

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.⁴³

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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

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

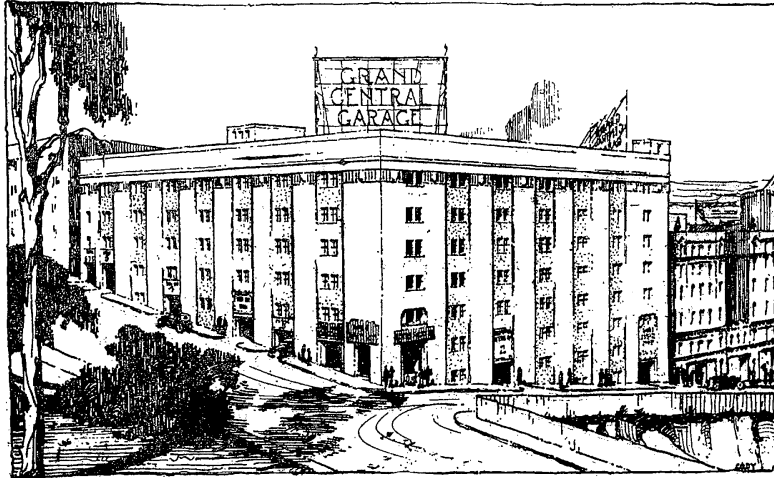
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Flower Street, Los Angeles, looking north toward Seventh, showing (left to right): Parmelee-Dohrmann store, 741-747 S. Flower, 1926-1927, Ashley & Evers, architects; Myer Siegel store, 733-737 S. Flower, 1926-1927, Ashley & Evers, architects; Ranschoff's 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.)

abilities to change. Patrons wanted to park as close as possible to their destinations, but some might only remain for a short period, while others spent the better part of the day downtown. The overriding objective of property owners, on the other hand, was the most profitable use of their land, which seldom entailed parking on more than a temporary basis. Finally, doubts were harbored by some parties as to how long parking might remain an issue. In 1928, the executive secretary of the Los Angeles Building Owners and Managers Association proclaimed that downtown streets would soon be congestion-free. Evidence was mounting, he asserted, that deliveries would be restricted to nighttime and streetcars would either run underground or encircle the city center. Most cars would be confined to the periphery. Specially designed mass transit vehicles would carry people “beyond easy walking distance” within the core.⁴⁶

For those less optimistic, there was the exasperating fact that automobiles consumed so much space, when parked and while maneuvering, relative to the number of persons they carried. Accommodating any significant number of vehicles was a costly enterprise. Yet the greatest need for parking occurred where land values were highest. These opposing factors intensified during the 1920s when downtown Los Angeles, like other cities, continued to grow in a concentrated form once predicated on mass transit as the near universal carrier.





The most common off-street parking facility was the surface lot. At an early date, the parking business became profitable enough to warrant the demolition of small buildings, deemed obsolete, on blocks surrounding prime downtown locations. As a result, a patchwork of car lots took hold in all but the centermost part of the business district in the late 1910s (figure 26). While fewer than five such lots existed in the 102-square-block area between First, Eleventh, Figueroa, and Wall streets in 1915, over forty could be found in 1920. The most intense period of growth occurred over the next five years, in the aftermath of the city's first major parking crisis, raising the total to over one hundred in 1925. Expansion slowed thereafter; about twenty additional lots were operating in 1930. Combined, these facilities had a capacity of about 12,000 cars at a time, one of the largest then found in the nation. Slightly fewer automobiles were accommodated at curbside spaces and in sheltered parking structures combined.⁴⁷

Car lots, as a rule, were developed by parties independent of the businesses they served. Coordination between the two often did not exist at the outset. Lot operators sought proximity to major businesses, of course, but had to convince property owners that a more profitable use of their land was not imminent. From the owner's perspective a parking lot was no more than a holding action—a temporary method of deriving income until the land was densely developed. Downtown Los Angeles's rapid growth during the 1920s made the situation especially unstable. Even if the geographic area consumed by new buildings did not reach the proportions often predicted, the pace was fast enough to render any one car lot a short-lived enterprise. Approximately three-quarters of those operating downtown in 1920 became sites of construction over the next five-year period. Much the same rate occurred between 1925 and 1930. Only five of the lots that existed at the start of the decade were still operating at the end.⁴⁸

