

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

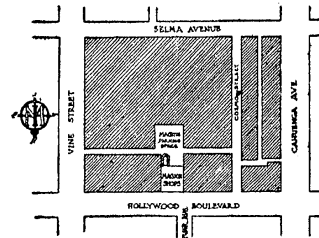
6340 HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD
HOLLYWOOD - CALIFORNIA

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, I-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.

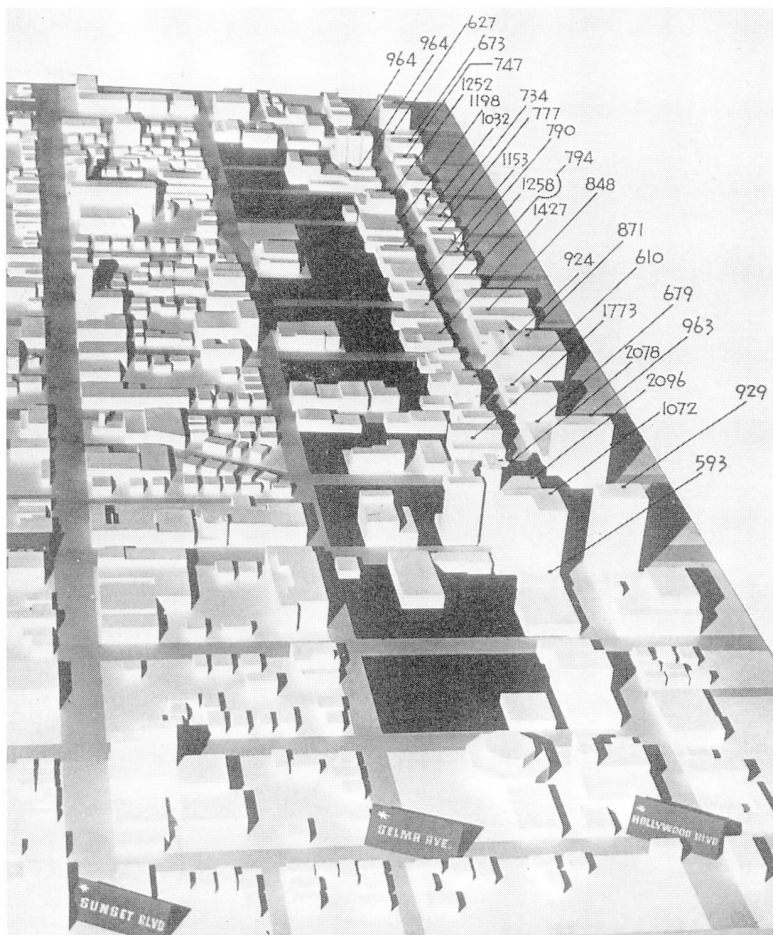
The problems generated by the chamber's initial plan soon led to a more ambitious scheme aimed at centralizing management, equitably distributing expenses, and creating additional parking space. Unveiled in May 1940, the scheme called for a nonprofit corporation comprised of all boulevard property owners 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-