



University of Pennsylvania
ScholarlyCommons

Theses (Historic Preservation)

Graduate Program in Historic Preservation

2013

Penn Fruit and the Everyday Modern: Interpreting the Mid-Century Supermarket

Shannon Teresa Garrison
University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: http://repository.upenn.edu/hp_theses

 Part of the [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#)

Garrison, Shannon Teresa, "Penn Fruit and the Everyday Modern: Interpreting the Mid-Century Supermarket" (2013). *Theses (Historic Preservation)*. 225.

http://repository.upenn.edu/hp_theses/225

Suggested Citation:

Garrison, Shannon Teresa (2013). *Penn Fruit and the Everyday Modern: Interpreting the Mid-Century Supermarket*. (Masters Thesis). University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. http://repository.upenn.edu/hp_theses/225

For more information, please contact libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Penn Fruit and the Everyday Modern: Interpreting the Mid-Century Supermarket

Abstract

In Philadelphia, Penn Fruit was one of the earliest grocery stores to adopt the supermarket model and remained an innovator in the grocery business from its founding in 1927 until it declared bankruptcy in 1975. Max Zimmerman, editor of *Super Market Merchandising* and founder of the Super Market Institute considered it a "recognized leader" in the field, highlighting it as one of the "outstanding operations in the country" in his 1955 book, *Super Markets*. In the 1950s its per-store sales were over three times the national average, and the company's distinctive stores, with their arched rooflines and sparkling glass facades were immediately recognizable throughout Philadelphia and its rapidly growing suburbs. There are approximately forty former Penn Fruit supermarkets still standing, scattered throughout Southeastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. The iconic barrel vaulted structures have been converted into other supermarkets, auto supply stores, car dealerships and office buildings. Each Penn Fruit, because of its location, condition and history poses a different preservation problem. This thesis traces the history of Penn Fruit, focusing on its main supermarket building campaign during the 1940s and 50s and includes preservation recommendations for remaining structures, particularly the Frankford and Pratt location.

Keywords

supermarket, vernacular, grocery stores, philadelphia, commercial architecture

Disciplines

Historic Preservation and Conservation

Comments

Suggested Citation:

Garrison, Shannon Teresa (2013). *Penn Fruit and the Everyday Modern: Interpreting the Mid-Century Supermarket*. (Masters Thesis). University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

PENN FRUIT AND THE EVERYDAY MODERN:
INTERPRETING THE MID-CENTURY SUPERMARKET

Shannon Teresa Garrison

A THESIS

in

Historic Preservation

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTERS OF SCIENCE IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

2013

Advisor
Aaron Wunsch
Assistant Professor in Historic Preservation

Acting Chair
Frank Matero
Professor of Architecture in Historic Preservation

For my parents
and Nikil

Acknowledgements

To my advisor, Aaron Wunsch, thank you for the constructive criticism and support over the past two years.

To my friends and colleagues in the Historic Preservation Department, I've learned a great deal from all of you. Thank you for the stimulating discussions, heated debates and encouragement.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations.....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	10
Chapter 3: “The Penn Fruit Story is a Philadelphia Story”	20
Chapter 4: Preservation.....	47
Figures.....	54
Bibliography.....	65
Index.....	71

List of Illustrations

Figure 1	Original Penn Fruit, 52 nd and Market Street.....	54
Figure 2	Penn Fruit Advertisement, Illustration of Unknown Location.....	55
Figure 3	19 th and Market Street Penn Fruit.....	56
Figure 4	Thalheimer & Weitz Rendering of 19 th and Market Penn Fruit.....	56
Figure 5	19 th and Market Street, Interior.....	57
Figure 6	Black Horse Pike Shopping Center Advertisement.....	58
Figure 7	Penn Fruit Plan and Model, Audubon.....	59
Figure 8	Penn Fruit, Audubon	59
Figure 9	Unknown Penn Fruit opening, 1962.....	60
Figure 10	Penn Fruit Interior, Haddon Heights.....	61
Figure 11	Penn Fruit, Haddon Heights.....	62
Figure 12	Dynamic Dollar, 52 nd and Market Street	62
Figure 13	Acme Supermarket, Audubon.....	63
Figure 14	Original Upper Darby Penn Fruit.....	63
Figure 15	New Jersey Lottery Headquarters, Trenton.....	64
Figure 16	Pep Boys, Glenolden.....	64
Figure 17	Thriftway, Frankford and Pratt.....	65
Figure 18	Thriftway Interior, Frankford and Pratt.....	65

Chapter 1.

Introduction

At the corner of Frankford and Pratt in Northeast Philadelphia, across from the busy Frankford Transit Depot, the Holiday Thriftway supermarket is a charismatic relic of the not-so-distant past. Originally built by Penn Fruit, a local grocery chain, it is a surprising building to find capping off an otherwise typical block of brick storefronts. The siting is unusual, angled diagonally in order to face oncoming traffic from three separate directions, and the supermarket's giant barrel vault, floor to ceiling glass façade and candy-colored paint are immediately legible as expressions of the optimistic post-World War II building boom that drastically changed the American landscape. As suburban housing developments replaced farmland and vast numbers of people moved out of the city—chasing the American dream of home-ownership—gas stations, drive-ins and supermarkets cropped up along intersections and off ramps, beckoning motorists with out-sized signage and eye-catching architecture.

For a preservationist recently transplanted to Philadelphia from California, the Frankford Penn Fruit evoked, for me, additional nostalgia in the form of powerful, personal memories of home. I wanted to know more about this building, and more about this period of building in Philadelphia. My initial curiosity soon led to questions about the role of preservation in relation to ordinary mid-century commercial architecture. Why are so many of Philadelphia's buildings from the post-WWII period generally not understood as important, contributing factors to the built environment in the same way their vernacular counterparts from other

periods are. Why is existing scholarship on these structures usually confined to geographic studies of Western cities like Los Angeles and Las Vegas. While building materials and techniques were increasingly standardized during the mid-twentieth century, and patterns of settlement are similar in many suburbs, surely that's no reason to ignore the important role buildings like the Frankford Penn Fruit played in reshaping Philadelphia.

Philadelphia is home to 20th-century icons Louis Kahn, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and fabled city-planner Edmund Bacon, and studies of the city's mid-century architecture tend to focus on the high style, "Philadelphia School" buildings these architects and planners are responsible for. While continued work on these figures is hardly misplaced, more research needs to be done into the ordinary mid-century buildings scattered throughout the city. The lives of average Philadelphians changed just as dramatically as the city's landscape in the mid-twentieth century. Movies, television and advertising promised that a brighter future was possible for all, and technological innovation, a housing boom and flourishing economy made possible for many Americans a life that was radically different from that of their parents and grandparents. Roadside buildings and shopping centers, subdivisions and highways formed a decentralized network that characterized suburban life and provided a template for growing new metropolises like Los Angeles, but also affected historic cities. In the 1960s, urban renewal reshaped much of Philadelphia's historic core, but a decade before Ed Bacon's attempt to redesign Philadelphia as an ideal modern city, the more ad hoc building campaigns of commercial interests like Penn Fruit had already begun remaking

small parts of the city, adding parking lots to accommodate newly mobile customers and experimenting with glamorous designs made possible by new building technology. For most Philadelphians, Penn Fruit supermarkets were more than just eye-catching buildings; they represented a completely modern experience. A housewife shopping for groceries at Penn Fruit encountered a radically different space than her mother would have two decades before.

A remarkable number of Penn Fruit's are still standing and still identifiable by the company's signature arched roofline. Many of them continue to serve as grocery stores, though the Frankford location is remarkable for its relatively intact façade and interiors. These buildings offer an excellent opportunity to reconsider a specific type of postwar commercial architecture in Philadelphia, and the affect of new twentieth century building types, such as the supermarket, on the city and its citizens. Penn Fruit represents a lacuna in our understanding of Philadelphia's architectural history—a lacuna this thesis begins to address.

+++

Preservationists like to observe that the buildings a generation chooses to save usually reveal more about that generation's values and interests than those of the original builders. If that is the case, the field has come a long way since its late 19th century origins, when sites were preserved largely because of their connections to early American history and association with patriotic events. As the field professionalized throughout the twentieth century, its focus shifted toward

aesthetic arguments for preservation, and the work of important architects or examples of influential styles became a primary concern. More recently, preservationists have argued the “great man slept here” and “great man built here” arguments for significance that informed the movement’s first hundred years need rethinking. Increasingly important are the close study of common building types and efforts to identify and interpret sites of diverse cultural significance.¹

Simultaneously, buildings from the recent-past are of growing concern for preservation professionals and the academy. Beginning in the 1990s, many preservationists, architects and historians began to focus on the fate of 20th century buildings. Conferences such as the National Park Service’s 1995 “Preserving the Recent Past,” addressed specific issues of significance, advocacy and materials conservation related to 20th century buildings. Despite certain complicating factors, namely, a lack of age-value and perceived public hostility to various iterations of the Modern style, participants called for a broad approach to preserving the architecture of the recent-past—one that included ordinary buildings of historic importance rather than focusing solely on the monumental work of master architects. Historians Richard Longstreth and Richard Striner delivered papers encouraging preservationists to consider the history of architecture and design as “intimately connected to the history of patrons and builders and users and communities and culture” rather than “separating the attributes of historic

¹ Daniel Bluestone, “Academics in Tennis Shoes: Historic Preservation and the Academy,” and Richard Longstreth, “Architectural History and the Practice of Historic Preservation in the United States,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 58, No. 3, (September 1999): 300-307; 326-333.

resources that are said to possess purely 'architectural' significance from the attributes that are said to possess purely 'historical' significance."²

The broad scope of the papers presented at the conference reflected an academic interest in studies of ordinary, everyday experience of space and place. The program included discussions on the gas station as well as Graceland, drive-ins along with Dulles Airport, but a presentation on trends in the areas of significance listed for all post-1950 buildings on the National Register revealed that the overwhelming majority of properties had been included on the Register for reasons of stylistic significance.³

More than fifteen years later, advocacy on behalf of postwar buildings still regularly relies on style-based arguments. A cursory review of mid-century properties listed on the register since 1995 confirms the continued prioritization of buildings noted as significant because they are a local example of an important style or exhibit characteristics of the Modern Movement. This tendency amongst preservationists to rely on architectural style as the substance of their preservation arguments is not always wrong, but it can distract from a larger understanding of the cultural, historical and technological significance of specific buildings. Curiosity about charismatic buildings is what drives many preservationists, and aesthetics is

² Richard Striner, "Scholarship, Strategy, and Activism in Preserving the Recent Past," *Preserving The Recent Past*, (Washington, D.C., Historic Preservation Education, Foundation, 1995).

Prudon, Theodore H.M., *Preservation of Modern Architecture*, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

³ Carol D. Shull and Beth L. Savage, "Trends for Recognizing Places for Significance in the Recent Past," in *Preserving the Recent Past*, (Washington, D.C., Historic Preservation Education, Foundation, 1995).

important in preservation, but interpretations that prioritize buildings as expressions of architectural style come at the expense of a more complete understanding of our built environment and the forces that shape it.

In the Fall of 2012, the *Forum Journal* republished Richard Longstreth's "I Can't See It; I Don't Understand It and It Doesn't Look Old to Me," in a special issue of "articles that have made a difference." Revisiting his statements from the Preserving the Recent Past conference, Longstreth acknowledges the exponential growth in interest in the recent past among preservationists but notes that while "many significant contributions to the postwar legacy have been preserved... many more remain ignored and frequently are lost." He concludes, "there is much work still to be done."⁴

Methodology

Though a number of important supermarket chains operated in the Philadelphia region in the mid-twentieth century, including A&P, Acme and Food Fair, I specifically chose Penn Fruit for this case study for a number of reasons. As addressed in the introduction, the remarkably intact Frankford Penn Fruit was the main inspiration for this thesis. Further research into the company revealed that it was one of only two supermarket chains based in Philadelphia in the 1950s. Founded in 1927, the company operated supermarkets throughout Philadelphia until its bankruptcy in 1975. In the city, as well as nationally, Penn Fruit was

⁴ Richard Longstreth, "I Can't See It; I Don't Understand It; and It Doesn't Look Old to Me," *Forum Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Fall 2012): 35-45.

considered an innovative chain. Local newspapers frequently credited Penn Fruit with having opened the first supermarket in Philadelphia, at Broad and Grange, in 1932. The company's early stores were on average much larger than competitors and though they built fewer supermarkets than other chains, a large number of buildings constructed during the postwar period are still in use and eminently recognizable.

