The Commercial Building as a Promotional Tool in American Marketing History, 1800 - 1940

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This paper recounts how marketers, in the period from 1800 to 1940, used American commercial buildings for a variety of promotional purposes. The analysis begins with a review of the theory of marketing aesthetics, turns to representations of buildings in the visual and decorative arts and on advertising ephemera, and then examines the promotional uses of three specific building forms — department stores, skyscrapers, and car culture architecture. The paper concludes with a discussion of the evolving meanings of American buildings and suggests some paths for further historical research.

Buildings have multiple purposes and meanings. They are functional spaces where people work and shop, worship and govern, and educate and entertain themselves. Buildings also make aesthetic statements and, when successful, can awe, inspire, and sometimes amuse. Buildings are part of the social and cultural history of humanity and embody a surviving, material record of the past. Finally, buildings are promotional tools providing both utilitarian and symbolic information about goods, services, and organizations. Buildings communicate messages directly to passersby, via their sheer physical presence and architectural expression, and indirectly when depicted on products and packaging or used as an illustrative element in advertising. Indeed, buildings are also an advertising medium when their exterior walls become a backdrop for hanging store signs, posters, and other outdoor media.

Buildings have received some attention from marketing and consumer researchers. Donovan and Rossiter (1982), among others, have considered the influence of store atmosphere on shoppers, while Grove and Fisk (1992), using a theatrical analogy, have discussed physical settings as the "front region" of the service experience. Van Raaij (1993) has speculated on how the built environment, both modern and postmodern, affects daily consumption. Marketing historians have also written about buildings. Dixon (1995a, 1995b) has described and nicely illustrated the Agora in ancient Athens and Trajan's Markets and shop architecture in ancient Rome. Csaba and Askegaard (1999) have looked at the Austrian-born architect, Victor Gruen, and his influence (Gruen advocated at least two anchor department stores connected by an enclosed pedestrian "main street") on the evolution of modern American shopping malls. All in all, this literature provides tantalizing suggestions, but quite limited description and analysis, of how buildings communicate marketing messages. Thus, there is a need for a much more thorough and historically grounded account of buildings as a promotional tool.

This paper tells the story of how buildings have been used as a promotional tool in American marketing from 1800 until 1940. Commercial structures — stores, factories, offices, hotels, restaurants, gas stations — are the central characters in this history because they are so instrumental to the processes of marketing exchange. The analysis begins with a short discussion of the theory of marketing aesthetics and, using some current examples, shows how commercial buildings fit into this paradigm. The next section describes representations of buildings — how they were portrayed artistically on early prints and decorations, and later in paintings and photography, and how they were incorporated into advertising and other promotional ephemera. The following section treats buildings as material artifacts. It focuses on three important types of commercial buildings that were invented in the 19th and early 20th centuries — department stores, skyscrapers, and what can be called car culture architecture. The concluding section proposes some evolving meanings of the building in American history and suggests some areas for further historical research and analysis.

Primary data sources consulted for this project include trade and show cards, magazine advertisements, fine art prints and paintings, photographs, and a variety of other images, as well as some contemporary newspaper and magazine accounts of specific buildings. Buildings as physical entities are treated as tangible or material data sources that give insights into the cultures, organizations, and individuals that produced and promoted them (Gagliardi 1990). Their exterior and interior architectures symbolize cultural values and embody cultural rituals. These meanings are conveyed to customers, to those who work on the premises, and to the surrounding community. Interpreting buildings as artifacts usually necessitates reconstructing the relevant contexts from other evidence (Laird 1998, p. 453). Thus, this research has drawn from a
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variety of secondary literatures, with an emphasis on ar
tectural, retailing, and advertising history.

Although the research will emphasize commercial
structures, public, religious, and domestic buildings also
can have promotional dimensions. Thomas Jefferson's
design of the University of Virginia campus, for example,
inspired American schools, libraries, courthouses, city halls,
and state capitolts to embrace classical architecture as a way
of conveying key virtues of education and self-improvement,
respect for the legal system, and belief in republican government.
Churches have been built not just as places of worship, but also as expressions of their
congregations' faith, taste, and wealth. Well-designed
church buildings can enhance a religious experience and,
consequently, attract larger crowds. Lastly, nominally
"private" residences, say Mary Pickford and Douglas
Fairbanks' elegant Hollywood estate, Pickfair, William
Randolph Hearst's Casa Grande at Hearst Castle, or Hugh
Hefner's luscious Playboy Mansions in Chicago and Los
Angeles, have served as an element in the self-publicity mix
of their celebrity owners.

COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS AND THE
THEORY OF MARKETING AESTHETICS

Schmitt and Simonson (1997) have coined the term
"marketing aesthetics" to refer to "the marketing of sensory
experiences in corporate or brand output that contributes to
the organization's or brand's identity" (p. 18). The domain
of marketing aesthetics draws from three fields: (1) product
and graphic design, (2) communications, and (3) spatial
design. In product and graphic design, marketing aesthetics
focuses on form, such as packaging, rather than on function
or utilitarian attributes. In communications, the emphasis is
upon the peripheral message (shapes, colors, music,
physical attractiveness of the presenter) rather than the
central message (persuasive arguments). In spatial design,
marketing aesthetics is concerned with the symbolism,
the nonfunctional experiential aspects of space, not with
structure (number of floors, location of elevators). These
dichotomies -- form v. function, peripheral v. central, and
symbolic v. structural -- stem from the Bauhaus design
movement (Schmitt and Simonson 1997). Founded by
Walter Gropius in 1919, Bauhaus was a school of design in
Dessau, Germany, that had great influence on modern
architecture, industrial and graphic arts, and theater design.

Buildings as a promotional tool clearly cut across all
three areas. The spatial design of commercial buildings,
both internal and external, can be experiential and symbolic
as well as utilitarian. Consider, for example, the immense
hotels on the Las Vegas Strip that are planned not only to
efficiently accommodate throngs of guests and visitors, but
also, through their gigantic decorative elements, to
reinforce the dominant entertainment theme, whether it be
ancient Egypt (Luxor), pirates (Treasure Island), or the film
industry (MGM Grand). Spatial design is especially critical
for Las Vegas casinos. Unlike most hotels in other cities,
which lodge travelers who come to see or do something else
in the vicinity, these establishments are the destination, the
reason for the trip. Distinctive architecture allows Las
Vegas resorts to differentiate themselves from competitors
while concurrently enhancing their rival's product offering.
That is, by giving visitors something else to gawk at while
in town, each new hotel adds to the drawing power of the
others. Bell (1998) contends that the farcical architecture
and spectacles of Las Vegas instructs consumers to adopt a
mood of playfulness and irreverent disregard for normal
behaviors and sensibilities.

Buildings are also part of the peripheral message of
communications. In advertising and other media, they often
play supporting, even decorative roles, but are sometimes
cast more assertively as a kind of presenter (a
"spokesbuilding" perhaps). For example, the distinctively
shaped headquarters of the Transamerica Corporation, the
Transamerica Pyramid (1972) in San Francisco, dominates
the company logo, has been featured in a series of magazine
spreads and advertising campaigns including a "King
Kong" television commercial and a "pop-up" in Time, and
is a prominent image on the website (Transamerica
Corporation 2000). Buildings impart a sense of place and
stability, an extra attribute of tangibility, to a product,
service, or organization. The messages buildings convey
can be affected by the physical characteristics of size,
shape, architectural style, quality of material, attention to
detail, and technologies employed in construction and
operation.

Finally, buildings can be considered a kind of
packaging for the core product/service offerings (Berg and
very well:

What's important to recognize is that fast-food and
motel chains are not like packages, but that they
are packages. The goals of packaged places and
experiences are exactly the same as those of more
conventional packages. They allow corporations
to have complete control over their messages, up
to and following the moment of consumption.
And they provide consumers with uniform
expectations that can be fulfilled (p. 170)

Serving the same functions as the packaging of consumer
goods, buildings as packages protect, identify, and promote
the services taking place inside. "They symbolize the
characteristics and quality of the goods and services being
produced and exchanged" (Berg and Kreiner 1990, p. 54).
Interestingly, U.S. law makes little distinction between
packaged buildings and packaged goods. The look and feel
of a chain of supermarkets, restaurants, transmission
centers, theme parks, or dental offices are protected on the
same basis as the design of a box, bottle, can, or tube. Both
are forms of trade dress and subject to the same protections
(Hine 1995).
REPRESENTATIONS OF COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

This section considers how buildings were represented in both fine and decorative arts and in various forms of commercial advertising prior to 1940. Representations established and reinforced visual conventions that influenced the way people imagined buildings and, consequently, the way advertisers portrayed and audiences consumed them (Schroeder 1998, 1999; Schroeder and Borgerson 1998). Moreover, most mass produced prints and decorated housewares were consumer goods that quickly needed to find a market. Artists and publishers chose specific buildings as subjects and illustrated them in particular ways in part because these were the most saleable images.

