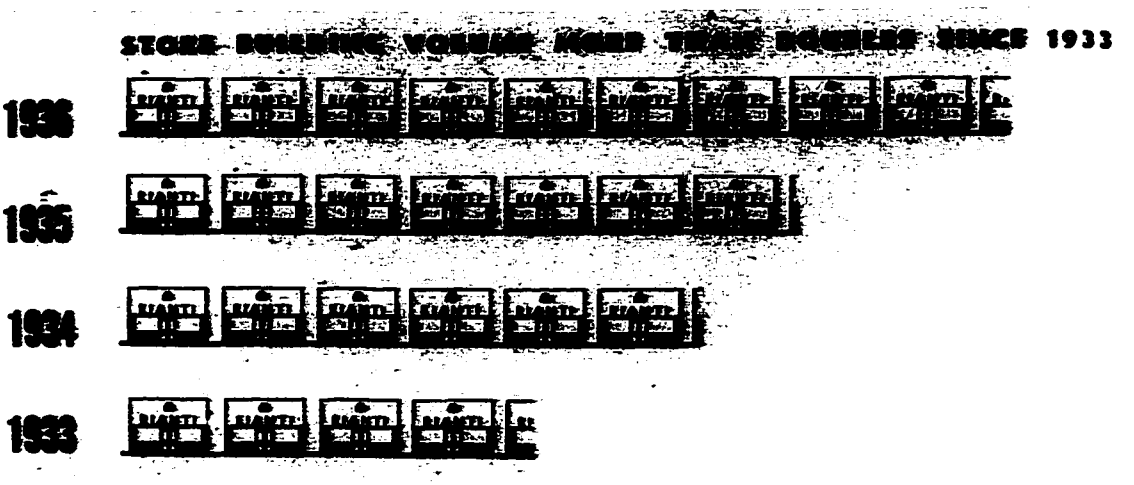


Figure 153. Store building activity: chart showing increased volume between 1933 and 1936 for first six months of each year. Each complete symbol designates $5 million of store building. Source: Architectural Record 80 (August 1936): 38.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 154. Typical modernized storefront showing influence of LOF Competition: Schwenk's Bakery in North Bergen, New Jersey. Designed and installed by Vitrolite Products Company of Newark. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

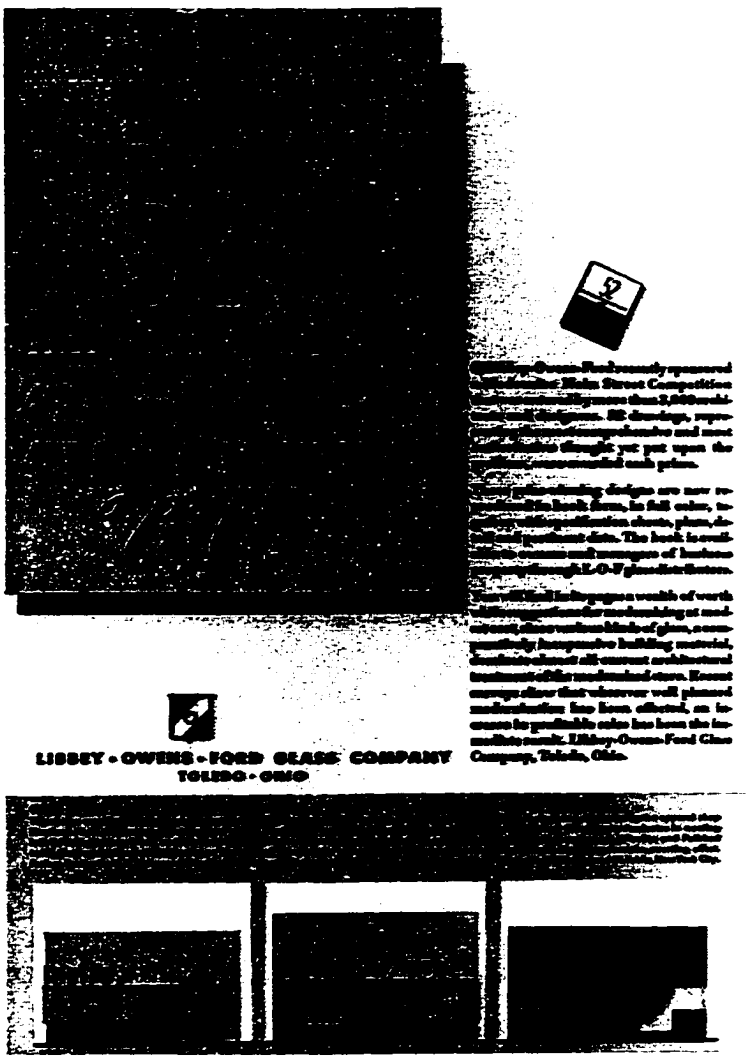


Figure 155. Typical LOF advertisement promoting winning designs of *Modernize Main Street* Competition. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 95.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

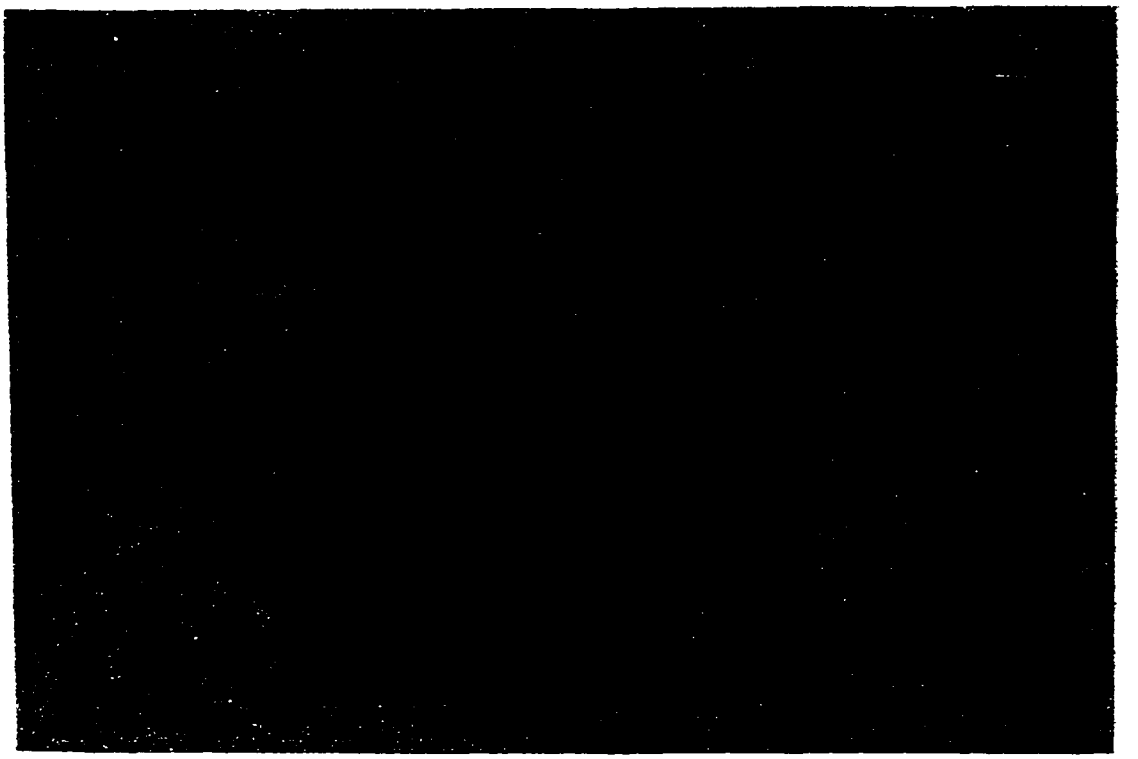


Figure 156. Owens-Illinois Insulux Store Competition: M. Righton Swicegood, 4th Prize Restaurant. Source: Architectural Forum 71 (November 1939): 19.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

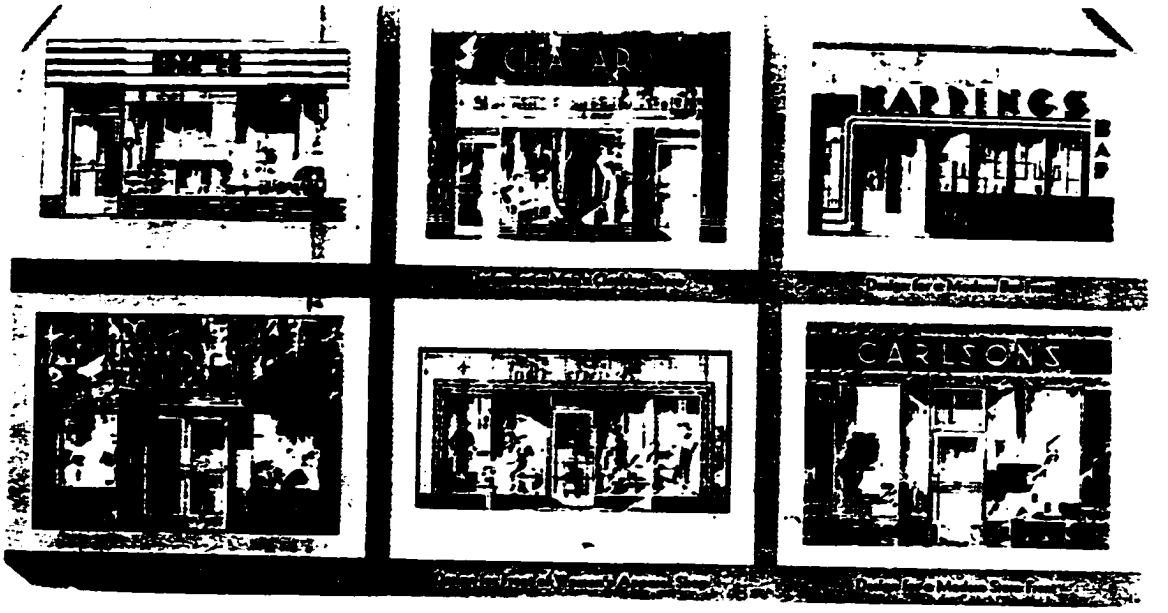


Figure 157. Frank Sohn, Vitrolite Storefront Designs emphasizing "agate" shades, 1936. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1936 Advertising Scrapbook.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

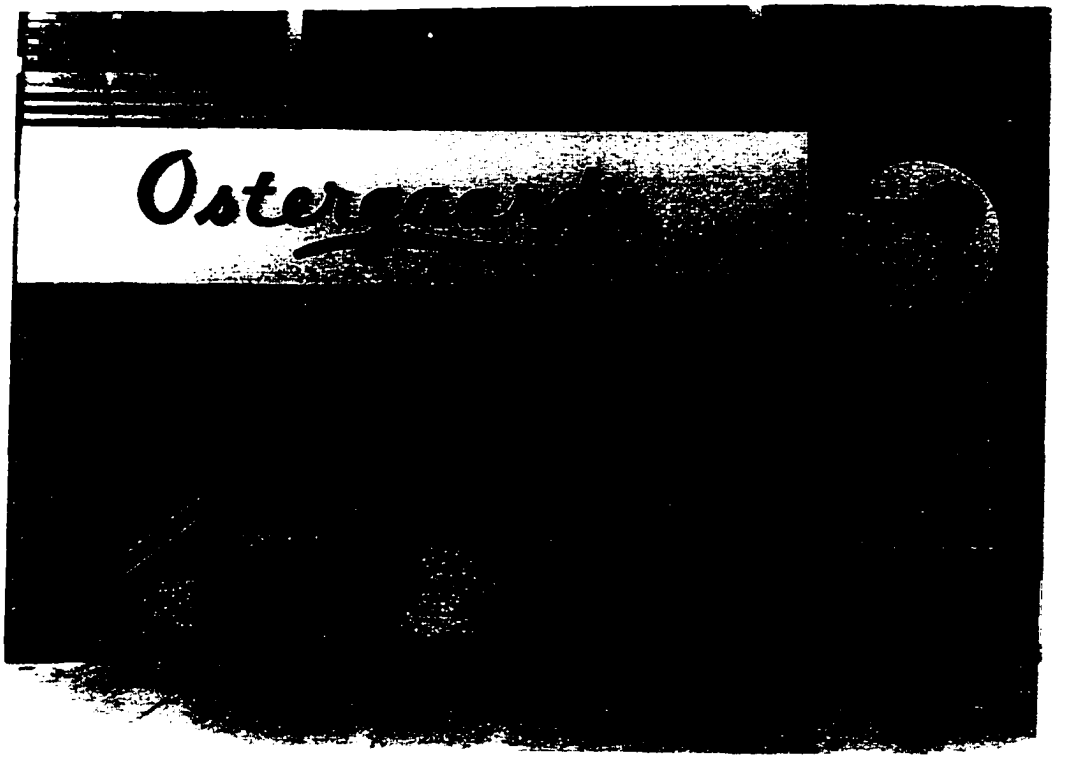


Figure 158. Typical modernized storefront with bent glass bulkheads and displays: Ostergaard's Bakery, Racine Wisconsin. Installed by Patek Brothers of Milwaukee, 1937. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

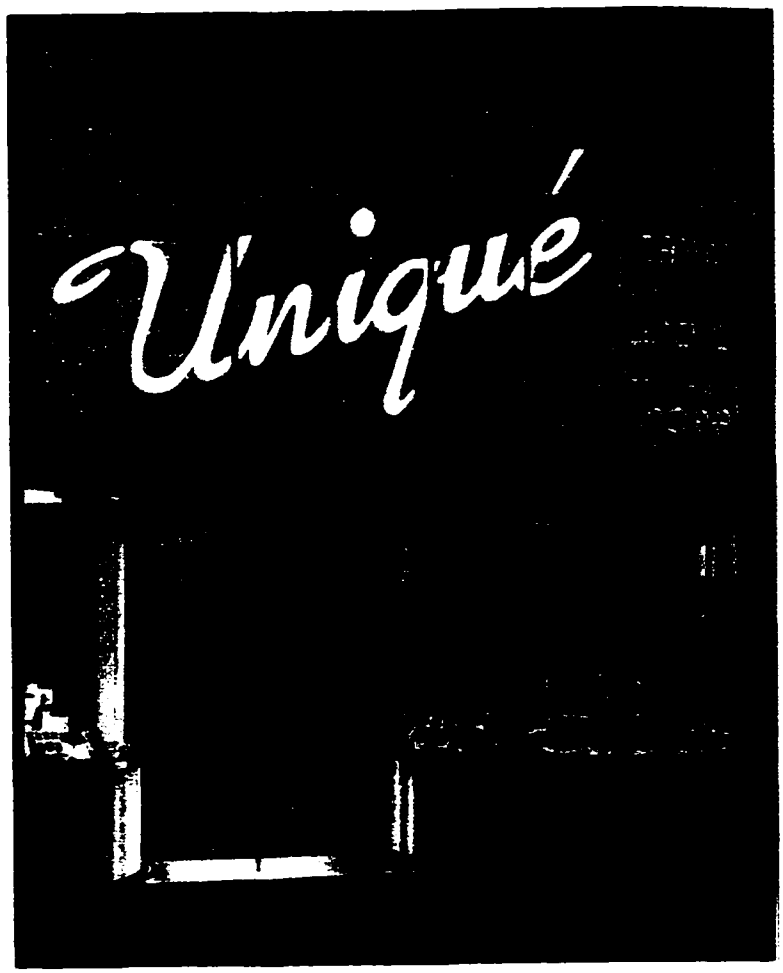


Figure 159. The LOF Colorful Storefront: Uniqué Ice Cream Parlor & Soda Fountain in Niagara Falls, NY. Designed by architect C.T. Macheras of Buffalo, 1938. The store has a Vitrolux signboard and Vitrolite bulkheads. Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1940): 18/2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

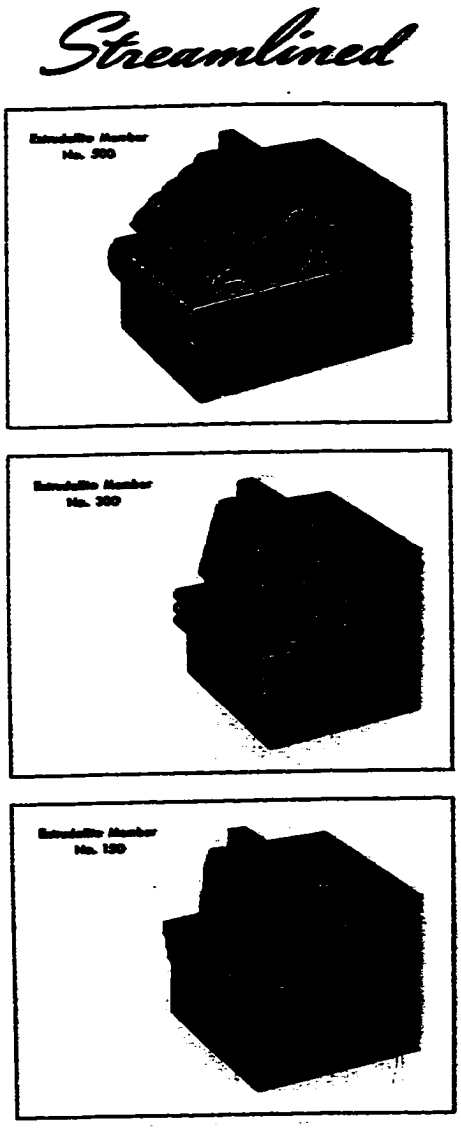
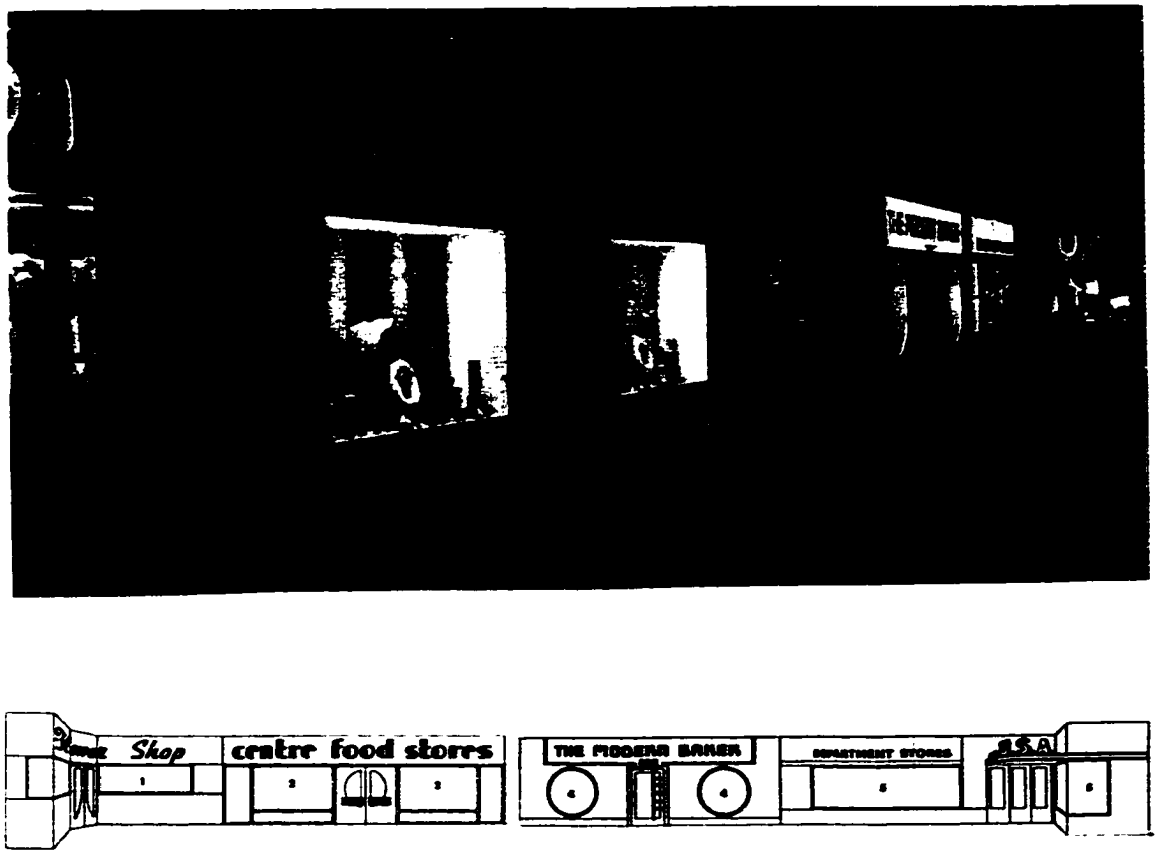


Figure 160. LOF Extrudalite Storefront Metal, introduced 1937. Standard sash members in three sizes and styles. Sections show sash grip of plate glass and facing glass. Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1940): 19/6.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 161 & 162. LOF, *Modern Shopping Center*: 7/8 scale model & elevation diagrams of shopping center retail units, 1937. Source: Architectural Forum 67 (December 1937): 27; Libbey-Owens-Ford, "Colorful Storefronts" (1937).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

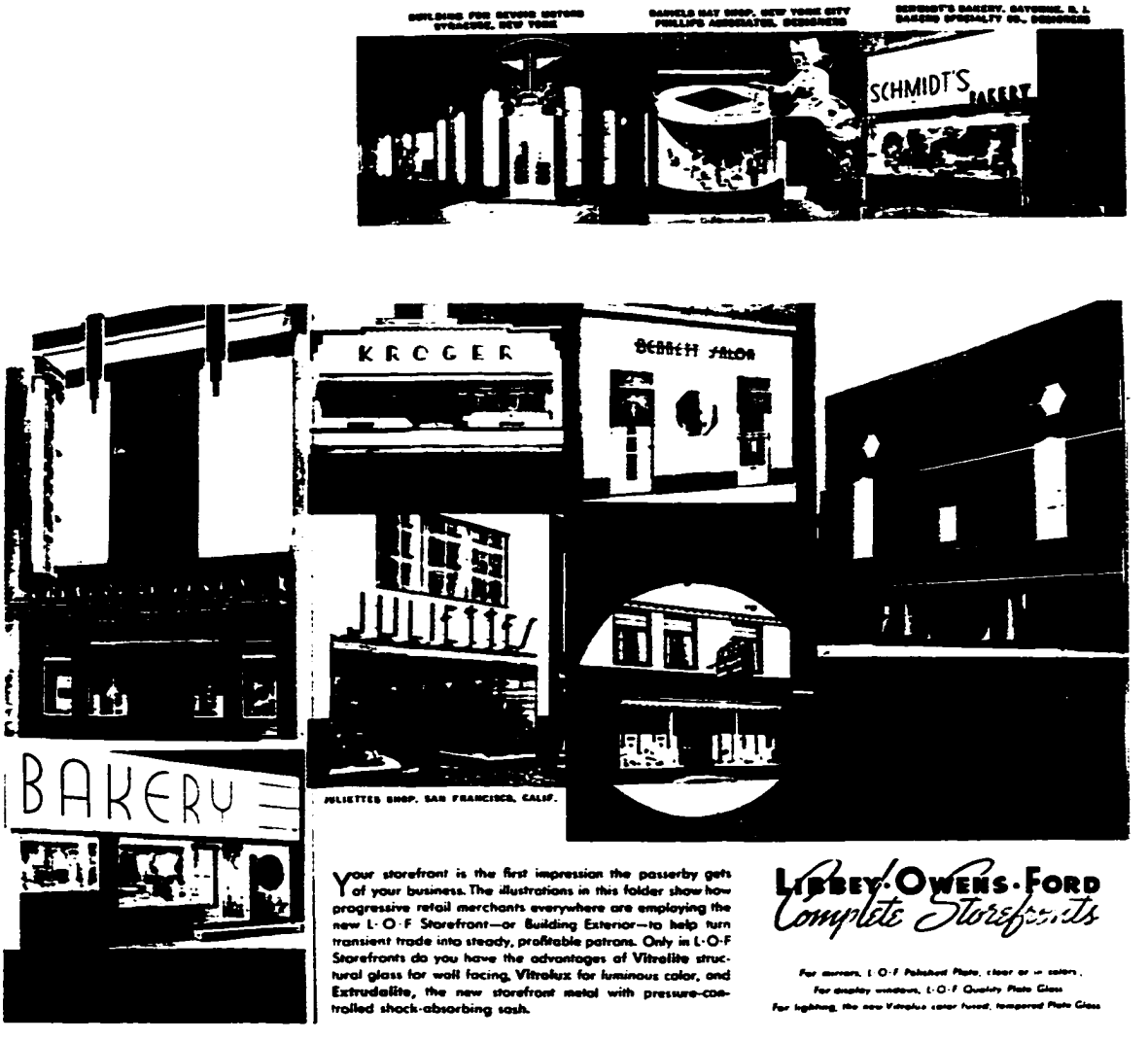


Figure 163. Storefronts across the country modernized with LOF products. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, "Why a New LOF Storefront is a Business Asset" (1938).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

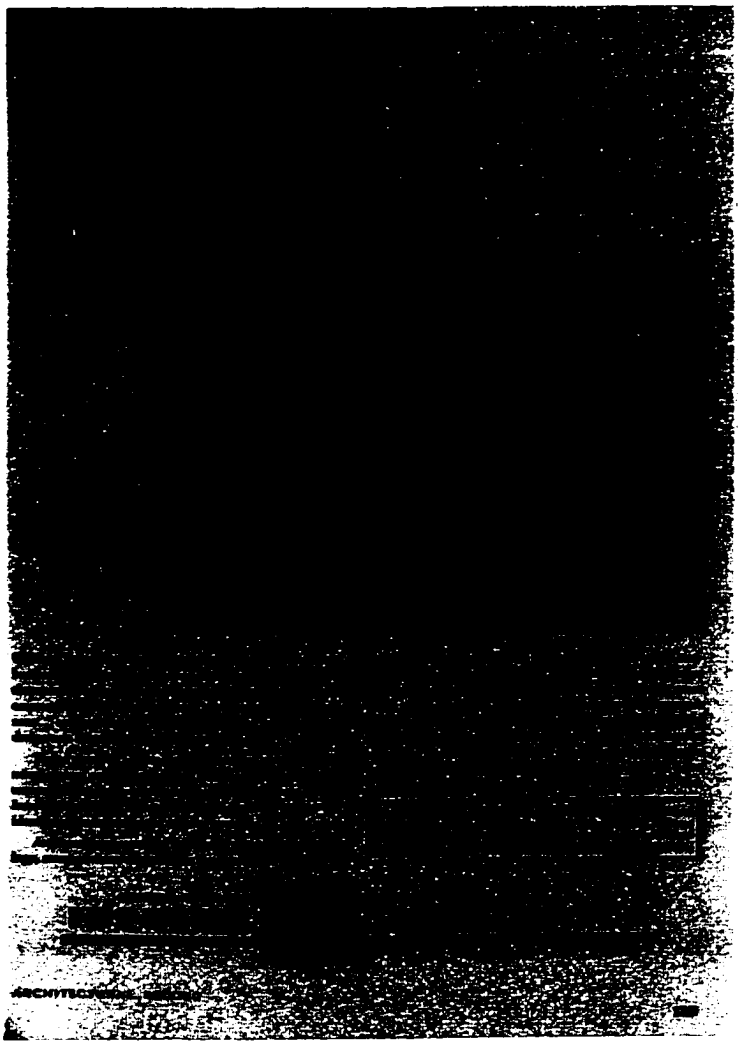


Figure 164. "An appreciation of architecture long overdue," Owens-Illinois advertisement. Source: Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 125.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

