



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-

cally; most multistory construction rose amid smaller buildings of the previous generation or amid newly vacant lots used for commercial parking.<sup>27</sup>

Retail development was among the most active contributors to downtown's progress. Floor space in shopping facilities probably doubled between the war and the depression. But, like the district generally, retail growth occurred as a result of increased density rather than significant territorial expansion. Virtually all new building of consequence took place between Fourth and Ninth streets on Broadway and between Broadway and Flower Street (one block west of Robinson's) on Seventh. Most new retail activity on side streets was situated no more than a block away from the two principal corridors. Hill Street emerged as an important secondary spine, but only for a short distance, close to the Broadway and Seventh intersection. Office buildings erected beyond these blocks seldom attracted retail functions save those that were convenience-oriented or so specialized that they could operate independently. Geographic stability characterized not only the district as a whole but also the location of its stores. Many prominent merchants remained at their established addresses. When movement did occur, it was usually within a block or two of the former site.



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Bullock's department store, showing additions (left to right): 630 S. Hill Street (1933–1934), 638 S. Hill (1923), 640 S. Hill (built for Pease Furniture Company, purchased 1917), 650 S. Hill (1924), 660 S. Hill (1927–1928), 325 W. Seventh Street (built 1908 as Gerard Eastman Building, purchased 1919), and original building. Not shown: 639–641 S. Broadway, 1911–1912. All but purchased buildings by John and Donald B. Parkinson, architects. Photo "Dick" Whittington, 1955. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

19

Fifth Street Store (later Milliron's), 501–515 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, 1921–1924, Aleck Curlett, architect. Photo "Dick" Whittington, 1940. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

The near absence of lateral growth in the shopping district was partly attributable to the city's department stores having demarcated a core area with ample room for dense new building. This arrangement, combined with the newness of their plants, gave department store executives no reason to redirect the course of development as the consumer market swelled. Instead, they expanded their buildings, which collectively stood as the largest single component of downtown's retail growth during the 1920s. Hamburger's again set the pace. Soon after the store's purchase by the St. Louis-based May Company in 1923, a new section was built, followed by a larger one in 1929, together more than doubling floor space. Bullock's undertook three additions between 1923 and 1928, adding a total of nearly 400,000 square feet, and purchased two adjacent buildings as well. The aggregate seemed like a city in itself and dwarfed the original section (figure 18).<sup>28</sup> Robinson's and the Broadway also erected additions in 1923 of some 158,000 and 130,000 square feet, respectively. Between 1921 and 1924, the Fifth Street Store embarked on a phased replacement of its facility, much as the Broadway had done a decade earlier, with a new building more than three times the size of its predecessor (figure 19).<sup>29</sup> Together, these programs represented over 1.5 million square feet of floor space, an area that came close to matching the total of the five big stores when originally built.

If seldom as large, new buildings for more specialized retailers were even more conspicuous elements in the shopping district's growth during the 1920s. By remaining close to the department stores, these establishments reinforced the existing structure, further inhibiting any thought of relocation. Clothing stores played an especially prominent role in the consolidating trend. Prior to World War I, most of these outlets were housed either in modest-sized, single-purpose buildings or in the lower floors of office blocks. A pronounced change began in 1920 when F. B. Silverwood opened a five-story emporium at Sixth and Broadway, with over 115,000 square feet to hold a vast stock of men's wear and accessories, arranged on multiple floors like a small department store (figure 20). Two leading rivals, Desmond's and Harris & Frank, followed suit, with new stores of 65,000 and 71,000 square feet opening in 1924 and 1925, respectively. Specialty shops for women's wear tended to remain much smaller, yet one prominent firm, Myer Siegel, constructed a six-story, 52,000-square-foot building in 1926–1927.<sup>30</sup> All these facilities were designed to project a memorable image inside and out (figure 21). Exterior treatment was more individualistic than that of earlier department and dry goods stores. Rather than sheer mass, they employed a decorous use of composition, materials, and detail to gain a strong public identity.

