Philadelphia Corner Stores: Their History, Use, and Preservation

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Abstract
The corner store is a unique type of commercial building due to its placement within row house neighborhoods and on otherwise residential blocks. These buildings stand in stark contrast to the concentrations of commercial structures in shopping districts and along commercial corridors. This study examines this distinct combination, which was created to serve the needs of residents on the periphery of city centers in a specific historical moment, the latter half of the 19th century into the early 20th century. The study utilizes scholarly histories of urban expansion, neighborhood formation, and transportation advances in the United States from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, as well as a multi-neighborhood architectural survey and in-depth archival research into the histories of three Philadelphia corner stores, to gain a broad understanding of these structures from their creation through today. Though Philadelphia's historic row house neighborhoods have undergone intense changes since their creation, the corner store still plays an active role in the vibrance and vitality of these communities. Additionally, extant fabric stands as a visual reminder of the history of these stores and their role in Philadelphia's expansion and development. These stores act as physical representations of an important period in the growth of Philadelphia and the United States, while also promoting an active street life and serving as economic drivers. For these reasons, corner stores should be preserved and protected, their continued use supported through economic programs and their extant fabric preserved through preservation protections and oversight.

Keywords
corner store, row house, retail, groceries, vernacular

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PHILADELPHIA CORNER STORES:
THEIR HISTORY, USE, AND PRESERVATION

Lynn Miriam Alpert

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Rebecca Alpert, the most brilliant, wonderful, and fascinating person I have ever met and without whom I would not be me.
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# Table of Contents

## Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 1
  - The Study of Vernacular Architecture ................................................................................. 2
  - Explanation of Methodology ................................................................................................. 5
  - Existing Literature .................................................................................................................. 10
  - Outline of the Argument ........................................................................................................ 16

## Changing Cities and the Emergence of the Neighborhood Store ...................................... 17
  - Urban Expansion and Philadelphia ...................................................................................... 17
  - Advances in Transportation ................................................................................................. 22
  - Social Changes ....................................................................................................................... 24
  - Advances in Commerce and Industry .................................................................................. 27
  - 20th Century Threats to the Corner Store .......................................................................... 33
  - Conclusions ............................................................................................................................ 34

## Corner Store Architecture and the Philadelphia Neighborhood Survey .............................. 36
  - Studies of Commercial Architecture .................................................................................. 36
  - Studies of Row House Architecture .................................................................................... 39
  - Traditional elements of the corner store ............................................................................. 42
  - Survey Findings ..................................................................................................................... 52
  - Queen Village / Southwark .................................................................................................. 55
  - Fairmount / Penn District ..................................................................................................... 62
  - South Philadelphia / Passyunk Township ........................................................................... 66
  - Conclusions ............................................................................................................................ 69

## Philadelphia Corner Store Case Studies .............................................................................. 71
  - 1713 Wolf Street .................................................................................................................. 71
  - 829 North 26th Street .......................................................................................................... 76
  - 626 South 3rd Street ............................................................................................................ 82
  - Conclusions ............................................................................................................................ 88

## Preserving the Corner Store ................................................................................................. 89
  - Issues in Corner Store Preservation .................................................................................... 90
  - Corner Store Preservation: Fabric ....................................................................................... 93
  - Corner Store Preservation: Commercial Use ...................................................................... 95
  - Spurring Investment and Preservation: The Storefront Improvement Program ............ 97
  - Design Assistance: The Community Design Collaborative .......................................... 98
  - Further Recommendations: National Register Listing ................................................... 99
  - Conclusions ............................................................................................................................ 102

## Conclusions .......................................................................................................................... 103

## Bibliography ........................................................................................................................ 106

## Appendix A: Survey Form .................................................................................................... 111

## Appendix B: Select Survey Data .......................................................................................... 112

## Index ...................................................................................................................................... 115
List of Figures

Figure 1: 1876 map of the intersection at 24th and Aspen Streets in Fairmount ......................... 3
Figure 2: Map of Philadelphia zoning in the Newbold neighborhood ........................................ 4
Figure 3: Study area locations within Philadelphia ........................................................................ 7
Figure 4: Study area boundaries .................................................................................................... 8
Figure 5: Map of Philadelphia and its surrounding counties, 1854 ............................................... 19
Figure 6: Map of Philadelphia in six periods of its growth .............................................................. 20
Figure 7: Two distinct façade sections at 1613 Ritner Street .......................................................... 37
Figure 8: Corner store and row house façade comparison .............................................................. 43
Figure 9: Example of a traditional historic storefront .................................................................... 45
Figures 10 and 11: Cast iron column details ................................................................................... 46
Figure 12: Detail of historic plate glass window ............................................................................. 47
Figure 13: Detail of stylized pressed-metal storefront cornice at 1713 Wolf Street ...................... 47
Figure 14: Storefront with secondary façade eliminated ................................................................. 49
Figure 15: Corner store at 6001 Upland Street in 1952 ................................................................. 50
Figure 16: Contemporary awnings and signage .......................................................................... 50
Figure 17: Cover of the George L. Mesker & Co. catalogue of store fronts ................................... 51
Figure 18: Example of a pre-fabricated corner storefront from the Mesker catalogue ............... 51
Figure 19: Areal configuration of 1714 to 1724 Wolf Street .......................................................... 53
Figure 20: Murtaugh’s City house plan example ............................................................................. 54
Figure 21: Fire insurance plan of 1713 Wolf Street ....................................................................... 54
Figure 22: 1854 Philadelphia map with study area locations ......................................................... 56
Figure 23: Map of Philadelphia in six periods of its growth, with study area locations .............. 57
Figure 24: Map of corner property uses in the Queen Village study area ..................................... 60
Figure 25: Map of commercial uses in the Queen Village study area .......................................... 61
Figure 26: Map of corner property uses in the Fairmount study area .......................................... 64
Figure 27: Map of commercial uses in the Fairmount study area .................................................. 65
Figure 28: Map of corner property uses in the South Philadelphia study area .............................. 67
Figure 29: Map of commercial uses in the South Philadelphia study area .................................... 68
Figure 30: Detail of 1713 Wolf Street storefront .............................................................................. 73
Figure 31: Corner store turned residential row house at 829 North 26th Street .......................... 77
Figure 32: Detail of infilled corner .................................................................................................. 77
Figure 33: Detail of where the projecting brick meets the historic façade of the adjoining
property at 829 and 831 North 26th Street ................................................................. 79
Figure 34: Corner store at 626 South 3rd Street ......................................................... 83
Figure 35: Detail of contemporary window and extant storefront fabric at 626 South 3rd Street ......................................................................................................................................................................... 84
Figure 36: Historically-insensitive storefront adaptation at 735 South 5th Street........ 91
Figure 37: Historically-insensitive storefront adaptation at 2531 Parrish Street .......... 92
Figure 38: Example of rStore program building sketch ............................................ 100
Figure 39: Cambria Pharmacy after improvements .................................................. 101
Introduction

The corner store is a commercial structure placed within an otherwise residential block. It is part storefront and part row house. This distinct combination was created to serve the needs of residents on the periphery of city centers in a specific historical moment, the latter half of the 19th century into the early 20th century. The corner store is a prolific element of many urban neighborhoods in the United States still today, including Philadelphia’s. Small shops, groceries, restaurants, and bars bring vibrance and vitality to urban neighborhoods. They are economic drivers and support an active street life. At the same time their extant historic fabric can engage residents and visitors with the history of these neighborhoods and the integral role of corner stores in the development of the city. For these reasons it is important to preserve both the historic fabric and the commercial uses of Philadelphia’s historic corner stores.

Commercial structures with façades designed to overtly express retail use came into being in the United States in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Corner stores are house-over-shop commercial structures. These buildings have existed since antiquity, but did not become prevalent as a noticeable and designed type until the early 19th century. Shop-houses express their two uses through a clear division between commercial use on the ground floor and residential use above. This is expressed visually on the façade through different treatments of the first and upper stories. The first story of most historic corner stores has a canted corner entrance that is low to the ground, as compared to the front-facing entrances of adjoining row houses that are raised several feet above ground level for privacy. Corner


2 Longstreth, Main Street, 24.
stores also have large, picture windows on the first floor which are located at eye level for the easy display of goods, while the upper stories contain smaller, double-hung windows. This division is solidified visually through a first-story cornice that separates the retail space below from the private, residential space above.

Historic maps show that corner stores were common in Philadelphia’s residential neighborhoods by the mid- to late 19th century (see Figure 1). The neighborhoods that contain these stores were some of the first suburbs of Philadelphia. Though technically located within the city limits, they were a part of a trend of urban expansion that was taking place in cities all over the country. Expansion was possible due to advances in transportation and industrialization, which attracted an influx of workers to cities. Corner stores served the needs of the residents of these newly-formed neighborhoods. This historic pattern of residential development, which placed commercial uses on most corners, can still be seen in the built fabric today. It was prevalent enough still in the 1960s to have left a lasting mark on the city’s zoning code (see Figure 2). Many corner properties in residential neighborhoods are still zoned as C1, “Mixed-Used ‘Corner Store’ Commercial” properties, and commercial uses are still prevalent in many neighborhood corner stores today.3

The Study of Vernacular Architecture

The corner store is a common and pervasive structure in Philadelphia’s historic neighborhoods, and the study of these buildings is an exercise in examining vernacular architecture. These buildings became ubiquitous because they served the needs a particular group of people in a particular time and place. They inform

Figure 1: 1876 map of the intersection at 24th and Aspen Streets in Fairmount. The four corner stores include two shops, a bakery, and a bar room. This is representative of most neighborhood corners on late 19th and early 20th century maps.

*Ernest Hexamer, ed., Insurance Maps of the City of Philadelphia, vol. 6, 1876, pl. 89.*
Figure 2: Map of Philadelphia zoning in the Newbold neighborhood. On most residential blocks, the corner properties are still zoned “COM1” or “Mixed-Use ‘Corner Store’ Commercial” reflecting the historic pattern of corner commercial uses.

*Map by the author.*
scholars about the lives of specific populations at specific times.4

Corner stores were prolific in mid- to late 19th and early 20th century urban neighborhoods. Their changing owners and uses show changing needs and changing populations over time, one element of the greater patterns of movement in and around Philadelphia during these periods. These changes were slow, incremental, and generally remained within the confines of the historic grid and lot patterns established at the time these neighborhoods were constructed. For these reasons many of Philadelphia’s urban neighborhoods have retained much of their historic fabric and character. This high level of extant fabric makes these areas excellent candidates for a study of vernacular architecture.

Explanation of Methodology

The study of vernacular architecture requires research and analysis of scholarly books and articles, extant architectural fabric, and archival sources. I began this project with extensive historical research. Sources that focused directly on the corner store were few and far between. To obtain background information on these buildings, I looked to sources that would provide historical context. This included the history of urban expansion and neighborhood formation from the mid-19th to the early 20th century and the rapid advances in transportation that made this expansion possible. Literature on the creation and expansion of commercial corridors and early highway architecture provided an understanding of what smaller, isolated neighborhood stores were competing with, and histories of advances in particular commercial uses, such as groceries and bars, further clarified the pressures that neighborhood shopkeepers were under to keep their stores up-to-date and competitive. Sociological studies examine the corner store specifically and explain

how these stores served particular needs in their communities. These stores created jobs for women and minority groups. They promoted an active street life, making neighborhoods safer. Often shop owners were community leaders and shops were centers of community life.5 Lastly, I used architectural histories of commercial buildings to broaden my understanding of the formal and urbanistic aspects of these buildings -- to understand their materials, spaces, and surroundings.

I then conducted an architectural survey to gain a more detailed understanding of what extant fabric remains in Philadelphia's historic neighborhoods and what changes these buildings have undergone, architecturally and functionally. In order to obtain thorough and detailed information, I limited the scope of the survey to portions of three historic neighborhoods: Queen Village, Fairmount, and South Philadelphia (see Figures 3 and 4). I chose these three neighborhoods based on their different periods of development and growth, the different changes they have undergone since white flight and urban renewal, and the various socio-economic groups that have inhabited them over time. I surveyed each area corner by corner. I chose the specific characteristics to survey from an in-depth exploration of traditional corner store elements gathered from historic photographs, architectural histories, and historic catalogs of prefabricated storefront façades. In addition to surveying extant fabric, I also gathered information on demolition, construction dates (pre- or post-1965), and contemporary uses.6 These study areas inevitably included some purely residential, commercial, and mixed-use blocks, which serve as useful comparisons and help to tell a more complete story of the residential corner store and its context. Once all of the data were collected, it was analyzed and mapped using GIS (Geographic Information System) software, which

6 See Appendix A: Survey Form.
Figure 3: Study area locations within Philadelphia.

Key

- **Fairmount Study Area**
- **Queen Village Study Area**
- **South Philadelphia Study Area**

Figure 4: Study area boundaries.

displays individual aspects of the survey as they exist parcel by parcel. GIS maps show where historic fabric is densest, where it has been lost, and what uses are prevalent in each neighborhood. An understanding of current conditions, regarding both use and historic fabric, informs a preservation plan that is sensitive to extant historic fabric and knowledgeable about what uses already exist and what types of reuse and development will help these communities grow and thrive.

Architectural survey provides an overview of corner stores as they exist today. In order to gain more detailed information on the changes these buildings underwent over time, I conducted in-depth archival research. This type of research is rewarding, but it is also time consuming. For this reason I narrowed my study of individual buildings to three corner stores, one in each survey area. Deed abstracts, census records, and historic newspapers provided a clear chain of ownership and use for these buildings. Through this research I was able to see where generalizations made by scholars were in line with, and where they diverged from, the actual changes that a few of these buildings have housed and undergone since their construction. These detailed stories place today’s urban corner stores in a concrete historic context and show that current users and uses are a part of a greater chain of changes over time.

Due to the time constraints that exist in a project of this nature, I chose to leave out certain steps in the exploration of these buildings that a more thorough study of vernacular architecture would include. I limited my architectural investigations to reconnaissance-level survey and exterior photography. I did not conduct detailed studies of the interiors of these buildings or create measured drawings. These investigations can provide detailed information on construction methods utilized and changes the buildings have undergone over time. Though this intense level of detailed recording would be a valuable project for future scholarship,
it would not have been the best approach to answer the questions I had about these buildings, which pertained to changing users, owners, and occupants and the role these buildings have played in their neighborhoods, both historically and today.