The factors that affected parking lot location often ran counter to the convenience of patrons. Facilities close to key portions of the shopping district were relatively few. Many shoppers, some eighty percent of

26

Parking lots, downtown Los Angeles, looking south on Flower Street from top of Richfield Building. Photo "Dick" Whittington, 1930. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

27

Grand Central Garage, 525–555 W. Fifth Street and 440–460 S. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, 1920–1921, Reed & Hibbard, architects; demolished 1988. (*Los Angeles Times*, 15 February 1920, V-2.)

whom were women, resisted walking even two or three blocks to a store from their car. Driving was still a new experience to most consumers and widely perceived as liberating and facilitating. The circuitous route taken, coupled with the time entailed in finding a car lot with space available, then in reaching one's destination, seemed like an ordeal. Moreover, in many people's minds, mobility was viewed as a right; one should not have to pay to park. As an exasperated realtor noted in 1930, women especially resented deducting the cost of automobile storage from their shopping budget and frequently spent considerable time searching for curbside space instead. In a survey conducted by a prominent local real estate firm, the great majority of respondents patronized downtown stores far less than they would have liked due to the parking conditions.⁴⁹

Besides the car lot, the most important kind of off-street parking facility was the multistory garage. These buildings enabled much more efficient use of land, but at a high cost, owing to the strength required of the structure and the complex layouts needed for efficient vehicular circulation. Parking garages also necessitated a sizable staff if cars were to be stored and retrieved with any speed. In sharp contrast to the car lot, the multistory garage represented a major investment, designed to last for a considerable length of time. Yet these behemoths did not generate as much revenue as did well-situated office buildings, hotels, or major stores. Thus the number of large garages in Los Angeles and other cities prior to the depression was relatively small. Like the car lot, garages tended to be on peripheral sites not far from the edge of concentrated development.⁵⁰

While no sizable parking garages existed in Los Angeles prior to World War I, ambitious projects began soon thereafter. In February 1920, plans were unveiled for the Grand Central Garage, boasting eight levels that would hold over 1,000 cars in addition to an accessories store, gasoline pumps, repair and paint shops, wash racks, and a chauffeur's lounge (figure 27). When it opened, the facility ranked among the most capacious of its kind in the nation.⁵¹ The building stood on the edge of Bunker Hill, at Fifth and Grand streets, then some distance from the main business blocks but close to where intense building activity was predicted—a forecast that soon proved accurate.

Six other multilevel garages were constructed downtown between 1923 and 1928, though none exceeded the Grand Central's size and most carried 500 cars or fewer.⁵² The first two successors rose nearby at Fourth and Olive streets, where the terrain likewise was so irregular that it held no appeal for office building construction. On the other hand, these peripheral sites enabled patrons to skirt the most congested areas when entering and leaving. Operators often emphasized accessibility so that motorists would see their garages as convenient destination points rather than the places of last resort (figure 28). Women customers were actively courted in at least several cases. Publicity emphasized the care with which cars were handled and the rooms provided for personal comfort. Irrespective of gender, the garage's clientele probably differed somewhat from that of many car lots. Minimum charges at a garage could run twice that of a

The two seven-story reinforced concrete Class "A" fireproof buildings offset a half story.

At last! The Solution to the Downtown Parking Problem

(Diagram of patented ramp system that differentiates the Mutual Garage from all others—a car may be driven from bottom to top in high gear. Note the spacious interior and ramps.)

The downtown parking problem has been solved for you. On Monday, January 14th—the Mutual Garage opens—it is the garage the entire automotive world has been interested in.

The Mutual Garage offers you advantages that have never before been available in Los Angeles.

All cars enter and leave through one entrance—greater protection and more efficient service. Theft proof!

Each car is driven by means of easy ramps to its stall on the floors above—no congestion on elevators.

The ramps are each only a half story high, generously wide and of easy grade, with clear vision at all times—you can drive from bottom to top in high gear.

A separate, roomy stall, guarded on three sides by concrete curbs, protects your car from damage. Once in place, your car is never touched except on your instructions.

No cars are parked in aisles—this means that every car is instantly accessible without moving any other car.

All modern conveniences, including waiting room and ladies' rest room. Fast passenger elevator service day and night.

Located in the most accessible location adjacent to the congested business district.

All avenues of travel to every part of the city over unfrequented routes are accessible from Fourth and Olive.