Music stores also acquired a conspicuous presence, with elaborate new buildings constructed to house bulky traditional wares such as pianos but also a wide selection of new items such as phonographs and radios, whose popularity was growing rapidly.<sup>31</sup> The configuration of these emporia—typically five to seven stories, encompassing 50,000 to 80,000 square feet—was much like that of furniture stores, which had enjoyed visual prominence since the 1890s owing to the space requirements of main-

There's style from "cellar to garret" in this great store  
 There's style in every one of the famous lines of merchandise featured  
 There's a large assortment to choose from in every department  
 There's a friendly, helpful spirit that permeates the entire institution  
 There's a sincere desire and constant striving to be of real service which has built this into one of America's greatest stores for men and boys

**HART SCHAFFNER & MARX CLOTHES**  
 Stetson hats, Manhattan shirts, Setz and Banister shoes

**SILVERWOODS**  
 Sixth and Broadway

**Our Eighth Home Built for You  
 Rededicated to Service**

THE FORMAL OPENING OF THE NEWEST BUILDING OF ONE OF LOS ANGELES' OLDEST MERCANTILE INSTITUTIONS, BEGINS TODAY AND CONTINUES THROUGHOUT THE WEEK.

WE TRUST THIS INVITATION WILL BE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD...IT INCLUDES EVERYONE READING THIS ANNOUNCEMENT. IT IS, IN SPIRIT AND IN FACT, TO THE ENTIRE MOUNTAIN. THE VISITORS FROM ALL PARTS OF THE LAND AND OVERSEAS; NO CARDS OF ADMISSION ARE REQUIRED. ALL ARE WELCOME.

Today—the Opening Day • Hours—Ten to Ten • No Selling  
 MUSIC BY MAX FISHER'S ORCHESTRA

**Desmond's**  
 1862 676 BROADWAY 1924

The Great Southwest  
 Receives the  
 Newest Home  
 of  
 Los Angeles'  
 Pioneer  
 Institution

20

F. B. Silverwood store, 555-559 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, 1920, Walker & Eisen, architects; altered. Advertisement. (*Los Angeles Times*, 21 November 1927, 1-9.)