**Existing Literature**

In the catalogue from her 1999 exhibition on Galveston corner stores, Ellen Beasley takes a moment to define her study as limited to corner structures within residential neighborhoods, excluding general stores and storefronts in commercial districts.\(^7\) She points out that, “the latter [types] have been amply covered in other publications.”\(^8\) As Beasley’s statement implies, literature on the neighborhood corner store is scarce. There is a great deal of information available on the history of commercial architecture, and a body of writing on the history of row house neighborhoods and row house architecture, but neither of these genres includes a focus on the role of the neighborhood corner store per se.

The corner store is, in part, a commercial building. It is indistinguishable from the “two-part commercial block” type of commercial building as defined by architectural historian Richard Longstreth in his book, *The Buildings of Main Street*.\(^9\) Architecturally-speaking the corner store fits into this defined commercial building type. Even so, Longstreth does not see buildings like corner stores as an element of commercial architecture. While laying out the particular characteristics that dominated commercial architecture by the mid-19th century in America, he states:

> Another key characteristic [of commercial architecture] was that commercial functions consumed, or at least dominated, adjacent land rather than sharing it with extensive residential development. Even when commercial facilities in neighborhoods contained single

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dwellings or apartments above, the character of the shopping street differed markedly from adjacent ones lined with residences alone.10

Corner stores are commercial buildings situated within otherwise residential neighborhoods and, therefore, completely outside of this definition. Longstreth's views are in line with many architectural historians who limit their studies of commercial architecture to isolated commercial areas.11

In studies of row house neighborhoods, too, the scholarship generally remains focused on the residential architectural styles and patterns and does not go into great detail on the commercial types that were often mixed into these neighborhoods.12 In Mary Ellen Hayward's and architectural historian Charles Belfoure's book on Baltimore row houses, the corner store is only referenced once.13 This reference appears in a brief note on an image of Mrs. J. Perontka's Northeastern Meat Market.14 Hayward and Belfoure note that corner row houses in Baltimore were wider and would often be “fitted out with storefront windows,” which suggests that these designs were not original to the buildings, but this hypothesis is not explored in any greater detail in the text.15

This thesis will bridge this existing gap in the scholarship by acknowledging

10 Longstreth, Main Street, 14.
11 Other sources include Longstreth's City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), and The American Department Store Transformed, 1920-1960 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), as well as Chester H. Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture (Boston: Little Brown, 1985).
14 Hayward and Belfoure, fig. 91.
15 Hayward and Belfoure, fig. 91.
the prevalence of commercial buildings within Philadelphia's residential neighborhood. The corner store is not simply an example of the “two-part commercial block” type, due to its placement within an otherwise residential block. Nor is it a row house, due to the commercial use on the first story. It is a combination of the two, a distinction that is overlooked by architectural historians and which this thesis will bring to light more clearly.

The few sources that do examine the corner store specifically tend to focus on the social history of these buildings above their architectural details. Even Beasley’s catalog for her exhibit at the National Building Museum in Washington, DC tends to focus on the social and economic roles of corner stores more than the physical fabric of the buildings. Beasley sees the significance of the corner store in the combination of public and private roles that it served “as commercial venture, family residence, neighborhood parlor, and physical anchor to the street and intersection.” Like much of the scholarship related to corner stores, this study quickly focuses in on the corner grocery as the primary historic use for these stores. Beasley describes the lives of immigrant owner-occupants of these stores, and asserts that the ability to live and work in the same location made it possible for immigrant families, as well as for women raising children alone, to make a living in this country while ensuring that there would be food on the table for their families.

While it is true that many corner stores were groceries, I will explore the many other uses that existed in Philadelphia’s corner stores, such as bars, pharmacies, bakeries, and other commercial enterprises.

17 Beasley, 9.
18 Beasley, 9.
19 Beasley, 9.
20 Beasley, 9-10.
and hardware stores, and shed some light on the assumption that the majority of these buildings were owner-occupied.

Anne Satterthwaite is another historian who considers the importance of the corner store. In her book, *Going Shopping*, Satterthwaite examines the history of shopping in the United States and the role that this activity has played in our society. She asserts that shopping was a community activity and that local stores in all areas, be they small or large, urban or rural, were not only the economic hub of their communities but also the social one.  

Satterthwaite notes the importance of shopkeepers as community leaders and links the vitality of historic urban neighborhoods with their inclusion of mixed uses, including small shops with involved, local shopkeepers. The historic place of these shops in their communities, though, was threatened in the late 19th century by industrialization. Satterthwaite uses the example of Haussmann’s late 19th century changes to the built fabric of Paris to support this argument. She quotes Philip Nord, author of *Paris Shopkeepers and the Politics of Resentment*, who argues that these efforts to remake historic cities with more open and efficient plans also destroyed smaller neighborhood establishments and the social role they played within their communities.

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22 Satterthwaite, 64, 76.

23 Satterthwaite, 66.

24 Satterthwaite, 66.

25 Satterthwaite, 66.
Like Satterthwaite, urban theorist Jane Jacobs notes the importance of diverse uses within urban neighborhoods which maintain street safety and encourage casual public contact and socializing within these primarily residential areas. Jacobs argues for the vitality of urban neighborhoods based on these traits. Arguments for these mixed uses and casual social spaces within neighborhoods did not end with Jacobs. Ray Oldenburg wrote about these neighborhoods in the 1980s and coined the term “third places” to describe their shops, bars, and cafés. Oldenburg argues that the creation of the post-war suburb led to the loss of these social spaces within American neighborhoods. As a comparison, Oldenburg looks to the taverns of European towns where residents still go to socialize on a regular basis. He believes that this opportunity for community involvement and socialization as an essential part of neighborhood life and something that is missing from American neighborhoods today.

Other studies of successful post-World War II suburban neighborhoods have argued against Oldenburg’s theories on the essential role of casual public spaces. Sidney Brower, author of *Good Neighborhoods*, argues that many individuals today expect to go outside of their neighborhoods for social relationships. He believes that for many the neighborhood is a “refuge from relationships” and that often

27 Satterthwaite, 75.
28 Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts and How They Get You Through the Day* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 14. It is important to note that none of these authors focus on the corner store directly, though it was corner stores that often brought about these mixed uses in otherwise residential neighborhoods.
29 Oldenburg, 4.
30 Oldenburg, 4-5.
31 Oldenburg, 4-5.
people are looking “for something less binding, less local, perhaps less intimate” from their daily neighborhood social interactions.\textsuperscript{33} Brower acknowledges that there are various types of neighborhoods that cater to different needs and styles of living. What he refers to as the “Center neighborhood” is a neighborhood located in and around a city’s core which is distinguished by a mix of uses and activities, dense development, and available public transit.\textsuperscript{34} Brower sees a specific place for this type of neighborhood within urban areas and distinguishes them from the suburbs which, to him, are not problematic but simply different.

Oldenburg is so distracted by the lack of third places in post-war suburban neighborhoods that he overlooks the urban neighborhoods in which some of these uses still exist.\textsuperscript{35} Whether or not Brower and Oldenburg are correct in their arguments regarding the suburbs, their writing makes it clear that the existence of these “third places” in urban residential neighborhoods is unique. Philadelphia’s historic corner stores help to create this unique space. Though their uses may have changed over time, the locus they provide for social interaction and street life in otherwise quiet, residential areas remains. For this reason continued commercial use of corner stores should be supported and encouraged. This thesis will set forth best practices for the preservation of corner stores, examining how preservation can spur investment in historic urban neighborhoods and retain the commercial uses that continue to make these areas unique and vibrant places to live.

\textsuperscript{33} Brower, 41.

\textsuperscript{34} Brower, 142-3.

\textsuperscript{35} It is important to note that Oldenburg was writing in 1989, a time when urban regeneration was only just beginning and when suburban sprawl dominated discussions about neighborhoods. Still, to argue that “third places” ceased to exist completely in America exemplifies a shortsighted element of Oldenburg’s otherwise important and valuable study.
Outline of the Argument

In the following chapters I will utilize various elements of vernacular architectural studies to gain a more detailed understanding of Philadelphia’s corner stores. I begin by examining the history of urban expansion in the United States, how advances in technology and transportation aided this expansion, how these advances influenced various industries and commercial activities, and how all of these changes affected the uses and the utility of neighborhood corner stores. I will then look at architectural studies of commercial buildings and row houses to explain the physical makeup of corner stores. Through an exploration of the results of my Philadelphia neighborhood survey, I paint a more vivid picture of what fabric and what uses exist in these neighborhoods today. Detailed archival studies of three corner stores, one from each study area, provide case studies of the actual changes in ownership, inhabitants, and use that Philadelphia’s corner stores have undergone over time. All of this information provides the base for an understanding of what is most significant about these buildings: the vibrance and vitality that their continued commercial use brings to historic neighborhoods today, as well as the extant historic fabric that visually relates the history of corner stores and their integral role in Philadelphia’s development and expansion. This understanding of significance guides recommendations for actions and programs that can help preserve these structures and their active use for future generations.
Changing Cities and the Emergence of the Neighborhood Store

Corner stores were built as a direct result of the rapid changes that were taking place in urban areas during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The many technological advances that reshaped transportation and industry in the second half of the 19th century greatly affected the American city. Urban areas expanded at rapid rates due to these changes, and the neighborhoods that developed around the city’s core marked the beginning of America’s great suburban expansion. These new neighborhoods, away from a city’s commercial center, demanded new opportunities for shopping and entertainment. The social, economic, and technological forces that shaped these neighborhoods provide a context for corner store creation and are explored in more detail below.

Urban Expansion and Philadelphia

From the middle of the 19th century into the early 20th century American cities were undergoing rapid growth and expansion. In the period between 1830 and 1860 alone, Philadelphia’s population increased more than threefold, from 161,410 to 565,529. According to the urban historian Sam Bass Warner, “social and economic heterogeneity” defined the city at this time, and social classes mixed


together in the limited developed areas of the city, generally those located within walking distance of Philadelphia’s port industries.\(^{38}\) Though various classes lived within close proximity of one another at this time, the upper class found other ways to set themselves apart from the lower classes, such as social clubs and gatherings that catered only to the wealthy and reinforced their higher social standing.\(^{39}\) This was also the age of Philadelphia’s earliest suburbs. Historian William Cutler points out that demographic density along the Delaware River port “peaked in 1830, and for the rest of the century Philadelphians spread out into the vastness of the city’s vacant territory to the north, west, and south.”\(^ {40}\) This included areas in the city west of Broad Street, such as Rittenhouse, as well as districts beyond Philadelphia’s borders including Southwark and Spring Garden (see Figures 5 and 6).\(^ {41}\)

As the city continued to grow and expand, it also experienced growing segregation based on both income and ethnicity that had not been evident up to this point.\(^ {42}\) Historian Howard Gillette believes that the foundation for this tension was laid as early as the 1840s.\(^ {43}\) The influx of Irish and German immigrants at this time pitted native-born citizens against immigrants, and many of Philadelphia’s districts contained smaller, local clusters of different ethnic groups.\(^ {44}\) The result

\(^{38}\) Warner, Private City, 50.

\(^{39}\) Stuart M. Blumin, The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 24, 26.


\(^{41}\) Cutler, 251.

\(^{42}\) Cutler, 169.


\(^{44}\) Gillette, 6-7.
Figure 5: Map of Philadelphia and its surrounding counties at the time of consolidation, 1854.

Figure 6: Map of Philadelphia in six periods of its growth.

was a series of violent riots throughout the city in 1844.\textsuperscript{45} City leaders believed part of the solution to this problem was to consolidate the city and incorporate its vast surrounding districts within its boundaries (see Figure 5).\textsuperscript{46} Consolidation took place in 1854, and the government believed that this act would replace tensions with a new, overarching political solidarity.\textsuperscript{47} While the effectiveness of this effort is disputed by historians, consolidation made it possible for Philadelphia to become a modern city.\textsuperscript{48} According to Gillette, consolidation allowed for the “dramatic imposition of centrally directed order over indigenous customs.”\textsuperscript{49} Standards were imposed upon the entire city which superseded local customs and allowed economic development to thrive.\textsuperscript{50}

The expansion of the city, pushed by consolidation, resulted in the continued growth of Philadelphia’s early suburbs. Warner asserts that the city’s earlier, mixed-class districts became a “burden” to the middle class.\textsuperscript{51} Life in these neighborhoods required a constant, watchful eye on children, the support of a strong police force, and a tolerance of differences in ethnicity and class that did not exist in insular suburban neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{52} While the upper class had been participating in social sorting since the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the newfound ability on the part of middle-

\textsuperscript{45} Gillette, 6.
\textsuperscript{46} Gillette, 3.
\textsuperscript{47} Gillette, 3.
\textsuperscript{48} Gillette, 3.
\textsuperscript{49} Gillette, 11. Gillette does not believe that consolidation helped to ease these tensions in any way. Warner asserts that consolidation actually reinforced divisions. See Warner, \textit{Private City}, pages 100 and 152.
\textsuperscript{50} Gillette, 11. An example of this is the 1858 consolidation of street names which affected 960 streets throughout Philadelphia. Ward designations also did away with ethnic divisions. Districts with internal ethnic divisions, such as Spring Garden and Kensington, had their ward boundaries defined by district borders, forcing local divisions to work together. Sections of Moyamensing were combined with others of Southwark to recreate wards 2, 3, and 4, despite clear political rivalries.
\textsuperscript{51} Warner, \textit{Private City}, 174.
\textsuperscript{52} Warner, \textit{Private City}, 174.
and upper-class families to easily move further out from the city’s center was appealing and left the poor and minority groups clustered together in the older and cheaper housing closer to the core. Neighborhoods to the west of Broad Street attracted a higher number of native-born middle- and upper-class residents while neighborhoods closer to the Delaware retained a higher number of immigrants and unskilled laborers. Still, Philadelphia’s neighborhoods remained diverse into the late 19th century. For example, as the Penn District, located to the northwest of the densely-populated Delaware port area, grew in the mid- to late 19th century, it attracted more and more members of the upper class, but by 1880 the number of artisans living in the district was still higher than that of the upper class. Even if this was a slow transition, Warner notes that “the result by 1930 was a core city of poverty, low skills, and low status surrounded by a ring of working-class and middle-class homes.”

