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HOLLYWOOD — LOS ANGELES'S OTHER HALF

Just as the term “parkless” was used by the press to discuss parking problems rather than a dearth of municipal open space, so the “other half” referred not to the city’s poor, as Jacob Riis had popularized the term among east coast reformers, but rather to potential area of real estate growth. “Hollywood,” gloated a 1927 account in the *Los Angeles Realtor*, was rapidly becoming “a gateway between . . . new and old Los Angeles.” Lying to the northwest of downtown in an area roughly bounded by Vermont Avenue on the east, Beverly Boulevard on the south, La Brea Avenue on the west, and the Santa Monica Mountains on the north, the Hollywood district “has for a decade played the leading role in the suburban growth of Los Angeles during [the city’s] most remarkable period of development.” But this surge in metropolitan expansion “simply foreshadow[s] the big activity that is yet to come.” The author asked his readership to imagine a giant fan, its handle positioned near Hollywood’s business heart. If oriented to the southeast, the fan’s ribs “will point to everything that Los Angeles’ present ‘half’ has done in the last fifty years. Turn the fan around and it will spread over the San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles’ ‘other half,’ and Hollywood thus becomes the connecting link or gateway between the two.”¹

This buoyant prophecy did not materialize to a significant extent until the late 1940s; prior to then most of Los Angeles’s growth took place west and south of Hollywood. Yet the idea that Hollywood was destined

to be the new metropolitan hub was widely believed and helped propel the intense development of its commercial center up to the depression. By 1930 Hollywood Boulevard boasted a “skyscraper mile” that formed the second largest business district in Los Angeles and one of the largest outlying centers in the United States.

ALADDIN CITIES

For all of its aura as a unique center of filmmaking and stardom, Hollywood was in fact part of a national phenomenon in urban development that represented the initial challenge to downtown’s hegemony as a retail center. During the 1920s, most large cities spawned at least one such outlying center, more ambitious in size and scope than preceding examples, that functioned as an alternative to downtown for many shopping and related needs. These new magnets of trade—such as Upper Darby outside Philadelphia, Englewood in Chicago, and Midtown in St. Louis—were well removed from their city centers, and it was this distance upon which their rise was predicated.² Residential developments of the 1910s and 1920s placed so many middle-class people far afield from downtown that a substitute business district could flourish amid their new tracts. Typically located where little or no concentrated settlement had existed a generation previous, these Aladdin cities, as one observer termed Upper Darby, seemed like miniature downtowns, providing an array of stores, restaurants, financial and professional services, as well as entertainment facilities, many of which theretofore had been rare or unavailable outside the urban core.³ In layout and appearance, these places also echoed city center characteristics, with buildings densely congregated along a main street, the largest tending to form clusters around one or two intersections. Construction of a building over four or five stories was seen as a benchmark for the precinct coming into its own.

Yet Hollywood differed from most major outlying centers of the 1920s in several important ways. Even with the inflated expectations of the period, boosters seldom thought they would wrest commercial dominance from the city center, as a number of parties in Hollywood believed. Most Aladdin cities were targeted to people of moderate income. Hollywood merchants courted this audience but also sought to cultivate a sense of exclusiveness, capitalizing on patronage by movie stars and the more traditional urban elite. Finally, most Aladdin cities were tied to strategic locations along public transportation routes. Hollywood was well served by streetcars, but its principal attraction was to the motorist. Many well-to-do households were now locating nearby in the hills where public transit did not reach. The car, too, made Hollywood conveniently accessible from areas further afield. Boosters even claimed that driving to Hollywood from Glendale and Pasadena was easier than going downtown. At first, its business precinct also lacked congestion.

During the 1920s, Angelenos saw Hollywood as a model for decentralization and credited the automobile with spurring the district's meteoric rise. When Hollywood was incorporated as a third-class city in 1903, approximately 700 people resided within its limits; when annexed to Los Angeles seven years later, the population was at 10,000. The increase was more than sevenfold over the next decade and thereafter climbed at an average of 10,000 people a year, the total exceeding 153,000 in 1930.⁴ The rise of the motion picture industry to a position of national leadership during the same twenty-year period helped transform Hollywood into one of the fastest-growing parts of the region. The large amounts of capital generated by that industry also fostered the rise of a major new business district in its midst. But Hollywood's economic strength was beholden to no one source. Many residents worked in downtown Los Angeles. The most frequently cited reason for Hollywood's success was its appeal as a place to live, using the automobile as a routine mode of conveyance. The most prestigious residential areas of previous decades, lying on more or less level terrain west and southwest of the city center, began to lose ground. Further removed from downtown, more varied topographically, and tinged with the glamour of the movies, tracts in and around Hollywood were now the places of choice for many prosperous commuters. A large affluent populace and an even larger middle class made the average income in Hollywood considerably higher than that citywide, an extremely appealing market for many businesses.

STORIES

At the end of World War I, Hollywood's commercial landscape combined features typical of new outlying districts and of large town centers found in many parts of the United States. Small clusters of modest one- and two-story buildings were scattered along Hollywood Boulevard, the main east-west artery and streetcar route from downtown Los Angeles. Toward the western end of the car line, extending for eight blocks between Cahuenga Boulevard and Highland Avenue, lay the largest of the city's first-generation outlying centers, with more than 200 stores by 1920 (figure 51). These outlets purveyed routine goods and services used by middle-income households. Almost all the businesses were locally based. Selection was limited; a trip downtown was necessary for specialized needs and for comparison shopping.