Complete Gasoline and Oil service—also greasing and washing and polishing.

Rates moderate—only 300 cars can be accommodated.

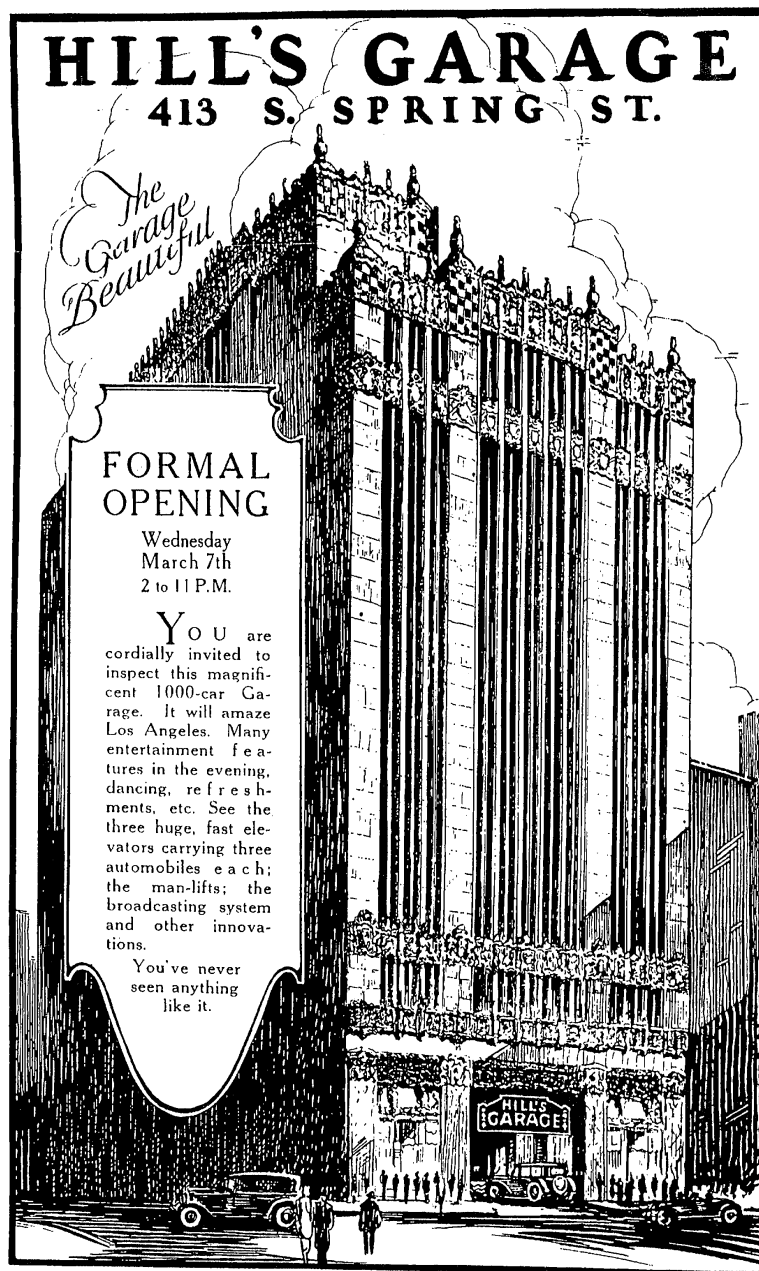
4th and Olive
MUTUAL GARAGE

The map here shows the accessibility of the Mutual Garage to all parts of the city and the business district.

Mutual Garage, 354–363 S. Olive Street, Los Angeles 1923–1924; demolished 1980s. Opening advertisement. (*Los Angeles Times*, 12 January 1924, 1–8.)

car lot and monthly storage exceeded twelve dollars in the mid-1920s. While such fees held, only a small portion of the motoring public could afford to utilize the facilities on a regular basis.⁵³