**Advances in Transportation**

The rise of the suburbs was not simply due to an increased desire for economic and ethnic segregation, but also for a separation of commercial uses from residential areas. In the early 19th century commercial, industrial, and residential...
areas were not segregated from one another. The city was primarily a walking city and people needed to live as close to their jobs as possible. The concept of living in a primarily residential area, away from the congestion and smells of industry and commerce, was a novel possibility in cities that had always previously been traversed solely by foot. This new possibility was the result of a series of advances in transportation options, and in combination with rising populations and increases in congestion and pollution, it drove people with means out of the city center.

From 1815 to 1875, cities saw the introduction of the steam ferry, the omnibus, the commuter railroad, the horsecar, the elevated railroad, and the cable car as ways of navigating the city with greater ease. The development of Brooklyn is an excellent example of the effects of transportation options on a city. Starting in 1800, the borough began growing at a faster rate than Manhattan, and Brooklyn’s population doubled each decade for the remainder of the century. This was due to two things: a regular ferry service that began in 1814 which made transportation to Manhattan simple, and housing that was appealing to people of middling incomes, as opposed to the mansions and shanties that were available to the more traditionally stratified economic classes in downtown Manhattan. Though ferries were most popular around Manhattan, a city completely surrounded by water, they were also in operation in Philadelphia, bringing early commuters from Camden even before the Civil War, though clearly much later and on a much smaller scale than New York.

59 Jackson, 15.
60 Jackson, 20.
61 Jackson, 20.
62 Jackson, 29. These changes came to New York somewhat earlier than Philadelphia, and Stuart Blumin notes that there was greater segregation in New York than other American cities, noticeable as early as the late 18th century. See Blumin, Emergence, 26.
63 Jackson, 28-29.
64 Jackson, 33. New York’s social stratification began earlier, and the proliferation of ferries around the city in the early 19th century is an indicator of that.
The creation of the omnibus was the earliest major advancement in urban ground transportation. Considered the first form of public transportation, the omnibus was a horse-drawn stagecoach that made stops at regular intervals and picked up passengers for a fare.\textsuperscript{65} An omnibus system began running in Philadelphia in 1831.\textsuperscript{66} The omnibus was slow, uncomfortable, and contributed to the growing congestion of city streets.\textsuperscript{67} For this reason, it was replaced in the 1850s and 1860s by the more efficient horsecar system, which placed a horse-drawn carriage on rails to transport people more safely and quickly through the city.\textsuperscript{68} The invention of the horsecar did lead to some urban expansion and speculative building along its routes, but the phenomenon of rapid outward expansion and speculative construction did not truly accelerate until the introduction of the electric trolley in the 1880s.\textsuperscript{69} These technological advances supported the spread of rowhouse neighborhoods outward from Philadelphia’s urban core.

\textbf{Social Changes}

Advances in transportation affected different social classes in different ways. As Howard Gillette notes, areas such as Southwark and Northern Liberties, located directly south and north of the Delaware River respectively, retained the majority of immigrants and unskilled laborers.\textsuperscript{70} These groups could not afford the cost of the new streetcars, nor could they spare the time it would take to travel from one area of the city to another on a daily basis.\textsuperscript{71} However, early suburban neighborhoods did

\textsuperscript{65} Jackson, 34.
\textsuperscript{66} Jackson, 34.
\textsuperscript{67} Jackson, 34.
\textsuperscript{68} Jackson, 39.
\textsuperscript{69} Chester H. Liebs, \textit{Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture} (Boston: Little Brown, 1985), 11-12.
\textsuperscript{70} Gillette, 18.
\textsuperscript{71} Gillette, 18.
not only attract the middle- and upper classes. Like the influx of workers who were forced to locate to the north and south of the Delaware, new industries were also unable to locate directly within the overcrowded area around the Delaware port. In the second half of the 19th century, new factories for textile, carpet, and paper production were pushed to the outskirts of the developed city, and neighborhoods that catered to factory workers, such as Kensington, Southwark, and Manayunk, clustered around them.72

In the latter half of the 19th century, commuter rail made it possible for members of the upper class to move beyond the city limits, but even more ease of mobility came to those with means with the invention of the car. The effect of the motor vehicle on the social stratification of cities was twofold. First, cars gave members of the upper class an even greater freedom of mobility and choice in where they would live. Second, factories were also able to relocate as they were no longer dependent on the location of freight lines and could instead use trucks and roadways to transport their goods throughout the country. In both of these ways, the car allowed a much greater freedom of choice for those individuals and companies with means, and therefore changed the role of a centralized and economically powerful port city dramatically. The freedom of choice now afforded to upper class families solidified and extended the social stratification Warner suggests had taken hold in 1930s Philadelphia.73

This great shift in transportation methods was just one element of the many technological advances that changed how people lived in the second half of the 19th century and into the 20th century. The century witnessed the shift from small-scale, artisanal production to large-scale assembly line manufacturing as the means of creating goods. As historian Stuart Blumin points out, “At the beginning of the

72 Cutler, 251.
73 Cutler, 253-254.
century most domestically produced goods were sold to the public by the men who made them, and many imported goods were sold at retail by merchants who brought them from abroad.” By the middle of the century, though, artisans have become contractors and “wage-earning producers for merchant capitalists and manufacturers,” and merchants increasingly only sold their goods wholesale. This shift created a new role within the 19th century economy: the retailer. The position came with a higher level of professionalism than the early 19th century storekeeper. Retailers often specialized in one type of product. They fit into the economy in a new way as a direct result of changes in production.74

The retailer was one of many new “white collar” figures to appear in the mid- and late 19th century workforce.75 Others include office clerks, store clerks, and master craftsmen, many of whom stepped back from the creation of goods in order to manage and supervise workshops.76 This growing middle class had the means to move further from their jobs and travel to work every day on the new streetcar lines.77 These social changes solidified the stratified rings of social classes around the poor, urban core that Warner notes as being fully-formed in 1930s Philadelphia. These social changes also allowed for the formation of various working-, middle-, and upper class neighborhoods around the city’s core, and the populations of these neighborhoods required local stores to meet their needs.

75 Blumin, Hypothesis, 315.
76 Blumin, Hypothesis, 315.
77 By 1935 approximately half of all Philadelphians were traveling to work by streetcar, as opposed subway, car, bus and rail travel, which were generally closer to 5 and 10 percent, depending on the district. (See Warner, Private City, page 199, table XXII)
Advances in Commerce and Industry

In his book, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, architectural historian Chester Liebs explores a previously under-examined element of commercial architecture, the American roadside. Liebs notes that as cities expanded in the 19th century, stores logically followed residents out of the center and into the newly formed suburbs so that people would not have to travel all the way downtown to do their shopping.\(^78\) Liebs’ study focuses on the commercial shopping strips that sprang up along transportation lines in these areas, but it is important to note that these new neighborhoods also contained corner stores. Individual neighborhood stores were more convenient, especially for housewives who (in this pre-refrigeration age) needed to pick up groceries on a daily basis.\(^79\) Though neighborhood corner stores had various uses, the grocery is most readily associated with these buildings.\(^80\) An exploration of changes in the grocery industry from the 19th to the 20th century helps one understand how these structures were used and how their importance changed over time.

Before the refrigerator became a common household appliance and before the car allowed for the easy transportation of bulk items from store to home, people shopped for groceries on a daily basis.\(^81\) As such, proximity to grocery stores was essential.\(^82\) Grocery shopping in the 19th century involved visiting multiple shops for different items, further complicating this daily process.\(^83\) Grocers carried canned and dried goods, while fresh produce, dairy products, meat, and fish were all sold

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\(^78\) Liebs, 12.

\(^79\) Sewell, 56.

\(^80\) The few sources that focus primarily on corner stores also concentrate on the grocery as the primary business in these establishments. For example, see Beasley, 9.

\(^81\) Beasley, 9.

\(^82\) Beasley, 9.

\(^83\) Liebs, 117-118.
separately. Grocery stores were often located within residential neighborhoods. In her book, *Women and the Everyday City*, the historian Jessica Ellen Sewell focuses on grocery work, be it sales or ownership, as one of the few respectable trades for women in late 19th and early 20th century San Francisco. Ninety percent of female grocers lived at the same address as their stores, allowing them to remain at home while also earning a living. Sewell notes that in a 1911 San Francisco directory there were 1,255 grocers listed, as compared to only 380 butchers, 250 bakeries, and 161 clothing stores. Groceries were spread throughout the city, and often these businesses were located in residential areas, while the specialty stores tended to locate on commercial streets. These facts support Sewell’s argument for the primacy of grocery uses in neighborhood corner stores at the turn of the 20th century and explain why the grocery is so often associated with urban neighborhood corner stores.

The small, independent grocery of the 19th and early 20th century was greatly changed by the introduction of chain stores to the industry. Liebs noted that many groceries relocated from the centers of cities to the outskirts, moving their stores into the larger buildings that could only be constructed along new commercial corridors. In the early 20th century groceries were expanding to include not only canned and dried goods but also meat, produce, and baked goods. One of the main problems with small, independent groceries was that the system made basic food

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84 Liebs, 117-118.
85 Sewell, 56.
86 Sewell, 56.
87 Sewell, 56.
88 Sewell, 56.
89 Sewell, 56.
90 Liebs, 123.
91 Liebs, 121.
staples extremely expensive for families.\(^9^2\) For the average family in the 1920s food costs were higher than rent or mortgage payments and made up one third of the total family budget.\(^9^3\) The grocery industry employed an extremely high percentage of the population, but it also made basic health and nutrition a real struggle for families through high prices and the complexity of obtaining fresh meat, fish, dairy products, and produce.\(^9^4\)

The first major step forward for the grocery industry came with the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, or the A&P, grocery chain. The company realized that lower prices brought people into the store, and so they were the first to sell groceries based on volume to turn a profit.\(^9^5\) Through a chain of A&P stores they were able to utilize many cost-saving tactics unavailable to individual groceries such as brokered deals with wholesalers based on volume, chain-wide sales on specific goods, and cooperative advertising.\(^9^6\) In his book on the A&P Mark Levinson points out, “The economist Joseph Schumpeter coined the phrase ‘creative destruction’ in 1942 to describe the painful process by which innovation and technological advance make an industry more efficient while leaving older, less adaptable businesses by the wayside.”\(^9^7\) Unable to compete with the chains, many independent groceries became A&P groceries.\(^9^8\) Others joined together locally, creating smaller cooperatives in

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92 Marc Levinson, *The Great A&P and the Struggle for Small Business in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011). 8. Levinson, like Sewell, comments on the proliferation of small groceries as late as the 1920s. In 1926 Kansas City, not a very densely populated city at the time, there were 30 food markets per square mile, or “literally grocery stores on every corner.”

93 Levinson, 8.

94 Levinson, 7.

95 Levinson, 8.

96 Levinson, 8.

97 Levinson, 9.

98 Levinson, 9.
order to compete with the larger chains.\textsuperscript{99} These early changes affected many corner store owners, but by making these changes in ownership or management structure, neighborhood corner stores were able to remain in business.

The Piggly Wiggly market, which opened in Memphis in 1919, was the first self-service grocery shopping system in the country, and its creation brought intense changes to the industry that would have a more serious effect on the small, urban corner store.\textsuperscript{100} Self-service shopping reduced the number of clerks needed in stores.\textsuperscript{101} As clerks were often male, this system was especially popular during World War I when many young men had to leave home to fight and stores were subsequently left without enough help.\textsuperscript{102} With new floor plans consisting of multiple aisles, as well as the newly increased inventories discussed above, these stores needed more space. Many groceries along commercial strips expanded their smaller stores by purchasing adjoining shops and removing the party walls, creating one much larger store.\textsuperscript{103} This, though, was not an option for corner stores within otherwise residential neighborhoods. Unable to expand, some proprietors changed over to liquor sales after the end of prohibition in 1933, a business that required less physical space, while others simply shut their doors.\textsuperscript{104} The increased abandonment of corner stores as groceries was a real threat to this type of building, leaving many stores vacant until a new use could be found.

Another widespread use of neighborhood commercial structures was the corner bar. The saloon was the most prevalent type of bar from the mid-19th century

\textsuperscript{100} Liebs, 119.
\textsuperscript{101} Liebs, 119.
\textsuperscript{102} Liebs, 119.
\textsuperscript{103} Liebs, 123.
\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Half a Day on Sunday}, 5.
up to Prohibition in 1920. The urban saloon evolved, appropriately enough, out of the grocery store. Certain groceries would sell tobacco and liquor out of a back room that would often become a makeshift and illegal barroom at certain hours of the day. These stores were known as grog shops in America. The historian Christine Sismondo explains that eventually the sale of liquor and tobacco would overtake that of groceries. At this point many grog shops would do away with grocery sales entirely and convert the business into a full-service saloon. Both Sismondo and historian Jon Kingsdale note that saloons often located on corners, in urban and suburban neighborhoods, and the majority of blocks had at least one neighborhood saloon.

There was a wide variety of urban saloons in the late 19th and early 20th century that served various social classes. Many of the neighborhood saloons, though, served the working class. Saloons were also often divided along ethnic lines, each one serving a different immigrant community and preserving the customs and languages those groups brought with them to America. The local corner bar

105 Christine Sismondo, America Walks Into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies and Grog Shops (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 102. Up until this point in American history, the tavern was the most prevalent drinking establishment. The tavern served as the backdrop for some of the most important meetings and discussions of the Revolution.
106 Sismondo, 105.
107 Sismondo, 105.
108 Sismondo, 105.
109 Sismondo, 105.
110 Sismondo, 105.
112 Sismondo, 111, 114.
113 Kingsdale, 484.
114 Kingsdale, 485.
in a working-class neighborhood served as a community center. Saloon-keepers were often seen as leaders in the community, and the saloon was one of the few places that locals could go to use a telephone, as well as finding out game scores, picking up mail, and cashing checks.