Preservation issues surrounding the supermarket at Frankford and Pratt raised specific questions that a case study of the Penn Fruit chain allowed me to explore in depth. Preservationists are still struggling to interpret the everyday built environment from the mid-century and seriously consider the preservation of ordinary buildings from this era. Focusing on buildings during the chain's main period of expansion in the 1940s and 50s, and studying national trends alongside regional developments, this thesis attempts to contribute to the growing body of knowledge about Philadelphia's mid-century landscape. Reconstructing the company's business history through newspaper accounts of store openings, magazine interviews with employees and executives, and coverage in supermarket trades provided a solid foundation for interpreting store design and company decisions. Penn Fruit hired professional architects to design their stores and allowed them to interpret the supermarket's preferred style in different ways. But many of the most important decisions—including location, parking lot lay out, and interior decoration and organization—were driven by business concerns, company data and marketing research.

In addition to archival research, fieldwork was an important part of this project. In the past few months I have visited former Penn Fruit sites throughout Philadelphia and New Jersey. These visits were essential for ascertaining what change has occurred over time at specific locations and assess the surrounding areas, including street patterns, shopping centers, and other buildings that contribute to the meaning of these supermarkets. What follows is a close study focused on the business history and physical pattern of development of an important local supermarket chain and an assessment of the current condition and use of the existing structures. I believe studies like this are an important step in exploring how the significance of the supermarket and similar everyday structures in the Philadelphia area can best be articulated and publicized.

A Note on "Vernacular"

Vernacular architecture has various definitions, sometimes referring to buildings that were completely handmade, sometime to any structure that is not the work of a trained architect. The Vernacular Architecture Forum currently defines the term as "ordinary buildings and landscapes" though there is some debate within the VAF about whether any aspect of the built environment built using industrially produced materials or mass-circulated designs qualifies as vernacular architecture. In 2006, Dell Upton, one of the founding members of the VAF, stated that the category of vernacular architecture had "reached the limits of its usefulness." Always somewhat of a "fuzzy concept," in the past it was used as a convenient catch-all for the vast number of buildings and building types architects and architectural

historians refused to acknowledge as important.⁵ As vernacular studies gained traction, the term's tendency to cause confusion has made it somewhat of a liability, especially when discussing twentieth century architecture. For this reason, I have avoided using "vernacular" in reference to the Penn Fruit supermarkets—though this study might easily fall into the category—preferring instead "roadside architecture," a term used by historians such as Chester Liebs to describe building types that developed alongside decentralized suburban tracts and highways throughout the twentieth century.

⁵ "What is Vernacular Architecture," Vernacular Architecture Forum, accessed February 21, 2013 <http://www.vernaculararchitectureforum.org/learning/whatis.html>; Dell Upton, "The VAF at 25: What Now?," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2006/2007): 7-13.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

Until recently, the ordinary architecture of the mid-twentieth century was undervalued as part of America's cultural heritage. The story these buildings tell—of rapidly changing suburban landscapes, the growth of the American middle class and a burgeoning consumer culture, that came to define the United States by the close of the century—were often ignored by preservationists, historians and architectural historians, largely because these buildings were considered too new to merit preservation. Still, mid-century commercial buildings and building patterns have played an important role in architectural thought for over a quarter of a century. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steve Izenour's classic, *Learning from Las Vegas*, celebrates commercial architecture as an important American contribution to architectural history and has been considered an essential architectural text since its publication in 1972. J.B. Jackson was similarly early to recognize the roadside as a significant American landscape, worthy serious study. Chester Liebs's *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, first published in 1985, is the first comprehensive history of roadside architecture to trace the evolution of a wide variety of building types, including the supermarket. More recently, Richard Longstreth's work on the history of shopping centers, drive-in shops and supermarkets in Los Angeles, offers insight into the early development and design of these now ubiquitous structures.

But the cultural importance of roadside architecture remains controversial. Perhaps it is because these buildings pose a challenge to the familiar figure of the genius Modern architect. A crass American public is often blamed for misunderstanding these architect's theory-driven works. Indeed, the first instinct of architectural historians and preservationists, particularly those studying twentieth century architecture, has overwhelmingly been to look past the building itself, past its use and evolution over time, and focus on the precise period during which it was designed and built and the specific use it was built for. While hardly a misplaced exercise, focusing only on this narrow period in a building's life usually results in an argument for significance based on the importance of the architect, the man (and it is almost always a man) behind the building, rather than the building itself.

Public criticism of Modern architecture is frequently dismissed as a popular "failure to understand" either the architect's intention or Modernism as a movement. Mid-century shopping centers, supermarkets and drive-thru restaurants, many with expressive, exaggerated forms, are not the product of any one architectural theory or artistic advance, but were designed to attract the attention of as many people as possible, not as representations of strict architectural theory or artistic experiments. The architects who designed these buildings maintained close working relationships with businesses, real estate speculators and developers. They designed with the customer and their clients' bottom line in mind.

Preservationists have argued over the relative importance of the ordinary versus extraordinary for the past forty years. The most famous example is the 1975 debate between sociologist Herbert Gans and architecture critic Ada Huxtable, cited

in the opening pages of Hayden's *Power of Place*. Exchanging letters in *The New York Times*, Gans criticized the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission's tendency to offer protection only to "the stately mansions of the rich and buildings designed by the famous architects" while allowing "popular architecture to disappear...distort[ing] the real past, exaggerat[ing] affluence and grandeur." Defending the Commission's prioritization of architecturally distinguished buildings, Huxtable characterized the preservationist's role as more curatorial, tasked with protecting the "primary and irreplaceable part[s] of civilization."⁶

The below literature review offers an overview of recent-past preservation efforts and debates, some relevant developments in the field of vernacular architecture studies and current scholarship on supermarkets and roadside architecture. Review of the work mentioned below and included in the bibliography informed my Penn Fruit case study and helped place it within current scholarly discourse.

Preservation Issues

The most obvious problem separating recent-past preservation efforts from more general preservation issues is that buildings built within the past fifty or so years do not possess the perceived value that comes with having survived for a longer period of time. They are not "historic" or "unintentional" in the sense that Alois Riegl defines these terms; they do not represent lost building arts or

⁶ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), 3-6.

unfamiliar forms. With the possible exception of drive-ins, mid-century building types are not yet rare enough to elicit a sentimental public response. And while age-value alone is often not a suitably convincing reason to save a building, a perceived lack of it has proven to be a hurdle for preservationists when arguing for a building's significance.⁷

The definition of "recent-past preservation" is somewhat loose. Widely used by historic preservationists since the late 1980s, initially the term referred to advocacy and planning efforts on behalf of buildings that were not yet old enough to be considered for the National Register. Though many of the buildings once considered threatened because of their young age are now safely past the fifty-year mark and qualified for consideration for the National Register, those active in recent-past preservation still consider much of the post-war built environment to be under threat and generally use the term to describe any building dating from the 1950s to present.

A lack of public understanding of the importance of mid-century and more recent structures is often given as the main threat to these buildings. In their introduction to the Association for Preservation Technology's 2011 *APT Bulletin* devoted to Modern Heritage, editors Thomas Jester and David Fixler write that neither high-style Modern buildings nor "ordinary everyday modernism" have gained wide public acceptance as a part of our cultural heritage. Jester and Fixler

⁷ Alois, Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development," in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, edited by Nicholas Stanley Price, M. Kirby Talley, Jr., Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1996).

draw attention to many internal issues that must be addressed by architects and preservationists in order to better protect “Modern heritage”, but the lead quote, emphasized in bold text, reads: “*Although the preservation field has made tremendous strides in addressing Modern heritage, the challenges remain great, particularly in achieving general public acceptance of Modernism as heritage.*”⁸ In an otherwise detailed report on the current state of recent past preservation, this opening quotation might easily lead the reader to assume that the authors believe the main problem is the public, not the preservationists.

A tendency to blame preservation failures on an unenlightened public is a particularly bad habit of preservationists. Garry Stevens tracked a similar insular tendency among architects in *The Favored Circle*. Using techniques established by Pierre Bourdieu, Stevens maps the closed circle of class, gender and influence within the architecture profession and illustrates how the critical reception of work and an architect’s professional reputation are largely determined by factors having more to do with valorizing the role of the architect in order to maintain the architecture field’s cultural superiority over members of the general public.

Architectural historian, Daniel Bluestone, has highlighted a similar history of elitism and connoisseurship in the field of preservation, tracing the “ascendancy of aesthetics” to the preservation field’s period of professionalization in the first half of the 20th century, a period during which the tastes and opinions of art historians, almost all of them male, replaced the tastes and opinions of local preservation

⁸ Thomas C. Jester and David N. Fixler, “Modern Heritage, Progress, Priorities and Prognosis,” *APT Bulletin* Vol. 42, No 2/3, (2001): 3-8.

organizations run mostly by women.⁹ Nearly a decade before, in a 1991 *APT Bulletin*, Richard Longstreth pointed out that the narrowing of influence in the field has resulted in a tendency among preservationists to confuse critical appreciation with history, particularly as relates to the recent past. As a result:

“we know...hardly a thing about the development of airport terminals or how air conditioning has affected architecture since the 1920s...patronage has not been given much attention, nor have popular forms of symbolism...our knowledge of the twentieth century is far narrower in scope than could be the case, and these limitations stem in part from longstanding ties between historians of modern architecture and contemporary architectural practice”¹⁰

Despite this earlier criticism, in the same September 1999 *JSAH* issue in which Bluestone’s article appeared, Longstreth credits preservationists with expanding the scope of study amongst architectural historians. Indeed, preservationists are responsible for some of the earliest and most important studies of ordinary mid-century building types. The Society for the Commercial Archeology, has worked to “preserve, document and celebrate the...20th century commercial landscape” since its founding in 1977.¹¹ Alan Hess, who authored the national register nomination for the earliest surviving McDonalds, published *Googie: Fifties Coffee Shop Architecture* in 1985, the same year Chester Liebs’s classic, *Main Street to Miracle Mile* was published. Hess’s second, expanded edition, *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture*, published in 2004, contains a helpful glossary of

⁹ Bluestone, “Academics in Tennis Shoes,” *Journal for the Society of Architectural Historians*, (September 1999) 303.

¹⁰ Richard Longstreth, “The Significance of the Recent Past,” *APT Bulletin*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1991): 12-24.

¹¹ “About the SCA” Society for Commercial Archeology, accessed March 9, 2013, <http://www.sca-roadside.org/content/about-sca>.

architectural terms related to ordinary mid-century buildings, terms which have yet to find their way into most architectural dictionaries. Longstreth, himself, has published extensively since the late 1980s on understudied commercial building types such as the shopping center and department store.¹²

Architectural History

Over the past decade, architectural historians have begun re-evaluating traditional narratives surrounding Modernism in the United States and the overall mid-century environment. Beginning with her book *Women and the Making of the Modern Home* and more recently, in *American Glamour* Alice Friedman explores the important influence of women, advertising and Hollywood on architecture throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Resisting readings that focus solely on the intent of architects, Friedman values user experience and influence on space as equally important in the history of architecture.¹³ Similarly, Mary Anne Hunting's recent monograph on Edward Durell Stone foregrounds the importance of that architect's relationship with his clients and how client taste and opinions influenced his designs. These are only two recent examples of a larger shift in thinking about mid-century architecture, a shift toward exploring the multiple histories of

¹²Alan Hess, *Google: Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004).

See bibliography for a list of relevant Longstreth publications.

¹³ Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998).

