

**FROM DOWNTOWN TO THE MALL:
DEPARTMENT STORE LOCATIONAL STRATEGIES IN BALTIMORE SINCE 1945**

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ABSTRACT

The four major department stores in Baltimore followed different suburbanization strategies in the post World War II years. This paper traces the sites of the various non-downtown stores through the years and thereby infers each company's locational strategies. By extension, retailing strategies are discerned.

INTRODUCTION

In the decade plus prior to World War II, first the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and then the Great Depression of the 1930's precluded much construction of housing and commercial structures. Hence, cities maintained their compact quality along with their population density. But, in the immediate post-World War II period, urban areas underwent dynamic changes. Because of the lack of funds during the Depression and then the emphasis on filling the production needs of wartime, the condition of the country's housing stock had declined. Much of the existing housing had not been properly maintained and very little had been built. Thus, there was a large amount of pent-up demand. In addition, veterans returning from fighting the war who got married and wanted to start families were confronted with a housing shortage further increasing the demand. To satisfy this demand, developers bought land on the outskirts of cities and beyond and began to build tract houses there. This new suburban housing was rapidly sold.

This phenomenon completely changed the dynamics of the urban areas of the United States. The suburbs experienced rapid population growth at the expense of the inner city. At the beginning of this outward population movement, people were forced to return downtown to do their shopping as there was a dearth of stores in the suburbs. Simultaneously with this outward population movement other processes were occurring that fostered further changes in the cities. As a result of increasing mechanization in the agricultural sector, African-Americans from the rural areas of the South, who had begun migrating to the large urban areas of the North starting in 1940, arrived in greater numbers during the later 1940's and 1950's. These new urban migrants settled in the areas of the city vacated by the people who were moving to the outlying areas.

To keep up with the demographic changes that were occurring, department stores began to move to the suburbs in pursuit of their clientele. At first, stand-alone stores were constructed. These stores saved customers from making the trip downtown to do their shopping. The department stores found, however, that their business would be increased if the stores were grouped with other stores so that customers could satisfy more of their needs in one place. Department stores thus became the anchors in long strip shopping centers. Customers, however, still had to go outdoors to patronize the other stores in the center.

To improve the environmental conditions for their customers, some of the strip shopping centers were enclosed and converted into malls. Others that were not converted languished. During this time many of these shopping center/malls included grocery stores as tenants. Spurred on by the success of the enclosed shopping centers, developers began to construct malls which would be occupied by department stores serving as anchors, and a myriad of specialty stores. Over time mall construction resulted in a hierarchy of malls with the quality and number of the anchor department stores and accompanying specialty stores determining the mall's place in the hierarchy.

The changing urban dynamics described in the previous section occurred throughout the country. This paper will concentrate on the changes that happened in the retail sector of one city, Baltimore, MD from 1945 to the present. It will examine the strategies that the four department stores which existed in 1945 near the

city's nexus, Howard and Lexington Streets, employed to counter the demographic changes experienced in the city during the fifty year period since the end of World War II. In 1945, four department stores were located near the corner of Howard and Lexington Streets in Baltimore, MD. They were Hochschild-Kohn, Stewart's, May Co., and Hutzler's.

Hochschild-Kohn occupied the northwest corner of Howard and Lexington Streets in a building constructed in the late 1870's. The Christmas parades that Hochschild's staged were Baltimore's version of the famed Macy's parade in New York. Stewart's, located across Howard Street from Hochschild-Kohn was founded in 1901 by Louis Stewart, Sr. of New York who purchased the Posner Brothers Store at the same location. It traditionally catered to upscale customers who were generally older and more conservative. A branch of the national company, the May Co., was located across Lexington Street from Hochschild-Kohn on the southwest corner of Lexington and Howard Streets. It would later merge with a local Baltimore store, Hecht's and would be known as Hecht's in the Baltimore-Washington area before expanding to a wider geographic area of the Mid-Atlantic states, Virginia, and the Carolinas. Hutzler's, or more formally Hutzler Brothers was located just to the north of Hochschild-Kohn on Howard Street and extended north to Saratoga Street and covered the better part of an entire city block. It had its roots in the wholesale dry goods business of Abraham G. and Charles G. Hutzler which opened on Baltimore Street in 1867. Their younger brother, David, had previously opened a retail store on Howard Street near Clay Street in 1858. Abraham and Charles closed their business and went into business with David in 1884 (Kahn 1989). The first grand Hutzler edifice opened on Howard Street in 1888. It had been expanded several times by 1945.

