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Burlington, Vermont Five Sisters Neighborhood and Vicinity:

Transition of “Corner Store” Neighborhood Commercial Buildings Into Non-Commercial Uses

The southern end of Burlington, Vermont, much of which is known as the Five Sisters neighborhood, was developed heavily during the decade preceding and two decades succeeding the turn of the 20th Century (*Sanborn 1900, 1926*). Along with a wealth of middle-class residential housing, small-scale commercial “corner store” structures provided goods and services within a convenient distance. Notably, the neighborhood is within walking distance of the industrial area of Pine Street, in addition to the University of Vermont and Champlain College. However, the car-dependent separation of residential neighborhoods and commercial districts after World War II has led many of the commercial spaces in neighborhoods like this one to be converted to non-retail uses, especially residences.

This research project follows a selection of 13 structures in the southern end of Burlington through much of the 20th century and compares how their uses changed over time. The structures were chosen based on superficially appearing to be commercial buildings located in predominantly residential surroundings. Many of these structures are indeed former commercial spaces, a couple are still commercial spaces today, and a couple have consistently been used only as residences. The evolutions of their uses turned out not to be as similar as I was expecting, but they do tell an interesting story about the rise and fall of small businesses in the residential areas of Burlington.

Even when businesses were active inside, many of these structures also included residential apartments. There was considerable variation in whether or not the business owner and/or building owner lived in one of the units, whether individuals or partners lived in the units, and how long the tenants stayed. This information, sourced from the Burlington City Directories, was also collected for comparison.

53 Howard Street

This is a two-story corner building directly within the Five Sisters neighborhood at the corner with Hayward Street. Also on this corner, diagonally to 53, is a house that at one point had a billiards hall (though it did not make it into this research project) (*Directory 1914*). The first



directory record for this address is from 1907, when the property was owned by Gustave Trombley (spelled Tremblay in one directory, though numerous obvious spelling errors were found throughout the research, so some skepticism is necessary). In 1909, Damase Lapierre entered into the ownership, or at least the business enterprise, and the two opened Trombley & Lapierre, a grocery store (*Directory 1909*). Sometime between 1920 and 22, the property was sold to Thomas A. Bouchard who continued to run the grocery store. Around this time, a resident named Roy J. Yandow began renting a unit in the building (*Directory 1920, 1922*). Bouchard's ownership did not last long, and in 1924 or 25 the store was sold again to Myer Colodny (*Directory 1925*). Yandow appears to have stayed in the building during this transition, though by 1933 a different tenant named Leo Ringuette had moved into Yandow's

flat (*Directory 1933*). Colodny's grocery store held intact through the Great Depression and World War II, but between 1949 and 52 the building and store were sold to Archie J. Godin, who ran the store as A.J. Godin & Son (*Directory 1952*). Ringuette's flat had been taken over by Louis C. De Rocco around the end of the War, but with the sale to Godin he moved out and the Godin family occupied the residence. By 1961, Floyd A. Godin, most likely a son of Archie, had taken over the business and named it Godin's Market (*Directory 1961*). In 1968 or 69, the store closed for good. During the 1970s, two different residents named Juergen Spies and Ramond C. Longe lived in the building, and by 1980 it had been split into four different units, essentially how it exists today (*Directory 1980*).

65-69 King Street

This is a three-story wooden building with very simple Italianate or Neoclassical cornices, located on the block between Pine and South Champlain Streets. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps from 1896, 1900, and 1912 indicate that the building was built between 1896 and 1900 and a



grocery store and a drug store were in the building during 1906 and 1912 respectively, but the city directories from those times do not mention this and are not specific about who owned the property. The first business that could be confirmed by the directories was in 1918 when A&P Tea Store was in business, but it did not last long and the store was vacant in 1921. In 1922, the Vermont Confectionery Company opened in the storefront (*Directory 1922*). The upper floors were resided in by Margaret A. Mano and by John J. and Nora Sullivan, the latter two of whom

had been there since at least 1914 (*Directory 1914*). Vermont Confectionery, which also opened a subsidiary called Vermont Maple Tree Sugar Company, stayed in the building until sometime between 1958 and 61 when the storefront was vacated (*Directory 1961*). It remained vacant until 1968, when King's Millwork & Building Supply opened in its place, but it left in 1969 (*Directory 1969*). In 1971, Green Mountain Glass Company opened in the storefront (*Directory 1971*). Between 1984 and 86, the store was vacated again, and the building was converted to all-residential as it remains today (*Directory 1986*).