By the mid-1920s, conspicuous changes began to affect the size, composition, and character of Hollywood's business core. New commercial buildings were rising at a rapid rate on lots previously vacant or occupied by houses and smaller store blocks. Many new retail outlets opened, joined by others that were expanding. The range of available goods increased, particularly in clothing and accessories. Spurred by the film industry, Hollywood was emerging as a center of fashion, with shops that sought to rival ones in New York and Chicago as purveyors of stylish



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Hollywood commercial center, Hollywood Boulevard at Wilcox Avenue, looking west. Photo E. T. Estabrook, ca. 1922. (Security Pacific Historical Photograph Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.)

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Mullen & Bluett store, 6316 Hollywood Boulevard, 1921–1922; W. P. Fuller & Company store, 6318–6322 Hollywood Boulevard, 1922; and Witzel Studio 6324 Hollywood Boulevard, ca. early 1920s; all buildings demolished or altered. Photo before 1928. (Security Pacific Historical Photograph Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.)

women's wear.⁵ The most decisive factor in Hollywood's rise as a magnet of trade was the first wave of branch store development among prominent local and national downtown-based retailers. Specialty stores in apparel and accessories led the way, among them Schwab's (1921) and Mullen & Bluett (1922) in men's clothes, Myer Siegel (1925) in women's clothes, Innes (1923), Young's (1923), Wetherby-Kayser (1923), and C. H. Baker (1925) in shoes, and the New York Hat Store (1924).⁶ Hollywood boasted the first branch of the distinguished San Francisco emporium I. Magnin, which opened in 1923. A second Bay Area clothier, Roos Brothers, followed six years later.⁷

Numerous other well-known businesses built Hollywood outlets as well. The paint manufacturer W. P. Fuller erected a large store in 1921. Barker Brothers opened a multistory, 50,000-square-foot facility in 1927, for a brief period southern California's largest branch outlet. Showrooms were built for Maytag (ca. 1925), Frigidaire (1927), and General Electric (1928) at a time when major household appliances were still regarded as new emblems of attainment.⁸ Yet other branches such as the Platt Music Company (ca. 1922) catered to the recreational pursuits of the well-to-do. Fancy restaurants of the sort then primarily identified with downtown also appeared: Paulais (1924), the Elite Catering Company (ca. 1926), and Pig N' Whistle (1927). Chain drug and food stores could be found in considerable number by 1926; variety stores (F. W. Grand, J. J. Newberry) somewhat later (1928–1930).⁹

By 1930 Hollywood had some 300 stores along the heart of "The Boulevard" and probably 100 more along nearby side streets. Promotional efforts emphasized the small-scale ambience of the district's stores, where one could purchase goods in an intimate, convivial atmosphere.

Hollywood not only lacked the traffic of downtown Los Angeles, boosters claimed; it also lacked the pressing crowds, particularly those segments of the population that a well-heeled clientele found undesirable.¹⁰ Most stores were of modest dimensions and many were boutiques. Hollywood Boulevard was cast as a great collection of specialty shops unsurpassed anywhere in the region. Some leading branch and chain stores looked the part, with buildings that were considerably more elaborate—inside and out—than facilities in other outlying centers prior to the late 1920s (figure 52). Yet the majority of buildings were of a conventional cut.¹¹ Hollywood's distinction lay with the scope of its businesses, not with their physical attributes. At the end of the boom, the commercial center no longer resembled that of a midwestern town, but rather that of a moderate-sized midwestern city (figure 53).

Just as with a city, the specialty store was only one part of the equation. While promoters stressed exclusiveness, they also cultivated the mass-market appeal of a metropolitan center. Soon after the first world war, business leaders began to pursue the development of a large department store as a catalyst for retail growth. By October 1921, Charles E. Toberman, a major landholder along Hollywood Boulevard and a key figure in advancing its business development, announced plans for a large emporium. When the building opened ten months later, Toberman noted that he had tried to interest prominent Los Angeles businesses in Hollywood but was always rebuffed due to a lack of distinction in local outlets. Thus, "I determined to build a department store, . . . not only [because] . . . it would be good business . . . but because . . . it would do more to hold business in Hollywood than any other one thing."¹²

Initially called the C. R. S. Company and soon renamed Robertson's, the department store did in fact stimulate retail growth. The building rose four stories and contained some 46,000 square feet, making it by far the largest store in Hollywood and among the largest outside downtown Los Angeles when it opened. Yet the business was a new one, with-



out reputation, and while Toberman claimed that it equaled the finest emporia on Broadway, the store never approached that stature. Downtown merchants might be receptive to opening branches in Hollywood, but not to creating equivalents to their parent stores.¹³ An establishment befitting the core of a great city still eluded The Boulevard.

