Soon after the bill's passage, the chamber resumed the drive to implement a long-term plan, presenting a somewhat modified version of the city's court scheme in August (figure 130).[19] The principal change was a reduction from four to two ranges of parking spaces, perhaps out of recognition that a wider area would encroach upon the space increasingly needed by many stores. Despite the fact that total capacity was about a third of what the city had proposed in 1938, the scheme was favorably received. Hopes for implementation persisted after the United States entered the war; but, as in Hollywood, the momentum eventually dissipated. After that conflict's end, an even more ambitious proposal was developed, only to remain on paper.[20] All Beverly Hills had to show for its foresight, leadership, cooperation, meticulous study, and statewide initiative to address the parking problem was a diminishing number of temporary lots on vacant parcels of land.

Even if the scheme had been realized, it probably would not have proven as beneficial as its sponsors believed. Each court would have accommodated about sixty cars, less than demand at peak shopping periods. A tight configuration invited bottlenecks as motorists searched for a vacant space. Deliveries would have to be made curbside to avoid blocking customers' cars at the rear. Converting utilitarian rear elevations to suitable store entrances would have been expensive, especially given the small number of patrons served. Finally, it is doubtful whether the well-heeled and often status-conscious clientele that frequented the Business Triangle would be enthusiastic about parking in an expanded alley corridor. Beverly Hills business leaders had a solid grasp of the problem and its implications for their community, but proved incapable of implementing a preventive strategy and were not fully aware of the kind of space needed to provide a viable solution.

The changes needed to ensure a long-term supply of parking came from forces other than legislation, zoning, Chambers of Commerce, reformers, planners, or even major real estate developers. They came rather from merchants and were based on a narrow set of pragmatic concerns. Change came slowly, incrementally, and tentatively at first, not in large-scale projects but in modest ones along boulevards less fabulous than Wilshire. The developments had no names, except sometimes informal ones that identified the intersection—much like speculative boom developments along Western Avenue in the 1920s. Yet they boasted configurations to which Beverly Hills parking advocates pointed as models, to which the planners of Hollywood's grand, stillborn parking scheme likewise looked for inspiration, and to which A. W. Ross may have turned a wistful eye, wishing he had gone so far on the Miracle Mile.

MAIN STREET

The integration of parking and retail space beyond that found at individual buildings began to occur during the late 1930s as the shopping center

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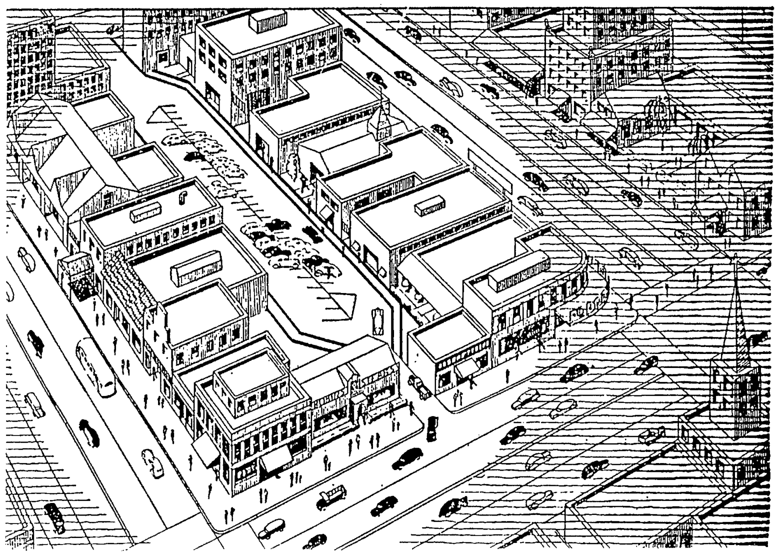

concept began to enter the general realm of speculative commercial development. These first examples contrasted markedly with Westwood Village and other ambitious projects planned in the previous decade. The new generation were smaller—"neighborhood" centers, they would soon be called—containing up to around twenty stores, with a supermarket as the anchor tenant.[21] They were oriented to routine needs, although variety, apparel, and accessory stores might be included. Their audience was local and largely middle-income.

