

Apparitions of the Past

The Ghost Signs of Fort Collins

An Historical Context

July 2007



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The Ghost Signs of Fort Collins

An Historical Context

Submitted to:

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Contents

Introduction ix

Section I: Historical Context I

Chapter 1: History of Outdoor Advertising and Painted Wall Signs 3

Chapter 2: Privilege Signs 5

Chapter 3: Wall Dogs 7

Chapter 4: The Art of Painting Wall Signs 9

Chapter 5: The Demise of Painted Wall Signs 13

Improvements in Sign Technologies and Media 13

Sign Regulation 14

Innovations in Transportation 14

Chapter 6: Painted Wall Signs in Fort Collins 17

Chapter 7: The Wall Dogs of Fort Collins 25

Chapter 8: Preserving the Ghost Signs of Fort Collins 29

Notes 33

Section II: Reconnaissance Survey Report 37

Bibliography 93

Sources 95

Introduction

Signs are among the most ubiquitous yet little noticed components of the American built environment. Despite the best efforts of their creators, many signs, particularly old ones, begin to blend in with buildings, streets, trees, and other elements that comprise a downtown or neighborhood. Yet, perhaps residing only at a subconscious level, signs help tell use where we are—how this particular place is different from any other place on earth. “Signs are everywhere,” writes Michael J. Auer in a National Park Service preservation brief on historic signs:

And everywhere they play an important role in human activity. They identify. They direct and decorate. They promote, inform, and advertise. Signs are essentially social. They name a human activity, and often identify who is doing it. Signs allow the owner to communicate with the reader, and the people inside a building to communicate with those outside of it.¹

Among the most revered yet endangered sign media in American history is the painted wall advertisement. Painted by hand in vivid colors or in bold contrast, these signs were left to the elements and faded with time. The results were “ghost signs.” This term comes from two phenomena. First, some faded signs appeared on masonry walls when the light is just right, or when the viewer had stared long

enough to see the specter. “Some call them ‘ghost signs,’ apparitions visible under certain light conditions when their painted letters rise from the wall to herald a forgotten flour or smoking tobacco,” writes Arthur Kim of the Society for Commercial Archaeology:

In this muted light, colors become tinted again and sometimes portions of different signs will appear, the letters jumbled and overlapped—a cup of alphabet soup. Yet with a patient stare, one can see the letters re-form to recognize order, as a Mayan codex deciphered in sudden discovery and delight.²

Another meaning of “ghost sign” comes from those advertisements that were covered by an addition or adjacent building and forgotten. A restoration or demolition suddenly brings them to life in vivid color, often only for a fleeting moment.

This context addresses the ghost signs of Fort Collins. It is intended to provide a means of determining the significance of the city’s extant painted wall signs and provide suggestions for the preservation and interpretation of these historic advertisements. In so doing, this document traces the development of the painted wall sign medium in the United States generally (chapters one to five) and Fort Collins specifically (chapters six to eight). It provides biog-



“Yet with a patient stare, one can see the letters re-form to recognize order, as a Mayan codex deciphered in sudden discovery and delight.”

ographies of some of the city's notable signpainters and a brief survey of existing signs.

The definition of "ghost sign," as expressed in William Stage's *Ghost Signs: Brick Wall Signs in America* and numerous other books and articles, limits them solely to those signs painted on masonry walls. Thus, this context is similarly limited, concentrating on those advertisements painted on exposed brick or stucco-over-masonry surfaces.

This is not to say that other historic signs in Fort Collins are not worthy of preservation. Indeed, the Emma Malaby Grocery sign, painted on the wood fascia of this North Meldrum Street storefront, is certainly significant, as is the neon sign cantilevered from the façade of the Northern Hotel, at College at Laporte avenues. Yet these are not "ghost signs" as they are traditionally understood and, thus, are not addressed in this context.

Section I

Historical Context



Chapter I

History of Outdoor Advertising and Painted Wall Signs

Outdoor advertising is truly an ancient tradition. The huge stone obelisks of Egypt, incised with hieroglyphs, told passersby of the greatness of Pharaoh, recorded laws and treaties, and marked the farthest corners of the empire. But in antiquity as in today, the amount of outdoor advertising directly corresponded to the amount of freedom provided to the market. That is to say, the more capitalistic the economy, the more fervently a culture used outdoor advertising. The Phoenicians, for instance, were the world's greatest seafarers and traders around the year 100 A.D. Merchants in their port towns painted rocks and cliff sides along well-traveled trade routes, hoping to entice traders into their own particular market stalls.¹

The merchants of Pompeii advertised their stores much like modern retailers. Before a devastating eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. covered and ultimately preserved the city under a thick layer of volcanic ash, most shops had inscriptions painted or carved near their entrances advertising what merchandise was available inside. One of these inscriptions was a sign for a *thermopolium*, the Roman equivalent of a luncheonette.²

European sign customs are particularly important because they greatly influenced outdoor advertising practices in the United States. Outdoor advertising became common in Europe during the Renaissance. Generally, these advertisements consisted of two kinds. The first were signs painted or affixed to buildings, indicating the kind of

business inside. Because a large portion of the population was illiterate, these signs often used a rather standardized iconography to visually represent businesses. The painted signs were often “fascia signs,” which were painted in a band on the fascia, or face, between the first and second stories of a storefront. Indeed, this area of the façade eventually became known as the “signboard” or “signband.” The second kind of outdoor advertising were posted bills, or posters, which proliferated after Johannes Gutenberg invented the movable-type printing press in 1450. Printers produced numerous identical posters and sent them out to be pasted on walls and other vertical surfaces. Because weather quickly destroyed these posters, they were often used to advertise upcoming events rather than promoting established businesses. Posters remained dependent on text to deliver their messages until the advent of lithography in 1796, which allowed bills to be illustrated.³

Even as today, overzealous merchants in seventeenth and eighteenth century European cities often created signs that ultimately became public nuisances. To attract more business than their competitors, shopkeepers cantilevered larger and larger signs over the streets, creating a dangerous situation for pedestrians. England's King Charles II decreed in the early 1700s that no sign should hang across the street. In Paris, a 1761 ordinance required that all signs had to be painted on or affixed against shop walls. A 1797

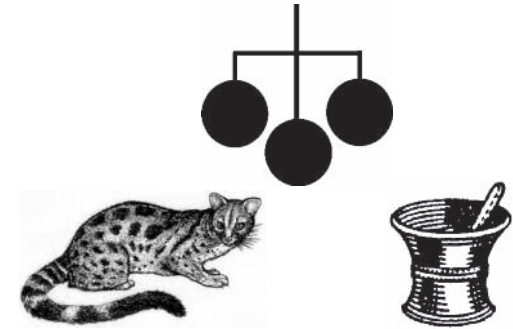


Figure 1.1.1: Standardized iconography of European signs. In a time before most of the population was literate, uniform images served to identify businesses and services. The civet cat (left), three balls (center), and mortar and pestle (right) indicated perfumers, pawn brokers, and apothecaries respectively. Many of these images continue to be used today.

English statute ordered the removal of all signs that projected over the street.⁴

The rise of large cities, particularly places like London, Paris, and New York, provided expanded opportunities for outdoor advertising. Not only was the size of the market larger, but also taller buildings provided increased areas for painted advertisements. Signpainters began to install their work between upper stories, not just between the first and second stories. Buildings became massive handbills, meant to be read from top to bottom. Often, these painted buildings were like an inventory, listing, for instance, all of the

departments in a department store.⁵

On the American frontier, painted wall signs were particularly eye-catching because the printed word was so rarely seen. “In past days, when paper and printing presses were expensive, and the printed word somewhat scarce, advertisements painted on the side of brick buildings were commonplace,” writes western historian Richard D. White. “These advertisements were large, striking in their use of color, and often times served to describe what type of business occupied a particular building.”⁶

Chapter 2

Privilege Signs

Painted wall signs could be financed in one of two ways. The first was directly from the pocket of the advertiser who also owned the wall. The owner of a store, hotel, restaurant or other enterprise would hire a signpainter to install a sign on his business. The second method was to allow some related, national advertiser to finance the sign painting in return for a “privilege” given to the wall’s owner. Generally, this privilege was a mention of the wall owner’s business as part of the sign. Thus, a huge Coca-Cola wall sign would include a smaller portion advertising the café housed inside the building. But privileges could take many forms, including a keg of beer, drapes, and even free inspections of the building’s roof to check for leaks—anything it took to get a sign painted on a really visible wall. Signpainter Art Hunn remembered leasing agents offering farmers cash or a gold watch for use of a barn wall. The farmers usually took the watch. “The lease men usually carried a whole box of them,” Hunn said. For many building owners, the most persuasive privilege was simply a fresh coat of paint over often deteriorating brick.¹

In the years before standardized billboards and, indeed, for years after, privilege signs were a way for corporations to conduct national advertising campaigns.² Moreover, privilege signs were directly responsible for the great proliferation of painted wall advertising. “Privileges were essentially the tradition of wall painting,” writes William Stage in his history of ghost signs. “Without priv-

ileges, the shopowner might not have been motivated to surrender his walls to advertising.”³

Among the earliest and most prolific national advertisers to use painted wall privilege signs was Straiton & Storm’s Owl Cigar brand. Their iconic owl could be seen on buildings in New York, Chicago, Seattle, and in towns across the country. The Straiton & Storm Cigar Company was the country’s largest domestic manufacturer of cigars in late nineteenth century. John Straiton was born in Scotland in 1850. Soon after arriving in the United States, Straiton worked as an assistant to his uncle, who was a leading cigar maker. Around 1860, John Straiton opened his own cigar manufacturing company with partner Frederick Storm, who was born in Alsace, France, on July 2, 1844. Storm arrived in the United States at the age of two and eventually eventually settled in Bayside, Queens, New York. He was a prominent businessman, developer, and even served in Congress. Around 1872, Straiton and Storm opened their first formal factory in Bayside, which they continually expanded as they added hundreds of brands to their catalog. According to company legend, Storm named the Owl and White Owl cigar brands for a stray owl that flew into his bedroom one night and fascinated the young man. Despite its success, the Straiton & Storm factory was the scene of some of the earliest labor unrest in the United States, including strikes and riots. The unionization of America’s cigar makers was a direct result



Bayside Historical Society

Figure 1.2.1: Straiton & Storm Cigar Factory. This Bayside, New York, factory was the largest domestic manufacturer of cigars in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Its Owl brand cigars were promoted through privilege signs painted on buildings across America.

of this unrest. Straiton & Storm later became the Owl Commercial Company and exists today as the American Tobacco Company.⁴

Yet there were numerous other national brands that



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Figure 1.2.2: Owl Cigar Privilege Sign. The Owl Cigar sign at 113 College Avenue is a typical privilege sign.

used painted wall privilege signs to promote themselves, among them Coca-Cola, Pepsi Cola, Canada Dry, Champion Spark Plugs, Signal Oil, Wrigley's Chewing Gum, and Gold Medal Flour. Beginning in 1890, one of the nation's most unusual but iconic painted wall sign cam-

paigns promoted the Bloch Brothers Tobacco Company's Mail Pouch brand. While the sign copy was unchanging ("Chew Mail Pouch Tobacco, Treat Yourself to the Best"), the company advertised almost exclusively on the sides of barns. In this privilege relationship, the company paid the farmer between \$1 and \$2 a year in 1913 (\$20 to \$40 today), or offered free tobacco and magazine subscriptions. But perhaps more valuable to the farmer was the fresh coat of paint applied over his barn wood and repainted every few years. At the height of the Mail Pouch campaign, tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of barns carried Mail Pouch advertisements. Indeed, one painter, Harley Warrick, of Belmont County, Ohio, estimated that he alone had painted the Mail Pouch advertisement on over 20,000 barns. One legend maintains that a British celebrity, upon arriving in New York City after a tour of the country, was asked what America was most famous for. He replied, "Good-looking women and Mail Pouch Tobacco."⁵

Mail Pouch challenged traditional advertising models by concentrating its campaign on the countryside rather than in the city. But as advertisements in urban areas crowded every wall and rooftop, the tobacco company found an uncluttered niche that resonated with an ever more mobile American public. As a result, the company's barn side advertisements were among the most successful rural-based marketing campaigns of all time. Bloch Brother's successor, Swisher International (now Helme Tobacco Company), suspended the barn painting campaign in 1992, but continues to employ one signpainter to maintain its historic signs in Ohio, West Virginia, and western Maryland and Pennsylvania.⁶

Chapter 3

Wall Dogs

The men who painted wall signs were called, unglamorously, wall dogs. This title reflected not only the grunt work of sign painting—the often monotonous task of transferring standardized images from paper to brick walls—but also their commitment to their art. Indeed, sign-painters wore the title “wall dog” with pride. The reality of their art forced them to become jacks of many trades—and daredevils. As William Stage muses:

Consider the special problems these signpainters faced in 1906. If they painted walls, they lacked special comforts and contingencies available today. For starters, there were no pre-mixed paints, no pounce patterns, and no electric scaffolding. And if a signpainter did happen to be injured on the job, he was in a world of trouble, because there was no OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] and no workmen’s compensation.¹

Wall dogs were not only skilled artists, they also had to be skilled chemists to mix paint. They had to understand masonry and carpentry. They had to be acrobats and salesman. And there were many dangers, including deadly falls and overexposure to the high amounts of lead in sign paints. While sign companies often paid higher wages for particularly hazardous work, such as painting above the

seventh story, the long-term exposure to lead and toxic chemicals often went uncompensated. White lead (basic lead carbonate, $2\text{PbCO}_3 \cdot \text{Pb}(\text{OH})_2$) served as the white-pigment base of paints for centuries. Indeed, it was one of the longest- and widest-used pigments in the history of the world. Unfortunately, lead was also extremely toxic to living organisms, particularly children. It caused damage to the brain and nervous system, resulted in hearing loss, stunted growth, delayed development, and reduced I.Q. Signpainters mixed white lead paste with linseed oil and dry pigments to make their paint. In general, the more lead, the longer the paint would last. Thus, the white paint used in even century-old ghost signs remains visible. But the lead compound easily soaked through the skin and entered the bloodstream where it could remain for a lifetime. Many older signpainters suffered from “painter colic,” or lead poisoning,” which resulted in upset stomachs, headaches, disorientation and mental degradation, gnarled and crippled hands, and, ultimately, death. Indeed, the tradition that many signpainters were drunks may have derived from observing the neurological effects of lead poisoning, which often resembled inebriation. The federal government banned lead and lead-based paints in 1978.²

Despite these risks, signpainting remained a popular calling. About half of all wall dogs in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries worked for one of the country’s large sign companies: General Outdoor



Figure 1.3.1: Wall Dog on the Cover of the Saturday Evening Post. Norman Rockwell not only depicted the signpainter as an American icon, but must have felt some empathy in creating this image—he had worked briefly as a wall dog himself.