The chance to bestow metropolitan stature on Hollywood's shopping district came five years later, in July 1927, with plans for an enormous second B. H. Dyas store at Hollywood and Vine. The program stipulated a nine-story edifice containing over 130,000 square feet, making it larger than the downtown Dyas emporium (figure 54). A syndicate of local businessmen had aggressively pursued the project, persuading Bernal Dyas to break ranks with his competitors. Los Angeles department store executives had informally agreed to resist branch development in an effort to maintain the volume of their downtown trade.¹⁴ Dyas was a newcomer to the field, having expanded his business from sporting goods a decade previous, and may well have believed that creating a large Hollywood store was the best means of capturing a larger share of the market. The new building was not only bigger than his existing one, it was run independently, with a separate staff of buyers who targeted the affluent residents of Hollywood. Here, Dyas believed, his company could move to the forefront. When announcing the plan, he proclaimed that Hollywood and Vine would rival Forty-second Street and Broadway in New York.¹⁵

Dyas's move had little precedent anywhere in the United States. When the Hollywood emporium opened in March 1928, the trend toward branch development among downtown department stores was barely under way. Just as in Los Angeles, parent companies had invested millions of dollars in their physical facilities, and conventional wisdom held that a big branch would erode downtown patronage. The few branches then operating were mostly small and specialized in nature. Among the first was erected in 1925 by William Filene's Sons Company of Boston and targeted to students at Wellesley College. Over the next three years, Filene's opened two additional stores in other college towns, three in resort communities of Massachusetts and Maine, and three in small cities—Portland, Providence, and Worcester—of which the Worcester outlet was by far the largest at 28,000 square feet. Branches of New York stores were limited to tiny outlets of departmentalized stores specializing in apparel and accessories: Best & Company (1924) and Saks Fifth Avenue (1925) at Palm Beach.¹⁶ All these units were conceived as extensions of the parent store, engaging the patronage of customers while they were at school or on vacation or enlisting a new clientele beyond the company's trading radius. An important exception to this tendency was the first known branch of a major downtown store: B. Nugent & Brother's outlet in the Midtown district of St. Louis, which opened at the remarkably early date of 1913. Adapting space in an existing facility, the store contained nearly 40,000 square feet, some 15,000 of which was at first used for selling space.¹⁷ The only other comparable outlet constructed before Dyas Hollywood was the 50,000-square-foot branch of a small but long-established Philadelphia department



store, George Allen, completed several months earlier. Situated in German-town, it was likewise designed to attract residents of affluent enclaves nearby as a substitute for shopping downtown.¹⁸ Dyas's store was thus far the most ambitious of its kind and stood at the leading edge of a phenomenon that would transform urban retailing in later years.

Upon its completion, the Dyas store was heralded as a benchmark in Hollywood's commercial ascendancy. Seeing the benefits the new emporium would bring to his own business, Robertson's manager asserted that "Hollywood Boulevard can now in every sense of the word be the 'Mecca' for the great shopping public," adding that only "a few years ago people could with some justification say, 'I can't find what I want in Hollywood and have to go downtown anyway.' That can hardly be true now for Hollywood has not only ample stock to choose from but a great variety of stocks at prices to fit any purse."¹⁹ Within a short period, however, this purported capstone to the shopping district was experiencing financial problems. Dyas had overextended his resources. At an early stage of the depression he retrenched, consolidating assets in the downtown facility and concentrating on a more limited range of goods. Though Dyas's bid for leadership failed, it inaugurated the idea of large-scale

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Hollywood Boulevard, looking east from McCadden Street. Photo ca. late 1920s/early 1930s. (Courtesy Christy McAvoy.)

branch development. Even with the economic downturn, several competitors bid to take over the enterprise and, on the third anniversary of its initial opening, purchase was announced by the president of the Broadway department store.²⁰ What seemed like a disastrous turn of events for Hollywood was averted, the retail base strengthened in the process.



The Broadway's reputation and very name, synonymous with the retail corridor downtown, gave recognition to Hollywood in a way that Dyas could not. At the same time, the Broadway's executives followed their predecessor's strategy in using the outlet to upgrade their clientele. The Broadway had built its business upon a middle-income market. Now the company could court a more elite audience as well, featuring fashionable wares and other costly items. The attributes of store and community thus were mutually reinforcing. The Broadway Hollywood prospered, expanding to occupy three previously unused floors and, in 1938, to include a six-story addition of over 52,000 square feet.²¹ For several decades, the facility fulfilled its promise as an anchor for trade in the community.

An important factor in the Broadway's decision to establish a large store outside downtown was that its competitors were contemplating, and in one case had already made, similar moves. Bullock's confirmed long-standing rumors when its president announced plans to build an elegant emporium on Wilshire Boulevard in April 1928, seven months after the company had achieved complete financial separation from the Broadway.²² Far more ominous from the latter's perspective were indications that the archrival May Company would erect a nine-story branch on Hollywood Boulevard three blocks west of Vine Street.²³ A year earlier, Universal Pictures president Carl Laemmle had nearly succeeded in courting a "large New York department store" to establish an enormous outlet right across the street from the Dyas building. Laemmle had gone so far as to secure a design by an unnamed French architect, which, while somewhat schizophrenic in composition, would have been among the most arresting examples of modernism in the country at that time, making its precursor seem both small and dated by comparison (figure 55).²⁴ Both projects were stillborn, no doubt due to the depression, yet Hollywood's desirability as a center for large-scale retail development was now well established. Dyas's move forever changed the thinking of Los Angeles's major retailers. Not only was further downtown growth hampered by soaring land values, but fear was mounting that with ever more customers living ever further afield, fewer among them would be willing to make frequent downtown shopping journeys. A great emporium could continue to expand primarily by coming to its clientele. The fact that one department store had taken this step no doubt made it seem imperative for the others to follow.

