

The height limit worked in conjunction with topography. The downtown that emerged during the late nineteenth century was configured like the neck of an hourglass, bounded to the east and northeast by lowlands and railroad tracks and to the immediate west by the precipitous slopes of Bunker Hill, which extended south to Fifth Street. Expansion to the north would have to overcome a narrow, irregular street pattern and rolling terrain. To the south and southwest, on the other hand, the existing grid of streets was straighter and wider, the land nearly flat. These distinctions continued for a considerable distance: hilly terrain lay to the north and northwest of the established city while seemingly limitless flatlands extended in a broad arc from south to west. After 1900, the first great thrust of residential development occurred within this latter sphere, where the terrain enabled lower costs for the construction of houses and, most importantly, of streetcar lines. Barring unusual circumstances, downtown was likely to grow in the same direction as the city itself.

DEPARTMENT STORES

Beyond the limits of height and direction, a factor that proved key to the specific form of downtown's expansion was the rise of the large department store. No other kind of business activity and no infrastructural project appears to have matched the impact of this commercial enterprise in setting the main paths and parameters of downtown into the mid-twentieth century.

Department stores in the modern sense did not exist in Los Angeles until the century's end, and even then they were of relatively modest size. The process began in 1890 when a dry goods emporium, A. Hamburger & Sons, expanded its operation by moving into the four-story Phillips Block (built 1887) at Spring and Franklin streets. One of the largest, most ornate business buildings then in the city, the latter contained around 40,000 square feet. Fifteen years later, Hamburger's had more than trebled in size, adding to the rear and acquiring the use of an adjacent building (1896, 1899). The store's only rival was the Broadway, founded in 1896 as a small enterprise situated close to the then southwestern edge of downtown at Fourth Street and Broadway. That store was enlarged in 1901 and twice in 1905 to encompass over 145,000 square feet, likewise by adapting contiguous space. These were the sole full-fledged department stores in 1906. Only seven other retailers occupied more than 50,000 square feet: four dry goods houses (Coulter's, Ville de Paris, Boston Dry Goods Store, and Jacoby Brothers) and three furniture stores (Barker Brothers, California Furniture Company, and Los Angeles Furniture Company), all of which likewise had expanded in recent years. The average store size remained much less; most occupied under 5,000 square feet.⁸

Department store growth between 1890 and 1906 was very modest compared to what occurred over the next decade, when four enormous buildings were erected. In appearance and appointments, they

compared favorably to counterparts nationwide and were outpaced only by the most venerable operations, such as John Wanamaker in Philadelphia, R. H. Macy in New York, and Marshall Field in Chicago. This transformation took place during a significant period of change for the department store business generally: retail operations were eclipsing those of the wholesale trade, the range of goods and services available greatly expanded, and shopping at such places became at once a frequent pastime and ritual indulgence among millions of consumers, especially middle-class women. To accommodate these changes, a new wave of department store construction began in some U.S. cities as early as the 1890s and was particularly intense in the years before World War I. Buildings were much larger and far more sumptuous than most of their forebears. The new department store was a latter-day palace—the most ornate and luxurious environment to which many consumers had ready access.⁹

The Los Angeles merchants who took the ambitious leap from modest-sized stores to grand emporia understood the national phenomenon of which they were a part. Each studied firsthand contemporary developments in the field in major cities while preparing plans at home. Each also seems to have realized that Los Angeles was a metropolis in the making and that by redefining their own businesses they would have a significant impact on the city itself.

The first project was the most audacious. In April 1906 D. A. Hamburger announced plans to build an enormous store containing

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A. Hamburger & Sons (later May Company) department store, 801–829 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, 1906–1908, A. F. Rosenheim, architect. Photo ca. 1908. (Security Pacific Historical Photograph Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.)



nearly 500,000 square feet, over two-thirds of which was to be selling space—purportedly the largest building of its type west of Chicago. The exterior possessed much the same purposeful character—its composition at once classicizing the reflective of the structural frame beneath—as Marshall Field's new State Street store (1900–1902, 1905–1907), while carrying more embellishment (figure 12). Inside, its vast selling floors were elaborately appointed and boasted choice wares. A suite of intimate show-rooms was set aside for gowns and millinery. Departments specialized in sporting goods, glass, china, pianos, rugs, wallpaper, furniture, and upholstery. A restaurant, together with a market carrying basic and fancy foods, occupied the entire fourth floor. Besides staffed retiring rooms for women customers, there were offices for doctors and dentists, a 1,000-seat auditorium, and, for several years, the public library.¹⁰ The scale of operation combined with the array of amenities was impressive for any city, and would make almost everything else in the western half of the nation seem dated. So big an enterprise depended upon a huge clientele; this palace would serve the area's swelling middle-class population. But Hamburger's



Robert Marsh & Co.