Elsewhere in the United States, neighborhood shopping centers had emerged during the 1920s as an outgrowth of comprehensive community planning efforts generated by reform concerns, and were the direct descendants of the earlier store block.[22] But the neighborhood center as part of a planned residential enclave held little interest among Los Angeles developers. Instead the parties involved had traditionally undertaken arterial development. Their motivation was strictly to increase profit margins.

The catalyst for introducing the neighborhood center to Los Angeles appears to have been the supermarket. Between the late 1920s and mid-1930s, the city was arguably the nation's most important proving ground for this new kind of food emporium.[23] Supermarkets carried every basic kind of food product under one roof, with most, if not all, departments operated as a single business. These outlets depended heavily on brand-name goods, self-service, low staffing, and cash-and-carry sales. But what most distinguished the supermarket from earlier food stores was the large scale of its operation. Goods were stocked in quantity and sold in volume; thus prices could be kept low, lower even than at chain stores. Pioneers in the field, most notably Ralphs Grocery Company, proved the advantages of this economy of scale before the stock market crash, but the broad application of the concept, in Los Angeles and elsewhere, began after significant economic decline when competition for consumer dollars grew acute.

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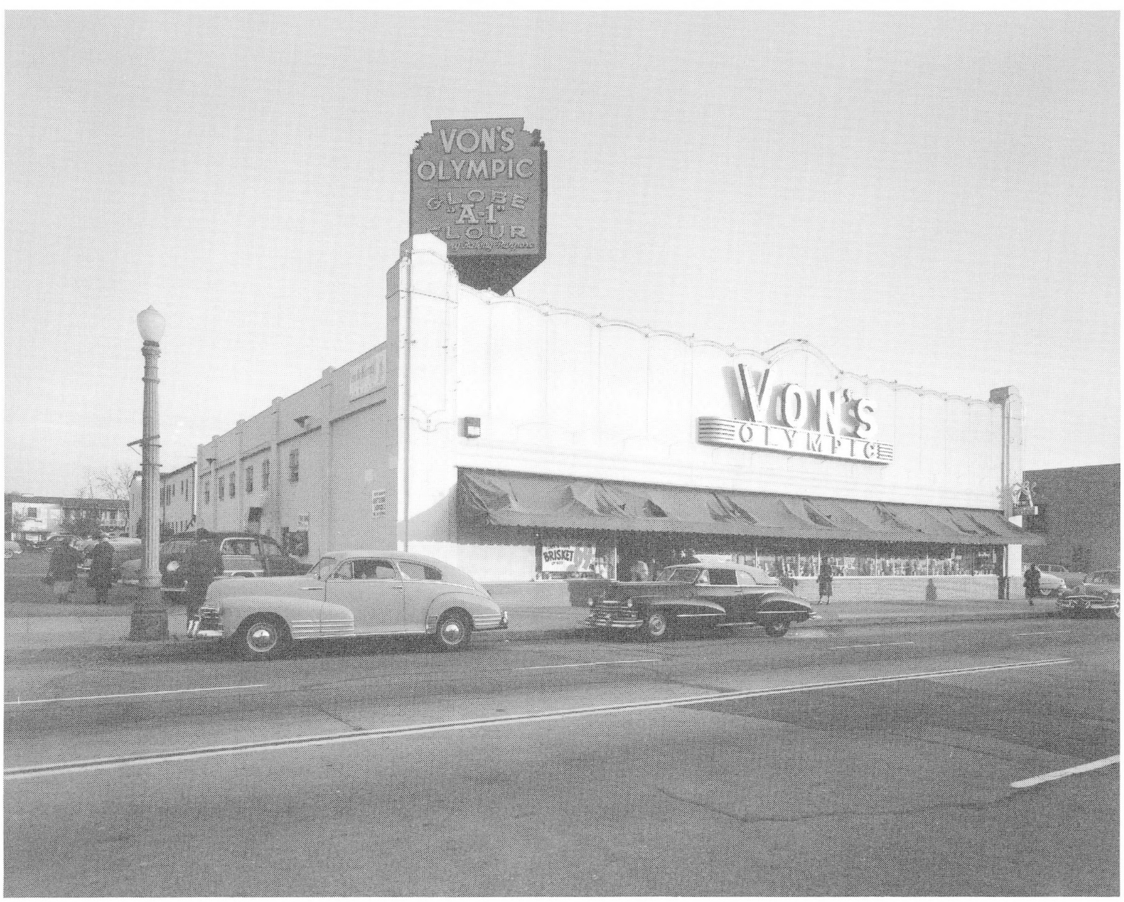
By 1939 the Los Angeles area boasted some 350 supermarkets, by far the largest concentration in the country. The average size of new units was around 10,000 square feet in 1935, and twice that at the decade's end.[24] These enormous plants could be found in numbers as part of middle-class and many prosperous blue-collar precincts throughout the region. They made significant inroads on the business done by other food stores, including chain outlets. The supermarket helped revolutionize the distribution system by firmly establishing low price as a transcendent factor in mass appeal, by expanding the scope of self-service shopping, and by selling food and other convenience goods at a much larger volume than previously thought possible. These buildings further accelerated the trend of business development away from established nodes, with location increasingly predicated on easy access for motorists.