While the neighborhood saloon was an important community center, it also served to reinforce the ethnic divisions that were so prevalent in urban areas and that led to Philadelphia’s 1854 consolidation. Saloons also reinforced gender divisions and inequities that were becoming more prevalent with the suffrage movement in the early 20th century. Working women often took advantage of the free lunch that was traditionally offered by saloons at the time, but the neighborhood working-class saloon culture was dominated by men. The urge to get men back into the home, combined with desires on the part of more traditional Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Americans to have immigrants assimilate, made the corner bar a target of reform. In 1893 the saloon became the primary focus of the temperance movement. When Prohibition took full effect in January of 1920, saloons were shuttered. Speakeasies did come about to replace them, but this transition was slow. Also, with the high price of illegally-imported liquor, most of these establishments catered only to the upper class. The local corner bar was either left vacant or saw a shift in use. This customary use of neighborhood corner bars...
stores was absent from the urban landscape for thirteen years, but at the end of
Prohibition many bars obtained legitimate liquor licenses and reopened their
doors.125

20th Century Threats to the Corner Store

While advances in commerce and political pressures related to prohibition
had varying effects on the vitality of neighborhood corner stores, historian Ann
Satterthwaite notes that an even greater threat to this type of commercial building
came with urban renewal.126 In addition to the challenges of the general volatility
of retailing and the severe demographic, economic, and social changes that urban
areas faced after World War II, in the 1950s corner stores were now facing the
threat of the physical bulldozing of urban neighborhoods that were seen as blighted
and rundown.127 In her examination of corner stores at this time, Satterthwaite
notes Jane Jacobs’s study of Greenwich Village as well as Herbert Gans’s research
on the West end in Boston.128 Both authors fought urban renewal’s destruction of
neighborhoods. They argued that, far from being blighted and rundown, urban
buildings’ mixed uses and commercial, social spaces actually helped them to be
lively and thriving places.129 This specific character is unique to urban residential
neighborhoods and sets them apart from city centers, suburbs, and small towns.

Another more recent threat to the corner store is the franchise store.
Franchises have grown to dominate most commercial markets over the course of
the 20th century.130 For example, hardware stores and general merchandise stores,

125 Christie Balka, urban historian, e-mail message to author, March 19, 2012.
126 Satterthwaite, 75.
127 Satterthwaite, 75.
128 Satterthwaite, 75.
129 Satterthwaite, 75.
130 Satterthwaite, 67-69.
which often had fewer than ten employees in the 1950s, primarily employed 20 or more people by the end of the 20th century. Over the same time period, the number of stores themselves dropped by half. Pharmacies, too, have seen the total number of employees in the industry double with only a small increase in the number of stores. These statistics imply that the stores themselves are becoming larger. During the second half of the 20th century, smaller stores also faced rising rents, insurance, and pricing. These difficulties became more severe once small stores began competing with larger chains that, like larger grocery chains, utilize volume to broker deals with manufacturers and organize cooperative sales and advertising. Just as was true for chain groceries, chain stores in general often require specific floor plans and layouts that do not fit physically within the confines of historic structures. When these stores replace smaller, independent stores in urban neighborhoods they cannot move into the historic buildings that many of these independent stores inhabited and must instead demolish and build new or move to other areas, leaving corner commercial buildings vacant. This problem, compounded by the urban disinvestment of the urban renewal period, left an even greater number of corner stores vacant and neglected by the end of the 20th century.

Conclusions

The United States underwent rapid changes in the 19th century, and these changes greatly affected how people lived. As populations grew and people with means moved further and further from the city’s core, services inevitably followed.

131 Satterthwaite, 67.
132 Satterthwaite, 67.
133 Satterthwaite, 67.
134 Satterthwaite, 69.
135 Satterthwaite, 67.
136 Satterthwaite, 67.
Due to the lack of refrigeration in homes along with neighborhood-based social circles, many of these services, such as groceries, bakeries, butchers, and corner bars, were located on every corner throughout these neighborhoods. This need for extremely localized services is the historical backdrop that created the corner store. Advances and changes to commercial activities that were housed in these stores forced many of them to close or, more often, to change use. The creation of chain stores throughout the 20th century was a greater threat to the corner store, as most traditional uses of these stores now have larger inventories and space requirements that are beyond the capacity of smaller stores. Despite all of these threats and the more holistic urban problems of white flight and urban renewal, corner stores and the mixed uses they house still serve an essential and unique role in urban neighborhoods, and this role should be supported by preservation and economic programs that will help them thrive.
Corner Store Architecture and the Philadelphia Neighborhood Survey

Philadelphia’s corner stores are semi-commercial buildings within an otherwise residential setting. To understand the corner store architecturally, it is essential to understand its roots in commercial architecture and in row house design. Extant commercial fabric is a visual clue to the history of corner stores in today’s urban landscape, and it is part of what makes these buildings significant. Identifying these architectural elements is an important step in the overall understanding and preservation of corner stores.

Studies of Commercial Architecture

In his book, *The Buildings of Main Street*, the architectural historian Richard Longstreth outlines and analyzes an array of commercial building types. Of the categories Longstreth defines, Philadelphia’s corner stores fit neatly within the “two-part commercial block” type. This commercial building type is identified by two distinct façade sections, the ground floor and the upper stories, which are clearly divided from one another visually (see Figure 7).¹³⁷ This separation is accomplished through a cornice that divides the first and upper stories, and the first-story storefront elements, such as large, double doors and picture windows which stand in stark contrast to the smaller, double-hung windows above. The two-part commercial block can contain a variety of uses on all floors, but Longstreth notes that the earliest iterations were house-over-shop buildings with commercial uses on the ground floor and residential uses above.¹³⁸ The author traces this “shop-house” form back as far as Roman antiquity and notes that in Colonial America it was common

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Figure 7: Two distinct façade sections at 1613 Ritner Street.

*Photograph by the author.*
for business transactions to take place on the ground floor of residences, though the distinct architectural form that Longstreth explores was not prevalent in America until the mid-19th century.\textsuperscript{139}

Longstreth points out that in these early examples of shop-houses commercial activities took place within purpose-built residential buildings. This may not have been true in every case, though. Architectural historian Bernard Herman's study of early American town houses reveals that space for ground floor commercial use was built into the program of these structures during the design and construction phases.\textsuperscript{140} Though commercial uses may have been planned for some shop-houses in Colonial America, it was not until the late 18th century that architects begin designing commercial structures that expressed their intended use on the exterior and not until the early 19th century that these designs become prevalent.\textsuperscript{141} The façades of earlier commercial structures were visually indistinguishable from those of residential structures, and commercial structures were only differentiated through small signs from domestic buildings.\textsuperscript{142} As commerce increased after the Revolutionary War, people began building new buildings and also retrofitting older ones to clarify the distinction between residential and commercial use.\textsuperscript{143} As retail became increasingly important to American identity over time, commercial buildings increasingly expressed their intended purpose to the public through specific architectural elements, such as large plate glass windows to display

\textsuperscript{139} Longstreth, \textit{Main Street}, 24.


\textsuperscript{141} Upton, 151; and Longstreth, \textit{Main Street}, 12.

\textsuperscript{142} Longstreth, \textit{Main Street}, 24.; Herman, 104, 175. The Alexander Perronneau Tenement in Charleston and the Widow Eberth house in Philadelphia exemplify the visual ambiguity of early American house-over-shop buildings. It is not at all clear from the façades of these buildings that they had any use other than purely residential. It is through examinations of specific floor plans and actual uses that Herman sees the targeted design of these buildings for partial commercial use.

\textsuperscript{143} Longstreth, \textit{Main Street}, 24.
products and first-story cornices to visually divide ground floor commercial uses from the residential above.\textsuperscript{144}

\textbf{Studies of Row House Architecture}

The design of neighborhood corner stores employs many of the visual elements that define Longstreth's "two-part commercial block" type. These buildings are set apart from other shop-house structures by their location on otherwise residential blocks in predominantly residential neighborhoods. While scholars acknowledge that these interspersed commercial uses were common practice in urban neighborhoods all over the country, major studies of row house architecture often focus solely on residential design.\textsuperscript{145} For example, in his essay, "The Philadelphia Row House," architectural historian William Murtaugh examines four types of historic row house plans utilized in the city.\textsuperscript{146} His brief study does not stray beyond purely residential structures. There are more detailed studies of row house neighborhoods in Philadelphia, New York and Baltimore, but they all focus primarily on residential construction.\textsuperscript{147} Studies of Baltimore's 19th century row house neighborhoods are the most detailed and applicable to a study of corner

\textsuperscript{144} Upton, 151, 153; and Longstreth, \textit{Main Street}, 13.

\textsuperscript{145} For a list of sources see the Introduction of this thesis.


\textsuperscript{147} Murtaugh, 9. Murtaugh's study of purely residential types makes sense due to the goals of his short essay. It is also important to note that Murtaugh is looking at early 19\textsuperscript{th} century buildings. As was evident from both Longstreth's understanding of a distinct commercial architecture coming about later in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century as well as Herman's observations that earlier commercial buildings were not obviously stylistically distinct from residential structures, these houses might have held commercial uses but may not have had obvious architectural distinctions.
stores, though they do not reference these stores in detail directly.\textsuperscript{148} Baltimore’s pattern of row house construction is similar to Philadelphia and is a useful reference when studying Philadelphia’s neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{149} In her exploration of Baltimore’s 19\textsuperscript{th} century row houses, architectural historian Mary Ellen Hayward makes several references to the similarities between Philadelphia and Baltimore’s vernacular styles of row house construction.\textsuperscript{150}

Gridiron plans, those which divided expanding urban areas into uniform blocks and lots, were popular in most American cities.\textsuperscript{151} Uniform lots made deed descriptions and land sales simple and straightforward, as well as bringing regularity and order to rapidly expanding urban areas.\textsuperscript{152} The ubiquitous subdivision of larger blocks into smaller, identical lots shaped the city’s form.\textsuperscript{153} Architectural historian Dell Upton examines how gridiron urban expansion also directly affected the fabric built upon it. He notes, “As streets were made uniform, so were the buildings that lined them.”\textsuperscript{154} Early building traditions tend to remain dominant over

\textsuperscript{148} Donna Rilling’s book, \textit{Making Houses, Crafting Capitalism}, focuses on early speculative row construction in Philadelphia and provides great background for the eventual construction of the neighborhoods studied here, but the book leaves off in 1850, where this thesis really begins. As such, the writings about architectural styles in Baltimore, which date to the period focused on here, are most the most relevant sources for understanding the stylistic development of these buildings from the 1850s onward.


\textsuperscript{150} Hayward, 33, 35.


\textsuperscript{152} Cullingworth and Caves, 45.


\textsuperscript{154} Upton, 3.
time. As cities continued to expand, so did the grid and row house construction. For these reasons many different neighborhoods in Philadelphia built in different decades all contain similar blocks, lots, and houses.

The construction of speculative rows began in Philadelphia around 1750. By the early 19th century it was common to see block-long rows of identical houses in the city, the design of which were influenced by similar designs that were made popular in London, Paris, and Dublin. The earliest complete and identical row was Sansom Street Row, designed by Thomas Carstairs in 1800. Identical, speculative rows continued to be constructed more and more after this point, and the high-style designs for the upper class influenced construction in working-class neighborhoods. Hayward explains, “In Baltimore and Philadelphia the row house was the predominant form of building, and small working-class row houses were developed from these grander prototypes.” Shop-house buildings in row house neighborhoods have distinct architectural details that set them apart from their purely residential counterparts, but all of the buildings in these speculative rows were constructed of the same materials and in the same styles. As such, the upper stories of corner store properties are often identical in style and construction to the residential buildings they adjoin. Hayward notes small changes in the style of Baltimore’s row houses over time, such as the transition from the prevalence of Greek Revival detailing to that of the Italianate after the Civil War. She also notes

155 Moudon, 133.
156 Moudon, 133.
157 Hayward, 35.
158 Murtaugh, 12-13.
159 Murtaugh, 13.
160 Hayward, 35.
161 Hayward, 33.
162 Hayward, 54-56.
the transition in the 1880s from wooden, machine-cut cornices to the dominance of pressed metal cornices.163 The cornices on vernacular, working-class row houses were intricately detailed, but made of inexpensive sawn wood or pressed metal.164 This made the houses less expensive to build but still “related visually to their fashionable counterparts” in upper-class neighborhoods.165 These trends and stylistic changes, though observed in Baltimore, aid an understanding the way Philadelphia’s row house neighborhoods changed over time.

Traditional elements of the corner store

The treatment of the first story of these buildings sets them apart from the rest of the row and fits them into the “two-part commercial block” building type. A typical residential row house in Philadelphia has a front-facing entrance that is raised several feet from ground level and double-hung windows that are similar to those of the upper stories (see Figure 8). By comparison, corner stores have canted corner entrances that are closer to, or often at, ground level and larger, plate glass windows (see Figure 8). Lower entrances made stores easier to access and decreased the visual divide between the public space of the street and the privately-owned interior space of the store. The windows were subsequently also situated closer to eye level. Their placement allowed for the open display of goods for sale, and the increased availability of larger pieces of glass further minimized the divide between the street and the store. These important differences made corner stores more inviting and open to the public than the strictly residential buildings, whose heightened entrances and windows aided privacy from passersby.

The typical corner store found in mid-19th to early 20th century row house

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163 Hayward, 58.
164 Hayward, 58.
165 Hayward, 58.
Figure 8: Comparison of corner store façade to adjacent residential row houses at 1713 Wolf Street.

*Photograph by the author.*
neighborhoods has specific character defining elements that set it apart from the residential buildings around it. The stores often had a canted corner entrance that was angled at 45 degrees from the façade to face the corner directly (see Figure 9). The remaining stories cantilever over the entrance, forming a small covered porch above the doorway. The corner of the porch ceiling was sometimes supported by a cast iron column (see Figures 10 and 11). The original storefront doors were generally wooden double doors with a transom window above (see Figure 9). The doors and transom window were framed with decorative, carved wood moldings, and the whole entrance was often flanked by decorative wooden or cast iron piers or pilasters (see Figure 9).

Large, plate glass windows flanked the store’s entryway (see Figures 9 and 12). The windows were general raised a few feet from street level with bulkhead panels below, with transom windows above the larger plate glass windows, often comprised of divided lights and sometimes operable, to allow for ventilation. The storefront area was demarcated by a pressed metal cornice that mimicked the larger and more detailed cornice along the building’s roof, and a simple frieze sometimes added a more highly-stylized element to the cornice (see Figure 13). The front and side storefront façades were generally identical in terms of window placement and

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166 Parts of this physical description were influenced by the 2009 studio report on Philadelphia’s historic Fairhill neighborhood. The studio group highlighted the prevalence of these structures within Fairhill and highlighted these buildings as potential contributors to the revitalization of the area. Libbie Hawes, “Fairhill’s Historic Corner Stores,” in Leveraging a Community’s Historic Assets to Meet its Contemporary Needs: A Preservation Plan for Fairhill (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2009), 92, 95, accessed March 21, 2012, http://www.design.upenn.edu/files/Pages_from_2009_Fairhill_Studio_Final_Report-Part_3.pdf.

