



A Snapshot of Commercial Real Estate as we entered the 1960's Commercial Revolution by John Swisher III

What I would like to convey with this “snapshot” is what “Ann Arbor” looked like in the early 1960's. I want to show where people shopped, ate, and worked. I want to show how much change there has been, and at the same time show how important the downtown is today as it was back in the early 60's.

When Ann Arbor went shopping, we went downtown to Sears, Goodyear's Department Store or Kline's. We shopped at Jacobson's, Wilkinson's, B E Muehlig's Dry Goods, Schlanderer or Seifried's (both still there), Hutzels, or Kessels. Shopping for men's clothes was at Fiegels, Sam's or Ann Arbor Clothing. The Kay-Jay shop, Dixie Shop, Thom McAnn and Vanity Fair, Wanty or Mast Shoes, the Collins Shop, and Woolworths were major shopping points. You either bought your office supplies from Ball Office Supply or from Mayer-Schairer, located right next door. Mayer-Schairer is currently a wine bar and restaurant with residential condos on the upper floors. Western Auto was on Washington and Capital Market sold groceries and snacks on 4th Avenue.

Goetzcraft printers, Argus Cameras, Buhr Machine, and King Seeley Thermos were big attractions in downtown for employment along with the County and City systems. King Seeley is the current site of the new Liberty Lofts residential/retail condo project. Master Furrier was on Liberty, along with Dobb's Optical and Chelsea Flowers. Vogel's locksmith is still on West Washington and you had a choice of three shoe repair shops on Main, Washington and 4th Avenue. The Salvation Army operated out of the corner of Washington and 5th Avenue across from what was then the Anderson Paint Company (now on West William). The public Library opened in its present location as had the “new” YMCA on 5th Avenue.

When you went “downtown” you bought your drugs from Pecks, Cahows, Crippens, Prichard's, Pillsbury or Cunningham's. You bought your piano at Grinnell Brothers on Main, got your records at Liberty Music Shop, and Shipman's was a fine place to buy kids clothes. You ate at Preketes Sugar Bowl, Curtis Restaurant, the Elks, Joe's Snappy Service, Dag Wood Diner, The Pretzel Bell, the Old German and Metzger's or the (private) Town Club. You went to the Wuerth or the Orpheum Theaters on Saturday afternoon, or the huge State and Michigan Theaters which held “thousands”. Stocks were sold by Smith Hague or Watling Lerchen (now part of AG Edwards). You had a choice of two funeral chapels, Muehlig's, which remains, and Staffan on Huron Street (who also ran the ambulances). Hertler Brothers (now Downtown Home and Garden Center) was “the” choice for all gardening and canning supplies. City Hall was where the City Center Building is now. If you wanted to stay downtown, you stayed at the Allene Hotel across from the Embassy Hotel, which remains today. The Campus Inn came later. You had two choices of bowling alleys on Huron Street; Huron Lanes across from what is now City Hall and 20th Century Lanes on West Huron between Ashley and First. There was an A&P store across from the current Firestone store and you had two drive-in beer stores. Farmer' Market was open for business on Saturdays.



The main post office was in the 200 block of North Main (now a county administration building.) The Elks were on Main Street and the Moose on Ashley. The Eagles were on East Washington and the VFW on East Liberty; all downtown. Eberbach Drug Company and Varsity Laundry Plant were where the Federal Building is now. Stein Cleaners, Stein and Goetz Sports and Fisher Hardware were on East Washington. Fischer Pharmacy was at Liberty and 5th Avenue. The Card and Camera Shop, Schlenker's Hardware (now renovated) were two blocks off Main Street. And who could forget the massive Masonic Temple where the "old Y" and the AATA bus station are today. You went to Kiddie Korner on South Main for a new bike and the Gas Company, that is now part of the children's museum on Huron Street, and the Edison Company was on West William at South Main. Edison still gave away free light bulbs and you could pay your bills and talk with real people at each location. There were at least two wonderful full service bakeries, but the best was Quality Bakery on South Main where Palio's is now; everything from cakes to bread and pastries, and made right there.

I remember that for years my family shopped at the C and H grocery store on Packard (near the Big Ten). My grandfather owned a wholesale grocery company in downtown Ann Arbor that sold to all of the mom and pop grocers in the area. Kroger's opened their first stores in Ann Arbor, followed by National and A & P. The A&P went up just across from the C and H store, putting them and other mom and pop stores out of business. My grandfather was forced to sell out. I remember that after that, he and my grandmother always bought their groceries from Strickland's, Steeb Brothers, or White Market until they passed away.

Ann Arbor Implement sold and fixed most anything that ran on gas engines except cars. It was on First and Ashley Street. In fact, cars were sold downtown. Ann Arbor Buick was on West Huron at Ashley and Jim White Chevrolet is now a City rented parking lot on West Huron. Fords were sold on East Huron at State Street (now the Campus Inn) by Herb Estes and Coffee Cadillac was on East Washington where "Tally Hall" was built in the 80's. Don Naylor sold Chryslers on Washington & South Main and Bob Buell sold Dodges from First Street. Miller-Jahnke sold Plymouths and International trucks on West Huron.

The downtown banks included Ann Arbor Bank, State Savings Bank, Ann Arbor Trust Company, Ann Arbor Federal Savings and State Bank & Trust, the new Huron Valley Bank, which gave out apples. The title companies were all downtown to be physically close to Court records. They have certainly disbursed, but some remain downtown. You didn't have the "Tally-Hall" parking structure or Ann-Ashley or Washington and 4th or Fourth and William. We didn't have the Maynard structure (only a surface lot) or the Forest parking garage, and the University did not have many structures except around the hospital. We did have the West Washington structure and the First Street structure which has most recently been removed.