Main Corridor, Ground Floor, H. W. Hellman Building

Both Phones EX. 175

The greatest building in all the West will be the New Hamburger Store. Engineers have here laid for the past week in special consultation by reference to the installation of boilers, heating equipment, ventilating, compressed air, electric lighting, cold storage and the plumbing and cleaning systems. These important factors have been successfully located and the engineers have returned here to draw up specifications and let contracts, which for the machinery ALREADY will cost over \$200,000.

More than 2000 tons of steel are now on route and will soon be here in Los Angeles—both the city and the Hamburger Store.

A riveted man, a steel mill and a fast line of what this gigantic undertaking require to see the colossal giant of steel welded together, you will be sure you indeed to the "black fellows"—the real estate agents, who, when they run fast on your legs, knock you—'you'll be sorry you didn't take our advice and invest in and around the NEW COMMERCIAL CENTER.

Buy any one of the above "black fellows"—IT WILL MAKE YOU RICH.

The conditions are bettering themselves daily, and money is getting easier, confidence in Los Angeles as a future city of great possibilities is getting firmer daily. The opportunities for making money never will be so good as they are TODAY.

Marshall Field had twenty-five million in Chicago real estate and almost three million in New York. Nothing is safer and surer.

The southeast corner of Fourth and Broadway is worth \$2000 per foot. What made that value, when ten years ago it could be bought for \$400 per foot? Simply the fact of passing that corner making it THE CENTER OF THE RETAIL DISTRICT.

In a few years (twenty at the most) Ninth street will be the business center of the city and value of that point will be enormous, as valuable as they now are at Fourth and Broadway.

DO NOT DELAY—every MINUTE you are losing opportunities and MONEY.

Every one of the above "black fellows" are to be improved and will pay good interest from completion. There is 10 per cent. to 15 per cent. in any one of these pieces between now and January 1st.

A WORD TO THE WISE IS SUFFICIENT

"Keep Your Eye on Hill Street—The Future Fifth Avenue of Los Angeles"

In time Hill street will be equally as valuable as Broadway. Localities change—streets change. Broadway for half a century was New York's greatest retail street. Today roads are changed as Broadway than on Fifth Avenue. The same holds true in Los Angeles. Spring street used to be the great retail street. Now it is Broadway and ten years hence it will be HILL STREET.

Newcomers must go to Hill street. This city is not going to stop growing. It is in its infancy. Twenty-five years hence it will have one million population, and when it attains this growth, Hill street will be "IT."

We remark in this space advertise all the properties we have on Broadway and Hill streets, but if you are interested, call and see us.

One of the best buys pictured among the "black fellows" at the top of this page is the northeast corner of Eighth and Broadway—100x120 feet. As the illustration shows, it is diagonally across from the gigantic Hamburger store, which will be the hub of the new commercial center. Broadway will never present a more opportune buy. There is a good feature in this piece for the buyer who is interested in a magnificent opportunity to invest in the attractive price we are offering.

We can safely venture to say that not another city in the United States offers a better business buy for the money than this northeast corner of Eighth and Broadway—in the very shadow of the Big Store. Go down and see it today and then call and see us in the morning.