167 Today many of these columns are missing. It is likely therefor that these columns were merely decorative, as the cantilevered portion of the buildings are generally not bowing or collapsed. It is possible that many corner stores did not ever have a corner column, though the column is still today a noticeable feature. This will be discussed in more detail below.

168 This feature is quickly lost on corner stores as single doors are often seen as more practical and easier to operate.
Figure 9: Example of a traditional historic storefront with canted corner entrance, double wood doors with glass transom above, and carved wooden piers at 2451 Fairmount Avenue.

*Photograph by the author.*
Figures 10 and 11: Cast iron column details at 200 Queen Street and 701 South 2nd Street.

*Photographs by the author.*
Figure 12: Detail of plate glass window with divided transom above and historic wooden moldings at 2551 South Chadwick Street.  
*Photograph by the author.*

Figure 13: Detail of stylized pressed-metal storefront cornice at 1713 Wolf Street.  
*Photograph by the author.*
size, though in certain neighborhoods the secondary façade was minimized or done away with completely (see Figure 14). Storefronts were further distinguished by applied elements such as retractable awnings over the windows and signage that was applied to the façade or would hang on metal bars and project out from the building to make the building more noticeable to customers (see Figures 15 and 16).

The similarities in many of these historic storefronts can be explained by the rise of prefabricated façades that were available for purchase from catalogs and salesmen (see Figure 17). Prefabricated cast iron façades were prevalent in America from the mid-19th century onward. This widespread availability was due to technological advances in cast-iron, which made architectural cast-iron readily available, and in the glass industry, which resulted in larger and larger panes of glass to be manufactured and be made affordable. These storefronts could be inserted into older residential buildings, used to update existing commercial fronts, or utilized in new construction. Examples of these complete fronts can be seen in George L. Mesker & Company's 1904 catalog of store fronts. Corner storefronts much like those seen in Philadelphia's neighborhoods today are among the various options offered (see Figure 18). The catalog differentiates between the heavier iron columns, sills, cornices, and window caps that could be inserted into brick buildings and the sheet metal fronts that were meant to cover wooden framing. The former were

171 Dilts and Black, 74-75.
Figure 14: Fairmount storefront with secondary façade eliminated at 2427 Brown Street.

Photograph by the author.
Figure 15: Corner store at 6001 Upland Street in 1952.

*Photograph courtesy of PhillyHistory.org, a project of the Philadelphia Department of Records.*

Figure 16: Sweettooth at 630 South 4th Street with colorful awnings and signage in 2012.

*Photograph by the author.*
Figure 17: Cover of the George L. Mesker & Co. catalogue of storefronts.

*Photograph by the author.*

Figure 18: Example of a prefabricated corner storefront from the Mesker catalogue.

*Photograph by the author.*
strong enough to be load-bearing while the latter served only aesthetic purposes.\textsuperscript{173}

Row houses and corner stores are similarly alike in plan. Corner properties, be they residences or stores, were able to maintain their full façade width from front to back (see Figure 19). Generally the rear portion of row houses must be recessed to allow light to enter the central rooms (see Figure 20). This also created more room for the family to live with wider rear rooms. Historic fire insurance surveys show that most corner stores contained the shop in the front room with private dining and kitchen areas in the rear of the first story divided by a stairwell or partition wall (see Figure 21). This plan resembles those for row houses with the entrance opening directly into the parlor, as opposed to a side hall that separated the entryway from the parlor area. In this way many of these corner structures could easily be interchanged between commercial and residential use. These buildings, though they have minor intrinsic design differences, are really flexible in plan, and this flexibility supported their proliferation in Philadelphia’s row house neighborhoods.

Survey Findings

Much of the historic fabric of these stores has been lost today, but there are many stores that retain a few extant elements of their original storefront design. Close examination of a few of Philadelphia’s historic neighborhoods brings to light where this fabric exists and to what extent, as well as an overview of what uses inhabit these stores today and how that relates to, or diverges from, a historical understanding of these structures. Though each neighborhood contains many of

Figure 19: Areal configuration of 1714 to 1724 Wolf Street. Interior properties must be recessed while corner properties are not.

Figure 20: Murtaugh's City house plan example. The rear portion of many row houses must be recessed to allow light to enter these rooms.


Figure 21: Fire insurance plan of 1713 Wolf Street. The plan is similar to that of Murtaugh's City house, but due to its corner location, the rear portion does not have to be recessed. Light enters from the Colorado Street windows.

*Plan by the author, based on Franklin Fire Insurance Company of Philadelphia, Survey No. 73758, 1898.*
the same extant architectural elements, each was built up in a different time period and has developed differently due to its unique situation within the greater changes and movements that have affected Philadelphia’s neighborhoods since the city’s founding (see Figures 22 and 23).

**Queen Village / Southwark**

Southwark, which corresponds roughly to today’s Queen Village neighborhood, was, according to Kenneth Jackson, Philadelphia’s first suburb.\(^\text{174}\) It was originally settled by the Swedish, but English settlers began buying up land in the area as early as 1700.\(^\text{175}\) Southwark was popular due to its location on the Delaware just south of the city’s southern border.\(^\text{176}\) The neighborhood was well developed by the mid-18th century, mostly by artisans and people who worked at the Delaware Port.\(^\text{177}\) Unlike today, 18th and early 19th century suburbs were not designed to serve the wealthy.\(^\text{178}\) Before the many new forms of transportation discussed in the previous chapter came into being, wealthy members of society lived within the city’s core with easy access to their jobs while the poor were forced to live further out and travel greater distances to work.\(^\text{179}\)

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\(^{174}\) Jackson, 16.


\(^{176}\) Tinkcom, 327.

\(^{177}\) Tinkcom, 327; Jackson, 16.

\(^{178}\) Though the practice of having scattered dwellings outside of city centers, especially as estate homes for the wealthy, can be dated back to ancient civilizations, Kenneth Jackson limits his definition of suburbanization to the specific process of rapid growth around the immediate edges of densely populated urban centers. This specific process dates to the early 19th century in the United States and Great Britain, and involved residents commuting daily to the center for work along with a growth rate that exceeded that of the city center. It is with this definition in mind that suburbs are discussed here. See Jackson, 13.

\(^{179}\) Jackson, 18.
Key

- Fairmount Study Area
- Queen Village Study Area
- South Philadelphia Study Area

Figure 22: 1854 map with study area locations.

Figure 23: Map of Philadelphia in six periods of its growth, with study area locations.

grew and spread to new streetcar suburbs over the course of the 19th century, Southwark continued to attract members of the working class and immigrants. These groups generally could not afford the cost of streetcars or the time it would take to commute an even greater distance to their jobs from the newly-forming and more remote suburban areas.\textsuperscript{180} Southwark was home to a relatively high working-class population throughout its long history as compared to other areas of the city, and the ethnic and racial backgrounds of these people would have changed regularly as new immigrant populations came to Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{181} These changing populations and inhabitants affected the character of the neighborhood and the stores that the residents owned and ran.

Today house heights and decorative elements in Queen Village vary, even house to house, due to the relatively long period of time over which the neighborhood developed. Many late 19th and early 20th century suburbs were comprised of subdivided blocks in uniform lots with speculative rows constructed in the same style and at the same time.\textsuperscript{182} The area abuts the active historic commercial corridor on South Street and contains commercial blocks along portions of 3rd, 4th, and Bainbridge Streets. Despite this wealth of economic options within the study area, the survey showed that residential blocks still often had corner properties that were either in commercial use or had many extant architectural elements of historic corner stores. It is likely that many of these storefronts were inserted into older residential structures, as many of these buildings were constructed before the early to mid-19th century when designed retail architecture came into its own and the shop-house style was prevalent.\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{180} Gillette, 18.
\textsuperscript{181} Blumin, \textit{Emergence}, 24, 43.
\textsuperscript{182} Hayward, 35; and Moudon, xvii. An extreme example of this is found in South Philadelphia, which will be examined later in this chapter.
\textsuperscript{183} Longstreth, \textit{Main Street}, 12, 24.
Queen Village’s historic corner stores show a high level of material integrity based on the above description of standard historic corner store elements. Of the 188 properties surveyed over half showed signs of having been a corner store at one point in the building’s history.\textsuperscript{184} I found a strong sampling of extant cornices, the majority of which are metal, as well as a good number of cast-iron columns and glass-filled transoms over the entrances. Extant storefront windows with frames that did not appear to be more recent replacements were much lower in number, especially when compared to the surviving cornices above them.\textsuperscript{185}

While Queen Village has retained a good deal of historic fabric in its historic corner stores, the neighborhood has also maintained a high level of commercial uses for these properties (see Figure 24). Some of this is supported by the commercial corridors that exist in and around the area, but many of these active stores exist on otherwise residential blocks. Though there is a good mix of uses in the area, the majority of these stores today are shops and restaurants (see Figure 25). The vast majority of active commercial buildings in the study area are shops, many of which are related to the historic “fabric row” on 4th Street between Bainbridge and Catharine Streets.\textsuperscript{186} The next most common use is restaurants, and there are also a number of medical offices, cafés, and dry cleaners. The more traditional corner store uses of groceries, bakeries, hardware stores, pharmacies, and corner bars do exist, but they are in the minority. Considering the clear changes in use that these buildings have undergone over time, it is all-the-more impressive that the area

\textsuperscript{184} The survey included more overt indications, such as first-story cornices and pressed-metal columns, as well as more subtle clues, such as entrances at or close to grade, canted corners, and first-story infill, especially infill that was only within the storefront area, as opposed to the entire first story. See Appendices A and B for more information on the survey and its results.

\textsuperscript{185} The level of intervention here varies greatly. Some storefronts have large and open contemporary storefront windows while others, often residences, have severely decreased the openings for the sake of privacy.

\textsuperscript{186} See Appendix B: Select Survey Data.
Figure 24: Map of corner property uses in the Queen Village study area.

*Map by the author.*
Figure 25: Map of commercial uses in the Queen Village study area.

*Map by the author.*
contains the level of material integrity that it does.

Fairmount / Penn District

The Penn District, the area of the present-day Fairmount Neighborhood, developed much later than Southwark and fits more readily within patterns of suburban expansion in late 19th century American cities. As the district grew, it attracted inhabitants from many social classes and is an example of the socioeconomic mixing that was still evident in Philadelphia’s suburbs into the late 19th century. The area attracted more proprietary workers as it grew, but by 1880 artisans still outnumbered them. The Penn District is marked by the standardized lots and speculative rows that would dominate urban expansion in America at this time, and historic maps show that corner stores and bars opened up almost as quickly as parcels could be subdivided, developed, and sold. These buildings were constructed in the latter half of the 19th century and were used as commercial properties at least within a few years of their construction date. These corner properties were most likely designed to express their commercial use on the exterior.

Like Queen Village, of the 174 properties surveyed in Fairmount, around half show signs of having the physical characteristics of corner stores. Unlike Queen Village, though, with its many commercial corridors and history of mixed-uses, Fairmount has always been a more thoroughly residential area. Commercial

187 In 1850 Southwark had 38,799 inhabitants while the Penn District only had 8,939 (see Gillette, 6).
188 Gillette, 18.
189 Gillette, 18.
191 Longstreth, Main Street, 24.
buildings mainly appear on the corners of major intersections within the neighborhood while often the intersections of smaller streets and alleys contain few, if any, buildings that show extant commercial fabric. One third of these properties have storefronts with shortened sides. These are storefronts that spanned the entire front of the structure but only extended a short distance along the side, usually to the same point as the edge of the canted entrance (see Figure 14). The storefronts with partial sides were often located on the minor streets and alleys where the side of the building was less visible and a side picture window would have attracted few customers.

Fairmount today is a predominantly residential neighborhood. Over two-thirds of the properties with corner store characteristics have been converted to residential use. For this reason extant historic materials are less intact. A good number of properties have canted corner entrances, but far fewer have extant cornices. 192 Interestingly, one third of these cornices appear to be constructed of wood, predating the majority metal cornices found in Queen Village and perhaps existing from the buildings’ original construction. 193 As with Queen Village, few properties retain storefront windows with their historic frames, and more than half of the historic commercial buildings contain brick and stucco infill around the corner area. Of the few operating commercial properties, over a third of them are restaurants and corner bars (see Figures 26 and 27). 194 There are a number of medical offices in the area, but no other use dominates by any means. There are a few pharmacies and corner delis, but the traditional use that has stood the test of time in this area is the corner bar. Fairmount residents are within a short walk or

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192 See Appendix B: Select Survey Data.
193 Hayward, 58.
194 Most corner bars in gentrified areas such as Fairmount offer extensive menus and a wide variety of beverages, making them less distinguishable from restaurants. See Appendix B: Select Survey Data.
Figure 26: Map of corner property uses in the Fairmount study area.

*Map by the author.*
Figure 27: Map of commercial uses in the Fairmount study area.

*Map by the author.*
drive to large grocery stores and chain pharmacies, but having a local bar on the corner still serves a need in this area.

South Philadelphia / Passyunk Township

South Philadelphia is a peninsula. The areas along the Delaware River and, later, the Schuykill River attracted sailors, longshoremen, artisans, and mill hands early in the 19th century. Development beyond the port was slow, though, and the area of Passyunk Township, on the west side of Broad Street and inland from both rivers, did not become densely populated until the early 20th century. Warner points out that South Philadelphia was also the main point of entry for poor immigrants and formerly enslaved African Americans and that the nature of the area as a peninsula meant that members of the middle class were not passing through the area on their daily commutes as was true of some other predominantly working-class suburbs. Italians, African Americans, and Eastern European Jews made up much of the early 20th century population of South Philadelphia.

The insular nature of this area can still be seen today in high number of corner stores that are still in active use (over one third of the corner properties in the study) often with the same types of businesses that would have been common in the early 20th century (see Figures 28 and 29). There is a good spread of uses as well. Offices, shops, and salons and barbers dominate, but there are also multiple groceries, delis and bakeries, as well as a butcher and a hardware shop. Though there are a large number of extant canted entrances, other historic architectural

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196 From 1820 to 1830, Passyunk Township was one of only three townships that decreased in population, and in 1850 the township only had 1,607 residents (see Krulikowski, 196 and Gillette, 6).
199 See Appendix B: Select Survey Data.
Figure 28: Map of corner property uses in the South Philadelphia study area.