BUSINESS DIVERSITY

Retail trade was by no means the only contributor to Hollywood's commercial boom. The range of enterprises located on or near The Boulevard did indeed resemble that of a typical city center. Together with the Broadway Hollywood store, the most conspicuous components were tall office buildings, seven of which existed by 1930. Over the previous five years Hollywood's "skyscraper" construction had outpaced that in other outlying areas of Los Angeles and elsewhere in the nation as well.²⁵ The impe-

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B. H. Dyas Hollywood (later the Broadway Hollywood) department store, 6300 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, 1927-1928, Fred. H. Dorn, architect. Photo "Dick" Whittington, ca. 1953. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)



tus for this work came to a large extent from leading Los Angeles financial institutions, which proved less reluctant to develop large, full-service branches there than their retail counterparts. These companies also recognized Hollywood's potential for a concentration of professional offices, offering services theretofore primarily available downtown.

Concrete steps to make Hollywood an important financial and office center began before comparable advances materialized in the retail sphere. In 1920, Security Trust & Savings Bank, one of the largest in southern California, unveiled plans for a six-story building in the heart of the new business district, a project that Toberman later admitted was crucial to his decision to erect a department store.²⁶ Three years later, construction began on a height-limit (thirteen stories) block for the Guaranty Building & Loan Association, followed by one for the First National Bank in 1927.²⁷ Local capital began to match that from outside Hollywood at an early date. The district's largest office building project was undertaken in 1923–1924 by the Taft Realty Company, whose leadership ranked with Toberman's in fostering business growth. Work started in 1928 on the Bank of Hollywood's new headquarters, which rivaled its branch neighbors in size and embellishment.²⁸



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Department store, Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street, northwest corner, Los Angeles, 1929–1930; project. (*Los Angeles Times*, 26 January 1930, V-2.)

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Idealized view of Hollywood, ca. 1926. (*Hollywood Daily Citizen*, Hollywood Today Edition, 8 June 1926, I-1.)

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“Shopping’s Good in Hollywood,” promotional illustration. (*Hollywood Daily Citizen*, 4 December 1928, 3.)



SHOPPING'S GOOD in HOLLYWOOD

Hollywood Boulevard, looking east toward Cahuenga Boulevard intersection; tall buildings from left to right: Security Trust & Savings Bank (1920–1922, John and Donald B. Parkinson, architects), Guaranty Building (1923–1924, John C. Austin and Frederick M. Ashley, associated architects), Bank of Hollywood Building (1928–1929, Aleck Curlett, architect), and the Broadway Hollywood store. Photo “Dick” Whittington, 1939. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

Collectively, the tall buildings formed Hollywood’s image as a new metropolitan center. By 1926, the *Hollywood Daily Citizen* was carrying depictions of the emerging skyline, arranged to suggest a pyramidal assemblage soaring above sequestered residential enclaves (figure 56). Two years later the momentum in high-rise building had increased to the point that Hollywood Boulevard was portrayed as the heart of a great city, resembling the coveted urbanity of Fifth Avenue (figure 57).²⁹ But the configuration was hardly the same. Hollywood’s tall commercial buildings formed clusters around the two principal north–south arteries—Vine Street and Highland Avenue—which lay close to either end rather than in the middle of the retail center (figures 58, 59). In between, few buildings exceeded four stories and most were no more than two. This configuration distinguished Hollywood from other Aladdin cities, whose tallest buildings were concentrated around one or two closely spaced intersections. Visually, the results enhanced the perceived size of the district, emphasizing its length, without disturbing the small-scale characteristics of the retail spine for most of its extent. Hollywood continued to grow according to the linear structure established well before 1920. Toberman concentrated his energies on one end of the spine, the Tafts on the other.





Widespread automobile use fit well with this development pattern. The distance between tall building clusters allayed the problems of traffic congestion. Not only were the greatest concentrations of tall buildings separated by a considerable distance, but many of the intervening retail blocks felt little impact from drivers destined for the two ends. An independent assessment made in 1928 found that curbside parking space in the business center could be secured most of the time without undue difficulty.³⁰

Concurrent building projects in the residential and recreational spheres did much to bolster Hollywood's ascendancy as a business center. Several multistory hotels were constructed during the 1920s, most notably the Roosevelt (1925–1927), which served as a social center for the area's elite as well as a destination for well-to-do tourists.³¹ On blocks north of Hollywood Boulevard rose a bumper crop of midrise apartment houses, forming the largest concentration of its kind in the metropolitan area.³² Far more people of means lived in proximity to Hollywood's core than to downtown Los Angeles. To the south, Sunset Boulevard became home of the nine-story Hollywood Athletic Club (1923–1924) as well as the metropolitan area's second highest concentration of automobiles sales and service facilities.³³

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Hollywood Boulevard, looking east toward Highland Avenue intersection; tall buildings from left to right: Pacific-Southwest Trust & Savings Bank (1927–1928, Meyer & Holler, architects), Hotel Christie (1920–1921, Arthur R. Kelly, architect); and Barker Brothers Hollywood store/El Capitan Theatre (1926–1927, Morgan, Walls & Clements and G. Albert Lansburgh, associated architects). Photo "Dick" Whittington, 1939. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

One of the most conspicuous and influential features of Hollywood's commercial center was its movie theaters, the aggregate of which posed a challenge to Broadway as the metropolitan region's focus of popular entertainment. That challenge stemmed not so much from size or elaborateness of the facilities as it did from their function as settings for lavish premieres and first-run pictures. Nationally, first-run movies were shown almost exclusively in downtown theaters throughout the interwar decades, not in neighborhood houses in outlying areas. Having first-run movies, complete with opening spectacles, made Hollywood Boulevard seem unique.³⁴