Alice Friedman, *American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2012).

buildings, many of them previously overlooked because of a narrow interest in the architect and his intentions.¹⁴

Vernacular Architecture

In his account of the first twenty-five years of the Vernacular Architecture Forum, Dell Upton encourages a similar, more inclusive approach to the study of buildings. Vernacular studies and the often-overlapping field of cultural landscape studies are to be credited with raising awareness of and preserving ordinary architecture over the past three decades. The influential works of Henry Glassie, Dell Upton, and J.B. Jackson continue to serve as cornerstones for any serious study of the everyday built environment. And while both fields have been particularly successful in establishing multi-disciplinary methodologies for serious study of everyday landscapes, a bias towards the pre-industrial and rural prompts Upton to observe “we are as much aestheticizers of our materials as any historian of high art or architecture is...with few notable exceptions we tend not to have much to say about the truly ordinary or about the seamier aspects of our buildings or builders.”¹⁵

Upton challenges members of the VAF to adopt a broader approach to the study of buildings and landscapes, one that treats architecture as only one of many over-lapping spheres of history. Like Dolores Hayden in *The Power of Place*, he encourages the VAF to consider the theories of Henri Lefebvre, as well as Michel de

¹⁴ Mary Anne Hunting, *Edward Durell Stone: Modernism's Populist Architect*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2012).

¹⁵ Upton, “The VAF at 25,” 9.

Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu and to pay more attention to building use, how the design of space promotes certain kinds of activities and behaviors and how gender, race and class affect experience of the same space.¹⁶

Supermarket History

More specifically related to this thesis is a small body of work that addresses roadside architecture in general, and the supermarket specifically. Liebs's *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, includes a comprehensive history of the supermarket and mentions Penn Fruit's 1950's prototype design by Victor Gruen & Associates as "a good example of the new look in markets" in which "the building and sign coalesced into a distinctive trademark that could be reproduced in future units."¹⁷ Richard Longstreth's book, *The Drive-In the Supermarket and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914- 1941* focuses on a slightly earlier period than this case study, and a very different city, but is an essential text—the more so because many early developments in supermarket design can be traced to Los Angeles in the 1930s. In particular, Longstreth's book provides a detailed description Stiles Clements's work for the Ralph's chain. Penn Fruit hired Clements to design an important store in Upper Darby.¹⁸

James Mayo's *The American Grocery Store: The Business Evolution of an Architectural Space*, traces the history of food shopping in the United States from the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*, (Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co., 1985), 132.

¹⁸ Richard Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000).

public market of the 19th century to the modern supermarket of the 1960s and combines business history with architectural analysis. The book mentions the Penn Fruit Company as among the first supermarket chains to encourage greater self-service by removing the lids from all of their refrigerated cabinets, an experiment that resulted in an increase in sales.¹⁹ Food marketing techniques, first tested in the mid-century supermarket, have greatly influenced the way Americans are marketed to today, and a general overview of marketing history, such as found in Richard Tedlow's *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America*, is necessary for understanding one of the supermarket's most significant legacies.²⁰

If one is to believe the rhetoric of the age, the most influential figure in the development and design of supermarkets such as Penn Fruit was the American housewife. One need only page through a copy of *Progressive Grocer* from the 1950s or 60s to understand just how closely supermarket executives tracked the tastes of the 'typical housewife.' Her opinion was valued above any other and mid-century supermarkets are just one example of the growing importance of female consumers and their effect on the built environment. Tracey Deutsch's *Building the Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* is an excellent analysis of the shift in shopping habits of the American woman in past hundred years and how efforts to interpret women's needs and desires reshaped the American landscape. Similarly, Lizbeth Cohen's *A Consumers' Republic: The*

¹⁹ James Mayo, *The American Grocery Store: The Business Evolution of an Architectural Space*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993): 161.

²⁰ Richard Tedlow, *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America, is an important examination of the ways in which postwar consumer culture reshaped and continues to shape the United States.²¹

Primary Sources

Trade publications, particularly *Progressive Grocer* and *Chain Store Age* are invaluable sources of information about the business and design of supermarkets in the twentieth century. Both magazines regularly featured Penn Fruit stores in the 1950s and 60s. The company also received coverage in *Business Week* and *Philadelphia Magazine* in addition to the daily Philadelphia papers. I was unable to locate the Penn Fruit company archives, so these primary sources were essential in reconstructing the company's history.

²¹ Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

Chapter 3:

“The Penn Fruit Story is a Philadelphia Story”

In Philadelphia, Penn Fruit was one of the earliest grocery stores to adopt the supermarket model and remained an innovator in the grocery business until it declared bankruptcy in 1975. Max Zimmerman, editor of *Super Market Merchandising* and founder of the Super Market Institute considered it a “recognized leader” in the field, highlighting it as one of the “outstanding operations in the country” in his 1955 book, *Super Markets*.²² In the 1950s its per-store sales were over three times the national average, and the company’s distinctive stores, with their arched rooflines and sparkling glass facades were immediately recognizable throughout Philadelphia and its rapidly growing suburbs.

Because successful ideas spread rapidly through trade journals and industry associations in the twentieth century, it can be difficult to track where precisely innovation occurred in the supermarket business in the booming postwar years. In general, smaller regional chains such as Penn Fruit were well positioned to experiment with unorthodox store placement, and innovative exterior and interior designs. Though Penn Fruit executives took credit for inventing self-service as well the supermarket in press releases and interviews with local papers, in reality, both developments occurred elsewhere. But Penn Fruit was quick to recognize such innovations as good for business and among the earliest to introduce them to Philadelphia.

²² Max Mandell Zimmerman, *The Super Market: A Revolution in Distribution*, (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1955) 55-56.

For the thousands who worked and shopped at Penn Fruit between 1927-1975, the company represented different aspects of a rapidly changing world. To many, especially Philadelphia's urban population, the supermarket offered access to a greater, sometimes healthier, and relatively affordable, selection of food items. For women in charge of feeding their families, weekly supermarket trips replaced daily visits to multiple specialty stores, freeing up time for work or other activities. And for its many African-American employees, Penn Fruit, specifically, represented job security and potential for advancement. Penn Fruit was one of the only supermarkets in the city to hire African-Americans in visible sales positions in the early 1940s. This policy, extremely liberal for the time, is likely the result of the owners' own empathy (two of the three Penn Fruit founders were Jewish) and general business savvy—many of Penn Fruit's markets were located in increasingly diverse neighborhoods. The first Penn Fruit at 52nd and Market, was located at the intersection of a major metropolitan commercial strip and a smaller local main street along 52nd Street, which included many African-American owned business. In 1961, the *Philadelphia Tribune* ran a three-part series on the company, highlighting Penn Fruit's African-American corporate executives, warehouse supervisors, and store managers in addition to clerks and cashiers. Many employees had been with the company for over twenty years and the paper praised Penn Fruit's hiring policies for "disproving an old theory that Negroes in sales positions are no good for business."²³

²³ "Penn Fruit Company Executives Earned Big Money," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 11, 1961; "Penn Fruit Pioneered with Sales Jobs," *Philadelphia Tribune*,

Supermarket openings were spectacles throughout the 40s and 50s, drew massive crowds and received regular newspaper coverage. Through Penn Fruit's sparkling glass store fronts a mind-bending array of colorfully packaged goods promised an abundance of choices, all made possible, supermarket literature intimated, by a democratic, capitalist society. The commercial counterpart to the kitchen, supermarkets were routinely used as symbol of the success of American capitalism during the Cold War. In 1957's Penn Fruit managers traveled to Yugoslavia to oversee the supermarket exhibition within the U.S. pavilion at the International Trade Fair in Zagreb. The exhibition featured a giant cornucopia display from Penn Fruit's William Penn gift shop, "a six-foot, bright blue orange-juice machine, and two plane loads of fresh fruits and vegetables." The exhibit was designed to promote American business and cultural exchange –"bananas, not bullets"—as one manager put it. But the American pavilion presented an image of American life designed to offer a striking contrast to that of the average Yugoslavian's everyday experience under the influence of the USSR. Though a Penn Fruit manager insisted that the idea behind "towering" displays of 4,000 different food items, was "not showing off with things [Yugoslavian's] haven't got" the pavilion, which also featured an array of shiny new automobiles, farm machinery and a model American house, apartment and laundromat, seems designed to do just that. The Penn Fruit managers' mission, to "explain how we do things, with suggestions that they might be interested in the same methods," is a thinly veiled

February 14, 1961; "52nd Street Biggest Penn Fruit Store," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 18, 1961.

acknowledgment of the pavilion's main purpose of promoting capitalism in a former Eastern Block country, still in close contact with the Soviet Union. Along with plane-fulls of groceries, Penn Fruit also sent along a team of women to demonstrate the shopping habits of the typical American housewife. "They'll go through all the motions, from pushing carts and selecting foods to seeing their money vanish into a good old American cash register."²⁴

+++

The Penn Fruit Company began as a small produce store on 52nd and Market, at a busy intersection, in a bustling street car suburb, steps away from a major trolley stop. Opened in 1927 by brothers Morris and Isaac Kaplan and Sam Cooke, the Kaplans and Cooke originally planned to enter the grocery business, but couldn't afford to buy dry goods in enough bulk to make a profit. Perishable items with a quick turnover required a smaller initial investment and the Philadelphia produce business lacked an established presence like A&P, which dominated the Northeast grocery market in the 1920s.²⁵

America's first successful chain store, The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, based their innovative approach to buying and selling groceries on the efficiency model of the food manufacturers whose goods they sold in stores. A&P

²⁴ Patricia Spollen, "The Fruit of This Labor," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, August 16, 1957.

²⁵ "Penn Fruit in 25th Year Plans Stock Sale to Public," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 19, 1957.

bought in bulk, straight from the manufacturer and priced goods low so they would sell in larger quantities. The chain opened its own warehouses and multiple stores in a single market. As a result they controlled deliveries to and from stores, saved on advertising, and negotiated better insurance rates. Collecting data on each of its stores and comparing the success of various locations allowed A&P to quickly identify and implement changes. They expanded rapidly, opening grocery stores throughout the United States, in crowded cities and along “taxpayer strips” in growing streetcar suburbs.

In order to maximize profits, the A&P looked for the cheapest rent and designed “economy stores,” capable of opening in existing building within a week of signing a lease.²⁶ These “capsule[s] designed to fit efficiently into a standard building and neighborhood,” reflected the factory-like efficiency of the company itself.²⁷ Standardized fixtures and equipment were purchased like grocery items, in bulk, so that a new A&P store could be outfitted and opened as quickly as possible. Often items from unprofitable stores were reused in new locations. The interior organization in these “economy stores” was not drastically different than that of the local independent grocery merchant, goods were kept behind shelves and customers required the aid of a clerk. But by standardizing the design of each store A&P saved on construction cost and time—“a lease signed on Monday meant the premises were open and ready for business the following Monday.” Items were

²⁶ Mayo, *The American Grocery Store*, 77-79; Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket...*, 121-126; For a complete history of the A&P company see Marc Levinson’s *The Great A&P and the Struggle for Small Business in America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011).

²⁷ Mayo, *The American Grocery Store*, 87.

stocked in the same locations at every A&P store and staff adhered to specific, standardized policies so that they might be transferred between different stores with no extra training required.²⁸

A&P revolutionized the business model for grocery retail in particular, and chain stores in general. Their business practices put thousands of independent grocers out of business in the first quarter of the 20th century. By the 1920s, A&P had expanded into produce and other perishables along with dry goods. Despite this cutthroat climate, the Kaplans and Cooke believed they could capture customers by offering higher quality items than the dominate chain. Determined to eek out a profit, Penn Fruit eagerly adopted the self-service model, developed by Clarence Saunders at Piggly Wiggly in 1916, at their 52nd St. store. The Memphis, Tennessee, Piggly Wiggly was located in a non-descript narrow city storefront, but the interior set up, which required customers to enter through a turnstile and follow a designated route through rows of aisles, helping themselves to groceries along the way, completely changed shopping in the 20th century. The self-service set up made sense financially—by turning customers into clerks retailers no longer needed to hire experienced sales people to retrieve goods for from behind counters—and when left alone customers were more likely to make impulse purchases.²⁹ The “assembly-line” layout encouraged movement through the store as quickly as possible. Narrow aisles did not accommodate lingering, there was no space to stop

²⁸ Ibid., 85-89.

²⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 119-120.

and chat, the one-way flow of shoppers kept one another moving through the maze of aisles toward the checkout counter.