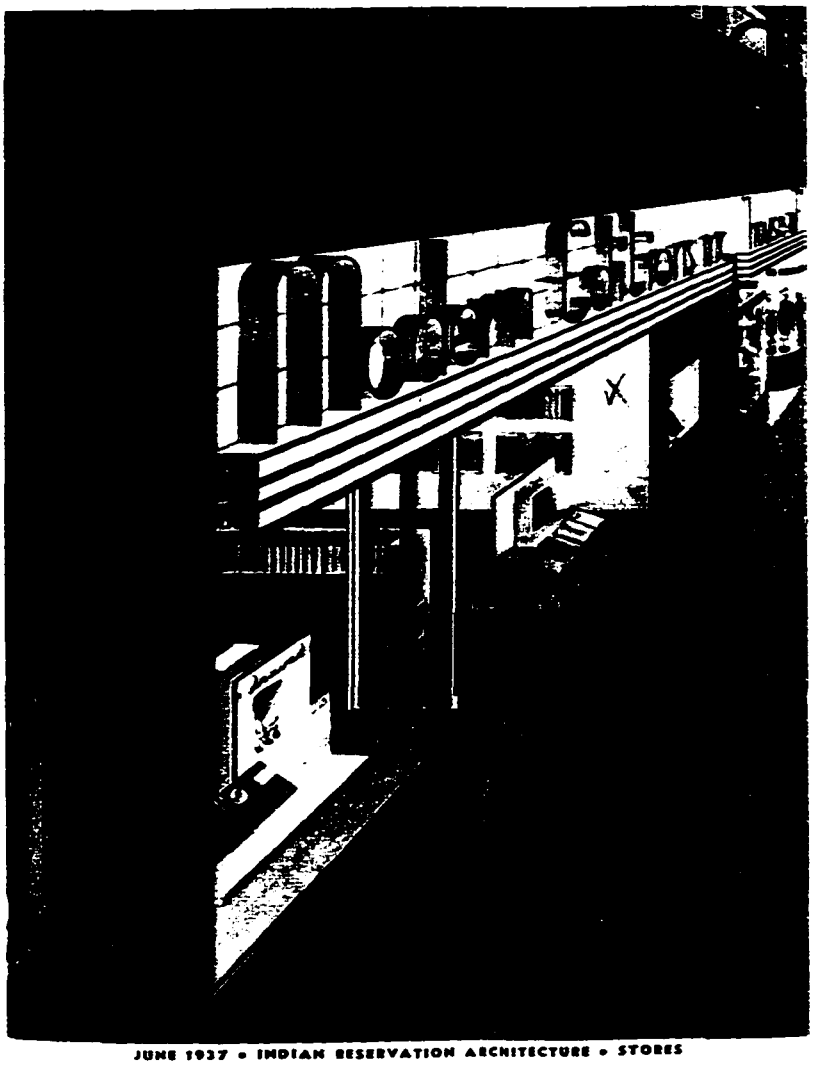


Figure 165. Perspective rendering of modernized storefronts on cover of American Architect 150 (June 1937).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

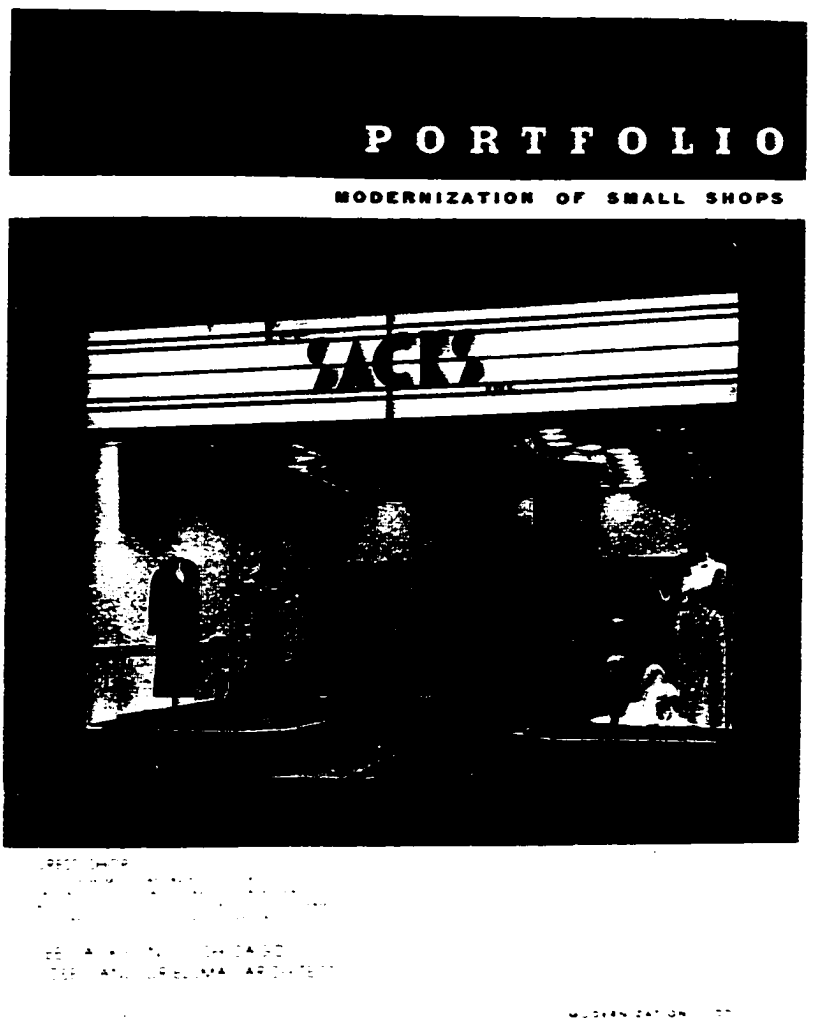


Figure 166. Portfolio: Modernization of Small Shops from Architectural Record. Source: Architectural Record 76 (September 1934): 155.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

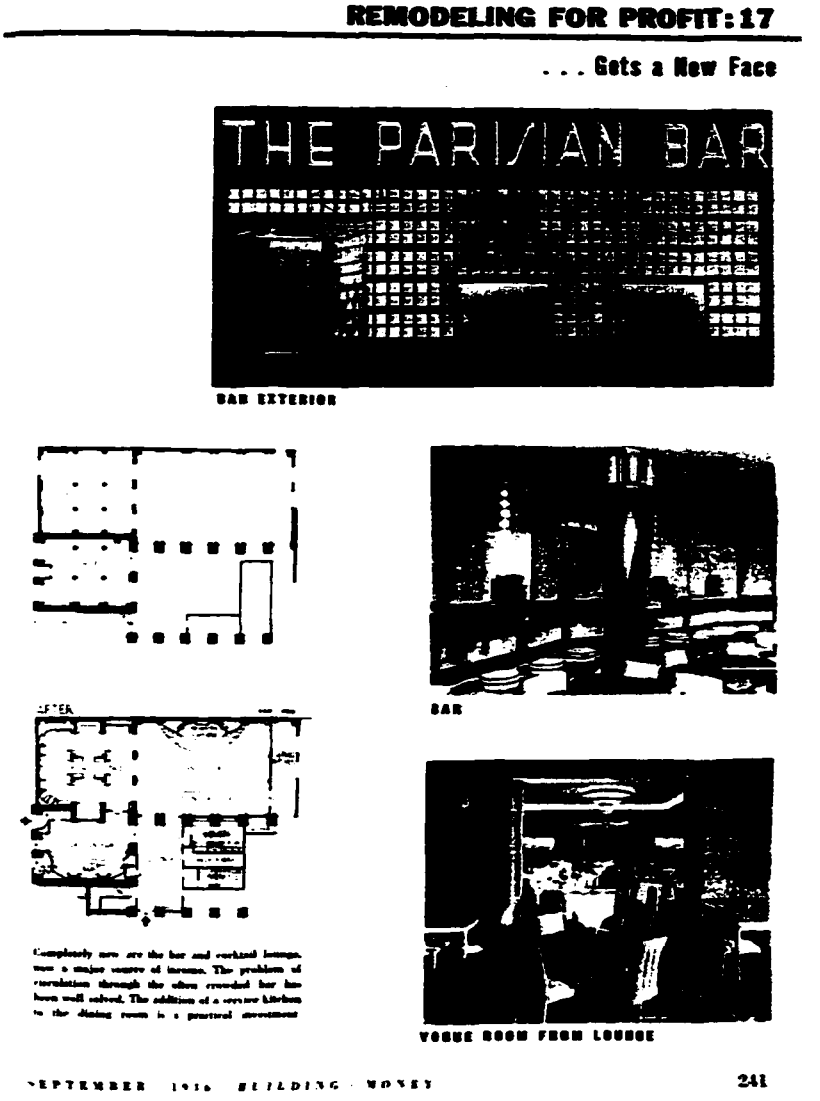


Figure 167. "Remodeling for Profit": case study of renovations to the Hotel Hollenden in Cleveland, by Oscar Nordstrom. Source: Architectural Forum 65 (September 1936): 241.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

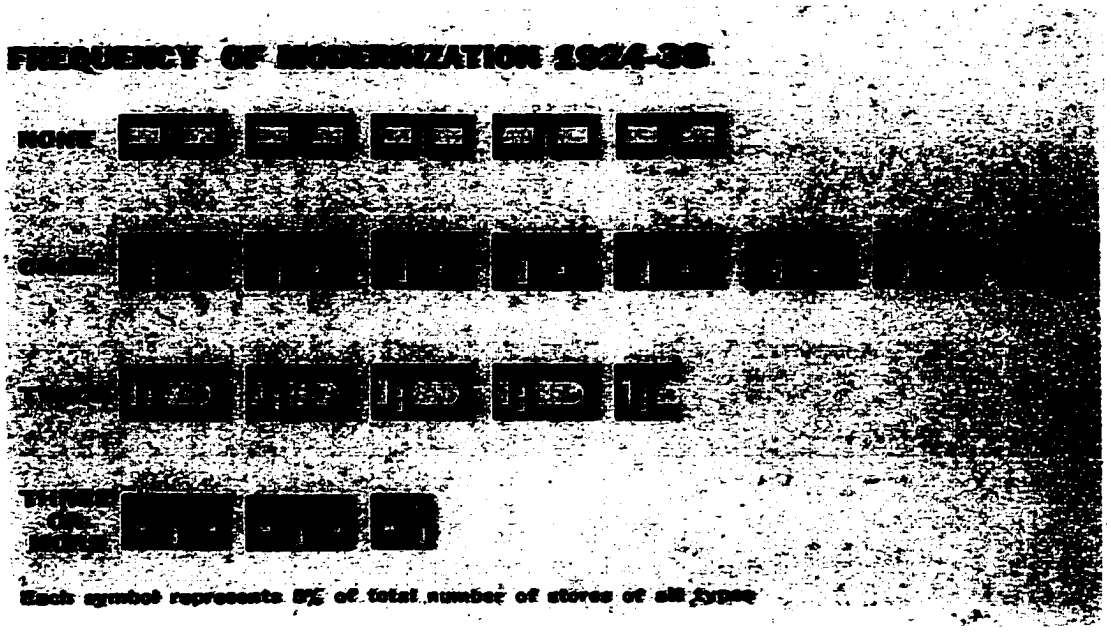


Figure 168. Store Modernization on Main Street: chart showing frequency of modernization activity, 1924-38. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 83.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

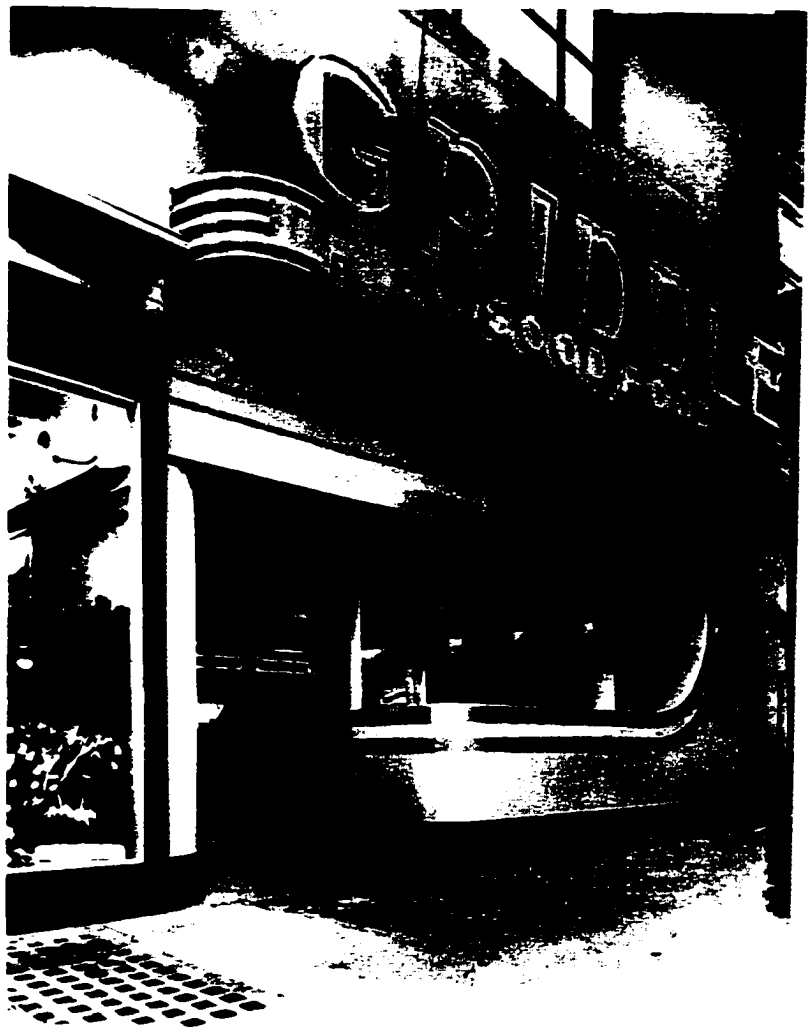


Figure 169. *Typical streamlined storefront:* The Griddle Restaurant, San Francisco, 1937. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

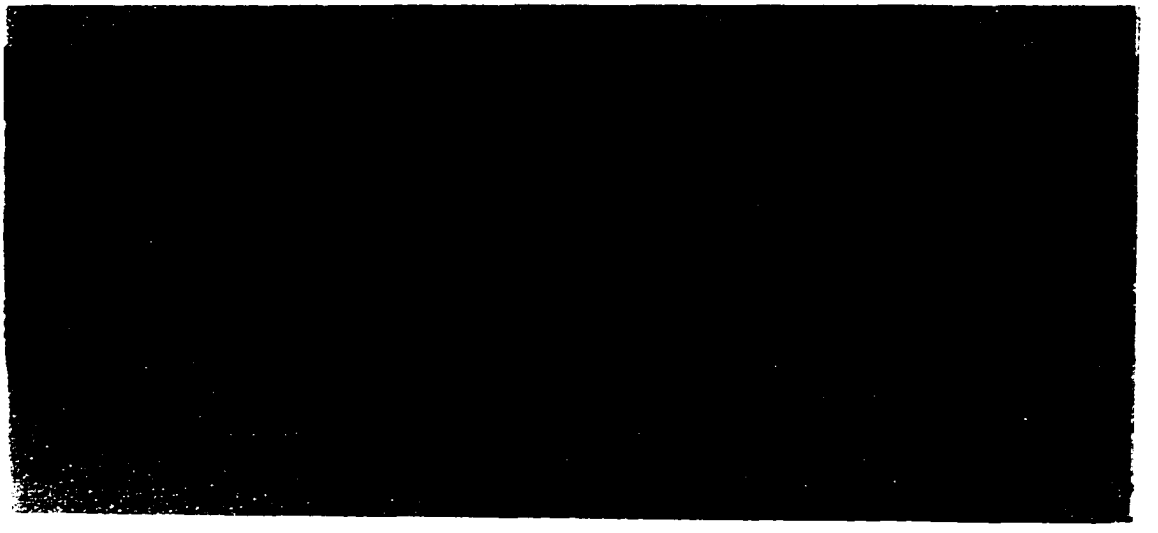


Figure 170. *Typical streamlined car:* Carl Breer, Chrysler Airflow Imperial Coupe, 1934. Source: Jeffrey Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited (1979), p. 150.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

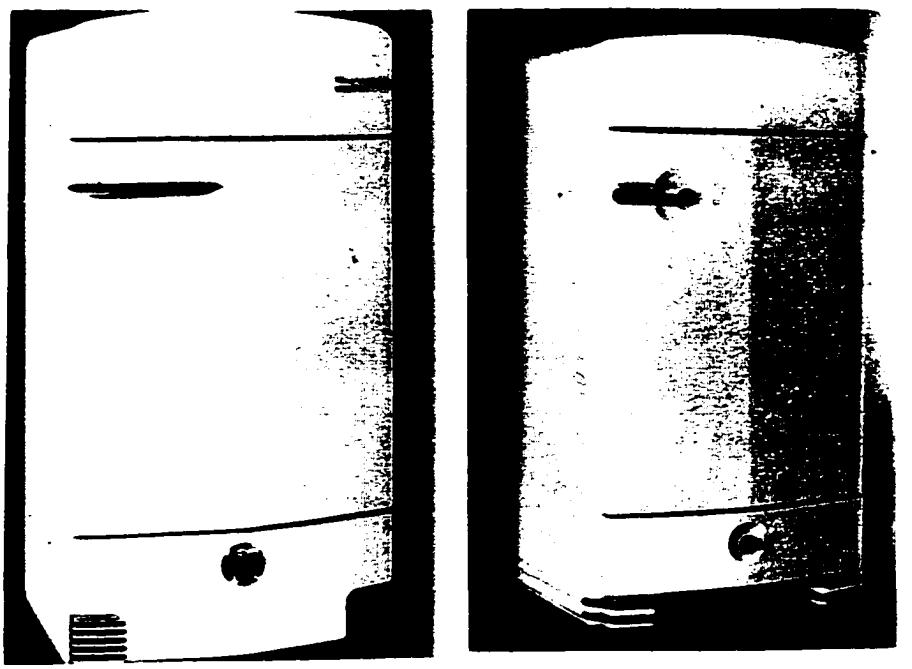
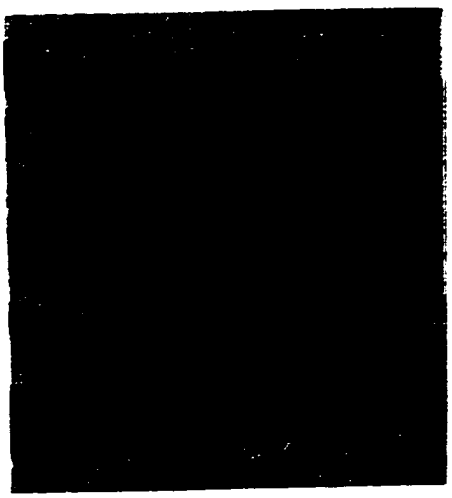
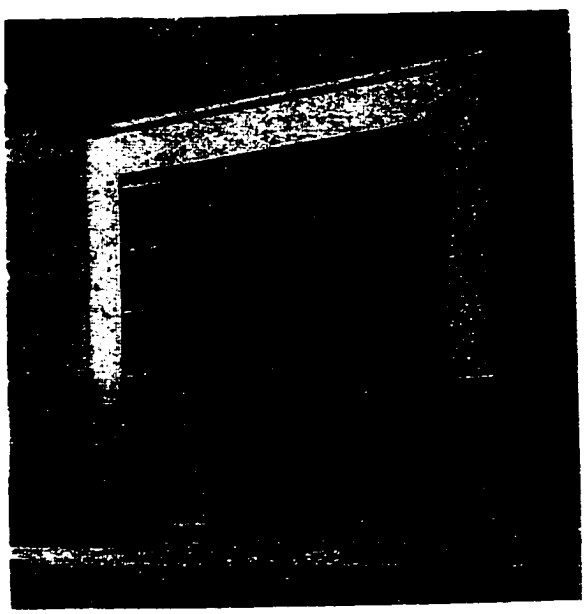


Figure 171. *Typical restyled refrigerator*: Raymond Loewy, Sears Coldspot, 1936-38. Source: Jeffrey Meikle, Twentieth Century Limited (1979), p. 107.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 172 & 173. *Total Transformation*: The Hub Clothing Store in Grand Rapids, Michigan BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed by Harry L. Mead, 1937. Source: Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 174. *Billboard-like facade*: Wise Shoe Store in Chicago, 1936. Designed by Elias Rothschild. Source: Architectural Forum 66 (April 1937): 97.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

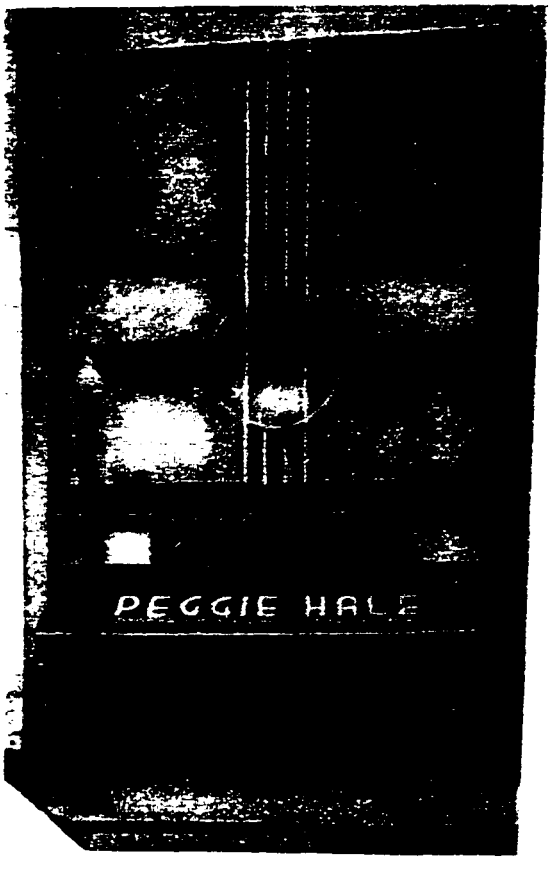


Figure 175. *Billboard-like facade*: Peggy Hale Clothing Store in Birmingham, Alabama, 1934. Designed by Morris Lapidus. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 116.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 176 & 177. *Billboard-like facade*: Star Electric Supply Company, Newark BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed by Barney Sumner Gruzen, 1936. Source: Architectural Forum 64 (May 1936): 426.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

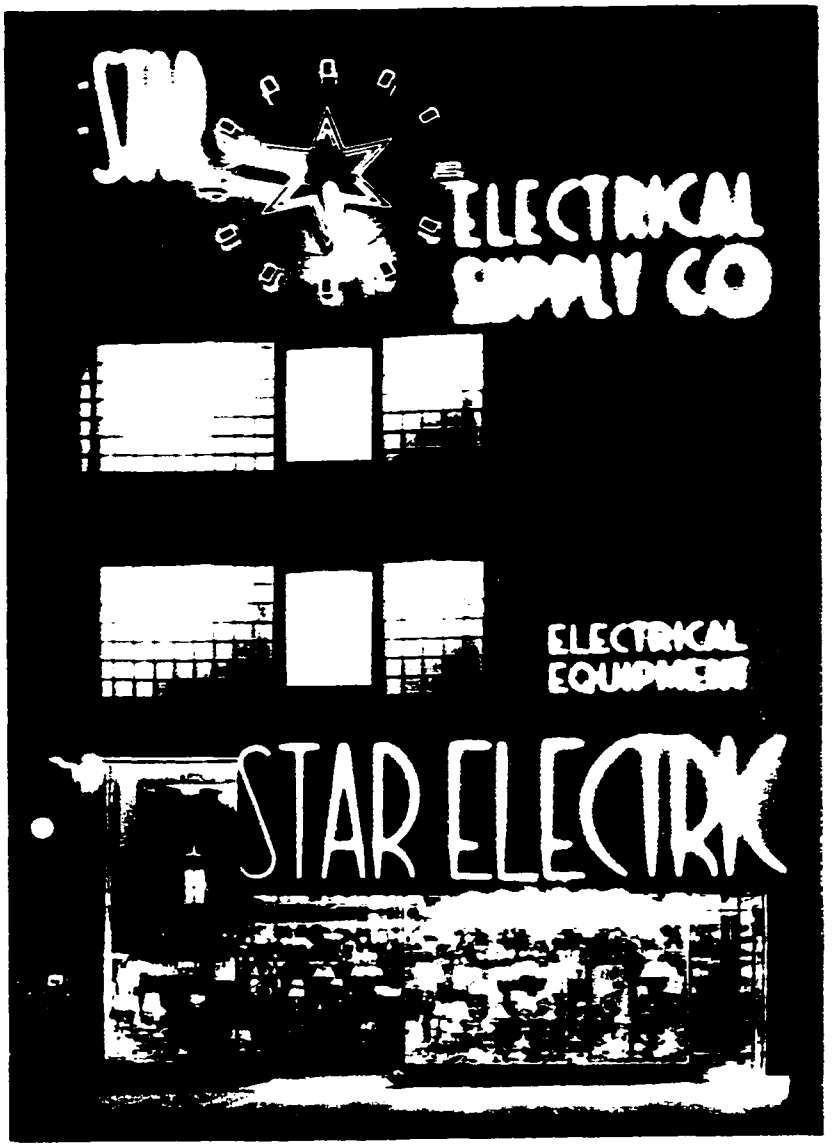


Figure 178. Night view of Star Electric Supply Company, Newark AFTER modernization. Designed by Barney Sumner Gruzen, 1936. Source: Architectural Forum 67 (August 1937): 103.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

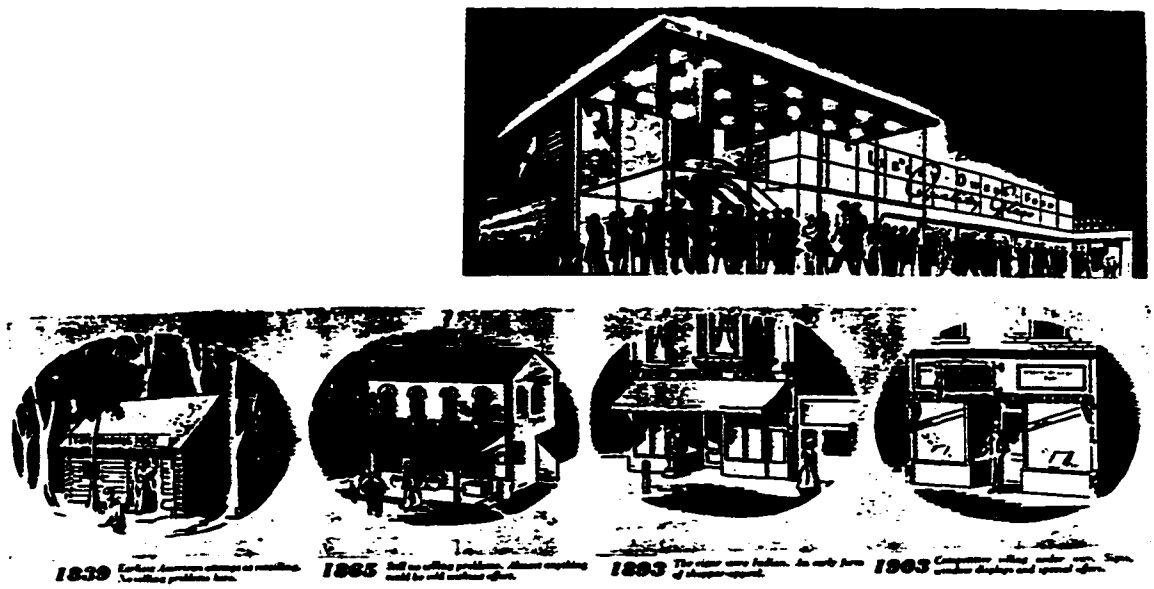


Figure 179. Timeline of retail evolution, from LOF promotional piece "Keeping Store Today," 1939. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford Archives, Sales & Promotion.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

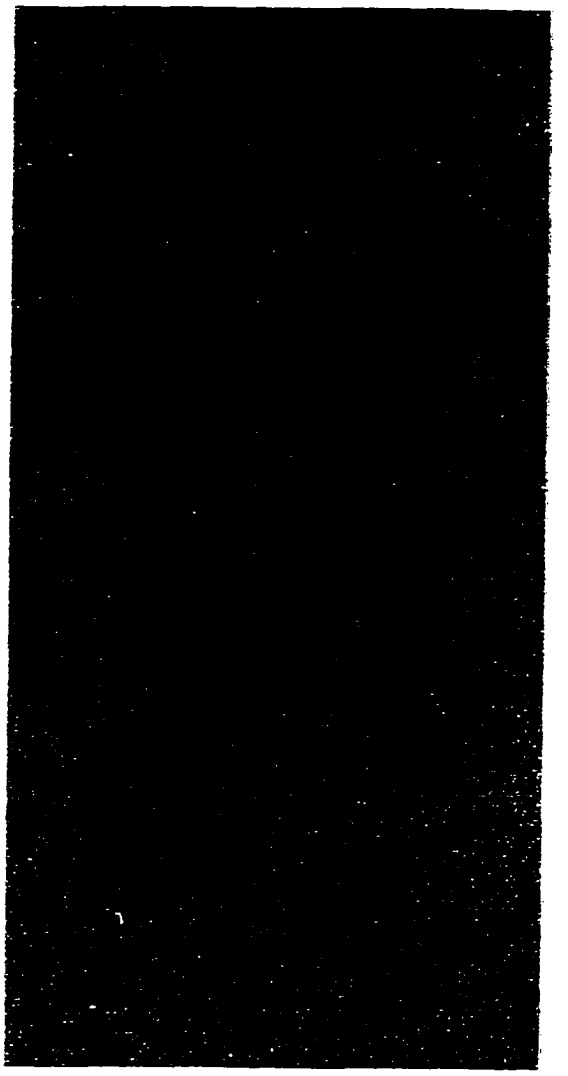


Figure 180. Evolution Chart of Automobile by Raymond Loewy, 1936. Source: Martin Greif, Depression Modern (1975), p. 26.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