Most of the attorneys were downtown, close to the courts. They were scattered in the Ann Arbor Trust building, The Municipal Court Building, the First National Building and



on upper floors over most of the “main offices” of the downtown banks. One North Main replaced the Municipal Court Building on the corner of Main and Huron, but not until the ‘80s.

If you wanted to buy furniture for your home, most went to Martin Haller (which burned in the 60’s), Behnke on West Liberty, Hanicraft on Division at Liberty, or Stanger’s Furniture on Ashley. If you wanted carpeting and didn’t what to buy from the furniture stores, you went to Smith Floor Covering on North Main.

I remember the Schwaben Inn and the two entrances to the Old German restaurant, and the center table where the “regulars” ate.

Bolgos Farms and Cloverleaf Dairies delivered your milk and dairy products to your door. Washtenaw Dairy was an institution even then and is still located on Madison.

If you were ill, needed emergency care and you weren’t part of the “U”, you went to St. Joe’s Hospital with its brand new additions on North Ingalls Street (now a part of the University of Michigan hospital system).

If you ventured toward the “students” on the “diag”, you shopped at Jacobson’s, Marty Walkers, Wilds, Saks Fifth Avenue, Sarah Magnusson, Kresge’s, Wagners, the Collins Shop, Chester Roberts, John Leidy (which is still there thankfully), and Drake’s Sandwich Shop to mention a few. You bought books from Ulrichs, Overbecks, Wahrs, Folletts or Slaters. You shopped and can still shop at Van Boven in Nickels Arcade. That corridor also had Van Burens, the Betsy Ross Shop and the Caravan Shop with exotics (still there). And there was even a post office, which was really small, but very handy. If you needed a prescription filled on campus it was Wikel Drugs on State & South U.

Student territory on South University also included Tices Men’s wear, Fileccia Brothers Shoes, O’Gradys Barber Shop and The Dillon Shop with campus “togger”. The Brown Jug eatery, Englander’s Ladies Wear, the Campus Theater, Purchase Camera Shop, Food and Drug Mart, and Camelot Men’s Clothes were frequented. The Artisan Gift Shop was the only alternative to John Leidy for fine gifts. Miller’s Ice Cream was a staple for town and gown alike. University High School was on East University at South U. It closed in the late 60’s and now some of us don’t have a high school to go back to. That brought on the need for Greenhills, which came later.

The Butts and Swisher Company was on East Washington near its present location and it specialized in residential real estate because there wasn’t enough commercial business at the time to make a living. The other prominent names in real estate were the Newton Company, F A Seargent Company, Carl Brauer, Hobbs Caldwell, Standish Realty, RA Cooch and Harold McKercher. Many were located downtown.

When my father joined Stuart Butts to form the Butts and Swisher Company in the early 1950’s, there was really only one market, and that was residential. When I was in high



school, I decided I would get a degree in real estate and my real estate license. So by 1963, I was working part time with Butts and Swisher and attended Michigan State full time, which at that time had the only university real estate program in the State of Michigan. I would work on weekends and summers as a leasing agent for small apartment complexes and I started to learn how to sell houses. By the time I graduated and came to work full time, I knew I did not want to raise a family and be in the residential real estate business. My father, Mr. Butts and I decided that I would try to get a commercial branch going for Butts and Swisher and in 1965 the City Center Building was about to be built. That was my first commercial project. I remember at the time that this was the largest speculative venture, some 80,000 square feet of Class A office and retail space. That was a significant addition to the total market. There had not been a new commercial office building built downtown since World War II. So in 1966, that was my first real leasing job. I remember leasing 4 floors of the 80,000 square foot building to the University of Michigan for a whopping \$6.50 per square foot. That was high rent back then. The telephone company and the Ann Arbor News have remained anchors to the Huron Street corridor. The News has since moved its printing operation, but other operations still operate out of the downtown offices.

This is what I remember most about “downtown” Ann Arbor in the early 60’s. After all, it was still the main place to shop and work. The University of Michigan was a catalyst toward change as it grew right along with the rest of the city, adjacent to and even infiltrating the “town” from the “gown” to where today there are University of Michigan buildings all over the city. The apartment boom in the 60’s, which is the subject of a whole different article, took off on a massive scale and certainly had an effect on the commercial market.

The real opening salvo of change came when Arborland Shopping Center opened in the spring of 1962. It was anchored by Montgomery Ward and JC Penney, both of which moved from downtown after the fire on 4th Avenue. They joined Hughes-Hatcher-Sufferin and Winkleman as major “Detroit” tenants. This was the beginning of the largest change for the downtown in a hundred years and marked the exodus of retail from downtown that was further diminished by movement to Briarwood Mall.

That could have spelled the end to downtown Ann Arbor, but it didn’t. Ann Arbor adapted to the market. When retail and office moved out of downtown, restaurants, specialty shops and galleries moved in. New office and residential buildings were built including One North Main, 301 Liberty, Tower Plaza, and now with the massive amount of downtown residential development on the drawing boards and that already here, the downtown is arguably stronger than ever.

We must keep in mind that it’s imperative that we continue to provide the amenities that a strong downtown needs such as retail (including food shopping), housing, parking and office space. With the strong leadership of the DDA, the Chamber of Commerce, City government, local merchants, associations and the developers and shop owners, downtown Ann Arbor will continue to evolve and to thrive.