The supermarket was inconceivable without general consumer mobility. If shoppers were to buy in volume, they had to rely on their cars to carry the food home. The need to minimize the distance between the storefront and the car, combined with the sizable number of patrons at peak shopping periods, rendered curbside space inadequate almost from the start. Street congestion also was an issue. As a result, supermarkets were generally located on the fringe of neighborhood shopping districts, or in lone-wolf locations, where traffic was less and where land was rela-

130
Proposed inner-block parking plan sponsored by Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce, 1941. (*Western City*, March 1942, 37.)

131
Von's Olympic store, 1020 S. Fairfax Avenue, Los Angeles, ca. 1934; no longer standing. Photo "Dick" Whittington, 1953. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)



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tively cheap. Like Sears, the supermarket could attract enough customers to stand alone, without adjacent stores. Thus situated, these emporia could have a large floorplate and ample contiguous space for parking. A lot with a capacity of perhaps 100 to 150 automobiles was not uncommon by the mid-1930s (figure 131).

Competition among supermarkets grew to the point that many early examples had closed or were operating marginally toward the decade's end.[25] Problems stemmed not from a flawed concept but from oversaturation. Many merchants believed the only way to improve their situation was to expand through more and/or larger facilities. One of the most innovative responses came from Ben Surval, a veteran wholesaler who opened one of the first Hollywood supermarkets in 1931, and his new partners, grocers Al and Morris Wisstein. Among their initial joint ventures was a neighborhood shopping center designed to sustain trade for the immense supermarket that lay in its midst.[26]

The Wisstein Bros. & Surval complex was constructed in stages between 1936 and 1939 on South Broadway between Eighty-seventh and Eighty-eighth streets (figure 132).[27] The site was ideal for a supermarket, located at the edge of a modest-sized shopping district developed during the previous decade. Residential growth was rebounding in the area, with single-family dwellings and a few small apartment complexes occupied by persons of moderate means—a budget-conscious constituency that was the bedrock of the supermarket's success. An entire block was purchased to allow room for a critical mass of stores in the project. Collectively, these outlets would enhance the district as a whole by broadening the choices available to shoppers, but they would also compete with existing businesses. With the supermarket as its centerpiece, the ensemble would become a new locus of trade, pulling customers away from the established heart of the district one block to the north. Surval was frank about the supermarket's generative role: "You can see that the whole community develops to your [the market's] advantage. You can rent to the types of stores that will draw the kind of traffic you want."[28]

What gave the complex its merchandising strength was the clustering of chain outlets, including two drug and two variety stores, which complemented the supermarket by providing other routine goods at low prices. Many items may have been offered on especially favorable terms, given the positioning of rival companies within the same complex. Smaller shops, most of which carried apparel and accessories and were likewise chain-operated, were interspersed among the big units.[29]

Wisstein Bros. & Surval tailored their strategy to a new wave of chain store expansion that was beginning to take shape. In outlying areas of Los Angeles, chain development had largely been forged by food companies during the previous decade. Now other kinds of retailers were entering the field. Hollywood, the Miracle Mile, and Westwood Village had the greatest concentrations of newcomers, but many chains also targeted smaller, less prestigious shopping districts as well. Drug and variety stores were the most aggressive. The three principal drug companies—Owl,