Only one large parking structure, Hill's Garage, was built in a truly central location, on Spring Street between Fourth and Fifth. When



it opened in March 1928, the facility was heralded as a source of much-needed relief both to the financial district and to the main shopping blocks nearby. The venture was an extravagant one. Thirteen levels were served by three vehicular elevators, rather than the usual ramps, in response to site constraints. The facade was decorously festooned to rival its ornate neighbors (figure 29). While the capacity of Hill's nearly equaled that of the Grand Central, the project cost considerably more. The sponsors hoped their initiative would set a precedent: if enough garages comparable in capacity and convenience were erected, curbside parking could be eliminated and downtown streets would be relatively congestion-free.⁵⁴ The governing trend in the field, however, was less altruistic. The blocks west of Hill Street between Fifth and Ninth—where ample land existed

and where the need was considerable—harbored only two garages at the decade’s end. Holding out for more profitable development remained the norm. Hill’s was the most splendid, but also the last, example of its kind built in the city.⁵⁵

Like car lots, most parking garages were developed by parties specializing in that field and were not directly tied to other downtown businesses. Only on rare occasions did one of the latter build a garage to sustain or expand its clientele. Such facilities could generate some revenue if open to general use, but most of their space was customarily reserved for patrons, who could park without charge or at a greatly reduced one. Hotels were among the most frequent businesses to initiate such projects in the United States, due to the rapidly increasing number of motorist travelers. The earliest multilevel garage in Los Angeles opened in 1919 to serve the Hotel Clark upon its completion.⁵⁶

Department stores were the other leaders in this limited field. Among the pioneers nationally was Scruggs, Vandervoort, Barney of St. Louis, which opened a 296-car garage in 1922 where customers could park free for as long as two hours.⁵⁷ Not long after the St. Louis-based May Company purchased Hamburger’s, it embarked on one of the most elaborate garages of its kind. Completed in 1927, the building housed 535

29

Hill’s Garage, 413 S. Spring Street, Los Angeles, 1926–1928, Kenneth MacDonal-d, Jr., architect; altered. Opening advertisement. (*Saturday Night*, 3 March 1928, 2.)

30

May Company Garage, 218–228 W. Ninth Street, Los Angeles, 1926–1927, Curlett & Beelman, architects. Photo “Dick” Whittington, ca. 1940. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)



cars on six levels (figure 30).⁵⁸ Unlike most such facilities, it lay less than a block away from the store and was designed as a closely related part of the shopping district. Ground-floor space was leased to convenience stores, and the main elevations were composed to match embellished Broadway neighbors. Beyond accommodating loyal customers, the main reason for the venture was to draw others away from emporia on Seventh Street. Perhaps for that reason, the building was sited to the south of the May Company store rather than to the west, where it might enhance competing outlets. Soon thereafter, the Broadway department store joined the fray, purchasing the five-year-old Mutual Garage, the third largest in the city, and allowing patrons two hours of free parking (versus the May Company's one hour) with a one-dollar minimum purchase (figure 31). By that time a number of merchants were striking agreements with car lot opera-



A New BROADWAY Service

Free Auto Parking

For BROADWAY Customers

KEEPING pace with modern merchandising service requirements, and with the problems of automobile parking in the metropolitan district, The Broadway has acquired a modern 7-Story fireproof garage at the north-west corner of Fourth and Olive Streets, for the convenience of its customers.

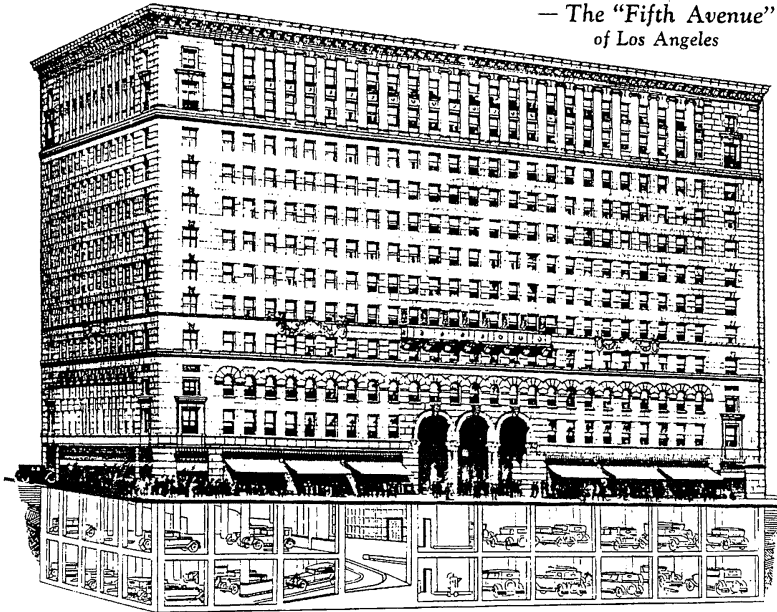
This spacious, modern garage (formerly the Mutual) is built with staggered floors, approached by ramps. It is close to the Store, easy to enter, and provides the most modern parking facilities. Gas and oil are available, and courteous attendants will handle your car with utmost care.