Advertising Company, the Thomas Cusack Company, the P.H. Morton Company, the O.J. Gude Company, and the Foster & Kleiser Company. (The last of these firms, Foster & Kleiser, was established in 1901 and became the largest outdoor advertising company in the United States. It exists today as Clear Channel Outdoor.) Signpainters for these companies generally worked in two-man crews and, in rural areas, traveled from town to town, often not returning home for months. They were expected to complete at least one sign a day. Some large-scale wall-sign advertisers often had their own, in-house signpainting crews. Among them was Denver-based M&O Cigars, who painted their own signs across Colorado and the West, including Fort Collins. These ads often featured the iconic “M&O” man, sophisticated and cheerful as he puffed away on his mild M&O cigar. Yet he was an incredibly complicated image for painted wall signs and required a highly skilled signpainter. The other half of wall dogs operated their own signpainting businesses. They tended to work alone and in a limited geographic area. To survive between sign commissions, many independent wall dogs painted houses as well. With their artistic abilities and knowledge of paint preparation and chemistry, some worked as interior decorators and even photographers.³

Wall dogs earned a reputation for being colorful individuals, literally and figuratively. At the end of a workday, most went home in their white coveralls splattered in a rainbow of colors. Yet to remain respectable, some would paint their shoes black before boarding the streetcar home at the end of the day. As mentioned above, another stereo-

type, generally unjust, depicted wall dogs as drinkers. “Yes, there is the stereotypic notion of the signpainter on a scaffold, a fitch in his hand and a pint in his back pocket,” writes William Stage. “For every signpainter who says this is hogwash, there is another who will slyly wink.” Fort Collins signpainter Don Brown remembered his first outing with a veteran Pepsi signpainter:

I’ll never forget...the first I’d signed up with Pepsi Cola, and they wanted me to go with one of their old time signpainters. Turned out he was a real drunk. We went five stories up on a swing stage, as they called it, so the signpainters can walk back and forth while they do their painting. And every little bit he’d say, ‘punk, let’s go down and get a cup of coffee,’ and I learned after a while that every time he got a cup of coffee, what he really got was a double rooster tail and a beer. I finally kept on talking and told him off about it, and he just called me a ‘punk kid’ and did whatever he pleased about it.⁴

While often cantankerous, signpainters were lauded as hard workers and skilled artisans. The great painter of mid-twentieth century Americana, Norman Rockwell, occasionally featured signpainters in his iconic *Saturday Evening Post* covers. Perhaps Rockwell’s affinity for the wall dog stemmed from his own brief career as a signpainter.⁵

Chapter 4

The Art of Painting Wall Signs

Painting a wall sign began with selecting a suitable location. The perfect location offered an expansive wall surface unobstructed at ground level and situated along a busy street. But the perfect location was often difficult to find. For many business owners located midblock in a downtown, the only options were the exposed elevations of their buildings. This often meant painting signs on the second story or higher or in a break between buildings. Some national corporations that were privilege-sign advertisers often had very specific standards when it came to location. Coca-Cola preferred the ground level, particularly the walls of corner drug stores and cafes. Wrigley Chewing Gum liked broad, uninterrupted wall surfaces, such as warehouses. One of the locations advertisers favored the most were on the walls of buildings facing churches. Here, companies were guaranteed at least weekly repeat exposure to their advertisements. Similarly, the owners of walls within sight of train stations and trolley stops could change a premium for this repeat exposure.¹

With the location selected, the advertiser and signpainter could develop a layout based on the restrictions imposed by the size and materials of the wall. Painted wall advertisements came in two forms. By far the most common were lettered signs. These were generally block letters, borrowed from a signpainter's standard book, and applied directly to a brick wall. The other, less common form of wall signs was the "pictorial," which included a graphic

illustration. Often this image was the trademark of the product advertised—the Coca-Cola bottle; "Elsie, the Contended Cow" for Borden Milk; the M&O Cigar Man; and so on. Painted wall signs began in the sign shop, where an artist (usually the signpainter himself), sketched out the advertisement. These were almost always scale drawings, usually one inch to the foot. The signpainter also had to consider color and perspective, especially when a sign painted high on a wall was viewed from the street. They used contrasting colors, deep shadows, and extreme highlights, all with the goal of catching the eye and creating a lasting impression.²

Before 1940 or so, wall dogs painted signs in 1-foot squares, freehand, from the sketch the signpainter carried with him. Because of this process, exposed brick walls were particularly important to the sign-painter. The mortar joints provided a natural grid for keeping lines straight. Wall dogs learned to count bricks to determine if lines of text would actually fit on the wall before they started painting.³

After 1940, signpainters used "pounce patterns." The pattern was traced at actual size on paper with a "pounce wheel," which made tiny perforations in the outline of the design. The signpainter then placed the paper at the appropriate location on the wall and dusted it with a powdered charcoal or blue chalk-line dust. The results were temporary dotted lines applied directly to the wall. But even this

simplified method of painting wall signs had its share of difficulties. “You have to get or buy some paper from the meat market or some place that had a big roller,” remembered Don Brown, “and it was seldom big enough for a whole sign, so you’d tape it together.”⁴

Actually painting the sign presented its own problems. For many signpainters, just getting to the wall was a challenge. Often they had to traverse fire escapes and rooftops. Most locations were not suitable for scaffolding, but wall dogs usually did not have enough time to erect them anyhow. Many simply worked from the ground or the nearest horizontal surface on ladders or suspended from above on ropes. Don Brown recalled setting up a swing stage to paint his iconic Coca-Cola/Angell’s Delicatessen advertisement in Old Town Fort Collins:

Oh, you have to have a swing stage, which is a long platform with a big ladder, [which I] brought from the Fort Collins Fire Department.... And on each end of it you have a pulley and block to move up. If you work with a helper, one gets on each end and it goes level all the way up. If you work alone, which I did most the time, you pull it as high as you can on one side, at quite an angle, and you go half the way to the other side and bring it up even with that, and you’d keep it up that way ’till you get to the top.⁵

As mentioned above, ready-mix paints were not available until the 1930s, providing yet another challenge to late nineteenth and early twentieth century signpainters. They mixed dry paint pigment with linseed oil and a hearty

amount of white lead paste. Typically these paints required an hour or more of constant mixing and were much flatter than today’s glossy paints. Yet they consisted of 85 to 95 percent pigment. But the hand-stirred paints of the wall dog, which often required days to fully cure, proved to be phenomenally durable. Unlike modern paints, early sign paints could flex and bend without cracking. This was a particularly important and necessary feature for paints used on brick walls. Not only were they exposed to the elements, but also bricks tend to absorb and retain the sun’s ultraviolet radiation. Thus, while inches above the sign’s surface the ambient air temperature could be below freezing, on a sunny day the core of the bricks could be over 100 degrees Fahrenheit.⁶

Brick walls were a notoriously unpredictable medium for paints. The unglazed, pressed bricks used in the secondary elevations of most commercial buildings proved to be unquenchably thirsty. The only thing signpainters could do was apply coat after coat of paint until it became visible from blocks away. And the coarse surfaces took their toll on the extremely stiff brushes wall dogs had to use. “Some of the surfaces were so bad, they would wear out good brushes in a day or two,” said Joseph Backstock, an executive for the Patrick Media Group, a California-based advertising company. Contrary to some contemporary sign installations, these signpainters never covered their completed work with shellac, varnish, or any other clear coating, believing (correctly) that these products would have ultimately accelerated deterioration.⁷

Despite these difficulties, most two-man wall dog teams were expected to complete one averaged-sized sign a day. Veteran signpainter R.E. “Rollie” Nauman, of

Lancaster, Ohio, remembers the ceaseless push to keep painting signs. “After finishing a wall or barn by headlights, I often wondered how the workmanship looked in the day-light, through I rarely found out,” Nauman recalled. “After one job was done we’d head to the next location to get a few hours’ sleep before sun up.”⁸

Chapter 5

The Demise of Painted Wall Signs

While some signs continue to be painted on masonry walls even today, this method of advertising has diminished greatly from its zenith around 1900, leaving cities with far more ghost signs than current advertisements. There were at least three major reasons for the demise of painted wall advertising: improvements in sign technologies and media; the evolution of sign regulations; and innovations in transportation.

Improvements in Sign Technologies and Media

The medium that most challenged the dominance of painted wall signs was the billboard. The roots of billboard advertising reach to 1835 when Jared Bell, a circus advertiser in New York, developed a system of piecing together posters and mounting them on boards to create a single, 5-by-9-foot advertisement. The size of billboards remained inconsistent, however, limiting any kind of national advertising campaigns until 1900, when billboard sizes became more standardized.

The creation of standardized billboard sizes meant that national advertisers could initiate campaigns coast to coast and be assured that their sign would fit every frame. This freed many corporations from the privilege-sign system for their national campaigns, significantly diminishing the pool of money available for painted wall signs. As well, billboards could be changed easily and often. One of the

most frequent complaints from advertisers about painted wall signs was that, eventually, they blended into the urban fabric and ceased to be noticed. Yet, they were too expensive to change frequently. Billboards solved this problem.

Like the advent of the standardized billboard, electric illumination at the turn of the twentieth century radically altered sign-based advertising in the United States. Initially, electric lights simply illuminated a sign painted on or attached to a flat surface. But advertisers soon developed ways of forming words with the light bulbs themselves. In addition, blinking bulbs allowed signmakers to provide an element of motion that was, to that point, impossible (except for a few wind-powered signs). Flat, immovable painted wall signs quickly fell out of favor and, with the advent of neon-tube signs in the 1920s, nearly disappeared. The proliferation of translucent plastics following World War II allowed sign makers to produce inexpensive but durable back-lit signs that became the dominant medium through the rest of the century.¹

Technology also altered the signs of local advertisers who previously relied on painted wall signs. Soon neon tubes, extruded metal and plastic lettering, and back-lit plastic signs replaced those painted directly on a building. Technology even eroded the last remaining strongholds of painted wall advertising: large, densely settled urban areas such as New York City. Many of the advertisements that appear to be painted on the sides of the towering buildings

are actually vinyl banners attached to hooks. Like billboards, these banners can be easily changed.²

Sign Regulation

Another powerful force in the evolution of sign-based advertising in the United States was sign regulation. Like the prohibitions against cantilevered signs in eighteenth-century England, early sign regulations in the United States were based on protecting the public. Following World War II, however, local governments began to attempt to regulate signs based on less-defined aesthetic values rather than health and safety. Not surprisingly, these regulations immediately met legal challenges. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately decided in *St. Louis Gunning Advertising v. City of St. Louis* that “it is within the power of the legislature to determine that the community should be beautiful as well as healthy, spacious as well as clean, well-balanced as well as carefully patrolled.” Thus, the Court equated taste with public safety and cleared the way for stringent sign control across the country.³

These regulations typically dictated the number, size, and types of signs allowed in a particular zone. They controlled where signs could be placed and demanded that advertisements be “compatible” with the architecture of a building or community-wide aesthetic standards. These regulations were often the most restrictive when it came to illumination, often banning bare bulbs and, particularly, neon, which had become an iconic means of advertising in the prosperous years following World War II. Unfortunately, these regulations were often based on contemporary tastes, which could quickly change. An unintended consequence was that many historic painted wall

signs were not in compliance with the ordinances. They were often too large or contained too many words and graphic elements. These “nonconforming” signs were usually allowed to remain intact after the passage of sign regulations on the condition that they would be removed or modified if the signs or the buildings they were attached to required any modification or even routine maintenance. Thus, many building owners were forced to paint over painted wall signs in order to obtain building permits for even basic alterations to their buildings.

Despite their rural locations, even the iconic Mail Pouch barn advertisements fell victim to sign regulations. The Highway Beautification Act of 1965 prohibited signs within 660 feet of interstate and federally aided highways. As a result, Mail Pouch had to paint over many of its signs, a project requiring nearly three years to complete.⁴

Innovations in Transportation

The third reason painted wall advertising fell out of favor also had to do with technology, in particular, improvements in transportation. By their very nature, painted wall signs were location dependent. The advertiser required a large expanse of uninterrupted masonry to install a sign. This generally ruled out the façade and forced signs to the side elevations. In urban areas, this meant spaces between buildings—spaces that were often quite narrow. The person on foot or in a horse-drawn wagon had plenty of time to both discover these advertisements and consume their messages. But with the advent of rapid transit and, especially, the automobile, people moved through cities faster and often in roofed conveyances. Walls that had been prime advertising spaces for years suddenly

became invisible. Even if traffic moved slowly through downtown, the roofs of automobiles, streetcars, and buses obscured what was once valuable second-story advertising space. The popularity of the automobile ultimately eroded the dominance of rail-based transportation. Signs painted within sight of train stations and trolley stops became less valuable.

Paradoxically, however, it was the evolution of the automobile and highways that actually extended the lifespan of rural painted wall advertising. Situated in open fields, barn advertisements, like the Mail Pouch Tobacco campaign, were easily seen from highways and provided plenty of time for the motorist to consume the sign's message.