79 King Street

This is a two-and-a-half-story building with a hipped roof and an octagonal corner oriel turret that extends the second and third stories out over the corner storefront. Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps indicate that it was built between 1900 and 1906. By 1914, a grocer named John A. Leary and his wife Margaret



Leary occupied the building and had opened a grocery store (*Directory 1914*). The name of the store is given in a 1933 directory as Leary's Market, but it is unclear whether they used that name earlier. In 1944, Leary's went out of business, and Lambert's Cash & Carry Store opened in its place in 1946 (*Directory 1944, 1946*). In 1948, Lambert's closed and a grocer named Samuel H. Shirey opened a grocery store in the building (*Directory 1948*). In 1970, Shirey's store closed and a new store called M and A Variety opened, and in 1974 the store changed again to Ross Groceries (*Directory 1970, 1974*). In 1975, Handy's Groceries opened, remaining open later than 1992 (*Directory 1975*). It is unclear whether this is related to Handy's Lunch currently

in business on a neighboring block. From the Learys' tenure on, no other residents are recorded as living in the building until after the publication of the last available directory in 1992.

109 Maple Street

Similar to 79 King Street, this is a hipped-roof corner store building, though without an oriel or an apparent third story. Vacant between 1917 and 1921, around 1922 William E. Bashaw and his wife Nellie D. Bashaw moved their meat market from 121 Maple Street to this building (*Directory*



1922), and a 1933 directory hints that by this time Bashaw had established a full grocery store. However, the 1931 directory names the business as Doenges Bros., before naming Bashaw again in 1933. In 1927, Joseph W. Boiley opened a barber shop in the building, which in 1929 changed hands to William B. Dorey, in 1930 changed hands again to Charles H. Durivage, and in 1931 changed hands yet again to Camille M. Daigneault (*Directory 1927, 1929, 1930, 1931*). In 1933 the barber named in the directory was Frank Lavigne, and two residential tenants, Frederick E. Tuttle and Bennett S. Gainey, lived in the building (*Directory 1933*). In 1934, the grocery store changed hands to Anthony Joseph and the barber was named as John Daigneault, which suggests that the Daigneaults and Lavigne were working in the barber shop at the same time, but this could not be determined (*Directory 1934*). In 1938 the barber was Homer J. Pelletier, and in 1943 the barber shop was under the name of George D. Toole (*Directory 1938, 1943*). In 1944, the grocery store's ownership changed to John M. Izor, and the barber shop was out of business (*Directory 1944*). In 1950 or 51, the grocery store closed and Barrett's Cash Market

took its place (*Directory 1951*). In 1952 or 54, it became the grocery store of Mrs. Anna M. Ross and three residential tenants were listed for the property (*Directory 1954*). In 1966, the grocery store went out of business and Alcide P. Desilets opened a television repair shop in the storefront while occupying one of the residential units (*Directory 1966*). In 1970 the store became a Kirby Vacuums retailer, and in 1980 another unit became a Career Opportunity Center (*Directory 1970, 1980*). In 1982 the vacuum store became Vacuum City and the Career Opportunity Center left, replaced in 1983 by Grandma Georgie's This That & Other Things, which in turn was replaced in 1987 by The Rug Doctor (*Directory 1982, 1983, 1987*). In 1989, there were no businesses on the site (*Directory 1989*).