In an interview with the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin*, Samuel Cooke likened the original store to a five and dime.³⁰ A drawing of the first Penn Fruit (figure 1) depicts a one story, mid-block storefront with large glass windows prominently displaying produce to tempt passing pedestrians. A false front accommodated giant letters reading Penn Fruit Co. in cursive across the glass doors. The store was modestly sized, and the company quickly outgrew the space, eventually expanding to surrounding buildings. Grocery retailers during this time increasingly combined several storefronts, knocking down walls and installing large plate glass windows in which to display the seemingly endless variety of groceries, available for purchase in what the trade referred to as “combination stores.”

A&P, meanwhile, was slow to adopt self-service, keeping most goods behind sales counters well into the 1920s. Having perfected the art of centralized organization and distribution of goods, the chain struggled with implementing changes. As the grocery business began to shift from the small economy-style store typical of the first decades of the twentieth century, A&P found itself lagging behind local stores. The chain tended to accept marketing innovations only after stores like Penn Fruit proved they could be profitable.

Still, in 1927 A&P dominated the grocery business. In order to compete Penn Fruit began stocking fast moving items such as cans of coffee and peaches, selling

³⁰ “Penn Fruit Ready to Expand into Neighboring States,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, August 9, 1953.

them below cost. This tactic proved profitable when shoppers bought more expensive perishable items along with their groceries. Threatening to put their principal competitor out of business, the local A&P dropped its own prices to a level Penn Fruit couldn't sustain, forcing them to raise the price of dry goods to normal levels. While Penn Fruit ultimately lost the price war, their experience at 52nd Street convinced the Kaplans and Cooke that the company could distinguish itself in a crowded market place by focusing on quality perishable items—seafood and dairy in addition to fruits and vegetables—and capture additional sales under the assumption that “a shopper is apt to purchase all of her grocery needs where she buys her vegetables and meats.”³¹

Despite the depression, Penn Fruit expanded rapidly in the 1930s, opening a large store based on the new supermarket model at Broad and Grange in 1932, and four additional supermarkets between 1933-1937. In the years leading up to WWII, the East Coast was the most significant and innovative market for selling groceries. While the West Coast is largely responsible for developing charismatic midcentury supermarket building in 1930s and 40s the Northeast was home to more grocery chains than anywhere else in the nation.³² The first freestanding supermarket, King Kullen, opened in Jamaica, Queens in 1930. Michael Cullen, a former Kroger employee, rented cheap space in a former auto garage and filled it with stacks of groceries and other household items, priced startlingly low. Two years later, in nearby Elizabeth, New Jersey, an even larger market, Big Bear, opened in an old

³¹ “Penn Fruit in 25th Year Plans Stock Sale to Public,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 19, 1957.

³² Mayo, *The American Grocery Store*, 85.

automobile factory. These stores prioritized the movement of large quantities of merchandise out the door as quickly as possible, and open floor-space, high ceilings and industrial loading docks were necessary to facilitate deliveries and large volume displays. Usually located on the outskirts of cities, the first supermarkets kept overhead at a minimum and did not spend money on amenities, attractive fixtures or other unnecessary flourishes. Walls and floors were left unadorned, and with goods stacked in giant rows, the stores looked more like company storage facilities than selling floors.

Chain managers found these early supermarkets dirty, crowded and unorganized. As stores with names like Giant Tiger and Bull Market opened in cities throughout the East Coast and Midwest in the early 1930s, trade literature began referring to them as “wild animal stores.” The industry believed these early supermarkets, with their circus-like atmosphere and rock bottom prices, were temporary, depression-era aberrations. Under the assumption that low-class, bargain-hungry customers and interiors that resembled industrial warehouses would repel middle and upper class customers, A&P and other chains refrained from building supermarkets in the early 1930s.

Penn Fruit, perhaps looking to precedents like the Ralph’s markets in Los Angeles, realized a combination of the East coast bargain-basement model with the West coast stand-alone store type would attract customers looking to do all their shopping in a single location, but willing to pay more for quality. The first Penn Fruit supermarket, located at Broad and Grange, opened in July 1932, the same year as Big Bear in nearby Elizabeth. The unit was 16,600 square feet, and included seafood,

poultry, delicatessen and bakery departments, but no parking lot.³³ This early store served customers within walking distance and was located close to a busy transportation hub in order to attract foot traffic from commuters. The northern terminus of the Broad Street Line, Olney Station, was located just a few blocks south. By 1937 the company operated six markets in Philadelphia area and were planning a new, giant store to replace an existing Penn Fruit in Upper Darby.

In the late 1920s, John McClatchy, a developer responsible for building over 30,000 homes throughout the city's growing suburbs approached Penn Fruit to help anchor the full service shopping center he was designing for the busy intersection of 69th and Market. Located at another central commuting hub, along the same elevated high-speed line as the 52nd Street store, the original 69th Street Penn Fruit occupied three connected storefronts along McClatchy's business strip from 1929-1941.³⁴ In 1941, they moved to a huge new store, at the corner of 69th and Chestnut. To design the new Penn Fruit, the company hired Stiles Clements, a Los Angeles architect whose previous work included Los Angeles movie theaters and a number of large stores for the Ralph's chain.

The 69th Street Penn Fruit, a true supermarket in both style and substance, opened in 1941 and represents a transitional moment in the chain's approach to locating and designing its stores. The Upper Darby market combined an East Coast retail model with the stand-alone store type, unique to Los Angeles and Houston

³³ Zimmerman, *The Super Market*, 55-56.

³⁴ David Lieber, "Dreaming Big for a Renewal on 69th Street," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 8, 1987, accessed March 1, 2013, http://articles.philly.com/1987-03-08/news/26221614_1_renovations-desk-shopping.

prior to the late 1930s. Located on a corner lot, the new Penn Fruit was designed to accommodate increasing automobile traffic in a neighborhood once defined by easy access to the elevated train. The new store was located farther from the 69th street train stop than the original, up a steep hill at the end of McClatchy's original strip. Clements's Penn Fruit provided ample parking for customers and featured a massive marquee "stretching out over the entire pavement [and] around the building for 295-feet." An 85-foot "tower sign" reached from the side of the building with "a gigantic grace [that] belie[d] the eighty tons of steel that went into it." The marquee emphasized the three-dimensional nature of the space, which might be approached from a variety of directions, on foot but increasingly, by car.³⁵ According to an article in the *Philadelphia Record*, the selling floor's distinctive arched roof, the first recorded use of what would become Penn Fruit's signature architectural feature, resulted when a shortage of materials required Clements to alter original plans, adding an arched roof that required less steel.³⁶

Clements treatment of stores as three-dimensional objects was particularly innovative in the early 1930s. In his book *The Drive-In, The Supermarket and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941*, Richard Longstreth describes the architect as "a principle innovator in the field" of store design. With elements that curved around all four sides, Clements's early supermarkets were designed as three-dimensional objects, clearly meant to be seen from various

³⁵ "Store Designed to Handle 65,000 Customers Weekly," *Philadelphia Recorder*, November 9, 1941; Nirenstein's 69th Street, Upper Darby Business Section, 1950, Plate 1, Free Library of Philadelphia.

³⁶ "Store Designed to Handle 65,000 Customers Weekly," *Philadelphia Recorder*, November 9, 1941.

directions, from the sidewalk, but also the parking lot and from moving vehicles on the busy street.

Though exterior photos of the original 69th Street store have not been found, a drawing that appeared in Penn Fruit's 25th anniversary Philadelphia Inquirer ad (figure 2) closely resembles the *Recorder's* descriptions of the store, as well as similar Clements designed building in Los Angeles. It is very likely the first use of the arched roofline, and it seems that the company quickly decided to adopt the feature for most new markets. Penn Fruit continued to experiment with a variety of styles in the early forties, but images and newspaper descriptions indicate that almost all stores built after the Upper Darby location featured barrel-vaulted roofs. The Upper Darby store is representative of a major shift in store design in the late 1930s and early 40s, as grocery chains began to build stand alone stores rather than repurpose existing space. Local chains like Penn Fruit usually "set the pace," during this period, opening large scale stores and incorporating distinctive design elements, often in the Art Moderne style.³⁷

In the 1940s, while most food retailers were focused on the growing suburban market, Penn Fruit made the unconventional decision to open a huge two-story super in the heart of Philadelphia's business district. Located in an 1875 building, once used as a wholesale grocery warehouse, the 46,700 square foot store opened in 1941.³⁸ Despite competitors' predictions, the store proved successful.

³⁷ Longstreth, *The Drive-In, The Supermarket...*, 123-125.

³⁸ "The Penn Fruit Story is a Philadelphia Story," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 11, 1951.

Penn Fruit selected the location after analyzing transportation statistics. Estimating that 170,00 trolley passengers and 18,000 automobiles passed the intersection of 19th and Market daily, they tailored the center city super to attract commuters in addition to nearby residents. It is one of the last Penn Fruit's designed to cater to this type of urban customer. The store focused primarily on perishables and frozen foods—light items that might conveniently be carried home from work—and offered amenities such as free refrigerated storage for customers running other errands in the city. Investment in store design at 19th and Market, and a layout that resembled something closer to a department store than a warehouse, helped brand Penn Fruit as a market that served a more discerning class of customers.

After a fire destroyed the original 19th century building, the company hired architects Thalheimer and Weitz to design a brand new store, which opened in 1946 (figure 3). The second store (now demolished), combined a Colonial Revival aesthetic with dramatic modern lighting and a crisp, clean interior.³⁹ With a lunch counter at the back, a two-story high selling floor and a glamorous candy and gift shop, it was designed as a space for customers to linger, stopping for a bite to eat while they picked up necessities on their lunch break or ordering a box of chocolates on the way home from the office. The store is strikingly lit in drawings and photographs. The material may have been familiar, Colonial Revival brick, but the lighting design was pure Hollywood. Rather than quietly fade into its surrounding, the store announced itself as a new Philadelphia institution, calling to mind the

“Penn Fruit cordially invites you to the grand reopening of their all-new 19th and Market St. store,” invitation, Historic Society of Pennsylvania, UPA/Pam F 158.8.P38 P46 1950.

³⁹ Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 126.

monumental Academy of Music with its prominent arched windows and possible spectacle to be found inside. Shopping itself was marketed as an attraction, rather than a chore, and Philadelphians lined up on opening day to be the first to choose from the variety of “food from all parts of the world” (figure 4). The roofline was obscured from view on the street by a false front displaying the Penn Fruit Co. name, but the inclusion of a dramatic barrel vaulted roof in a store so stylistically different from the company’s Upper Darby location is further evidence that Penn Fruit had adopted the arched roof for new store construction by the 1940s (figure 5). The 19th Street store’s traditional style was somewhat of an aberration for the company. Only one other store, the Haverford Penn Fruit, designed by Wallace and Warner in 1950, was described as “colonial.”⁴⁰

The 1940s can be characterized as a period of experimentation for Penn Fruit. The Upper Darby and 19th Street stores successfully established the chain as one devoted to “high standards.” Adopting a policy of “fewer, bigger stores instead of many small ones,” Penn Fruit made sure its “enormous” stores reflected the quality of the items for sale inside. They invested heavily in individual locations and the investment paid off.⁴¹ Their prices were slightly higher than local competition, which now included Food Fair as well as Acme and A&P, but Penn Fruit had a “long reach,” attracting an “affluent, sophisticated and mobile” customer willing to travel farther distances for better produce and greater variety.⁴² Though the company operated fewer stores than other chains, only eleven in 1947, its volume per store

⁴⁰ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 3, 1950.

⁴¹ James Cooke, “How Penn Fruit Checked Out,” *Philadelphia Magazine*, July 1977.