None of these stores had opened any branch stores outside the downtown area by the end of World War II. How each of these department stores coped with the changing demographics will be the focus of this paper.

HOCHSCHILD-KOHN

Hochschild-Kohn, a Baltimore institution since the late 19th century, opened its first branch store outside downtown in Edmondson Village, west of downtown, in 1947. The Edmondson Village Shopping Center was touted as a "suburban shopping center of harmonious design, said to be unique in American city planning." (Baltimore Evening Sun April 30, 1947). Edmondson Village was a white middle class suburban rowhouse community on the west side of Baltimore that was developed in the 1920's (Orser 1994).

Hochschild-Kohn opened its next suburban branch store in the Govans neighborhood at the Belvedere to the north of downtown Baltimore on York Road in 1948. (Baltimore News-Post September 23, 1948 ; Baltimore Sun September 29, 1948). The Belvedere store was a stand-alone structure that had large display windows and fronted on York Road, a main thoroughfare to the northern city neighborhoods. Both of these stores, Edmondson Village and Belvedere, were still within the city limits of Baltimore, but were significantly distant from the downtown store at Lexington and Howard Streets. A third story was added to the Edmondson Village store in 1951 (Orser 1994) and an addition was made to the downtown Lexington and Howard Street store in 1959-60.

Branch stores just outside the city limits were opened at Eastpoint Shopping Center in 1956 and Harundale Shopping Center in 1958. In these locations Hochschild-Kohn was one of the anchor tenants in what were very big strip shopping centers. Then in the 1960's, control of the company passed first to a western group (Baltimore Evening Sun May 2, 1966) and then to Supermarkets General in 1969 (James 1986). Because of five years of declining sales volume, the Edmondson Village store was closed in early 1974 (Chalmers 1973), while the Belvedere store was extensively renovated and changed into a store selling only contemporary fashions in 1976. Small stores were opened at Reisterstown Road Plaza and North Plaza in the same year, 1977, after these two centers were enclosed and transformed into malls, as opposed to their earlier strip shopping center format. A small fashion store was also opened at Kenilworth Bazaar in Towson a year later in 1978.

The Lexington and Howard Street store closed in the fall of 1977 just after Hochschild-Kohn opened its first store in a regional mall at Security Square in Baltimore County, just west of the Baltimore Beltway. However, a large number of small stores selling primarily fashions could not compete with the other department stores in the Baltimore area. The Belvedere store closed in early 1984, while the Eastpoint, Harundale, Reisterstown Road Plaza, and Security Square stores closed later in the same year. The first two stores, Eastpoint and Harundale, were in strip shopping centers that had languished after nearby regional malls had opened. Both Eastpoint and Harundale were enclosed in the 1970's and transformed into malls, but by then these locations did not have the cachet of the new generation of regional centers such as Security Square. Security Square opened too late to help the failing Hochschild-Kohn chain survive the changing retail climate in the Baltimore metropolitan area. The Harundale and Security Square locations were sold to Hutzler's (Baltimore Sun August 21, 1984). The Kenilworth Bazaar store in Towson and the North Plaza store in Parkville were the last remaining Hochschild-Kohn stores. They closed a couple of years later in the middle of 1986 (James 1986).

The strategy of operating a store in each neighborhood necessitated smaller stores which did not attract the number of customers full fledged department stores would have. The idea of being in many neighborhoods probably stemmed from the fact that Hochschild-Kohn was owned by a grocery chain.