Yet, it was the ease in the production of electrically illuminated signs combined with more stringent sign regu-

lation and a retreat from the fast-paced world of the automobile that renewed interest in older neon and painted wall media and even sparked a movement to preserve historic signs. Mass-produced plastic signs and sign regulations often led to standardization and the loss of regional differences and local character. Because of the nearly infinite variations in masonry walls, paint colors, sign artists, and advertisers themselves, painted wall signs were and continue to be unique expressions of local character. "Mass-produced signs have replaced local signs that differed from owner to owner and from signmaker to signmaker," writes Michael J. Auer in a National Park Service brief on preserving historic signs. "...But the preservation of historic signs is one way to ensure that at least some of these expressions of local history continue to enliven our streets."²⁵

Chapter 6

Painted Wall Signs in Fort Collins

Painted wall advertisements appeared very early in the development of Fort Collins's business district. After a flood wiped out the original Camp Collins, near present-day Laporte, on June 9, 1864, the army moved the encampment downstream along the Cache La Poudre River. But the new Fort Collins existed only briefly, closing on March 7, 1866. By 1867, the buildings became civilian property and the genesis of what would become downtown Fort Collins. Among these buildings was a sutler's store owned and operated by Joseph Mason. (A sutler was a civilian who sold provisions to soldiers.) Mason combined stock raising with operating the camp commissary to become the area's most prosperous pioneer settler. The construction of his commissary was unusual; it was built of a concrete made from river sand, a material the locals called "grout." Mason's old grout store, located on what is now the southwest corner of Jefferson and Linden streets, was Fort Collins's first retail business.¹

An early photograph of "old grout" reveals that the building hosted a number of signs. They all had dark letters on a light background. The letters were crudely drawn, clearly done without a signmaker's pattern book. As well, all were painted on wood and attached to the building or its porch. A later photograph, probably taken shortly before the building's demolition in the spring of 1882, shows Old Grout sans its porch and covered in painted wall signs. In less than two decades, the signs had become larger and

notably more sophisticated. Dominating the front gable was a huge sign advertising the livery then housed in the building. The north wall hosts at least two advertisements that appear to be privilege signs.²

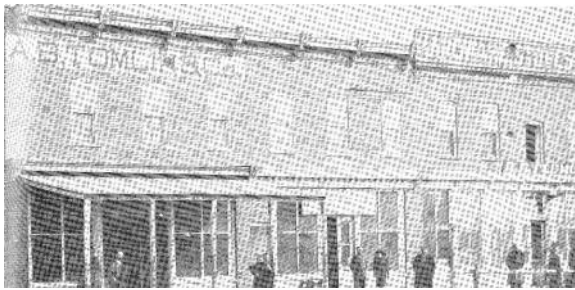
From the abandonment of the military compound in 1866 until 1870, the development of Fort Collins was anemic at best. But that year, the Territorial Legislature selected Fort Collins as the home of Colorado's land-grant college. The agricultural college provided legitimacy to the settlement and a new market for business owners. In the 1870s, a number of frame storefronts joined Old Grout, particularly along Jefferson Street. These buildings were typical frontier structures—wood-frame boxes with high, false fronts concealing a gable. The broad area between the top of the store windows and the bottom of the cornice crowning the false front was perfect for signs. On most buildings, these signs consisted of the same, typically crude lettering seen on Old Grout. They generally told the passerby only the type of business contained inside (e.g. "hardware," "groceries," and "undertaker") or the name of the business (e.g. "A.B. Tomlin & Co."). Rarely did they contain both the type of business and its name. But there were exceptions. A photograph from 1880 shows an exquisitely painted sign on the false front of the Christopher Philippi Harness Shop, located on the south side of Jefferson Street's 300 block, flanked by rather primitive commercial buildings. The top line of text, gracefully



Ansel Watrous | History of Larimer County

Figures 1.6.1 and 1.6.2: Old Grout. As the first store in Fort Collins, it is not surprising to find many signs attached to this building. The earlier image above (circa 1870) shows rather crude signpainting as compared to the later image (circa 1880) below.





Fort Collins Yesterdays

Figure 1.6.3: Jefferson Street business block.

The signs on these buildings were typical of the simple advertisements in early Fort Collins.

Figure 1.6.4: Christopher Philippi Harness Shop. This 1880 image shows sophisticated signpainting in the otherwise crude setting of Jefferson Street.

Fort Collins Public Library



curving, proclaimed “Christ. Philippi.” The rest of the sign, written in large block letters popular in the American West at that time, read “HARNESS, SADDLES, WHIPS & C.” If this was not enough, Philippi installed another sign perpendicular to his storefront and spanning the sidewalk; it read “HARNESS SHOP.” Borrowing a signage technique from Renaissance Europe, Philippi even suspended a huge harness precariously over the sidewalk.

But painted wall advertising remained primitive in Fort Collins until the settlement had more buildings constructed of the signpainter’s preferred medium—pressed bricks. H.C. Peterson and Elizabeth “Auntie” Stone brought the first brick kiln to Fort Collins in 1870, build-

ing the first brick house later that year. But better bricks and the machinery needed to make them arrived with the railroad, which opened on October 8, 1877. From that time, through the 1880s, the town witnessed a flurry of masonry construction in its downtown and, very early, a flood of painted wall advertising.³

Among the earliest and most intriguing advertisements painted on a brick wall was for Stover’s City Drug Store, while it was located in the Tedmon House Hotel. This building was constructed in 1880 and was located at 262 Jefferson Street.

Druggist Frank P. Stover was born in St. Joseph County, Indiana, on December 11, 1852. He was the brother of pioneer Fort Collins merchant and civic leader William C. Stover. Frank Stover arrived in Fort Collins in 1874 and purchased his brother’s share of the Hocker & Company City Drug Store, which was originally located in Old Grout. He moved the store to the Yount Bank Building in 1874, where it remained until the completion of the Tedmon House in 1880. A photograph from around 1884 shows a detailed image of Stover’s corner storefront. To the left of the entrance is a painted wall sign promoting “ICED CONGRESS & SELTZER MINERAL WATER ON DRAUGHT.” Congress was a brand name of the Congress & Empire Spring Company, among the many bottling companies based around the famous mineral springs at Saratoga, in east central New York.⁴

The large sign painted to the right of the entrance is even more interesting because its appears to be one of the earliest examples of a privilege sign in Fort Collins. As well, the advertisement reveals a high level of artistic sophistication that would define later painted wall signs in the city.

The left half of the sign consists of dark letters on a light background reading “CITY DRUG STORE/FRANK P. STOVER/MEDICINES/DRUGGISTS.” To the right is an advertisement for St. Jacobs Oil German Remedy, one of the most popular late nineteenth-century cure-alls. The elixir was the creation of Charles A. Vogler, who, with his father, Augustus Volger, and partner, John H. Winklemann, started A. Vogeler & Company in Baltimore, Maryland. Like all of the patent medicines of the day, St. Jacobs Oil promised to cure a variety of illnesses, including “rheumatism; neuralgia; sciatica; lumbago; backache; soreness of the chest; gout; quinsy; sore throat; swelling and sprains; burns and scalds; general bodily pains; tooth-, ear-, and headache; frosted foot and ears; and all other pains and aches.” St. Jacobs Oil was wildly successful and inspired numerous imitators, ranging from the St. Anthony Liquid Cure for Rheumatism to St. Joseph’s Liver Regulator. But the popularity of St. Jacobs Oil had little to do with the effectiveness of the product itself but more with its innovative marketing. “[T]he late Charles A. Vogler exploited St. Jacob’s Oil,” observed *The Pharmaceutical Era* in its June 18, 1908, edition, “being one of the pioneers of progressive patent medicine advertising and employing many novel schemes.” The company printed trading cards, handbills, stamps, calendars, and almanacs, and purchased advertising space in newspapers across the country. Not surprisingly, St. Josephs Oil was also a major user of privilege signs, as the one that appeared on the side of Frank’s Stover’s drug store.⁵

St. Jacobs Oil, also known by its German name St. Jacobs Oel, or simply, The Oel, was long-lived. By 1933, the John Wyeth Chemical Company owned rights to the



Fort Collins Public Library

Figures 1.6.5: Frank Stover’s City Drug Store.

Taken around 1884, this photograph of the City Drug Store, in the Tedmon House Hotel, shows not only some of the earliest paint-on-brick wall signs, it also shows one of the first privilege signs in Fort Collins.

remedy and continued to manufacture it into the 1940s. And Frank Stover’s City Drug Store was even longer-lived. It exists today as City Drug, located on the southwest corner of South College and West Mountain avenues.

The number of painted wall signs in Fort Collins increased as the number of multiple-story, masonry buildings in the downtown grew, particularly after 1900. The physical evolution of the various business blocks created certain locations better suited for painted wall signs than others. For instance, the west side of the 100 block of South College Avenue hosted single story buildings evenly spaced between two-story buildings, creating a zig-zag skyline. The result was a row of second-story side elevations



Fort Collins Yesterdays

Figure 1.6.6: 100 block of South College Avenue, looking northwest, 1931.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 1.6.7: 100 blocks of North and South College Avenue, looking southwest, circa 1925.

The remodeled Opera House Block, now the Central Block, hosts a sign for McAuglin's XXXX Coffee.



History of Larimer County, 1911

Figure 1.6.8: 100 block of South College Avenue, looking southwest, circa 1910.

This block was a favorite for advertisers because single-story buildings separate each of the two-story structures.



Mark Miller | Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 1.6.9: 100 block of North College Avenue, looking northwest, 1904. The towering stagehouse of the Opera Block became a huge billboard.



Fort Collins Yesterdays

Figure 1.6.10: Linden Street, looking north, circa 1900. A large privilege sign for McAuglin's XXXX Coffee dominates this street scene.

History of Larimer County

Figure 1.6.11: Linden Street, looking north, circa 1910. The McAuglin's sign has become an advertisement for Owl Cigars.



Ralph Giddings | City of Fort Collins

Figures I.6.12 and I.6.13: Anderson Implement & Coal ghost sign. Many Fort Collins ghost signs disappeared under a coat of paint. This advertisement, as seen in 1978 (above), was painted over after 1986. Below is the same wall surface seen in 2006.

Carol Turner | City of Fort Collins



perfect for the installation of painted wall signs. Historic pictures of this block consistently show each of the alcoves hosting a sign, including two of the most intact signs today: Damm's Bakery and Owl Cigar. Another notable location was the stagehouse (or fly loft) that towered over the Opera Block, 121 North College Avenue. While not an original feature of this building, it quickly became a kind of billboard as it was visible from everywhere in downtown.

Painted wall signs remained a vibrant advertising medium in Fort Collins through at least the 1930s. After World War II, however, new painted wall signs in the downtown became rare, as they did across the United States. When Don Brown painted the Coca-Cola/Angell's Delicatessen sign in 1958, his labor attracted a number of onlookers. Part of this attention could have come from the rarity of painted wall sign installations at that time. Indeed, this advertisement, along with the nearby circa 1965 Roger's Plumbing & Heating/Pepsi-Cola advertisement, may well have been the last privilege signs painted on walls in Fort Collins, marking the end of an era.

Further impeding the preservation of existing painted wall signs and the installation of new signs was increased regulation. In 1971, the Fort Collins City Council adopted a stringent sign code, which set limits on the number, location, and size of all signs business could use within the city limits. The City implemented the regulations "to get a little control on the size [of signs] so they will not create a traffic of safety hazard," said Maria LaValley, then the City's zoning inspector. "But mostly it is an aesthetic thing."⁶ The ordinance gave business owners until 1977 to remedy non-conforming signs. That year, 33 merchants joined together

in a class-action lawsuit against the City, claiming that the sign code represented an economic hardship. Echoing *St. Louis Gunning Advertising v. City of St. Louis*, the court ruled against the merchants, stating that the City had the "right to limit a proliferation of signs for the aesthetic well-being of the citizenry."⁷

The code was successful in "cleaning up" South College Avenue, particularly south of Prospect Road, where a sea of brightly lit signs overwhelmed the landscape. But an unintended consequence of the ordinances was the forced modification or removal of some painted wall signs. In particular, a section of the code forbidding signs "which project above the fascia wall" forced sign-painter Harold Asmus to significantly modify the sign identifying his own shop. Signs that had to be removed included Feeders Supply Company (a Purina privilege sign), at 131 Linden Street, and Valley Veterinary Supply, at 359 Lincoln Street. While it is unclear whether other wall signs were painted over as a result of these ordinances, some of the historic signs, which no longer exist, certainly would not have met the City's current sign standards.⁸

At the time the sign ordinance passed, however, Fort Collins's historic painted wall signs simply were not regarded as worthy of preservation. Indeed, while they may have been nostalgic vestiges of the past, they were seen as impediments to progress. "A real downtown renovation probably should obliterate the old, fading signs," opined Betty Woodworth in her August 4, 1976, "Sidelights" column, a regular feature in the *Fort Collins Coloradoan*. "But while they still exist, they are fun to see."⁹

Historic photographs suggest that many, if not most, of the painted wall signs in Fort Collins have now van-

ished. Lack of maintenance and exposure to the elements, however, account for few, if any, of these disappearances. The city's painted wall signs have proven to be quite durable. Even when the pigment of aging paints has washed away from the brick, it generally leaves a faint yet seemingly indelible outline of the original sign, such as the Hodgson's Jeweler's advertisement on the north elevation of the Armstrong Hotel, at 249 South College Avenue. More often, these painted wall signs vanished for three main reasons. First, they may have been painted or stuccoed over.

This often occurred when another business replaced the advertiser in a retail storefront. Second, the building on which the sign was painted had been demolished or remodeled in such a way that it eliminated the exposed wall. Third, the remodeling or construction of an adjacent building covered the sign. In some cases, the signs were left intact on what became a protected, interior surface. Sometimes, in subsequent remodeling projects, these signs are inadvertently uncovered, appearing with surprisingly vibrant and delightful colors.

Maximum Height of Letters and Logos For Wall Signs			
Use	Letter	Logo	Cabinet
Auto-related and roadside commercial and business service uses	12"	18"	18"
Convenience shopping center	18"	24"	24"
Neighborhood service center; Neighborhood Commercial District	24"*	30"*	30"*

* Any individual tenant space exceeding forty-five thousand (45,000) square feet in floor area shall be permitted one (1) flush wall sign with individual letters not to exceed forty-eight (48) inches in height and/or logos not to exceed fifty-four (54) inches in height. The maximum cabinet height shall be fifty-four (54) inches in height.

Fort Collins Sign Code Pertaining to Wall Signs

(Fort Collins Land Use Code, Article 3, Division 3.8.7)

(8) The maximum size of individual letters and logos on flush wall signs and flush wall cabinets shall be as follows (see table at left).

(9) If signs are illuminated, only internal illumination shall be permitted. This requirement shall not apply to freestanding or ground signs.

(10) The length of any flush wall sign for an individual tenant space shall be limited to seventy-five (75) percent of the width of the tenant storefront, but no sign shall exceed forty (40) feet in length; provided, however; that any individual tenant space exceeding forty-five thousand (45,000) square feet in floor area shall be permitted one (1) flush wall sign not exceeding fifty-five (55) feet in length. Each tenant space shall be allowed one (1) such flush wall sign on each exterior building wall directly abutting the tenant space. In the event that a tenant space does not have a directly abutting exterior wall, one (1) sign not exceeding thirty (30) square feet may be erected on an exterior wall of the building for the purpose of identifying that tenant space.

(11) The location of any flush wall sign shall be positioned to harmonize with the architectural character of the building(s) to which they are attached, including but not limited to any projection, relief, cornice, column, change of building material, window or door opening. Flush wall signs shall align with other such signs on the same building.

(12) No illuminated sign visible from or within three hundred (300) feet of any property which contains an existing or approved residential use or is zoned for residential use, may be illuminated between the hours of 11:00 p.m. (or one-half [1/2] hour after the use to which it is pertains is closed, whichever is later) and 6:00 a.m.; provided, however;

er; that this time limitation shall not apply to any lighting which is used primarily for the protection of the premises or for safety purposes or any signage which is separated from a residential use by an arterial street. For the purposes of this subsection, the term "approved" shall mean having current project development plan or final plan approval.

(13) One (1) flush wall sign or under-canopy sign per street frontage, not to exceed twelve (12) square feet in area, shall be permitted on or under the fascia of a canopy covering the retail dispensing or sales of vehicular fuels.

(14) For the first two hundred (200) feet in building frontage length in a neighborhood service center; the maximum sign area permitted shall be equal to one and one-quarter (1 1/4) square feet for each linear foot of building frontage length. For that portion of a building frontage which exceeds two hundred (200) feet in length, the maximum sign area permitted shall be equal to two-thirds (2/3) foot for each linear foot of building frontage length over such two hundred (200) feet.