Buildings in Fine and Decorative Arts

American public buildings and town views had occasionally been engraved during the 18th century (Deák 1976; Museum of Graphic Art 1969), but the first systematic work of high artistic quality was that of William Birch and his son, Thomas, who prepared and sold a portfolio of 28 views of Philadelphia in 1798-1800. An English immigrant, Birch noted in his introduction that "The ground on which [Philadelphia] stands, was less than a century ago, in a state of wild nature; covered with wood, and inhabited by Indians. It has in this short time, been raised, as it were, by magic power, to the eminence of an opulent city ..." (cited in Deák 1976, p. 38). The leap from wilderness to civilization, the literal building of a new nation, must have intrigued many people besides Birch for his venture was a financial success (Deák 1976). Over the next few decades, images of American buildings became a popular artistic and decorative theme, as well as objects of consumption.

During the 1820s and 1830s, for example, numerous buildings were depicted on what collectors today call Historical Staffordshire — pottery tablewares using the technique of transfer-printed decoration made in England for export to the U.S. market (Larson 1939; Snyder 1995). These plates, bowls, teapots, tureens, and other items featured images of American ships, trains, scenery, historical events, cities, towns, and buildings. Images were frequently copied from the works of other engravers until the British Copyright Act of 1842 slowly brought this practice to an end (Snyder 1995). Staffordshire potters portrayed numerous statehouses, libraries, hospitals, and churches on their wares. Their depictions of commercial buildings included New York's Fulton Market and City Hotel, the Nahant Hotel in Massachusetts, and Mitchell & Freeman's China and Glass Warehouse, Chatham Street, Boston (see Figure 1). Mitchell and Freeman were in business from 1828 to 1832 and, according to Snyder (1995), probably ordered this print themselves from the potters, William Adams and Sons.

Figure 1 Historical Staffordshire: Mitchell & Freeman's China and Glass Warehouse, Boston, by William Adams, c. 1828-1832
SOURCE: Snyder (1995, p. 41)

Historical Staffordshire on the collectors' market generally shows minor signs of wear. Surviving examples probably represent just a fraction of original production, most pieces having disappeared from the ravages of use and time. Alternatively, good condition suggests that in some houses these ceramics were more decorative than utilitarian. During a period when consumers had limited opportunities to acquire pictorial art, these items for table and cupboard helped serve the aesthetic aspirations of middle class American consumers. By presenting American scenes, Staffordshire potters catered to the tastes and patriotism of their American clientele and, in so doing, repaired any damage to sales caused by the War of 1812. John and William Ridgway (in partnership 1814-1830) flourished their American market by naming their building series " Beauties of America. " In these ways, images of buildings were a promotional tool for selling tablewares, albeit not necessarily one controlled by the owners of the buildings and/or the businesses they housed.

By mid-century, Currier and Ives and other lithographers were still including images of buildings in their burgeoning catalogs of decorative prints, but considering the great number of different scenes produced, commercial structures did not appear to be an overly popular subject (Baragwanath 1978; Deák 1976; Peters 1942, Rawls 1979). Print buyers of the Victorian era seemed more attracted to scenes featuring people going places and doing things, the action of everyday life in America. However, one striking exception was the image of New York's Crystal Palace, built for the 1852 World's Fair (officially called the "Exhibition of the Industry of all Nations") and published by Daniel Currier in 1853. Touted as being completely fireproof because it was made of iron and glass, the building burned to the ground in 1858.
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(Baragwanath 1978). Also in 1853, the competing firm of Sarony & Major published a lithograph of the Hippodrome, a large arena on 23rd and Fifth Avenue that resembled a Roman circus. Covered by a brightly striped, waterproof canvas canopy, the building hosted a number of exotic acts including female chariot races. The Hippodrome failed financially and was closed after two seasons and soon torn down (Deak 1976). A few years later, circa 1860, Louis Prang & Co. issued a nostalgic print of the Old Warehouse Dock Square, Boston. Built 1680, Taken Down 1860, as part of their “city interior” series (Hitchings 1978, p. 111). The Prang image commented upon what most Americans had long realized — their buildings were transient structures to be built, demolished, and rebuilt again and again.