Two Hours' Free Parking in a Convenient Garage

A merchandise purchase of \$1.00 or more entitles customers to two hours' free parking service. A charge of 5c being made for each additional hour or fraction thereof. Customers will simply have their garage check validated at the Information desk on our Street Floor, and this check presented to the Garage attendant will entitle you to the two hours' parking without charge.

Locate Your Business in the Path of Progress!

— The “Fifth Avenue”
of Los Angeles



ONE of the many important features of the Roosevelt Building at 7th and Flower is a modern 450 car garage in the basements. Elevators connect garage serving every floor. Monthly rental is only \$10.00.

Every modern convenience,—advantageous location and added prestige — at moderate rates.

— — — — —
One Hour
FREE Parking for
Clients of
Roosevelt Building
Tenants
— — — — —

A conference with our leasing department will incur no obligation

Telephone
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SUN REALTY CO., Owners
LEASING and BUSINESS OFFICE

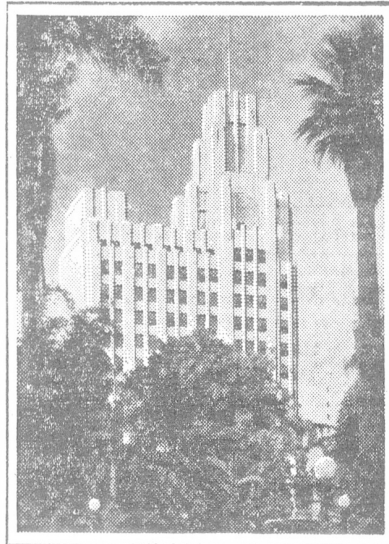
720 Roosevelt Building — 727 West Seventh Street

31
The Broadway (formerly Mutual) Garage,
advertisement. (*Los Angeles Times*, 20
November 1929, I-4.)

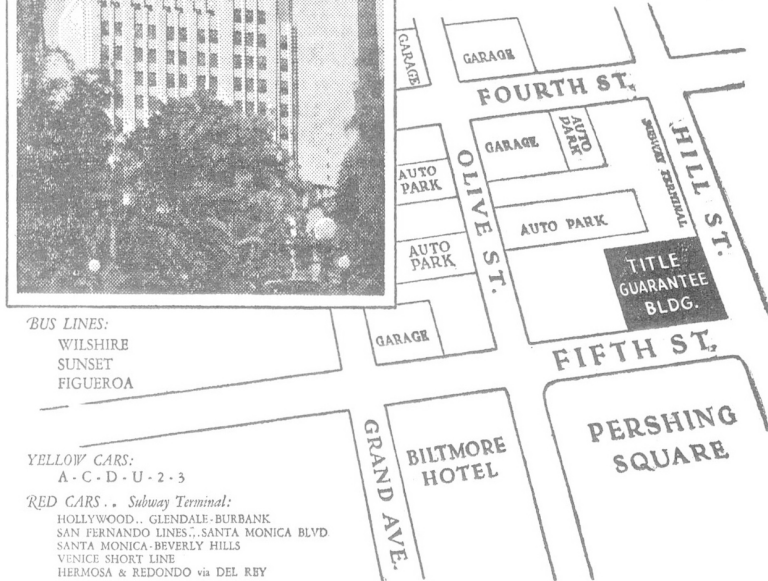
32
Roosevelt Building, 727 W. Seventh
Street, Los Angeles, 1926–1927. Cur-
lett & Beelman, architects. Leasing adver-
tisement, showing basement garage.
(*Southern California Business*, July 1927,
19.)

tors so that patrons likewise could park for little or no money if they made the minimum purchase.⁵⁹