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Sontag, and Thrifty—had a total of eight outlying units in Los Angeles in 1930, sixty-six in 1940. Among variety chains, S. H. Kress was the exception in adding only two outlying units during the decade to the seven it had in 1930. F. W. Woolworth, on the other hand, went from nine such units in 1930 to twenty-one by 1940. Southern California's other major variety chain, J. J. Newberry, had only one outlying unit in 1930, thirteen a decade later.[30]

Chain outlets increased dramatically in size as well as in number. The supermarket afforded an important model for drug and variety stores in its large, uninterrupted floor area, emphasis on self-service, and sleek imagery—all to stimulate volume purchasing. Drug as well as variety store units were now almost always purpose-built instead of being adapted to existing retail blocks.[31] Drug stores had long been considered nearly as important to the tenant mix of a neighborhood center as a market, but most of these had been independently owned. Now securing a unit of a major drug chain was believed to significantly increase the draw of a retail complex. In a parallel vein, the expansion of variety stores in outlying areas rendered their inclusion a prized objective. As a result chain companies had enormous leverage in the planning of a project.[32]

The configuration and visual character of the Broadway and Eighty-seventh Street center reflected the circumstances of its development. The heavy reliance on well-known chains led to an emphasis on individual storefront identity to a far greater degree than at Westwood or other large shopping centers of its kind. Some coordination was evident in features such as a more or less uniform cornice line; however, the overall effect did not suggest a complex planned as a single entity. The largest and most conspicuous component was the supermarket, yet other stores held their own in attention-getting facades. The presence of each was enhanced by particularized graphics as well as by amount of frontage (for the major outlets), which was much wider than the standard a decade earlier. Store depth varied between 120 and 135 feet, again reflecting the normative size increase of the period.

Off-street parking was, of course, essential for the supermarket, and for the other stores it would be a novel feature that could only enhance patronage. The presence of those additional outlets necessitated a car lot considerably bigger than would have been needed for the supermarket alone. The grouping also prevented the car lot from being in its normal location at one side of the market. Given the circumstances, only two siting options existed: to the front or to the rear of the range. The former was inconceivable to supermarket owners, who depended heavily on the visual appeal of open-front buildings adorned with lavish produce displays. Even without this factor, both chain store companies and independent merchants in the region adamantly believed a strong streetfront orientation was essential to their success. Parking would be in back, just as at Sears and the big Wilshire stores.

So positioned, the car lot needed to extend the full length of the block if it was to function efficiently for vehicular circulation and access

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132

Shopping center, 8701–8765 S. Broadway, Los Angeles, 1936–1937, 1939; altered. Photos "Dick" Whittington, 1949. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

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to all stores. It made no sense to have this space less than the depth of the property, because the residual land would have had little market value. This premise, plus the precinct's block configuration, led to a parking facility of more or less equal area to the buildings. This 1:1 ratio was unusually high at that time, permitting space for 280 cars. The demand proved commensurate, however. Reportedly, the lot was often full at peak hours. Further convenience was afforded by customer entrances at the rear of at least some of the stores. Yet despite the importance of this amenity, it was treated in a wholly utilitarian fashion. Architectural and product display were reserved for the Broadway facade; the rear elevation, which many patrons may have experienced more often, was designed as if it faced no more than the service alley that ran between it and the parking area (figure 133). For all their love of the automobile, Angelenos exhibited no love of parking lots. These spaces were seen as eyesores—unfortunate ne-