STEWART'S

Occupying the northeast corner of Lexington and Howard Streets was Stewart's, a store which served its upscale, older, and more conservative customers with traditional merchandise. Stewart's, a New York store, had purchased Posner Brothers in 1901. Then in 1960, Stewart's was purchased by Associated Dry Goods. Stewart's first branch store in Baltimore was located on York Road to the north of the Baltimore city/county line in Drumcastle Plaza. This location is about a half mile north of Hochschild-Kohn's Belvedere store. The two-story store which opened in 1955, anchored the small strip shopping center named for the former estate on which it was situated. A second branch store opened on the north end of Reisterstown Road Plaza when the strip shopping center opened in 1962 (Williams 1962). Then in February of 1970 a third suburban Stewart's store opened at Westview Shopping Center, a strip shopping center, two miles west of Edmondson Village on U.S. 40 at its juncture with the Baltimore Beltway. Stewart's, connected to Hutzler's which had opened in 1958 via a parking garage, thus was situated at the same end of the center and only 320 feet away from one of its primary competitors (Glasgow 1968). A year later in early 1971 the Timonium Mall store opened. Stewart's was a two-story anchor store in a very small mall at the end of a strip shopping center. The strip shopping center's anchor was a grocery store. The last Stewart's branch to open was at Golden Ring Mall when that mall opened in 1974. Golden Ring was one of the early regional malls in the Interstate 95 corridor between Washington and Philadelphia and for a brief time served as a major tourist attraction (Klein 1996).

By the late 1970's the demographics of the city of Baltimore had changed and few people traveled downtown to shop. When it was announced that the downtown Stewart's would close in February of 1979, so many people mobbed the store to take advantage of the store closing sale that the number of customers admitted to the store had to be limited (Bainbridge 1979).

Stewart's was having financial difficulties. The decision was made by Associated Dry Goods to close all the remaining Stewart's stores in the Baltimore metropolitan area, which was done by early 1983 (Baltimore Sun February 10, 1983).

Stewart's conservative location strategy did not permit it to enter the regional malls that were opened in the early 1980's especially in the growth areas of the city. Operating two stores in the York Road corridor and hence concentrating resources in one geographic area split customers between the two stores and lowered Stewart's profits. In addition, on the west side of the city, both locations, i.e. Westview and Reisterstown Road Plaza, were inside the Baltimore Beltway in neighborhoods that were no longer as upscale or prestigious as they had once been. With respect to the Golden Ring Mall location, in the early 1980's a newer, bigger, and

better mall opened a few miles to the northeast at White Marsh. This siphoned off the customers from Golden Ring. It was no longer chic to go to Golden Ring like it once had been.

Stewart's had tried to follow its customers to the suburbs but in doing so had overbuilt in certain areas while leaving others with no stores. At any rate, depending on older customers is always an iffy proposition at best. Doing so in the suburbs is even riskier. The conservative development strategy had not been a good one for Associated Dry Goods and Stewart's in the Baltimore area. All of the closed Stewart's locations in the Baltimore area were transformed into Caldor stores, Associated's discount chain.

HECHT'S

At the corner of Howard and Franklin Streets, a few blocks north of Howard Street's junction with Lexington Street in downtown Baltimore, was a Hecht Brothers store. Another Hecht Brothers store located at Baltimore and Pine Streets was close to a secondary downtown Baltimore retailing center (Shivers 1995). These two stores merged with The Hub Appliance Store at the corner of Baltimore, Charles, and Fayette Streets in 1951. The company was then known as The Hecht Company of Baltimore (Baltimore Sun October 4, 1951).

The first suburban store opening by the Hecht Company of Baltimore occurred in 1954. Located on the southeast corner of Loch Raven Boulevard and Hillen Road, it provided an anchor for the Northwood Shopping Center. The store contained two floors of merchandise and had rooftop parking as well as a parking deck alongside the store (Consolidated Engineering Company Achievement October, 1954). With the opening of this store, many customers from northern Baltimore found it much more convenient to go to Northwood than to go downtown (Klein 1996). A second suburban store opened on October 15, 1956. The two story stand-alone store was located on the south side of Edmondson Avenue (U. S. 40) across from the Edmondson Village Shopping Center (Orser 1994).