*Map by the author.*
Figure 29: Map of commercial uses in the South Philadelphia study area.

*Map by the author.*
elements such as cornices and columns are rare.\textsuperscript{200} The majority of extant transom windows over entrances have been filled with personal air conditioning units, and almost two thirds of the buildings appear to have first-story infill of some kind covering historic materials below. Though traditional uses thrive in this neighborhood, certain visual symbols of the historic corner store have been lost almost completely.

Conclusions

These three neighborhoods developed under different circumstances and at different points in Philadelphia’s history, yet they all contained corner stores. This fact speaks to the need that these stores filled in the early Philadelphia suburbs. South Philadelphia has seen a serious loss of extant fabric, but the intent of these stores, their service to the immediate community, is alive and thriving. While many of the uses in Queen Village’s stores have changed, the corner commercial properties are also still serving the needs of that community as it exists today. In Fairmount it is clear that the demand for residential properties close to the city’s core has surpassed the demand for commerce on many corners. Still, the extant fabric here speaks to the neighborhood’s history and development which happened in line with greater trends of urban expansion during the second half of the 19th century in this country.

Physically these buildings have specific architectural elements that define them, even in areas where a good deal of historic fabric has been lost. Canted corner entrances at or near grade, first-story cornices, cast-iron columns, and large picture windows speak to the history of this particular form of commerce. While these physical elements are not peculiar to corner commercial properties, they are

\textsuperscript{200} See Appendix B: Select Survey Data.
a visual variation in the otherwise identical speculative rows that make up much of Philadelphia's neighborhood fabric and visual represent the historic period of urban expansion in Philadelphia when they were ubiquitous and essential parts of neighborhoods all over the city.
Philadelphia Corner Store Case Studies

Scholarly sources provide excellent background to understand how cities grew, why they formed the way they did, and what role corner stores played within them. While historic maps provide basic information on use, such as commercial, residential, and institutional, they rarely provide details on the specific uses of commercial properties.\(^{201}\) To gain a greater understanding of how uses in particular stores changed over time, detailed archival research is necessary. Research of this depth was only possible for a few, select properties, and these histories connect the greater patterns of expansion and change with what was actually occurring year to year in these neighborhoods. These cases reveal specific storefront uses, the ethnicities of owners and renters, and the patterns of movement that people and businesses underwent from the mid-19\(^{\text{th}}\) to the early 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century in South Philadelphia, Fairmount, and Queen Village. Each example brings clarity and depth to the overarching histories of these neighborhoods. They show that the uses of these stores in Philadelphia was much more diverse than the use as groceries that is often the focus of scholarly writing and that, even where there is no historic fabric left, clues to a former corner commercial use often remain.

1713 Wolf Street

The building at 1713 Wolf Street is a two-story brick store and row house that was constructed around 1898 (see Figure 8).\(^{202}\) It is located in South

\(^{201}\) Often bar rooms, and sometimes bakeries and barber shops as well, are noted explicitly on historic maps, but this is not true for every map in every era, and most properties are simply marked as "shop" or "shop and dwelling" with no further detail.

Philadelphia on the northeast corner of Wolf and Colorado Streets. The south façade, the main façade of the building, and the west and north façades are all exposed, while the east side of the building forms a party wall with the adjoining row house.

The building is a strong example of a shop-house.²⁰³ This is most clearly expressed on the south façade, the first story of which retains many elements of historic corner store design. These include large, plate glass windows (there is an identical window on the west façade as well), a canted corner entrance, and an extant cast-iron column (see Figure 30). The entrance is two steps up from the sidewalk, providing more direct access than the entrances of the adjoining row houses, which are 5 steps up from the ground. The second story of the building expresses a more private, domestic space through two smaller, symmetrical double-hung windows. The two stories are divided visually by a pressed-metal cornice which extends along the entire length of the south façade and continues along a portion of the west façade.

The block is a strong example of speculative row construction in Philadelphia. Other than the storefront elements in the first story of 1713 Wolf Street, the buildings in the row are identical (see Figure 8). They are simple row houses, but each has decorative brownstone lintels above the double-hung windows. The houses have articulated party walls and are visually divided from one another through corbelled brick pilasters. Each pilaster starts in the middle of the second story and extends up to the roof. These stylistic details unify the row through small design elements. Historically the buildings would have been further unified through matching pressed-metal roof cornices, though this detail has been lost on all but 1711 Wolf Street. All of these details are akin to those described by Hayward: smaller, working-class properties using more affordable materials and small details in otherwise simplified versions of the more expensive and detailed row houses.

²⁰³ Longstreth, Main Street, 24.
Figure 30: Detail of 1713 Wolf Street storefront.

Photograph by the author.
historically built for Philadelphia’s elite.\footnote{Hayward, 33, 35.}

The building at 1703 Wolf Street was sold as a “store and dwelling” to Michael Whelan in 1902, but the first long-term owner of the property was Lorenz, aka Lawrence, Wucher who purchased it in 1907.\footnote{Philadelphia City Archives, Deed Abstracts, William A. Frank[?] to Michael Whelan, May 2, 1902; Philadelphia City Archives, Deed Abstracts, Marie Glad to Lorenz Wucher, November 15, 1907.} Wucher was a German immigrant and an owner-occupant of the property.\footnote{United States Federal Census, 1910, Philadelphia Ward 26, Enumeration District 0599, roll T624_1401, p. 7A, accessed March 8, 2012, http://www.ancestry.com.} He was the proprietor of the first-story store, and he and his wife lived in the apartment upstairs.\footnote{United States Federal Census, 1910, p. 7A.} Wucher’s profession is listed as “grocer” in the 1914 Boyd’s city directory, but it is clear from archival research that Wucher’s grocery carried fresh dairy products in addition to dried and canned goods.\footnote{Boyd’s Co-Partnership and Residence Business Directory of Philadelphia City (Philadelphia: E. Howe Company, 1914), 1169; Monthly Bulletin of the Dairy and Food Division of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture 7, no. 1 (Harrisburg, PA: Harrisburg Publishing Company, 1909), 58.} In 1915, when Wucher puts the business up for sale, he lists it as a “well established delicatessen store” in the advertisement.\footnote{Philadelphia Inquirer 173, issue 60 (August 29, 1915), 11, accessed March 10, 2012, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.} Considering the general pattern of expansion in the grocery industry, it makes sense that a grocery of this period would offer meat and dairy products in addition to the more traditional preserved goods.\footnote{For a detailed history of this expansion pattern, see Chapter 1.}

Wucher successfully sold the property in 1919 to Bertha and Harry Mill.\footnote{Philadelphia City Archives, Deed Abstracts, Lorenz Wucher to Bertha Mill, Wife of Harry, August 1, 1919.} The Mills were also German immigrants, but unlike Wucher, they purchased the building for use as a rental property.\footnote{United States Federal Census, 1920, Philadelphia Ward 26, Enumeration District 804, roll T625_1629, p. 4B, accessed March 8, 2012, http://www.ancestry.com.} In 1920 the family lived at 1427 Wolf Street,
only a few blocks away.\textsuperscript{213} Also a corner property, it is likely that the family ran their bakery business in the first-story storefront.\textsuperscript{214} The histories of both the Wuchers and the Mills are strong examples of how corner store ownership helped immigrant families rise in social standing in the country. The Wuchers sold their delicatessen business due to the growth of another successful business that required their full attention, a saloon at 20\textsuperscript{th} and Ritner Streets.\textsuperscript{215} The Mills’ bakery business was successful enough that the family was able to purchase an additional, income-generating property. Additionally, by 1930 the Mill family was able to move to the more suburban area of Hunting Park, north of the city center, after Harry Mill retired.\textsuperscript{216} Most of their children moved with them to Hunting Park, but their oldest son, Harry W. Mill, continued to work in the family business as a baker.\textsuperscript{217} He also moved to the suburbs with his wife and young daughter, but instead of going north, he relocated to the streetcar suburb of West Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{218}

It is unclear what use the storefront had under the ownership of the Mills, but in 1922 it was still in commercial use of some kind.\textsuperscript{219} By the time of the 1930 census the building was again under new ownership. The new owners were Carmine and Carlinia Rodia, Italian immigrants.\textsuperscript{220} They lived at 1713 Wolf Street with their two

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{213} United States Federal Census, 1920, p. 4B.
  \item \textsuperscript{214} United States Federal Census, 1920, p. 4B.
  \item \textsuperscript{217} United States Federal Census, 1930, p. 9A.
\end{itemize}
sons, who both helped their father in his barber shop. It is unclear how long the Rodia family owned the property, but they too fit within a clear pattern of attaining success in this country through the ownership and operation of a shop-house.

Documentation of use at the property is scarce after this time. It is clear from historic maps that the property still contained commercial uses on the ground floor throughout the 1950s. In 2009 the first story was in use as a music store called “UROCK2,” but since that time the business has left. Currently there are shades drawn over the picture windows, which may indicate a change to residential use or simply the lack of a commercial tenant. The property is cared for and in good physical condition. With its quite recent use as a shop and its many extant historic architectural elements, it is primed to continue functioning as a neighborhood corner store.

829 North 26th Street

829 North 26th Street is a 3-story row house that was constructed between 1874 and 1876 in the Penn District (see Figure 31). The building is located on the northeast corner of 26th and Parrish Streets. Like the structure at 1713 Wolf Street, the west, south, and east façades of the building are exposed, but the north side

221 United States Federal Census, 1930, p. 8B.
Figure 31: Corner store turned residential row house at 829 North 26th Street.

*Photograph by the author.*

Figure 32: Detail of infilled corner store. The entrance is much lower to the ground than that of the adjoining properties.

*Photograph by the author.*
forms a party wall with the adjoining row house. The building is made of brick, but the majority of the brick on the south façade has been painted over in a cream tone.

The building as it exists today does not have any extant storefront fabric, but it does have several characteristics that hint at a former commercial use. The front entrance, though not canted, is only two steps up from the sidewalk (see Figure 32). This is much lower than the entrances of the adjoining residential properties. What would have been the historic storefront area has been faced in a layer of brick that is clearly from a different period than the brick on the upper stories and which projects out from the flat plane of the original façade (see Figure 33). This brick covers the entire first story of the west façade and continues along the south façade for several feet. The entire area is capped by a synthetic shingle awning.

An 1876 fire insurance survey of the building confirms that there was a store in the front half of the first story as early as that date. It also gives a detailed description of the storefront.225 Originally the building had a canted corner entrance with double doors and a transom above, a cast-iron column, and marble steps. Side lights and pilasters flanked the entrance and a cornice with frieze extended across the length of the west façade and continued along the south façade to the end of the doorway. This is the same area that the shingle awning extends across today, and the area that has been faced in brick clearly correlates to the area of the storefront described in the survey. Many of the historic storefronts in Fairmount have undergone these changes as more and more historic shop-houses have been converted to residential use.

John S. Miller, a German immigrant, was the first long-term owner of the property.226 Miller was a grocer who lived with his family at 827 North 26th Street,
Figure 33: Detail of where the projecting brick meets the historic façade of the adjoining property at 829 and 831 North 26th Street.

*Photograph by the author.*
just across the street from 829 North 26th Street, and likely ran his grocery business from the first story of the building.  

227 Miller was successful enough in his business to purchase the property across the street. One of the earliest tenants in the building was the Brill family. John Brill was a Prussian immigrant who ran a tavern, likely the bar room that is listed as the first-story use of the building on an 1876 map.  

228 It is clear from the 1900 census that John Miller’s business had continued to grow and his rental property had paid off. By this time the Miller family had moved to a new home on the northwest corner of 26th and Parrish Streets, cattycorner to their former home.  

229 Miller was the owner of this building as well. He was still working as a grocer, and his daughter Marie was working as a dry goods dealer. It is likely that, while John Miller was selling perishable groceries out of the old shop at 827 North 26th Street, Marie Miller was running a dried goods store out of the storefront in the family’s new home. The property at 829 North 26th Street was still a rental property for the family, though by 1900 the commercial use had changed from a bar room to a shop.  

230 There were also new renters. Lizzie Mealey, a native-born American of Irish decent, appears to have been running the property as a boarding house.  

231 The 1900 census lists eight boarders of various ages and professions renting rooms from Mealey.  

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227 United States Federal Census, 1880, p. 512A.  
229 United States Federal Census, 1900, p. 1A.  
230 United States Federal Census, 1900, p. 1A.  
231 United States Federal Census, 1900, p. 1A.  
232 Ernest Hexamer & Son, eds., *Insurance Maps of the City of Philadelphia*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia: Ernest Hexamer & Son, 1899), pl. 92. A more specific use for the shop at this time is unknown.  
233 United States Federal Census, 1900, p. 11A.  
234 United States Federal Census, 1900, p. 11A.
In 1910 Otto Kraus was running a drugstore at 829 North 26th Street.\footnote{United States Federal Census, 1910, pp. 11A. One of Mealey’s boarders, Gustav Liebert, was employed in a drugstore in 1900. Though this does not confirm the use of the storefront at that time, it is possible that he was employed in a drugstore below and lived upstairs as a matter of convenience.}

Originally from Connecticut and the son of German Immigrants, Kraus moved to Philadelphia and graduated from the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science in 1901.\footnote{United States Federal Census, 1910, p. 11A; and Joseph W. England, ed., \textit{The First Century of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, 1821-1921}, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science, 1922), 586.} Though Kraus originally rented the storefront from the Miller family, he purchased the building from Ida Ostertag, John Miller’s daughter, in 1916.\footnote{Philadelphia City Archives, Deed Abstracts, Ida A. Ostertag to Otto L. Kraus, June 28, 1916.}

In 1920 Ida and Marie, who had been living with their father in the family home up to this point, have both retired and moved to the more remote suburb of West Philadelphia.\footnote{United States Federal Census, 1920.} Though relatively young, they were probably able to afford this early retirement through the sale of their father’s multiple property holdings in the area, including the store and dwelling at 829 North 26th Street.