Twentieth-century artists and printmakers also created images of commercial buildings. Among the more stunning is John Marin’s 1913 vibrant, expressionistic rendering of the Woolworth Building (The Dance). Marin, who had a brief career in architectural offices, continued to break new artistic ground two years later with a series of similarly avant garde transcriptions of New York landmarks (Watrous 1984). As a promotion, The New Republic offered, in 1924, a portfolio of six etchings — and a subscription — for $9. Buyers could choose one of three Marin city scenes and also received five additional prints including the urban sidewalk scene, Night Shadows, by Edward Hopper and The Bandit’s Cave (in Greenwich Village) by John Sloan. In 1930, Charles Sheeler published a very modernistic, small lithograph of the Delmonico Building (Watrous 1984, p. 82). Like Marin, Sheeler is best known as a painter who, among other industrial subjects, depicted Ford’s River Rouge plant in Michigan (Wilmerting 1976).

American painters and their patrons in the 19th century generally preferred portraiture, landscapes, and genre scenes as subjects. In the early 20th century, however, a number of major artists became intrigued by the increasingly dynamic urban environment, including commercial buildings. None showed a more intense or long-standing interest in buildings than Edward Hopper (1882-1967). He painted stores, office buildings, and gas stations located in big cities, small towns, and in isolated settings. Hopper showed building exteriors and interiors, frequently bathing scenes in autumnal light, and often made physical structures the thematic equal to his human characters (Heller and Williams 1982; Kranzfelder 1995). Many of his images, like Drugstore (1927) or his masterpiece, Nighthawks (1942), featured the large plate glass windows that allowed the public to observe the goods and services sold inside, workers and customers to see the city environment outside, and viewers to voyeuristically appreciate both perspectives. Hopper’s “objectivism” influenced other painters and photographers (Kranzfelder 1995), some of whom applied his ideas to advertising.

Buildings in Advertising

Since newspapers and magazines restricted display advertising until well after the Civil War, advertisers who wanted illustrations had make use of other media such as posters, handbills, and trade cards. Engraved trade cards had been used to promote various merchants and artisans since the 18th century. They were typically given away directly by tradesmen or shopkeepers although late in the 19th century some were being bundled within product packaging. Jay (1987) provides several examples of early depictions of retail/wholesale establishments including see Figure 2 View of the Chart and Quadrant Store of William Hooke (New York, 1818), Hopper & Brother Looking-Glass Warehouse (New York, c1849), and Elihu Geer, Steam Job and Card Printer (Hartford, 1860).

![Figure 2 Early Trade Card](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 2 Early Trade Card**

**SOURCE:** Jay (1987, pp. 18 - 20)

Trade cards reached their zenith as a promotional medium for companies and brands from the 1870s until the first decade of the 1900s, following the widespread adoption of chromolithography, a color printing technology that superceded the tedious process of hand coloring. These later trade cards were usually postcard-sized, printed on both sides, and somewhat stiff. They became the rage at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 and sometimes over one million were distributed for a single promotional run (Laird 1998). Competition was brutal in the printing business. Based on business directories from America’s eight largest cities, Marzio (1978) estimated that nearly 500 firms (100 in New York alone) produced,
published, or sold chromolithographs in 1879. Some printers, like Louis Prang & Co., published both fine art prints and advertising trade cards.

Trade cards often featured enormous manufacturing plants (see Figure 3) such as Fleischmann & Co. of New York (c. 1875) and McCormick Harvester Works in Chicago (c. 1890). Both cards claimed their factories were the largest in the world — Fleischmann's yeast works was said to cover 100 acres with 1,500,000 square feet under roof — and, like several other related examples, showed tall smokestacks emitting clouds of dark effluents (Jay 1987). Circa 1885, two New York City retail clothiers, Vogel Brothers and Bronner & Co., handed out cards showing exterior and interior views of their stores (Jay 1987, pp. 78-79). These impressive five and six story structures occupied opposite sides of Broadway at Houston Street. In 1909, a fanciful postcard for the Huyler's Confectionary and Candy Factory depicted views of the assembly line and factory exterior, the latter encased within a huge coconut representing a year's worth of the raw material condensed into a single nut (Laird 1998, p. 126).