Paralleling what occurred in the financial sphere, efforts to make Hollywood a center for the exhibition of motion pictures began prior to the district's rise as a leading retail area. In 1921, the redoubtable Los Angeles impresario Sid Grauman started construction of the Egyptian Theatre, which, while not large (1,760 seats), was conceived to replace his still new Million Dollar Theatre (1917–1918) on Broadway and be the new scene of his lavish premieres. Five years later, Grauman was at work on a slightly larger (2,200-seat) and much more imposing Chinese Theatre, whose front itself suggested a stage set.³⁵ More or less concurrently, Warner Brothers erected a 2,700-seat "palace" for the introduction of its films. Complementing this triad was the 1,500-seat El Capitan (1925–1926), probably the largest legitimate theater in the region and developed to attract major performances from New York, and the 2,800-seat Pantages (1928–1930), conceived for extravagant vaudeville shows and adapted for movies by the time it opened.³⁶ These enterprises, extending the full length of Hollywood's business core, elicited comparisons to Broadway in New York and were as significant as any other development in nurturing the belief that this district would become the new heart of the California metropolis.³⁷

PROMOTION

By 1930, Hollywood functioned much like a metropolitan center in miniature, with an array of mutually reinforcing commercial activities. While it never approached the importance of downtown Los Angeles, it nonetheless was more than the equivalent of small satellite city centers such as in Pasadena or Glendale, for the aggregate encompassed a caliber of retail, financial, and recreational facilities seldom found in those places. Numerous parties shaped the amalgam. Real estate developers such as Toberman and the Tafts played a formative role, but there were many others with lesser resources at their command, including long-time owners of boulevard frontage who constructed single, modest buildings. Initiatives taken by businesses and investors from outside the district were as crucial to Hollywood's advance as were local concerns. Conservative banks no less than the flamboyant Grauman proved essential to transforming the street.

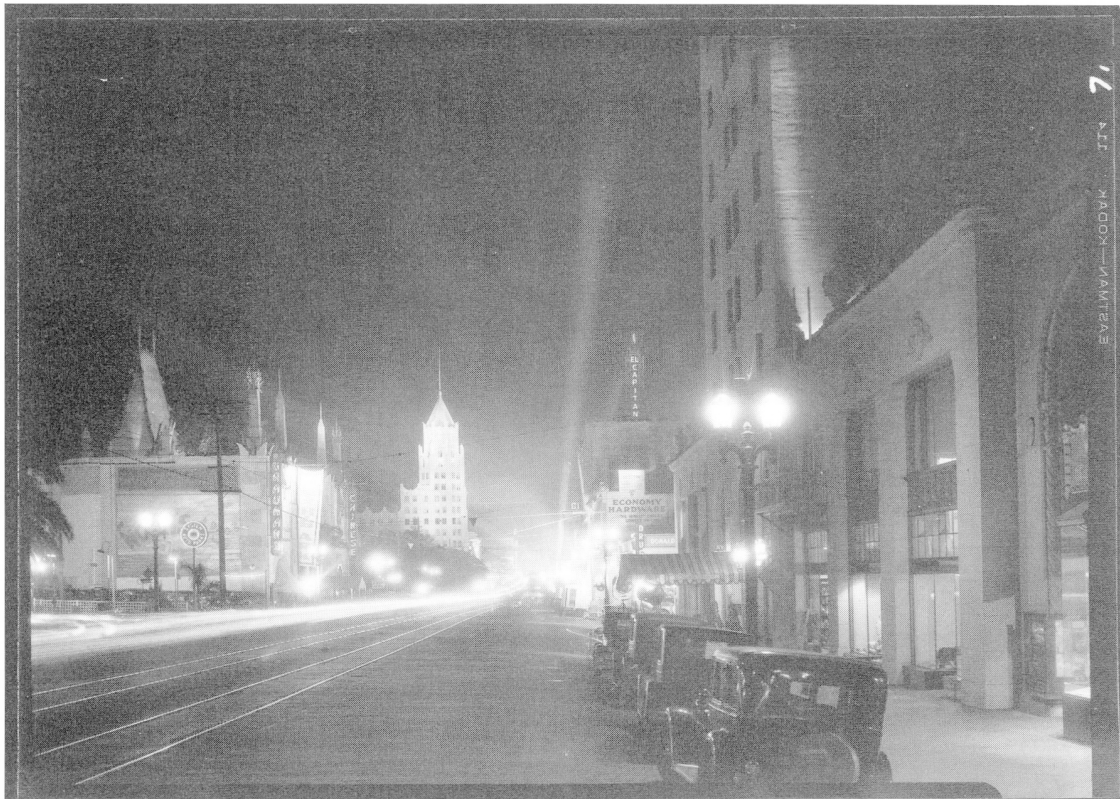
The results would not have been so successful without some cooperative relationship among members of the business community. Hollywood had its own Chamber of Commerce, which worked for physical improvements and generated publicity to enhance patronage. Special shopping days were staged by coalitions of merchants early in the decade, but all such efforts seemed parochial compared to “Hollywood Dresses Up,” a three-day affair organized by the chamber during the 1927 Christmas season. Fusing glamorous aspects of the film industry with those of the retail trades, the event was christened by a battery of klieg lights along Hollywood Boulevard and nearby streets, which, when the master switch was thrown by Mary Pickford, set a forest of illuminating shafts skyward just after sunset (figure 60). The public could “mingle with the stars” while perusing the latest store displays. A chamber spokesman minced no words in explaining the costly program:

Much of the outside world is more prone to order things from Hollywood than the average resident of the town. We have . . . the means of setting fashions throughout the world. Many of the best people here realize this. . . . But there are enough Hollywood people going down town for all their needs to have inspired us to inaugurate this campaign.³⁸

The spectacle gave the public something downtown did not offer, underscoring the idea of Hollywood as a unique destination point.³⁹ Property owners continued the initiative the following April when they established the Hollywood Boulevard Association, which was patterned after

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Hollywood Boulevard, looking east from Sycamore Avenue; night view probably taken at movie premiere. Photo “Dick” Whittington, 1928. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)



organizations promoting Broadway in New York and Michigan Avenue in Chicago.⁴⁰ Among the most ambitious of the group's early projects was held in the spring of 1929 and entailed coordination of merchandise and pricing throughout the commercial center so that it would function as the "World's Largest Department Store."⁴¹ By this point, the objective was not so much to stimulate awareness of what retailers had to offer as to demonstrate that prices were competitive with those downtown. Such programs were, of course, partly built on illusion. Hollywood never actually operated as a single store. Even for the association's event, only about a third of the merchants in the business center participated. Yet the stream of publicity emanating both from the chamber and from the association enhanced trade. These activities also helped prepare business leaders for devising strategies in response to the subsequent economic downturn, when aspirations to become another Fifth Avenue soon faded and "dressing up" for boulevard spectacles no longer had such widespread public appeal.

STRUGGLE

Hopes continued to run high for Hollywood's future during the early stages of the depression, but increasingly were directed toward recapturing what was now portrayed as a past era of elegance. In 1932, Roos Brothers placed a conspicuous advertisement in the *Hollywood Citizen News*, declaring, with some unease, "Hollywood is still Hollywood!" Appearances still counted, even if the emphasis of promotional campaigns was shifting to more basic objectives. By 1934 the *News* itself ran a full-page call for a "modern crusade," urging that "just as the Crusaders of old went in search of the Holy Grail—so we seek the modern "Holly-Goal"—a bright, gleaming, spotless town—comparable to the Hollywood of pre-depression days! Spring is here. . . . Let Hollywood be Hollywood again!"⁴²

The situation was not quite as gloomy as such accounts might suggest. 1931 saw the completion of the so-called "Five Fingers Plan," a six-million-dollar public works project. The result of intensive lobbying by the Chamber of Commerce and other local groups, the improvements included widening, straightening, and repaving six miles of arteries in the business district to make it more accessible to motorists.⁴³ The number of national chain store branches increased, and a more or less steady influx of new independent outlets opened along Hollywood Boulevard throughout the 1930s.⁴⁴ Some merchants expanded their quarters. Campaigns for building modernization were launched as early as 1930; by the eve of Pearl Harbor, many Hollywood Boulevard storefronts were updated or completely remade.⁴⁵ On the other hand, two major companies, I. Magnin and Mullen & Bluett, closed their branches. Robertson's went out of business. Even more ominously, Hollywood failed to attract any new stores of comparable stature.⁴⁶ Much of the mercantile growth that did occur was oriented more toward a broad, middle-income market than to-

ward an elite trade. The extent of new construction paled in comparison with that of the 1920s. Aside from the Broadway's 1938 addition, the most ambitious project of the decade was a four-story store for S. H. Kress Company, completed in 1934. Max Factor embarked on a sumptuous remodeling of his headquarters in 1935, but most of the facelifting done to stores failed to generate the aura of elegance that boosters still wished to project.⁴⁷ On the whole, Hollywood's architecture had never possessed unusual élan; now it saw restrained, sometimes minimalist modern vocabularies employed for remodeled fronts. A poignant example was provided by Nancy's, a locally based women's apparel store, whose owner in 1939 converted the vacant I. Magnin building into a scaleless box.⁴⁸

On the eve of World War II, while Hollywood remained the second largest retail area in Los Angeles and continued to hold much of its appeal, it no longer enjoyed the prestige of the 1920s. The depression was not the primary cause of this change, however. Well before the stock market crash, the groundwork for a challenge to Hollywood's commercial prominence was being laid in other places, which would grow and flourish during the next decade. Behind attempts in the 1920s to make Hollywood the new metropolitan center lay the belief that a city would always have a single dominant business precinct, and that with growth concentrated to the north and west in Los Angeles County, Hollywood was ideally situated to be this single center. Local business leaders knew that their counterparts elsewhere were pursuing the same goal, but they assumed that, like competing communities in a metropolitan region, the relationships among them would become increasingly hierarchical. One outlying center would enjoy leadership; most others would rank well below. What Hollywood's promoters failed to foresee was that the mobility that so contributed to their center's rise as an alternative to downtown also fostered development of other outlying centers further afield, conveniently located near yet newer residential areas. One of the key factors in this struggle was adequate off-street parking space, which Hollywood's business community was slow to recognize.