121 Maple Street

This is a two-story, flat-roofed building with a bracketed cornice at the top. Vinyl siding has replaced the trim that may have once made the storefront more obvious, but a set of first-story windows incongruous to the rest of the building hint at its commercial past. In 1909 a company called Purinton Co., run by Luther



A. Purinton, was addressed here, but in 1914 it closed and a grocer named A.S. Poquette opened a grocery store (*Directory 1909, 1914*). In 1917 or 18 William E. and Nellie D. Bashaw opened their meat market here. When the Bashaws moved their market to 109 Maple Street in 1922, the store changed hands to Alex Colodny, likely related to Myer Colodny at 53 Howard Street, and became Colodny Grocery (*Directory 1922*). In 1928 the storefront was vacated, and in 1929 Ideal Cash Market opened. Three residential tenants were in the building at this time: Charles H.

Mable, Henry Bonneau, and Edwin M. Eno (misspelled in one directory as Edward Meno) (*Directory 1928, 1929*). In 1945 or 46, Eno was recorded as the owner of a grocery store here, though it is unclear whether it was Ideal Cash Market or a new store as that name was no longer being recorded by then (*Directory 1946*). In 1961, with Eno's store still in business, the Burlington City Directory recorded that students were living in the residential units. In 1978, Eno's store closed and the Early Learning Day Care Center opened (*Directory 1978*). This establishment remains open today as Early Learning Preschool Center.

141 Maple Street

Similar to 121 Maple Street, this is a simple two-story, flat-roofed building with a cornice, however the remnants of the storefront are more obvious. According to Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, it was built between 1889 and 1894 as a livery stable (*Sanborn 1889, 1894*). The Burlington City



Directory records the business as Ready Brothers Livery, owned by John Ready. In 1930, clearly in response to the appearance of automobiles in Burlington, Ready Brothers became a taxi service (*Directory 1930*). By 1947 or 48 the taxi service closed and John Forville & Co. had moved in with its two subsidiaries, Forville Hardware & Paint Co. and Forville Flooring Service (*Directory 1948*). In 1953 or 54 it became Hugh Ramsden & Son Color Bar, a paint and wallpaper showroom until it went out of business in 1957 or 58 (*Directory 1954, 1958*). In 1961 House of Hobbies moved in, then in 1963 or 64 it was replaced by Wheeler, Wood & MacLeod Inc., an advertising management firm (*Directory 1961, 1964*). The firm moved out in 1966, and

in 1967 Cydon Sales Corp. was in the building, but also left by the next year (*Directory 1966, 1967, 1968*). In 1969 Vince Tatro Excavating moved in, followed the next year by Champlain Plumbing & Heating Inc. and Green Mountain Construction Co. Inc. (*Directory 1969*). In 1973 Green Mountain Construction Co. was still running here, but the other businesses were replaced by Air Equipment Sales (*Directory 1973*). These were both gone in 1977, and King Street Area Youth Program had taken their place (*Directory 1977*). Today, the property is residential, but until the Youth Program had left, there had never been residences recorded in the building.

44 Marble Avenue

Located on a smaller street closer to the city's industrial yards, this building is another two-story, flat-roofed structure with a bracketed cornice. While it lacks the classic glass storefront typical of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, the two sets of paired windows it does have seem to be original. By



1909, Antoine and Maggie Rashaw operated a grocery store here and lived above (*Directory 1909*). In 1928, the store was being run by Jeddie Rashaw, likely a child of Antoine and Maggie, and three residential tenants were recorded: Myrle M. Mahoney, Harry J. Muir, and Eugene Fay (*Directory 1928*). In 1946, the Burlington City Directory recorded Mrs. Della M. Rashaw as an occupant of the building but did not mention a business here (*Directory 1946*). In 1954, the Rashaws had left and there were four residents: Mahoney, Stephen Forcier, Rudolph T. Snyder, and Bernard W. O'Day (*Directory 1954*). In 1968 the residents were Victor M. Anderson, Richard C. Prim, Frank M. Jones, and Kenneth J. Lozell (*Directory 1968*). In 1975, the

building's owner was recorded as Larry Reed, and in 1980 Reed was the only occupant (*Directory 1975, 1980*). In 1986, there were three residents, not including Reed (*Directory 1986*).