A far more expensive method of providing off-street space was to incorporate it in the business building itself. Space used for this purpose was limited to one or two basement floors or, less often and never in Los Angeles, to lower above-ground floors. The number of cars thus sheltered tended to be less than in multistory garages while use fees were greater. Robinson’s basement garage was a pioneering experiment, but one not repeated by the city’s other retail establishments due to the high cost and the fact that customer demand quickly outstripped the space that could be allocated to the purpose. After World War I, however, the concept began to gain favor with the developers of tall office buildings. In this context, the limited confines of a basement could be transformed into an amenity for executives who wanted the convenience of on-site parking for themselves and for their clients (figure 32). The earliest Los Angeles example was constructed in 1920–1921 for the Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Com-



Centrally Located
OFFICES



BUS LINES:
WILSHIRE
SUNSET
FIGUEROA

YELLOW CARS:
A - C - D - U - 2 - 3

RED CARS . . . Subway Terminal:
HOLLYWOOD - GLENDALE - BURBANK
SAN FERNANDO LINES - SANTA MONICA BLVD
SANTA MONICA - BEVERLY HILLS
VENICE SHORT LINE
HERMOSA & REDONDO via DEL REY

In New **TITLE GUARANTEE Bldg.**
(FACING PERSHING SQUARE)

CONVENIENT transportation facilities... a veritable downtown "crossroads." • Many neighborhood auto parks. • Lots of sunshine and fresh air. • A good location in which to increase your business. • One, two and three room suites facing Pershing Square. • Apply to Case Bradford. TRinity 3741.

TITLE GUARANTEE & TRUST COMPANY

TITLE GUARANTEE BUILDING
HILL at FIFTH, LOS ANGELES
Capital and Surplus \$7,500,000.00

pany at Sixth and Grand streets. Land just behind the building harbored an underground garage for 200 tenant cars and a street-level lot for visitors—provisions that were depicted as novelties for any city at the time of completion.⁶⁰ Within a few years, however, the practice became more widespread, if hardly commonplace. Between 1924 and 1930 at least eight other downtown Los Angeles office blocks were constructed with subterranean parking, now always placed directly under the building's occupied floors due to the soaring cost of land. Most facilities contained space for around 120 cars, but the enormous Roosevelt Building (1926–1927) on Seventh Street could hold up to 350.⁶¹

The appeal of on-site parking was sufficiently great that at least one property owner adapted the basement of an extant building to garage purposes. Located at Sixth and Broadway, the W. P. Story Building (1908–1910) was one of the first height-limit structures in a then still new part of downtown. The conversion some two decades later was likely made to retain tenants who might otherwise be lured to recent facilities with on-site parking, most of which lay several blocks to the west.⁶²

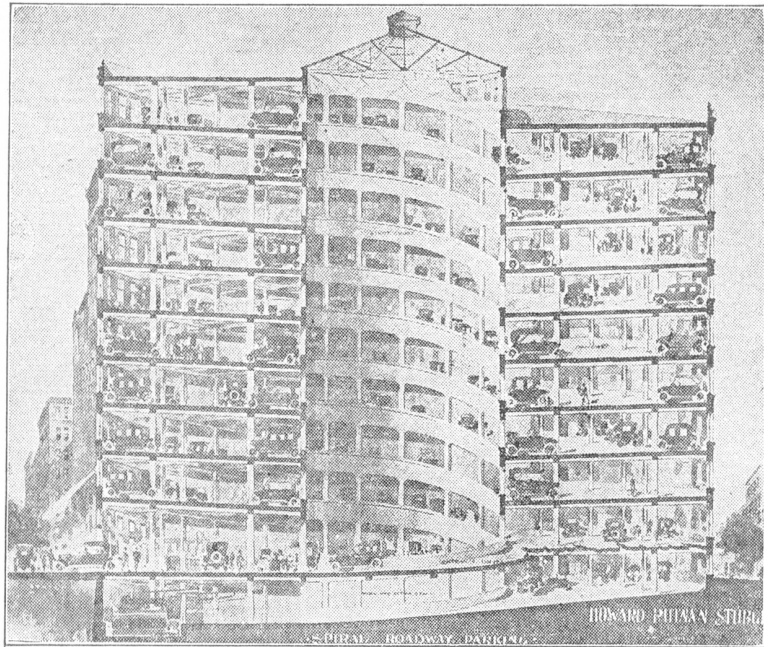
Competition also led several office building owners to follow the example of garage operators and promote peripheral locations. As early as 1927, advertisements for the new Western Pacific Building, which rose at the southern tip of the business district on Broadway below Tenth, claimed occupants could save twenty to forty minutes daily by avoiding congested streets and utilizing several nearby car lots. When the Title Insurance Building opened at Fifth and Hill streets four years later, the owners published maps emphasizing its “central” location, set not in the traditional terms of concentrated development and pedestrian circulation, but rather in relation to off-street parking (figure 33). Among the most extreme measures were taken by the developers of the Beaux-Arts Building (1926–1927), situated on Eighth Street more than ten blocks to the west of Flower in an area then containing little more than scattered neighborhood commercial services amid blocks of houses and apartment buildings. The pile had its own adjacent car lot; the management boasted low rents as well as accessibility. But while the building lay “only 5 minutes from downtown,” such complete removal from concentrated business development remained very much of the exception. The advantages of centrality outweighed all others for the bulk of office functions.⁶³