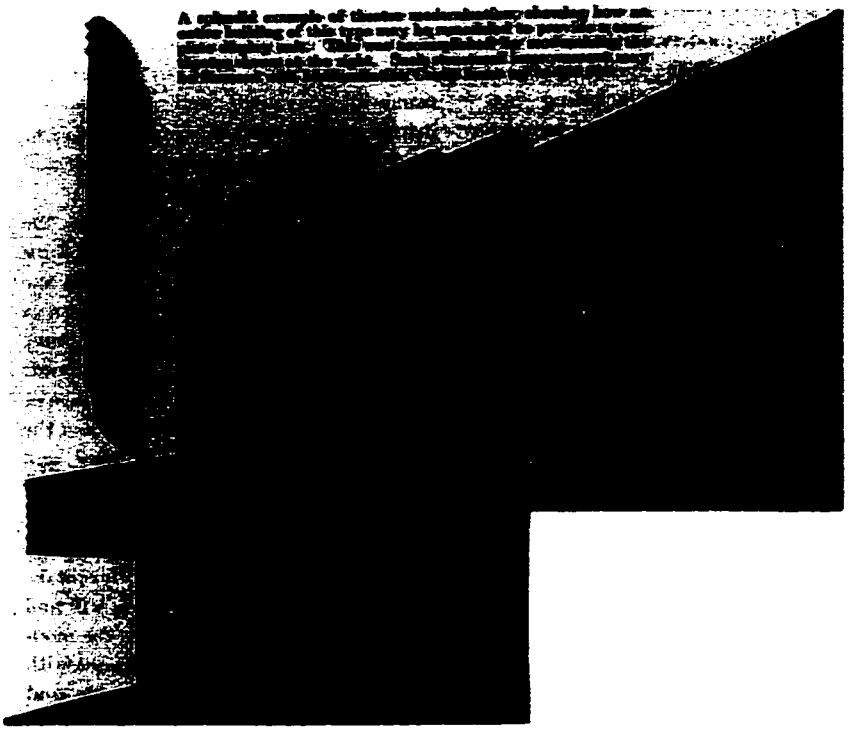


Figure 181. Lancaster Movie Theater BEFORE & AFTER modernization. *Typical FHA case study*. Source: FHA, Modernize for Profit (1935), p. 10.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 182. *Montage of obsolete buildings.* Source: FHA, Modernize for Profit (1935), p. 3.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 183. Retailer to Architect: "I Want the Smartest Store on the Street." From LOF promotional piece, 1938.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

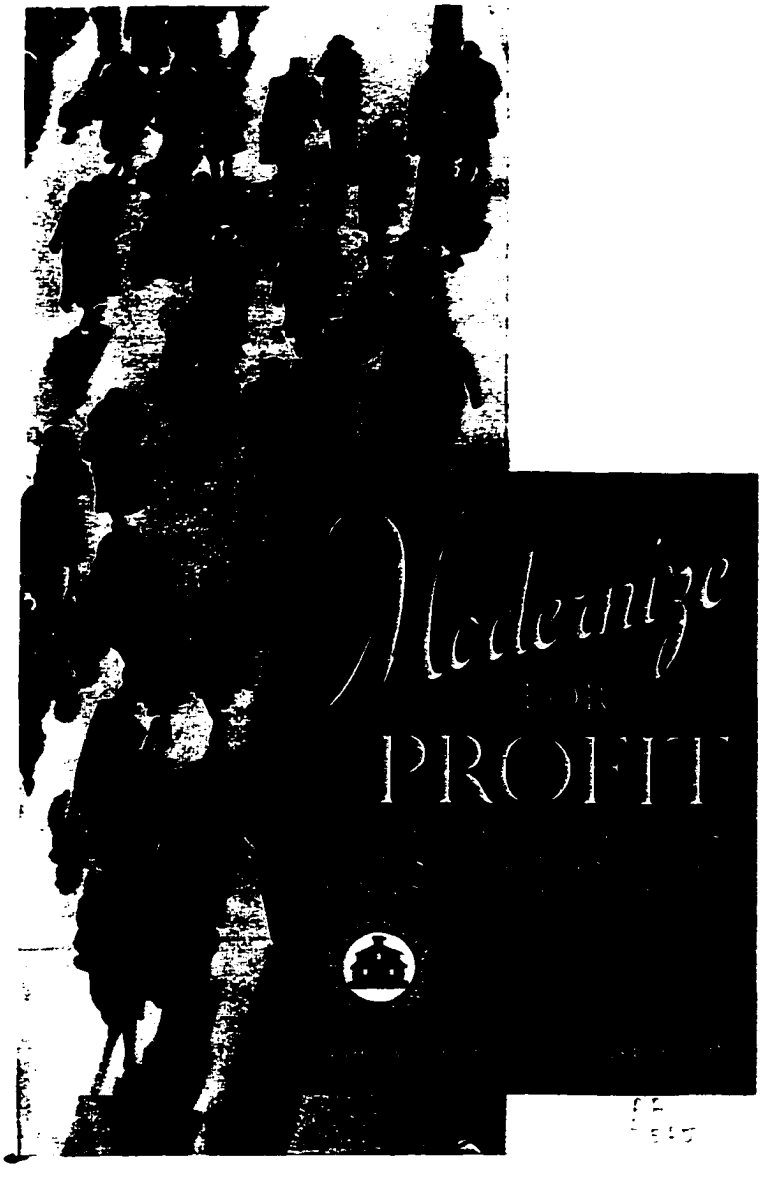
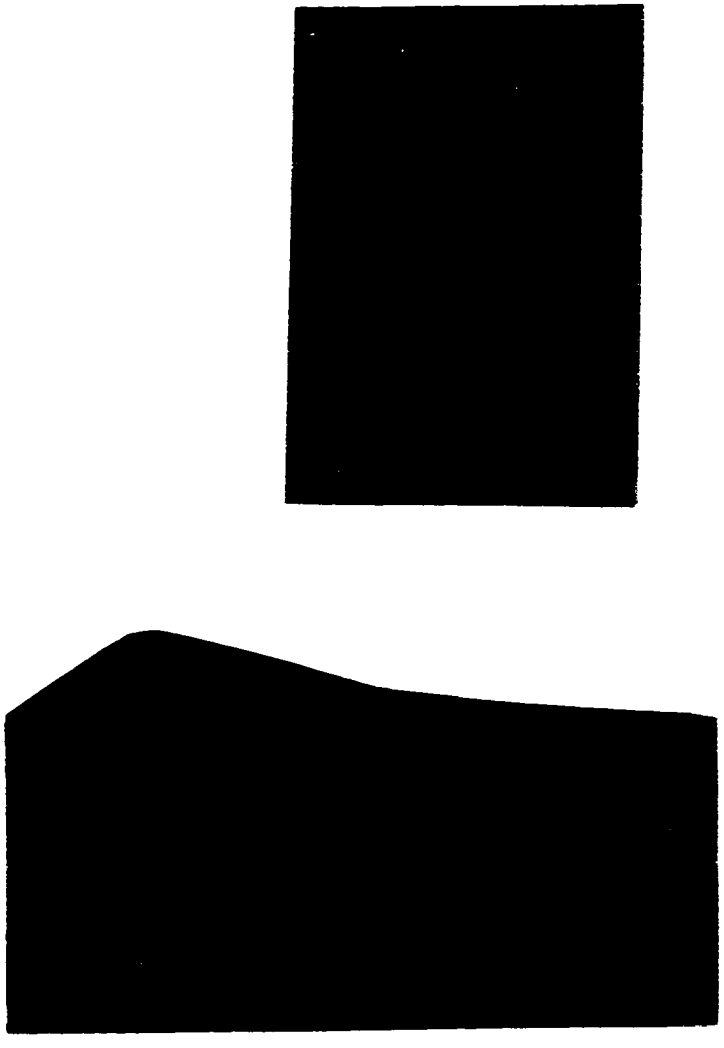


Figure 184. *Modern shoppers* on title page of Modernize for Profit. Source: FHA, Modernize for Profit (1935), p. 1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 185 & 186. *Women as consumers of home modernization.* Source: FHA, How to Modernize Your Home (1935), pp. 18-19.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 187. "Accent on Style!" Oldsmobile advertisement. Source: House and Garden, January 1936, p. 65.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 188-89 & 190-91. *Stripping & Sheathing*: Commercial block in Chicago BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed by Leo B. Steif, 1936. Source: Architectural Forum 64 (January 1936): 73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

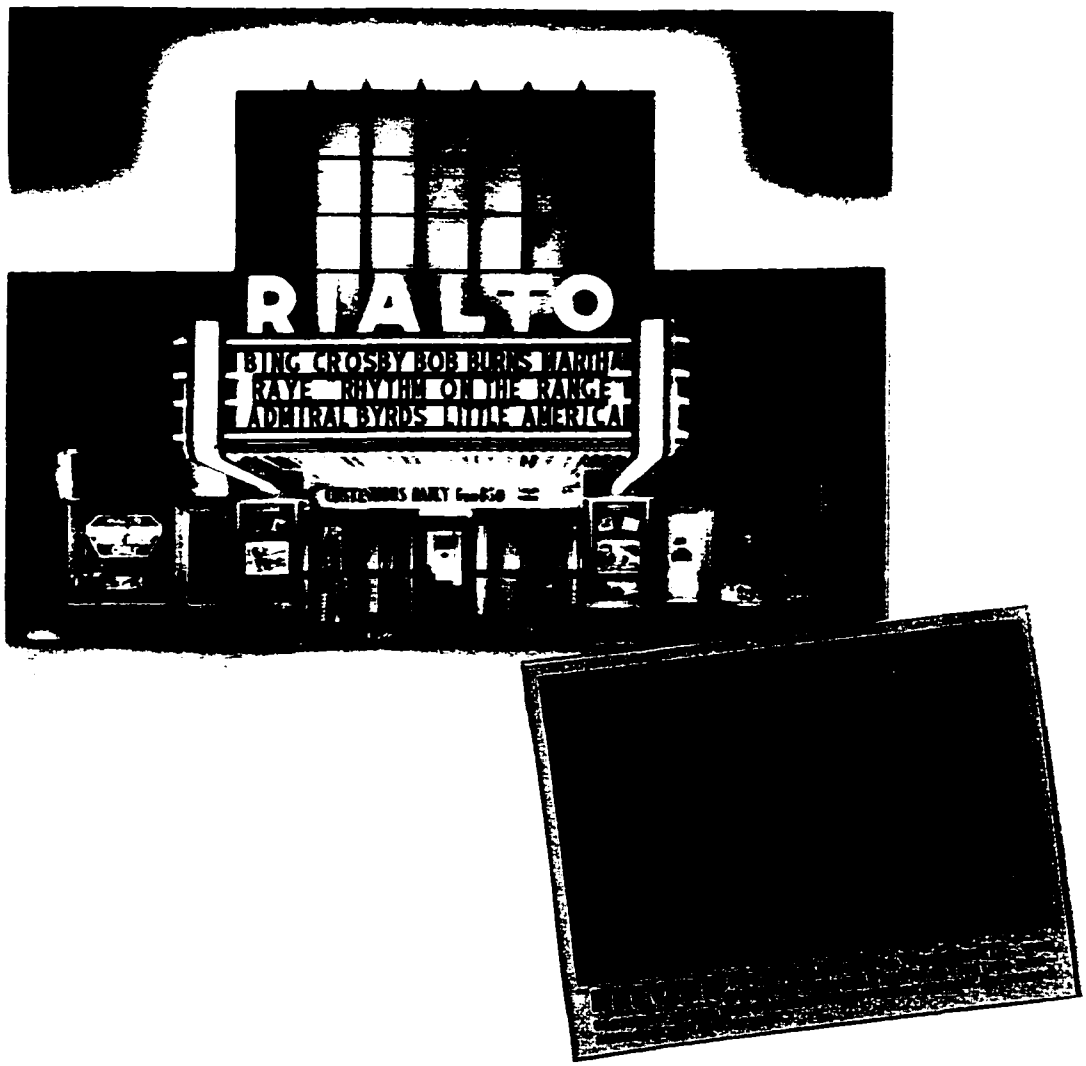


Figure 192. Rialto Movie Theater in Waukegan, Illinois BEFORE & AFTER modernization, 1936. Source: Architectural Forum 66 (March 1937): 61.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 193. "Give Packages Plate Glass Pulling Power," Celluloid advertisement. Source: Fortune, October 1936, p. 73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

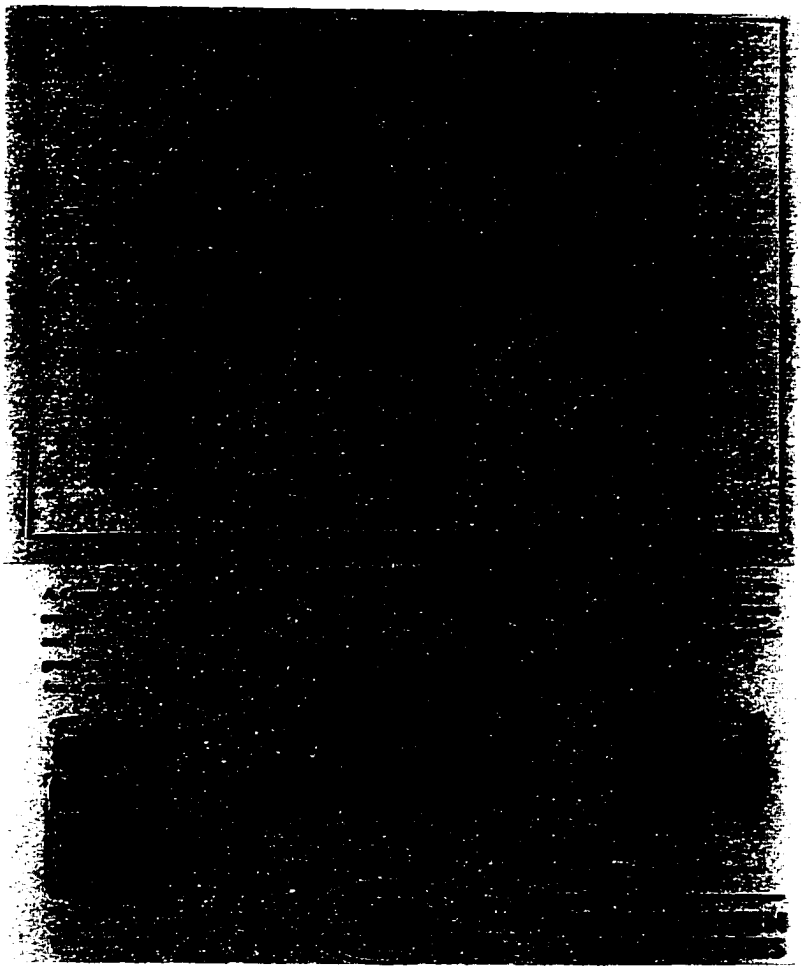


Figure 194. *Modernistic drug packaging*: Publix Complete Manicure set, 1932. Source: Chain Store Age, January 1932, p. 38.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

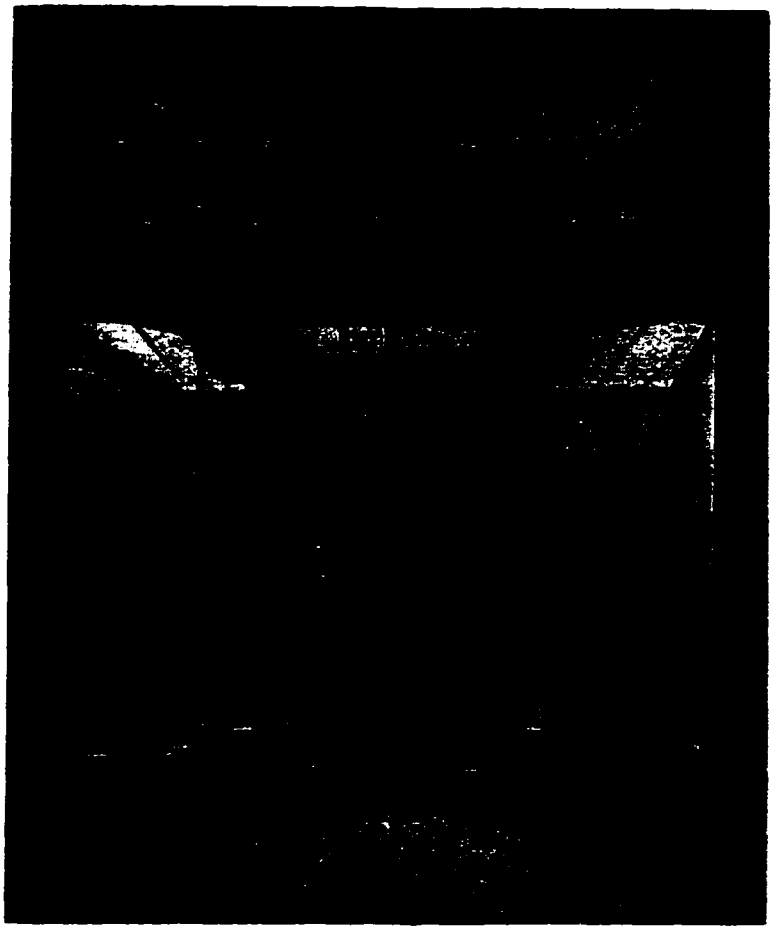
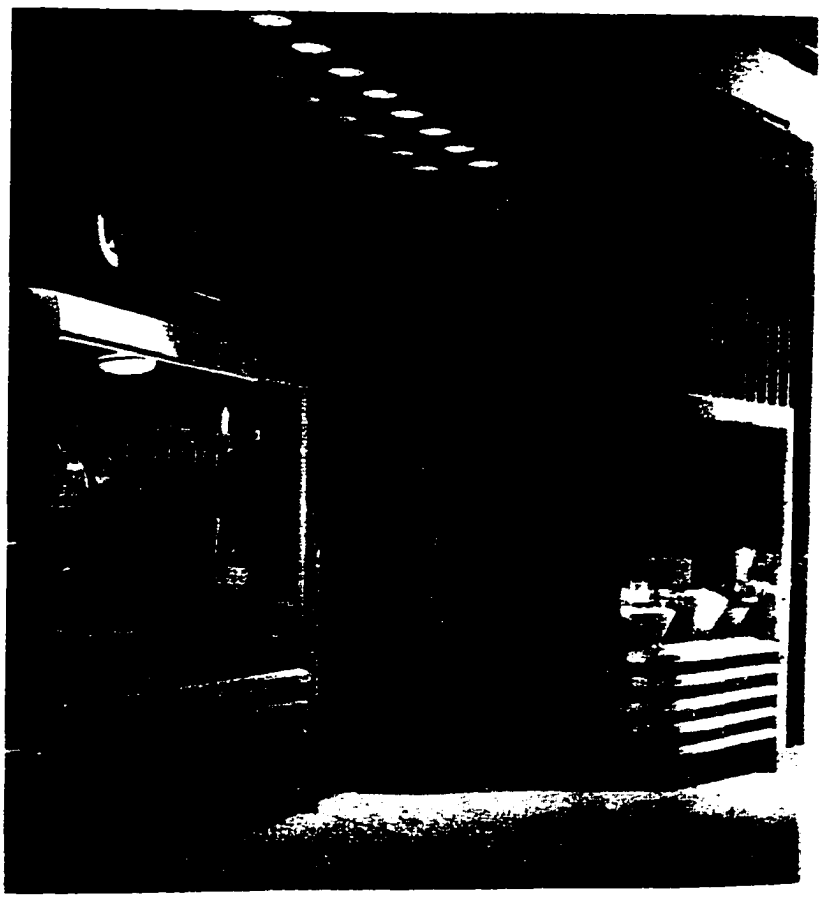


Figure 195. *Modernistic drug store*, Katz & Besthoff Store No. 9 in Chicago, 1932. Source: Chain Store Age, January 1932, p. 31.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 196 & 197. Chock Full o' Nuts in New York City, designed by Horace Ginsbern, 1936. General view and store entrance. Source: Architectural Forum 65 (October 1936): 317.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





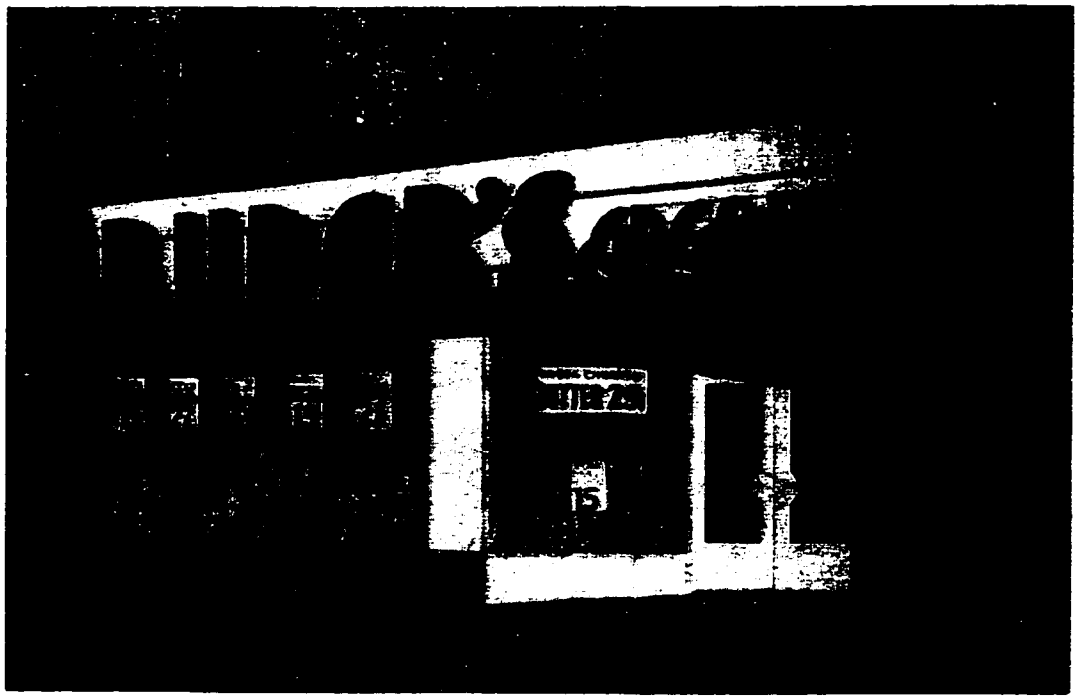
Figures 198 & 199. Cushman's Sons Bakers: typical modernized units, circa. 1935-6. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1936, p. 114; Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 105.

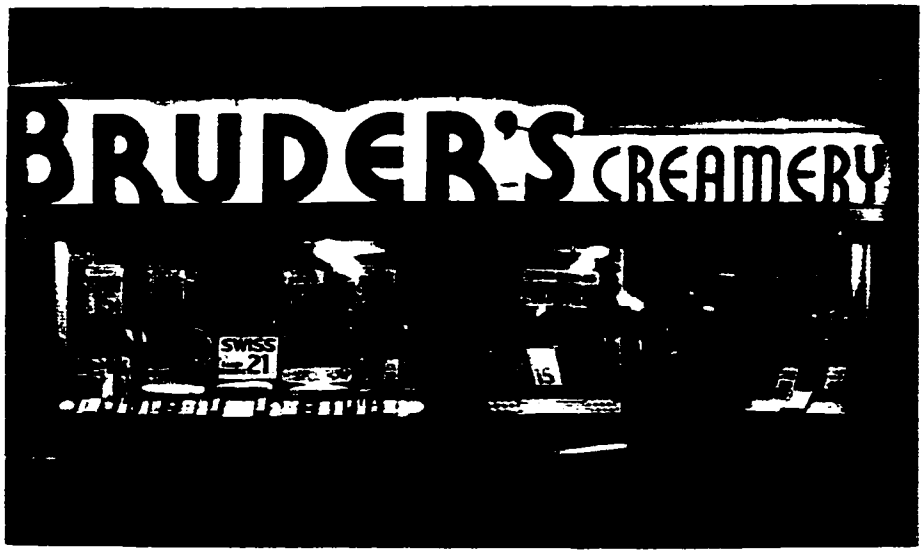
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 200-201 & 202. Cushman's Sons Bakers: Units modernized by Raymond Loewy, 1936-39, general views and elevation. Source: American Architect 150 (June 1937): 93-96.





Figures 203 & 204. Bruder's Creamery in Cleveland, Ohio. Modernized by Wilbur Henry Adams, 1935. Day and night views. Source: Chain Store Age, June 1935, p. 72; Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 60.