Like almost every outlying commercial center developed during the 1920s, Hollywood had little space reserved for parking. Conventional wisdom held that problems with automobiles were endemic to the city center but not to areas well removed. Boosters who prophesied that Hollywood would be the new commercial heart of the metropolis ignored the potential problems that stature might bring. Programs initiated for motorists echoed those in downtown Los Angeles: widening, straightening, and otherwise improving arteries into the business district so as to facilitate traffic flow. Because adequate curbside space seemed to exist in most parts of the commercial area, it was assumed that parking, in itself, would not become a serious problem. Several stores did break from this mode by making special provision for customers. I. Magnin was the first in Hollywood, and among the earliest in Los Angeles, to have a parking area at the rear of its store when it opened in 1923 (figure 61). Additions made some five years later included a basement garage for patrons, an amenity also fea-

I. MAGNIN & CO.

Womens' and Misses' Exclusive Apparel & Accessories

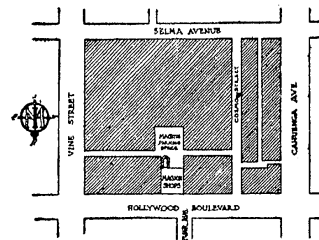
6340 HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD
HOLLYWOOD - CALIFORNIA

LOS ANGELES
THE AMBASSADOR HOTEL



WE PARK YOUR CAR

A gratuitous parking space service
for the exclusive use of our patrons
in the rear of the I. Magnin & Co.
shop at 6340 Hollywood Boulevard



I. MAGNIN & CO. have established a commodious free parking space in the rear of their shop at 6340 Hollywood Boulevard as indicated on the above diagram. Here their patrons may conveniently and securely park their motors, while shopping, free from the annoyance of parking regulations. *If you drive your own car our uniformed attendant will gladly park it for you.* You are cordially invited to avail yourself of this service.

NOTE: Our Shop at The Ambassador Hotel is likewise free from parking annoyances

tured at the Roos Brothers emporium of 1929.⁴⁹ But such provisions were unusual. The largest stores, including Robertson's, Dyas, and Barker Brothers, had no parking lots of their own. Even when retailers recognized the need for off-street space, most let independent parties address the matter, just as in the city center. Thus by 1930 a few commercially operated parking lots could be found on side streets near Hollywood Boulevard, situated on land whose owners were waiting to put it to more profitable use (figure 62).

The extent to which Hollywood actually had a parking problem in 1930 is difficult to ascertain, for almost no discussion of the matter was carried in the press. Ten years later, on the other hand, the problem was not only acknowledged but said to be acute. Off-street and curbside space alike were inadequate. The situation was exacerbated by the many motorists who cruised the streets in search of curbside parking, which was still free. The problem did not stem from new commercial development, since the business district had experienced little new growth. What had changed was the number of motorists, with automobile registrations in Los Angeles County increasing by some 300,000 between 1930 and 1940. Many shoppers had still relied on the streetcar to take them to Hollywood Boulevard during the 1920s, but public transportation had much less appeal on the eve of World War II. By 1936 it was estimated that automobile use was four times greater than that of trolleys and buses combined.⁵⁰ Finally, new residential development continued, especially after 1935, in the San Fernando Valley, which had little besides neighborhood-oriented outlets until the 1950s. Hollywood may have lost some of its prestige as a retail center during the depression, but it succeeded in sustaining patronage on a large scale.

Despite the problem, little was done to address parking needs in Hollywood until conditions became acute, and even then measures were inadequate.⁵¹ Merchants continued to rely on others to provide the service, paying scant attention to how much space was required and where it might best be situated. Only once did a coordinated segment of the business community succeed in establishing a sizable number of new off-street parking spaces in an area where demand was greatest. That initiative occurred in 1931–1932, shortly after Hollywood’s most intensive period of commercial development, under the auspices of the Vine Street Development Association, a consortium of property owners headed by A. Z. Taft. The program led to the construction of commercial car lots at the rear

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I. Magnin & Company store, 6340 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, 1923, Myron Hunt, architect; altered. Advertisement. (*Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1925, 1-3.)

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Theatre Auto Park, Argyle Street, Los Angeles. Photo “Dick” Whittington, 1931. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)



of the tall buildings clustered around the Hollywood and Vine intersection—an achievement, Taft claimed, that would ensure commercial viability for years to come.⁵²

But what Taft and most others then involved with Hollywood's business center failed to understand was the aversion motorists had to fee parking, particularly in outlying districts, where they believed ample space should always exist for their cars along the street. The plan also was oriented to office buildings and the large workforce they housed more than to retail activities. Following the example of downtown stores, some merchants arranged to reimburse lot operators for parking charges incurred by store patrons. Yet individual agreements failed to stimulate shopping in the district as a whole. Customers were constrained by time limits on free parking and felt further inconvenienced if they wished to visit stores some blocks away on the same trip.

Concerted efforts to improve conditions did not coalesce until the decade's end. In March 1939 the Chamber of Commerce unveiled a scheme for "universal free parking." The strategy was to provide a convenience no other district offered: a unified system allowing motorists to park without charge in any lot for at least one hour if they made a one-dollar minimum purchase at any store.⁵³ Though quickly implemented, the plan enjoyed only limited success. Some forty percent of the merchants refused to participate and many others failed to promote it to customers, apparently due to a lack of voice in parking lot operations and improvements. Some car lot operators also resisted the plan because they believed that they could reap greater profits on their own.