(15) For the first two hundred (200) feet in building frontage length in a neighborhood convenience shopping center; business service use or auto-related and roadside commercial use, the maximum sign area permitted shall be equal to one (1) square foot for each linear foot of building frontage length. For that portion of a building frontage which exceeds two hundred (200) feet in length, the maximum sign area permitted shall be equal to one-half (1/2) foot for each linear foot of building frontage over such two hundred (200) feet.

Chapter 7

The Wall Dogs of Fort Collins

From around 1880 through the late 1990s, Fort Collins was home to number of gifted wall sign painters. The early wall dogs also painted houses and performed other odd jobs while later sign painters dedicated their lives to the trade.

One of the most prominent sign companies in Fort Collins was actually based in Denver. Considered the father of outdoor advertising in Colorado, James A. Curran was born in New York City on July 31, 1855. In 1869, at the age of 14, Curran traveled westward with his parents and settled in Kansas City. He initially arrived in Denver on May 10, 1876, and eventually settled in Leadville, in 1880, where he opened an outdoor advertising business. A year later, Curran became an advertising agent for the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad, promoting excursions to the small towns dotting the railroad's scenic narrow-gauge lines. In 1883 he moved to Denver, where he established the Curran Bill Posting & Distributing Company. Curran quickly became the preferred sign poster and painter for most of the major manufacturing and distributing companies in Denver. He dispatched crews across Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico to paint signs for Denver-based businesses.

The Curran Company was also one of the most innovative outdoor advertising firms in the West. Curran was the first advertiser in Colorado to publicize the big circuses that came to the state. He was also a pioneer in using

billboards and painted wall signs to promote political candidates. When Robert A. Speer first ran for mayor of Denver and faced opposition from every one of the city's newspapers, Curran supported him with signs that changed daily, requiring a dedicated team of 20 expert signpainters. Speer was elected mayor, and Curran's campaign strategy spread across the country.

An early association as the advertising agent for the Tabor opera houses in Leadville and Denver prompted Curran to become an ardent supporter of the performing arts. He brought "legitimate" theater companies to Colorado, as opposed to the more bawdy burlesque shows popular at the time. Among those troupes he brought to the state were the Madison Square Company of New York, Fun on the Bristol, and Haverly's Minstrels.¹

The first signpainters in Fort Collins were hard to identify because little, if any, of their work remains. Most also worked as house and carriage painters and may not have identified themselves primarily as signpainters. Perhaps the earliest official signpainter in Fort Collins was the flamboyant Franklin A. Soult, who operated a sign shop here as early as 1880. He was born around 1848 in Cazanovia, New York, where he worked as a carriage painter beginning around 1865. Like most early signpainters, Soult also advertised himself as a housepainter and wallpaper hanger. He also worked as a photographer. While his shop in Fort Collins appears to have been locat-



History of Colorado

James A. Curran

ed at 150 West Mountain Avenue (136 West Mountain Avenue in 1902), Soult moved his residence from 308 Jefferson Street to the self-named Boulevard de Soult (also a prominent street in Paris, but its Fort Collins location is unknown). By 1895, Soult worked in partnership with John Letford Smith to operate a paint and wallpaper store, known as Smith & Soult and, later, Smith, Soult & Smith. Soult worked in Fort Collins until his retirement around 1910, when he and his wife, Cornelia Soult, moved to Denver. Prior to 1930, they settled in Los Angeles.²

Other early signpainters were J. Frank Dukes and L.T. Woodring, who operated the Star Paint Shop at 201 Jefferson Street around 1902. Dukes was born in Iowa in 1879 and also identified himself as a blacksmith and carriage builder. Little is known of Woodring, who appears to have left Fort Collins prior to 1904.³

The 1904 city directory lists three firms, in addition to Soult, as signpainters: Charette & Kuhre; Frank Elliott; and George Lemmon. The first two were also listed as housepainters. George Charette was born in New York around 1866 to a French-Canadian father and French mother. He appears to have been more of an interior decorator and skilled interior painter than a signpainter, working through at least 1925. His partner, Carl A. Kuhre, was born on December 16, 1863, in Denmark, and also considered himself a decorator as well as a painter. Charette and Kuhre opened a paint shop in the McPhearson Block (149-155 Linden Street) around 1903. Prior to 1917, Kuhre parted company with Charette and operated a paint and wallpaper store at 225 North College Avenue. His firm remained in business until 1948.⁴

Another signpainter who also identified himself as a

housepainter and decorator was H. Frank Elliott. He was born in Colorado in December 1873. At the age of 26, he opened a shop in the Miller Block, in April 1900. With a shop at 827 Laporte Avenue, he remained in business through at least 1930, but appears to have concentrated solely on interior decorating in the later years of his career.⁵

Less is known about George T. Lemmon. In addition to being a signpainter, he appears to have operated a novelty store at 140 West Mountain Avenue.⁶

The first signpainter listed in city directories to be identified solely with that profession was Joseph F. Stewart. He was born in Tennessee around 1880. He operated a sign shop from his home at 320 Willow Street from around 1906 through at least 1910. In October 1914, Stewart opened a formal sign shop at 159 West Mountain Avenue. “Mr. Stewart is an expert signpainter,” noted the *Fort Collins Morning Express*, “and can be easily located by parties needing work in that line.” Stewart appears to have worked at his trade through at least 1919.⁷

The 1909-10 city directory lists another signpainter in addition to Stewart: Mathias Pfeffer. He was born around 1868 in Germany (some sources say Austria), and arrived in the United States in 1879. Based at his shop at 226 Pine Street, Pfeffer also offered to paint houses and carriages, hang wallpaper, grain trim, and finish woodwork. By 1917, this shop became the Pfeffer Paint Store. He moved to Los Angeles around 1919, but later returned to Denver to operate a paint and wallpaper store.⁸

The sign-painting profession continued its maturation in the city when brothers Charles Edward Scott Forington and W. Robbins “Bob” S. Forington established the Fort Collins Sign Company around 1922. The brothers were

both born in New York City, Charles on August 26, 1892, and Robbins on January 18, 1895. Their father was also a signpainter, practicing his art in a city renowned for its painted wall signs. In 1915, the brothers tried their hands at farming, taking up a homestead near Grover, but moved to Fort Collins in 1922. The Foringtons initially based their sign shop at 133 East Mountain Avenue. By 1929, it was located a 120 East Oak Street. By this time, Charles appears to have left the partnership. By 1933, the Fort Collins Sign Company was located at 501 South Mason Street. Robbins Forington dropped the Fort Collins Sign Company name around 1948 and referred to his business as Forington Signs instead. He continued to paint signs until his death in January 1965.

Around 1930, two other signpainters joined Robbins Forington: Thomas C. Duncan and Dueffort Wiley Wade. Duncan was born in Massachusetts around 1898. He operated his sign shop out of his home, at 422 Wood Street. He remained in business through 1936, but not until 1938.¹⁰

Dueffort Wade was born in Fort Collins on March 21, 1902. His father, Fred F. Wade, also appears to have worked as a painter, although not specifically as a signpainter. Dueffort Wade operated a sign shop at 132 South Mason Street through 1940. He died on January 24, 1981, in San Bernardino, California.¹¹

Following the end of World War II, in 1945, Harold Asmus opened a sign shop in Fort Collins, which he continued to operate for over 50 years. Asmus began painting signs around 1933 as he served an eight-year apprenticeship in Greeley. He was preparing to open his own shop there when the war started and he was drafted.

After the war, Asmus opened a sign shop at 214 Pine

Street. At the time, he was one of the only freehand signpainters in Fort Collins. He steadily moved his operation up Pine Street, to 222 around 1956 and, ultimately, to 226 around 1966. Asmus had a steady stream of painted wall sign commissions, which he jovially signed “Asmus, Of Course.” In addition to painted wall signs and other advertisements, Asmus specialized in freehand painting weekly grocery store sale banners. Indeed, he had painted the paper signs every week since 1945, completing 4,000 banners a year. When grocery stores converted to machine-printed signs in 1985, Asmus had completed nearly 160,000 paper signs. Despite the loss of the grocery store business, Asmus continued to practice what would become a lost art wrought by a steady, patient hand. He sensed the same ever-quickening rush that doomed so many painted wall signs. “People are in too big of a hurry,” Asmus said in a 1985 interview. “I was driving into town this morning, and people were going past me so fast, it was like I was going backwards. Where’re they going, anyhow?” He remained in business right until his death in March 1999.¹²

One of Asmus’s friendly competitors was commercial artist Donald Dee Brown. He was born on March 8, 1920, in York, Nebraska. He arrived in Fort Collins as a child, in 1927, when his father, Terilus “Dee” Brown opened a barbershop here. Don Brown’s mother, Gladys, was raised in the city. The younger Brown graduated from Fort Collins High School in 1938 and attended the Denver Art Institute to study commercial art. While he had to suspend his studies to serve in World War II, Brown returned to the school and graduated in 1947. He initially worked as a commercial artist for the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension until 1953, when he decided to become a free-

lance artist in Fort Collins. At first, Brown had only a trickle of work, so he turned to sign painting. “Being a commercial artist, it was natural that I pick up the signpainter’s skill,” Brown said in a 2001 interview.

He opened a sign shop at 203 East Mountain Avenue (later moving to 1700 South College Avenue) and approached local Pepsi and Coca-Cola distributors about painting wall signs for them. Pepsi immediately recognized his talent and hired Brown to paint its privilege signs in the Fort Collins-Greeley area and in Denver. “I painted signs in all those little towns around Fort Collins,” Brown recalled. His Pepsi signs revealed an unusual level of sophistication, bespeaking of Brown’s formal artistic training. They had subtle variations in color and, most difficult to execute on painted wall signs, delicately graduated shading. The local Coca-Cola distributor was so impressed with Brown’s work, that he hired the artist to complete what would become Brown’s best-known Fort Collins wall sign, the Angell’s Delicatessen/Coca-Cola privilege advertisement at 200 East Mountain Avenue. As a friendly jab at Asmus, Brown signed his wall signs as “Brown, Who Else?”

Brown returned to the university in 1960 where he remained for four years. He then worked for a sign company before becoming a free-lance artist again. In 1971, he

and his wife, Mildred “Mid,” lived on a small Mediterranean island, off the coast of Spain. This began a worldwide adventure, which included stays at an isolated Caribbean island and the frigid and stormy port of Punta Arenas, Chile. It was here in 1979 that Brown provided exquisite illustrations for a field guide of the region’s birds, *Guía de Camp para las Aves de Magallanes*, by Claudio Venegas and Jean Jory. When Brown returned to Fort Collins, he again became a free-lance artist. It was at this time that he penned a series of illustrations combined with trivia, which he called “Factorama.” These illustrations addressed two of Brown’s personal passions, antique automobiles and western history, particularly Native Americans. Distributed through Singer Features, these images were syndicated in newspapers across the country, including the *Omaha World Herald*.

Don Brown died on February 1, 2001, but he continues to live on through his artistry. His Fort Collins Coca-Cola advertisement, which Brown considered his favorite painted wall sign, remains relatively intact and has become an icon for the Old Town redevelopment. As well, many companies continue to use the corporate logos Brown designed for them, including the Charco Broiler Restaurant and Kunkler Wholesale Foods.¹³

Chapter 8

Preserving the Ghost Signs of Fort Collins

The preservation and interpretation of historic painted wall signs present many challenges for preservation planners. First, these signs often endured longer than the businesses and products they promoted. An example of this is the remaining Owl Cigar sign, painted around 1900. It was a privilege sign for the Tyler-Lowe Mercantile, which remained here only until about 1910. Thus this sign, one of the best preserved in Fort Collins, actually advertised a business that had been defunct for nearly a century. Later tenants occupying the building may want to use the same space to advertise their own businesses.

Second, many painted wall signs, particularly those in very visible locations, consist of two or more layers of advertisements. Because of the varying adhesiveness of paints used through the years, the different layers have shown through, creating a visual mixture of commerce and commercial art through time. The preservation of these signs poses an obvious question: which layer should be retained?

Third, historic ghost signs may contain copious amounts of lead paint—a hazardous substance—making preservation difficult and restoration with original materials impossible. Indeed, the longevity of certain paints used in wall signs appears to have been directly related to the amount of lead they contained. Thus, some of the best preserved signs are actually the highest in lead content. On the other hand, one of the preferred methods for mitigat-

ing lead-paint danger is to keep the paint intact. Thus, the preservation and maintenance of historic wall signs may actually reduce the risk of lead paint exposure.¹

A fourth issue facing the preservation of historic painted wall signs is the subject of the advertisements themselves. In some cases, the product or business historically advertised on the wall of a building may be antithetical to the mission of the business presently occupying the structure. Other painted wall signs may promote a product that is now implicitly taboo or explicitly illegal to advertise in some locations, such as signs for tobacco products.

To provide some assistance in determining what wall signs should be preserved, Michael J. Auer provides eight criteria in National Park Service Preservation Brief 25: “The Preservation of Historic Signs:”

Retain historic signs whenever possible, particularly when they are...

1. Associated with historic figures, events or places.
2. Significant as evidence of the history of the product, business, or service advertised.
3. Significant as reflecting the history of the building or the development of the historic district. A sign may be the only indicator of a building’s historic use.
4. Characteristic of a specific historic period,



Ralph Giddings | City of Fort Collins

Figures 1.8.1: Don Brown's Coca-Cola advertisement. This Ghost Signs marks one of the major entrances into Old Town Fort Collins.

such as gold leaf on glass, neon, or stainless steel lettering.

5. Integral to the building's design or physical fabric, as when a sign is part of a storefront made of Carrara glass or enamel panels, or when the name of the historic firm or the date are rendered in stone, metal or tile. In such cases, removal can harm the integrity of a historic property's design, or cause significant damage to its materials.
6. Outstanding examples of the signmaker's art, whether because of their excellent craftsmanship, use of materials, or design.
7. Local landmarks, that is, signs recognized as popular focal points in a community.
8. Elements important in defining the character of a district, such as marquees in a theater district.

For the City of Fort Collins, the preservation of ghost signs should be an objective of its comprehensive preservation planning for three major reasons: 1) they are works of public art similar to murals and architecture; 2) painted wall signs are unique historical texts, providing insight into the culture and economics of a particular place at a particular time; and 3) ghost signs are often major components in an overall sense of place.