21

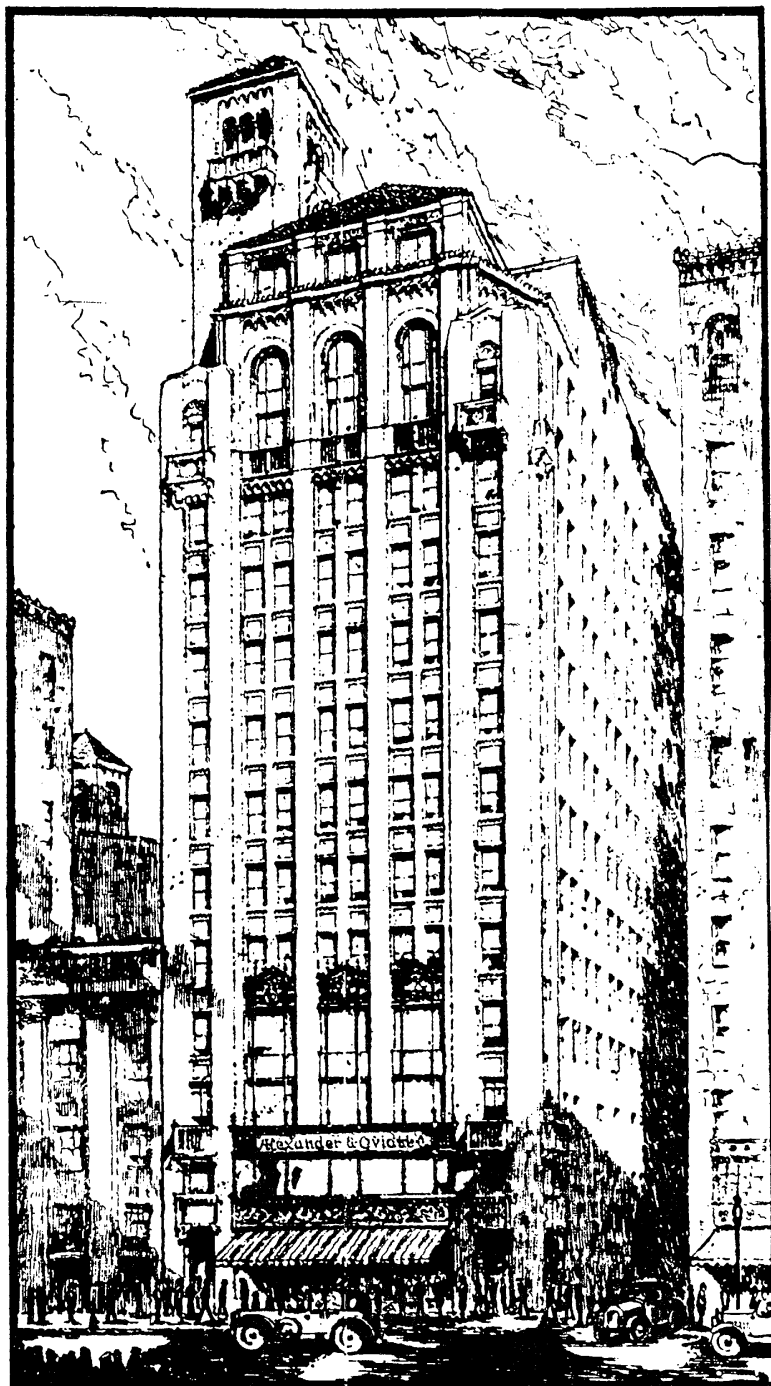
Desmond's store, 616 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, 1923-1924, A. C. Martin, architect. Opening advertisement. (*Los Angeles Times*, 16 September 1924, 1-5.)

taining an adequate stock.<sup>32</sup> Furniture store expansion was limited during the 1920s save for the ambitious program of Barker Brothers, which claimed to be the largest in the trade west of Chicago and took aggressive steps to dominate the local market. Situated on Broadway between Bullock's and Hamburger's, its complex was the product of five building campaigns and encompassed nearly 335,000 square feet when the last addition was completed in 1922.<sup>33</sup> Lacking room to expand further, the company soon prepared plans to relocate on Seventh Street in a block-long behemoth of 500,000 square feet, rivaling the major department stores as a landmark of the retail district (figure 22).<sup>34</sup> The exterior offered a marked contrast to those emporia, however, with an understated dignity and palatial references more characteristic of premier office buildings of the period. Both the principal entrance and the lobby extended three stories high, the former suggestive of a large governmental seat, the latter of an enormous movie house.

The rising cost of space in what remained the most desirable downtown locations led some retailers to erect multistory buildings in which they occupied a small portion of the space, deriving rental income from the rest. Alexander & Oviatt, a fashionable men's store, announced plans for such a venture as early as 1923. Implementation was delayed,



however, and the design was recast in a more stylish tone four years later (figure 23). Thus configured, the store's presence was fostered not only by a soaring, twelve-story mass but also by an unusually extravagant external display area, one of the first in Los Angeles to emulate the modernism of the 1925 Paris decorative arts exposition, with intricate glasswork from René Lalique's studio. The store-office combination was not limited to upper-end establishments, however. Foreman & Clark, a budget-oriented men's clothier, announced plans for a height-limit building before the

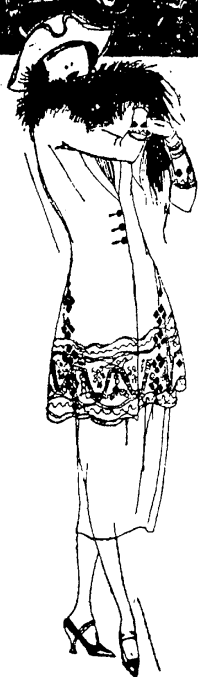


22

Barker Brothers store, 840 W. Seventh Street, Los Angeles, 1924–1926, Curlett & Beelman, architects. Photo “Dick” Whittington, 1930. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

23

James Oviatt Building, 617 S. Olive Street, Los Angeles, 1927–1928, Walker & Eisen, architects. (*Los Angeles Times*, 25 May 1927, 1–7).