⁴² James Cooke, “How Penn Fruit Checked Out.”

numbers were unmatched. In 1950, Penn Fruit stores averaged \$2,500,00 per year. The national store average was \$694,382.⁴³

The layout of supermarket interiors was largely standardized by the 1940s, with aisles of double-loaded “gondola” shelving set up in the center of a store and specialty departments like the deli and produce along the market’s perimeters. With the exception of 19th and Market, Penn Fruit’s stores were not drastically different from any others, though the company was early to invest in high priced amenities such as air conditioning, automatic doors and self-service refrigerated cases. Interiors were designed to show off the quality of produce, which was used to lure shoppers into stores. In an interview with *Supermarket Merchandising*, Samuel Cooke stated:

“There is nothing in the entire food line that has such irresistible sales force, nothing that commands such real buying action as a sparkling display of fresh fruits and vegetables. That is why all of our markets are laid out with this department occupying at least 20 per cent of the floor space and situated in the best location. The personality of these counters then becomes the personality of our markets. The color, the life, the dramatic qualities that no other food product can approach, deserves and gets top billing with us. Aside from bread and milk, no other commodities bring the customer to the store more often than fresh produce. Naturally, the more often folks visit your market, the more of their total food budget is spent with you.”⁴⁴

But beautiful produce was not enough to brand a store, and as supermarket building accelerated, companies looked for ways to distinguish themselves in an increasingly crowded market. Now comfortable with the supermarket as a profitable investment, in the late 1940s and early 1950s big chains began to open

⁴³ Oliver Bunting, “50 Million in Volume Forecast for this Year,” *Evening Bulletin*, October 22, 1950.

⁴⁴ Zimmerman, *The Super Market*, 229-230.

supers at a rapid pace that Penn Fruit could not match. With higher prices than the competition the only way to compete with A&P, American Store's new supermarket off-shoot, Acme, and the rapidly growing Harrisburg-based chain Food Fair was to invest in distinctive stores that offered a singular shopping experience in addition to superior perishables and a wider grocery variety. The necessity of establishing an easily identifiable presence was driven home to a Penn Fruit executive when upon greeting the first customers at a new location, "one happy little lady told us "God Bless Food Fair."⁴⁵

In order to stand out in a crowded field, Penn Fruit, which had already experimented with dramatic three-dimensional architecture in the 1940s, embraced "exaggerated" forms and brighter color schemes during its rapid expansion. With two decades of success behind them, "the organization exuded confidence" in the 1950s, and embarked on a massive building campaign, looking beyond metropolitan Philadelphia, to locations in New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and New York.⁴⁶ Penn Fruit worked with a variety of local architects, including David Supowitz, Thalheimer and Weitz, and Wallace and Warner, giving them the freedom to interpret the Penn Fruit look in different ways at different locations, but while stores varied their use of materials—some incorporated stone and stucco while others remained strictly steel and glass—the look-at-me roofline was always included.

⁴⁵ Cooke, "How Penn Fruit Checked Out."

⁴⁶ Ibid.

In the early 1950s, Penn Fruit hired a color consultant, Wanda A. Norstrom, director of design at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, to design its interiors. While local competitors stuck with the “dead white walls,” that for decades had been thought to enhance the appearance of cleanliness, Norstrom used color psychology as a basis for Penn Fruit’s interior palettes.⁴⁷ Norstrom was responsible for the lemon yellows, lime greens, “soothing Dutch blues and gay corals,” that the company believed would “would create a feeling of fun,” adding a sense of adventure to a housewife’s regular shopping trip and hopefully stimulate spending.⁴⁸ A 1959 *Evening Bulletin* article highlights Penn Fruit as “the first chain to explore fully the value of color in merchandising food.”⁴⁹

The company didn’t stop at candy colored walls. Throughout the early fifties, Penn Fruit worked with a series of local artists, designers and landscape architects to build attractive stores that reflected quality inside and out. Abstract sculptures by Frederic Weinberg decorated various departments in the Cheltenham Penn Fruit while landscape architect George Patton designed the plantings for the Lawndale location. The company invested heavily in the kind of eye-catching architecture and design that would “pull the customer...into the store.”⁵⁰ And the customer they sought was the discerning housewife. Supermarket trade literature emphasized that the average wife and mother used a trip to the supermarket as an escape, something

⁴⁷ “Trends in Chain Store Modernization,” *Chain Store Age*, July 1956, 26.

⁴⁸ “Lobsters Enliven Opening of Penn Fruit,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, August 25, 1954.

⁴⁹ Daniel O’Leary, “We Need More Color in Our Lives, Experts Say,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, October 24, 1959.

⁵⁰ “Trends in Chain Store Modernization,” 22.

to break up the monotony of her day. According to *Progressive Grocer*, “if the store front is imaginatively conceived the impression is conveyed to the customer that here is a different market—one that promises her a sense of discovering something new.”

More than any other supermarket chain in Philadelphia the Penn Fruit stores represent the aggressive use of design to attract female customers in the post-World War II period. Through the floor to ceiling glass walls, local women were presented with what Alice Friedman, in her book, *American Glamour*, characterizes as “a beautiful fantasy of modern living.”⁵¹ In these 1950s supermarkets Hollywood set design blended with Madison Avenue manipulation, all in an effort to convince the average housewife she was engaged in a dramatic adventure while shopping for groceries, rather than completing a weekly chore.⁵² And while chains like Penn Fruit purported to cater to the needs and desires of the average female customer—needs and desires that revolved mostly around pleasing one’s husband and children with low cost, quickly prepared meals—this kind of marketing language obscures the larger, political influence of supermarkets in the 1950s. For these were largely spaces where normative gender roles were reinforced and promoted. Women, viewed as particularly susceptible to sensual stimulation, were considered to be easily manipulated with pretty colors and towers of ripe produce. It’s no

⁵¹ Friedman, *American Glamour*, 2.

⁵² “The Big Change in Store Fronts,” *Progressive Grocer*, December, 1960, 72-82.

coincidence that the final scene of the *Stepford Wives*, the one where all the women have all been replaced by robots, takes place in a supermarket.⁵³

In emphasizing their appeal to these white middle and upper class housewives, the supermarket simultaneously made itself more attractive to developers who were reshaping the suburbs with new shopping centers. Penn Fruit's ability to attract the coveted mid-century housewife resulted in shopping center developers courting the supermarket chain to anchor their complexes throughout the 1950s. Securing the supermarket as an early tenet was key strategy in renting the center's smaller retail spaces to businesses eager to capitalize on Penn Fruit's business. A review of the monthly publication *Chain Store Age* lists numerous new developments that prominently feature Penn Fruit's participation in their projects (figure 6). The Levitt brothers specifically chose Penn Fruit for their shopping center development because its "high standards...would enhance the shopping center."⁵⁴ Penn Fruit was the first store to open in the Levittown Shop-A-Rama center in 1953.⁵⁵

The shopping center was the most "exciting and dramatic" new development for chain store operators in the 1950s.⁵⁶ Developers sought supermarkets to anchor their centers, while supermarkets looked to developers to "scent the trail of the

⁵³ Lizbeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003; Deutsch, *Building the Housewives Paradise*, 183, 217.

⁵⁴ "Hometown History," *The Levittown Leader*, November 12, 2011, <http://www.levittownleader.com/Articles-c-2011-11-12-190052.114126-Hometown-History.html>, accessed March 18, 2013.

⁵⁵ "Penn Fruit Comes to Levittown," Penn Fruit advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 4, 1953.

⁵⁶ "Trends in Chain Store Modernization," *Chain Store Age*, July 1956, 19.

suburbanite before a new area is so fully developed that zoning freezes out business.”⁵⁷ By the 1950s three distinct types of shopping centers, all serving slightly different needs, were common throughout the United States. The neighborhood type was the smallest. Averaging 40,00 square feet, it served homeowners within the immediately surrounding area, no more than a few minutes drive from customer’s homes. The community center was somewhat larger, approximately 150,000 square feet, offered a greater variety of stores, and consequently drew customers from many surrounding neighborhoods, but still within a relatively close drive. The regional center was massive, 400,000 square feet on average, usually anchored by a large department store and was, as the name suggests, a destination for an entire region of shoppers who might drive thirty to forty minutes to shop at such a center.⁵⁸

Penn Fruit’s approach to locating proper shopping centers was based on pure volume. More shopping traffic meant more business, and the company’s calculations led to the decision to focus on the large regional shopping centers that drew from many surrounding communities rather than the smaller neighborhood centers designed to meet a small population’s immediate needs. Stores in regional centers were larger and more expensive to build and the move was risky. Trade literature largely recommended that supermarkets avoid the largest shopping centers where department stores were the main draw and grocery shopping less of a priority. Statistics showed that supermarket customers rarely drove more than

⁵⁷ “Penn Fruit Ready to Expand to Neighboring States,” *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, August 9, 1953.

⁵⁸ Mayo, *The American Grocery Store*, 163-167.

five to six minutes to do their shopping, but Penn Fruit always depended on a customer who was willing to travel slightly farther distances than average. Penn Fruit's shopping center stores were some of the largest supermarkets in the region—40,000 square feet versus the national average of 18,000. Though the company leased these stores, they were usually committed to projects well before construction began and able to design based on their own company specifications. Perhaps because of the investment these stores required—stores averaged \$225,000 in the early 1950s but by 1955 cost closer to \$700,000—Penn Fruit took out relatively long leases in many centers; the average Penn Fruit lease was fifteen to twenty years, where A&Ps maximum lease in the 1950s was five.

After taking the company public in 1951, Penn Fruit posted record profits for shareholders for four consecutive years. By 1954 the chain operated thirty-six locations in Philadelphia, New Jersey and Maryland. A corporate campus and distribution center opened in Northeast Philadelphia in 1955. Flush with cash and confidence, they acquired a toy store, Kiddie City and built increasingly expensive stores. In 1955, Penn Fruit hired nationally known shopping mall architect Victor Gruen to develop a new store prototype for a shopping center in Audubon, New Jersey. The architect was particularly qualified to design a space where housewives might participate in their own “modern fantasies.” Like Stiles Clements, Gruen was based in Los Angeles and had experience creating the theatrical aesthetic associated with Southern California. A former vaudeville performer, after escaping Vienna in 1938, Gruen drafted exhibitions for GE and Coca-Cola for the 1939 World's Fair. He quickly realized “the retail environment could entertain Americans better than any

show, exhibition or performance.” In all of his designs he relied on “visual surprises to amuse visitors, create consumers, and produce profits.”⁵⁹

At a cost of \$1,500,00, the new Penn Fruit store, located in the Black Horse Shopping Center, was the most expensive supermarket the company ever built and is representative of a shift away from the Penn Fruit’s early focus on important urban transit hubs, and towards a more speculative building campaign centered around shopping center development. In 1941 Gruen stated “a good storefront is one of your best salesmen,” and for Penn Fruit his office designed a store that expanded the company’s arched roof, increasing its span until the roof line became the entire façade and most of the buildings walls.⁶⁰ Gruen’s design eliminated the division between roof and entryway, typical of the early ‘50s stores and created a “dramatic and forceful” building with an uninterrupted 113-foot laminated wood arch framing the entire store front. The bright new market with its soaring roofline shone like a beacon, a pleasing tableau of post-war prosperity clearly illuminated for passing drivers. With the company’s name incorporated on the interior and exterior there was certainly no mistaking it for a Food Fair.⁶¹

The Audubon store received coverage in architectural journals as well as supermarket trades. *Progressive Architecture* featured the project six months after its grand opening as one of its monthly commercial building prototypes. The magazine notes Gruen’s replacement of a “readily comprehended architectural form

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Hardwick, *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). 1-7.

⁶⁰ Hardwick, *Mall Maker*, 8.

⁶¹ “What the Supermarket Means to the Center...and Vice Versa,” Victor Gruen, *Chain Store Age*, May 1955.

[which] if repeated at various locations would identify itself without...‘the need for extraneous and arbitrary sign structures.’”⁶² A model of the structure accompanies Gruen’s 1955 *Chain Store Age* article on supermarkets and shopping centers. In the article, Gruen draws particular attention to the importance of “establish[ing] personality” for a shopping center supermarket. Additionally, he encouraged shopping center developers and store designers to consider the specific parking needs of the supermarket, where customer turnover was much quicker than at other stores, and shoppers more concerned with finding a parking space close to the entrance so as not to have to carry groceries long distances. Gruen solved this problem at Audubon by situating Penn Fruit at the long end of a pie shaped parking lot. With parking spaces angled toward the market in a V, rather than the more conventional vertical arrangement, more parking was made available closer to the entrance (figure 7 and 8).⁶³

According to *Progressive Grocer*, the “clear span arch” had become one of the most popular architectural forms for forward-looking supermarket chains by 1960. In the same article, which included Penn Fruit among the “stores that stand out,” the magazine noted the increased use of “daring” store designs fostered by advancements in architecture and engineering and a desire among store owners to differentiate their stores from the competition.