- Another buy of wonderful promise is the north side of Eighth street, between Broadway and Hill—50x120 feet. You can buy this fine piece of commercial ground for \$20,000, and it's worth more money. Remember that this property is also directly across from the great Hamburger Enterprise. This property is now renting at a sufficient amount to carry it until you are ready to acquire. We have a tenant who can guarantee you 7 per cent. for the next ten years if you build. **\$90,000**
- Another excellent buy is 425 South Hill street. The piece is 20x120 feet—located on east side of Hill street, between Eighth and Ninth streets. Just a step from the Hill street side of the Hamburger Store. **\$60,000**
- A remarkably good one is the piece on Hill street, between Seventh and Eighth—100x135 feet. **\$125,000**
- A fortune maker for anybody is the Hotel Lillie, with 60 feet frontage on Hill street, and 135 feet deep to 20-foot alley. You know no ought to know the powerful location of this property if you have ever walked down Hill street from Fourth to Eighth. This property is located between Fifth and Sixth, facing beautiful Central Park, the finest public square in Los Angeles. The hotel contains 250 rooms and there is a view of ocean on the property for a large addition. We can deliver this property in one business day. **\$130,000**
- Southeast corner of 15th and Hill—120x150—8000 per foot. **\$72,000**
- For a future investment there is an better piece on Hill street. Its size makes it a piece that will command a big price in five years hence. **\$60,000**
- Northeast corner of 7th and Hill streets. **\$60,000**

- You can still get 46 feet at \$200 per foot and still get as much for the Hill street frontage as you would on the entire length. The improvements to be made at this street will advance the property \$100 per foot.
- 1025-7 Hill street, 30x135 feet, at \$1000 per foot. Last week at this price. **\$50,000**
- This is on the west side of the street, between Tenth and Eleventh streets. The corner on Twelfth sold for \$1200 a foot. This is absolutely the cheapest choice in piece of Hill street property to be had. They are now asking \$2500 between Ninth and Tenth. The price of this property will be raised next week.
- We have the small east corner of Eighth and Hill and northeast corner of Ninth and Hill for sale at attractive prices.
- We can sell you property on east side of Broadway, between Seventh and Ninth, at \$2000 per foot—by January 1st, 1907, it will be worth \$4000.
- We can deliver property on the east side of Broadway, between Eighth and Ninth, at \$2200 a foot that we are positive will be worth \$3000 by the time the steel frame of the Hamburger Building is up in a month hence. We will use this time to build to \$2750 a foot.
- We have 20x110 feet on the west side of Spring street, between Eighth and Ninth streets, at \$2250 per foot. **\$112,500**
- Property on the block north is held at \$2000 a foot and this will be worth the same within the year.
- 40x115 feet on north side of Ninth, between Hill and Broadway. **\$44,000**
- Asking \$1000 on Eighth street, between same streets. This will be worth as much very shortly.

The Hamburger Realty & Trust Co.
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BUILDING

also was clearly targeted to the elite, catering to its needs and whims as did no other store then operating in southern California.

The most remarkable aspect of Hamburger's plan was the location. The site extended from Broadway to Hill Street on the south side of Eighth, several blocks away from the edge of the business district, in a precinct occupied by modest houses, flats, and neighborhood shops.¹¹ In the process of creating a new kind of store for the region, Hamburger was determined to reshape the city. He was not the first department store owner to "pioneer" a location, as members of the trade referred to the strategy. A. T. Stewart and R. H. Macy had made similarly unprecedented moves in New York during the mid-nineteenth century, with stores that in turn became catalysts for a new "uptown" shopping district known as the Ladies Mile. Now the process there was repeating itself, with major new stores erected further north on Fifth Avenue. Yet in both phases of relocation the target districts in New York were already well established, first as fashionable places of residence and later as locations of important institutions, houses of worship, hotels, and clubs.¹² Hamburger's site, on the other hand, was marginal in both stature and function.

Perhaps the closest historical analogy to the Los Angeles enterprise had occurred along State Street in Chicago shortly after the Civil War, when Potter Palmer acquired extensive landholdings in what until then had been considered an undesirable precinct. Palmer convinced his former associates, Marshall Field and Levi Leiter, to erect a large new store on one of the blocks. That move, in turn, triggered a shift in the retail center from Lake Street to State, of which Field himself was a principal beneficiary through his real estate transactions.¹³

Whether Hamburger knew of this precedent or not, he pursued much the same course. While assembling the land for his store, he purchased numerous additional lots in the vicinity, and soon after plans for the building were announced began an aggressive campaign to sell sixteen parcels valued at nearly \$1.8 million (figure 13). The financial opportunities the store would provide investors were trumpeted in advertisements:

The remarkable growth of Los Angeles has forced the retail district southward. Those who anticipated . . . the trend . . . and invested wisely, have rolled up fortunes. Those who are *now* buying in advance of the present retail growth will reap big rewards. The gigantic Hamburger store . . . will be the backbone of the new commercial center. Investments made anywhere . . . [near] this building will bring wealth to the . . . buyers.¹⁴

By combining real estate speculation with retail development, Hamburger reduced the risks of breaking from the fold. He also secured a means to finance the dramatic enlargement of his business. Furthermore, the new site was much less expensive than any in the established business district. But the location was also strategic, lying close to where a number of the car lines from middle-class residential tracts approached the city center. Riders would reach the big new store before others downtown and might decide to remain, perusing the acres of floor space, rather than traipsing several blocks afield to comparison-shop.

