scape, shopping patterns, and the very idea of what a business center should be.[4] Nowhere was that impact so great so early as in Los Angeles, where four enormous shopping centers were operating, under construction, or on the boards by the close of 1950—all of them in "meadows" theretofore removed from concentrated settlement (figure 152).[5] All of them, too, were experiments, and underscored the challenges and risks involved in setting a course for which little precedent existed. As much as any metropolitan area, Los Angeles demonstrated at an early date that the shopping center was now a key feature of urban expansion. At the same time, an underlying strain of conservatism characterized aspects of the phenomenon locally. None of these centers emerged as a paradigm for later work, but, directly or otherwise, they left an indelible imprint on the broad patterns that eventually coalesced.

MARKET CONDITIONS

A number of factors contributed to the rapid growth of shopping centers across the country. There was a rise in population nationally (almost twenty million added between 1940 and 1950), a significantly greater percentage of which now resided in metropolitan areas (a 22.4 percent gain from 1940 to 1950). There was a huge increase in buying power ($25.20 per week in 1940, $60.00 per week in 1950) and with it greater disposable income ($979 per annum in 1940, $1,314 in 1950). With the forty-hour work week becoming commonplace, more time could be spent on leisure pursuits, shopping among them. This shift, along with the shopping center's accessibility, fostered greater family and male patronage in addition to the more customary women shopping alone.[6]

The rise of moderate-income households with disposable incomes was recognized as one of the most significant new factors in retailing and had a major impact both on the location and the nature of commercial development through the postwar years.[7] The percentage of both highest and lowest income groups had declined since 1929; more people were now considered middle class. Much of this group was upwardly mobile. Some had been victims of the depression and were on the rebound. Others were enjoying money and leisure for the first time. As the consumer market was increasing, it also shifted geographically. Along with more affluent groups, families of modest yet expanding means continued to relocate in outlying parts of metropolitan areas. A majority of the latter group now expected to live in a freestanding residence set amid a sizable yard—the low-density environment commonplace for some time in Los Angeles. From coast to coast, much of the newly settled territory lay beyond city limits. Population increases in cities themselves were often less during the 1940s than they were in the surrounding counties. There was also a substantial growth of businesses, especially industrial plants, well beyond the city center. These patterns were both fostered by, and in turn

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Site of May Company Crenshaw store, 4005 Crenshaw Boulevard. Photo "Dick" Whittington, 1945. (Whittington Collection, Department of Special Collections, University of Southern California.)

further stimulated, automobile use. Highway building became ever more ambitious as public transportation systems suffered.[8]

These demographic changes had a great impact on both the acceptance of the shopping center as an optimal means of selling goods and on the scale at which those centers were constructed. Since mass consumer markets were being created very rapidly in new places, they could be captured most effectively by large centers because of the range of offerings they provided. Land was cheap and in many cases unencumbered by the rather mechanical zoning patterns established during the interwar decades. Many outlying business districts developed prior to 1941 were already overcrowded. Often they lacked adequate space to satisfy postwar needs, and a paucity of off-street parking made traffic congestion prevalent at prime shopping periods. Much the same conditions precluded large-scale new development from concentrating in established centers of satellite communities now being absorbed by metropolitan areas. It was far easier and cheaper to start afresh on virgin soil—in the meadows.

Development on a large scale was spurred by the realization that substantial acreage had to be dedicated to parking. Chain store companies, moreover, considered a big selling area essential for their mass merchandising techniques. The smaller, independently owned specialty shop was still seen as an important part of the tenant mix, but chain stores were now considered the foremost attractions to the vast white- and prosperous blue-collar target populations. Financial reward as well as recognition lay in creating large complexes, particularly regional centers.

Los Angeles's continued importance as a proving ground for new ideas in retail development was in large part due to the persistence of conditions that were central to shaping the metropolis during the 1920s. Southern California had suffered less and for a briefer period from the depression than did many parts of the country. By 1935 the economic climate was showing clear signs of improvement, due to a significant extent to the demand for products that comprised the backbone of local manufacturing, including petroleum, motion pictures, food, rubber, and aircraft. In 1937 the county ranked fifth nationally in the value of goods made and seventh in wages paid. The defense buildup prior to World War II and the far greater surge of wartime production dramatically increased Los Angeles's economic importance. By the opening months of 1948, the city ranked third nationally in its dollar volume of business. The prosperity that characterized the postwar years exceeded most predictions.[9]

The sustained rise in business activity was a key reason why Los Angeles continued to attract large numbers of skilled persons from other parts of the United States. The county's population increase during the 1930s was less than half that of the previous decade but still amounted to over 500,000. Between 1940 and 1950 the gain was more than 1,360,000; between 1950 and 1960, close to another two million. Well before the latter date, the metropolitan area approached that of Chicago as the country's second largest.[10]