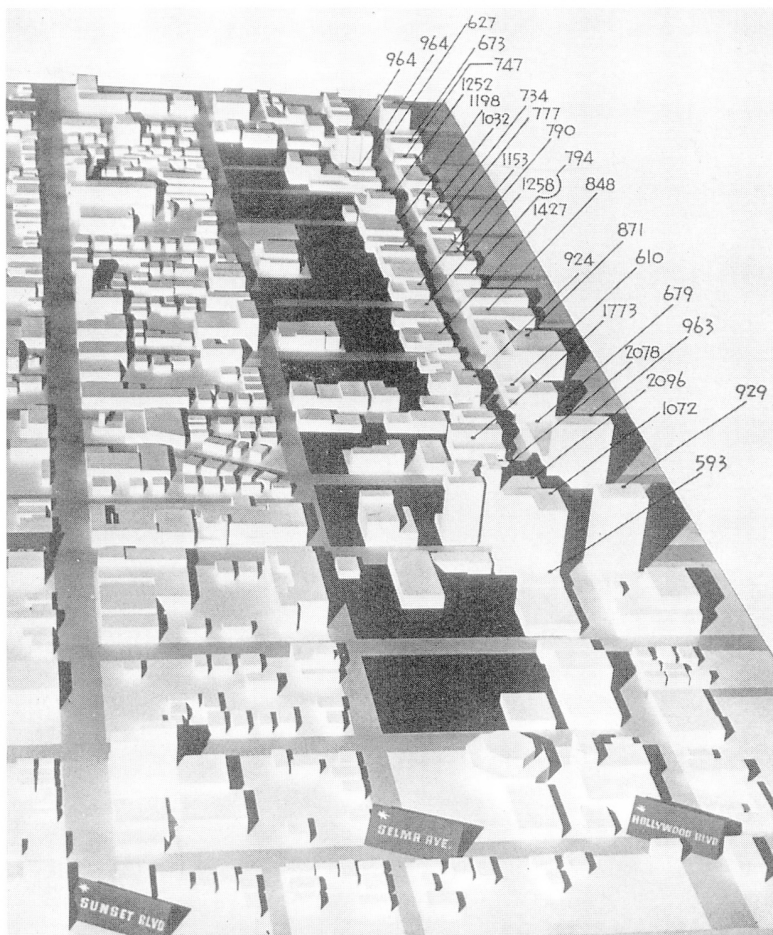
The problems generated by the chamber's initial plan soon led to a more ambitious scheme aimed at centralizing management, equitably distributing expenses, and creating additional parking space. Unveiled in May 1940, the scheme called for a nonprofit corporation comprised of all boulevard property owners in the main business district—a group that on the whole had shunned responsibility for the parking issue.⁵⁴ Through the corporation, owners and their tenants would contract with car lot operators for a specified sum over a specified number of years. Theoretically, this arrangement would prove lucrative enough to develop new car lots. The project would be limited to blocks on the south side of Hollywood Boulevard between Gower Street and Highland Avenue so that over time a more or less continuous parking area would emerge, extending some 600 feet from the rear of Hollywood Boulevard buildings to Selma Avenue, the next parallel street to the south (figure 63).⁵⁵ The corporation would be empowered to acquire some or all of the lots. Total ownership would be costly, but would enable unlimited free parking without the bother of validating tickets. The corporation would oversee, but not finance, improvements to the rear elevations of tangent buildings so that they could function as new customer entrances. Chamber officials argued that the cost of the entire scheme would not be great for any one party if shared in equal proportion by all property owners, and that much greater sums

would be lost, both in store revenues and property values, if Hollywood's consumer draw continued to erode.

The chamber's proposal, soon christened the Hollywood Plan, ranked among the most sweeping of its kind prior to World War II. The national publicity it received in turn may have had some influence on numerous undertakings for the redevelopment of other existing commercial districts during the postwar era. Yet the scheme itself never advanced beyond a modest first stage, which modified the program by allowing three hours of free parking with a one-dollar minimum purchase.⁵⁶ U.S. entry into the war curtailed further steps. The quilt of individually owned car lots was never integrated, nor were rear elevations converted to new "fronts." Perhaps the Hollywood Plan's most important lesson was to underscore the difficulties in implementing such programs. No matter how pressing the needs, no matter how logical the plan devised, no matter how assertive the leadership seeking to implement change, dependence upon the full cooperation of numerous independent parties, many of whom put immediate self-interest above long-term common goals, made the outcome problematic at best. Over a decade before the issue came to a head, a more efficacious course was being pursued by individual parties along Wilshire Boulevard in two districts that would soon challenge Hollywood as principal destinations for metropolitan retail activity.

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Plan for off-street parking proposed by Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, 1940; project. (*Architectural Record*, December 1940, 46.)





V

FABULOUS BOULEVARD

Even at an early stage, Wilshire Boulevard was assigned a leading role in Los Angeles's future. A year after the stock market crash, boosters seemed undaunted: "[Wilshire] has become, throughout the world, synonymous with Los Angeles . . . it will become the most famous lane in modern civilization . . . the Twentieth Century's super-street." Wilshire's promise did not lose its currency with the next generation. In 1949, a New York journalist, Ralph Hancock, wrote a "biography" of what he called the "Fabulous Boulevard." Hancock warned his readers that after driving Wilshire's length, one would "run out of descriptive adjectives . . . surrounded by a world so new, so kaleidoscopic that no basis of comparison exists." Yet the assemblage was hardly an alien composite: "To know the Boulevard intimately is to know the city and to know Los Angeles is to know a cross-section of the United States, for all of the currents . . . of American life . . . flow through this sunlit valley. . . . Here is a street more expressive of America's youth, its aspirations, and its daring than any other anywhere."¹

Between the late 1920s and the 1940s Wilshire became not only one of Los Angeles's most heavily traveled arteries but the city's most touted corridor of commerce, whose prestige challenged, and in some respects eclipsed, those of downtown and Hollywood. The endless stream of hyperbole used to depict the fabulous boulevard reflected the importance it acquired as a place and as a symbol in the minds of southern Californians. Few thoroughfares ran through so many new and significant urban districts. Furthermore, the commercial centers that were the principal bea-