Then early in 1959 The Hecht Company of Baltimore and The May Co. merged to become the Hecht-May Company (Baltimore American February 1, 1959). The only May Co. store in the Baltimore area was located on the southwest corner of Lexington and Howard Streets. The consolidation meant that the May Company gained access to the suburbs. The Hecht Company stores at Baltimore and Pine and Howard and Franklin Streets were closed. The new Hecht-May Company gave a boost to the downtown by consolidating its efforts at the Lexington and Howard Street store and the old Hub store at Baltimore, Charles, and Fayette Streets (Baltimore American February 1, 1959). (The downtown store continued to be called Hecht-May Company while all the other stores were known as Hecht's.)

The next suburban store to open was at the southern end of Reisterstown Road Plaza in 1961 (Baltimore News-Post March 13, 1962). The three suburban stores opened by this time were situated in middle-class neighborhoods within the city limits of Baltimore on the northern, northwestern, and western sides of the city. Two were anchors of open-air strip shopping centers while the third one was a stand-alone store across the street from a strip shopping center.

Renovations to the Lexington and Howard Street store were made in 1973 at the time that Lexington Street was transformed into a pedestrian mall. This strategy was typical of the efforts of many cities of all sizes across the United States to try to entice consumers back downtown by installing a suburban style environment (Baltimore Magazine December 1973). Further renovations were made to the Lexington and Howard Street store in 1979.

Despite the attempts to get people to return downtown to shop, they continued to patronize the suburban stores. A major shift in Hecht's locational strategy began to emerge during the 1970's with the opening of the Hecht's store at Golden Ring Mall in 1974. One of the other anchor stores in this climate-controlled mall located just outside the Baltimore Beltway was its neighbor on Howard Street, Stewart's. The store and the mall, a proto-type for other East Coast regional malls was a big success (Klein 1996). Reisterstown Road

Plaza was made into an enclosed climate-controlled mall in 1975 and 1976. Hecht's renovated its store in 1975 to coincide with the aforementioned transformation and then renovated it again in 1979. The Northwood store also received improvements in 1975 and 1979 while the Edmondson Village store closed.

The closing of the Edmondson Village store early in 1979 was followed a few months later by the opening of the Hecht's store at Security Square Mall on the west side of Baltimore just outside the Baltimore Beltway north of its juncture with Interstate 70. The Edmondson Village store was located in a maturing white middle-class neighborhood when it opened in 1956. That neighborhood experienced a very rapid racial and class population turnover in the first ten years that the store was open (Orser 1994). By the middle 1970's many of Hecht's customers no longer resided in close proximity to the store. The demographics of the Edmondson Village neighborhood changed so completely that that Hecht's store was not showing a profit.

In the early 1980's with the Northwood store's neighborhood demographics similar to those of Edmondson Village, Hecht's looked for a location in the northern quadrant of the city. Hutzler's, a local Baltimore store with a stand-alone branch store in the Baltimore county seat at Towson was in some financial difficulty in the early 1980's. It agreed to sell Hecht's some property adjacent to its Towson store to the north in the Dulaney Valley. There was an "understanding" that Hecht's and Hutzler's would eventually be connected to one another via a mall (Baltimore News-American July 17, 1981). The Towson Hecht's store opened on September 15, 1982 (Baltimore Sun September 16, 1982). The new stand-alone Towson store became the flagship store in the Baltimore metropolitan area as a result of the reduction of operations in downtown Baltimore. The top three floors of the Lexington and Howard Street store and a majority of the Fayette Street store (the old Hub appliance location) were turned over to the city of Baltimore (Baltimore Sun April 2, 1982). The Fayette Street store closed its doors in 1985. The Northwood store after being scaled down in size by leasing the bottom floor to Hechinger's, a home improvement store, in 1983 closed completely in 1986. The Reisterstown Road Plaza store was also pared down in size and again it was Hechinger's that leased the bottom floor while Hecht's retained use of the top floor of the two-story building. The Reisterstown Road Plaza store closed completely in September, 1986 about a month after the opening of the Owings Mills Town Center Hecht's.

