

REMINISCENCES

the year
It's ¹⁹³⁷ and I'd like to have you ^{Accompany} ~~walk with~~ me as I walk down Memory Lane. Except our Memory Lanes are Forbes, Murray and Forward, the three chief shopping streets in Squirrel Hill. By the way if you're curious, here's how the three streets got their names.

Murray Ave. was named for Pittsburgh's fourth Mayor, Magnus M. Murray. Forbes was for General John Forbes, who seized Fort Duquesne from the French. Forward was the name of a well-known judge from Pittsburgh's early colonial days.

We're going to start our journey on Murray Ave. In the early 30's I lived in an apartment house on Hobart, just behind Murray. It was a high-rise apartment because we had to walk up 51 steps from Hobart to get to the front door. Whenever I walked out it was usually down the street on my way to Colfax School. So Murray between Beacon and Phillips was my front yard, in fact my whole world. All I knew about down the hill past Phillips was that my parents on occasion would go to Polis Gille.

In the other direction, I got past Beacon ^{only when} ~~whenever~~ my mother would walk me to the Manor Theater. A few years later when I went to the movies with my friends, we would stretch our youthful explorations by going around the corner of Forbes to Youngks Newsstand for some panny candy. Like red licorice dollars or rock candy. Holloway Milk Duds, however, we got out of the machine in the Manor lobby, assuming we had the extra nickel.

Incidentally the price of a ticket to the movies was 10¢. I recall when the city tacked on a one-penny amusement tax. It was enough to upset our whole budget.

But Youngks (in 1938 it became the Squirrel Hill Newsstand) was the outpost of my world. I had absolutely no idea what lay beyond. Forbes St. to me was the southern border of that mystic "north of Forbes" that to a south-of-Forbeser like me was an enchanted forest, never to enter.

I guess we've strayed a little bit so let's get back to Murray Ave.. I remember a lot about Murray Ave., but I'm sure there's more I forgot. Fortunately the Polk City Directory of 1937 jogged some of my memory. It has a listing of all the businesses on Murray, as well as Forbes and Forward.

Before we stroll down Murray, I want you to look up and behind the store fronts. On both sides between Hobart and Douglas you'll note houses that in earlier times fronted on Murray. When it became apparent that Murray was to become a commercial street and lose it's residential character, store rooms were squeezed into what was probably the front yards of those houses. I often wonder if these houses were raised up from the ground or what we see today is the 3rd or 4th floor.

You'll note that there are stairways in between some of the store rooms that lead up to the houses

In 1937 some of the blocks on Murray Ave. were like the present day Strip District. The majority of the stores were involved in some way with food. So much so that there were 26 stores from Beacon to Phillips that ~~were involved with food~~. Grocers, butchers, bakers, fruit, fish and poultry markets, all side by side and each had their own clientele. None of them were fancy like today's super markets and there was no pretense about being particularly clean. Sawdust on the floors and fly strips hanging from the ceiling were the norm. Oh yes, there was a Sanitary Meat Market on Forbes but after all, that was Forbes. Not Murray. Evidently it was too clean because by 1938 it was gone. My favorite food store on Murray was Benkovitz's because of the fish tank in the front window. I didn't know what a real aquarium was like but Benkovitz's window had to be really close.

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On the west side of Murray from Hobart down, there were eight food purveyors in a row. I'll name a few to get your memory cells working. Orringers Grocery, Steinberg Meats, Schilits Fruit, Adlers Deli, Plotkin Poultry. Across the street, there was Whitman's Fruits, Cohens Kosher Meat Market, Seewalds Poultry and Glucks Food Market.

Going back up Murray toward Beacon it was a little more varied. There were some food outlets such as Blocks Grocery, Max Horowitz Butcher and Caplans Fruit Market. On the west side also there were two restaurants, Abrams and Friedman and the Canton Tea Garden, which is on the exact spot where the ~~PERKING KITCHEN CHINESE~~ Restaurant is today.

Two doors from Hobart was Isalys Dairy Store, fondly remembered for it's skyscraper cones by Pittsburghers for many generations. I'll always remember when they opened up sometime in the early 30's. On opening day they gave away two cones for the price of one. A line from inside the store gradually grew down Murray and up Hobart for at least 100 feet and stayed that way most of the day. I'm not sure how many times I got in line, but I know it was more than once.

There was also Ritz Tailoring and the Hollywood Beauty Shop + Barber Shop which in 1937 also had a circulating library. Incidentally the type of business that in number was second to food outlets was beauty and barber shops. On the three streets there were 22 establishments that were involved with hair cutting and styling. The third most popular business was cleaning and tailoring and there were 18 of these. We must have had a fetish about looking good and keeping clean.