## Chappell

will open in her  
new building at  
645

South Flower St. at  
9 a. m. on Tuesday,  
September the 6th

—offering a premier display of  
many charming new fall and win-  
ter modes, reflecting fashion's  
latest tendencies of style.

Wishing to offer our patrons the  
opportunity of viewing this show-  
ing at this time, we are opening our  
new shop before the final details of  
construction and furnishing are en-  
tirely complete.

SUITS

GOWNS

HATS

SPORT CLOTHES

Oviatt was completed. Occupying over 56,000 square feet, the store proper was situated on the second, third, and fourth floors so that the lucrative ground-level spaces could be leased to others. The savings incurred, advertisements noted, were important in keeping prices low.<sup>35</sup>

The opportunity for smaller retail operations to occupy buildings of their own in the business core diminished steadily with the construction of ever more multistory buildings. Nevertheless, some merchants found parcels of land that were deemed unsuitable for intense development, most of them scattered on residual lots between large-scale projects.<sup>36</sup> More pronounced was the emergence of an exclusive specialty shop

zone at downtown's western edge, along Flower Street to either side of Seventh. Like that of Robinson's, a Flower Street location carried appeal because of its position on the fringe.<sup>37</sup> Well-heeled consumers could reach Flower Street without encountering the worst downtown congestion. Flower was not a major thoroughfare and had no streetcar lines between Sixth and Tenth streets, facilitating automobile movement and curbside parking as well as keeping the price of land relatively low. The cost factor was particularly appealing to some Seventh Street merchants who were seeing their rental rates rapidly increase as available property along that corridor came ever more at a premium.

Flower Street's transformation began at the start of the new decade. Initially the tone was set by Chappell, a stylish women's clothing store that had to vacate its Seventh Street quarters to make way for construction of a height-limit office block.<sup>38</sup> When it opened in 1921, Chappell's new store contrasted with most commercial buildings in the city (figure 24). The front was cast in a historicizing mode evocative of the vernacular fabric of Hispanic towns, creating an intimately scaled, quasi-domestic ambience antithetical to that of the contemporary urban core. Even more unusual was the provision for customer parking on the rear third of the site—probably the earliest case in the metropolitan area in which a surface car lot was created as part of a new retail facility. Other posh stores soon located nearby.<sup>39</sup> This trend, in turn, may have influenced the decision by Barker Brothers to situate at Seventh and Flower, two blocks west of Robinson's—the one case in which a major store expanded the perimeter of the shopping district.

Barker Brothers greatly enhanced Flower Street's standing as a retail location but also changed its attributes, for with prestige came a rise in land values. A new scale and urban density was introduced in 1926, the year Barker Brothers opened, with the six-story emporium for Myer Siegel half a block to the south. Soon Parmelee-Dohrmann, a store purveying costly china, silver, and glassware as well as objects of art, started building large quarters next door (figure 25).<sup>40</sup> These initiatives, along with public works projects extending the street to make it more accessible, led some observers to predict that Flower would replace Seventh as “the street of smart shops,” an exclusive precinct much like that emerging along Chicago's North Michigan Avenue.<sup>41</sup> Flower Street's prominence proved short-lived, however. Development came to a halt in 1931, arrested both by the depressed economy and by competition from new outlying retail centers. Most stores either closed or relocated. Even in its brief heyday, Flower Street functioned as a subsidiary extension of a unified retail core rather than as a precinct in its own right. Unlike Chicago and some other large cities, Los Angeles never developed a fashionable shopping area tangent to, yet distinct from, the core. Instead, its downtown structure remained more analogous to those of smaller urban centers—an Indianapolis or a Denver—tightly knit and closely tied to the drawing power of the major department stores.