Owings Mills is a planned growth area of Baltimore County approximately 4 miles outside the Baltimore Beltway adjacent to a feeder highway, I-795. The Baltimore subway line terminates next to the Rouse Company owned mall. Geographically this mall is about 8 miles further out in the suburbs than Reisterstown Road Plaza in an area not likely to undergo rapid demographic change in the next couple of decades.

Hecht's strategy was to open stores in regional malls in the Baltimore metropolitan area. Therefore, when a regional mall, Marley Station, the equivalent of Owings Mills, opened south of Baltimore in Anne Arundel County in 1987, Hecht's was an original anchor tenant. Until that time, Hecht's did not have a store in the southern part of the metropolitan area. In the early 1990's, Hecht's moved into the regional center at White Marsh in the anchor space formerly occupied by Hutzler's. White Marsh, on the northeast, is another area to which the local government is steering growth in a similar pattern to what is occurring at Owings Mills. In opening a store at White Marsh, Hecht's was repeating its earlier locational strategy. The White Marsh store is five miles further out of the city than the Golden Ring store in the Interstate 95 corridor. The Rosedale area where Golden Ring Mall is located is at the beginning of the spiral of neighborhood decay which presages changing demographics. Stewart's, which had been one of the original tenants when the mall opened had been converted, into a Caldor store. The retail mix of stores was of a lesser quality than what a shopper might expect to find in a regional mall. If the earlier location pattern is indeed being replicated by Hecht's, the Golden Ring store will be closed in the near future.

A couple of years before the opening of the White Marsh store in 1990, the flagship Towson store was expanded and connected into the greatly enlarged Towson Town Center. The original plans of the mall owner, the Hahn Company, included Hutzler's, but in the implementation stage, Hutzler's location was left out, and another anchor, Nordstrom's, built and opened a store at the opposite end of the mall property.

In early 1989 Hecht's closed its downtown store at Lexington and Howard Streets. It had hung on a decade longer on the corner than Hochschild-Kohn and Stewart's. Only one other competitor remained open downtown when Hecht's closed and that was Hutzler's.

HUTZLER'S (HUTZLER BROTHERS)

The largest and grandest of all the stores on or near the corner of Lexington and Howard Streets was Hutzler's or Hutzler Brothers. The original store in this location, called the Palace Store because of its distinctive architecture, opened in 1888 (Harwood 1995). The company purchased the air rights over Clay Street from the city of Baltimore and extended its frontage north on Howard Street with an art deco style addition in the early twentieth century. Hutzler's, more than any of the other three stores epitomized the downtown Baltimore shopping experience (Oden 1996).

Hutzler's first branch store opened Monday December 8, 1952 at the intersection of Dulaney Valley Road, Joppa Road, Allegheny Avenue, and York Road in suburban Towson (Baltimore Sun November 21, 1952). This stand-alone store's location was a cross between city and suburbia. It was on a city-type lot adjacent to the older developed Towson retail area, but included undeveloped land on the north side of Joppa Road which provided space for a parking lot and deck. The parking lot opened into the lower level of the store with the entrance under Joppa Road, which in effect bridged a part of the store. The tea room overlooking rural Dulaney Valley became a favorite lunch place for many Towson women.

Four years later, in 1956, a second branch Hutzler's store opened at Eastpoint Shopping Center. This branch was followed by the opening of a store at Westview Shopping Center in September 1958. After the Southdale Plaza Shopping Center store on Ritchie Highway and Mountain Road opened in October 1965, Hutzler's had a branch store in each of the four major quadrants, north, east, west, and south of the metropolitan area.

Between 1979 and 1981, the Eastpoint store was renovated. The improvements coincided with the transformation of Eastpoint from a strip shopping center into a mall. The Westview store was also given a facelift during the same time period. A third store, the venerable downtown store on Howard Street, also was renovated between 1979 and 1981. At about the same time Hutzler's opened two additional stores (Baltimore Evening Sun August 6, 1981).