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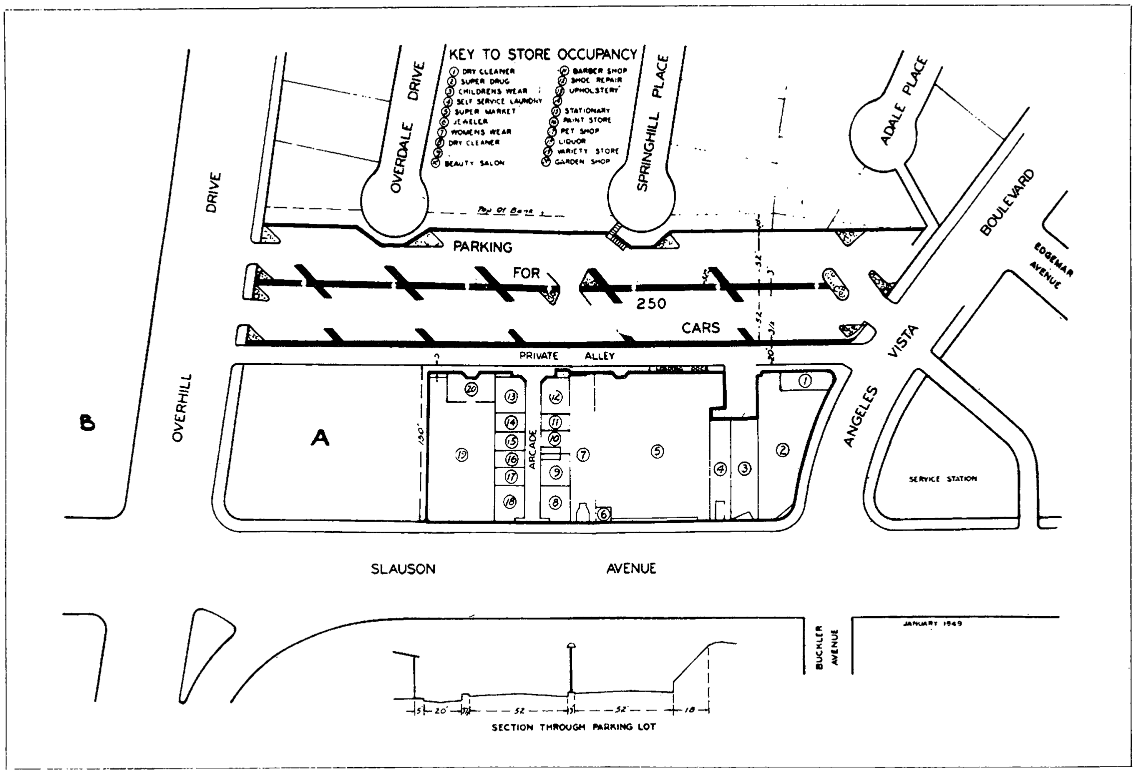

cessities best concealed from public view. The elegance of Bullock's arrangement had no impact beyond the other big Wilshire stores. Thus the contrast between front and back of the Broadway and Eighty-seventh Street center was inconsequential to its users. What was important was that ample space existed to park at a complex that offered new options in products and pricing close to home. The streetfronts were rendered in a sleek, streamlined vocabulary that likewise carried positive associations. Collectively, these advantages made the concept a model for the region.

That model was loosely interpreted in location, arrangement, and tenant mix. Not long after the Broadway and Eighty-seventh Street center was completed, Wisstein Bros. & Surval signed a contract to build a supermarket at a somewhat similar complex whose primary function was serving the new Windsor Hills subdivision (figure 134). The site lay some nine miles southwest of downtown on the fringe of urban settlement and well removed from existing shopping districts. Windsor Hills's developer, Marlow-Burns, wanted a center that would provide basic services, more limited in scope than at the Broadway and Eighty-seventh Street center. Here the target audience was smaller and also more affluent. Presumably Windsor Hills residents would drive to Westwood, the Miracle Mile, or some other major center to satisfy additional needs. As a result, most units were occupied by small-scale, independent operations, and there was less rear parking space (figure 135). Comprising some 22,000 square feet, the supermarket was by far the biggest unit in the complex and the first to be constructed so it would be a catalyst for other businesses. Owing to the isolated location and U.S. entry into World War II, the development pro-

133
Shopping center, 8701–8765 S. Broadway, rear view. Photo author, 1989.

134
Windsor Hills Shopping Center, 4401–4435 W. Slauson Avenue, Los Angeles, 1941, 1948, Office of Stiles Clements (and others?), architect; altered. Photo ca. 1948. (*Urban Land Institute Technical Bulletin*, July 1948, 10.)