As mentioned earlier in this document, by the very nature of their trade, signpainters had to be skilled artists. Even simple letters painted on a wall required advanced observations of depth and perspective. Wall dogs had to have a deep understanding of their medium and their audi-

ence. In some cases, their signs featured works of art themselves, such as the Owl Cigar owl. In other cases, the sign images were the works of skilled artists, such as Don Brown's Coca-Cola bottle. These were the same expressions of personality and desire, art and capitalism, that drove the architects who wrought the downtown landscape. And like so much art, painted wall signs become more venerated with time. "A sign is obviously at first only a practical thing, a means to sell a product or point out a business," writes *Buffalo News* critic Richard Huntington. "It has no pretensions to lasting value. But as time passes, a sign—like all common things—gathers romance."³

And the messages of ghost signs are often the only historical texts recording certain people, businesses, and products. The investment in a painted wall sign meant that the business or product it promoted was seen as at least viable, if not successful, in the local market. Prominent western historian Richard White found that ghost signs were crucial to his understanding of Colorado's mining towns. "These advertisements give us important clues about the social habits of the miners themselves," writes White, "with tobacco and cigar signs being by far the most common."⁴ Michael Auer provides this description of how historic signs enrich the historical record:

Signs speak of the people who run the businesses, shops, and firms. Signs are signatures. They reflect the owner's tastes and personality. They often reflect the ethnic makeup of a neighborhood and its character, as well as the social and business activities carried out there. By giving concrete details about daily life in a former era,

historic signs allow the past to speak to the present in ways that buildings by themselves do not. And multiple surviving historic signs on the same building can indicate several periods in its history or use. In this respect, signs are like archeological layers that reveal different periods of human occupancy and use.⁵

Perhaps most important is the power of ghost signs to define a sense of place. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine the ambiance of Old Town, one of the most unique places in Colorado, without its ghost signs. They are as important as the façades of buildings or the width of the

streets. Again, Auer provides a perspective on the power of signs to define a sense of place:

Historic signs give continuity to public spaces, becoming part of the community memory. They sometimes become landmarks in themselves, almost without regard for the building to which they are attached, or the property on which they stand. Furthermore, in an age of uniform franchise signs and generic plastic “box” signs, historic signs often attract by their individuality: by a clever detail, a daring use of color and motion, or a reference to particular people, shops, or events.⁴



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figures 1.8.2: Ghost Signs in Old Town. Although greatly faded, ghost signs are a major component of Fort Collins’s unique sense of place.

Notes

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4. Donald D. Brown, interview by Rheba Massey and J. Stephen Mack, 26 September 2001, tms., Local History Archive, Fort Collins Public Library.
5. Stage, 42.

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2. Stage, 49, 51.
3. *Ibid.*, 49-50.
4. Stage, 49; Brown.
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8. Stage, 42.

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3. Auer.
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3. Fort Collins City Directories; U.S. Census of 1900, Fort Collins, Larimer, Colorado, Roll T623 126, Page 12A, Enumeration District 213.
4. City Directories; U.S. Census of 1910, Fort Collins Ward 1, Larimer, Colorado, Roll T624_121, Page 16A, Enumeration District 225, Image: 670.; “Mrs. Kuhre Goes in Death,” *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, March 1953.
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Section II

Reconnaissance Survey Report



The following section is an inventory of the existing ghost signs in Fort Collins. The survey was conducted in the fall of 2006 by Adam Thomas, Historitecture architectural historian, and included those signs falling within the following parameters:

1. The sign must be visible, however faintly, from street level, with the naked eye. Thus, those signs that, due to remodeling and new construction, exist on interior walls, were not included.
2. The sign must be painted on brick or another masonry surface, keeping with the traditional definition of

“ghost sign.”

Historitecture used historic photographs to recreate the wording on many signs. A series of slides taken to record the advertisements, in 1978 and 1986, helped determine the rate of deterioration and set standards of integrity. In cases where more than one layer of a sign shows through, Historitecture assigned a depth to each layer. However, in most cases, establishing the order of layers is extremely difficult. Thus, the order of layers in this report is at best a guess and is meant simply to provide some order to the visual chaos of these multi-layer signs.

Bank



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.1. Bank sign in context, 2006.



Carol Tunner | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.2. Bank sign in 2006.

121 North College Avenue (Opera House Block)

Location: East end of the third story's south elevation.

Physical Integrity: Moderately Low

Top Layer Text: BANK

Date: After 1900

Artist: Unknown

Lower Layer Text: BANK

Artist: Unknown

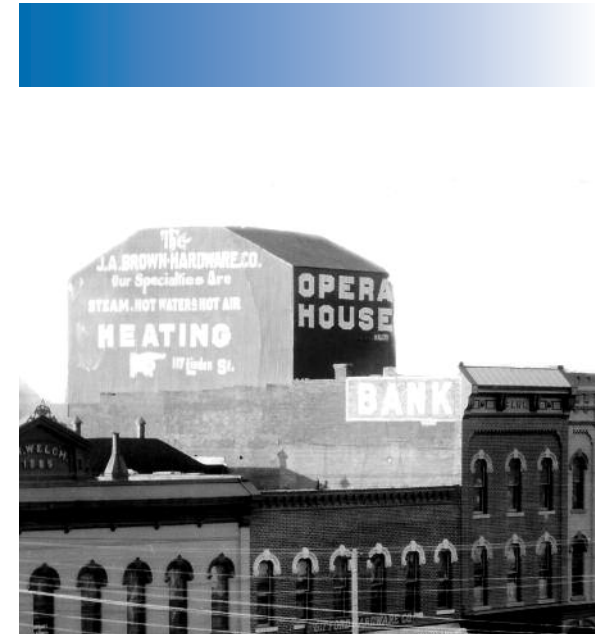
Date: Between 1881 and 1898

Narrative: In January 1881, Larimer County pioneer and financier Franklin Avery opened the Larimer County Bank in this building, which was then known as the Welch Block. The institution later became the First National Bank of Fort Collins and moved across College Avenue by 1898. By 1904, this building housed the Fort Collins National Bank, which remained here for decades.

Despite its simplicity, this sign would have been one of the most visible in downtown Fort Collins. Conversion of this block into an opera house required the construction of a backstage towering over the rest of the town. On it were painted huge advertisements. This bank sign would have been part of that visual tapestry.

Notes: A smaller “BANK” sign appears to have been painted over the original, larger “BANK” sign, particularly evident in the 1978 photograph at right. In addition to normal weathering, remodeling the cornice and parapet in 1920s has damaged this sign. As well, the mature trees lining College Avenue nearly obscure this sign during the summer.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
Woodworth, Betty. “More signs of old Fort Collins, *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, 4 August 1976, p. 1A.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.3: Bank sign circa 1900. The large structure in the background, covered with advertisements, is the stagehouse for the opera house.



Ralph Giddings | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.4. Bank sign in March 1978.

Seder & Son Molded Products Company



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.5: Seder & Son sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.6: Seder & Son sign in 2006.

300 North College Avenue

Location: Front (west) elevation, fascia and parapet.

Physical Integrity: Moderate

Text: SEDER & SON / MOLDED PRODUCTS CO

Date: 1934

Artist: Unknown

Narrative: This building was constructed around 1923 to house the McMillan Transfer and Storage Company. In 1942, John Gano Seder Sr. purchased this property for his fledgling plastics molding company. The history of this company can be traced to a Colorado pioneer in the plastics industry, William J. Colson Jr. A 1913 graduate of the Colorado Agricultural College (now Colorado State University), Colson held degrees in both civil and electrical engineering. A position at the Western Electric Company exposed Colson to Bakelite, one of the earliest plastics. In 1926, Colson helped his brother-in-law, G.F. Ingwersen, establish the Ingwersen Manufacturing Company, the first plastic molding firm in Colorado. In the early 1930s, Colson designed and built eight molding presses and dies for his son-in-law, John Gano Seder, of Fort Collins. In 1934, Seder used those presses and dies to establish Seder & Son Molded Products Company, with his son, John Gano Seder, Jr. During World War II, Seder & Son became a major employer in Fort Collins as it manufactured aircraft components. The company moved to another location in 1963.

Notes: This sign is a rare example in Fort Collins of a facade-painted sign. It is even more unusual because it incorporates architectural features into its design, namely the stepped parapet.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
Simmons, R. Laurie and Thomas H. [Front Range Research Associates]. Historic Building Inventory Record for 300 North College Avenue (5LR.1502), January 1992.
“William John Colson, Jr.” in *Colorado and Its People*, vol. IV, LeRoy Hafen ed. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1948), 604.

A Classic Touch



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.7: A Classic Touch sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.8: A Classic Touch sign in 2006.

300 North College Avenue

- Location:** West end of the south and north elevations, second story.
- Physical Integrity:** High
- Text:** A Classic TOUCH / Specializing in Harley-Davidson Motorcycles and Accessories
Image: A Spread-wing eagle
Date: circa 1990
Artist: Unknown
- Narrative:** This sign is among the newest painted wall advertisements in Fort Collins. This motorcycle sales and service business began around 1990, at which time the signs were installed.
- Notes:** The large, white-painted field beneath each sign suggests that larger signs may have existed here but were painted over. Under the main advertisement on the south elevation are actually two smaller wall-painted signs. On the west end is the image of a pointing finger and the word “ENTRANCE.” East of it is a sign reading “RESERVED FOR MOTOR CYCLES” painted in a figure reminiscent of the Harley-Davidson corporate logo.
- Sources:** Simmons, R. Laurie and Thomas H. [Front Range Research Associates]. Historic Building Inventory Record for 300 North College Avenue (5LR.1502), January 1992.

Auto Parts Company



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.9: Auto Parts Company sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.10: Auto Parts Company sign in 2006.

112 South College Avenue

Location: West end of the second story's south elevation

Physical Integrity: Low

Text: AUTO PARTS CO. / AUTOMOTIVE TRUCK & TRACTOR / AUTO PARTS

Date: Between 1936 and circa 1950

Artist: Unknown

Narrative: This building was constructed prior to 1907, when it was home to the Brinker Grocery Company. Around 1925, the building housed Brownie's Sport Shop (also known as Runge's Sport Shop) and the Runge Music Company. The sport shop and music store remained here through at least 1931. The Auto Parts Company, an auto parts wholesaler, was located in this building from around 1936 until 1988.

Notes: A coat of white paint had been applied over this sign and much of the rest of the south elevation. However, because the paint used for lettering the original sign was older and weaker than the paint applied over it, flakes of it have lost their adhesion to the bricks, taking the new paint with them. Thus, the lettering is faintly visible. The installation of a glass-block window has removed the portion of the wall hosting the letters "t," "r," and "u" in the word "truck."

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).

Owl Cigar



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.11: Owl Cigar sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.12: Owl Cigar sign in 2006.

113 South College Avenue

Location: East end of the south elevation's second story

Physical Integrity: Moderately high

Text: TYLER-LOWE MERC. CO. / STRAITON & STORM'S / OWL / CIGAR
 To the right of the word "OWL" is "NOW 5 CTS." To the left of the word "CIGAR," in area not visible from street level, is the phrase "THE ROTHENBERG & / SCHLOSS CIGAR CO. / DISTR'S, DENVER."

Image: An owl perched on a cigar, backlit by a full moon.

Date: Circa 1900-1910

Artist: Curran Bill Posting & Distributing Company, Denver

Narrative: This appears to have been a privilege sign painted for the Tyler-Lowe Mercantile Company, the first occupant of the Robert Trimble Block (109-113 South College Avenue). Robert Trimble was a prominent Fort Collins businessman and son of Larimer County pioneer merchant and stockman William H. Trimble. Tyler-Lowe remained in this building until about 1910.

The Straiton & Storm Cigar Company was the country's largest domestic manufacturer of cigars in the late nineteenth century. John Straiton was born in Scotland in 1850. Soon after arriving in the United States, Straiton worked as an assistant to his uncle, who was a leading cigar maker. Around 1860, John Straiton opened his own cigar manufacturing company with partner Frederick Storm, who was born in Alsace, France, on July 2, 1844. Storm arrived in the United States at the age of two and eventually settled in Bayside, Queens, New York. He was a prominent businessman, developer, and even served in Congress. Around 1872, Straiton and Storm opened their first formal factory in Bayside, which they continually expanded as they added hundreds of brands to their catalog. According to company legend, Storm named the Owl and White Owl cigar brands for a stray owl that had flown into his bedroom one night and captivated the young man. Despite its success, the Straiton & Storm factory was the scene of some of the bitterest labor unrest in the United States, including strikes and riots. The unionization of America's cigar makers was a direct result of this unrest. Straiton & Storm later became the Owl Commercial Company and exists today as the American Tobacco Company.

Straiton & Storm's Owl Cigar brand was among the earliest and most prolific users of privilege-sign advertising in the United States. Their iconic owl could be seen on buildings in New York, Chicago, Seattle, and in towns across the country; they were the urban equivalent of



Robert M. Copeland | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.13: Owl Cigar sign in February 1986.



Carol Turner | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.14: Detail of the Owl Cigar owl, 2006.



Arlene Ahlbrandt Collection | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.15: The Owl Cigar Sign on the back of 201-209 Jefferson Street, as seen from Pine Street, around 1920.

Notes:

the Mail Pouch tobacco signs. Indeed, Fort Collins has hosted at least four Owl Cigar advertisements (see below).

The Rothenberg & Schloss Cigar Company was the largest tobacco wholesaler with warehouses across the midwest, including Denver.

This sign is unusual for two reasons. First, it is one of the few pictorial wall-painted signs remaining in Fort Collins and certainly one of the oldest. It is also unusual because the sign painter used the natural color of the brick for his background. Typically signs of this era had either black or white backgrounds. This particular advertisement remains remarkably intact. This is especially astonishing considering that the business it advertised closed nearly a century ago.

This advertisement is the last intact Owl Cigar sign of four advertisements for this product that were painted on the walls of downtown buildings. The other signs were located at 142 Linden Street (under the Denver Post sign); on the back of 201-209 Jefferson Street (now demolished), visible from Pine Street; and on the south elevation of a building (now demolished) just south of Walnut Street, on the west side of Linden Street.

Sources:

Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).

Haas, Cynthia Lea. *Ghost Signs of Arkansas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 6-7.

Marmor, Jason [Retrospect]. Historic Building Inventory Form for 107-115 South College Avenue (5LR.1980), 4 May 1996.

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"Welcome to the Bayside Queens History Page," accessed 9 October 2006; available from <http://members.aol.com/tmpnyc/baysidmp.htm>; internet.



Figure 2.16: Undated photograph of the Owl Cigar sign.

Fort Collins Public Library

A.W. Scott Drug Company



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.17: A.W. Scott Drug Company sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.18: A.W. Scott Drug Company sign in 2006.

121-127 South College Avenue

Location: East end of the south elevation's second story

Physical Integrity: Low

Text: A.W. SCOTT DRUG CO. / The Rexall Store / KODAKS • KODAK SUPPLIES

Date: Between 1916 and 1930

Artist: Unknown

Narrative: Alexander Weir Scott was born in Shawangunk, New York, on February 4, 1862. He attended pharmacy school at Hope College, in Holland, Michigan. In 1877, he worked at a Holland drug store before moving to Grand Rapids, where he practiced until 1882. That year he came to Fort Collins and worked in the Lee & Elston drug store. A year later he left that business to establish his own drug store. In 1870, Scott established the A.W. Scott Drug Company with F.J. Shantz. The firm moved to this South College Avenue address, known as the Physicians Building, in 1916. Scott operated as a Rexall drug store, a branded pharmacy franchise. The company remained here into the 1950s, when Scott sold the business to the Walgreen's pharmacy chain.