## 24

Chappell store, 645 S. Flower Street, Los Angeles, 1921, Richard D. King, architect; no longer standing. Opening advertisement. (*Los Angeles Times*, 4 September 1921, III-2.)



The hegemony enjoyed by Los Angeles department stores helped ensure that the basic form, complexion, and character of the shopping district continued to be shaped by local interests during the 1920s. Furthermore, almost all leading retail business had reached a mature stage of development. Bullock's ranked among the newest; most were founded before 1900 and some dated to the mid-nineteenth century, when Anglo-American development was still in its infancy.<sup>42</sup> While many of these mercantile houses drew analogies between themselves and the youth, energy, and seemingly limitless potential for growth of Los Angeles itself, the retail



community was dominated by long-standing organizations, not upstarts.

Outsiders barely existed among the city's store owners before World War I. The situation began to change thereafter, but without significant effect on local practices. After purchasing Hamburger's in 1923, May Company executives took pains to retain its strong local identity. Acquisition of the California Furniture Company by W. & J. Sloane five years later gave Barker Brothers a strong new competitor but did not upset its dominant position. By that time, a number of other national firms had established outlets downtown. A few of these ventures were on a large scale. Bedell, a chain of women's clothing stores, opened its fourteenth unit in a six-story building at Sixth and Broadway in 1920. Others, such as Young's Shoe Company, operated with a string of tiny outlets. The success and standing of these stores varied, but none of them contributed in any significant way to local tendencies in the siting, scale of operation, or design of stores. Outside interests were more discreet followers, adapting to regional trends and tastes, than pacesetters.<sup>43</sup>

Companies based far afield did alter one aspect of retailing in Los Angeles during the 1920s: the selling of inexpensive, everyday items. As early as 1912, F. W. Woolworth opened three modest-sized units downtown in the shopping districts. S. H. Kress entered the local arena with a store in 1920. A decade later, these and two other national variety store firms were operating a total of nine facilities, all but one of them concentrated along a seven-block stretch of Broadway.<sup>44</sup> Such stores captured a major share of their market, and no doubt many local merchants in neighborhood settings as well as downtown saw their businesses erode as a result. On the other hand, the chain variety store reinforced the local spatial pattern by strengthening Broadway's primary over Spring and Main streets as the locus of mass market trade.

## P A R K I N G

Local interests were less than effective in attempts to meet the demand for off-street parking. While public agencies focused on upgrading downtown streets, improving access to the precinct, and regulations designed to enhance traffic flow, parking was left to the private sector. Projects were created on a piecemeal basis, each directed to immediate concerns. Conditions never deteriorated to the point of threatening the business district's viability, but marked overall improvements did not occur either. Instead, the somewhat chaotic status quo was maintained, with new parking facilities more or less keeping abreast of increased demand. The perils envisioned in 1920 had abated little a decade later.<sup>45</sup>

Part of the problem lay with the disparate needs among patrons, workers, and property owners. Many executives wanted convenient parking for themselves. Major business owners focused on provisions for their own customers rather than for the shopping district as a whole. Small-scale merchants, for the most part, believed the problem lay beyond their

## 25

Flower Street, Los Angeles, looking north toward Seventh, showing (left to right): Parmelee-Dohrmann store, 741-747 S. Flower, 1926-1927, Ashley & Evers, architects; Myer Siegel store, 733-737 S. Flower, 1926-1927, Ashley & Evers, architects; Ranschoff's store, 729 S. Flower, 1926, Myron Hunt, architect; Wetherby-Kayser store, 715-719 S. Flower, 1925-1926, Charles F. Plummer, architect; all no longer standing; Barker Brothers at rear. Photo "Dick Whittington, ca. 1930. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)