135
Windsor Hills Shopping Center, plan. (*Urban Land Institute Technical Bulletin*, July 1948, 10.)

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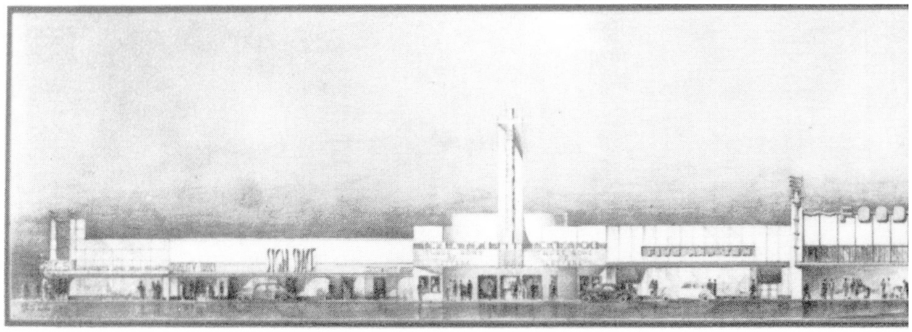

cess took longer than anticipated, and much of the complex was not realized until 1948. By that time, the rear parking lot was so heavily used that building on the western third of the site was never undertaken.[33]

The facade treatment at Windsor Hills was simpler than at Broadway and Eighty-seventh. Stiles Clements, whose office designed the market and probably the rest of the center as well, composed the front like a series of billboard frames, providing large but otherwise neutral backdrops for store signs. This configuration gave the center somewhat more the appearance of a unified ensemble, yet variation in facade height, setback and detailing still resulted in a decidedly accretive effect. The rear elevation was without embellishment; however, to facilitate circulation between front and back and to house a number of merchants requiring very small spaces, a covered pedestrian walkway, lined with shops, ran through the building at midblock—a feature then seldom employed in retail development of any sort.

The fully integrated neighborhood shopping center was slow to gain ground in southern California. Some ambitious proposals were made, but most appear never to have materialized in anything approaching their projected form (figure 136). By the eve of Pearl Harbor, perhaps as few as a half-dozen fully developed examples could be found in Los Angeles and adjacent counties. [34] The abundance of large new supermarkets in metropolitan Los Angeles substantially reduced the places where a shopping center anchored by yet another grand food emporium could thrive. If the supermarket was instrumental in shaping the neighborhood centers of the region, it likewise had a decisive effect on limiting that type's growth until large-scale development of new residential areas occurred during the postwar years.

At the same time, the approach to retail planning embodied at the Broadway and Eighty-seventh Street center was adapted in a number of projects of less complete scope. For example, an eight-unit complex was erected in 1941 by a syndicate, Southern Counties Investment Company, to complement a recently completed Ralphs supermarket lying just to the north at Exposition and Crenshaw boulevards (figure 137). The ensemble was created as a cluster of chains, including J. J. Newberry, J. C. Penney, Sontag, Grayson, and Karl's Shoe Company, supplemented by a few independent stores—all served by an equally large parking lot at the rear.[35] Similar complexes appear to have been undertaken during the same

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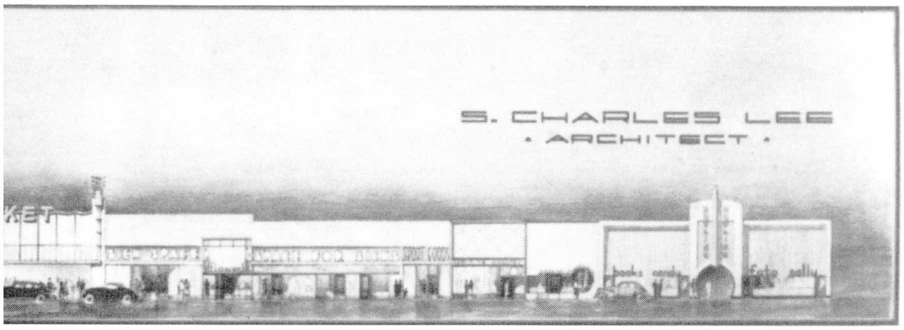

period. Some variation occurred among them in size and scope; nevertheless, the cumulative result represented the beginnings of a marked change in the metropolitan landscape. The rapid growth of chains, now including some that specialized in clothes, shoes, and other accessories, in many smaller, more localized trading centers heralded a substantial increase in the shopping choices many Angelenos could enjoy close to home. Variety was greater, prices often were lower, the quality of goods could be better—not just because of the chains' economies of scale but because of the opportunities they afforded for comparison shopping.