The Inner Harbor Store opened in the Equitable Bank Center building on the corner of Lombard and Hanover Streets in May of 1980. This investment in the renaissance of downtown Baltimore by Hutzler's coincided with the building by the Rouse Company of the Pratt and Light Street pavilions on the waterfront. It was hoped that this development would spur other growth in the downtown area. Hutzler's, naturally, supported the efforts to revive downtown retailing.

A little over a year later in August 1981 Hutzler's opened a store at White Marsh Town Center (Baltimore Evening Sun August 11, 1981). White Marsh was a regional mall on the northeastern side of Baltimore on Interstate 95 about five miles outside the Baltimore Beltway. It was in an area in which the local government was encouraging population growth and development. However, the cost of the renovations and the opening of the two new stores meant Hutzler's needed to raise some capital (Baltimore Sun May 17, 1983). Hutzler's was therefor amenable to selling some of its land in Towson to its competitor, Hecht's, with the "understanding" that the Towson Hutzler's store would be connected to the new Hecht's store in any mall development that occurred on the site.

A year later in October 1984 Hutzler's opened stores at Harundale Mall on Ritchie Highway and Security Square Mall, in locations the company purchased from the failed Hochschild-Kohn Company. Harundale had been a strip shopping center that had been transformed into an enclosed mall. It was about two miles north of Southdale Plaza. Having two stores so close together meant neither store could be particularly successful. The Southdale Plaza store closed in 1985. The Inner Harbor store in the Equitable Bank Center closed in

December 1986. It had been open just six years. Then early in 1987 Hutzler's closed the Westview store because of its proximity to the Security Square store which was in a newer mall in a better demographic area. Hutzler's designated its Towson store as its flagship store at this time (Baltimore Sun March 27, 1987).

In 1989 most of the other Hutzler's stores closed, one after the other, beginning with the Harundale store in January, and then the Howard Street store in February (Tyner 1989). These were followed by the closure of the Eastpoint store in April, the Security Square store in June and the White Marsh store in November (Atwood 1989). The last remaining Hutzler store, the first store it had opened in the suburbs was the very last Hutzler's store to remain open. It too closed in January 1990.

From the late 1970's or early 1980's to the end of the decade, Hutzler's had made some very costly locational errors that brought about its demise. First of all, the company had committed itself to aiding in the revival of the downtown by opening the Inner Harbor store and renovating the Howard Street store. The spread effect of the development outward from the waterfront pavilions was not strong enough to help a business even a block and a half away. Investing in the Howard Street store was not prudent given that two of Hutzler's competitors had left the corner of Lexington and Howard Streets by the end of 1979. Second, Hutzler's should not have sold the land in Towson to Hecht's or if it absolutely had to sell it to raise the capital, Hutzler's should have obtained a legal commitment that its Towson store would be connected to and part of any future commercial mall-style development. Finally, Hutzler's should not have purchased the Harundale Mall location from Hochschild-Kohn (Baltimore Sun May 24, 1984), but instead should have put its money into opening a store in the Marley Station Mall which opened in 1987. However, earlier financial blunders left too little cash for this to happen. The store that epitomized shopping in downtown Baltimore didn't survive the changing retail climate in Baltimore in the late 1980's. The company had spent too much effort trying to stay the course in a changing retail climate. The locational moves for the most part seemed to be made in an environment that existed ten years before they were made. The lack of foresight in planning store locations led to Hutzler's demise and marked the end of a retail era in Baltimore.

SUMMARY

Of the four stores that existed near the corner of Lexington and Howard Streets in 1945, only one continues to do business in the Baltimore metropolitan area today. Hochschild-Kohn, after being purchased by a supermarket chain changed its locational strategy and had several smaller stores in dispersed locations. Stewart's concentrated most of its stores in a fairly small geographic area so that some of them were taking business away from each other. Hutzler's hung on in its downtown location long after it ceased being profitable and built too many stores that were close to each other. Only Hecht's remains. Hecht's took a fairly cautious approach to building branch stores and has been quite successful in following the movement of its customers to the suburbs. As Hecht's has moved further from downtown in each direction, it has closed the closer-in stores in that quadrant.

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