Before we leave this part of Murray we have to note Cherno's Brown Bilt Shoe Store and Rosenblooms Bakery. Rosenblooms is still on the same corner and one of the handful of businesses that remain today in the same location. Neither can I forget kindly old Mr. Bonn (he was probably young then) who owned the popular Bonns Hardware from 1921 to 1956.

On the east side of Murray in the Beacon to Hobart block, among others there was Greenberg, the Tailor, Kubitz & Goss Fruits (I loved those two names), the Squirrely Hill Nut Shoppe and on the corner Callahans Drug Store.

Now a drugstore on the corner was a prerequisite in those days. Why all drugstores were on corners, I'm not sure. Evidently they were like anchor stores for the rest of the block. Corners were probably more marketable locations and perhaps drug stores were the only ones that could afford the higher rents. There were nine drug stores, all on corners, from Forbes and Shady and down Murray to Forward. They were Forbes-Shady (more recently Meyer Rosens) Sun Drug at Forbes and Murray, May Drug, next to the Manor Theatre, Steins Pharmacy in the Bartlett Block (earlier Sandomiers who also at one time was on Forbes) the Beacon Pharmacy (the only survivor until recently), the aforementioned Callahans at Hobart, Abe Litman Drugs at the corner of a block of buildings across from Douglas, the Phillips Pharmacy owned by Sol Adler, and down the hill, the Morrowfield Pharmacy.

Another fond memory ^{FOR ME} ^{this} in the area of Murray is Ciceros Barber and Beauty Shop. This indented block of stores looks today much like it did in 1937. But Cicero's brings more memories to me than most stores on Murray, simply because as a 12-year old boy I visited there at least every two weeks. I can't help remembering the always kibbitzing barbers, (I wish I could recall their names) the clippers, the itching hair down my back and the lollipops passed out for good behavior. A Barber shop to a 12-year old was like a rite of passage, an initiation into a man's world. And who at that age could keep their eyes away from the ever buxom manicurist!!

Now we'll skip a few of the upper blocks of Murray and make our way up to Forbes. Forbes in the 20's and 30's was not the fashionable esplanade that it is today. In fact in 1929 there were only 2 stores that could be classified as retailing womens wear. There was a Renee Salen, a beauty and dress shop located near where the library is today, and Abraham Goldsteins Furs a few store rooms up the street. By 1937 the flavor on Forbes was beginning to change. Renee was down on Murray and Goldsteins was no longer around. The effects of the depression of the early 30's was beginning to diminish and people were beginning to feel more affluent. The whole neighborhood of Squirrel Hill was changing as the migration of Jews from the Hill District was almost complete.

Some well known names in the women's fashion business were now in place. Adeles was then on the north side of Forbes at 5861-63. Mrs. Sarah Linton, Milliner was at 5877 Forbes which is approximately where Alexanders is (or was) today. Grace Miles was at 5867 Forbes, Littles Shoe Store at it's present location was in business, though smaller than it is today. Other fashion stores catering to women, but now long gone are the Marilyn Dress shop, the Yorkshire shop, the Paulette Hat shop and three fur salons, - Max Barfield, Weiners and Saul Schiffman.

The balance of the stores were mostly service type stores, such as beauty and barber shops, cleaning and tailoring, and a Chinese laundry, Yee Lim. One store that appeared as far back as 1929 and is still there is Forbes Hardware. The other survivor from 1929 is the Pittsburgh National Bank, then Peoples Pittsburgh Trust.

An interesting historical note concerns the present day Montefiore Hospital Health Place, which was formerly Isalys. In the 1920's, this storeroom was Squirrel Hill's first nickleodeon or movie theatre. It was called the Orpheum and if your eyesight is fairly good and your imagination is even better, you can see impressions of the word ORPHEUM in the arch near the top of the building.

The state liquor store was on Forbes, but then it was where the Squirrel Hill Foto Shop is today. Curious locations that show in the Polk Directory is Constantine's Motors at 5837 Forbes and a Samsons Auto Dealer at 5826. Samsons shared a location with Abbeys Pocket Billiards. Also in the auto business was Kamin Chevrolet who had a used car lot at 5880 Forbes, evidently a large vacant lot then.

Where the library ~~was~~^{is}, there was the Asbury Methodist Church. Other familiar names might be the Oliver Flower Shop, Scarborough and Klauss Hardware, the Carlton Shop Furniture and the Sara Gatz Gift Shop. The Atlantic Gasoline Service Station was where the office building at Forbes and Shady is now.