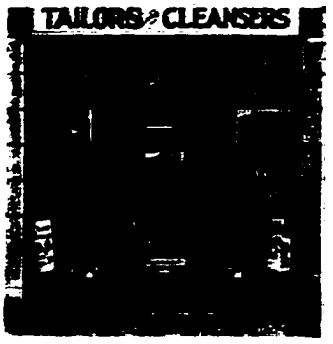
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

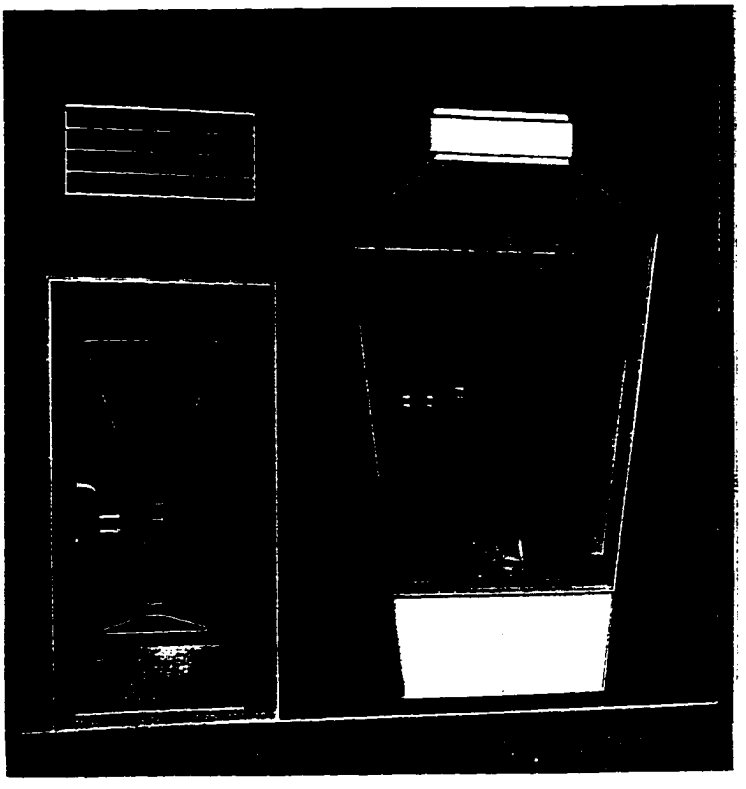




Figures 205 & 206. Wilmington Blue Print Service in Wilmington, Delaware BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed by Samuel and Victorine Homsey, 1938. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 101.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 207 & 208. Cocktail Lounge in Boston BEFORE & AFTER modernization. Designed and installed by Patriarca Store Fixtures, 1936. Source: American Architect 149 (August 1936): 114.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

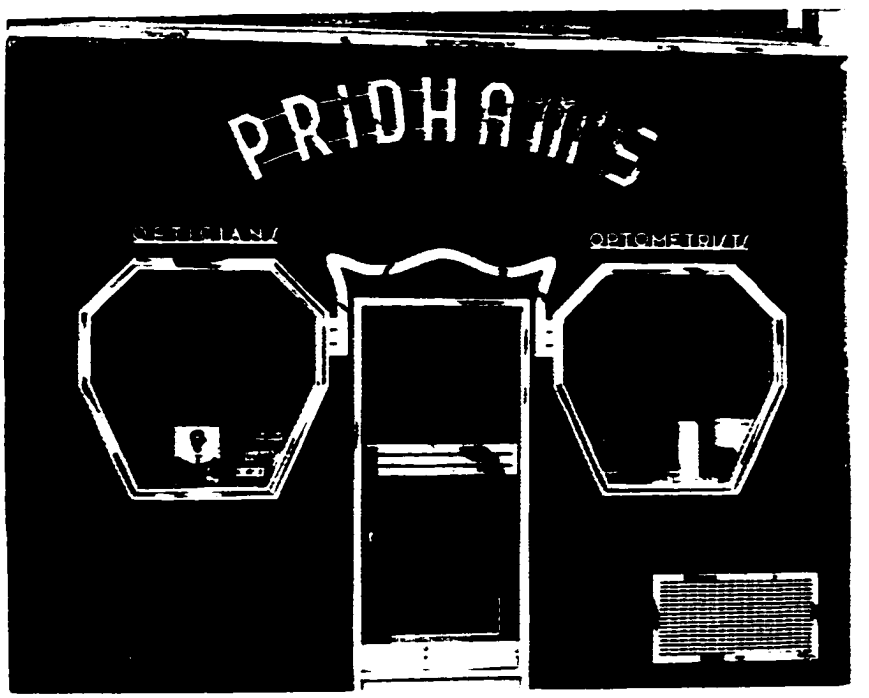
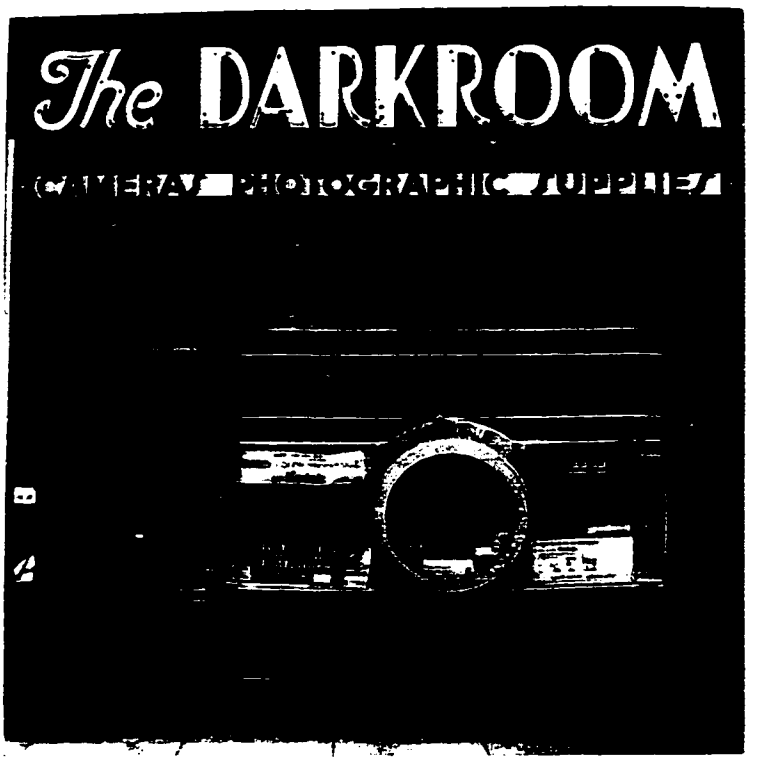
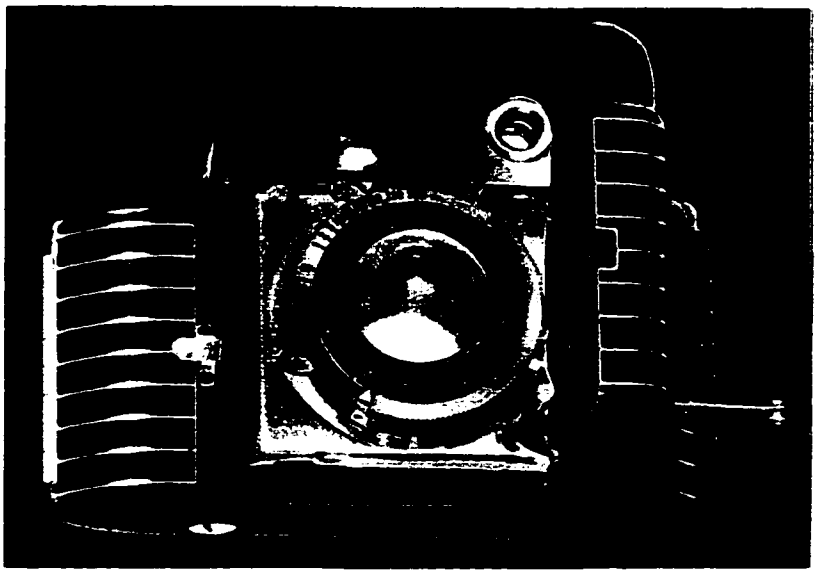


Figure 209. Pridham's Opticians by Brasco Store Fronts, 1938. Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1939), 19/1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 210 & 211. The Darkroom in Los Angeles, designed by Marcus Miller, 1938 & the Kodak Bantam Special Camera, designed by Walter Dorwin Teague, 1936. Source: Jim Heimann, California Crazy (1980), p. 48; John Heskett, Industrial Design (1980), p. 106.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 212 & 213. *Typical Beauty Shop Modernization:* Ann's Beauty Salon in New York City, designed by Walter Werkle, 1938. Source: Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 100.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

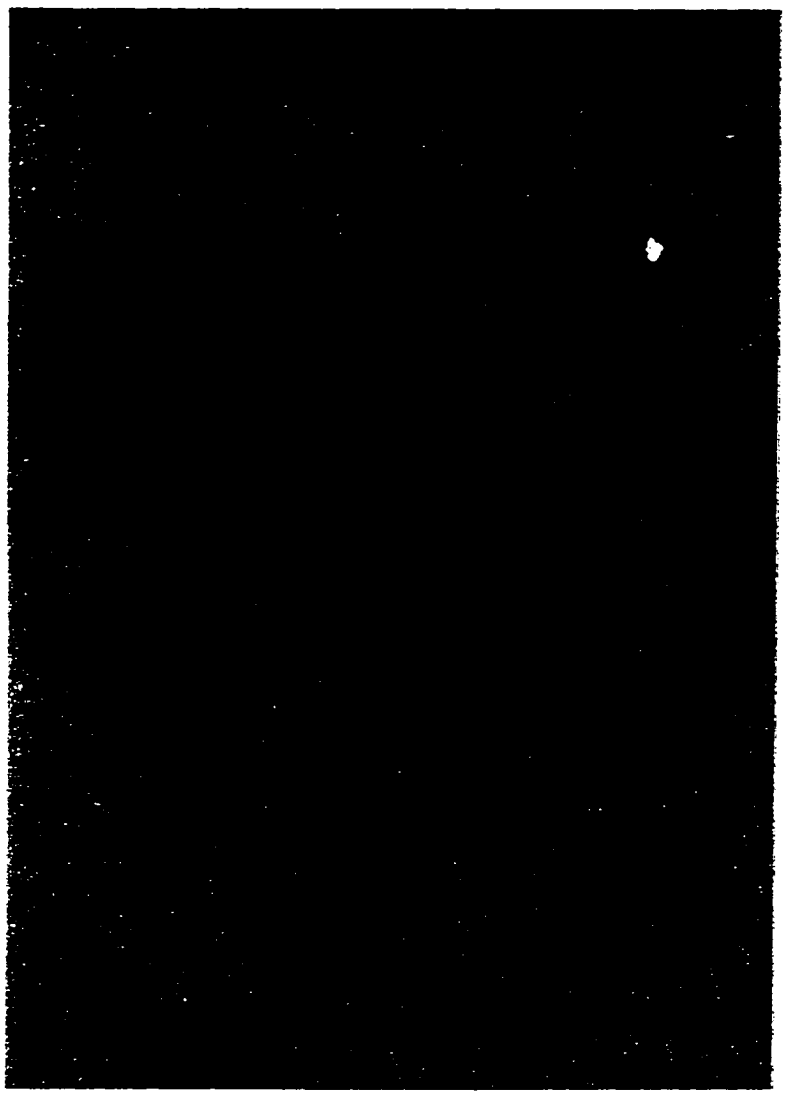


Figure 214. "New Faces for Old Buildings," Republic Steel advertisement. Source: Architectural Forum 62 (June 1935): 45.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

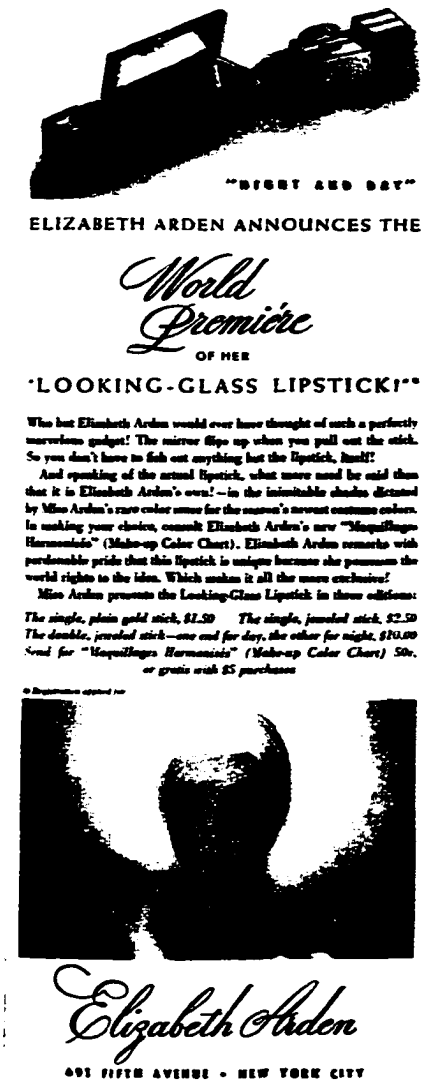


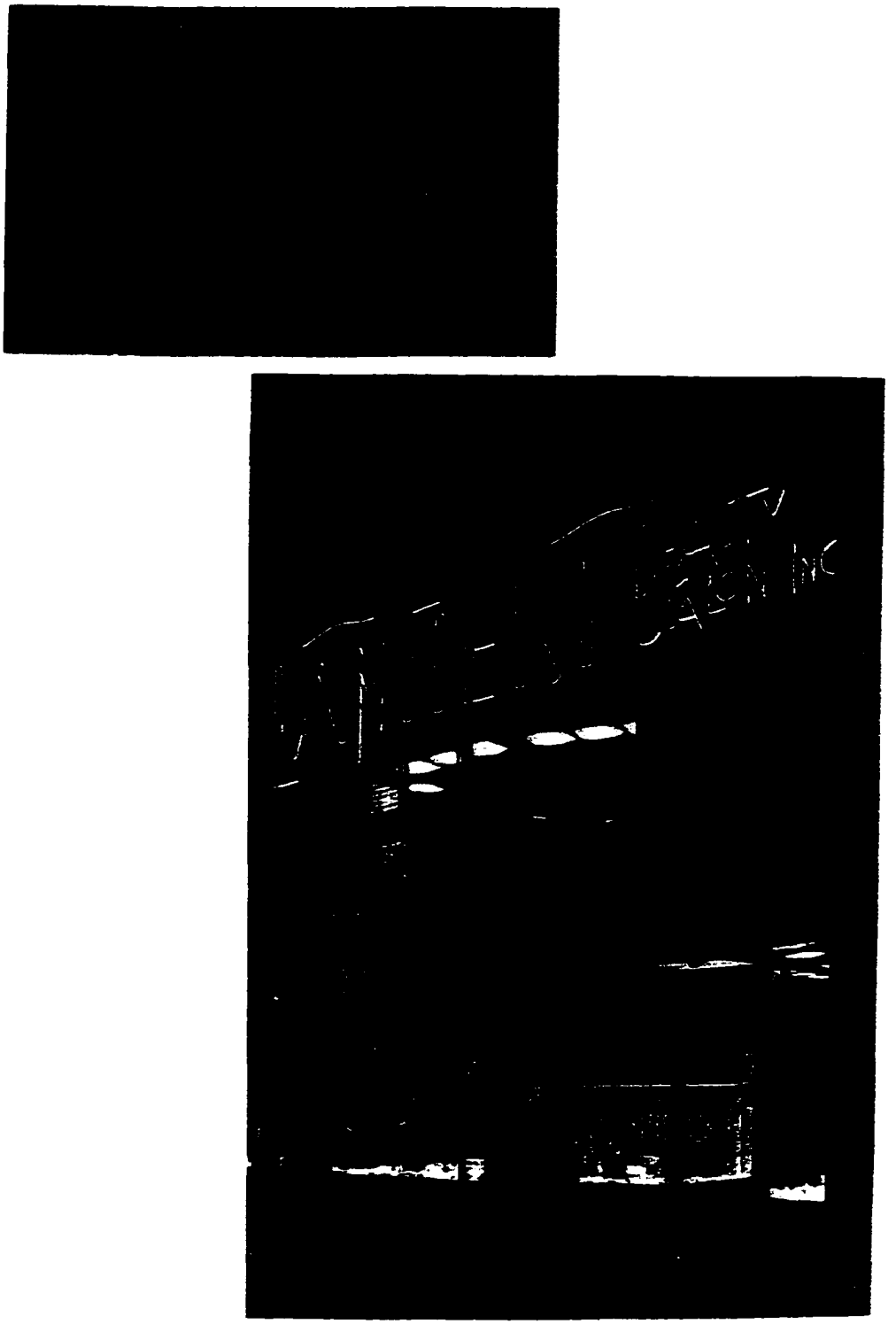
Figure 215. "World Premiere...," Elizabeth Arden advertisement for lipstick and lipstick case. Source: House and Garden, March 1936, p. 89.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 216. "One cream to buy...," Primrose House advertisement for Delv Face Cream. Source: New Yorker, April 1936, p. 57.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 217 & 218. Lantieri Beauty Salon in New York City, modernized by Vahan Hagopian, 1935. Source: Real Estate Record, 16 November 1935, pp. 19-20.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

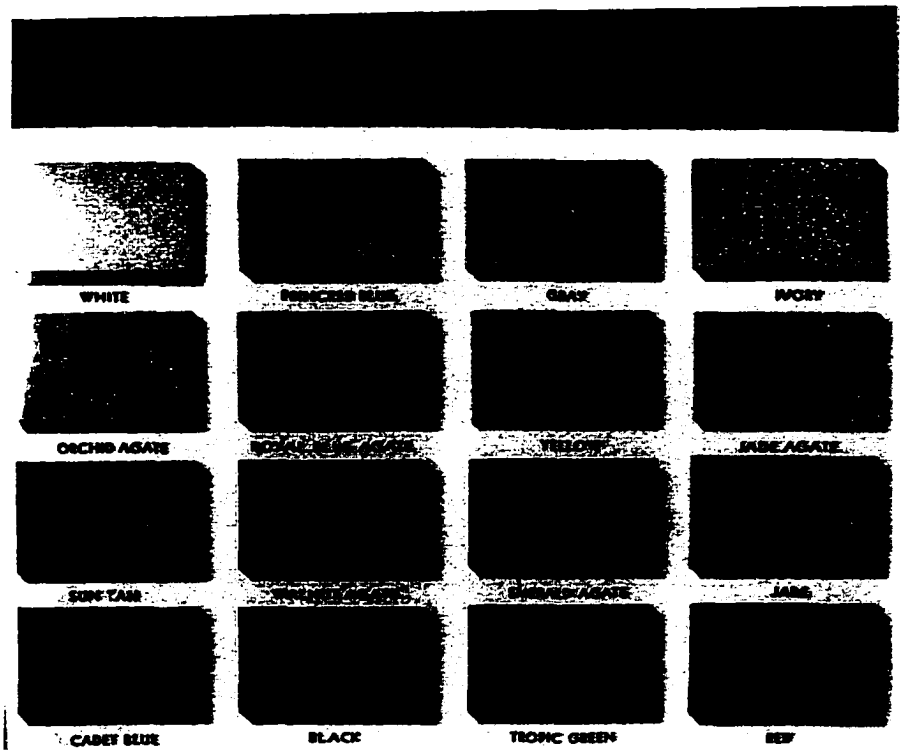


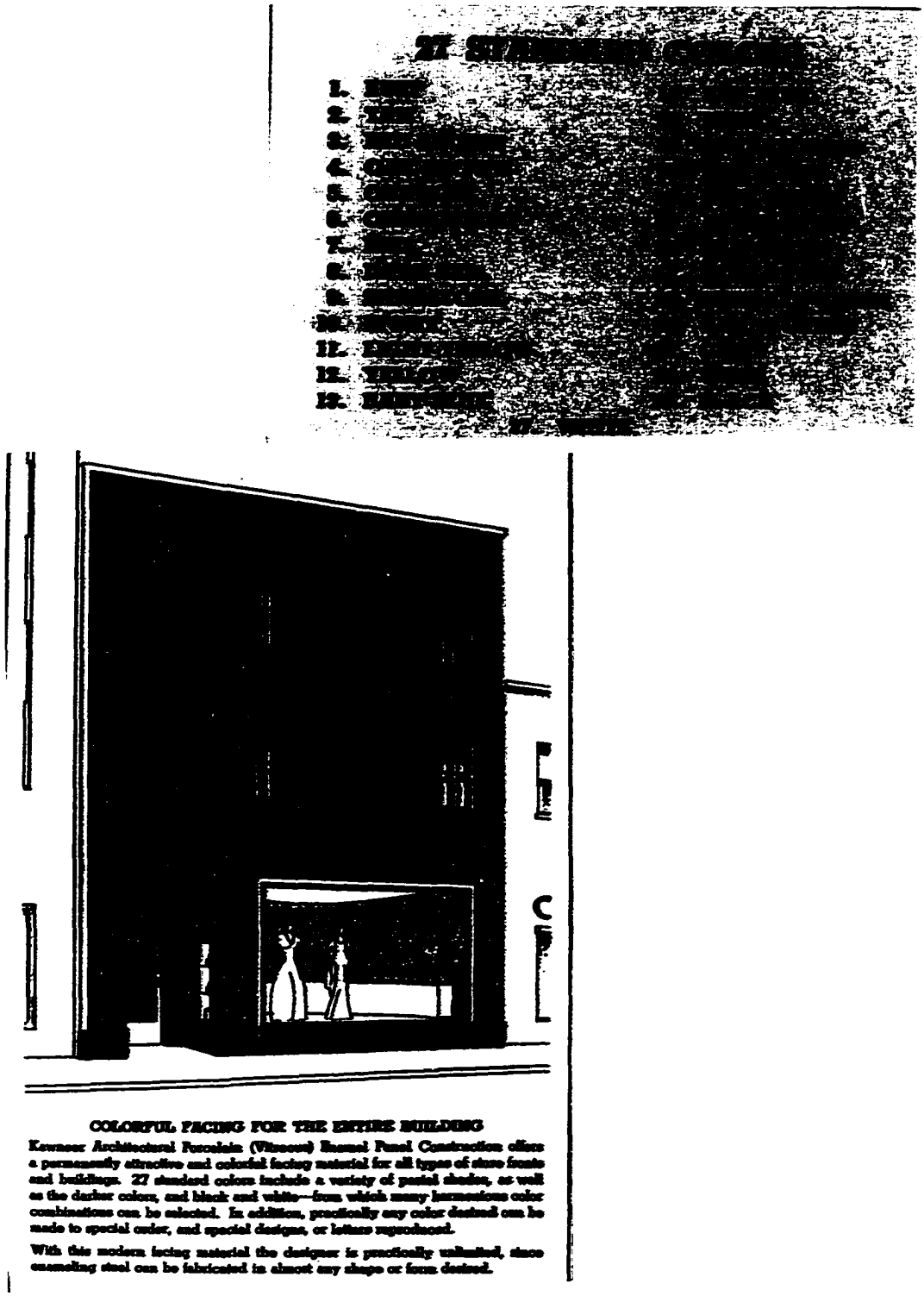
Figure 219. LOF, Standard Vitrolite Colors, 1939. Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1940), 18/2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 220. "*Smoky Shades* for Summer!" Cutex Lipstick and Nail Polishes, 1936. Source: Chain Store Age, June 1936, p. 59.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



COLORFUL FACING FOR THE ENTIRE BUILDING

Kawneer Architectural Porcelain (Vitreous) Enamel Panel Construction offers a permanently attractive and colorful facing material for all types of store fronts and buildings. 27 standard colors include a variety of pastel shades, as well as the darker colors, and black and white—from which many harmonious color combinations can be selected. In addition, practically any color desired can be made to special order, and special designs, or letters reproduced.

With this modern facing material the designer is practically unlimited, since enameling steel can be fabricated in almost any shape or form desired.

Figures 221 & 222. Kawneer Store Fronts, Colorful Facing & Standard Colors, 1939. Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1939), 19/6; Sweet's Catalogue File (1940), 19/5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

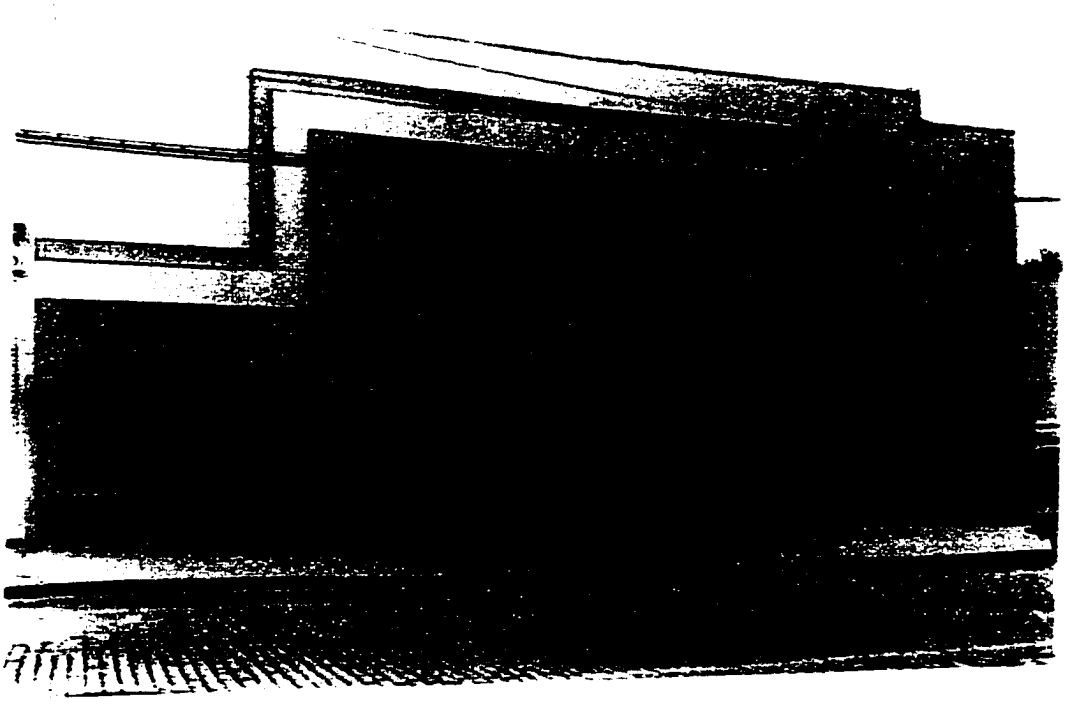


Figure 223. Kallet Theater in Pulaski, New York, modernized by George Ketchum, 1937. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

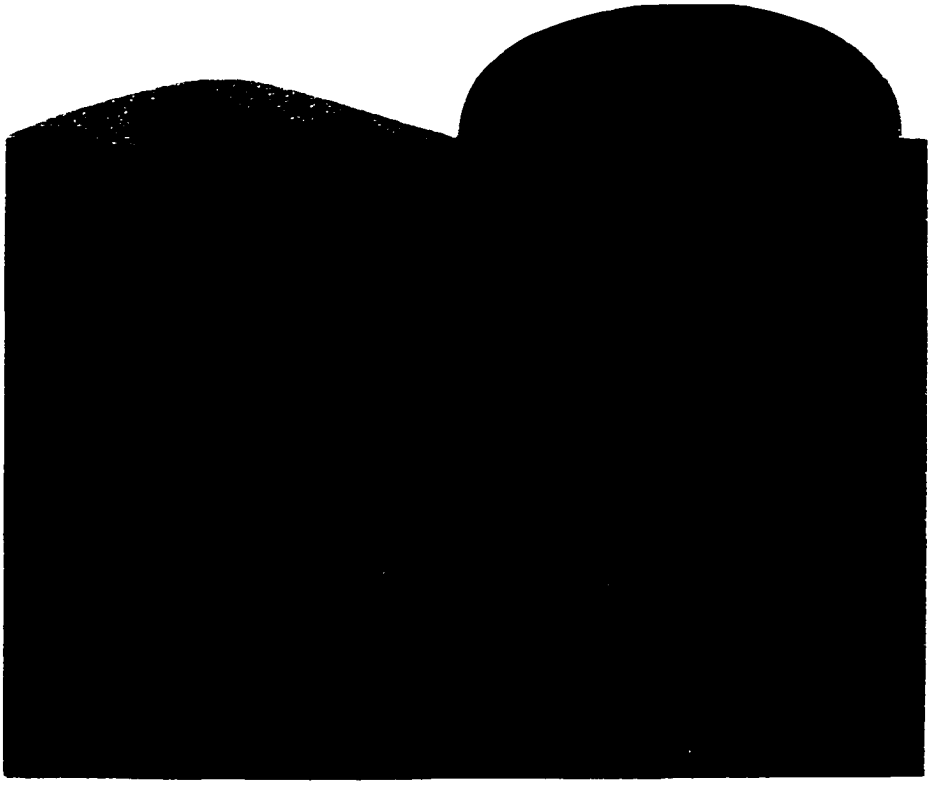


Figure 224. Sun Drugs BEFORE & AFTER modernization, in US Steel advertisement. Source: American Architect 150 (June 1937): 116.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

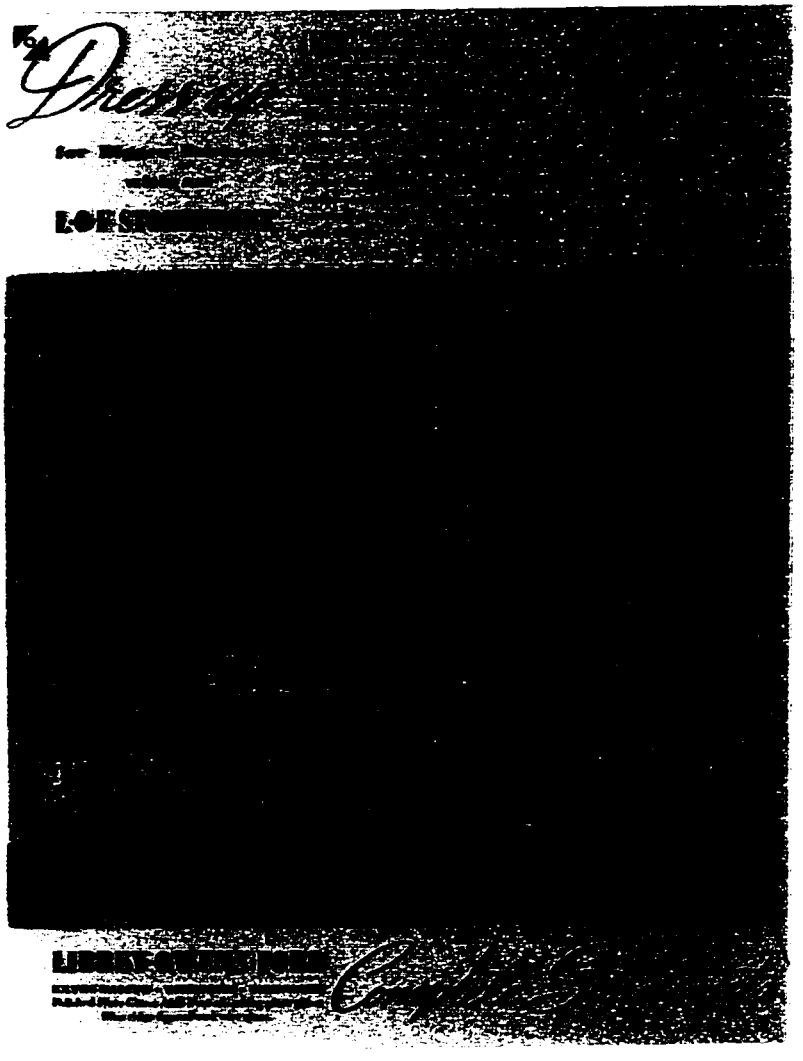


Figure 225. "Dress Up for Bigger Business," LOF advertisement from Apparel Arts, March 1938. Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1938 Advertising Scrapbook.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