![Figure 3 Manufacturer's Trade Card](SOURCE: Jay (p. 80))

Manufacturers and some retailers also distributed "show cards" which were, in effect, poster-sized (about 18 x 24") trade cards delivered by drummers (traveling salesmen) for display on shops. Examples portraying buildings include a large folio print, the Munich Lager Beer Brewery, Suffolk Brewing Co., Boston (ca. 1875), by C. Frank King (Hitchings 1978) and Macullar, Parker & Company's Cloth & Clothing Warehouse & Manufactory (ca. 1879) by Hatch Lithographic Company, Boston (Levinson 1988, p. 86). The latter image portrayed an exterior view of the building with its back wall removed so allowing the observer to see inside everything from the boiler room to the various workshops to shipping department. Laird (1998) depicts show cards illustrating the factories of Mitchell Novelty Plaster Company (circa 1880), the Sterling Piano Company, and the Estey Organ Company (circa 1890). Whereas Mitchell and Estey place their buildings at the center of the images (surrounded by, among other things, small insets of their fashionably-bearded likenesses), the Sterling poster depicts a Victorian parlor where a girl is playing piano accompanied by her brother (possibly Sterling's own grandchildren). Sterling's portrait is on the wall over the piano and, amazingly, his factory is visible through the window. About the turn of the century, trade and show cards very rapidly lost favor as advertisers allocated more and more of their advertising budgets to the burgeoning medium of illustrated national magazines (Jay 1987).

Promotional images of commercial buildings appeared in other 19th century media. In the 1840s, for example, guest bills for the National Hotel in Washington, D.C. had a view of the structure (Christian 1996, p. 34). In 1875, the cover of the Spring and Summer, Montgomery Ward & Co. catalog showed the Chicago headquarters (Margolin, Brighter and Brighter 1979, p. 28) and, in 1885, Jordan Marsh, one of Boston's leading department stores, illustrated its ornate storefront on the first page of its mail-order catalog (Strasser 1989, p. 208). Although only one company letterhead portraying a building has been located, for the Monmouth Pottery Co. in Monmouth, Illinois, December, 1897, (Waas 2000, p. 56), Laird (1998) believes that many, if not most other firms printed pictures of their offices and factories on their stationery. She also has found examples of architectural imagery in almanacs, entries in city directories, and on tin containers and all sorts of boxes.

By 1900, monthly magazines had become the dominant national medium. Titles had proliferated; their size had increased; and some were experimenting with full-page, color illustrations (Norriss 1990). Conventional 19th-century exterior scenes of offices, stores, and factories were used from time to time, but in the 1920s a new type of visual cliché became popular — the view from the office window (Figure 4). In these tableaux, the boss stands in his office looking out of an enormous window at a nearby factory with tall, smoking chimneys. According to Marchand (1985), these ads conveyed a production orientation with the businessman autonomous and in control. Ad agencies may have created these scenes to flatter self-important clients. Interestingly, this window perspective was echoed years later in a 1953 painting, Office in a Small City, by Edward Hopper. Not only does representation in fine art influence commercial art, but as Andy Warhol would demonstrate again in the 1960s, the conventions of commercial art could affect representations in other contemporary arts.

**COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS AS MATERIAL ARTIFACTS**

This section presents an alternative, but complementary method for analyzing the promotional history of commercial buildings. Here, specific architectural forms and exemplars of these forms are the focus and starting point of the investigation which, as it unfolds, incorporates
the histories of individuals, their times, and evolving American culture. Buildings as material data sources will be illustrated in this paper via another type of representation, the photograph, that itself contains visual conventions in terms of composition, perspective, and mixtures of black and white, grays, and texture.

Department Stores

As they evolved in 19th century Europe and America, department stores incorporated a potent mix of marketing and management practices including diverse product assortments under one roof, fixed prices and cash payment, small markups and rapid turnover, exchanges and refunds, aggressive advertising, and departmental buyer responsibility (Gardner 1984). Store architecture became an important part of the overall merchandising effort -- grand and impressive edifices that Boorstin (1973) and others have called "palaces of consumption" -- and created a legacy that still influences department store retailing today. The notion of "place" in retail distribution took on new meaning.

Two of the earliest and most impressive such buildings (see Figure 5) were the "Marble Palace" and "Cast Iron Palace" of Alexander T. Stewart (1801-1879) in New York City (Cantor 1975; Gardner 1984; Resseguie 1964). A Scotch-Irish immigrant who arrived sometime in the 1820s, Stewart built extremely successful and innovative, retail and wholesale businesses. When tax assessments were made during the Civil War, Stewart's personal income of $1,843,631 was the highest in the country (Cantor 1975).

His Marble Palace on 280 Broadway opened in 1846 and was enlarged again in 1850. It introduced the use of Italianate design and white Tuckahoe marble exterior walls to American commercial buildings and was the first store in New York to install large plate glass windows, which had to be imported from France. Above all, the Marble Palace boasted a great rotunda that allowed light and air to penetrate the interior. This building intrigued, among many others, the well-known editor, James Gordon Bennett, who praised the store in his New York Herald: "New York can now boast of the most splendid dry goods store in the world. . . . Mr. Stewart has paid the ladies of this city a high compliment in giving them such a beautiful resort in which to while away their leisure hours of the morning" (cited in Resseguie 1964, p. 142). By all accounts, the Marble Palace did attract an upmarket, female clientele, but it also offered merchandise priced for shoppers of more modest means.