An even more unorthodox scheme was revealed in 1924, incorporating a multistory garage as a centerpiece of an office building (figure 34).⁶⁴ Not only would there be parking space for tenants and visitors alike, but that space lay immediately adjacent to the office to which each party was destined. Parking thus would be self-service rather than by attendants; all pedestrian movement was internalized, including entry to the thirty-one shops lining an arcade. To accommodate these features, the plan approached titanic dimensions: over 109,000 square feet of ground area; a total square footage of 1.4 million—the largest area under one roof in the city at that time; 670 office suites; space for 1,800 cars—about the same as the total capacity of basement garages constructed downtown during the decade.

No precedent existed for what its promoters dubbed the Mammoth Office Building and Garage, although Howard Putnam Sturges, the Chicago architect responsible for its design, may have known of the more or less concurrent scheme, employing an automatic parking system in its core, for the Jewelers Building in his own city.⁶⁵ The Los Angeles syndicate that developed the proposal intended it to be a prototype for at least four others in the city. Ambitiously billing it as “The Problem Solved,” announcements indicated that construction was imminent; however, the high cost (four million dollars) relative to the projected return, combined

PARKING

54



with the fact that its footprint did not conform to the block sizes in the area where it was to be built, probably contributed to the venture's demise.⁶⁶ A more modest plan for a garage, with the front quarter of each floor devoted to offices, was unveiled two years later, but likewise never left the planning stage.⁶⁷

Abrupt departures from the norm elicited interest, but never affected the formative tendencies of real estate development for downtown buildings. Most developers ignored the problem. On-site parking was, after all, a luxury of which only a small fraction of a building's workforce could partake. However appealing such provisions, they were seldom considered an essential factor in a new business building's success. At the height of its growth and stature, downtown Los Angeles remained conspicuously congested, scarcely better equipped than it had been a decade before to deal with the specter of a "parkless town." But parking, as it turned out, was only one of the perils facing downtown Los Angeles. Even as the central shopping district was reaching new heights in size and prestige, its regional dominance was beginning to be challenged by new outlying centers that were growing at a much faster rate.

34

"Mammoth Office Building and Garage,"
Los Angeles, 1924, Howard Putnam
Sturges, architect; project. (*Los Angeles
Times*, 27 March 1924, I-11.)



III

WESTWARD HO FOR BUSINESS

Before World War I, when building several blocks from the established core area was a source of controversy in business circles, no major Los Angeles retailer would have contemplated a site outside downtown. The belief was universal that only a center city location could tap a sufficient consumer market to sustain large stores and many types of small ones as well. The development of ever more ambitious retail outlets reinforced this view. During the early twentieth century, the construction of enormous department stores and complementary emporia consolidated the regional market, attracting ever greater crowds from ever increasing distances. So strong was downtown's hold on the metropolitan area's consumer public that it is doubtful whether many Angelenos really believed the *Times's* warning in 1920 that major stores would relocate outside the city center if the parking problem was not satisfactorily resolved.

Yet attitudes soon began to change as a result of the fast pace of both residential and business growth in areas some distance from downtown. The greatest concentration of new development now lay along a broad path extending toward the Pacific Ocean, giving rise to forecasts that the metropolis would occupy the entire intermediate area within the foreseeable future. Predictions such as that made in 1922 that La Brea Avenue, located five miles west of downtown, would become a major commercial artery in ten years no longer seemed far-fetched. Already one real estate veteran had asserted that "in Los Angeles it is 'Westward, Ho, for Business.' City builders are in a progressive trek toward the sea."¹ Within