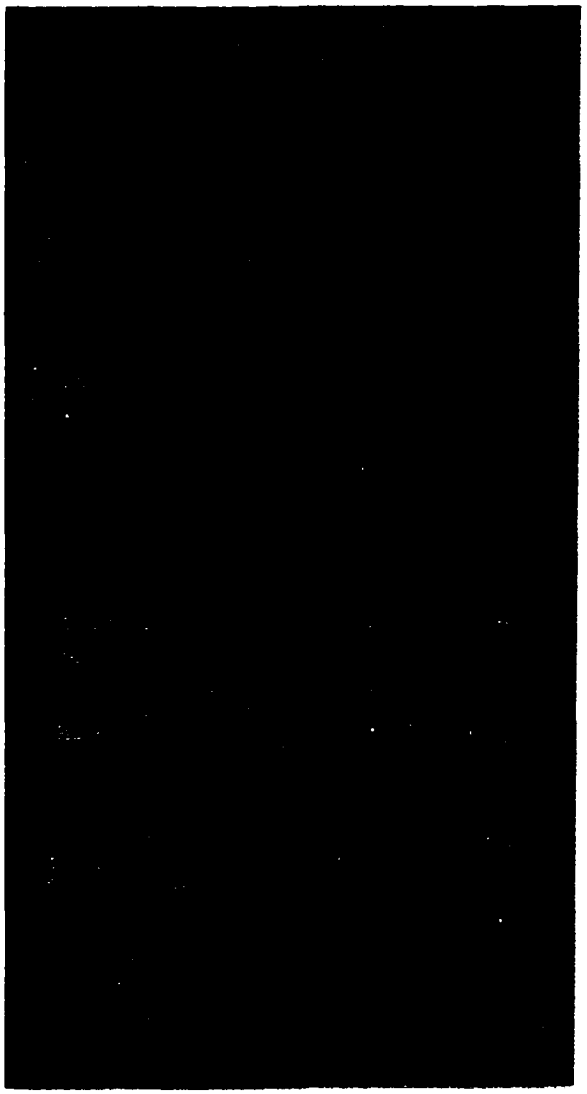


Figure 226. *Typical Brasco storefront*: "From sidewalk to coping unified in character." Source: Sweet's Catalogue File (1939), 19/1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

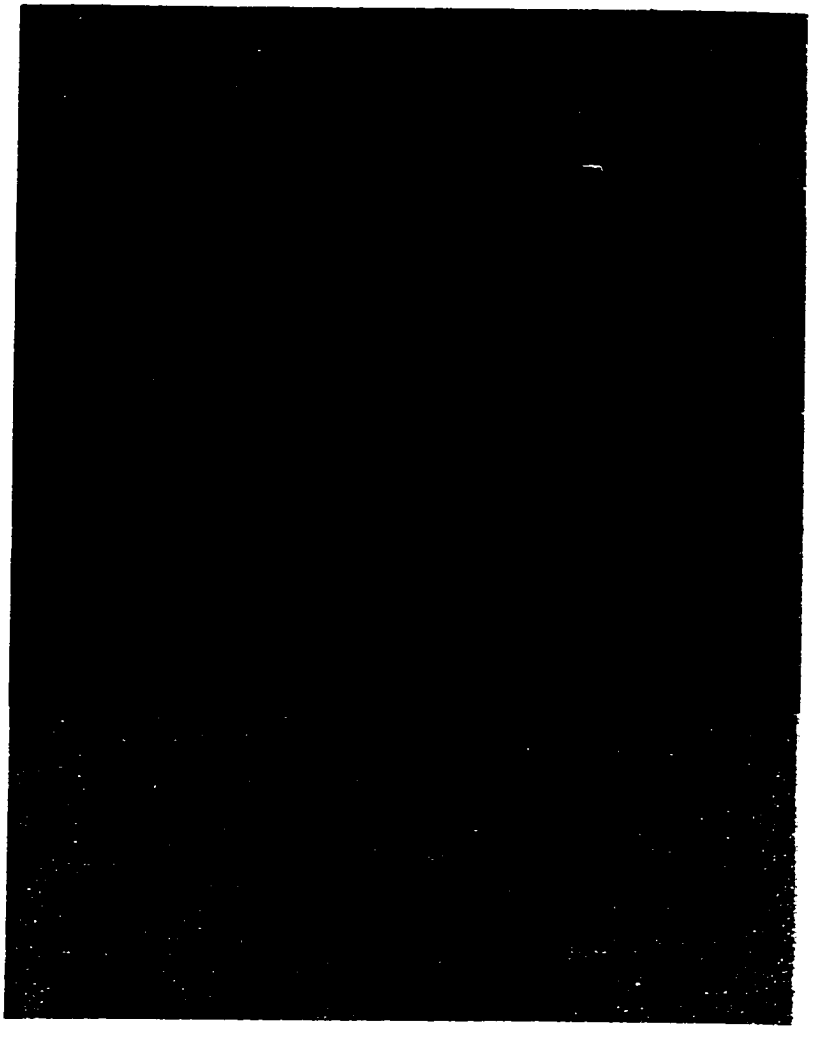


Figure 227. "The Wallflower of Main Street," LOF advertisement. Source: Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

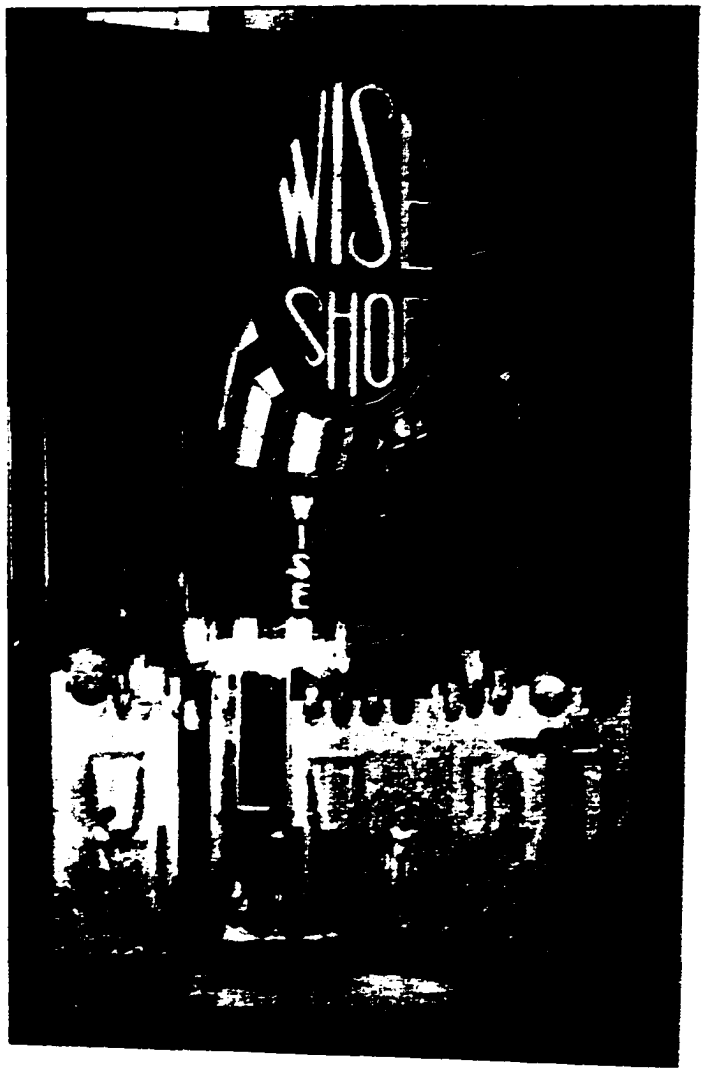
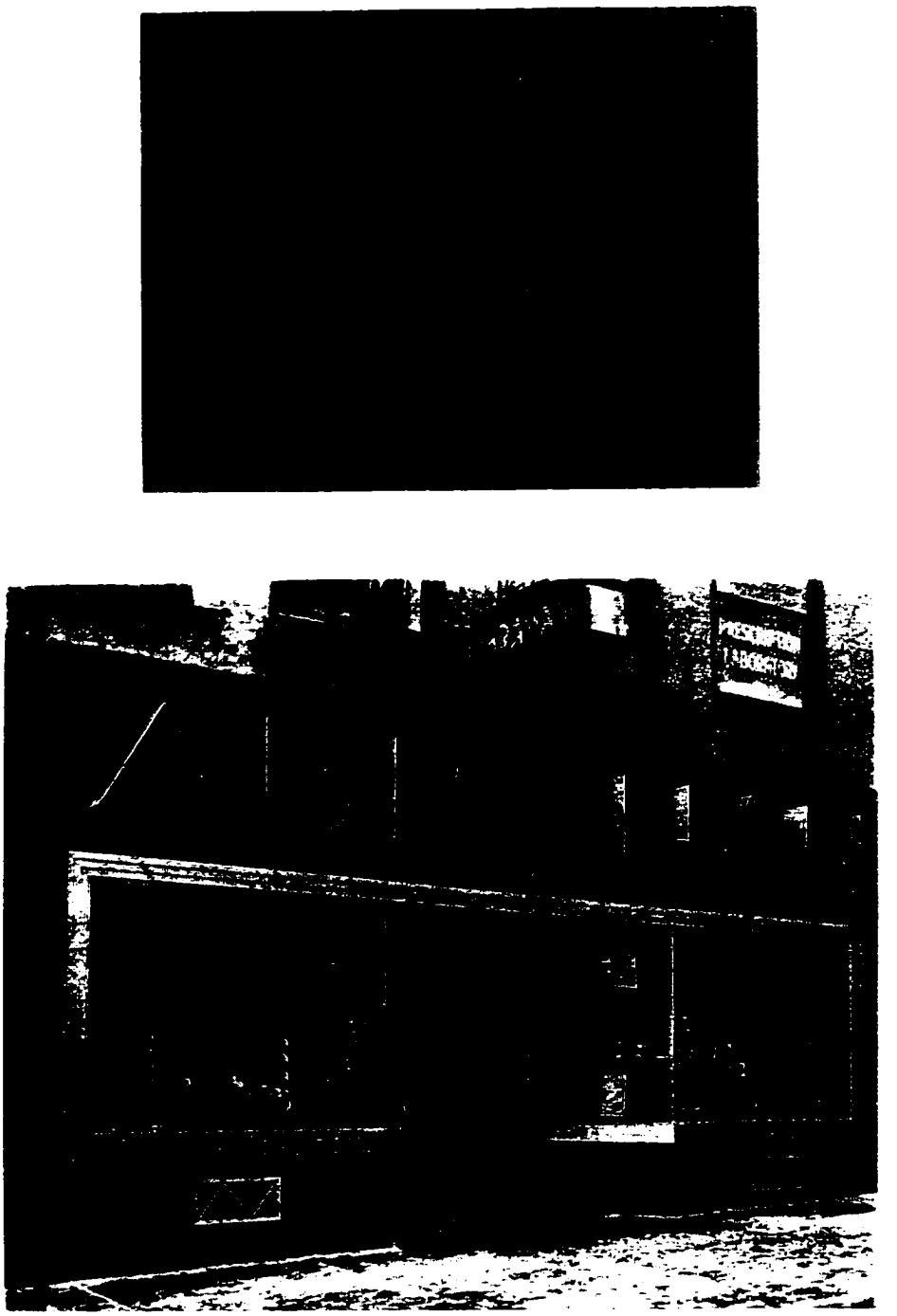


Figure 228. Wise Shoes in Chicago, 1933, utilizing 1925 "Fifth Avenue" standard front. Compare to Fig. 174. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1933, p. 72.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 229 & 230. Abraham Cigar Store in Burlington, Vermont, modernized by Louis Newton, 1934. Source: Architectural Forum 61 (August 1934): 116.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

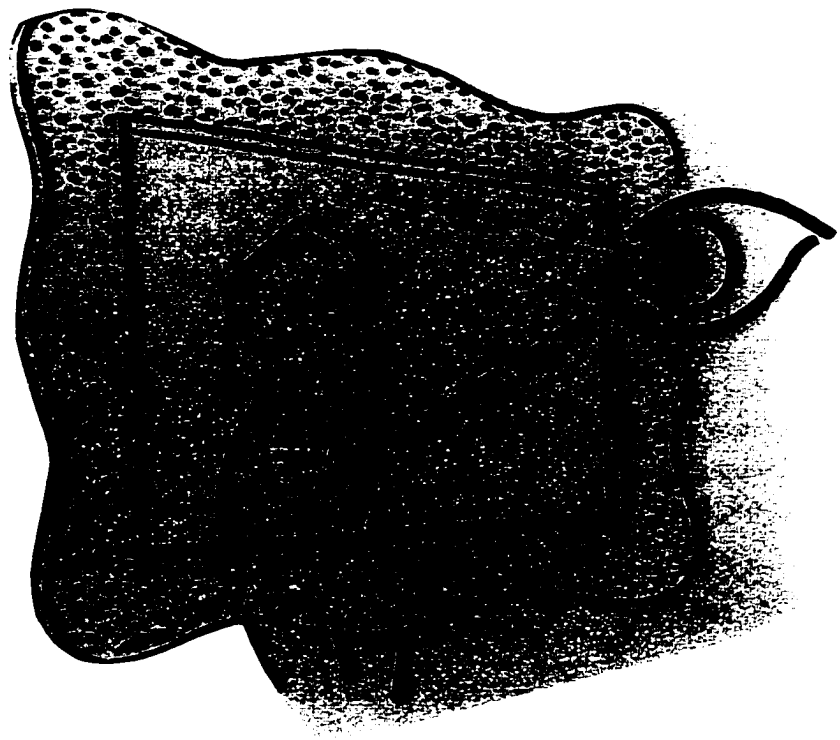


Figure 231. Diagram of Storefront Display by Morris Lapidus. Source: Architectural Record 88 (February 1941): 118.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 232. "Put on a Good Front, It Pays!" LOF promotional pamphlet, 1936. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1936 Advertising Scrapbook.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 233. "Critical Eyes are Sizing You Up Right Now," Williams Company advertisement. Source: Saturday Evening Post, August 1932, p. 77.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

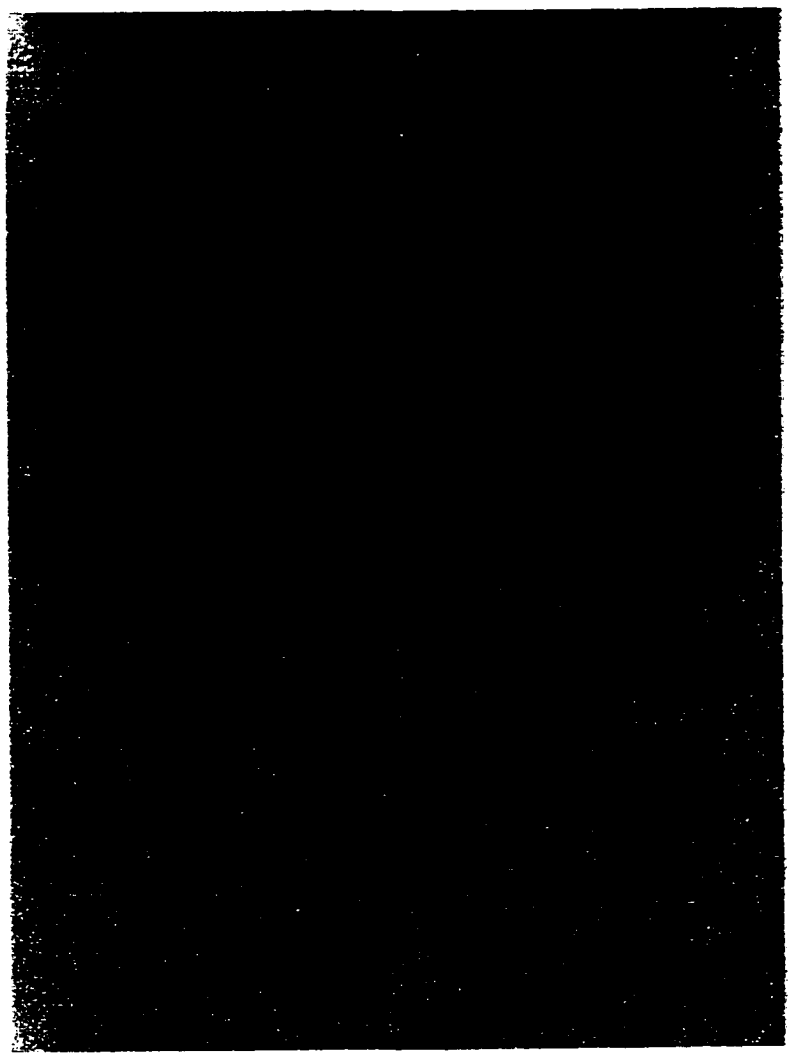
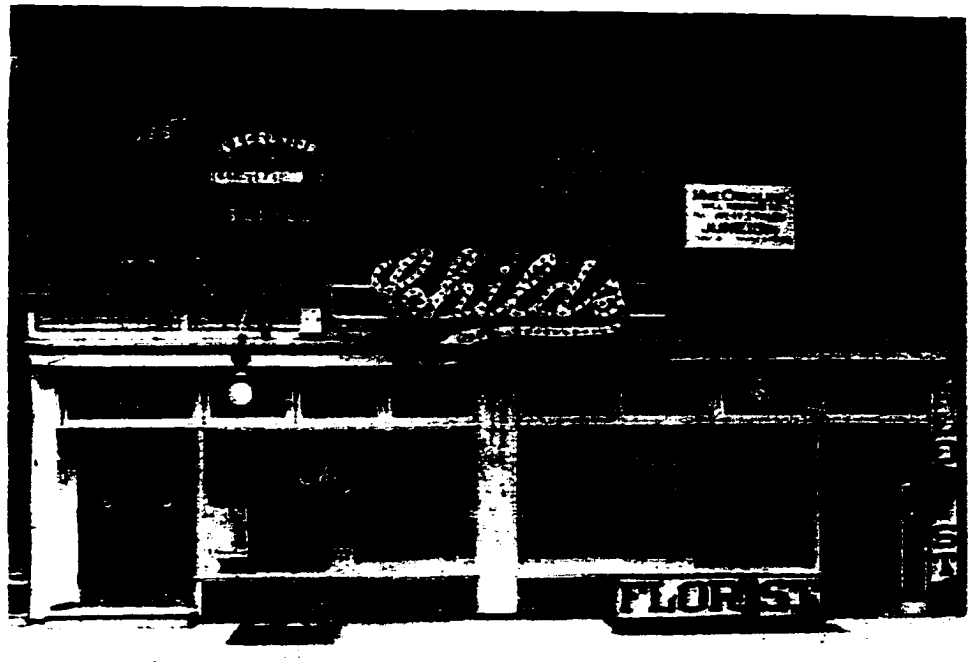
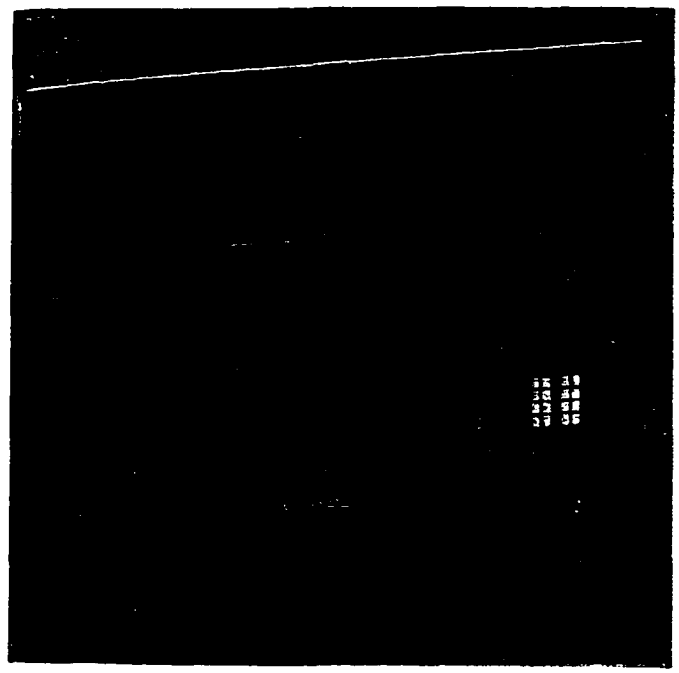


Figure 234. "For Individuality in Store Fronts," PPG advertisement. Source: Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

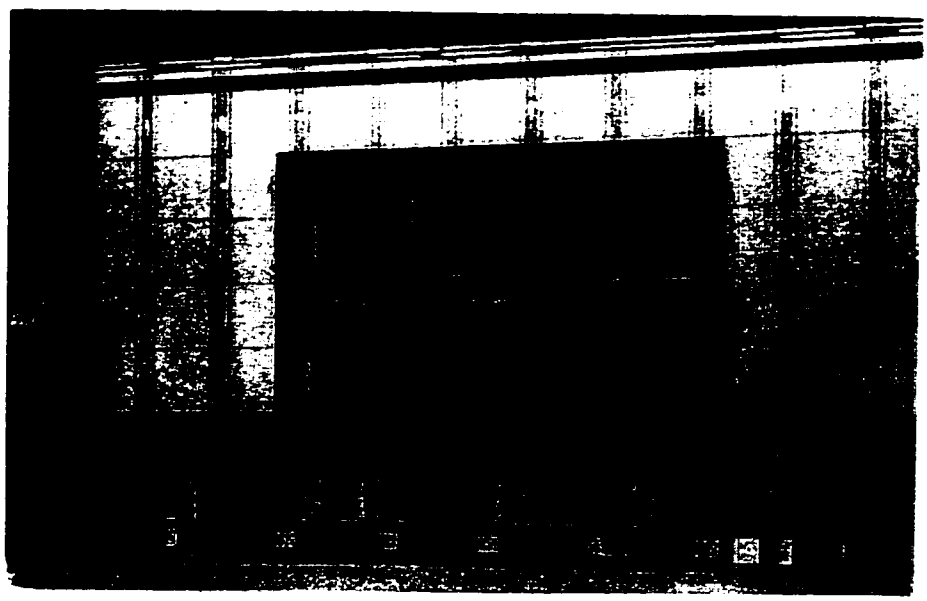




Figures 235 & 236. Childs Restaurant: Standard Dairy Front, c. 1900-1910 & modernized Childs at 196 Broadway, New York City, 1935. Source: Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 15; Chain Store Age, April 1935, p. 71.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 237 & 238. George Sweet, Childs Restaurant, Times Square, 1936 & typical modernized Childs. Source: Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 15; Sweet's Catalogue File (1939), 19/1.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

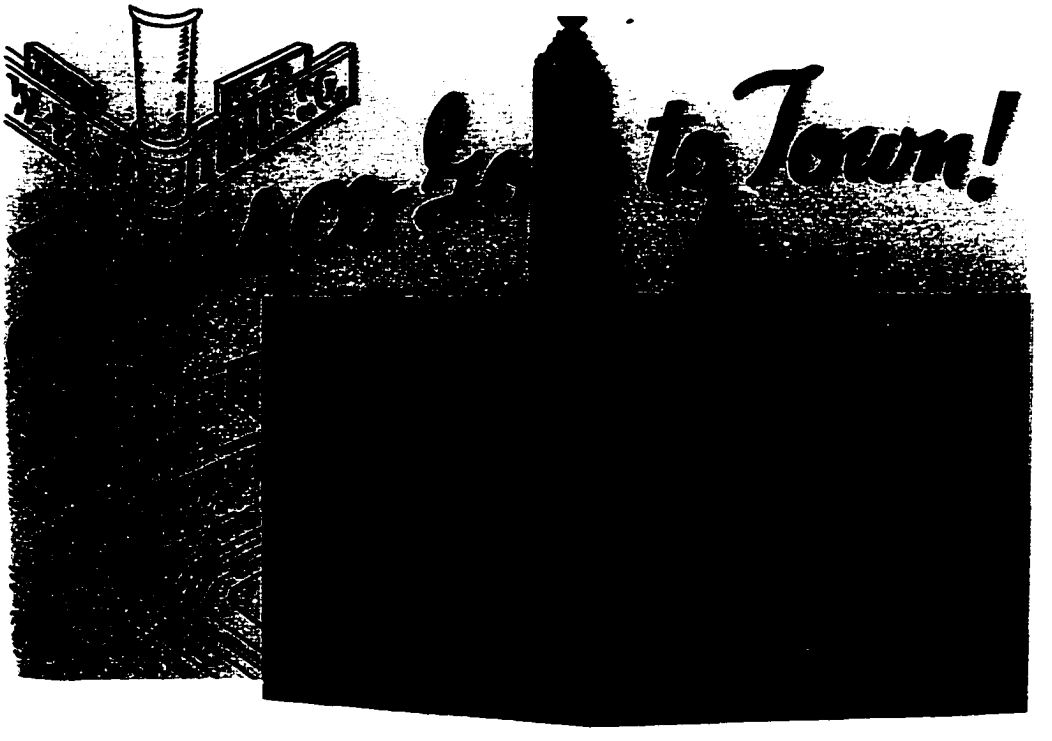


Figure 239. Rosario Candela, Rialto Theater, Times Square, 1935 (with George Sweet's modernized Childs at right). Source: Chain Store Age, June 1936, p. 105.

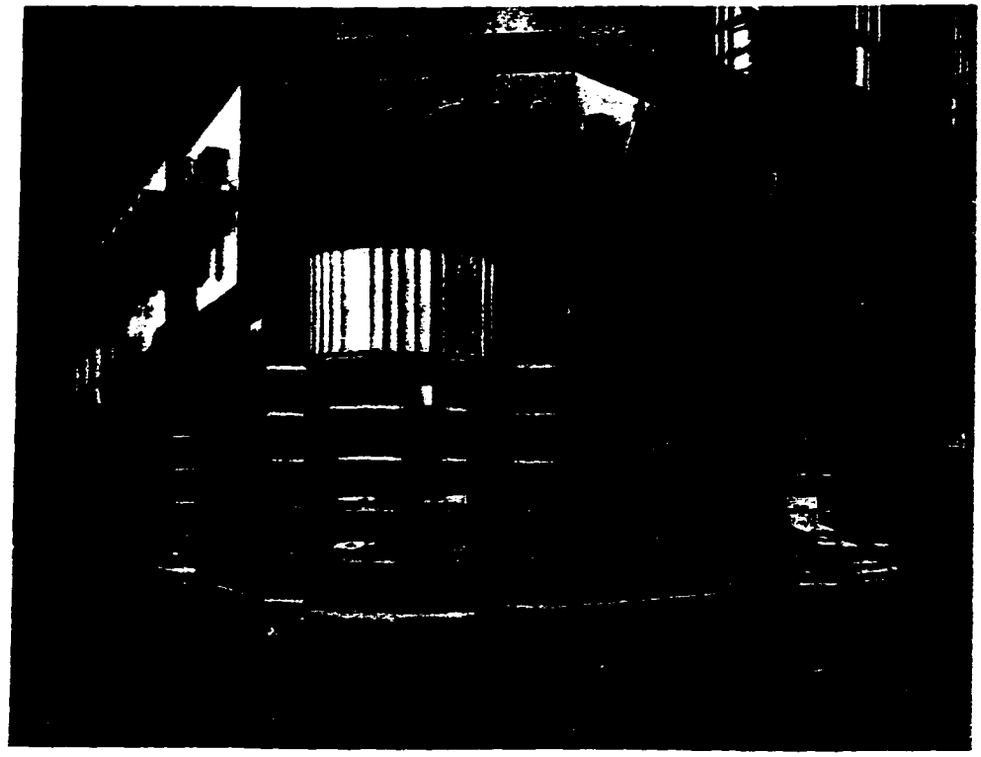
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

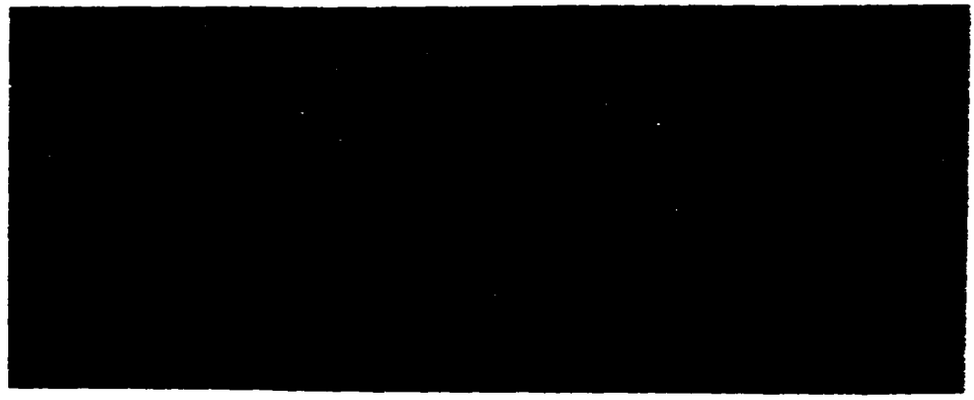




Figures 240-241. Horace Ginsbern, Hanscom Bake Shops, New York City, circa. 1936. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1934, back cover; Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 167.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.