Notes: Historic photographs suggest that this sign was probably first painted over when Walgreen's took over the store in the 1950s. It may have received subsequent coats of paint since that time. The fact that this sign is still faintly visible is a testament to the durability and quality of paints used by sign painters.

A similar sign was painted on the north elevation of this building, but is no longer visible.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
 "Alexander Weir Scott," in *History of Colorado*, vol. V., James H. Baker, ed. (Denver: Linderman Company, 1927), 212.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.19: A.W. Scott Drug Company sign in 1931.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.20: A.W. Scott Drug Company sign on the north elevation, circa 1951.

Nedley Hotel



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.21: Nedley Hotel sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.22: Nedley Hotel sign in 2006.

130-134 South College Avenue

Location:	West end of the second story's north elevation, west of the "The Meyer Store" sign
Physical Integrity:	Moderately high
Text:	NEDLEY/ HOTEL
Date:	Circa 1909
Artist:	Unknown
Narrative:	This building was completed in 1909 for Lewis Secord and originally hosted a retail space on the first floor and hotel rooms, known as the Nedley Apartments, on the second, with Mrs. N.L. Hinman as the proprietress. The enterprise seems to have always had female owners, including Minie A. Bock (circa 1927) and Vera B. Schofield (circa 1936), who is also identified as a nurse. Samuel Meyer, who operated a clothing store in this building, purchased the property in the early 1920s and converted the hotel rooms into offices around 1948.
Notes:	Based on historic pictures, particularly the 1986 image at right, this sign appears to have been repainted. This was one of the first electrically illuminated signs in Fort Collins. A lamp standard suspended a spotlight away from the wall, allowing it to flood the sign with light. The lamp standard and fixture are still visible today, but are now dangling rather than fixed in place, as shown in the 1986 photograph.
Sources:	Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970). Marmor, Jason [Retrospect]. Historic Building Inventory Form for 130-134 South College Avenue (5LR.1985), 10 May 1996.



Robert M. Copeland | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.23: Nedley Hotel sign in February 1986.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.24: Undated photograph of the Nedley Hotel and Meyer Store signs.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.25: The Meyer Store sign in context, 2006.

The Meyer Store



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.26: The Meyer Store sign in 2006.

130-134 South College Avenue

Location: West end of the second story's north elevation, east of the "Nedley Hotel" sign

Physical Integrity: Moderate

Text: THE MEYER STORE / PAY CASH AND SAVE

Graphic Elements: Beneath the words "The" and "Store" are large triangles, pointing downward

Date: Circa 1920

Artist: Unknown

Narrative: This building was completed in 1909 for Lewis Secord and originally hosted a retail space on the first floor and hotel rooms, originally known as the Nedley Apartments, on the second. In 1913, Samuel L. Meyer moved his clothing and dry goods store into the first floor space. He was born in Germany or Poland (census records differ) in 1878 and arrived in the United States in 1890. He opened Meyer & Company, proclaimed as the "Daylight Store of Fort Collins," prior to 1906. It was first located at 222 Linden before moving to 209-211 Linden around 1910. Sam Meyer purchased outright his South College Avenue storefront in the early 1920s and the structure became known as the Meyer Building. In the 1940s, Meyer converted the second-floor hotel rooms into offices. At that time, he appears to have left the clothing business and opened a real estate brokerage in one of the upstairs offices.

Notes: The faded condition of the lettering on this sign seems to indicate that the white-paint pigment was not durable. However, this sign originally had a black background, similar to the adjacent but repainted Nedley Hotel sign, indicating that it was the black pigment, in this case, that was less stable.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
Marmor, Jason [Retrospect]. Historic Building Inventory Form for 130-134 South College Avenue (5LR.1985), 10 May 1996.
U.S. Census of 1910; Fort Collins Ward 3, Larimer County, Colorado; Roll: T624_121; Page: 4B; Enumeration District: 227; Image: 753.
U.S. Census of 1920; Census Place: Fort Collins Ward 2, Larimer, Colorado; Roll: T625_166; Page: 2B; Enumeration District: 152; Image: 155.



Robert M. Copeland | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.27: The Meyer Store sign in February 1986.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.28: Undated photograph of the Nedley Hotel and Meyer Store signs.

Damm's Bakery



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.29: Damm's Bakery sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.30: Damm's Bakery sign in 2006.

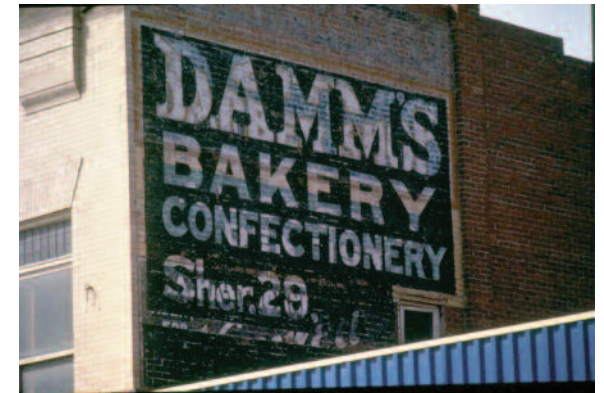
131 South College Avenue

Location:	East end of the second story's north elevation
Physical Integrity:	Moderately high
Top Layer Text:	DAMM'S / BAKERY / CONFECTIONERY / Sher. 29
Date:	Circa 1925
Artist:	Stewart Case (most likely)
Lower Layer Text:	The text is unclear.
Artist:	Unknown
Date:	Unknown

Narrative: The history of confectioners in this building begins around 1904, with the G.R. Hutchison Confectionery. Continuing the trend was Albert Damm, Sr., who was born in Magdeburg, Germany, in April 1845. He emigrated to the United States in 1882 and worked as a baker. He opened a store at 142 Linden Street in 1889, selling it to Frank H. Knemeyer in 1903 (see below). Damm purchased Charles Christman's Confectionary Shop at 133 South College and combined candymaking with his own business. The entire family assisted in the enterprise. Sons Albert Jr., Herbert, and Seibert all worked as bakers at one time or another. Daughter Ernestine Singleton kept the books while daughter Hilda Damm ran the front counter. The business closed in the 1930s.

Notes: The rainbow colors in the letters of this sign are vestiges from a previous sign over which the Damm's sign was painted. The white paint of the foreground text has deteriorated faster than the black paint of the background, allowing the previous sign to show through. "Sherwood 29" was the phone number during the era of operator-assisted dialing. Above this sign was a smaller advertisement for "WOLFER'S / MEAT MARKET," referring to George J. Wolfer's meat shop, located at 137 South College Avenue from the 1930s until around 1941, when the market moved to 650 South College Avenue and became the Wolfer-Cahill Food Store.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
Marmor, Jason [Retrospect]. Historic Building Inventory for 133-147 South College Avenue (5LR.1986), 4 May 1996.
Swanson, Evadene Burris. *Fort Collins Yesterdays* (Fort Collins: published by the author, 1975), 142-145.
U.S. Census of 1900, Fort Collins, Larimer County, Colorado; Roll: T623_126; Page: 46B; Enumeration District: 213.
U.S. Census of 1910, Fort Collins Ward 3, Larimer County, Colorado; Roll: T624_121; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 227; Image: 746.



Ralph Giddings | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.31: Damm's Bakery sign in March 1978.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.32: Damm's Bakery sign, circa 1951.

Neutze Furniture Company



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.33: Neutze Furniture Company sign in context, 2006.



Jotham B. Farnum | Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.34: Neutze Furniture Company following a fire in December 1951.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.35: Neutze Furniture Company sign in 2006.

204 South College Avenue

Location:	West end of the south elevation, second story
Physical Integrity:	Low
Text:	NEUTZE / FURNITURE CO. / NEW & USED / FURNITURE
Date:	Between 1948 and 1951
Artist:	Unknown

Narrative: According to city directories, the Harris-Warner Furniture Company first occupied this building circa 1927. Around 1948, it became the Neutze Furniture Company, operated by John W. and Mary Neutze. The sign clearly existed by 1951, when Jotham B. Farnum took a picture of the building following a fire. (The negative is in the Local History Archive, Fort Collins Public Library.) By 1957, the building had been converted into the Aggie Theater, which it remains today.

Notes: Like many of the other ghost signs in Fort Collins, this sign was painted over, probably beginning with the conversion of this building into the Aggie Theater, circa 1957. However the older paint from the sign has peeled away, carrying the newer paint with it. As a result, some letters are faintly visible.

Above the Neutze Furniture sign is another sign reading “HOTEL LINCOLN / EUROPEAN PLAN.” This sign is totally unreadable today.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).



Jotham B. Farnum | Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.36: Detail of Hotel Lincoln and Neutze Furniture signs.

Hodgson Jewelers



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.37: Hodgson Jewelers sign in context, 2006.



Carol Tunner | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.38: Hodgson Jewelers sign in 2006.

259 South College Avenue

Location: East end of the north elevation, first story

Physical Integrity: Moderately low

Text: HODGSON JEWELERS

Date: 1930s

Artist: Unknown

Narrative: The location of this sign, painted on the north elevation of the Armstrong Hotel, in a narrow corridor, seems at first to make little sense. A pedestrian would have to go out of his way to actually see the sign from College Avenue. But in the 1930s, when Charles Hodgson operated his jewelry and gift store at 249 South College, the building to the north did not exist. Instead, a series of houses extended northward to the post office. Their generous setbacks would have made this location an excellent choice for a street-level advertisement.

Notes: This sign has faded to the point of nearly vanishing. As well, graffiti and the installation of an iron gate have further damaged the advertisement.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).

Colorado Bakery & Grocery



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.39: Colorado Bakery & Grocery sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.40: Colorado Bakery & Grocery sign in 2006.

142 Linden Street

Location: North end of the second story's east elevation, above "The Denver Post" sign.

Physical Integrity: Moderately high

Text: Colorado Bakery & Grocery / F.H. KNEMEYER, Proprietor. / STAPLE & FANCY GROCERY & PROVISIONS / FRESHEST BREAD AND THE MOST FOR YOUR MONEY

Date: Between 1903 and 1927

Artist: Unknown

Narrative: Albert Damm, better known for Damm's Bakery on South College Avenue, opened the Colorado Bakery & Grocery at this Linden Street location in 1889. In 1903, Frank H. Knemeyer purchased Damm's business, having operated a grocery store in Superior prior to that time. Knemeyer was born in September 1856 in Germany. He arrived in the United States in 1874. Knemeyer and his family resided in an apartment above the store. John L. Hohnstein appears to have purchased this market prior to 1927 and may have moved it into his namesake business block, on East Mountain Avenue.

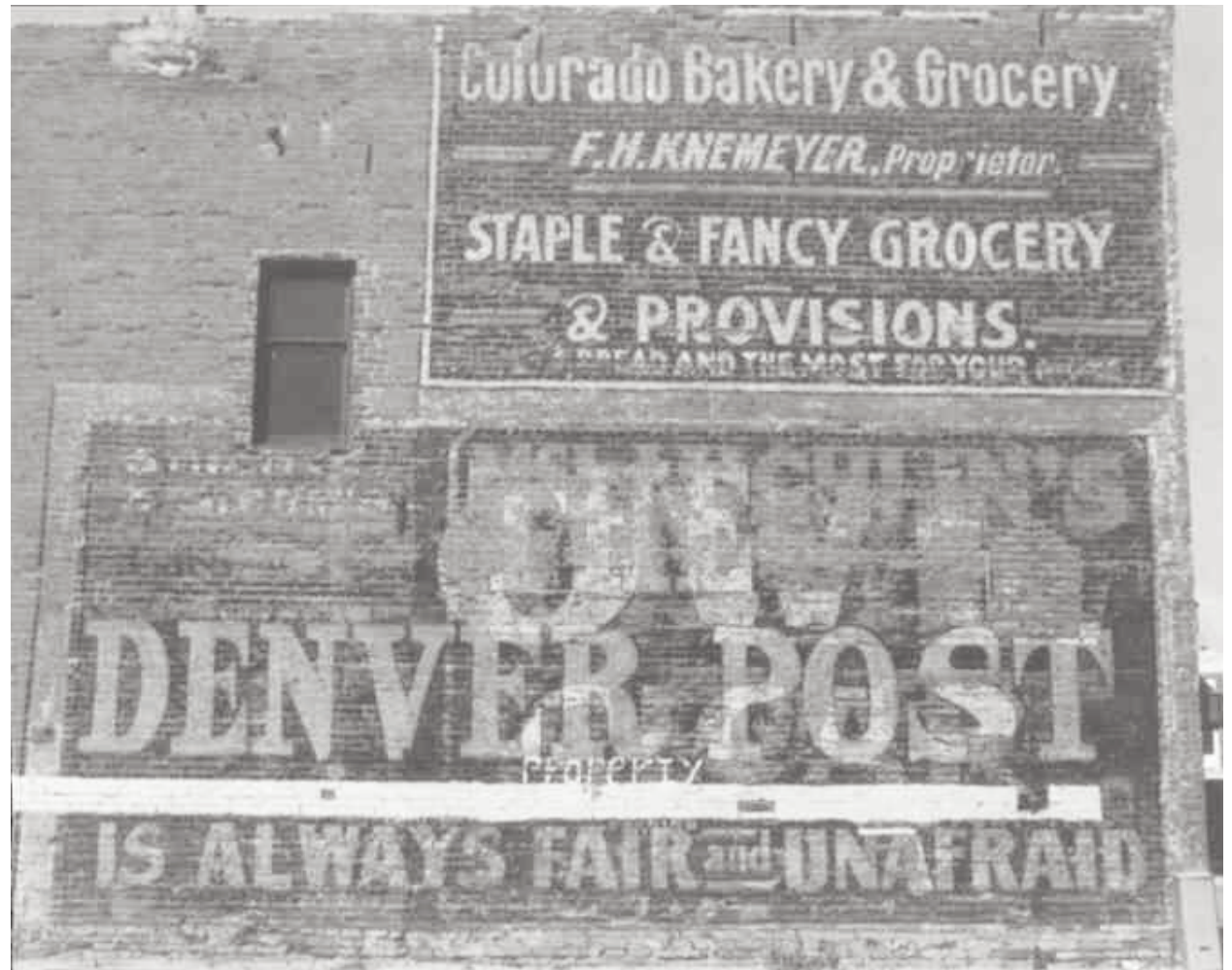
Notes: Unlike the advertisement beneath it, this sign appears to be the only one to have ever occupied this location. It represents the most common design for signs of this period: white letters on a black background.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
 Swanson, Evadene Burris. *Fort Collins Yesterdays* (Fort Collins: published by the author, 1975), 142-145.
 U.S. Census of 1900; Census Place: Superior, Boulder, Colorado; Roll: T623 121; Page: 17B; Enumeration District: 166.
 Woodworth, Betty. "More signs of old Fort Collins, *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, 4 August 1976, p. 1A.