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Hamburger Realty & Trust Company advertisement. (*Los Angeles Times*, 22 July 1906, V-19.)

Hamburger's enterprise succeeded. From the time it opened in August 1908, the store functioned as a magnet of trade. Development southward was accelerated. If the store first rose in splendid isolation, it was joined by many other retail establishments, office blocks, and theaters over the next decade. By the late 1920s, Broadway and Spring Street south to Eleventh formed the most densely developed axis in the metropolitan area. Yet the store never became a true centerpiece. Building activity to its west was sporadic. Hill Street did not grow to be the "Fifth Avenue of Los Angeles" as Hamburger had predicted. The main shopping district never extended far beyond his store to the south, west, or east. Part of the problem was that Hamburger failed to attain the hegemony he sought. Almost at once competitors entered the scene who likewise understood the potential rewards of pioneering location.

The first rival initiative was launched just two weeks after Hamburger announced his plans. Undertaken by east coast entrepreneurs, the project entailed a seven-story emporium of nearly 200,000 square feet and located just one block north at Seventh Street and Broadway (figure 14). When construction was well under way, the syndicate collapsed. Soon, however, the lease was assumed by Arthur Letts, owner of the Broadway department store. Apparently, Letts sought to safeguard against being unable to renew the lease of his own building on favorable terms. He turned the project over to an employee, John Bullock, giving him complete freedom to establish a separate store.¹⁵ Opened in March 1907, Bullock's proved an enormous success by concentrating ever more on high-caliber



merchandise and ever less on run-of-the-mill stock. Even before Hamburger's opened, Bullock's was attracting widespread patronage. The demand for prestigious goods surpassed all expectations, fueled by the prosperous middle class more than the carriage trade. To accommodate its growing clientele, Bullock's opened a ten-story addition in 1912. Large adjacent buildings were purchased in 1917 and 1919, bringing the store's floor area to nearly 460,000 square feet.¹⁶

Letts's apparent munificence toward Bullock was probably motivated by trying to keep Hamburger's expansive program at bay as well as blocking competitors from acquiring the site. Moreover, Bullock's location might inhibit any tendency for merchants to relocate yet further south around Hamburger's. Bullock's profile as an exclusive establishment complemented rather than posed a threat to Lett's principal operation. The Broadway's own swift rise as one of the region's biggest retail establishments stemmed from merchandising aimed at budget-conscious shoppers. Advertisements continually stressed low price and good value in a store that was "always giving a little more for a little less than any one else . . . a lonesome landmark on the road to economy," at once a center of style and "a museum of cheapness."¹⁷

Once Bullock's future seemed secure, a second salvo in the campaign to hold Hamburger's in check was launched by the Broadway itself. In December 1912, Letts unveiled plans for a mammoth new building of some 460,000 square feet, nearly equaling Hamburger's dimensions (figure 15).¹⁸ But rivalry was by no means the sole cause for expansion. Only through growth could the seemingly insatiable demand for consumer goods be met. Perhaps even more important was the need to maintain the high volume/low price equation relative to other stores. Without a significant increase in the scale of its operation, the Broadway could not remain competitive.

One aspect of Letts's scheme that resisted change, however, was its location. The decision to stay at Fourth and Broadway, which necessitated a phased, four-year construction program, was defended on fiscal grounds. Letts explained that "it is very easy to move" but difficult to generate enough new revenue to justify the change. If the store is well run, it need not relocate: "I have visited a great many cities and I have never seen them take business away from an established corner having a modern store of the size that the new Broadway will be." On the other hand, leapfrogging merchants "are injuring the city, . . . creating an upheaval in . . . real estate values that will make it very difficult to get reasonable loans . . . for improvements; they are creating a doubt in the minds of property owners . . . north of Fourth street whether or not it will be wise to improve."¹⁹ The business core, in other words, should not shift from one part to another as it periodically had done in many cities during the second half of the nineteenth century. But Letts stood in the minority among the downtown business interests. During the rapid pace of the city center's expansion before World War I, most major retailers moved their stores at least once, always in a more or less southwesterly direction; few significant