Figures 242-243. Horace Ginsbern, Hanscom Bake Shops, New York City, circa. 1936. Source: Chain Store Age, November 1934, back cover; Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 167.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

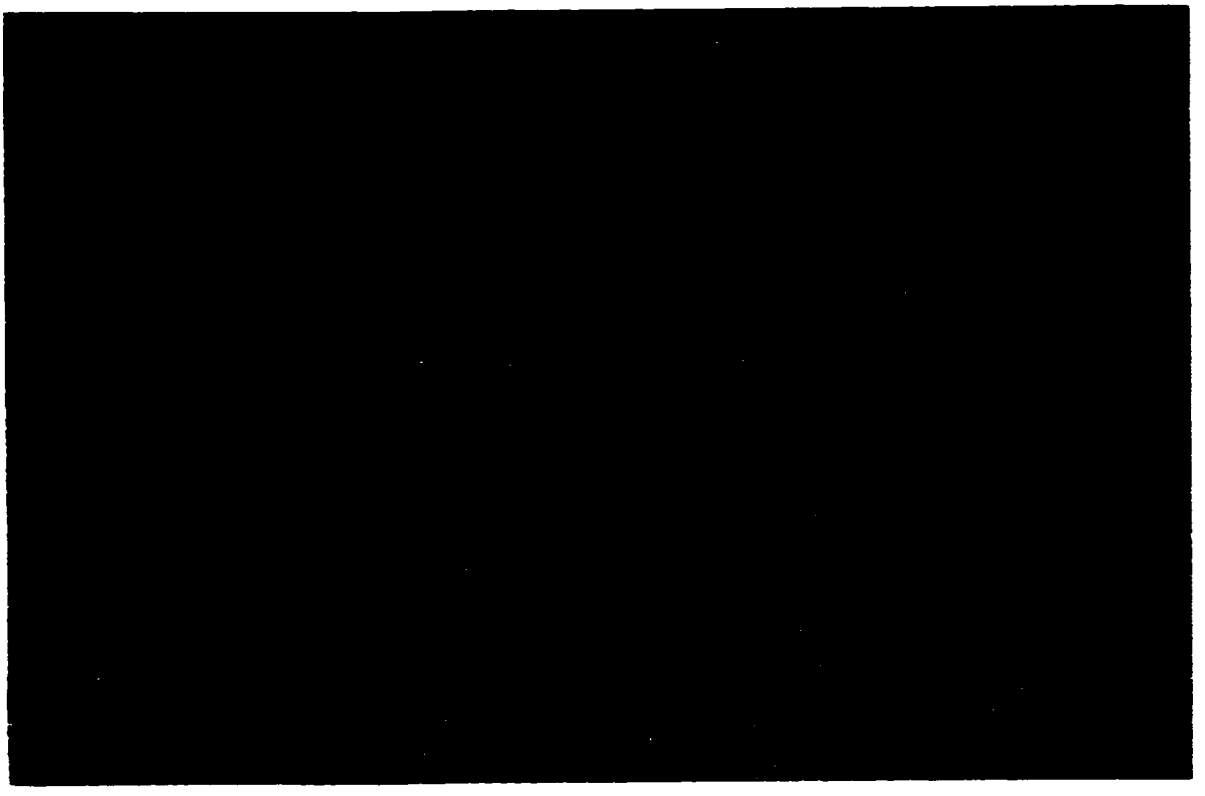


Figure 244. Penn Street in Reading Pennsylvania circa 1930. Penn Square, the intersection of Penn and 5th Streets is at the lower center. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), p. 15.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

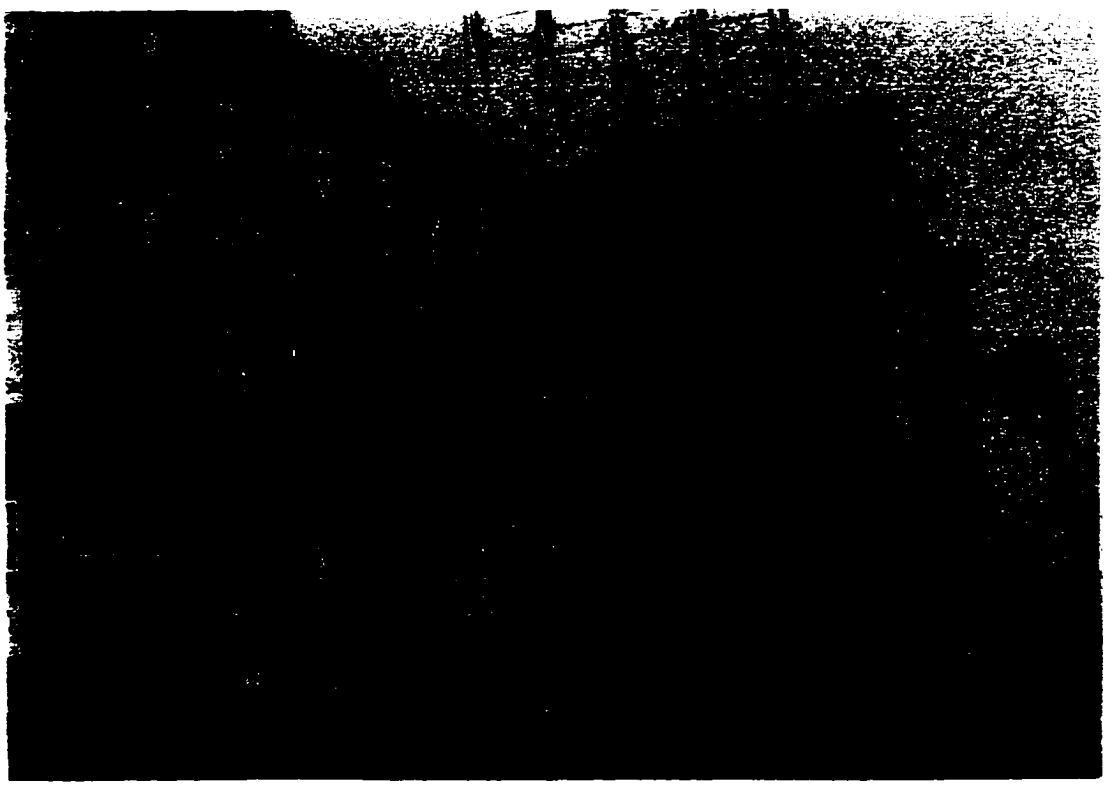
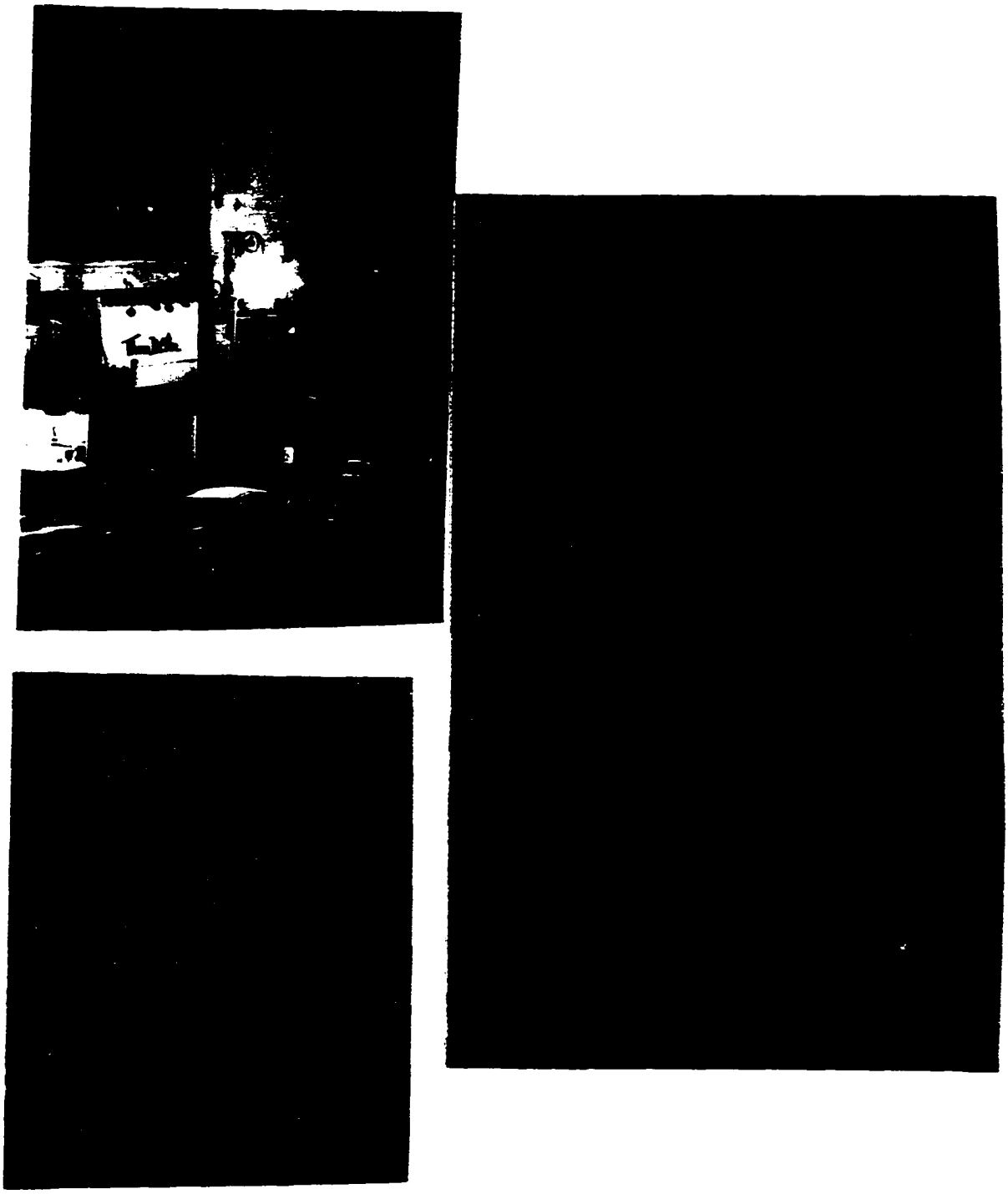


Figure 245. The 600 block of Penn Street circa 1932 with vacant storefronts and bankruptcy signs typical of the early Depression. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 6 (1988), p. 73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 246, 247 & 248. Chain Retailers move in: Thom McAn Shoes at 621 Penn Street; A.S. Beck Shoes at 700 Penn Street; Pep Boys at 425 Penn Street. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 7 (1991), p. 18; vol. 6 (1988), p. 75; vol. 5 (1988), p. 138.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

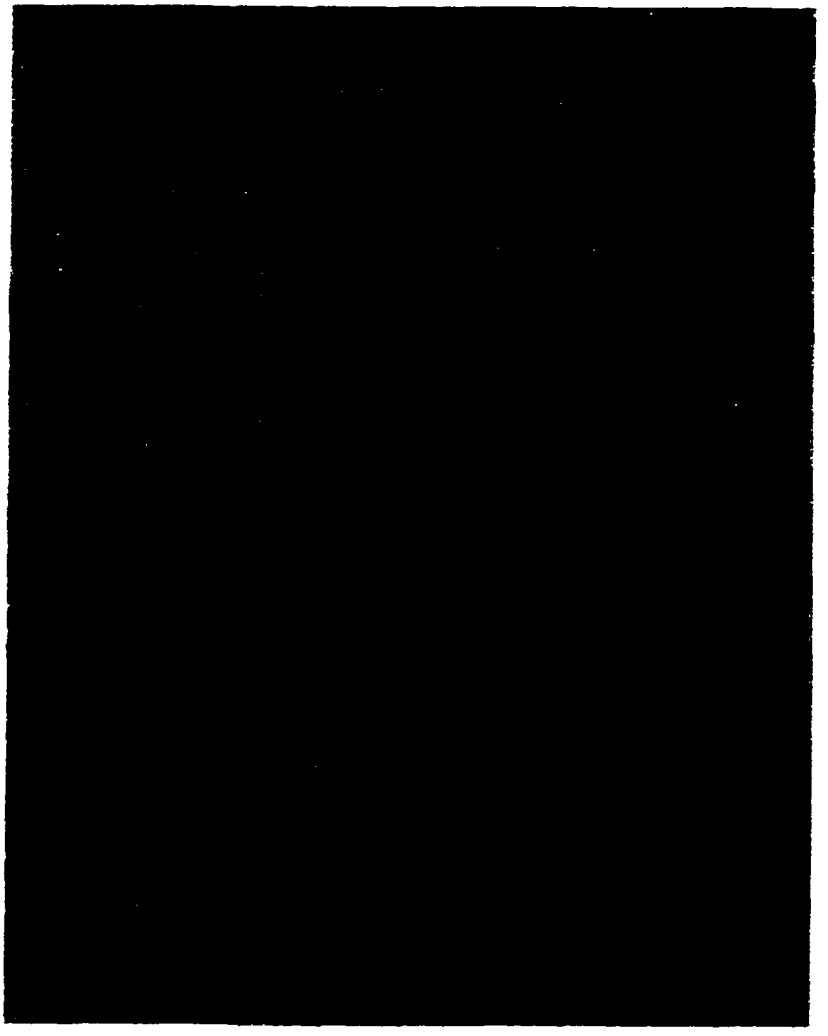
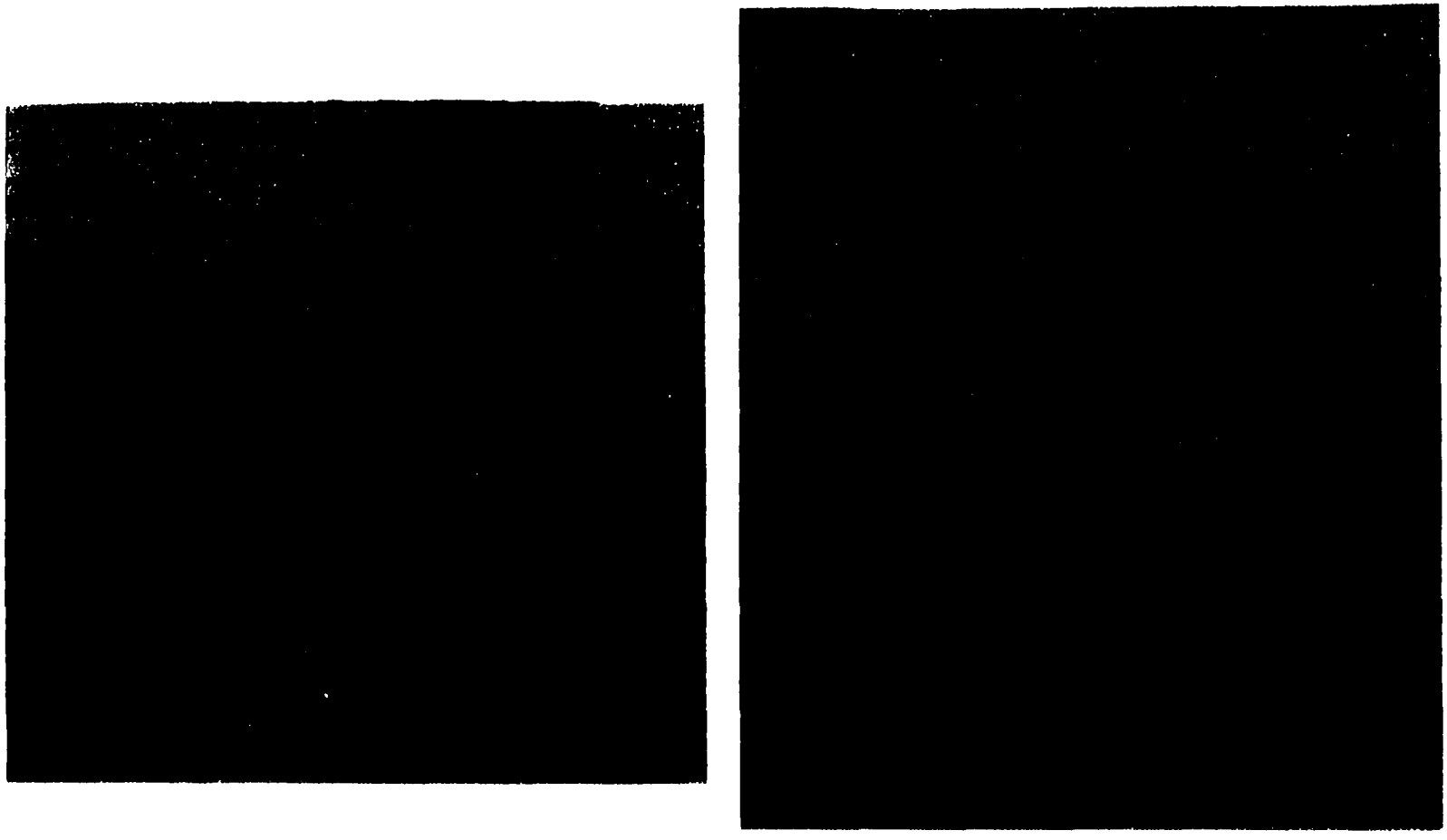


Figure 249. Institutional Failure & Retail Opportunity: Modernized storefronts occupying the former Penn National Bank in 1938. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), p. 161.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figures 250 & 251. Competitive Modernization: A&P Supermarket at 806-10 Penn Street; Keystone Meats at 818 Penn Street. The A&P is visible to the far right of this image. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), pp. 159-60.

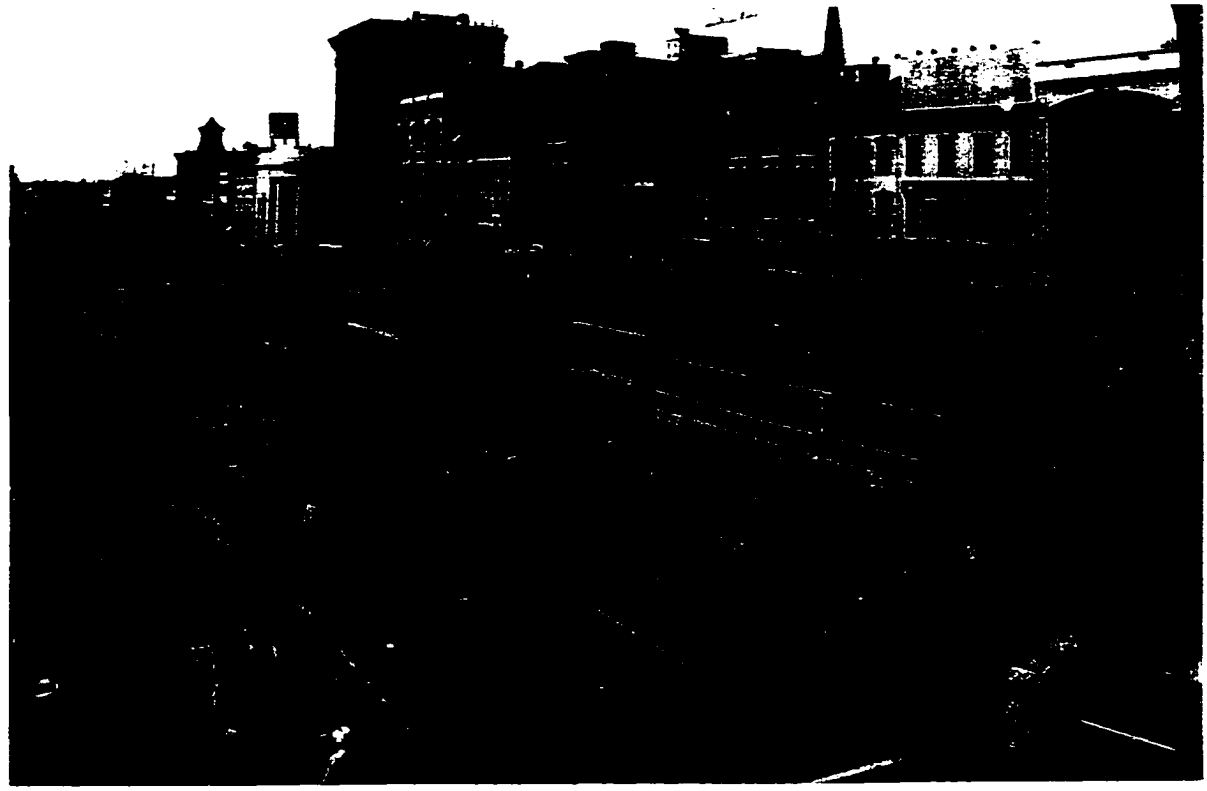


Figure 252. At the pulse of trade: the 500 block of Penn Street circa 1930. The Crystal Restaurant is at the far right of this image. Tri-Plex Shoes occupies the storefront two doors to the left. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), p. 29.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

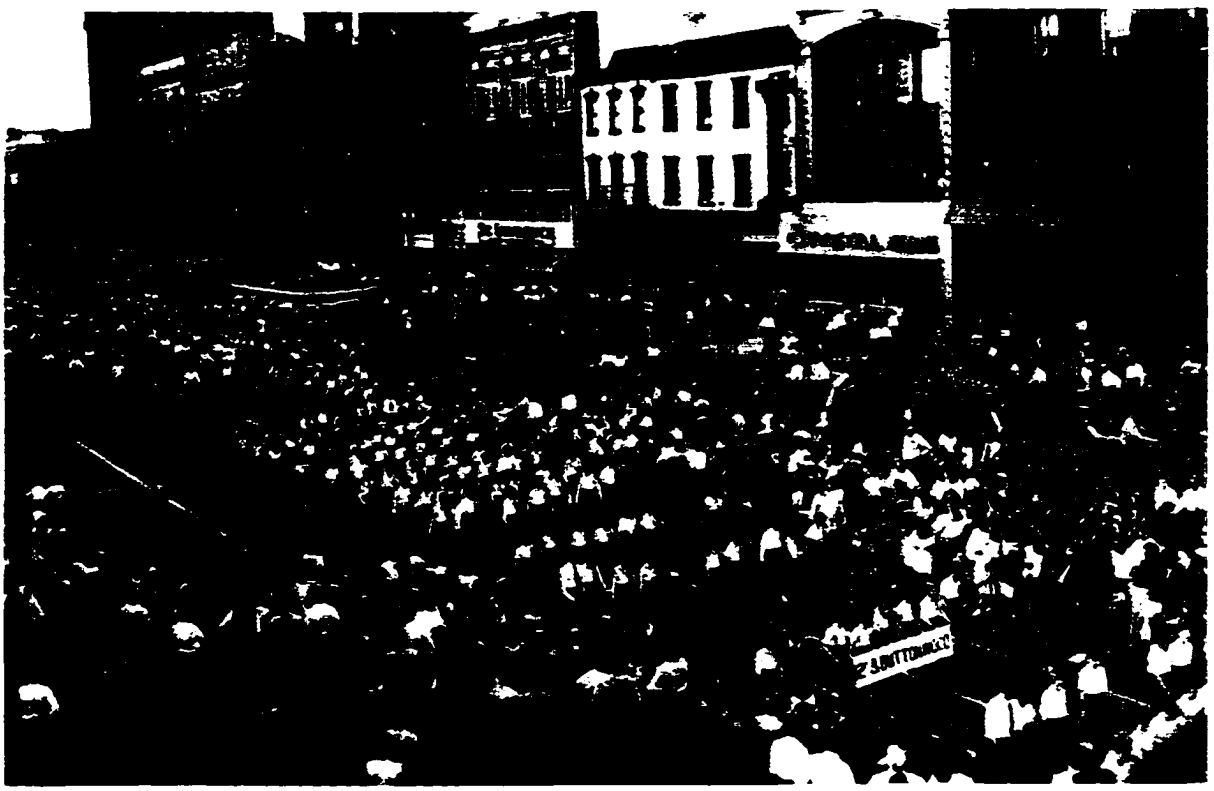


Figure 253. The 500 block of Penn Street modernized. Note the Crystal Restaurant's streamlined storefront and that of the Crystal Bar two doors to the left. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 7 (1991), p. 16.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

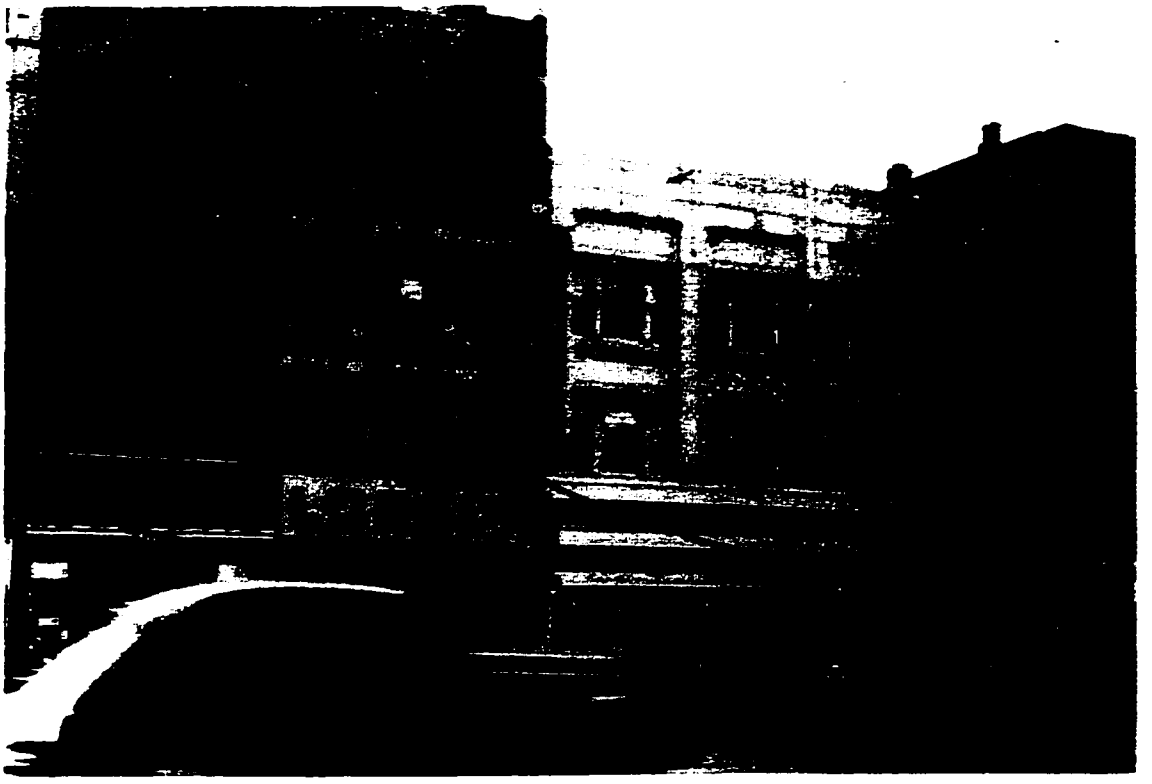


Figure 254. Tri-Plex Shoes in its modernized store at 520 Penn Street, occupying the former Kline, Eppihimer & Co. dry goods store. Note McCrory's (chain) 5 & 10 to the right. Source: George Meiser, The Passing Scene, vol. 5 (1988), p. 173.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.



Figure 255. F. A. Iacone Mens Clothing Store at 519-21 Penn Street. Designed by Elmer Adams, installed by J.M. Kase, manufactured by Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1938. Source: Libbey-Owens-Ford, Vitrolite Album.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Bibliography

Government Sources

Bracketed numbers refer to archival collections listed at the end of the bibliography.

Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. Financial Survey of Urban Housing. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1937.

Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. Real Property Inventory 1934, Cleveland, OH. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Central Housing Committee. A Glossary of Housing Terms. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1937.

Federal Housing Administration. 1st-10th Annual Reports. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935-1944.

Federal Housing Administration. A Newspaper Campaign to Increase the Linage of Present and Prospective Advertisers Affected by Modernization. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1936.

Federal Housing Administration. Achievements of the Federal Housing Administration. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1936.

Federal Housing Administration. Addresses and Speeches of FHA Officials [typescripts]. 1934-1938 [NA RG 287 Box y 748].

Federal Housing Administration. Analysis of the Real Property Inventory and Financial Survey for Peoria, Illinois. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Architects, Contractors, Building Supply and Other Merchants: Your Opportunity -- Your Responsibility Under the National Housing Act. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Federal Housing Administration. Better Housing [newsletter]. 20 September 1934-29 September 1936 [weekly editions].

Federal Housing Administration. Better Housing News Flashes Here Now. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Better Selling of Better Housing, Complete Program. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935), p. 1.

Federal Housing Administration. Bulletin for Manufacturers, Advertising Agencies, and Publishers. Washington: General Printing Office, 1934.

Federal Housing Administration. Checklist for Modernizing Stores and Shops. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1936.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Federal Housing Administration. Community Campaign. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Federal Housing Administration. Community Planning in Relation to the Modernization Phase of the National Housing Act. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Federal Housing Administration. *Dear Hospital Administrator* Direct Mail Piece. [1935?] [NA RG 287 box y740].

Federal Housing Administration. *Dear Retailer* Direct Mail Piece [1935?] [NA RG 287 box y740].

Federal Housing Administration. *Dear Veteran* Direct Mail Piece [1935?] [NA RG 287 box y741].