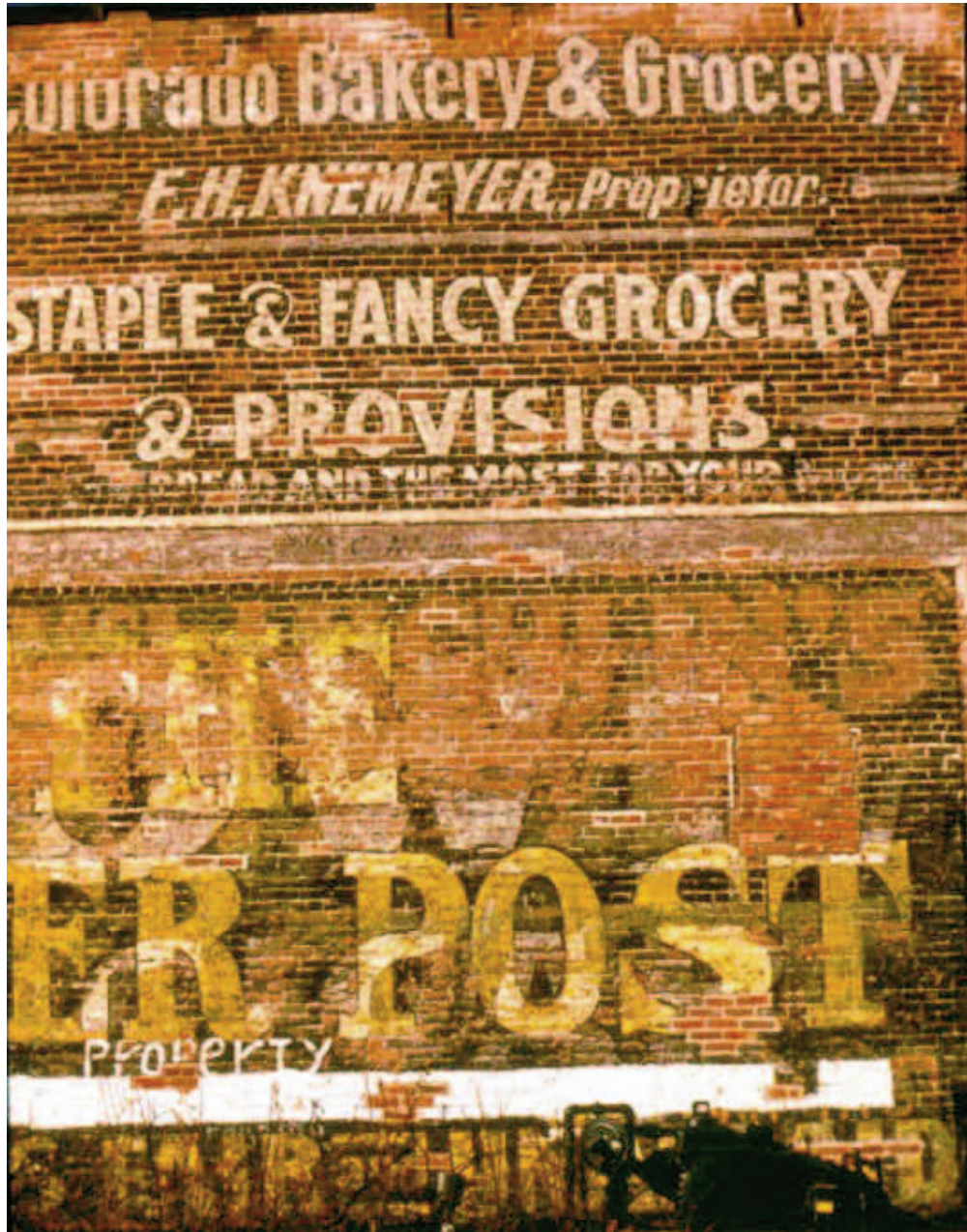
Ralph Giddings | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.41: Colorado Bakery & Grocery sign in March 1978.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.42: Undated photograph of the Colorado Bakery & Grocery and Denver Post signs.



Robert M. Copeland | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.43: Photograph of the Colorado Bakery & Grocery and Denver Post signs in February 1986.

The Denver Post



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.44: The Denver Post sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.45: The Denver Post sign in 2006. The yellow circle marks the owl in the Owl Cigar advertisement.

142 Linden Street

- Location:** North end of the east elevation
- Physical Integrity:** Moderately low
- Top Layer Text:** THE / DENVER POST / IS ALWAYS FAIR and UNAFRAID
Artist: Curran Bill Posting & Distributing Company, Denver
Date: 1930s
- Middle Layer Text:** STRAITON & STORM'S / OWL / CIGAR
Image: An owl perched on a cigar, backlit by a full moon
Artist: Curran Bill Posting & Distributing Company, Denver
Date: 1920s
- Bottom Layer Text:** MICHLIN'S (?). The rest of this sign is unreadable.
Artist: Unknown
Date: 1903-1920

Narrative: This building was completed around 1889 when it housed Albert Damm's Colorado Bakery & Grocery. Frank Knemeyer purchased the business in 1903 and later painted the upper sign. However, the lower signs appear to have changed at least three times. The product and/or merchant advertised in the bottom layer of this sign is unclear. However, sometime between 1910 and 1930 an Owl Cigar sign was painted here. (See the existing Owl Cigar sign for more information about this product.) *The Denver Post* sign dates to the 1930s, when the newspaper had a distribution center here, where trucks from Denver were unloaded for local deliveries.

Notes: The band of white paint across the bottom of the sign, with the words "Private Property" dates to at least the 1970s. The installation of a vent and its later removal have left a patch of unpainted brick above the "S" and "T" in "POST."

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970). Swanson, Evadene Burris. *Fort Collins Yesterdays* (Fort Collins: published by the author, 1975), 142-145.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.46: The Denver Post sign in June 1979.



Robert M. Copeland | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.47: The Denver Post sign in February 1986.

The Fair Store



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.48: The Fair Store sign in context, 2006.



Ralph Giddings | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.49: The Fair Store sign in March 1978.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.50: The Fair Store sign in 2006.

162 Linden Street (11 Old Town Square)

Location: North end of the rear (east) elevation, second story, above the M&O Cigar/Chesterfield/Coca-Cola sign

Physical Integrity: Moderately low

Top Layer Text: THE FAIR / PRICES THE LOWEST

Date: Late 1920s or early 1930s

Artist: Unknown

Bottom Layer Text: A business name spans the area above the window and “The Fair,” but it is unreadable. This most likely was simply another incarnation of a Fair Store advertisement.

Date: Prior to the late 1920s

Artist: Unknown

Narrative: This building, the Miller Block, was completed in 1888, with an addition in 1893. The Fair Store was one of the most popular mercantile stores in Fort Collins. Entrepreneur Frank Miller Sr. established the business prior to 1904 and housed it in his namesake business block. By 1906, Miller’s business associates were listed in city directories as D.C. Armitage and H.J. Koch. At that time, the business was advertised as carrying the unusual combination of “tin, granite, china, and stationery.” The Fair Store remained in business here through at least 1936.

Notes: The advertisement below The Fair Store sign, at various times selling Coca-Cola, Chesterfield cigarettes, and M&O Cigars, may have started as a privilege sign.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
Woodworth, Betty. “More signs of old Fort Collins, *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, 4 August 1976, p. 1A.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.51: The Fair Store sign in March 1986.

M&O Cigars / Chesterfield Cigarettes / Coca-Cola



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.52: The Coca-Cola/Chesterfield/M&O Cigar sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.53: The Coca-Cola/Chesterfield/M&O Cigar sign in 2006.

162 Linden Street (11 Old Town Square)

Location:	North end of the rear (east) elevation, first story, below “The Fair” sign
Physical Integrity:	Moderately low
Top Layer Text:	SMOKE M&O CIGARS (M&O advertisements typically used the slogans “Wise Smokers Prefer” and/or “Every Puff a Pleasure” but it is unclear whether this sign used those phrases. This advertisement only covered the lower half of the sign area and was contained within a yellow frame.
Artist:	Unknown
Date:	1930-1940
Middle Layer Text:	Chesterfield
Image:	A pack of cigarettes near the bottom left corner of the sign.
Artist:	Unknown
Date:	1920-1930
Bottom Layer Text:	DRINK / Coca-Cola
Artist:	Unknown
Date:	1903-1920

Narrative: The earliest advertisement painted on the lower half of this building was a standard “Drink Coca-Cola” advertisement that may have been part of a privilege sign for the company promoted in the upper story sign. The next advertisement was for Chesterfield cigarettes, and included an image of a cigarette package. The final layer promoted M&O cigars. This Denver-based company was an extensive user of wall-painted advertisements. Indeed, the company employed a full-time staff of sign painters, who traveled across the west to apply the company’s logo and iconic “M&O man.” The cheerful M&O man was sophisticated and cheerful as he puffed away on his mild M&O cigar.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
 Stage, William. *Ghost Signs: Brick Wall Signs in America* (Cincinnati: Signs of the Times Publishing, 1989), 39.
 Woodworth, Betty. “More signs of old Fort Collins, *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, 4 August 1976, p. 1A.



Ralph Giddings | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.54: The Coca-Cola/Chesterfield/M&O Cigar sign in March 1978.

Angell's Delicatessen / Coca-Cola



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.55: Angell's Delicatessen/Coca-Cola sign in context, 2006.



Robert M. Coppeland | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.56: Angell's Delicatessen/Coca-Cola sign in February 1986.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.57: Angell's Delicatessen/Coca-Cola sign in 2006.

220 East Mountain Avenue

Location:	South end of the east elevation
Physical Integrity:	Moderately High
Top Layer Text:	ANGELL'S DELICATESSEN / and PARTY SERVICE / DRINK / Coca-Cola / (REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.) / ICE / COLD / BIG 12 oz / KING SIZE / at [unreadable word] 12 oz prices
Date:	1958
Artist:	Don Brown, Brown Sign Company
Lower Layer Text:	The text is unclear.
Artist:	Unknown
Date:	Unknown

Narrative: Painted on the east elevation of the J.L. Hohnstein Block, this sign consists of two, possibly even three layers. Don Brown, owner of the Brown Sign Company and one of the best-known sign painters in Fort Collins, painted the topmost layer, a Coca-Cola privilege sign for Angell's Delicatessen, in 1958. This was the same year Mary B. and Jess Angell opened the deli, which remained in business through the 1960s. Unlike previous generations of sign painters who had to work freehand, Brown painted the sign using pounce pattern of his own design. In a 1985 newspaper interview, Brown remembered how passersby “would stop to admire the work as its progressed, remarking how steady Brown’s hand was.” Coca-Cola paid Brown \$400 for the sign. The corporation was and continues to be one of the largest users of privilege-sign advertising in the United States.

Notes: The 1978 photograph, at right, shows a coat of gray paint applied over all of the east elevation except for the topmost advertisement. A 1986 photograph, at left, shows the paint removed and some of the older signs showing through. Unfortunately, the treatment used to clean the brick may have caused undue damage to the topmost sign.

Because of its prominent location on Mountain Avenue the gateway to Old Town, this is one of the most popular and most-recognized ghost signs in Fort Collins.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
Heredia, Rick. “Sign survives seasons,” *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, 7 October 1985, pp. B1, B3.



Ralph Giddings | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.58: Angell's Delicatessen/Coca-Cola sign in March 1978.

Smith's Battery & Electric / Champion Spark Plugs



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.59: Smith's Battery & Electric/Champion Spark Plugs sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.60: Smith's Battery & Electric/Champion Spark Plugs sign in 2006.

238 East Mountain Avenue

Location:	South end of the east elevation
Physical Integrity:	Moderate
Text:	SMITH BATTERY & ELECTRIC SERVICE / GENERATORS STARTERS SPEEDOMETERS / [unreadable line] / CHAMPION / SPARK PLUGS
Date:	Between 1948 and 1960
Artist:	Unknown

Narrative: This building was constructed prior to 1908, when it housed the upholstery shop of James Baily. By 1910, it was the G.O. Stakebake Repair Shop. Around 1927, Ralph F. Woods operated a car wash here, followed by William R. Hiigel Auto Repair around 1936.

Meanwhile, Fred M. Smith opened an automobile battery and electrical service repair shop at 220 Pine Street sometime after 1940. He moved his business to this location, 238 East Mountain Avenue, around 1948 and remained here until about 1960, when the building housed Nelson's Palmer Repair.

Champion Spark Plugs was an avid user of privilege signs and the corporation's distinctive logo appears on the sides of buildings across America.

Notes: The line between the green band and the word "Champion" is unreadable. Typically, this line read "dependable" or "install new." However, neither of these phrases seems to fit the visible letters. This sign is surprisingly weathered and faded given its rather protected location and east-facing setting.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
Stage, William. *Ghost Signs: Brick Wall Signs in America* (Cincinnati: Signs of the Times Publishing, 1989), 39.



Ralph Giddings | City of Fort Collins

Figure 2.61: Smith's Battery & Electric/Champion Spark Plugs sign in March 1978.

Roger's Plumbing & Heating Co. / Pepsi-Cola



Cheria Yost | Historitecture

Figure 2.62: Roger's Plumbing & Heating Co./Pepsi-Cola sign in context, 2006. The arrow indicates the location of this ghost sign.



Cheria Yost | Historitecture

Figure 2.63: Roger's Plumbing & Heating Co./Pepsi-Cola sign in 2006.

250 East Mountain Avenue

Location:	South end of the east elevation
Physical Integrity:	Moderately low
Text:	ROGER'S • PLUMBING & / • HEATING CO. / PEPSI-COLA
Date:	1965-1973
Artist:	Don Brown (most likely)

Narrative: This is a rare example of a privilege sign advertising a major product not directly associated with the retailer. Roger's Plumbing & Heating Company occupied 250 East Mountain Avenue through the 1960s. While the business was not the grocer or cafe one would typically expect to sell Pepsi products, Roger's Plumbing & Heating may have hosted a cooler or, at least, a self-serve vending machine dispensing Pepsi soft drinks. This advertisement illustrates that the connection between the wall owner and privilege sign advertiser may have been quite tenuous.

Confirming the artist of this sign is difficult because it was either unsigned or the signature is now painted over. A likely candidate was Don Brown, who had painted privilege signs for northern Colorado Pepsi bottlers from 1953 to 1960 and from 1964 through the 1970s. Pepsi did not adopt the "swirled bull's-eye" logo, depicted on this ghost sign, until 1965. Prior to that time, the company used its "bottle-cap" and "serrated bottle cap" logos. It continued to use the original swirled bull's-eye until around 1973.