Not all ventures were so inclusive as the Crenshaw Boulevard complex. Some looked much the same but lacked a strong tenancy. A complex built several years earlier (1936–1937) on South Vermont Avenue near another Ralphs market contained neither a variety store nor major outlets for clothing and accessories, but did have units of all three leading drug store chains in the region (figure 138).[36] A rear parking lot was often a feature at such places, but not always: the belief persisted that curbside space was adequate when a supermarket or comparably sized stores were absent. Conventional wisdom maintained that these developments functioned much like an updated Main Street, drawing from a limited trade area. If many patrons living nearby drove, others would walk or take public transportation to shop at the local center.

Custom also affected ownership and development practices. Numerous shopping groups were created not under the initiative of a single firm but rather by a real estate broker, who in effect functioned as the de-

136
Shopping center, possibly for Sherman and Van Nuys boulevards, Los Angeles, 1939, S. Charles Lee, architect; project. (Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles.)

137
Retail development for Southern Counties Investment Company, 3651–3695 Crenshaw Boulevard, Los Angeles, begun 1941; altered. Photo author, 1989.

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veloper, working with a loose confederation of property owners and merchants. The products were not true shopping centers as they lacked central management, and many of them may not have had ongoing controls over tenancy or physical appearance. These groups also differed from the taxpayer block in that the scale was larger, stores were bigger, more types of chain companies were involved, and the structuring of an ensemble of mutually reinforcing tenants was a key objective. Yet these complexes were rooted in established practices of strip retail development in the region. New components modified those practices but did not subsume them. This orientation was aptly reflected in the name of the coterie formed shortly before World War II by about a dozen leading brokers involved in such work: the Main Streeters.

As a group, the Main Streeters had no specific agenda. Their gatherings were partly for social intercourse, partly for informal exchange of information.[37] The rare occasions when two or more members joined forces to work on a retail project stemmed from mutually advantageous circumstances, not from the objectives of the group itself. Most members had ties to a major regional or national chain company. The locational concerns that had guided chain store development in outlying parts of the metropolis for some two decades constituted a major undercurrent in the Main Streeters' thinking. As with the Broadway and Eighty-seventh Street center, the optimal site was believed to be at or close to the intersection of two major thoroughfares and surrounded by a large residential area. Multiple ownership was considered desirable because it lessened the risk taken by any single party—a factor that also led insurance companies to help underwrite such ventures. Planning and business integration were undertaken only to the extent the parties involved felt was needed to avert the high incidence of business failure and property vacancy that occurred during the 1920s. Since such centers proved to be very profitable investments, at least in the short run, the parties involved saw no reason to deviate further from established habits.

The new "Main Street" seemed at once strikingly modern yet reassuringly conventional. Little wonder that business leaders in Beverly

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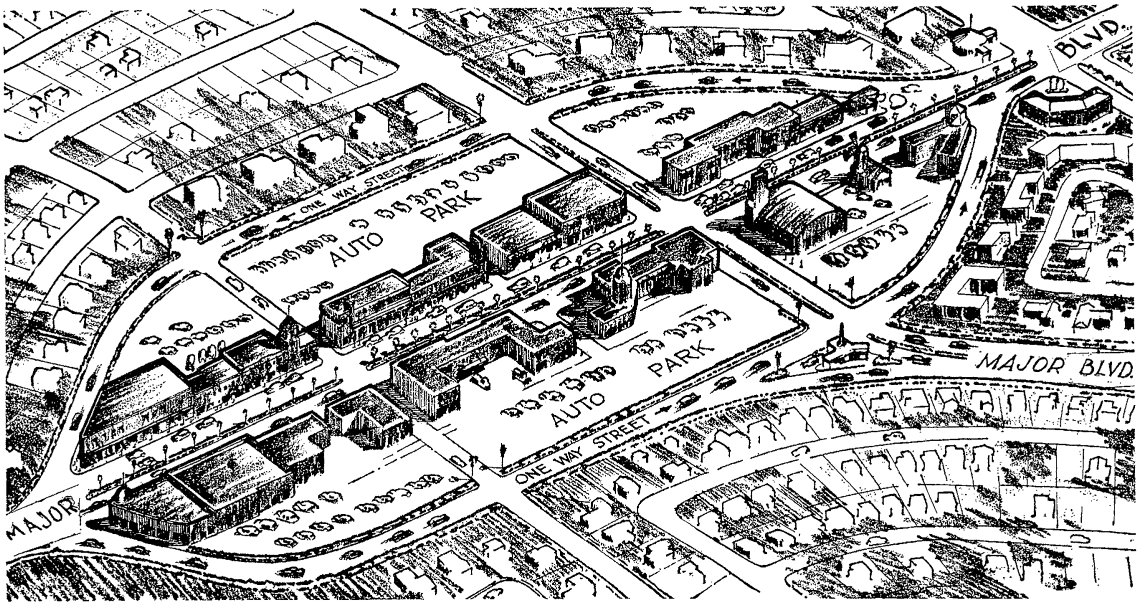