At the time of the *Progressive Grocer* article, Penn Fruit operated approximately seventy super markets in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, New

⁶² “Commercial Buildings: Prototype Supermarket,” *Progressive Architecture*, July, 1956.

⁶³ Gruen, “What the Supermarket Means to the Shopping Center,” 38-39.

Jersey and New York. But many of these stores no longer turned a profit.⁶⁴ In an interview with *Philadelphia Magazine* in 1978, former Penn Fruit president James Cooke blames the company's issues on a lack of infrastructure. While Penn Fruit continued to invest heavily in opening new supermarkets, it could no longer efficiently deliver groceries to all of its locations.⁶⁵ As opposed to operating a cluster of stores in a single market and saving cost on advertising and deliveries like in the old A&P model, Penn Fruit, whose operation and distribution were based in Northwest Philadelphia, lacked the resources to operate their out-of-state stores efficiently. They were forced to raise prices in their Philadelphia stores in order to make up for out-of-state losses. Diversification didn't help either. Kiddie City and the supermarket-style gardening center Gaudio's distracted from the company's primary business interests, and while the supermarket model ultimately proved successful when applied to other retail operations Penn Fruit was not adept at managing it multiple businesses.

As the optimism of the 1950s gave way to the turbulent Sixties and Seventies supermarkets preferred not to draw attention to themselves with distinctive architecture. By 1969 *Progressive Grocer* encouraged the use of earth tones and natural materials like wood and stone, highlighting designs in which supermarkets blended in with the surrounding environment. An economic recession in the 1970s resulted in consumers concerned with low prices rather than theatrics. Further, by

⁶⁴ "Penn Fruit Holders Opposing Merger Seek to Buy 150,00 Shares," *Wall Street Journal*, June 5, 1961, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/132663874?accountid=14707>, accessed March 21, 2013.

⁶⁵ Thomas Calak, "The Big Change in Store Fronts," *Progressive Grocer*, December 1960, 72-87.

1970 a generation of Americans had grown up shopping in supermarkets. The supermarket no longer represented a novel experience or exciting promise of the future. It was simply an ordinary part of everyday life.

Struggling to recapture the success of the 1950s Penn Fruit began to experiment with a discount model based on new president Jim Cooke's experience in Detroit and converted twenty-one stores to Dale's discount supermarkets in 1964. Profits continued to suffer and customers began to protest the high cost of food. In October of 1966 local housewives picketed three Penn Fruit locations demanding lower prices and boycotting the Levittown store, resulting in a 30% drop in volume in one week.

Penn Fruit tried opening a club store called Consumers Warehouse Market in a former bowling alley in 1967. They charged customers a yearly fee in exchange for further discounts, though the membership fee was quickly dropped when surrounding supermarket chains lowered their own prices in order to compete. With inflation a continued problem and food prices on the rise, Penn Fruit made the decision to convert all of its stores to the discount model in 1967. In 1970 Food Fair followed suit, converting most of its Philadelphia stores to the discount store Pantry Pride.

Though Dale's and the Consumers Warehouse Markets were profitable, margins were not high enough to save the floundering Penn Fruit. The chain abandoned its previous program of regular store modernization as it struggled to keep its doors open. This inability to keep up with trends in the 1960s and 1970s is one of the reasons the chain's stores have retained many of their features. Though

many of the arches are covered in stucco, the overall structures remain distinctive enough to spot in a landscape that is still dominated by rectangular roof lines.

In the early 1970s, with the economy in decline, consumers focused on finding the best deal and Penn Fruit found itself locked in a price war which required it to continually drop its prices below sustainable levels. Price freezes made this a particularly risky business move and in 1975, after a protracted battle with Acme and A&P, Penn Fruit filed for bankruptcy. Many of the stores were sold off to smaller independent supermarkets. Food Fair purchased seventeen stores and continued to operate many under the Penn Fruit name until that chain went bankrupt in the late '70s.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Cooke, "How Penn Fruit Checked Out."

Chapter 4

Preservation

There are approximately forty former Penn Fruit supermarkets still standing, scattered throughout Southeastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. The iconic barrel vaulted structures have been converted into other supermarkets, auto supply stores, car dealerships and office buildings. Each Penn Fruit, because of its location, condition and history poses a different preservation problem. Most have been altered dramatically but many are still in use. Identifying an “authentic” period for these buildings proves problematic. Penn Fruit’s 3-5 year schedule of renovation and modernization resulted in regular exterior and interior renovations, conducted by the company itself. Had the company continued operation, it almost certainly would have adapted its buildings to meet changing tastes, stuccoing over the glass vaults and adopting a more muted color palette. A Cherry Hill location opened in the 1960s already reflects a changing aesthetic, the low, flat roof and nostalgic old west fonts characteristic of the “blended” style stores of the 60s and 70s (figure 9). Interior layouts and color schemes, sometimes the most important aspects of a store, were often undocumented and subject to rapid change. Color photos of buildings are rare, so descriptions of store openings in newspapers must be used to identify exterior and interior colors.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ The Athenaeum of Philadelphia is the only archive with interior and exterior color slides taken at the Haddon Heights, NJ location, but the date of the photographs is unknown (figure 10 and 11).

A comparison of the most important Penn Fruit buildings—the first location at 52nd and Market, the Upper Darby store, 19th and Market and the Audubon Penn Fruit—offers an interesting capsule history of the supermarket’s development between the 1930s – 1950s. Unfortunately, such a material comparison is impossible from a preservation standpoint. None of these locations is in anything close to original condition. In the case of the 52nd and 69th Street stores, original photo documentation, which almost certainly exists, has yet to surface. The 52nd street store has been modified beyond recognition (figure 12), Upper Darby and 19th and Market were demolished, and the Audubon store, which still retains Victor Gruen’s expansive arch was stuccoed over when Acme supermarket renovated the store in the early 2000’s (figure 13).

Because they are subject to such rapid change, the history of commercial structures is much more difficult to track than domestic buildings or institutions. Turnover is fast and competition fierce. Business owners are less likely to lovingly document changes, which are made quickly and frequently to keep up with shifting tastes and marketing techniques. This makes documentation difficult, but all the more important, as these buildings do not stand still for long.

Photo documentation of the individually designed Penn Fruits—from the chaotic combined store fronts of the early Upper Darby location (figure 14) to the dramatic arched façade of Victor Gruen’s Audubon store—offer a succinct visual history of the supermarket in Philadelphia during the mid-century. A comparison of the individually designed Penn Fruits of the 1950s provides a different perspective on this period in Philadelphia, one more focused on shopping center development

and the proliferation of new building types throughout the city. In both cases, photo documentation alone provides a strikingly simple and persuasive case for preservation. Steve Izenour and Paul Hirshorn proved this in their book *White Towers*, which traces the history of a hamburger chain through a straightforward series of black and white photographs. Though the authors never address preservation of the chain's surviving buildings—Hirshorn speculates in his introduction to a recent reprint that neither would advocate it—the collection of images makes the argument for them. The collection of Penn Fruit locations included in this thesis remains incomplete, though this partial inventory provides an opportunity to appreciate the chain's use of whimsical architecture to elevate an ordinary task to something special and exciting. Documentation is the first step in considering the company's place as part of the city of Philadelphia's built environment and in a larger historical context of mid-century America.

Few of these buildings retain their 1950s appearance and it would be unrealistic (and perhaps unwise) to recommend tearing off all their layers and restoring them to some version of their former glory. After all, these stores, in their current state, bear witness to shifting retail strategies, consumer taste and patterns of neighborhood use. More obviously, of course, they record high-profile changes in commercial architectural fashion. For these stores, it seems important to gather as much information as possible about the different periods of renovation and use, to study how the buildings have changed over time, and to make that information available to an interested public.

Preservationists in particular might benefit from understanding recent changes that have affected these buildings. In Lawrenceville, NJ, a former Penn Fruit was converted to office space and is now the headquarters of the New Jersey lottery (figure 15). What does such a conservation teach us about these buildings' ability to adapt to changing neighborhoods and their needs? How much of the original structure was actually preserved during the renovation, in which a second story was added to the selling floor? Why did the developer decide to retain the building rather than knock it down? Penn Fruit's open layouts and high ceilings made them easily adaptable to fit the needs of other retail operations over the past fifty-plus years. In many cases exterior renovations have been extensive. Practically all of the original material was replaced or stuccoed over at Gruen's Audubon Penn Fruit, but a Pep Boys in Glenolden only seems to have modified the exterior color scheme to suit a new corporate identity (figure 16).

Stewart Brand juxtaposes this a "diachronic" approach—the study of building over time—to a "synchronic" or simultaneous alternative. While Brand's book, *How Buildings Learn* offers a persuasive and passionate argument for the former approach, it seems that one may be impossible without the other. In order to understand change we must also understand original design intent, decoration and use. The reason we can so easily evaluate what changes in domestic design mean in a larger historic context is that these spaces have been studied in depth and preserved or reconstructed in a multitude of museums. There is a relative lack of scholarly work on, and preservation of, commercial buildings and it is here that the

Penn Fruit chain seems to offer an opportunity to engage in both a diachronic and synchronic approach.⁶⁸

The Penn Fruit at Frankford and Pratt Streets (figure 17) presents an interesting opportunity to preserve a building type that had a substantial impact on the way Americans eat, as well as shop, during an important period of this nation's history, in which an infrastructure devoted to the consumption of goods and services replaced an infrastructure devoted to production. The location, while not particularly important in the history of the chain itself, is remarkable for having escaped drastic renovations and stylistic changes over the past sixty years. It is still legible as a mid-century building and chronicles an important period of growth and change along the edges of the city of Philadelphia through its continued existence.

Recently, the building has come to the attention of some of the city's leading advocates for preservation. On their blog, Field Notes, The Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia included the Frankford Penn Fruit in a recent poll of favorite commercial architecture in the city. The supermarket won handily, with 48% of votes.⁶⁹ In February of 2013, *Grid Magazine* published an article by Hidden City co-founder Peter Woodall advocating the building's addition to the Philadelphia Register.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After Their Built*, (New York: Viking, 1994) 210-211.

⁶⁹ Commercial and Industrial Buildings, Field Notes, The Preservation Alliance, retrieved on April 1, 2013, http://fieldnotesphilly.wordpress.com/ilikemod_commercial/.

⁷⁰ Peter Woodall, "Modern Love: Why a North Philadelphia Thriftway Deserves Historical Recognition," *Grid Magazine*, February 2013, retrieved on March 20, 2013

While historic designation is desirable, much time could elapse before Philadelphia's Historical Commission approves such an initiative, and the nomination would be unlikely to include an interior designation essential for protecting the striped ceiling and important aspects of the store's layout. In the meantime, other avenues deserve exploration. Figuring out how the building has survived in such an intact state is an important factor in determining whether the current owner is sympathetic to its preservation or has simply avoided making updates. Thriftway stores are independently owned and operated, and should the owner prove interested in maintaining the store in its current state, preservations could work with them on immediate conservation issues and future plans for the building.

Though images of the original design for Frankford and Pratt were not found during research for this thesis, the store's current façade closely matches period photos from other locations and these could inform any future renovation or restoration. The overall layout is probably close to original, as supermarket layouts have not drastically changed over in the past half-century. The self-service meat section is particularly well-preserved, its main storage freezers are located behind two-way mirrors, originally installed so staff might observe when cases needed restocking without themselves being observed by customers (figure 18).

Preservation efforts for the Frankford Penn Fruit should move forward, but further research is required on this specific location in order to identify original features

<http://www.gridphilly.com/grid-magazine/2013/2/18/modern-love-why-a-north-philadelphia-thriftway-deserves-hist.html>.

and those that have been remodeled. A more specific significance to the surrounding neighborhood needs to be determined and further inquiry into the Penn Fruit chain might reveal more about the history of this particular store.