Federal Housing Administration. Direct Mail Piece to Service Stations and Garages. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Eligible Improvements to Property Financed Under Title I, National Housing Act Amendments of 1938. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1938.

Federal Housing Administration. FHA Clip Sheet [broadside]. Volumes 1-20 (1934-1939.

Federal Housing Administration. Financial Institutions that are Extending Modernization Credit. Washington: General Printing Office, September 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Group II Lenders: Financial Institutions that are Extending Modernization Credit, Form FHE 61. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Housing Fact Series No. 2. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. How Owners of Home and Business Property Can Secure the Benefit of the National Housing Act. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Federal Housing Administration. Important Rulings on Modernization Loans. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Federal Housing Administration. Local Chairmen of Better Housing Program Committees. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Federal Housing Administration. Modernization Clip Sheet [broadside]. Volumes 1-3 (1934-1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Modernization Credit Plan, Bulletin No. 1. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, August 1934.

Federal Housing Administration. Modernize for Profit: A Manual for Merchants, Manufacturers and All Owners of Business Property. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Federal Housing Administration. National Housing Act as Amended and Provisions of Other Laws Pertaining to the FHA. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 23 September 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. National Housing Act--Title I Financial Institutions as of 29 June 1935 [typescript]. [NA RG 287 box y740].

Federal Housing Administration. Portfolio of Publicity for Use of Community Campaign Committees. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Federal Housing Administration. Portfolio of Radio Publicity. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Promotion Pointers 1 (Nos. 1-10, 1935).

Federal Housing Administration. Radio Portfolio. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1936.

Federal Housing Administration. Ready Now a New Release, Better Housing News Flashes. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1936.

Federal Housing Administration. Revised List of Accepted Institutions as of 24 August 1934. [NA RG 287 box y737].

Federal Housing Administration. Sample Better Housing Program Advertisements. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1936.

Federal Housing Administration. San Diego Sells an Idea: Results in Graphic Form, No. 1. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Selling Better Housing. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Seven More Banks Tell How and Why They Make Modernization Loans. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Federal Housing Administration. Structure and Growth of Residential Neighborhoods in American Cities. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1939.

Federal Housing Administration. The FHA Story in Summary. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1959.

Federal Housing Administration. Title I Lending Operations. Washington: General Printing Office, 1946.

Federal Housing Administration. To Mr. Retailer. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1936.

Federal Housing Administration. To Owners and Management of Income Property. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Federal Housing Administration. To the Merchants of America. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Ways for Women to Participate in the BHP. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. What a Manufacturer Can Do to Further the Successful Operation of the Better Housing Program [broadside]. 1934-35 [NA RG 287 Box y742].

Federal Housing Administration. Woman's Opportunity in the Better Housing Program. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

Federal Housing Administration. Women's Page Clip Sheet [broadside]. Volume 1 (1935).

Federal Housing Administration and Pathé. Better Housing News Flashes, Nos. 1-9. 1935-193[8?] [NA RG 031 items 31.1-31.9].

Federal Housing Administration, Division of Economic and Statistics. Special Occupation Code to be Used for Coding Occupation of Borrower on Title I Claim Audit Sheets [typescript]. 30 December 1935 [NA RG 287 box y738].

Federal Housing Administration, Division of Public Relations. FHA Press Releases, Nos. 1-203. 1934-1936 [NA RG 287 Box y 748-749].

Federal Housing Administration, Division of Public Relations. Press Digest & Confidential Supplements [typescript]. August-October 1934 [NA RG 287 Box y748].

Federal Housing Administration, Division of Research and Statistics. General Economic Data, Volumes A-F. 1934-36 [NA RG 207, Records of Housing & Home Finance Agencies, Vol. 1].

Federal Trade Commission. Growth and Development of Chain Stores, Report to the U.S. Senate, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Greenleaf, Walter J. Careers: Architecture, Leaflet No. 10. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, 1931.

National Resources Committee. Our Cities: Their Role in the National Economy. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1937.

Sacramento Better Housing Program. Let Inspiration House Show You the Way (Sacramento: Sacramento BHP, 1934.

State of New Jersey Better Housing Program. Report of Better Housing Headquarters (WPA Project #S 5059) [typescript]. 1936 [NA RG 287 box y741].

U.S. House of Representatives, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session. "National Housing Act, Minority Report." House Reports, III. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

U.S. House of Representatives, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session. National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

U.S. House of Representatives, 74th Congress, 1st Session. Report No. 202. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

U.S. House of Representatives, 74th Congress, 2nd Session. Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency on Extending Title I of the N.H.A. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1936.

U.S. House of Representatives, 74th Congress, 2nd Session. Extending Title I of the National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1936.

U.S. House of Representatives, 75th Congress, 2nd Session. Amendments to the National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1937.

U.S. House of Representatives, 76th Congress, 1st Session. Amendments of 1939 to the National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1939.

U.S. Senate, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session. National Housing Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Banking and Currency. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1934.

U.S. Senate, 74th Congress, 1st Session. Home Owners' Loan and National Housing Act: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

U.S. Senate, 74th Congress, 1st Session. Senate Report No. 438. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1935.

U.S. Senate, 74th Congress, 2nd Session. Amendment of National Housing Act: Hearing Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Banking and Currency. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1936.

U.S. Senate, 75th Congress, 2nd Session. To Amend the National Housing Act: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1937.

U.S. Senate, 78th Congress, 1st Session. Defense Housing Insurance: Hearings before the Committee on Banking and Currency. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1943.

U.S. Tariff Commission. Flat Glass and Related Glass Products, Report No. 123. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1937.

Works Progress Administration. Urban Housing: A Summary of Real Property Inventories Conducted as Work Projects, 1934-1936. Washington, D.C.: General Printing Office, 1937.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Period Articles

The modernization articles listed here represent only a small fraction of coverage in architecture and retail trade journals during the 1930s.

"12 Store Modernizations." Progressive Architecture 29 (October 1948): 81-88.

"2nd Competition for Insulux Glass Block, A Group of Three Stores." Architectural Forum 70 (May 1939): 22-4.

"4 Competitions for Insulux Glass Block." Architectural Forum 70 (April 1939): 30-31.

"50,000 Modernization Loan Bill Signed by President." Building Modernization, June 1935, p. 15.

"52 Prize-Winning Designs." Building Modernization, November 1935, p. 3.

"A Truncated Skyscraper." Architectural Forum 62 (March 1935): 271-2.

"Active Modernization Program Laid Down by Stores." Stores, July 1935, pp. 77, 96.

"Alphabets and Architects." American Architect, 148 (January 1936): 17-23.

"Architects' Participation in the Modernization Program." Architectural Record 76 (September 1934): 149-50.

"Architectural Forum Remodeling Competitions." Architectural Forum 61 (October 1934): 9-12.

"Arguments for New Business." Editorial. American Architect, 146 (June 1935): 67.

"As We See It: Lower Selling Price." Chain Store Age, February 1935, p. 107.

"Bruder Brings Color to Front." Chain Store Age, June 1935, p. 72.

"Business Pick-Up Brings Revival in Store Building." Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 33.

"Chain Store Growth Analyzed in Trade Commission Report." Chain Store Age, July 1932, pp. 426-7.

"Chain Store Modernization Active, Survey Reveals." Chain Store Age, November 1932, pp. 635, 667.

"Chain Store Probe Ends." Chain Store Age, July 1934, p. 84.

"Chain Stores are an Asset." Chain Store Age, December 1936, p. 114.

"Chains Spend $33,000,000 to Modernize Stores." Chain Store Age, November 1933, pp. 66-8.

"Chains Spend $70,000,000 on Store Modernization." Chain Store Age, November 1935, pp. 73-74, 127.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"Changing Front." Building Modernization, December 1933, p. 5.

"Checklist for New Construction and Modernization" and "Portfolio of Stores and Shops: New and Remodeled." Architectural Record 76 (December 1934): 435-54.

"Commercial Architecture." Architectural Forum 65 (October 1936): 303-330.

"Commercial Modernizations Profitable." Building Modernization, May 1935, pp. 10-12.

"Convention Resolutions." Octagon 6 (May 1934: 31.

"Cooperative Modernization Campaign Rebuilds Values in Downtown Oakland." National Real Estate Journal, March 1936, p. 50.

"Editorial: Our Bow." Building Modernization, September 1933, p. 5.

"Education on the March." Reader's Digest, June 1935, p. 43.

"FHA Modernization Loans." Real Estate Record, 19 October 1935, p. 8.

"Fifty Thousand Dollar Opportunities." Building Modernization, July 1935, p. 7.

"Finding Spenders, Not Lenders." Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 218-222.

"Forum of Events: Promotion Pieces." Architectural Forum 66 (June 1937): 98.

"Forum of Events: Winners in Modernize Main Street Competition." Architectural Forum 63 (October 1935): 78, 81.

"From Red into Black." Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 12-18, 216-17.

"Grand Union Spends $300,000 on New Equipment." Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 652.

"Group Modernization." Editorial. American Architect, 146 (June 1935): 66.

"How Beck Alters Store Fronts to Dominate Districts." Chain Store Age, October 1932, pp. 599-600, 606-08.

"How Can I Dress the Front of My Building?" Building Modernization, January 1935, pp. 26-27.

"How Chains Modernized in 1935." Chain Store Age, November 1935, pp. 75-8.

"How Chains Modernized in 1936." Chain Store Age, November 1936, pp. 116-17.

"Journalism is Catching Up with Architecture." Architectural Record 83 (January 1938): 103.

"Liggett's Remodels Unit As Chain Pace-Setter." Chain Store Age, February 1935, pp. 49-51, 87.

"Looking Ahead with the Chains." Chain Store Age, January 1933, p. 76.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"Los Angeles' $100,000,000." Architectural Forum 65 (September 1936): 244.

"Lumar: A New Marble Product." Architectural Record 79 (March 1936): 234-6.

"Main Street, U.S.A." Architectural Forum, 70 (February 1939): 73-88.

"Making a Bid for Store Front Jobs." Building Modernization, October 1934, p. 16.

"Manufacture of Structural Glass: Works No. 6 of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company." Glass Industry, 20 (June 1939): 215-20.

"Melville Remodels 100 Stores." Chain Store Age November 1934, pp. 97-98.

"Modern Theater Remodeling Institute." Box Office, August 1935, pp. 10-15.

"Modernity--Here Today...It May be Gone Tomorrow." Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 157-58.

"Modernization Credit Plan: Bulletin #2." Architectural Record 76 (October 1934): 226.

"Modernization Field Offers Many Business Tips to the Industry." Ceramic Industry 20 (March 1933): 145-146.

"Modernization Market Analysis." Real Estate Record, 23 March 1935, p. 2.

"*Modernize Main Street* Competition Awards." Architectural Record, 78 (October 1935), 209-266.

"Modernize Main Street." Architectural Forum 62 (April 1935): 422.

"Modernize Main Street." Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 51-61.

"Modernizing Main Street: A Few Designs and Comments." Building Modernization, October 1935, pp. 9-15.

"Modernizing Main Street: Selected Designs." Pencil Points 16 (October 1935): 501-19.

"New Life for FHA." American Architect 148 (April 1936): 2-4.

"News of the Field: Films on Store Modernization." Architectural Record 78 (July 1935): 8.

"Planning Techniques No. 1: Service Stations." Architectural Forum 66 (February 1937): 43-52.

"Planning Techniques No. 10, Men's Shops." Architectural Forum 68 (June 1939): 497-506.

"Planning the Newspaper Office." Architectural Record 82 (November 1937): 75-77.

"Portfolio of Commercial Work." Architectural Forum 64 (May 1936): 426-8.

"Portfolio of Commercial Work." Architectural Forum 65 (October 1936): 310+.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"Portfolio of Current Modernization Work." Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 94-106.

"Portfolio of Modernization and Rescued Buildings." Architectural Forum 61 (August 1934): 116-90.

"Portfolio of Restaurants and Shops." Architectural Record 79 (January 1936): 67-78.

"Portfolio." American Architect 150 (June 1937): 93+.

"Portfolio." Architectural Record 81 (January 1937): 35+.

"Portfolio: Current Modernization Work." Architectural Forum, 78 (October 1939): 89-108.

"Portfolio: Modernization of Small Shops." Architectural Record 76 (September 1934): 155-90.

"Prize Winners." Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 210.

"Prize Winning Designs: Terra Cotta Wall Block Competition." Pencil Points 17 (January 1936): 49-52.

"Prize-Winning Designs in the Insulux Glass Block Competition No. 2." Architectural Forum 71 (November 1939): 19-9.

"Products and Practice: Glass." Architectural Forum 67 (December 1937): 24 & 27.

"Products and Practices: Metal Store Front Construction." Architectural Forum 62 (March 1935): 38.

"Recovery through Remodeling." Architectural Forum 61 (August 1934): 81-88.

"Remodeled Beauty Salon." Real Estate Record, 16 November 1935, pp. 19-21.

"Remodeled Kitchen Competition: Report of the Jury." Architectural Forum 62 (March 1935): 236-40.

"Remodeling for Profit." Architectural Forum 64 (January 1936): 69-74.

"Remodeling Primer." Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 153-6.

"Remodeling, Modernization, Repair..." American Architect, 146 (April 1935): 10-29.

"Repair, Replan, Rebuild." Architectural Forum 61 (August 1934): 85-124.

"Repair, Replan, Rebuild." Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 157-90.

"Retail Store Planning." Architectural Record, 78 (July 1935): 49-72.

"Review of Alteration Trends." Real Estate Record, October 1935, p. 6.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"Selling the Modern Store Idea." Building Modernization, June 1934, pp. 26-27.

"Some Fall Ideas in Store Fronts." Chain Store Age, November 1933, p. 72-73.

"Sprucing Up Main Street." Building Modernization, September 1934, pp. 14-15.

"Store Building." Architectural Forum 64 (May 1936): 403+.

"Store Front Caravan Starts Tour to Show New Arrangements." The Economist, 12 September 1936, p. 6.

"Store Front Caravan." Architectural Forum, 65 (November 1936): 42.

"Store Front Designs in the Modern Mode." Building and Modernization, November 1936, pp. 12-13.

"Store Fronts and Show Windows." American Architect 147 (December 1935): 60-74.

"Store Fronts of Tomorrow." New Pencil Points 24 (February 1943): 30-41.

"Store Modernization Conference." Building Modernization, September 1936, p. 47.

"Store Modernization Survey of Department of Commerce Brings Interesting Conclusions." Building and Modernization, November 1936, pp. 10-11.

"Store Modernization: A Checklist.." Architectural Record 76 (September 1934):188-90.

"Store Modernized for the A.S. Beck Shoe Corporation, Fulton Street, Brooklyn, New York." Architectural Forum 58 (January 1933): 70-71.

"Stores." Architectural Forum 65 (October 1936): 316+.

"Stores." Architectural Forum 71 (December 1939): 427+.

"Terra Cotta Wall Block Competition." Pencil Points 16 (November 1935): 10.

"The A&P Company as a Whole." Fortune, July 1930, p. 45.

"The A&P from A to Z." Business Week, 30 November 1932, p. 9.

"The A&P in Fairfield, Conn." Fortune, July 1930, pp. 41-45.

"The A.S. Beck Shoe Store." Architectural Record 65 (June 1929): 543-53.

"The Architect Working in Commerce." Architectural Record 89 (March 1941): 58-65.

"The Cheapy Thrives." Business Week, 8 February 1933, p. 11-12.

"The Forgotten Man Seems to be the Retailer." Chain Store Age, November 1933, p. 65.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"The Month in Building: Modernization." Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 5.

"The Showroom as a Design Problem." Architectural Record 84 (July 1938): 75-6.

"The Trend in Store Fronts." Chain Store Age, November 1932, pp. 80-84, 136.

"The Way to More Profit." Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 634.

"Three Store Front Modernization Suggestions." Real Estate Record, 19 September 1936, p. 14.

"Tornado over Gainseville." Architectural Forum 66 (February 1937): 157-58.

"Trade Announcements: Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company." Architectural Record 78 (December 1935): 34.

"Two Business Blocks." Architectural Forum 66 (March 1937): 60-61.

"Uncle Sam will Help You Modernize Your Beauty Shop--Heres How." Modern Beauty Shop, July 1935.

"Using the Advertising Value of an Alteration." Building and Modernization, November 1936, p. 14.

"We Can Be Thankful." Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 698.

"Where is Modern Now?" Architectural Forum 68 (June 1938): 465-70.

"Where the Chains Stand." Chain Store Age, January 1932, p. 7.

"Wholesale Remodeling." Architectural Forum, 65 (December 1936): 490, 36-37.

"Winning Entries, Pittsburgh Glass Institute Competition." Architectural Forum 67 (August 1937): 103.

Bartels, W.F. "Better Practice: Store Fronts." Architecture 73 (March 1936): 159-61.

Barton, Fred B. "Why the Chains Should Support the Federal Housing Plan." Chain Store Age, December 1934, pp. 84, 97.

Besthoff, S.J. "Making the New Store Fit Its Location." Chain Store Age, January 1932, pp. 31-32, 56.

Bonner, Paul. "Style and the Salesman." Industrial Institute of Art Center. Talk No. 7 (April 1931).

Calkins, Earnest Elmo. "Beauty the New Business Tool." Atlantic Monthly, August 1927, pp. 150-56.

Calkins, Earnest Elmo. "Give Your Town a Personality." The Rotarian, March 1935, pp. 11-12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Chase, Stuart. "Prosperity--Believe it or Not." The Nation 129 (23 October 1929): 460-2.

Childs, Marquis W. "Main Street Ten Years After." The New Republic, 18 January 1933, pp. 263-265.

Churchill, Henry. "No Mere Facial Uplift Can Cure the Wrinkles of Our Cities." American City, June 1935, pp. 56-7.

Croly, Herbert. "A New Era of Building." Architectural Record 58 (1925): 289-290.

Ducas, Dorothy. "Is Your Daily Shopping Work?" House Beautiful, August 1946, pp. 39-40, 84-86.

Dusenberry, James. "The Architect and Housing--Today." The Octagon 7 (May 1935): 3-6.

Fash, R.A. "Drugstore Planning." Architectural Record 83 (February 1938): 109-11.

Fouilhoux, J. André, et al. "Jury Report for Modernize Main Street Competition." Architectural Record 78 (October 1935): 209.

Frost, Dudley W. "Today Vacancies are Not a Problem." American City, August 1939, p. 77.

Grace, Thomas G. "The Federal Housing Administration Modernization and Mortgage Clinics." Building Modernization, May 1936, p. 48.

Hamlin, Talbot. "Some Recent Shops and Restaurants." Pencil Points 20 (August 1939): 485-508.

Harrington, John W. "More Profit Store Fronts." Building Modernization, December 1933, pp. 6-13.

Haskell, Douglas. "Architecture on Routes U.S. 40 and 66." Architectural Review 81 (February 1937): 101-108.

Holden, Arthur C. "*Modernization*--Ballyhoo or Progress?" Survey Graphic 23 (July 1934): 334.

Holden, Arthur C. "Stabilized Modernization." American Architect 147 (September 1935): 37-40.

Holden, Arthur C. "The Problem of Modernizing Main Street." Building Modernization, February 1935, pp. 15-16, 31.

Holden, Thomas S. "What Has Happened to Architects?" Architectural Record 71 (May 1932): 291-93.

Holmes, Arthur B. "A Plan to Create New Business for the Architect." American Architect 141 (June 1932): 14-15.

Keyes, Robert E. "The Importance of Correct Air Conditioning." Stores, February 1935, pp. 159, 166.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Landau, Frank E. "Chain Stores Are an Asset, Say Independent Merchants. Chain Store Age, December 1936, pp. 114, 130.

Landau, Frank E. "Childs Remodels 25 Units in Drive for Modernization." Chain Store Age, April 1935, pp. 71-72, 82.

Landau, Frank E. "Keeping Melville Stores Up-to-Date is Standard Practice." Chain Store Age, November 1932, pp. 654-5, 659.

Landau, Frank E. "Store Fronts: Chains Adapt Family Types to Suit Specific Locations." Chain Store Age, June 1936, pp. 111-14, 152, 154.

Lapidus, Morris. "Basic Plans and Profiles of Store Front Construction." Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 53.

Lapidus, Morris. "Store Design." Architectural Record 89 (February 1941): 113-132.

Lapidus, Morris. "Store Modernizing without Metals." Architectural Record 92 (October 1942): 71-78.

Lebhar, Godfrey. "As We See It." Chain Store Age, July 1934, pp. 83-84.

Lebhar, Godfrey. "A Drive the Chains Should Help." Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 76.

Lebhar, Godfrey. "As We See It." Chain Store Age, November 1933, pp. 65, 76.

Lebhar, Godfrey. "How to Meet Unfair Charges Against Chain Stores--1." Chain Store Age, November 1935, pp. 105-106, 142. "How to Meet...--4." Chain Store Age, February 1936, pp. 122, 148-153.

Lebhar, Godfrey. "Why This Special Issue?" Chain Store Age, November 1932, pp. 633-34, 658.

Lloyd, Edward L. "Development of Retail Sales Indexes," Survey of Current Business, 16 (February 1936): 16-18.

Louden, C.B. "Review of Alteration Trends." Real Estate Record, October 1935, p. 6.

Mack, E.M. "Our Store Must be Modern; If Not, We Make Them So." Chain Store Age, November 1932, pp. 639-40, 667.

McDonald, Stewart. "FHA Modernization Credit Plan Offers Opportunities to Architects." Architectural Record, 78 (October 1935), 207-208.

Moffett, Virginia Mae. "Face Lifting the Old Home Town." Nation's Business, December 1936, pp. 69-70.

Morgan, Warren F. "Why Should I Modernize?" Building Modernization, September 1933, pp. 8-9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Mowry, Don E. "How National Chain Benefits the Community." Chain Store Age, August 1932, pp. 5-6, 86-87.

Mumford, Lewis. "The Skyline: Concerning Glass Houses." New Yorker, 11 April 1936, pp. 56-58.

Mumford, Lewis. "The Sky Line: New Buildings for Old." New Yorker, 24 October 1936, pp. 50-52.

Mumford, Lewis. "The Sky Line: New Facades." New Yorker, 20 November 1937, pp. 85-88.

Mumford, Lewis. "The Sky Line: New Faces on the Avenue." New Yorker, 9 September 1939, pp. 62-63.

Mumford, Lewis. "The Sky Line: Old and New." New Yorker, 11 January 1936, pp. 38, 40, 42.

Mumford, Lewis. "The Skyline: A Survivor of the Brown Decades." New Yorker, 19 March 1932, pp. 71-72.

Novins, J.K. "Clearly Something Had to Be Done!: How Modernization Saved the Day." Building Modernization, March 1934, pp. 18-19.

Plant, George L., et al. "Modernizing the Store in 1935." Stores, February 1935, pp. 145-67 [special supplement].

Rasmussen, R.V. "We've Profited by the Times." Chain Store Age, November 1932, pp. 644, 698.

Richmond, Ralph. "The Old Store Puts on a New Front." Stores, February 1935, p. 157-58.

Schacter, Harry W. "War on the Chain Store." The Nation 130 (7 May 1930): 544-45.

Schlanger, Ben. "Motion Picture Theaters." Architectural Record 81 (February 1937): 17-24.

Schoen, Lawrence A. "Keying Stores to Locations." Chain Store Age, January 1933, pp. 73-4, 90.

Schreier, E. Philip. "Better Housing--The Washington, D.C. Chapter." The Octagon 7 (January 1935), pp. 12-13.

Shapero, Nate S. "Full Speed Ahead! is Our Slogan." Chain Store Age, January 1933, pp. 71-2.

Sprague, Jesse Rainsford. "New York is Where the Money Is!" Saturday Evening Post, 14 September 1935, pp. 30-31.

Stein, Clarence S. and Catherine Bauer. "Store Buildings and Neighborhood Shopping Centers." Pamphlet reprinted with addenda from Architectural Record 77 (February 1934): 1-17.

Stires, Arthur. "Materials in Design: Glass." American Architect, 146 (March 1935), pp. 49-61.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Stowell, Kenneth K. "Modernize Main Street Competition Program." Architectural Record 78 (July 1935, Supplement): 1-9.

Stowell, Kenneth K. "The Editor's Forum: The National Housing Act." Architectural Forum 60 (June 1934): 25.

Sukert, Lancelot. "Sales Psychology in Store Modernization." Building Modernization, November 1934, pp. 22-31.

Sweeley, R. Stanley. "Activities in Retail Store Design." Architectural Record 83 (February 1938): 102, 103-8.

Teague, Walter D. "Structural and Decorative Trends in Glass." American Architect, 141 (May 1932): 40-43, 110-112.

Teague, Walter Dorwin. "Standardized Service Stations." Architectural Record 82 (September 1937): 69-72.

Turner, W.E.S. "The North American Glass Industry in 1938." Journal of the Society of Glass Technology 24 (1940): 5-36

Vogelgesang, Shepard. "Architecture and Trade Marks." Architectural Forum 50 (June 1929): 897-900.

Von Sternberg, J.R. "Unit Planning No. VI: The Store" American Architect 150 (June 1937): 97-109.

Weiss, Joseph Douglas. "Store Design Practice." New Pencil Points 24 (February 1943): 42-47.

Welch, Kenneth C. "The Apparel Store." Architectural Record 78 (July 1935): 62-64.

Wiley, J.W. "Structural Glass Has Arrived." Glass Industry 13 (September 1932): 148-9.

Wills, Royal Barry. "How to Find a Job During a Depression." Pencil Points 13 (January 1932): 13-15.

Books & (Non-Period) Articles

Moderne Ladenbauten: Aussen und Innen Architektur. Berlin: Ernst Pollak Verlag, 1929.

"The Preservation of Historic Pigmented Structural Glass." Preservation Briefs, No. 12 (1984), pp. 1-12.

Albrecht, Donald, ed. World War II and the American Dream. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995.

Allen, Frederick Lewis. Only Yesterday. 1931; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1964.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Allen, Frederick Lewis. Since Yesterday. 1939; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

Atherton, Lewis. Main Street on the Middle Border. 1954; rpt. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1966.

Banham, Reyner. The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Barton, Bruce. The Man Nobody Knows. 1925; rpt. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962.

Beaumont, Constance. How Superstore Sprawl can Harm Communities. Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1994.

Berman, Marshall. All That is Solid Melts into Air. 1982; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

Blackford, Mansel G. "Small Business in America: A Historiographic Survey." Business History Review 65 (Spring 1995): 1-26.

Blake, Peter. No Place Like Utopia. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

Bletter, Rosemarie Haag. "The World of Tomorrow: The Future with a Past." In High Styles: 20th Century American Design. New York: Whitney Museum, 1985.

Bletter, Rosemarie Haag and Cervin Robinson. Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Bogart, Michele H. Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Buck-Morss, Susan. "Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display." In Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances. Eds. Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.

Bush, Donald J. The Streamlined Decade. New York: George Braziller, 1975.

Cameron, John Aspley. Intensive Sales Management. Chicago: Dartnell Corporation, 1929.

Carnegie, Dale. How to Win Friends and Influence People. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936.

Carnegie, Dale. Public Speaking and Influencing Men in Business. 1926; rpt. New York: Association Press, 1939.

Caviglia, Rita. "Architecture and Storefronts of the 1930s." Masters Thesis Columbia University 1981.

Chase, Stuart and F.J. Schlink. Your Money's Worth. New York: The Business Bourse, 1927.

Cheney, Sheldon and Martha. Art and the Machine. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936.

Creighton, Thomas. Planning to Build. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1945.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Cutler, Phoebe. The Public Landscape of the New Deal. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

De Syllas, Justin. "Streamform." Architectural Association Quarterly 1 (April 1969): 32-41.

DeBoer, S.R. Shopping Districts. Washington, D.C.: American Planning and Civic Association, 1937.

Dos Passos, John. Manhattan Transfer. 1925; rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.

Doubman, J. Russell. Sales Management Today. New York: Sears Publishing, 1933.

Douglas, Ann. Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1995.

Douglas, Ann. The Feminization of American Culture. 1977; rpt. London: Papermac, 1997.

Eccles, Marriner S. Beckoning Frontiers: Public and Personal Recollections. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951.

Ekirch, Arthur A. Jr. Ideologies and Utopias: The Impact of the New Deal on American Thought. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969.

Esherick, Joseph. "Architectural Education in the Thirties and Seventies: A Personal View." In The Architect: Chapters in the History of a Profession. Ed. Spiro Kostoff. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Esperdy, Gabrielle. Connecticut's Merritt Parkway: History and Design. LOC Microfilm, HABS/HAER CT-63).

Ewen, Stuart. Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.

Ferrell, Robert H., ed. FDR's Quiet Confidant: The Autobiography of Frank C. Walker. Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1997.

Fleming, Ronald Lee. Facade Stories: Changing Faces of Main Street Storefronts and How to Care for Them. New York: Townscape Institute and Hastings House Publications, 1982.