Before we move away from Forbes, I have to mention the Squirrel Hill Cafe. It was there in 1937 but I'm not sure how long before that. In 1929 it was the Squirrel Hill Fruit Market. In 1938, it was the only establishment on Forbes that could be classified as a restaurant, with the exception of perhaps, Isalys.

Now let's continue back down to Murray. The first few blocks before you get to Beacon didn't quite have the 'borscht belt' atmosphere of lower Murray. The food stores were the large chains, rather than the small family owned ethnic outlets. Both Krogers and the A & P, the giants of those days had outlets on the east side of Murray, before you get to the Manor. Another large chain was Kresges 5 & 10. And that was when items were really 5¢ and 10¢. In that same block was Ortoleva's Shoe Fixery, Prices Dress Shop and Rhea Bakery. Just to digress for a moment from commercial places, I'll always remember the two chiropodists in the Manor Building, Drs. Donald and David Gipson. I often wondered why they had two separate offices.

On the opposite corner was the Gulf Service Station which seems like it's been there forever. Next door where today is Little Caesars and Wedners Squirrel Hill Flower Shop was the McKinley-Gregg Auto Co.. I was curious about this until I looked at the building from the Gulf Station side. It's apparent from the construction that this building indeed housed an automobile agency.

Next door was Benjamin Little shoes and the Peter Pan Cleaners. Then we had Kahns Restaurant situated in a large, old house that still stands today. Past Darlington where the post office ^{now} stands was a large empty lot. This holds many memories for me as it was the site for many years of the Beth Shalom lawn fete. The lawn fete

Synagogue

was a fun, carnival type of affair with individual booths designed for games and gambling to raise funds for the synagogue. To a 12-year old city boy it was an exciting few days of lights, sounds and smells that are associated with county fairs.

Past the empty lot was the OK Grocery, the forerunner of today's Giant Eagle, Markleys Beauty Shop and Schulbergs Restaurant and then a gasoline station.

On the opposite side of Murray, the Born Building, with it's many physicians and dentists on it's second floor still stands. Familiar names might be Albert Goldblum, M.D., Morris Goodstone, M. D., and Dentists Dr. Isadore Kreimer and Dr. Sylvester Steven. On the first floor were shops like Dimlings Candy and the Rose Sandwich Shop. Past Bartlett where Giant Eagle is today were Perl-Reichbaums, Philip Mazzocca Barber, the Modern Beauty Salon, Meyer Kaufmanns fruits, Morry's Boot Shop, Leonard Binstock Jewelers and the Lord Baltimore cleaners.

On the west side the U. S. Post Office was in the building that now houses Rite Aid. That same building was also home to the Murray Beacon Bowling Alleys and Georges Lunch Room. Next door was Kleins Rapid Shoe Repair and the Molla Beauty Salon.

Around 1937 or 1938, the Beacon Theatre was built. The area past the theater was vacant and this eventually was where the oft-lamented Weinsteins Restaurant was located.

By now, I believe we've covered all of Murray and Forbes so let's head downhill to Forward. Forward Ave. to me before 1937 was even more of a distant land than Forbes. Geographically, ^{POT}not socially. However about that year, my family moved to Pittock St. across from Alderdice. Now Forward Ave. was my front yard. My travels there were mostly to two important destinations. One to satisfy my appetite for films was to the Squirrel Hill Theatre, also built around 1937-38. The other was to satisfy my appetite for food, particularly the juicy red hots dispensed by the kindly Mr. Rosenberg at the Hot Puppy Shoppe. This shop was a little sliver of ~~a~~ place, but it could have been the Ritz to a boy of 12.

Other places in that block that a lot of you will remember is the Sol Lange Deli, Morris Sirocca Grocery, Louis Hinkes Tailoring and Cleaning, Rose Soltz Variety and, of course, the large Samson Automobile Showroom.

If my memory serves me right, in the early 30's a large miniature golf course was situated where Lord Duncan Cleaners is today. There was another miniature golf course where the Rite Aid is today just past the Share Torah Synagogue. Miniature golf was all the rage during the early 30's and these two courses evidently provided some inexpensive recreation during the depression years.. I don't believe either of them lasted that long.

We can't leave Forward without mentioning Watkins Real Estate. They had an office near Eldridge and today they still maintain n

office across the street next to the theatre. The Watkins family was responsible for building the Morrowfield Apartment Building and all of the apartments behind on the streets of Alderson and Maeburn Road. Not only that, Watkins was responsible for many of the residences in Squirrel Hill today.

This about completes our walk. I hope you've accompanied me all the way and that I've brought back some memories that you have long forgotten. In some ensuing columns, I plan to tell you more about Squirrel Hill and how it emerged in the 1920's as the community we know today.

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