Migration accounted for most of the population increase between 1930 and 1960, just as it had during the 1920s. Similarly, too, the dominant group was comprised of persons with white- or skilled blue-collar experience. Local business growth bolstered a broad-based prosperity among recent arrivals. By 1950, the metropolitan area possessed the highest percentage of proprietors, managers, and officials as a group in the nation as well as an unusually wide distribution of wealth.[11]

Abundant vacant land still existed in southern California to receive the new surge of migrants. As industry and other sources of employment continued to decentralize, the area's lateral, low-density patterns of residential growth were sustained, often intensified. Between 1940 and 1950, the population within an eight-mile radius of downtown increased only 39 percent, while that lying between an eight- and a twenty-mile radius rose 282 percent.[12] Inside the Los Angeles city limits, tracts in the San Fernando Valley and far to the southwest of downtown experienced some of the most intense growth. Areas outside the city, whether part of well-established communities such as Long Beach or in predominantly rural areas such as Orange County, acquired an increasingly significant place in the metropolitan realm. In 1930, residents of Los Angeles surpassed those elsewhere in the county by almost 300,000. Twenty years later, the ratio was nearly reversed, and by 1960 city dwellers comprised just slightly more than one-third the county total.

Among the most telling indicators of the character of this growth was the extent of new house construction. Even in 1935, Los Angeles ranked second to New York in construction costs estimated on building permits issued, a position the city maintained through 1941. During the same period, Los Angeles far exceeded all other cities in the number of building permits issued, the great majority of which were for single-family residences. By the close of 1939 almost 37,000 single-family houses had been erected in the city over the past six years. The *Times* repeatedly characterized the annual volume of house building as equivalent to the creation of a new city.[13] Los Angeles's leadership in residential development reinforced the belief in business circles that the 1920s boom was not an isolated occurrence but part of their city's sustained vitality. The freestanding house, which had carried particular importance as a distinctive feature of the region, gradually yet decisively usurped the vision of a towering metropolitan business center as a symbol of place.

The post-depression record of residential building was quite modest compared to the postwar years. In 1949 alone, the number of single-family houses begun in Los Angeles County exceeded 48,000. Well into the 1950s, the metropolitan area held its national lead even though many other cities were likewise experiencing a boom. Over 330,000 houses were added to the county's stock during the 1940s, more than 450,000 the following decade. The number of multiunit dwellings also increased, but most of the new buildings were still one- and two-story structures of modest dimensions and with some yard space.[14] The basic patterns of development changed little during the mid-twentieth century; it was the sheer scale that elicited so much attention, locally and beyond.

DEPARTMENT STORES

Prior to war's end, three of southern California's leading department store companies were planning major expansion programs in response to built-up demand and the anticipated flood of residential development. Earlier branches had not served as catalysts for district growth. The Dyas Hollywood and May Company Wilshire stores were built toward the end of the principal expansion periods of their respective retail centers. Bullock's Wilshire came toward the beginning of its precinct, but the depression abruptly ended the anticipated building boom. Bullock's and other major stores were linchpins in Westwood Village's development, but they never functioned as dominant retail magnets. Elsewhere in the country, most retail executives believed that large branches were uneconomical and threatened patronage at the parent store.[15] This situation changed dramatically after the war in Los Angeles and other cities. Within a few years, the large department store branch—generally over 100,000 square feet and often 200,000 or more—became the norm for new construction, a shift that was viewed as one of the most significant changes in retailing patterns of the period.[16] Urban population dispersal, growth in disposable income and leisure time, as well as increasing mobility all affected the trend, just as they soon would propel the advent of the regional shopping center.

But one of the key factors that initially forced department store owners to expand through large branches was intense competition, mounting since the prewar years, from national chains that dealt in a wide variety of merchandise, such as Sears, and in more specialized lines as well. The influx of the chains, not only in major outlying centers but also in more localized ones such as the complex at Broadway and Eighty-seventh Street, was seen as a significant threat to the department store's future. To remain competitive, department stores adapted the chains' mass merchandising techniques to suit their own agenda. Central to that program was creating branches that, like Sears's "A" stores, were full-line outlets. The modest buildings of the prewar era were now seen as ill suited to volume sales, especially for a wide range of goods. The new generation of branches provided an enormous amount of space for customers' cars. Employing techniques pioneered by the supermarkets as well as by Sears, department stores were turning not only to self-service but also to self-selection—an approach once unthinkable, but one that many consumers preferred and that required yet more space for displays.

The huge Los Angeles department stores constructed in outlying centers during the late 1920s and 1930s were no longer seen by industry leaders as anomalies, but rather as pioneering examples from which valuable lessons could be learned.[17] Los Angeles became a national leader after the war as a result of this legacy and even more because new expansion