Notes: Unlike most ghost signs in Fort Collins, this Pepsi privilege advertisement is painted on stucco applied over the original brick wall, instead of directly on the bricks. Not only has nearly half of the advertisement been painted over, but the construction of the adjacent building (252 East Mountain Avenue) in 1974 has made viewing this sign nearly impossible. However, this newer building may have provided additional protection for what remains of this sign.

Sources: Donald D. Brown. Interview by Rheba Massey and J. Stephen Mack, 26 September 2001, tms., Local History Archive, Fort Collins Public Library.
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 Stage, William. *Ghost Signs: Brick Wall Signs in America* (Cincinnati: Signs of the Times Publishing, 1989), 39.
 "Pepsi Slogans and Logos" [article on-line]; available from http://www.pepsinut.com/pepsi_slogans.htm; Internet; accessed 3 May 2007.
 PepsiCo, Inc. "Pepsi Cola Logo Timeline" [article on-line]; available from http://www.pepsiusa.com/help/faqs/faq.php?category=ads_and_history&page=history_of_logo; Internet; accessed 3 May 2007.



Figure 2.64: Pepsi logos. Subtle changes in corporate trademarks can help date some ghost signs. Pepsi introduced its "bottle cap" logo (top) in 1943, followed by the "serrated bottle cap" (middle) in 1962 and the much more abstract "swirled bullseye" (bottom) from 1965 to around 1973.

Paramount Laundry & Cleaners



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.65: Paramount Launderers & Cleaners sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.66: Paramount Laundry & Cleaners sign in 2006.

314 East Mountain Avenue

Location: Second story of the west elevation

Physical Integrity: Moderately low

Text: PARAMOUNT LAUNDRY & CLEANERS

Date: Between 1930 and circa 1950

Artist: Unknown

Narrative: This building was completed in 1907 as an armory for the Colorado National Guard, Company F. At the time of its construction, this armory was the largest public hall in Fort Collins. By 1915, however, it had become too cramped for National Guard use and public meetings. The National Guard completed a new armory at 830 South College Avenue in 1922. Paramount Laundry and Cleaners moved into the East Mountain Avenue building around 1930 and remained here through 1994.

Notes: Around 1970, the secondary elevations of this buildings received a coat of white paint, completely covering the painted sign. At that time, black plastic letters were installed over the location of the original sign and are still visible today. However, enough paint has peeled away to reveal the basic composition of the original sign. It is interesting to note that this monochromatic sign featured an inverse pattern that would have been quite eye-catching. The word “Paramount” was painted in black letters on a white background while “Laundry & Cleaners” was painted in white letters on a black background.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
Simmons, R. Laurie and Thomas H. [Front Range Research Associates]. Historic Building Inventory Record for 300 East Mountain Avenue (5LR.1546), January 1992.

Scrivner's Grocery & Market



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.67: Scrivner's Grocery & Market sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.68: Scrivner's Grocery & Market sign in 2006.

152 West Mountain Avenue

Location: Front (south) elevation, fascia

Physical Integrity: Moderately high

Text: SCRIVNER'S / GROCERY & MARKET

Date: Circa 1924

Artist: Unknown

Narrative: This building was constructed in 1909 as the A.L. Wheeler Laundry. Around 1917, the business hosted a grocery store, which, around 1924, was Scrivner's Grocery & Market, operated by L.A. Scrivner. The business remained here through at least 1950.

This sign's moderately high integrity resulted from the unintentional protection it received over the years. For decades, a tile-covered pent roof, cantilevered from the parapet, sheltered the sign. More recently, the installation of a metal façade treatment completely covered the sign.

Uncovered again in the 1990s as this building was remodeled into the Steak Out Saloon, the owners at that time wanted to remove the sign. However, the Fort Collins preservation community convinced the to owners the retain the sign.

Notes: This is rare example in Fort Collins of a fascia sign. As well, it is one of the few ghost signs painted on a plaster or stucco base rather than directly on the bricks.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
Simmons, R. Laurie and Thomas H. [Front Range Research Associates]. Historic Building Inventory Record for 152 West Mountain Avenue (5LR.1645), June 1992.

Auto Top Shop



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.69: Auto Top Shop sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.70: Auto Top Shop sign in 2006.

214 Pine Street

Location: West end of the south elevation

Physical Integrity: Moderately Low

Top Layer Text: AUTO TOPS [vertical]

Date: Unknown

Artist: Unknown

Narrative: This building dates to at least 1917, at which time Oscar J. Mincer opened his Auto Top Shop, here. Mincer specialized in repairing automobile roofs, which were generally canvas or some other soft material at this time. The painted wall sign on its south elevation advertised this business. By 1931, the business was listed in city directories as Mincer's Auto Trimming Shop. Sign painter Harold J. Asmus used this building as his shop around 1948, later moving down the street to 222 Pine.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).

Asmus Signs



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.71: Asmus Signs sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.72: Asmus Signs sign in 2006.

226 Pine Street

Location:	Front (south) elevation, fascia
Physical Integrity:	High (as a reconstruction)
Text:	Asmus SIGNS
Date:	Circa 1966 (original sign)
Artist:	Harold J. Asmus, Asmus Sign Company (original sign)

Narrative: After returning from World War II, in 1946, Harold J. Asmus opened a sign shop a few doors down from this address, at 214 Pine Street. At the time, he was one of the only freehand sign painters in Fort Collins. He steadily moved his operation up Pine Street, to 222 around 1956 and, ultimately, to 226 around 1966. Asmus specialized in painting freehand weekly grocery store sale banners. Indeed, he had painted the paper signs every week since 1945, completing 4,000 banners a year. When grocery stores converted to machine-printed signs in 1985, Asmus had completed nearly 160,000 paper signs. He remained in business right until his death in March 1999.

Notes: The existing sign is significantly different from the original. A 1969 tax assessor's photograph shows that Asmus had extended the facade above the existing parapet. On those upper panels he painted "Asmus SIGN Co." appearing much like the present-day sign. However, where the current sign exists, Asmus simply painted the word "SIGNS" in huge, block letters. Asmus was forced to alter the sign when the City passed its sign code in 1971. The regulations forbade the extension of signs above the roofline. In 2006, Asmus's sons repainted the sign; Mark painted the background and Mike painted the lettering. The sons desire that the sign remain intact in memory of their father.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
Burdette, Dick. "Substitutes let you down, but not Harold Asmus," *Triangle Review*, 20 November 1985, p. 2.



Larimer County Assessor | Fort Collins Public Library

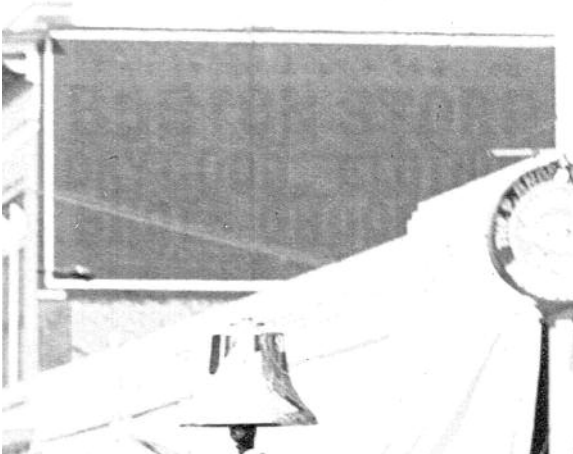
Figure 2.73: This 1969 Larimer County tax assessor photograph shows the original configuration of the Asmus sign.

Coca-Cola / The Boston Store



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.74: Coca-Cola/The Boston Store sign in context, 2006.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.75: The Boston Store/Coca-Cola sign circa 1915. Here it appears to have been painted over, but the lettering is still faintly visible. The Coca-Cola sign has not yet been painted.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.76: Coca-Cola/The Boston Store sign in 2006.

200-204 Walnut Street

Location: South end of the east elevation, second story

Physical Integrity: Moderately low

Top Layer Text: Coca-Cola

Date: Circa 1915 and circa 1950

Artist:

Bottom Layer Text: THE / BOSTON STORE / DRY GOODS / CLOTHING / SHOES GROCERIES

Date: Between 1906 and circa 1915

Artist:

Narrative:

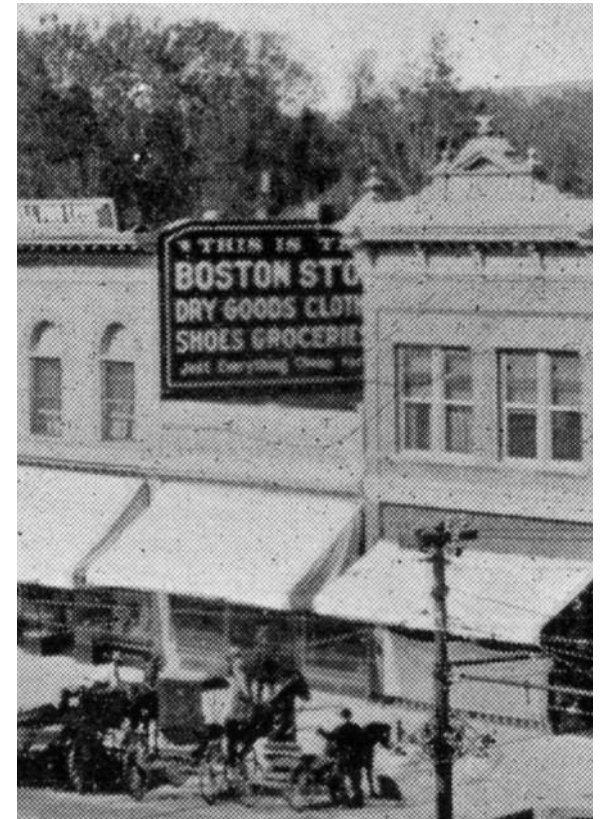
The bottom layer of this advertisement appears to have been one of the few wall-painted signs in Fort Collins not installed on the building housing the business advertised. The Boston Store was located at 113 South College Avenue. The South College Avenue building also hosted a Boston Store sign painted on its north elevation. (This area later became a sign for the Piggly-Wiggly market. The south elevation hosted the Owl Cigar advertisement mentioned above). This Walnut Street building, the C.C. Forrester Block, was completed in 1907 but, according to city directories, never housed this business. The first-floor businesses, however, were generally cafes and taverns, suggesting that the Coca-Cola advertisement was a privilege sign. An early fire department photograph shows the Boston Store sign already painted over, but with the letters faintly visible. It appears to have been nearly identical to the South College Avenue sign. The first floor occupants of the Forrester block were the Orpheum Cafe (F.J. Wolf, proprietor), ca. 1908; Mobley's Cafe, ca. 1910; George's Place (beer and billiards, George K. Deines, proprietor), ca. 1948; George's Place/Clem's Tavern, ca. 1957; George's Place/Cole's Tavern, ca. 1960; Gene's Tavern, ca.1966.

Notes:

Because black-and-white photographs are the only records we have of some signs and because black and white paints tend to remain intact longer than colors, present-day viewers often mistakenly conclude that most wall-painted signs were also black and white. The remnants of this sign reveal just how colorful and artistic wall painted advertisements could be. The frame around the Coca-Cola layer even appears to boast pilasters.

Sources:

Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.77: The Boston Store sign at 113 South College Avenue, circa 1900.

Anderson Mercantile Company



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.78: Anderson Mercantile sign in context, 2006.



Adam Thomas | Historitecture

Figure 2.79: Anderson Mercantile sign in context, 2006.

222 Walnut Street

Location: South end of the west elevation, second story

Physical Integrity: Low

Text: ANDERSON MERCANTILE CO.

Image: Rider on a bucking horse

Date: Between 1888 and 1915

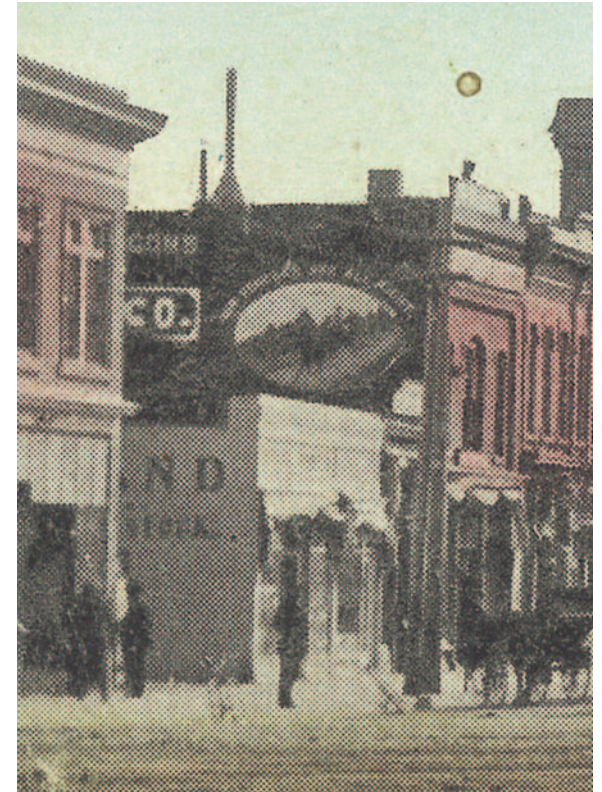
Artist: Unknown

Narrative: This building dates to at least 1886 and was originally the W.N. Bailey Feed Mill. Norwegian immigrant Peter Anderson purchased the business in 1888 and soon the farm implements and hardware departments of the business eclipsed the feed mill. Anderson himself was one of the city's foremost financiers and developers. He moved to the Fort Collins area around 1865 and became a successful farmer and stock raiser. Anderson was the first president of Fort Collins National Bank and a founder of the First National Bank of Fort Collins. After selling his hardware business in 1915, Anderson served as president of the First National Bank of Wellington. He was also a major figure in luring a sugar refining factory to Fort Collins.

Anderson's hardware business later became the Otis-Schureman Hardware Company and, around 1948, the Michaels & Osborn Hardware Company. By 1957, the business was simply the Osborn Hardware Company.

Notes: This sign was one of the most elaborate pictorials in Fort Collins. The southern end of the sign featured what appears to have been a bucking horse, framed in an oval. Unfortunately, this sign is in poor condition.

Sources: Fort Collins City Directories (reviewed 1902 to 1970).
 "Peter Anderson" in *History of Colorado*, vol II, Wilbur Fisk Stone, ed. (Chicago: S.J. Clark Publishing Company, 1918), 876-77.



Fort Collins Public Library

Figure 2.80: Anderson Mercantile sign circa 1900. This image is a detail of a postcard.

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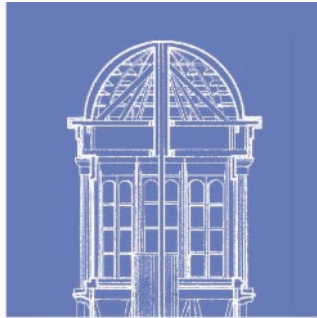
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