Otto Kraus owned this property until 1945, and it is likely that he continued to run his drug store there for quite some time.\footnote{Philadelphia City Archives, Deed Abstracts, Otto L. Kraus and Lillian E., his wife, to Theodore Ziegler, April 2, 1945.} In 1950 the property was still being used as a shop, but by 1958 it had been converted to residential use.\footnote{Phialdelphia 1916-May 1951, vol. 4, rev. 1950 (Philadelphia: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company, 1950), pl. 357; and \textit{Insurance Maps of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania}, vol. 4, rev. 1958 (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1917), pl. 357.} This early change from a shop-house to a dwelling may explain the severe loss of historic fabric related to the storefront. Many corner stores in the area were still operating as shops as late as 1958, including the Millers’ old property on the northwest corner.\footnote{\textit{Insurance Maps of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania}, vol. 4, rev. 1958 (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1917), pl. 357.}
Still, early conversions to residential use such as this may have set a precedent in the neighborhood for the complete removal of storefront fabric when making this type of alteration.

626 South 3rd Street

The structure at 626 South 3rd Street dates to the early 19th century, if not earlier. It is located in present-day Queen Village, on the northwest corner of 3rd and Bainbridge Streets. As with the previous two properties, the east, south, and west façades are exposed, while the north side of the building forms a party wall with the adjoining property. This structure was built much earlier than others in this chapter, and also unlike them, it was part of a historic commercial corridor. For these reasons it serves as an important comparison for style and use.

The building has a good deal of extant historic fabric, but it has also undergone many changes (see Figure 34). The three-story structure has a canted corner entrance, cast-iron column, and wooden double doors with a glass transom above (see Figure 35). A metal cornice divides the first story from the upper ones on the east façade, and extends along the south façade approximately one-third of the building’s depth. The cornice visually separates the historic commercial ground-floor front from the residential rear and upper portions of the building.

None of the first story windows are historic (see Figure 35). The upper half of each is contemporary glass, while the lower half is filled with glass brick for increased privacy, and the upper and lower portions are divided by a stucco sill. The windows are slightly wider than the double-hung sash windows on the upper stories. These windows express a clear residential use. The entire façade has been

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242 Philadelphia City Archives, Deed Abstracts, Alexander Anthony Niewiadowski to Thos. W. Webb, March 15, 1839. This is the earliest deed abstract available at the City Archives. The deed book that contains the full deed is either missing or has not been scanned to view in the online archives. As such, a construction date for this building has not been determined.
Figure 34: Corner store at 626 South 3rd Street.

*Photograph by the author.*
Figure 35: Detail of contemporary window and extant storefront fabric at 626 South 3rd Street.

*Photograph by the author.*
covered in two shades of stucco, the colors of which match the logo of the building’s current user, Queen Village Dental Care. The historic pressed-metal cornice remains intact, running the length of the entire west and south façades as well as a portion of the west façade. The cornice has been painted to match the color of the first-story cornice and cast-iron column. The canted entrance is no longer in active use. It is surrounded by a gate, and patients are directed to enter through the rear of the building.

Thomas Webb and his descendants owned this property from 1839 until 1903. Webb was a native-born American who worked as a druggist. He lived in the building, with his wife and three children, and ran a drug store there at least until 1870. Webb was wealthy enough to employ a live-in servant. In 1860 his real estate holdings were valued at $30,000 and his personal estate was valued at $20,000. Webb’s wealth stands in stark contrast to the predominantly working-class and immigrant population of Southwark at this time. His profession made him a skilled worker and a member of the middle class that was beginning to emerge at this time. Webb provided a service that met the needs of those in the neighborhood. His level of training and professionalism was not required of most other shopkeepers. As such, he was probably one of the few middle-class professionals in Southwark at this time.

248 Blumin, Hypothesis, 314-315.
By the time of the 1880 census, the Webb family was no longer living at 626 South 3rd Street, though they still owned the property. The building was rented out to a widow, Elizabeth Rushmeir, and her family. Rushmeir was a Prussian immigrant who kept an eating house. Her second oldest son worked as a butcher, as did the two boarders who rented rooms from Rushmeir. In 1900 the Rushmeir family had moved, but one of her former boarders, Lawrence Murray, was listed as the head of household. Murray lived in the house with his extended family. He was still working as a butcher and rented a room to one boarder, also a butcher. The steady chain of butchers living on the property suggests that the store below may have been a butcher’s shop over this period.

In 1903 Webb’s descendants sold the property to Harris and Aaron Oser, who owned and ran Oser Brothers, a printing company. This was probably a secondary location for the business, which also had a shop in the heart of town at Sixth and Market Streets. The company printed business stationery, advertisements, posters, and programs, among other things. Though a printing company would need space

250 United States Federal Census, 1880, p. 55A.
251 United States Federal Census, 1880, p. 55A.
253 United States Federal Census, 1900, p. 7A.
254 United States Federal Census, 1900, p. 7A.
255 I could not find a listing for Murray as a butcher in the 1900 Boyd’s City Directory at this address or any other, so there is no conclusive evidence either way.
in which to meet with customers and discuss orders, a printing press can also be considered an industrial use. The process would have required many large machines to be running at the same time. For this reason it would have made sense for the building to have ceased its residential function during this time. Furthermore, 626 South 3rd Street is missing from the 1910 and 1920 censuses, and both Oser brothers were living at other addresses during these years. It is likely that the entire building had been turned over to commercial use at this time. This type of use, both one that borders on the industrial and one that takes over an entire building, would not have been common for a neighborhood corner store. This greater variation in use can be explained by the active commercial corridor that the building was situated within. Though only a few blocks from residential rows with shops on the corners, this siting on a neighborhood commercial corridor made a difference in the variety of uses that were possible for the building.

In 1920 the property was purchased by Morris Honikman, who was a salesman of wholesale butter. Honikman and his family lived in Hunting Park, just northeast of where the Mills were living around the same time, and used the building as a rental property. In 1930 the property is again inhabited by renters, and the two working men in the house at the time were a city fireman and a vender of cigars in a pool room. It seems unlikely that either of these men was working in or running the shop downstairs. It is possible that Honikman used the store as an additional location for his wholesale business or that he rented it out to a proprietor who lived off-site. As late as 1950, though, the property retained a commercial

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260 Philadelphia City Archives, Deed Abstracts, Harris E. & Frances Oser, and Aaron & Lena Oser, to Morris Honikman, March 31, 1920; and United States Federal Census, 1930, p. 8B.
261 United States Federal Census, 1930, p. 8B.
262 United States Federal Census, 1930, p. 4B.
use. In 1980 the Third Street Gallery was operating on the site, and today the building is a dentist’s office.

Conclusions

Each of these buildings brings a new layer of clarity and depth to the history of their neighborhoods. Historic Southwark was a neighborhood with many artisans and day laborers, but it was also home to the owner-operators of corner stores who constituted some of the wealthier inhabitants of the neighborhood and those most likely to move up in social standing and out of the area to more remote suburbs. Though Fairmount has a low level of extant storefront fabric today, these buildings were initially prolific in the neighborhood and these stores are still visible today through subtle clues in the built environment. South Philadelphia has retained a high number of corner stores that are still in active use, but as change and new populations come to this neighborhood, many properties could lose their commercial uses, seriously altering the character of the neighborhood. It is clear from all of these examples that there were a wide variety of uses housed in corner stores, well beyond the corner grocery, and that any particular store could be easily adapted to contain a new use that was often completely different than the one that came before. A bar could easily become a pharmacy and a bakery change over to a barber shop, all the while remaining a neighborhood corner store.

Preserving the Corner Store

Neighborhood corner stores are an important part of the story of urban expansion in the United States, and a crucial aspect of the histories of commercial and row house architecture, as well as the history of commerce in America. Today corner stores add character to historic urban neighborhoods. They are economic drivers in these neighborhoods. They provide entertainment venues and promote an active street life, and these amenities in turn attract newcomers to the area. Retention of commercial uses provides these benefits, but it is the physical fabric that provides a visual link to the historical significance of these stores. It is clear from architectural survey that extant historic features have taken significant losses over time. No matter what the current use of these buildings, it is important to maintain this link to the commercial history of these neighborhoods wherever possible so that this tangible connection to this element of Philadelphia’s history remains for future generations.

When thinking about corner store preservation, it is important to acknowledge the regular change that is inherent to commercial architecture. It is clear from the three illustrative case studies in this work that corner stores were not designed exclusively for particular uses but that corner store use was as diverse in the 19th century as it is today. The floor plan and architectural elements of 829 North 26th Street when it was built in the late 19th century were quite similar to those of 1713 Wolf Street in the early 20th century, yet one was a bar and the other a grocery. While the interiors of these buildings were left open and made to be adaptable to a wide variety of uses, the exteriors of these stores were highly designed but also

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strategically planned to meet the needs of many stores. Large display windows and corner entrances met the needs of different types of proprietors. The item that required the most flexibility on the exterior was signage, but the designed architectural elements served the needs of many different stores, as they still do today. This history of diversity in use is just as important to preserve as the lasting historic architectural elements on their exteriors.

Issues in Corner Store Preservation

There are many threats to the preservation of corner stores. Often these properties are converted to residential use on the ground floor which can result in the loss of historic commercial fabric in deference to the needs of residents for increased privacy and code compliance. This problem is seen at 829 North 26th Street and many other properties in the neighborhood survey (see Figures 36 and 37). Investment programs that could help corner stores are available in Philadelphia, but they are generally targeted to neighborhood commercial corridors. Funding that is focused on these corridors create visible, tangible results on a large scale and in a concentrated area. As corner stores are isolated within otherwise residential blocks, they are more difficult to identify and work with. If funding were available to corner stores, it would be possible for the building at 1713 Wolf Street to be improved in a historically sensitive way and reused as an active commercial property, serving the needs of the local community. Subsidized design assistance is also available to Philadelphia’s historic commercial corridors, but for the same reasons the programs exclude isolated corner stores. Though the building at 626 South 3rd Street does retain some of its historic storefront fabric, an architect with a more sensitive and creative eye could have designed the current dentist’s office to utilize the historic corner entrance and larger storefront windows instead of closing the entrance off
Figure 36: Example of historically-insensitive storefront adaptation at 735 South 5th Street.

*Photograph by the author.*
Figure 37: Example of historically-insensitive storefront adaptation at 2531 Parrish Street. Though it appears that all historic storefront fabric has been lost, a small clue to the building’s former use remains in the extant marble step at the corner.

*Photograph by the author.*
completely and altering the building’s intended relationship to the street.

Corner Store Preservation: Fabric

Standards and best practices for the preservation of historic storefronts are easy to find. The National Park Service (NPS) has dedicated *Preservation Brief 11: Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts* to this topic, and state and local preservation offices base their own standards and practices on these principles. These guidelines maintain that where there is a good deal of extant historic fabric, whether it is the original storefront or a replacement from a significant historical period, the fabric should be repaired and retained. Where the storefront has been lost or is too deteriorated to save, a contemporary compatible design is desirable unless there is ample historical evidence that would make an accurate restoration possible. The inclusion of contemporary awnings and signage is encouraged, as these were prominent features of historic commercial buildings, but the manual suggests that they be kept simple to avoid “visual clutter.” Most compliance issues can be dealt with in historically sensitive ways through negotiations with officials and consultations with preservation professionals who have experience solving these problems.

Complications often arise in the conversion of historic storefronts to residential use. Though the standards above technically apply to storefront preservation regardless of intended use, homeowners generally place their needs for privacy, safety, and comfort above historic preservation concerns. There are many examples of historically insensitive conversions in Philadelphia’s historic row

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266 *Preservation Brief 11.*
267 *Preservation Brief 11.*
268 *Preservation Brief 11.*
269 *Preservation Brief 11.*
Residents often desire smaller, operable windows that are placed higher on the façade. This increases privacy as well as creating additional exits in the case of fire or natural disasters. Canted entrances and cast-iron columns are often altered or removed to simplify day-to-day access. The case study of 829 North 26th Street is an excellent example of this practice. The original fire insurance survey shows that this building was constructed as a store with all of the details listed above, but a change in use led to the loss of all of this fabric. The architectural survey of Philadelphia's historic neighborhoods shows that the case of 829 North 26th Street is not an anomaly and that residential conversion is a serious threat to the retention of historic fabric.

In its introduction, the NPS storefront brief asks this question: “If the building’s original retail use is to be changed to office or residential, can the commercial appearance of the building be retained while accommodating the new use?” The guide suggests that privacy needs can be dealt with through the use of blinds or insulating curtains, but never directly answers the larger question it raises except to assert that retention of historic fabric is the ultimate goal where possible. The brief also suggests that, where fabric has been lost, contemporary design should retain “the commercial ‘flavor’ of the building,” but this suggestion would not make much sense for an intended residential use. Stronger and more detailed guidance would help contractors and preservation architects to retain historic fabric where possible while also meeting the privacy needs of residents and code compliance requirements.

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270 See Appendix B: Select Survey Results.
271 In addition to being desirable to residents, operable windows on the first story are often a more basic matter of code compliance.
272 Preservation Brief 11.
273 Preservation Brief 11.
274 Preservation Brief 11.
For these reasons a more detailed and thoughtful guide for the conversion of storefronts to residential use should be made available in Philadelphia. An existing model for this is the *Philadelphia Rowhouse Manual*. The manual provides detailed information on how homeowners can best care for their row homes and mold these historic spaces to best serve the needs of contemporary inhabitants while respecting historic fabric. The guide provides a brief historical overview so that homeowners can better understand the historic roots and significance of their homes, as well as a basic overview of the process a property owner has to go through in the city of Philadelphia to make alterations to historic buildings both within and outside of local historic districts. Guides like these do not force people to comply with historic standards, but they provide ideas for solutions to problems that homeowners may not have considered. A homeowner is much more likely to invest time and money into preserving historic fabric if he or she has a clear understanding of its value and role in the neighborhood's past.

**Corner Store Preservation: Commercial Use**

Today's economic environment is quite different from the historic conditions that made corner stores essential in the expanding late 19th and early 20th century city. Many urban dwellers have cars and access to public transportation routes that provide easy access to supermarkets and chain pharmacies. Still, it is clear that even today corner stores that retain commercial use serve particular needs in the community, be it entertainment amenities in the form of restaurants and bars or a small corner grocery where residents can quickly and conveniently purchase staples like milk, bread, and eggs. Programs and trends that spur positive and healthy

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276 Schade, 5-8, 42-45.
investment and growth in Philadelphia's historic urban neighborhoods should be supported because of the advantages they provide to communities.