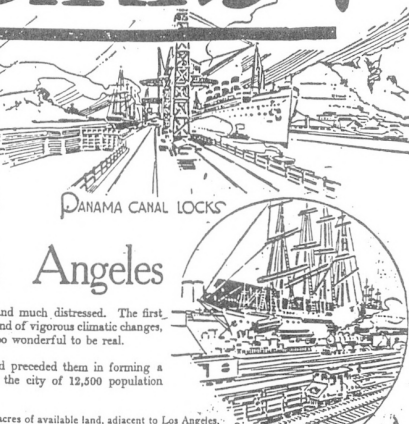
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Bullock's department store, 639-657
S. Broadway, Los Angeles, 1906-1907,
Parkinson & Bergstrom, architects. Photo
ca. 1907-1908. (Whittington Collection,
Department of Special Collections, Uni-
versity of Southern California.)

Opportunity!

1913

ARTHUR LETTS
Broadway Dept. Store
HOME 10571. BOWY 4944. BROADWAY COR. 4TH. L.A.



Thy Other Name—Los Angeles

Over the desert's wide expanse the wagon train toiled on, weary, travel-stained and much distressed. The first of the pioneers, who, as far back as 1781, came across the continent from the land of vigorous climatic changes, to the hitherto unknown glorious California. A Paradise it seemed, almost too wonderful to be real.

Twelve soldiers from the Spanish garrison at the San Gabriel Mission had preceded them in forming a settlement, the Pueblo de Los Angeles. From this modest beginning arose the city of 12,500 population in 1881.

Then the coming of irrigation, when the ingenuity of man put to more practical use the gifts of Heaven, the real wonders of California began to unfold. The outer world took notice. Those who came to visit wanted to remain. Those who went back sang the glories of the new Eden, as it were.

And so, swift as the fleeting wings of time, the city steadily grew with typical American energy, until the 1910 census revealed a population of 319,198.

Not for a moment has Los Angeles paused. Trans-continental railroads and steamship lines, that long since replaced the desert wagon train, bring into our midst increasing thousands yearly, until today, at the threshold of the year 1913, it is estimated that Los Angeles has a population close to 450,000.

The grand spirit of co-operation and harmony that inspired the earlier settlers increased in breadth and scope with the advancing years and the new Californians caught the spirit and they, in turn, heralded broadcast the wonders of Los Angeles and glorious California.

And now, as we take our first steps into the new year 1913, we have but to glance around us at the opportunities that are shaping the destinies of a city that is to be one of the greatest in the annals of the World's history.

First, the Owens River Aqueduct, 240 miles long, that was commenced September 20th, 1907, will be finished by March of this year, at an estimated cost of \$24,500,000. This means water in abundance for all purposes.

Then the building of the San Pedro Outer Harbor, which will likely be completed the latter part of 1913, at an approximate cost, including government expenditure, of \$8,000,000, providing a Harbor for the ships of the World.

And the possible arrival of the first boat through the Panama Canal, in the latter part of 1913, means the opening of the greatest piece of engineering work in the World's history, costing approximately \$375,000,000, with its millions of dollars benefit to California.

With building permits in 1912 reaching over \$30,000,000. (And the prospects for 1913 are estimated to far exceed this.)

With thousands of acres of available land, adjacent to Los Angeles, yet to be tilled and developed; land, the productiveness of which California alone can boast, providing a livelihood for the thousands of immigrants who are to come.

With the increasing investments of the thousands of dollars of Eastern and foreign capital.

With our 2400 manufacturing plants, having an annual production of \$85,000,000, that in all probability will be doubled in the near future.

With all these advantages and scores of others that might be mentioned.

Who Shall Gainsay the Fact That Los Angeles Is the Very Word "Opportunity"?

And the Broadway Department Store, that it may faithfully show its spirit of co-operation and harmony, in this great metropolis, meets the requirements face to face, and is striving with every ounce of energy to measure up to the full standard of the city's needs.

With a wonderful new building under progress (the first glimpse of which we give you here in the picture below)—a building designed to meet the advancing needs of Los Angeles' population now and for years to come.