This thesis is only a starting point for future work, an attempt at understanding the significance of Penn Fruit, not only as an example of an important twentieth century building type, but for average Philadelphians who worked and shopped at the chain. The recent attention of local preservation organizations is a good sign, but the Frankford Penn Fruit deserves a more concerted, organized preservation effort. This building is an ideal candidate for preservation, and a real effort to protect it would not only highlight the importance of preserving ordinary buildings, but also neighborhoods in areas, like Northeast Philadelphia, often overlooked by Philadelphia's preservation community. There is much work still to be done.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Original Penn Fruit at 52nd and Market Street. Illustration from advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

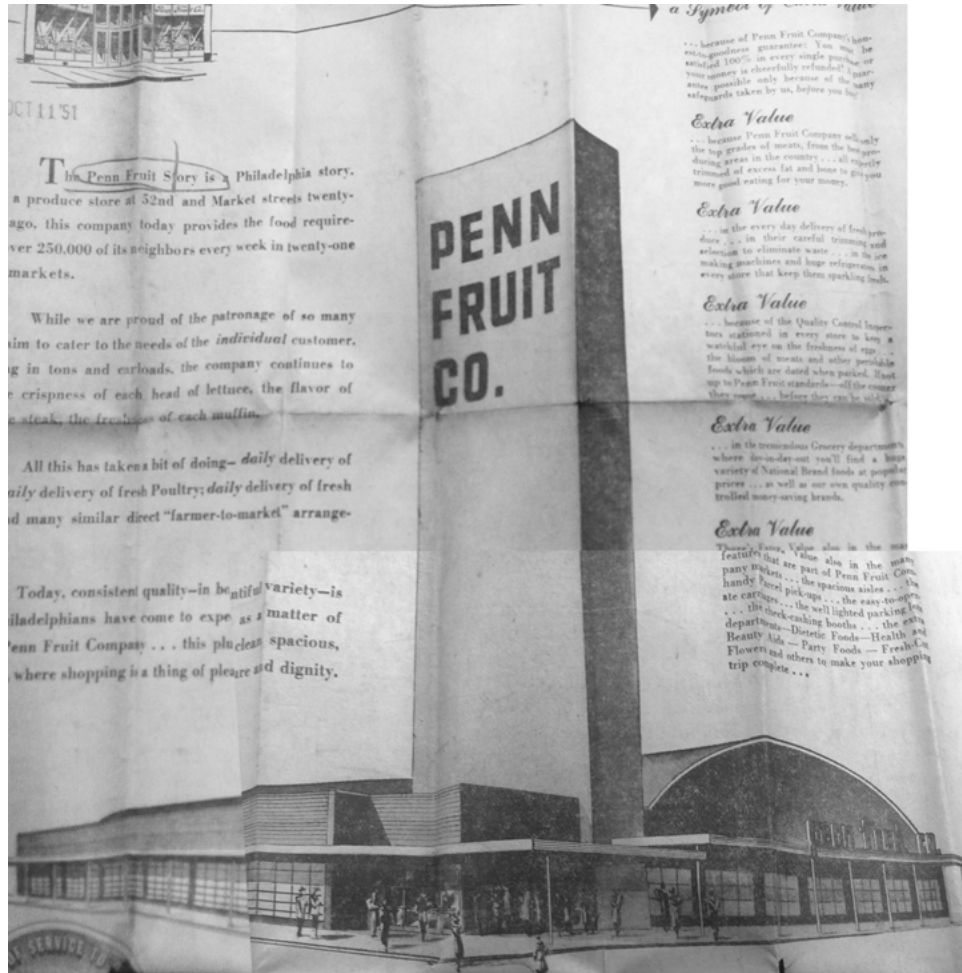


Figure 2: Unknown location, possibly Upper Darby Penn Fruit. Illustration from advertisement in *Philadelphia Inquirer*.



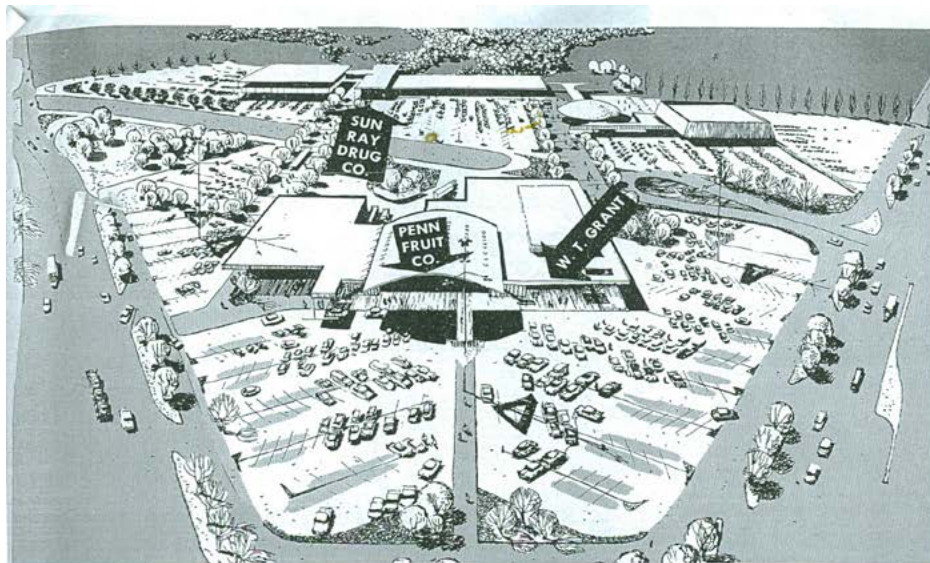
Figure 3: 19th and Market Street Penn Fruit, Athenaeum Collection.



Figure 4: Thalheimer & Weitz rendering, Athenaeum Collection.



Figure 5: Interior, 19th and Market St. Penn Fruit, Athenaeum Collection.



FABULOUS SHOPPING CENTER TO OPEN ON BLACK HORSE PIKE, AUDUBON, N. J.

Tremendous suburban growth and community development creates immediate need for large retail service.

• 400,000 sq. ft. available for chain store operation • Trading area of 250,000 • Parking for 3,000 cars • Will build to suit clients

Check these features:

- Estimated trading area (approx. 15 mile radius) 250,000
- Homes under construction since September 1954 — 13,210
- Average price of new homes — \$12,000-\$15,000
- Value of new homes \$175,467,000
- Annual Black Horse Pike traffic — 10,552,000 persons
- Number of establishments in area — 4,595
- Borders on network of highways — including N. J. Turnpike, new Garden State Parkway, new Delaware River Bridge making contact at Gloucester City where traffic empties into Nicholson Rd.
- No state corporation income tax
- No state sales tax
- Present roster of clients includes Penn Fruit Co., W. T. Grant, Sun Ray Drug Co.



Located at the crossroads of Black Horse Pike and Nicholson Rd. — the hub of South Jersey's rich and ever-expanding community belt.

CHAIN STORE AGE, MAY 1955

*Construction now underway—
Inquire Now*

WRITE! . . . WIRE! . . . PHONE!
MURRAY REALTY CO.
1616 WALNUT ST.
PHILA. 3, PA. • KI 5-3553

84

Figure 6: Black Horse Pike Shopping Center advertisement, *Chain Store Age*, May 1955.

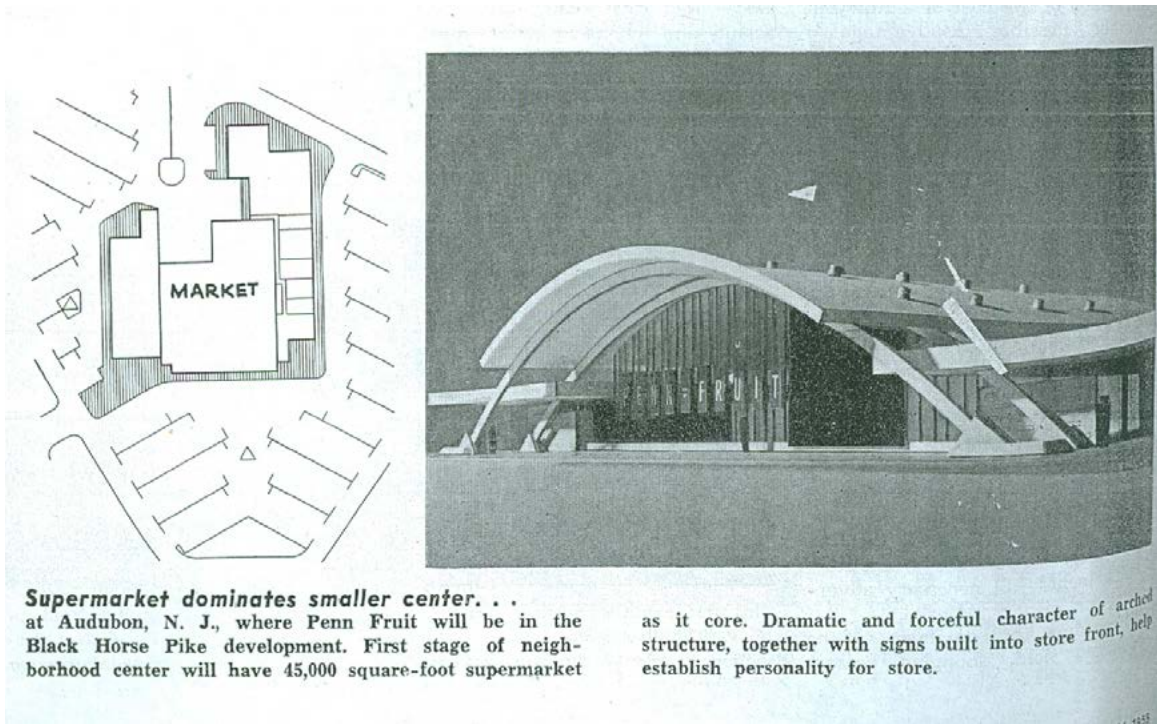


Figure 7: Audobon Penn Fruit plan and rendering, from Victor Gruen's *Chain Store Age* article, May 1955.

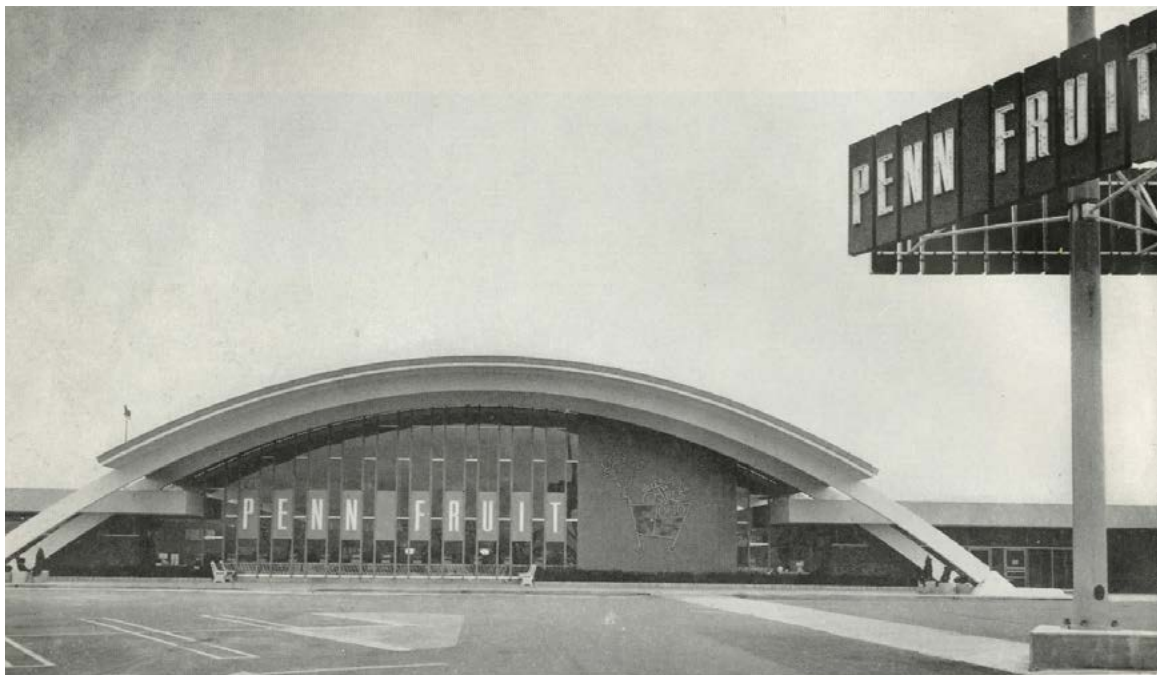


Figure 8: Audobon Penn Fruit, *Progressive Architecture*, July 1956.