138
Retail development, 8400–8436 S. Vermont Avenue, Los Angeles, 1936–1937; altered. Photo author, 1989.

139
Plan for development of outlying business centers, Department of City Planning, City of Los Angeles, 1941. (*Los Angeles Times,* 9 February 1941, V-3.)

Hills were envious of these complexes.[38] What so many parties could not accomplish in Beverly Hills was materializing, if still tentatively, along thoroughfares near the urban periphery. Given both the fragmented nature of the neighborhood shopping center's emergence in Los Angeles and the level of frustration over parking as a hindrance to business throughout the metropolitan area, it is little wonder, too, that planning officials sought to codify the concept.

Unveiled by the Los Angeles Department of City Planning in February 1941, the model scheme sought to combine the aim of bringing greater order, unity, and containment to commercial growth—factors very important to the developers of guaranteed neighborhoods—with the more pragmatic, mundane concerns of the mainstream. The configuration of the Broadway and Eighty-seventh Street center was expanded to encompass both sides of the thoroughfare for three long blocks (figure 139). The shopping experience as well as vehicular circulation were to be enhanced by directing through traffic onto peripheral streets. These one-way arteries improved access to the rear car lots, while functioning as self-imposed boundaries to commercial development. The planners were optimistic that their design would resolve the dilemma of parklessness once and for all. The proposal would be widely accepted in the marketplace, not only because of its "Main Street" origins but also because it had been specifically created as a cooperative venture with a syndicate of property owners for the Westchester district, a huge tract not far from Windsor Hills.[39] United States entry into the war ten months later delayed the plans. But once peace returned, Main Street reemerged as a springboard for many of the new shopping centers that soon would be built. The relatively few, modest complexes of the post-depression era convinced ever more retail and real estate concerns that at least some form of planning was needed for new business developments, especially if shoppers were to be rid of frustration in finding a place to park.

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VIII

HOLD ON!

"Hold on! It happened once. It will happen again." Thus did the *Los Angeles Times* editors paraphrase the 1933 New Year's message issued by the presidents of five leading financial institutions to property owners in southern California, especially to those in the city center. Many readers had grown skeptical of what the future might bring. But the *Times* incanted, as it had for decades, that the years ahead were filled with promise: "The history of real estate here through seven depressions is that from every low level it climbs to new high peaks. . . . Just as prices were once absurdly inflated, they are now absurdly deflated. Hold On!"[1]

In 1933 the hope lingered among many of those in business that a new downtown Los Angeles would take the form of a skyscraper city, punctuated with towers many times the height then permitted by law, permeated by high-speed motorways and other transportation lines at multiple levels—a futuristic update of the Bellamyesque images presented for two decades and which enjoyed special favor during the years just passed (figure 140).[2] The future city would be an even more radical departure from that of the present than the present one was from that of the late nineteenth century. If confidence remained strong, extraordinary things would occur.

Within a few years, however, such expansive visions largely were forgotten. Downtown Los Angeles did not recreate itself; indeed, it barely grew at all. Between the early 1930s and early 1950s little new construction of consequence occurred in the district. The depression did not, of

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