For example, not every community has easy access to full-service supermarkets. In many underserved urban neighborhoods, corner stores and bodegas remain the primary retailers of groceries.\(^{277}\) In recognition of this fact, The Food Trust, a Philadelphia-based organization dedicated to making nutritious food accessible to everyone, started the Healthy Corner Stores program.\(^{278}\) Today's corner groceries tend to stock items that are easy to sell and which have high profit margins.\(^{279}\) They avoid perishable goods, which are more complicated to stock and less predictable in terms of profits but are often the more nutritious choices when shopping for food.\(^{280}\) These stores have a strong, local customer bases, and the Healthy Corner Stores program works with owners to help bring more nutritious food options to these customers.\(^{281}\) This program primarily benefits people, but it also aids in the preservation of the buildings that house these stores. Promoting the continued use of local stores over the introduction of chain groceries keeps these buildings functioning as they have since the 19th century, as small shop-houses that serve the needs of the community around them.

The corner bar is another historic use that is still prevalent today. Though some chain restaurants have modeled themselves in the pattern of independent bars and pubs, they have not replaced corner bars to the same extent as chain supermarkets, pharmacies, and hardware stores have come to dominate those


\(^{279}\) “Healthy Corner Stores Q & A.”

\(^{280}\) “Healthy Corner Stores Q & A.”

\(^{281}\) “Healthy Corner Stores Q & A.”
markets. This makes sense as the latter offer lower prices on the same products that are available in local, independently owned stores, and also offer more options as their stores are larger and have the space to house a larger inventory. Bars, though, fit into the same relatively small spaces that they have utilized for centuries. Bars, like restaurants, still serve specific populations and often specialize in different types of beer and spirits. There are Belgian bars, Irish pubs, craft beer bars, sports bars, and even contemporary imitations of 1920s speakeasies. Local bars are still the places that neighborhood residents go after work to grab something to eat and drink and to meet up with friends. Bars provide entertainment. They show local sports games on television and host weekly events such as group quiz games and karaoke nights. Most important, many neighborhood bars are still located on corner properties, probably for many of the same reasons that they were appealing in the 19th century. Corner properties are often a bit larger. They can have multiple entrances and have more exposed façades, making the building easier to notice from more directions. These bars also represent a threat to preservation. As neighborhoods change and new bars open up on corners, historic storefronts can easily be lost to contemporary designs during the renovation and rehabilitation process.

Spurring Investment and Preservation: The Storefront Improvement Program

The city of Philadelphia currently has a program in place that encourages historically-sensitive rehabilitation projects for shop-house storefronts. The Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) reimburses owners of neighborhood stores for certain improvements that make commercial areas more attractive, therefore

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282 For example, there is one T.G.I. Friday’s in the city of Philadelphia and three Applebee’s locations, as compared to eleven Pathmark supermarkets and twenty-two CVS Pharmacy locations.
283 Sismondo, 108.
encouraging economic activity.\textsuperscript{284} The program is run through the Department of Commerce, but the participation of the Community Design Collaborative (CDC) and the Philadelphia Historical Commission guides improvements in a preservation-minded direction. This oversight is especially strong when these buildings are within National Register Districts. SIP is funded with the Block Grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Therefore SIP projects that are located within National Register Districts gain a second level of oversight through Section 106 review. While the recommendations that come out of this review process are not mandatory, if an owner strays too far from these recommendations they run the risk of losing their funding.

SIP funding is only available to commercial properties within a list of predetermined neighborhood commercial corridors.\textsuperscript{285} There is always the potential for a program like this to be expanded to include neighborhood commercial properties. SIP also lays a strong foundation for the creation of a similar program that would specifically target neighborhood corner stores, especially in conjunction with neighborhood revitalization efforts and the goals of local community development corporations and civic associations.

\textbf{Design Assistance: The Community Design Collaborative}

Grant-supported design assistance is also available for stores located along Philadelphia’s commercial corridors. The rStore program, which is run by the CDC, connects local business owners with design professionals who volunteer their time to create a vision for façade improvements.\textsuperscript{286} The owners of multiple stores

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{285} \textit{Storefront Improvement Program Guidelines}, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{286} \textit{rStore: Façade Improvement Design Consultations} (Philadelphia: Community Design Collaborative, 2012).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
along one corridor must work together to apply to this program, as one design session is intended to serve six buildings. Each store owner receives a building sketch, and often cost estimates as well, and these materials can be used to apply for improvement grants, such as those offered by SIP (see Figures 38 and 39). While this service could be extremely beneficial to corner stores, the requirement for owners to connect with one another to put together one joint grant application often proves to be a stumbling block. Commercial corridors are often the primary focus of programs like rStore and SIP, which are created to support neighborhood revitalization through the promotion of active neighborhood commercial areas. Corner store revitalization can also support these neighborhoods, but as isolated properties, they are more difficult to recognize and for owners to organize together. As with SIP, expanding rStore to work with corner stores would benefit these historic buildings and their communities, requiring only that guidelines be revised to make it easier for isolated stores to apply and participate.

Further Recommendations: National Register Listing

The location of many SIP properties within National Register Districts adds an important layer of oversight to many projects. These businesses are also eligible for other Federal tax incentives, such as the Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program, which provides a 20 percent tax credit for the rehabilitation of any income-producing property on the National Register. Some corner stores are already located within National Register Districts, but many others could be included through the creation of a National Register Multiple Property Nomination for Philadelphia’s historic neighborhood corner stores. Multiple Property listings include non-contiguous properties that fit within a unifying thematic framework

287 rStore: Façade Improvement Design Consultations.
288 rStore: Façade Improvement Design Consultations.
Figure 38: Example of a building sketch made possible through the rStore program. This sketch was created for the Cambria Pharmacy at 2860 North 5th Street.

*Image courtesy the Community Design Collaborative and the Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises.*
Figure 39: The resulting improvements to the Cambria Pharmacy based on the rStore building sketch.

*Image courtesy the Community Design Collaborative and the Hispanic Association of Contractors and Enterprises.*
that obviously applies to the corner store.289 A statement of historic context defines this unifying framework and individual properties that fit within this framework are included individually following the context statement.290 The statement also helps to assess the eligibility of other properties in the future quickly and easily, and a listing for Philadelphia’s corner stores could serve as a reference for similar nominations for other cities that exhibited similar patterns of growth in the 19th century.291 A National Register listing would make tax credit funding available to neighborhood corner stores and ensure responsible rehabilitation through the intensive tax credit process. It would also encourage continued mixed-use, as the tax credit is available for the development of commercial and rental-housing properties but not to buildings that are being rehabilitated as private homes.

Conclusions

Urban corner stores make significant contributions to historic neighborhoods. They do this through continued commercial use, which serves to enliven and enhance these neighborhoods, and through historic fabric, which is a visual testament to the history of these neighborhoods and the history of urban expansion in Philadelphia and in the United States. Neither of these traits can be preserved in every case, and often it will not always be possible to preserve them both in a single structure. The many recommendations listed above would help corner stores to continue to change and evolve as they have since the mid-19th century while also preserving their historic fabric for future generations to learn from and enjoy.


290 “National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submissions,” 1.

291 “National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submissions,” 1.
Conclusions

The corner store is unique within commercial architecture due to its placement within row house neighborhoods and on otherwise residential blocks. These buildings stand in stark contrast to the concentration of commercial structures in shopping districts and along commercial corridors. They housed a great mixture of uses and were created to serve the needs of urban neighborhood residents in the mid- to late 19th and early 20th centuries. Though these neighborhoods have undergone intense changes since that time, the corner store still plays an active role in the vibrance and vitality of these communities while extant fabric stands as a visual reminder of the history of these stores and their role in Philadelphia’s expansion and development. For these reasons, corner stores should be preserved and protected, their continued use supported through economic programs and their extant fabric preserved through preservation protections and oversight.

Corner stores are historically significant elements of their neighborhoods. As cities were expanding in the 19th century and transportation options improved, people were able to move further from the city’s core and commute to work on a daily basis. As people moved out, goods and services inevitably followed. The regular inclusion of commercial properties within otherwise residential blocks is a practice that served the specific needs of this time. Before cars and refrigeration, people took frequent trips to the store to purchase dry goods, produce, dairy products, bread, and meat, all of which were sold from separate locations. Local bars and restaurants also catered to those in the immediate neighborhood. Though these neighborhoods have changed greatly over the years in terms of the populations they house, and though the city has undergone serious fluctuations in population density, many
corner stores have survived. These stores continue to serve their neighborhoods today as both economic drivers and supporters of vibrant and active street life.

Corner stores have survived Philadelphia’s changes in two ways. Many of these properties retain historic corner store fabric, such as picture windows, cast-iron columns, and canted corner entrances. Many others retain commercial use, even where most or all of the historic fabric has been lost. Though the defining architectural characteristics are the same in each neighborhood, the primary uses of these properties vary from one neighborhood to the next as different areas have changed and grown in different ways, serving varied populations. In Fairmount, many corner stores have been converted to residential use, showing the high demand for housing in this neighborhood. In Queen Village there are a large number of restaurants and bars in these stores, reflecting the neighborhood’s proximity to South Street’s shopping district and active night life, but also the desires of the local community. The more traditional uses found today in South Philadelphia, such as bakeries, delis, and butcher shops, represent the needs and ideals of this community as well, which are still grounded in localized, regular shopping at small, family-run businesses. The number of active commercial properties in all of these areas shows that neighborhood commercial uses still serve a purpose in these neighborhoods today, though with very different drivers than those of the 19th century.

It is clear from research into the histories of a few corner stores that changing use is not only a recent phenomenon, but was present throughout the existence of these stores. Though some uses remained in one location for decades, every store changed use multiple times in its history, and it is clear from the open floor plans of different stores that all were designed similarly to allow for this change. Corner stores do not appear to have been constructed with any particular intended use. They were all easily adaptable. Case studies also brought to light the detailed hints
at former commercial use that exist today in highly altered corner properties. They include entrances that are much lower to the ground than those of the houses on the rest of the block and projected, contemporary facing on the first story that corresponds to the general area of historic corner storefronts. It is clear that many more corner stores existed than are easily noticeable in built fabric today, and that changing uses defined these structures throughout their history.

Corner stores are visible in Philadelphia’s neighborhoods today in two ways: through continued commercial use and extant historic fabric. Where it is possible to preserve either, and especially both, this preservation should be promoted and supported. Investment programs like those available for commercial corridors, if targeted at corner stores, would support continued use, preservation, and community revitalization. Readily available and understood design guidelines for residential reuse would help preserve historic fabric, as the specific requirements of this type of renovation greatly threaten storefront fabric. National register protection for these stores would promote continued commercial use and preservation through the availability of the tax credit. All of these actions are possible and can be promoted through an increased awareness and understanding of the significance of corner stores to their neighborhoods, both historically and today.

This thesis demonstrates that corner stores play an important role in their neighborhoods. They act as physical representations of an important period in the growth of Philadelphia and the United States, while also promoting an active street life and serving as economic drivers. Because of these critical contributions, corner stores’ historic fabric and continued use should be preserved by expanding investment programs to include them and creating a National Register district to protect and spur further investment in them.
Bibliography


### Appendix A: Survey Form

**Philadelphia Corner Store Survey**

**Surveyor:** Lynn Alpert  
**Date:**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Stories</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projecting Bay Window?:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roof Cornice?:</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stylistic details?:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Turret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arched Windows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gable Roof</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mansard Roof</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Stylistic details?:</td>
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<td>Inscriptions?:</td>
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## Appendix B: Select Survey Data

### Table 1: Extant Historic Fabric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Queen Village</th>
<th>Fairmount</th>
<th>South Philadelphia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canted corner entrances</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cast-iron columns</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double wooden doors</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-story cornices</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glass-filled transoms over entrance</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historic storefront windows</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
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Table 2: Extant Commercial Use

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>61</td>
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<td>Residential</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>132</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Vacant</td>
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### Table 3: Spread of Contemporary Uses

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<tbody>
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<td>Shops</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restaurants / Bars</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offices</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salons</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delis</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakeries</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butchers</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cafés</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dry cleaners</td>
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<td>Arts</td>
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Index

A
A&P 30

B
bakeries 13, 29, 36, 60, 69, 74, 107
Baltimore 11, 40, 41, 42, 43, 49
barber shop 74, 79-91
bars 1, 13, 14, 34, 36, 49, 60, 64, 65, 98, 99, 100, 106, 107
Brooklyn 24

C
Camden 24
Carstairs, Thomas 42
commercial structures 1, 31, 39, 106
Community Design Collaborative 101
consolidation v, 19, 21, 33

D
Delaware River 18, 22, 25, 26, 56, 69
dry cleaners 60

F
Fairmount vii, 3, 6, 7, 8, 23, 46, 50, 57, 58, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 73, 74, 81, 91, 107
female grocers 29
ferry 24

G
Greenwich Village 34
groceries 1, 5, 13, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 60, 69, 74, 83, 99

H
hardware stores 13, 34, 60, 99
Healthy Corner Stores 99
horsecar 24, 25

I
independent groceries 29, 30

M
Manhattan 24
methodology 5
mixed uses 13, 14, 34, 36

N
National Register iv, 101, 102, 105, 108
neighborhoods 1, 2, 5-6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35, 36, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 49, 53, 56, 73, 74, 91, 92, 97, 99, 100, 102, 105, 106, 107, 108

O
omnibus 24-25

P
Passyunk Township iv, 69
Penn District iv, 22, 64-79
pharmacies 13, 60, 98, 99
Philadelphia vii, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 33, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58-59, 64, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73-74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 81, 83, 84, 85, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 105, 106, 107, 108
prefabricated facades 49

Q
Queen Village vii, 6, 7, 8, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 73, 74, 85, 88, 107

R
railroad 24
refrigeration 28, 36, 106
row house neighborhoods 10, 11, 40, 42, 43, 53, 96, 106
rStore vi, 101, 102, 103, 104

S
saloon 31, 32, 33, 78
segregation 18, 22, 24
South Philadelphia vii, 6, 7, 8, 57, 58, 59, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 91, 107
Southwark iv, 18, 21, 25, 26, 56, 59, 64, 88, 91
Storefront Improvement Program 100, 101, 102
suburbs 2, 15, 18, 21, 22, 28, 34, 56, 59, 64, 69, 73, 78, 91

T

third places 14, 15

U

urban expansion 2, 5, 16, 17, 25, 41, 64, 73, 92, 105
urban renewal 6, 34, 35, 36