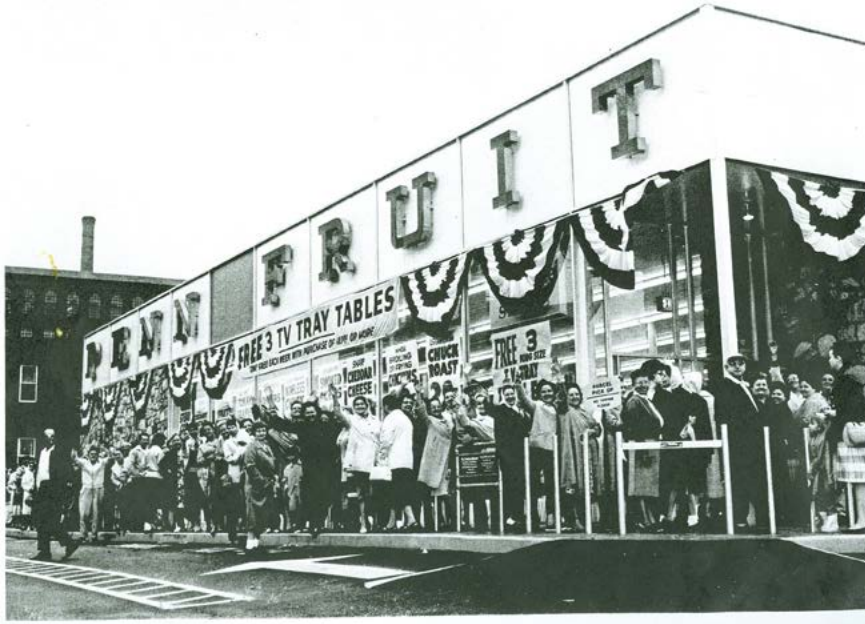


Figure 9: Penn Fruit store opening, unknown location, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Temple Urban Archives.



Figure 10: Interior of Haddon Heights, NJ Penn Fruit, Athenaeum Collection.



Figure 11: Haddon Heights Penn Fruit, Athenaeum Collection.



Figure 12: Dynamic Dollar, 52nd and Market Street. Photo credit: Google Earth.



Figure 13: Audobon Acme, former Penn Fruit, March 2013.



Figure 14: Original Upper Darby Penn Fruit. Undated Photo, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Figure 15: New Jersey Lottery Headquarters, former Trenton Penn Fruit,



Figure 16: Pep Boys, former Glenolden Penn Fruit, March 2013.



Figure 17: Thriftway, Frankford and Pratt, former Penn Fruit. Photo credit: Betsy Manning.



Figure 18: Interior of Holiday Thriftway, March, 2013.

Bibliography

- "52nd Street Biggest Penn Fruit Store," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 18, 1961.
- Andrzejewski, Anna Vemer. "Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, the VAF, and the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes in North America." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* Vol. 13, No. 2 (2006/2007): 55-63.
- Arms Bzdak, Meredith. "From Big Bear to Big Box: Twentieth Century Supermarkets in New Jersey." *Preserving the Recent Past 2*, edited by Deborah Slaton and William G. Foulks. Washington, D.C.: Association for Preservation Technology International, 2000.
- Barclay White Co. / Penn Fruit Co. Whse. & Off. Bldg. c. 1962. Lawrence S. Williams, Inc. Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- Bluestone, Daniel. "Academics in Tennis Shoes." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 58, No. 3 (September 1999): 300-307.
- _____. *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011.
- Brand, Stewart. *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built*. New York: Viking, 1994.
- Calak, Thomas. "Trends in Chain Store Modernization." *Progressive Grocer* July 1956.
- _____. *Outstanding New Super Markets*. New York: Progressive Grocer Magazine, 1961.
- Carter, Thomas and Elizabeth Collins Cromley. *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005.
- Chase, John. "Unvernacular Vernacular: Contemporary American Consumerist Architecture," *Walker Art Center Design Quarterly* No. 131 (1986): 1-32.
- Charvat, Frank J. *Supermarketing*. New York: McMillan, 1961.
- Clendenin, Malcom. "A Complicated Modernity: Philadelphia Architectural Design, 1945-1980," *Preserve Philadelphia! Thematic Context Statement*. Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia (2009). Accessed September 23, 2011. [http://www.preservephiladelphia.org/wp-content/uploads/HCS Modernism.pdf](http://www.preservephiladelphia.org/wp-content/uploads/HCS%20Modernism.pdf).

- Cohen, Lizbeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- "Commercial Buildings: Prototype Supermarket," *Progressive Architecture*, July, 1956.
- Cooke, James. "How Penn Fruit Checked Out," *Philadelphia Magazine*, July 1977.
- Deutsch, Tracey. *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Foreman, Joel. *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury Icons*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Friedman, Alice T. *American Glamour and the Evolution of Modern Architecture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- George D. McDowell Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin* Collection. Temple University Urban Archives.
- Goldberger, Paul "Design Notebook: A Leisurely Look at Our Roadside Architecture," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1980.
- Groth, Paul and Todd W. Bressi, eds. *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Gruen, Victor and Larry Smith. *Shopping Towns USA: The Planning of Shopping Centers*. New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1960.
- Gruen, Victor. "What the Supermarket Means to the Shopping Center...and Vice Versus." *Chain Store Age*, May 1955.
- Hardwick, M. Jeffrey. *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004.
- Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995.
- Hess, Alan. *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2004.
- Hirshorn, Paul and Steven Izenour. *White Towers*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007.
- Hunting, Mary Anne. *Edward Durell Stone: Modernism's Populist Architect*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2012.

- Jester Thomas and David Fixler. "Modern Heritage: Progress, Priorities, and Prognosis." *APT Bulletin* Vol. 42, No. 2/3 (2011): 3-8.
- Liebs, Chester H. *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1985.
- Levinson, Marc. *The Great A&P and the Struggle for Small Business in America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2011.
- Longstreth, Richard. "Architectural Historians and the Practice of Historic Preservation in the United States." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 58, No. 3 (September 1999): 326-333.
- _____. *From City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997.
- _____. "I Can't See It; I Don't Understand It; and It Doesn't Look Old To Me." *Forum Journal* Vol. 27, No.1 (Fall 2012) pp.35-45.
- _____. "Integrity and the Recent Past." in *Preserving the Recent Past 2*, edited by Deborah Slaton and William G. Foulks. Washington, D.C.: Association for Preservation Technology International, 2000.
- _____. *The Buildings of Main Street*. Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1987.
- _____. *The Drive-In, The Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999.
- _____. Richard. "The Significance of the Recent Past." *APT Bulletin* Vol. 23, No. 2 (1991): 12-24.
- Mack, Adam. "Speaking of Tomatoes: Supermarkets, the Senses, and Sexual Fantasy in Modern America." *Journal of Social History* Vol. 43, No. 4 (Summer 2010): 815-842.
- Mayo, James M. *The American Grocery Store: The Business Evolution of an Architectural Space*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993.
- Penn Fruit. Jacob Stelman Collection. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- Penn Fruit. Lawrence S. Williams, Inc. Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

- Penn Fruit, Chelton and Wayne. December 28, 1942. *Philadelphia Record* Photograph Morgue. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
- Penn Fruit Co. Ballinger Collection. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- Penn Fruit Co. Jacob Stelman Collection. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- Penn Fruit Co. February 22, 1941. *Philadelphia Record* Photograph Morgue. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
- Penn Fruit Co., Penn Towne Candy Shop. Jacob Stelman Collection. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- Penn Fruit Company Executives Earned Big Money," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 11, 1961.
- Penn Fruit Displays. Lawrence S. Williams, Inc. Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- "Penn Fruit Expands Its Orbit." *Business Week*. December 24, 1955.
- "Penn Fruit Pioneered with Sales Jobs," *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 14, 1961.
- Penn Fruit Shopping Center. Lawrence S. Williams, Inc. Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- Penn Fruit Store. Lawrence S. Williams, Inc. Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- Philadelphia Inquirer* Clippings Collection. Temple University Urban Archives.
- Philadelphia Stores Penn Fruit Co. November 5, 1941. *Philadelphia Record* Photograph Morgue. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
- Prudon, Theodore H. M. *Preservation of Modern Architecture*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008.
- Rilco Laminated Products/Penn Fruit. Lawrence S. Williams, Inc. Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
- Rubin, Barbara. "Aesthetic Ideology and Urban Design." *Annals of the Association of Urban Geographers* Vol. 69, No. 3 (September 1979): 339-361.
- Schull, Carol D., and Beth L. Savage, "Trends in Recognizing Places for Significance in the Recent Past." *Historic Preservation Forum* Vol. 10 (1995): 44-53.

- Shapiro, Kelli, "From Modernism to McDonalds: Ideology, Controversy, and the Movement to Preserve the Recent Past." *Journal of Architectural Education* (October 2007): 6-14.
- Stevens, Garry. *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998.
- Tedlow, Richard S. *New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1990.
- "The Big Change in Store Fronts," *Progressive Grocer*, December 1960.
- "Unorthodox Giant." *Business Week*. April 20, 1946.
- Upton, Dell. "The VAF at 25: What Now?" *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* Vol. 13, No. 2 (2006/2007): 7-13.
- Venturi, Robert. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture, 1977.
- Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1977.
- Zimmerman, M.M. *The Super Market: A Revolution in Distribution*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1955.
- Zukin, Sharon. *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Index

A

A&P, 6, 24, 25, 27, 29, 34, 35, 43, 45
Acme, vi, 34, 35, 45, 48
African-Americans, 22

B

Big Bear, 28, 29
Brand, Stewart, 50, 51

C

Chain Store Age, 19, 36, 38, 39, 42
Clements, Samuel 18, 30, 31, 41
Cold War, 23
Consumers Warehouse Market, 45
Cooke, Sam 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, 35, 36,
Cooke, James, 43,44,46

D

Dale's Markets, 44, 45

F

Food Fair, 6, 34, 35, 42, 45, 46

G

Grid Magazine, 51
Gruen, Victor, 17, 41, 42, 43, 48, 50

H

Hidden City Philadelphia, 51
Historic Commission, 52
housewives, 3, 19, 23, 37, 38

K

Kaplan, Issac and Morris 24
King Kullen, 28

L

Levitt Brothers, 38
Longstreth, Richard, 4, 6, 14, 15, 18, 31, 32

M

Mayo, James 18, 25, 28, 39
McClatchy, James 29

N

Norstrom, Wanda, 36

P

Penn Fruit, Individual Supermarket Locations:
19th and Market Street, 3, 16, 18, 32, 33, 34, 35,
39, 48
52nd and Market Street, 22, 24, 26, 27, 48
Audubon, 41, 42, 48, 50
Broad and Grange, 7, 28, 29
Cheltenham, 37
Cherry Hill, 47
Frankford, 1, 3, 6, 7, 51, 52, 53
Glenolden, 50
Haddon Heights, 47
Haverford, 33
Lawndale, 37
Lawrenceville, 50
Levittown, 38, 45
Upper Darby, 18, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 48

parking and parking lots, 2, 7, 29, 30, 31, 42
Patton, George 37
Piggly Wiggly, 26
Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia, 51
Progressive Grocer, 19, 37, 38, 43, 44

R

Ralph's, 18, 29, 30

S

shopping centers, 15, 30, 38, 39, 41, 42
Scott Brown, Denise, 10
Stone, Edward Durell, 16
Supowitz, David 36

T

Thalheimer and Weitz, 32, 36

V

Venturi, Robert, 10
Vernacular Architecture Forum, 8, 9, 16, 17

W

Wallace and Warner, 33, 36
Weinberg, Ed, 37
White Towers, 49