Eventually, Stewart needed still more floor space and a new location farther uptown and so the white-painted, Cast Iron Palace was constructed in two major stages between 1859 and 1868, eventually occupying an entire city block on Broadway between 9th and 10th Streets. The strength of cast iron permitted even larger windows, more spacious and open floors, and a more dramatic rotunda. It cost $2.75 million to build, and was serviced by 320 clerks and 200 cash boys. It was reputed to be the largest retail store in the world and on an average day some 15,000 customers spent $60,000 (Homburger 1994). Periodicals such as Godsey's Lady's Book and Magazine and Hearth and Home published breathlessly complementary articles about the Cast Iron Palace and its assortments of goods (Gardner 1984). However, not everyone was equally as impressed.
Writing in 1876 in the *American Architect and Building News*, P.B. Wight criticized the overuse of cast iron and argued that the building had little to attract passersby other than its giant size (Boyer 1985). Nevertheless, Stewart's architectural ideas influenced the design of stores built for Lord and Taylor, Marshall Field, and John Wanamaker, the latter having once been one of Stewart's wholesale clients (Ressague 1964). Between the Civil War and 1900 many such consumer palaces appeared in both major and middle-sized cities -- examples of the latter including Lazarus in Columbus, Ohio and Hudson's in Detroit (Boorstin 1973).

**Skyscrapers**

By the mid-1880s advances in elevator technology and steel frame construction, as well as soaring land prices in city centers, made possible a new form of commercial building -- the skyscraper. In New York City, the sharp edges of the Flatiron Building (1902) suggested, among other things, an aggressive commercialism (Homburger 1994). A subject for several major photographers, such as Edward Steichen and Alfred Stieglitz, this was the first skyscraper to become a major cultural icon. The Woolworth Building (1913), dubbed the "cathedral of commerce" because its shape and architectural details called to mind a very tall gothic church and steeple (Figure 6), announced a monumental capitalism. It was the tallest building in the world until the completion of the magnificent Chrysler (1930), Empire State (1931) and RCA (1933) buildings. In Chicago, the Spanish Revival Wrigley Building (1922) and flamboyant Gothic Tribune Tower (1925) formed an impressive gateway to one of the world's great shopping streets, North Michigan Avenue. Beginning in the late 19th century, corporations increasingly recognized how these high-rises could be used to identify themselves to the public and symbolically mark their own rise to prominence (Vidler 2000). By the 1920s, the skyscraper -- along with the airplane and dirigible -- had become the symbol of American modernity (Marchand 1985, p. 242).

Although all of above buildings have become landmarks, their promotional potentials have not always been exploited to the fullest. For example, Walter Chrysler built his skyscraper as a personal project, not as a corporate headquarters, and over the years it has had several owners. The RCA Building's promotional impact was somewhat eclipsed because it was part of a larger midtown Manhattan development, Rockefeller Center, that celebrated the civic mindedness and stature of the namesake family.

The Woolworth Building, in contrast, was a memorial to one individual, Frank Winfield Woolworth, who had nurtured the idea of an outstanding namesake building for years. He hired Cass Gilbert, one of the foremost architects of the time, and paid for the $13.5 million construction cost with cash out of his own very deep pockets. Yet, his "Skyline Queen" was also headquarters for the company which had just incorporated the previous year and merged with four smaller five and dime chains under the Woolworth name (Plunkett-Powell 1999; Winkler 1940). During various phases of construction, Woolworth distributed pictures of the building to all his stores and, for the grand opening, persuaded recently inaugurated President Woodrow Wilson to press a button in Washington that instantly lighted 80,000 electric bulbs in New York illuminating the skyscraper for guests inside and thousands of onlookers on the sidewalks below. Starting at the grand opening in 1913 and continuing for decades, the company issued hundreds of different Woolworth Building mementos including postcards, cast iron banks, salt and pepper shakers, hand mirrors, needle books, and many more which, today, have become collectibles frequently sold via online auctions (Plunkett-Powell 1999). In 1915, the Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco awarded the building the Medal of Honor for being the highest and finest office building in the world.