Fletcher, William L. How to Get the Job You Want. New York: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1929.

Foucault, Michel. The Archaeology of Knowledge. 1971; rpt. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

Fox, Richard Wightman and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds. The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Francaviglia, Richard V. Main Street Revisited: Time, Space and Image Building in Small-Town America. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996.

Frankl, Paul. Form and Re-form. New York: Harper & Co., 1930.

Frederick, Christine. Selling Mrs. Consumer. New York: The Business Bourse, 1928.

Galbraith, John Kenneth. The Great Crash, 1929. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1988.

Gauss, Chester A. and Lucius I. Wightman. Sales and Advertising: A Practical Treatise. Chicago: American Technical Society, 1935.

Gebhard, David. "The Moderne in the U.S., 1920-1941." Architectural Association Quarterly 2 (January 1970): 4-20.

Ghirardo, Diane. Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989.

Gordon, Colin. New Deals: Business, Labor, and Politics in America 1920-1935. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Greif, Martin. Depression Modern: The Thirties Style in America. New York: Universe Books, 1975.

Gries, John M. and James Ford. Slums, Large-Scale Housing, and Decentralization. Washington, D.C.: President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, 1932.

Gunther, John. Inside U.S.A.. New York: Harper & Brothers 1946.

Haiken, Elizabeth. Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Harris, Steven and Deborah Berke, eds. The Architecture of the Everyday. Princeton: Princeton Architecture Press, 1997.

Heimann, Jim and Rip Georges. California Crazy. New York: Chronicle Books, 1980.

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell and Philip Johnson. The International Style. 1932; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966.

Holler, William E. Step Out and Sell!. Chicago: The Dartnell Corporation, 1939.

Jackson, J.B. Discovering the Vernacular Landscape. New Haven: Yale University, 1984.

Jakle, John A. The American Small Town: Twentieth Century Place Images. Hamden, CT: Shoestring Press, 1980.

Jakle, John A. and Keith A. Sculle. The Gas Station in America. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Jester, Thomas C., ed. Twentieth Century Building Materials. New York: McGraw Hill, 1995.

Kaplan, Wendy, ed. Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885-1945. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995.

Kiesler, Frederick. Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display. New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1930.

Lapidus, Morris. Too Much is Never Enough. New York: Rizzoli, 1996.

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

Lears, T.J. Jackson. Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

Lebergott, Stanley. Consumer Expenditures: New Measures & Old Motives. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Lebhar, Godfrey M. Chain Stores in America, 1859-1962. New York: CS Publishing, 1962.

Lescaze, William. On Being An Architect. New York: Putnam, 1942.

Leuchtenburg, William E. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

Levy, Richard Michael. "The Professionalization of American Architects and Civil Engineers, 1865-1917." Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 1980.

Lewis, Sinclair. Babbitt. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1922.

Lewis, Sinclair. It Can't Happen Here. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935.

Lewis, Sinclair. Main Street. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1920.

Lichtenstein, Claude and Franz Engler. Streamlined: A Metaphor for Progress. Zurich: Lars Müller, [1993].

Liebs, Chester H. Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture. 1985; rpt. Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Longstreth, Richard. "The Diffusion of the Community Shopping Center Concept during the Inter-war Decades." Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 36 (September 1997): 268-91.

Longstreth, Richard. "The Neighborhood Shopping Center in Washington, D.C., 1930-1941." Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 51 (March 1992): 5-34.

Longstreth, Richard. The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture. Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1987.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Lupton, Ellen. Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993.

Lynd, Robert S. "The People as Consumers." In Recent Social Trends in the United States: Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1934.

Lynd, Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd. Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture. 1929; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956.

Lynd, Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd. Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1937.

Marchand, Roland. Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Marchand, Roland. "Where Lie the Boundaries of the Corporation?" Business and Economic History 26 (Fall 1997): 80-100.

Marinelli, Janet. "Architectural Glass and the Evolution of the Storefront." Old House Journal, July/August 1988, pp. 40-1.

Marling, Karal Ann. The Colossus of Roads: Myth and Symbol along the American Highway. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Marling, Karal Ann. Wall-to-Wall America. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1982.

Meikle, Jeffrey L. Twentieth Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-1939. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979.

Meiser, George M. and Gloria J. The Passing Scene, 7 vols. Reading, PA: Historical Society of Berks County, 1991.

Melosh, Barbara. Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

Mitchell, Broadus. Depression Decade. Economic History of the United States, Vol. IX. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1947.

Moley, Raymond. After Seven Years. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939.

Mumford, Lewis. Sticks & Stones. 1924; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1955.

Neumann, Dietrich. "'The Century's Triumph in Lighting': The Luxfer Prism Companies and their Contribution to Early Modern Architecture." Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 54 (March 1995): 24-53.

Nicholson, Emrich. Contemporary Stores in the United States. New York: Architectural Book Publishing, 1945.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ockman, Joan. "Mirror Images: Technology, Consumption and the Representation of Gender in American Architecture since World War II." In The Sex of Architecture. Ed. Diana Agrest et al. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Olson, Charles Dalton. "Sign of the Star: Walter Dorwin Teague and the Texas Company, 1934-37." Masters Thesis Cornell University, 1987.

Olson, James Stuart. Saving Capitalism: the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and the New Deal, 1933-1940. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Peiss, Kathy. Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1998.

Plunz, Richard. A History of Housing in New York City. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Pokinski, Deborah. The Development of the American Modern Style. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984.

Pommer, Richard. "Loewy and the Industrial Skin Game." Art in America, March/April 1976, pp. 46-47.

Posner, Richard. The Robinson-Patman Act: Federal Regulation of Price Differences. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1976.

Radford, Gail. Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Raucher, Alan R. "Dime Store Chains: The Making of Organization Men, 1880-1940." Business History Review 65 (Spring 1995), pp. 130-63.

Read-Miller, Cynthia, ed. Main Street, U.S.A. in Early Photographs. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1988.

Reitzes, Lisa B. "Moderately Modern: Interpreting the Architecture of the Public Works Administration." Diss. University of Delaware 1989.

Rifkind, Caroline. Main Street: The Face of Urban America. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977.

Ripley, William Z. Main Street and Wall Street. 1929; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1973.

Romanoff, Victoria and Sarah W. Adams. New York State Storefronts: Stone Through Carrara. Ithica, NY: V. Romanoff & Associates, 1982.

Rowe, Peter G. Making a Middle Landscape. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991.

Ryan, Carl. "The South and the Movement Against the Chain Stores." Journal of Southern History 39 (May 1973): 207-22.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Saint, Andrew. The Image of the Architect. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr. The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960.

Sexton, R.W. American Commercial Buildings of Today. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Company Inc., 1928.

Singley, Paulette and Deborah Fausch, eds. Architecture: In Fashion. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994.

Sloan, Alfred. My Years at General Motors. New York: McFadden Books, 1965.

Smith, Terry. Making the Modern. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Stern, Robert A.M., et al. New York 1930. New York: Rizzoli, 1987.

Stowell, Kenneth K. Modernizing Buildings for Profit. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1935.

Susman, Warren I. Culture as History. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Swing, Raymond. Forerunners of American Fascism. New York: J. Messner Inc., 1935.

Tafuri, Manfredo and Francesco Dal Co. Modern Architecture/1. New York: Rizzoli, 1986.

Tafuri, Manfredo. The Sphere and the Labyrinth. 1987; rpt. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990.

Tagg, John. The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

Terkel, Studs. Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression. 1970; rpt. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.

Thomas, Bernice L. America's 5 & 10 Cent Stores: The Kress Legacy. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997.

Tobey, Ronald C. Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Van Doren, Harold. Industrial Design: A Practical Guide. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1940.

Veblen, Thorstein. Absentee Ownership and the Business Enterprise in Recent Times. 1923; rpt. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1964.

Venturi, Robert. Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966.

Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. Learning from Las Vegas. 1972; rpt. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Weiss, Marc A. The Rise of the Community Builders. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Willis, Carol. Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago. Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995.

Wills, Royal Barry. This Business of Architecture. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1941.

Wilson, Richard Guy. "International Style: The MoMA Exhibition." Progressive Architecture 63 (February 1982): 92-104.

Wilson, Richard Guy, et al. The Machine Age in America, 1918-1941. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986.

Wright, Gwendolyn. Building the Dream. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981.

Newspapers

"28 Vassar Students Aid Housing Program." New York Times, 17 March 1935, II, p. 3.

"300,000,000 in 'New Money' Is Provided for Modernizing and Building of Homes." New York Times, 30 April 1934, p. 23.

"70,875,000 Outlay set to Spur Trade." New York Times, 6 November 1932, p. 19

"Advertising News." New York Times, 25 December 1936, p. 29.

"Air Conditioning Gaining." New York Times, 10 March 1935, sec. II, p. 19

"American Radiator and Standard Sanitary." New York World-Telegram, 24 October 1934.

"Ancient House Will Get New Dress at Fair" and "Big Aerial Show Thrills Crowds at World's Fair." Chicago Daily Tribune, 24 October 1934, p. 11.

"Big Companies Join in Rehabilitation." New York Times, 2 October 1932, sec. IV, p. 8.

"Campaign to Spur FHA Program Here." New York Times, 17 October 1934, p. 25.

"Canaday Says FHA Plan Will End Relief." New York Times, 28 September 1934, p. 32.

"Central Council Set Up." New York Times, 27 August 1932, pp. 1 & 8.

"City 'Housing Month' Declared by Mayor." New York Times, 20 November 1934, p. 12.

"City Seeks to Spur Repairs." New York Times, 3 April 1935, p. 19.

"Credit Plan for Glass Purchases." New York Times, 23 December 1935, p. 27.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"Explains Changes under Housing Act." New York Times, 12 April 1936, XI, p. 1.

"FHA Eases Rules." New York Times, 18 September 1934, p. 19.

"Government Loans as Realty Benefit." New York Times, 14 May 1933, X & XI, p. 1.

"Group to Aid Housing Program, Borough President Levy Head Committee." New York Times, 10 September 1934, p. 32.

"H.I. Harriman Urges Program." New York Times, 1 January 1935, p. 45.

"H-Men Named to Jail Racketeers in Housing." New York Times, 5 November 1935, p. 29

"Home Loan Racket Uncovered." New York Times, 21 December 1935, p. 1.

"Home Rebuilding only Under Code." New York Times, 7 May 1934, p. 5.

"Home-Loan Groups Plan Building Aid." New York Times 30 January 1934, p. 33.

"Home-Repair Pool Set up in Capital." New York Times, 19 February 1933, p. 13.

"Hopkins to Head Flood Survey of Needs for Rehabilitation." New York Times, 30 January 1937, p. 7

"Housing Act is Boon to Atlantans." Atlanta Daily World, 31 October 1934, pp. 1 & 4.

"Housing Bill Signed, Lumber Prices Cut." New York Times, 29 June 1934, p. 1.

"Housing Guaranty to be $200,000,000." New York Times, 4 May 1934, p. 40.

"Housing Program Endorsed to NRA." New York Times, 21 May 1934, p. 33.

"Hunt 1,620,000 Jobs in Run-Down Plants." New York Times, 12 September 1932, p. 17.

"Industries Spur Housing Program." New York Times, 26 September 1934, p. 10.

"Loans are Planned for Home Repairs." New York Times, 29 April 1934, X & XI, p. 1.

"Model Store Fronts Exhibited." New York Times, 9 September 1936, p. 38.

"Modernizing Work to Cost $105,266,429." New York Times, 19 December 1932, p. 2.

"Moffet Named Housing Chief." New York Times, 1 July 1934, p. 21.

"National Drive is Pressed for Repair Work to Produce $3.5 Million Wages." New York Times, 17 August 1932, p. 19.

"New Group Set Up to Help Recovery." New York Times, 6 November 1934, p. 8.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"Pass Housing Bill, H.I. Harriman Asks." New York Times, 19 May 1934, p. 5

"Plan $1,500,000,000 for Home Repairs." New York Times, 20 April 1934, p. 23.

"Plans for FHA Campaign." New York Times 30 August 1934, XI, p. 12.

"Profits Report: Pittsburgh Plate Glass." New York Times, 14 March 1935, p. 33.

"Retailers in Move to Improve Stores, New York Times, 10 March 1935, p. 19.

"Roosevelt Acts to Speed Building Trades Recovery." New York Times, 15 May 1934, p. 1.

"Sees Bronx Factory Aid." New York Times, 14 March 1935, p. 40.

"Suggests Government Authorize Loans for Modernizing Existing Buildings, New York Times, 5 November 1933, X & XI, p. 1.

"Title I of Housing Act Expires." New York Times, 1 April 1937, p. 43.

"To Aid Huge Housing Program." New York Times, 21 July 1934, p. 2.

"To Explain Housing Act." New York Times, 9 December 1934, XI & XII, p. 1.

"Trade Found Aided by Housing Plan." New York Times, 20 February 1936, p. 28

"Urges Higher Loan for Home Repairs" and "Renovating Work Paid." New York Times, 17 February 1935, IX & X, p. 3.

"Whalen to Direct Modernizing Drive." New York Times, 4 February 1933, p. 7.

"Wide Housing Plan Awaits Approval." New York Times, 30 March 1934, p. 23.

"Wide Housing Plan Awaits Approval." New York Times, 30 March 1934, p. 23.

Conroy, Thomas F. "Retailers in Move to Improve Stores." New York Times, 10 March 1935, sec. 11, p. 19.

Krock, Arthur. "Ask Cut Rate Plan to Improve Homes." New York Times, 2 March 1934, p. 3.

Krock, Arthur. "In Washington: Labor Cooperation is Part of 'Home Renovising' Plan." New York Times, 15 May 1934, p. 20.

Walker, Frank C. "Housing Bill Explained." New York Times, 15 May 1934, p. 37.

Advertisements & Corporate Promotional Materials

The items cited here represent only a small portion of the promotional literature associated with the modernization movement. See also manufacturers' catalogues in Sweet's Catalogue File (1930-

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

1940), especially "Glass" and "Storefronts" sections. Bracketed numbers refer to archival collections listed at the end of the bibliography.

American Radiator. "Properly Directed Remodeling Dollars [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 61 (September 1934): 21.

Armco. "Modernized...and Modern [advertisement]." Architectural Record 83 (February 1938): 148.

Brasco Manufacturing. "Bring it to Life with Brasco [advertisement]." Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 123.

Brasco Manufacturing. "In All Modern Metals and Finishes [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 66 (June 1937): 9.

Chase Brass & Copper. "The Penalty of 'Skin-deep' Modernization [advertisement]." Architectural Record 63 (September 1935): 217.

Formica Insulation Company. "12 Striking Store Front Suggestions [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 66 (June 1937): 13.

Formica Insulation Company. Formica for Store Modernization. Cincinnati, OH: Formica, 1935.

General Electric. "For Remodeling or New Construction [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 61 (August 1937): 14.

Insulated Steel Construction Company. Modernizing with Porcelain Enamel. New York: Insulated Steel, 1935.

Iron Fireman Company. "The Heart of Modernization [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 65 (July 1936): 47.

Johns-Manville. "Important Announcement [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 61 (October 1934): 35.

Johns-Manville. "Johns-Manville Modernizes a Main Street Shop [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 96.

Johns-Manville. 101 Practical Suggestions on Home Improvement. New York: J-M, 1934.

Johnson Service Company. "When Johnson Controls...[advertisement]." Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 34.

Kawneer Company. The Kawneer Book of Storefronts. Niles, MI: Kawneer, 1936.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "Beauty Always Pays! [advertisement]." American Architect 146 (June 1935): 97.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "Dress Up for Bigger Business [advertisement]." Apparel Arts, 1 March 1938. Reprinted in 1938 Advertising Scrapbook.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "Dress Up for Bigger Business [advertisement]." Reprinted in 1938 Advertising Scrapbook.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "Glass Dominates Designs for Modernization [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 63 (December 1935): 50.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "LOF Storefronts of Metal and Glass [advertisement]." American Architect, Architectural Record, Pencil Points, Architectural Forum (February 1938). Reprinted in 1938 Advertising Yearbook.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "New LOF Plan Helps Utilities Sell More Luminous Storefronts [advertisement]." Electrical World, 30 July 1938. Reprinted in 1938 Advertising Yearbook.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "Night is Brighter than Day [advertisement]." American Architect 151 (July 1937): 28.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "Salesmanship in Metal and Glass [advertisement]." Motor Magazine, September 1938. Reprinted in 1938 Advertising Yearbook.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "Sell Your Store [advertisement]." IGA Grocergram, May 1940, reprinted in LOF, 1940 Advertising Yearbook.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "Storefronts that Have Maximum Display Both Night and Day [advertisement]." Architectural Record 84 (September 1938): 9.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "The Newest Idea in Luminous Storefronts [advertisement]." IGA Grocergram, October 1938. Reprinted in LOF, 1938 Advertising Yearbook.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "The Wallflower of Main Street [advertisement]." Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 17.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "To Attract the Crowd [advertisement]." Box Office, May 1938. Reprinted in 1938 Advertising Yearbook.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "To Keep in Step with Competition [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, November 1935, p. 95.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. "Vitrolite, the Colorful Structural Glass [advertisement]." Chain Store Age (September 1935), p. 119.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. 18th Annual Report for Year Ending 31 December 1934. Toledo: LOF, 1935.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. 19th Annual Report for Year Ending 31 December 1935. Toledo: LOF, 1936.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. 20th Annual Report for the Year Ending 31 December 1936 (Toledo: Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1937), p. 6.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. 21st Annual Report for the Year Ending 31 December 1937 (Toledo: Libbey-Owens-Ford, 1938), p. 7.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. 22nd Annual Report for Year Ending 31 December 1938. Toledo: LOF, 1939.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. 52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass (Toledo: Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company, 1935).

Libbey-Owens-Ford. LOF Colorful Storefronts are an Invitation to Stop and Shop. Toledo: LOF, 1938 [LOF MSS-066, Box 16, folder 32].

Libbey-Owens-Ford. LOF Modernization Budget Plan. Toledo: LOF, 193[?] [LOF MSS-066, Box 6, Folder 23, Miscellaneous Company Documents].

Libbey-Owens-Ford. Marvels in Glass. Toledo: LOF, 1939 [LOF MSS-066 Box 16, folder 32].

Libbey-Owens-Ford. Put on a New Front. It Pays! Toledo: LOF, 1936 [LOF MSS-066, Box 25].

Libbey-Owens-Ford. Red and White and Libbey-Owens-Ford Join Hands. Toledo: LOF, 1937 [LOF MSS-066 Box 16, folder 32].

Libbey-Owens-Ford. The Batch (newsletter). Toledo: LOF, monthly 1939-1945.

Libbey-Owens-Ford. The Storefront is a Step Toward Better Business. Toledo: LOF, 1938 [LOF MSS-066 Box 16, folder 32].

Libbey-Owens-Ford. Today's Main Street is Open For Business. Toledo: LOF, 1956 [LOF, MSS-066, Box 16, Folder 32].

Libbey-Owens-Ford. Visual Fronts by the LOF Glass Company. Toledo: LOF, 1943 [LOF, MSS-066, Box 16, Folder 32].

Libbey-Owens-Ford. Vitrolite for Store Fronts. Toledo: LOF, 1936 [LOF MSS-066, Box 25].

Libbey-Owens-Ford. Vitrolite Photo Album [1930s-1940s] [LOF MSS-066 Box 46/folder 93].

Libbey-Owens-Ford. Why a New LOF Storefront is a Business Asset. Toledo: LOF, 1938 [LOF MSS-066, Box 16, folder 32].

Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Policy Holders Service Bureau. Merchandising and Advertising Practices in the Building Material and Equipment Field. New York: Met Life, 1931.

Owens-Illinois. "An Appreciation of Architecture Long Overdue [advertisement]." Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 125.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Owens-Illinois. "Merchandising by Day and by Night [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 33.

Owens-Illinois. "They're Going Modern with Insulux Glass Block [advertisement]." American Architect 150 (January 1937): 120.

Owens-Illinois. The New Story in Pictures: Owens-Illinois Insulux Glass Block. Toledo: Owens-Illinois, 1937.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "10 New Detail Drawings of Pittco Store Front Metal Applications [advertisement]." Architectural Record 84 (November 1938): 39.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "A Modern Pittco Store Front Builds Up Business [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, September 1935, p. 127.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "A Pittco Store Front Says Come In [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, October 1935, p. 87.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "A Pittco Store Front Says Come In [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, October 1935, p. 87.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Design Unified Store Fronts [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 73.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "For Individuality in Store Fronts [advertisement]." Architectural Record 85 (April 1939): 9.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "For Perfect Execution of the Store Fronts You Design [advertisement]." American Architect 148 (March 1936): 15.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Glass is Modernizing Main Street [advertisement]." Architectural Record 88 (October 1940): 131.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Good Chain Store Locations [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, March 1935, p. 105.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "How a Modern Pittco Store Front Puts Money in your Pocket [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, October 1936, p. 117.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Increased Profits Usually Pay the Bill [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, July 1935, p. 73.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "It Pays to Modernize Main Street [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, June 1935, p. 73.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Make Chain Store Sales Grow [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, June 1936, p. 127.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Make the Store Fronts You Design Better Looking [advertisement]." American Architect 146 (April 1935): 102.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "New Customers...Better Satisfied Customers [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, November 1934, p. 103.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "New Freedom in Store Design [advertisement]." American Architect 149 (August 1936): 114.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Now Design Unified Store Fronts [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 67 (July 1937): 73.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Our Organization is Particularly Well Qualified [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, November 1932, p. 661.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Pittco Store Front Products Offer New Possibilities [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 63 (December 1935): 59.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Split Seconds [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, September 1936, p. 123.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Turn Passers-By into Profitable Customers [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, May 1935, p. 93.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "We Offer Architects the Services of Our Staff of Store Front Specialists [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 63 (July 1935): 45.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "When Designing New Fronts for Old Stores Under NHA [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 62 (April 1935): 65.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "When You Hire Employees [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, December 1935, p. 73.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. "Why Does a Pittco Store Front Make Your Chain Store Individual? [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, November 1936, p. 121.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. Glass: History, Manufacture and Its Universal Application. Pittsburgh: PPG, 1923.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. How Modern Store Fronts Work Profit Magic. Pittsburgh: PPG, 1934.

Pittsburgh Plate Glass. Pittsburgh Plate Products (newsletter) 44-50 (monthly, 1935-1940).

Republic Steel. "Modernize Main Street [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 62 (June 1935): 45.

Republic Steel. "Modernize Main Street with New Faces [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 63 (June 1935): 45.

Republic Steel. "Our Volume in Remodeled Stores has Jumped 100 to 200% [advertisement]." Chain Store Age, November 1934, inside back cover.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Revere Copper & Brass. "It Pays to Practice What You Preach [advertisement]." Building Modernization, July 1935, p. 33.

Ruberoid. Modernizing Money. New York: Ruberoid Company, 1935.

Stritch, Thomas. The Kawneer Story. Niles, MI: Kawneer Company, 1956.

U.S. Steel. "Modern Architects do Wonders [advertisement]." American Architect 150 (June 1937): 116.

U.S. Steel. "There's Money in Remodeling Store Fronts [advertisement]." American Architect 148 (February 1936): 99.

Veribrite. "Resplendent! [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 66 (March 1937): 61.

Vitrolite Company. "Find Out How little It Costs to Beautify with Vitrolite [advertisement]." American Architect 146 (June 1935): 97.

Westinghouse. "2 New Luminaires [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 70 (February 1939): 35.

Weyerhaeuser. "7 Good Reasons Why Weyerhaeuser 4-Square Lumber [advertisement]." Architectural Forum 61 (December 1934): inside back cover.

Archival Sources

Of the numerous archival collections consulted for this project the following are most relevant.

Ward M. Canaday Collection. Ward M. Canaday Center, University of Toledo [Collection No. 072].

Horace Ginsbern Collection [Drawings]. Avery Archives, Columbia University [1989.005].

Morris Lapidus Collection [Photographs]. Avery Archives, Columbia University [1994.010].

Libbey-Owens-Ford Collection. Ward M. Canaday Center, University of Toledo [LOF MSS-066].

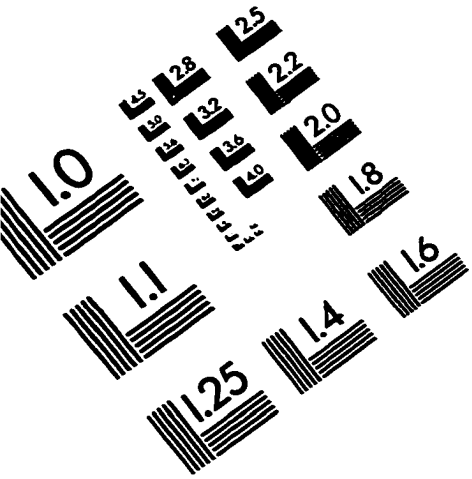
Records of the Central Housing Committee. National Archives of the United States [Record Group 207 Housing and Home Finance Agency/Central Housing Committee].

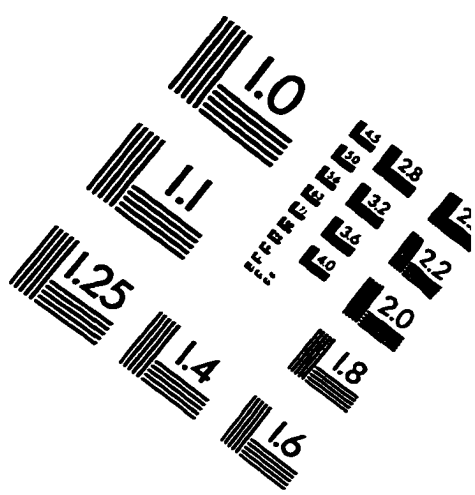
Records of the Government of the United States (Federal Housing Administration). National Archives of the United States [Record Group 287].

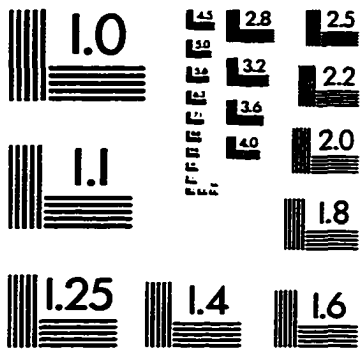
Walter Dorwin Teague Collection. George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University [NXSV1044-A].

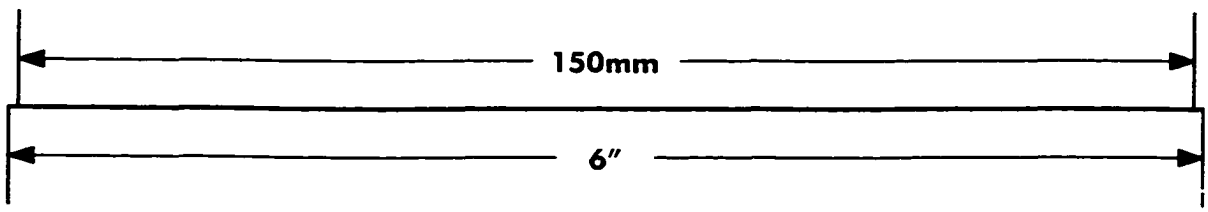
Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

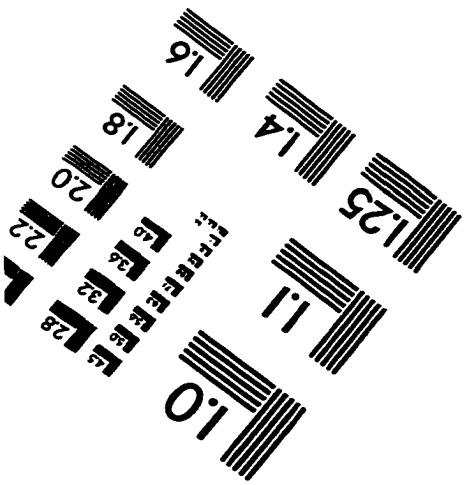
IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

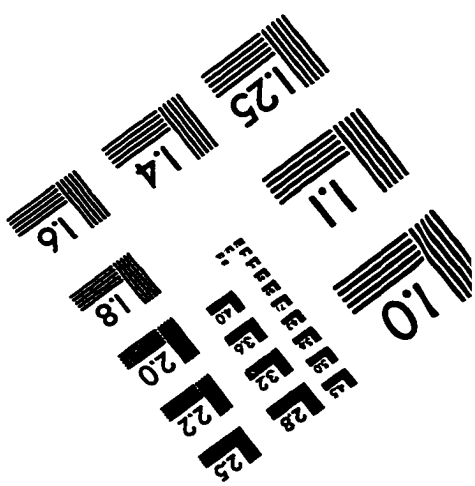












APPLIED IMAGE, Inc
1653 East Main Street
Rochester, NY 14609 USA
Phone: 716/482-0300
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.