A new store that will provide amply for every possible need, of our working staff—realizing that best store service may be rendered to our patrons by first providing for our buying and selling organizations, that they may work under the most perfect and happy conditions.

With an ever-growing and broadening organization we are putting our heart and energy, back of every movement pertaining to the betterment of Los Angeles and more perfect store service.

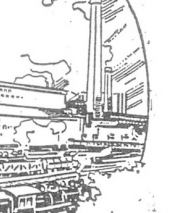
May the year 1913, the first day of which we have entered, be rich in Opportunities for you—that is our Wish and that you may have

Owens River Aqueduct commenced Sep. 20, 1907, to be finished Mar. 1913. Length 240 Miles Cost (Est.) \$24,500,000. Oil Production So Calif. Annually \$10,429,163. Citrus fruit trees in L.A. 3,976,333

Panama Canal: Ships expected thru to L.A. latter part of 1913. Estimated Cost \$375,000,000. Outer Harbor to be finished 1913. \$8,000,000. Inner Harbor in progress \$3,000,000.



Taxable Wealth of Los Angeles \$496,522,390. Bank Clearings Year \$1,129,620,504. Building Permits Year Over \$30,000,000. Post Office Receipts Year \$1,813,296.



Area of L.A. City 121.25 sq. Miles. Population 1881 17,500. 1912 450,000. 2400 Manufacturing plants. Value of products \$85,000,000. 127 Public Schools of Buildings. Inc State Normal School

A Most Prosperous and STORE CLOSED All Day Today

Happy New Year



THE NEW BROADWAY



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The Broadway department store, 401–423 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, 1912–1915, Parkinson & Bergstrom, architects. Advertisement. (*Los Angeles Times*, 1 January 1913, II-11.)

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J. W. Robinson Company department store, 600–632 W. Seventh Street, Los Angeles 1914–1915, Noonan & Richards, architects; exterior completely resurfaced 1934. Photo ca. 1915. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

projects were launched north of Fourth Street.

The final setback to retaining the old business district's primacy came in May 1914, with the announcement by the J. W. Robinson Company that it would erect a palatial new store of some 400,000 square feet. Robinson's had been one of the first major retailers to relocate on Broadway, opening its store there in 1895. Now the firm was moving further afield, three blocks west of Bullock's, to Seven Street between Grand and Hope.²⁰ Like Hamburger's site a decade earlier, this one lay on the very edge of downtown, beyond dense development (figure 16). The location differed, however, in that it stood away from the primary axis of commercial growth. The choice was no doubt affected by those already made by competitors. Robinson's was traditionally considered the most fashionable among the city's big stores—a prominence now challenged by Hamburger's and by Bullock's. Robinson's new site stood closest to the city's affluent neighborhoods along the Figueroa Street and Adams Avenue corridors to the southwest and also to the fast-growing ones in the Wilshire district due west. With Seventh Street becoming the major access route from these places to the city center, Robinson's would be the first downtown store reached by many well-to-do shoppers.

Yet far more consequential than the few blocks' difference in space was the relative absence of vehicular congestion, which was already starting to plague Broadway.²¹ Traffic jams were irritating enough to the streetcar rider, far more so to the motorist. Robinson's president, J. M. Schneider, may have been the first merchant to recognize that a site slightly away from the center of trade could appeal to drivers because it was much easier to reach. He was quite aware that an increasing percentage of this well-heeled clientele was using the automobile for shopping trips. The new store provided an amenity then perhaps unique among re-

tail establishments nationwide: a basement parking garage, from which patrons could reach the selling floors directly by elevator.²²

Little public comment had arisen over Hamburger's plans to move during the previous decade, perhaps because most observers thought them unrealistic. Robinson's project, on the other hand, generated considerable controversy because it seemed to accelerate what was now recognized as a serious trend. The *Times* editorialized on the ostensible damage initiated by the "Hamburger hegira" to a "country" location, which propelled business development "southward like an ever thinning string of molasses taffy" and could leave "a portion . . . detached for years from the rest."