The promotional potential of Tribune Tower (Figure 7) was similarly mined by its corporate management, above all, the opinionated publisher, Colonel Robert McCormick. Well before construction began, the *Chicago Tribune* made news by publicizing an international architectural competition, eventually won by John Mead Howells and Raymond M. Hood of New York City, with $100,000 in prize money. On opening day in 1925, the self-proclaimed "World's Greatest Newspaper" bragged that Tribune Tower had cost $8.5 million, less than what Frank Woolworth had spent in 1913 on his great edifice, but the world's most
expensive skyscraper at the time in terms of cost per cubic foot (Kamin 2000). Few major companies and no other American newspapers have been as closely identified with the buildings that house them. Although the Woolworth Building's eponymous corporate owner went out of business in 1997, Tribune Tower remains home of the vigorous Tribune Company, a very large media conglomerate with significant operations in publishing, broadcasting, and interactive ventures. A small store at the Michigan Avenue entrance sells Tribune building, newspaper, city of Chicago memorabilia.

Figure 7 Tribune Tower (May, 1925)
SOURCE: Kamin (2000, p. 5)

Car Culture Architecture

Transportation routes, from city streets to interstate railroads, have bred distinctive types of commercial architectures. Main Street, for example, became the quintessential institution of small towns and the symbol of the American heartland and its values (Kostoff 1987). Usually just a few blocks long, Main Street was bordered by one or two-story business buildings. Single story premises typically featured tall “false fronts” that provided space for store signage and masked the gabled ends of the frame buildings which were considered unsuitably prestigious and dignified. Railroads required stations which became, in the biggest cities, grand edifices that awed travelers while supplying them with mundane goods and services. Because they could reliably transport a large number of people long distances, railroads also created a growing market to be served by increasingly splendid urban center and resort hotels.

The arrival of the automobile spurred the development of new roads, like the celebrated Route 66, which opened in 1926 and was completely paved by 1937 (Waltis 1990), and new types of commercial buildings dedicated to servicing vehicles and their human occupants. Gas stations became a major type of pre-WWII car culture architecture. They started with distinctive signage such as Shell's bright yellow scallop, Texaco's red star, and Socony's flying red horse. In the 1930s, as the concept of the service station evolved, standardization became even more important. In 1937 Texaco introduced its new Type A station whose bright white panels, not unlike those in White Castles, conveyed an image of clean efficiency. By 1940 more than 500 Texaco stations adopted this design (Hine 1995).

Eating establishments also catered to the car culture. Among the earliest was White Castle, founded in Wichita in 1921. The name of the business described the building which was white both inside and out and whose roofline suggested medieval battlements and turrets.

The whiteness on the inside was not as innovative as the whiteness on the outside. The buildings declared themselves on the street just as boxes and bottles fight for recognition on the counter. They promised brand names and standardized products, and the promise of safety was literally built into the restaurants' design (Hine 1995, p. 122).

Howard Johnson's, founded in 1925 as an ice-cream stand in suburban Boston, brought distinctive architecture to the highways in the 1930s. Their sites were visible at great distances and the buildings had a highly visible orange-tilled roofs. Hine (1995) contends that they appropriated the fairy tale imagery of Maxfield Parrish; whereas Kostoff (1987) recalls a neo-colonial stone architecture on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and, along national roads, a pseudo New England town hall or church image complete with bright orange steeples, green shutters, and overhanging eaves.

Some of the most imaginative examples of car culture architecture were built in Southern California during the 1920s and 1930s. The low-density, horizontal sprawl of the region, combined with its mild climate, engendered a rapid and growing commitment to the automobile, made virtually irrevocable by the construction of the Pasadena Freeway in 1940. Herberts (1936), on Fairfax Avenue in Beverly Hills, was an especially well-conceived adaptation to this environment. This drive-in featured a circular design with radial parking, providing customers with easy access to the carhops and central kitchen (see Figure 8). Prominent from the roof was a pylon with neon signage to help attract passing motorists (Kostoff 1987). Other road-side
restaurants, such as the famous Brown Derby (1926) or the less celebrated Dog Café (1928) and Zep Diner (1930) in Los Angeles, were, in effect, massive signage easy to spot from a fast moving car (see Figure 9).

Figure 8 Herbert’s (1936)
SOURCE: Kostoff (1987, p. 198)

Much like the zany historicism of the Las Vegas Strip decades later, Sid Grauman's Egyptian (1922) and Chinese (1927) Theaters in Hollywood reinterpreted on a large-scale period/cultural motifs. Not too far away, in the City of Commerce, the offices and manufacturing facility of the Samson Tire and Rubber Company (1930) were modeled after a 7th century B.C. Assyrian palace. It boasted a 1750 foot-long crenulated concrete wall decorated with heraldic griffins and bas-reliefs of Babylonian princes. This façade has been preserved as the front entrance to the region's first outlet mall, Citadel Factory Stores, located right next to the later-constructed SantaAna Freeway (Figure 10). The building’s image and history are featured on the mall website (Citadel Factory Stores 2000). The original architecture was good enough -- or perhaps the building was just lucky enough -- to escape total demolition, to acquire a kind of patination and, therefore, to become worthy of preservation.

Figure 10 Citadel Factory Store

MILESTONES IN MARKETING HISTORY

INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Buildings, as well as representations of buildings, convey messages about their creators, their intended audiences, and their ambient societes. At a macro level of explanation, they can be an indicator of an era's cultural values. However, as Laird (1998, p. 464) reminds us, it is all too easy for the present-day interpreter to confuse his or her own reactions to buildings and their representations with the feelings these structures evoked from people in the past. Thus, the following readings are offered more as a series of working hypotheses, not definitive statements.

The evidence suggests that during the first quarter of the 19th century, buildings were becoming an element of great interest to the American public and a symbolic repository for the new nation's shared identity. The early depictions on prints and on Staffordshire tablewares celebrated the growing attractiveness and permanence of the burgeoning United States and, in the ca.1820s "Era of Good Feelings," appealed to the deep-seated patriotic inclinations of the purchasers. By mid-century, however, the meaning of commercial buildings appears in transition to something larger, more powerful, and more urban. For example, the portrayal of factory buildings on later 19th trade and show cards, letterheads, and other media conveyed pride in the sheer scale of the organization. By boasting about the size of their enterprises, industrialists revealed their great self-confidence, not to mention their pomposity. Laird (1998) contends that these images may have affronted of many prosperous people including:
... reformers concerned about urban blight or workers' conditions, artisans angry over the deskilling of production, nativists concerned about the immigrants who filled the factories, as well as many of the old elites, especially the merchant classes, who saw their neighborhoods and statues decline as the industrialists' rose (p. 97).

Before the turn of the century, owner-advertisers still dictated the creative approach according to their own tastes and, apparently, were more concerned with audience sensibilities. Later, in 1920's advertising, the executive himself, gazing through his outsized office window at the enormous manufacturing facilities below, became the visual center of attention. By this time, advertising professionals were mainly responsible for copy and layout and, presumably, were more attuned to the feelings of the target audiences. In the case of the Gulf Refining Company ad shown in Figure 4, placement in Fortune, an elite, business-oriented magazine, clearly suggests that the readers were sympathetic to this view from the top.

Buildings as artifacts also comment on the changing American scene. Impressively sized department stores not only provided customers with a previously un-lived and unimagined shopping experience, but also, with their almost cathedral-like interiors, seemed to make consumption something of a sacred ritual. These buildings also helped to create "consumption communities" where people from a wider variety of social classes could mingle:

The grand new consumer palaces were to the old small and intimate shops what the grand new American hotels were to the Old World inns. Like the hotels, the department stores were symbols of faith in the future of growing communities. For citizens of the spouting towns the new department-store grandeur gave dignity, importance, and publicity to acts of shopping and buying -- new communal acts in a new America (Boorstin 1973, p. 101).

Twentieth-century skyscrapers became the emblem of the big city and, along with the clean and efficient chain restaurants and gas stations of the 1930s, represented American-style modernity. Main Street architecture, on the other hand, seemed to reiterate the values of a simpler, more agrarian and more personal, past. Even Route 66, sometimes known as "America's Main Street," and the numerous mom-and-pop establishments it made possible had a more down-home feeling than the more impersonal and heavily franchised interstate highway system that followed in the 1950s and 1960s.

There are several promising avenues for further research in this area. Perhaps the first priority is to expand the breadth and depth of this history by conducting surveys of the promotional use of buildings since 1940, and in countries outside the United States. Interestingly, at the turn of the 21st century, when corporations have become more globalized and, in some cases, nearly virtual enterprises transcending any particular location, there may be less need for signature architecture (Vidler 2000). Moreover, specific structural forms like banks, hotels, and amusement parks provide opportunities for many more studies. These more narrowly focused topics, especially promotional histories of individual buildings, lend themselves to greater use of primary source materials such as newspaper accounts, magazine articles, letters and diaries. All in all, as an important promotional tool in the history of marketing, commercial buildings deserve much more attention from researchers.

REFERENCES


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