Many thoughtful observers have long deplored the fact that . . . instead of spreading out into a conveniently located, compact and well-built-up area, [businesses] have constantly tended to straggle southward in a ribbon-like band of ragged development. . . . The region already given up to business covers sufficient ground for a city three times the size of this.²³

Robinson's decision was the last straw. It "crystallized a consciousness that has been waxing and waning and waxing again in an endless cycle for many years." Now enough interested parties had begun to realize that "the business district . . . has too long been a thing on wheels. . . . Unanimity of purpose in the building of Los Angeles along modern and rational lines has been lost sight of in the scramble to create new business



centers and to make new killings for individual investors and financial cliques.” Such freewheeling forces served to destabilize conditions throughout the city center.²⁴

In the event, Robinson’s impact on the shape of downtown was greater than, but different from, what the *Times* predicted. The emporium became the catalyst for a cross-axial corridor that began almost at once to check the advance of new building projects to the south along Broadway by affording a sound and for some a preferable alternative. Soon after the store opened in September 1915, plans were under way for two of the region’s most prestigious dry goods firms, Coulter’s and the Ville de Paris, to relocate in large new buildings opposite one another at Seventh and Olive streets. Smaller specialty shops came as well, many of them situated on the lower floors of multistory office buildings, themselves following the retailers’ lead, just as had occurred on Broadway.²⁵ By 1920, Bullock’s and Robinson’s functioned as anchors to an elite shopping precinct that was unprecedented in Los Angeles (figure 17).

At the turn of the twentieth century, stores catering to any and all segments of the consumer public had been close to one another in a relatively confined area. The dispersal of retailing through the development of large department stores not only greatly extended the business district’s boundaries but stimulated a hierarchical division of precincts within those boundaries. Each area possessed much the same character as its largest stores. If Seventh Street represented the high end of this order, Broadway encompassed a much greater range. Some of its stores (N. B. Blackstone Company, Mullen & Bluett, Silverwood’s), from the Sixth Street intersection south, directly competed with those on Seventh or were strong, second-string counterparts.²⁶ Established stores oriented toward the lower end of the market (J. M. Hale Company, Jacoby Brothers) generally retained their sites north of Fourth Street. Newcomers to the bargain trade (Fifth Street Store) took sites nearby.

The locational tugs-of-war that occurred in downtown Los Angeles during the early twentieth century would be repeated by the major department store companies in the development of branches during the late 1920s and 1930s and again, with greater intensity, after World War II. More than any other kind of establishment, these emporia proved crucial to attaining prominence as an important locus of trade among the metropolitan area’s many outlying business districts. The introduction of such a facility could help secure the stature of an existing district, but more often these stores were instrumental in creating new hubs, echoing the reconfiguration of downtown spurred by Hamburger’s, Bullock’s, and Robinson’s. Likewise, too, the choice of a new site that came with expansion was driven not primarily by a search for cheap land or to realize an increase in land values for collateral real estate investments, but to provide the most convenient access for store patrons, a measure that included avoiding congested areas.

Arthur Letts correctly understood the power of a big store to generate business. Size, combined with quality of merchandise, service, and

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W. Seventh Street, looking east from Olive Street, Ville de Paris (later Dyas) department store (1916–1917) at right. Photo ca. 1926. (California Historical Society Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)



price, could create a prime location, but not just anywhere. A major reason for Hamburger's and Robinson's success in attracting trade and additional development was that each lay on a major approach route to downtown and thus functioned somewhat as a gateway; Bullock's site at the juncture of those routes was no less important to its success. Letts's call for a rebuilding of the old city center might have been valid were the locations there equally strategic. But since the blocks north of Sixth Street were hemmed in by Bunker Hill on the west side, the area was too constrained to accommodate the needs of a rapidly growing metropolis.

EXPANSION

Downtown Los Angeles's boom during the 1920s intensified patterns of the previous two decades but did not generate significant new ones, despite the proliferation of automobiles. Broadway remained a major spine for development as far south as Tenth Street (now Olympic Boulevard). Spring Street became identified almost entirely with the leading financial institutions that continued to erect grand quarters along the blocks between Fourth and Eighth streets. To the east, Main Street harbored less prestigious businesses, while Los Angeles Street became lined with a number of large wholesaling and light manufacturing companies, especially those engaged in the garment and accessories trades. On the other side of Broadway, Seventh Street attracted ever more premier retail and office functions. Some of the most concentrated activity occurred in the area west of Broadway and north of Seventh, which, by the decade's end, boasted new theaters, hotels, and clubs as well as numerous tall office buildings. The area directly south of Seventh grew much more sporadi-