161 Saint Paul Street

Located closer to the commercial center of Burlington, this structure was originally built as a factory, occupied as early as 1901 by the O.L. Hinds Company, manufacturer of children's clothes (*Directory 1901*). By 1914 Charles W. Papin had opened the Vermont Garage in



the building alongside O.L. Hinds (*Directory 1914*). A bowling alley was also located in the building in 1918 but gone by 1922 (*Directory 1918, 1922*). This duo of Vermont Garage and O.L. Hinds persisted through the 1950s, but by 1957 or 58 O.L. Hinds was out of business (*Directory 1958*). In 1963 or 64 a discount store was in the building, but it was gone by 1965, when the Howard Family Service Center, New England Hospital Supply Company, and Visiting Nurses Association moved in alongside the Vermont Garage (*Directory 1964, 1965*). In 1970 the building was first recorded as the Professional Building and the only organization inside was the Vermont Democratic Headquarters (*Directory 1970*). In 1971 or 72 the Junior Achievement Business Center moved into the second floor while the Democratic Headquarters was still in the building (*Directory 1972*). In 1978 Howard Bank moved into the first floor and the Junior Achievement Business Center moved out (*Directory 1978*). By this time 15 vacant offices and

three storage spaces were noted in the Burlington City Directory. In 1980 the building was only being used by the Howard Bank, and in 1987 it was fully vacated (*Directory 1980, 1987*).

457 Saint Paul Street

Located on a five-way streetcorner in the Five Sisters neighborhood, this building is actually still in retail use. In 1928, Harry, whose surname is variously spelled Payosian, Poyasian, Poyosian, and Poryazian in various directories, along with Moses Krekarian, founded “Payosian” &



Krekarian Grocers here, though the next year only “Poyosian” was recorded as the owner (*Directory 1928*). In 1931, Champlain Market was established here, and in 1933 Alfred’s Barber Shop and Beauty Parlor moved into a secondary storefront (*Directory 1931, 1933*). At this time, Harry “Poryazian” and a resident named Richard Kachadoorian lived upstairs, which raises a question about whether Harry, Krekarian, and Kachadoorian were all of Armenian descent and occupying the building together for a reason related to their common ancestry. However, no further information about this was found. In 1934 there was no barber shop recorded (*Directory 1934*). By 1938 Pete’s Superior Ice Cream had moved in alongside Champlain Market and Kachadoorian’s former flat was occupied by John Cheeseman (*Directory 1938*). In 1940, the ice cream shop became Manos Ice Cream, run by William Manos, but in 1944 it moved across the intersection to 463-465 Saint Paul Street (*Directory 1940, 1944*). In 1945 or 46, the market became Bixby’s IGA Store, then in 1950 or 51 became Lapham’s IGA (*Directory 1946, 1951*).

Finally, sometime between 1952 and 54, it became Longe Brothers IGA, which it remained through the 1990s (*Directory 1954, 1992*).

463-465 Saint Paul Street

At the same corner as 457, this building is also still in retail use. In 1925, Standard Meat Market opened on this site, and in 1927 a Finast (First National Store, an early grocery chain) opened alongside it (*Directory 1925, 1927*). In 1929, the meat market was replaced by Howard's Cut Rate



Store, and two residents, Arthur A. St. Germain and John H. Wilcox, lived upstairs (*Directory 1929*). In 1937, Howard's was replaced by Matthew O'Connor's Variety Store, but the other three occupants remained (*Directory 1937*). In 1943, the variety store was gone and St. Germain opened a barber shop in the building (*Directory 1943*). However, by 1944, both stores and St. Germain had left (*Directory 1944*). William Manos' ice cream shop moved in from across the intersection, and in 1946 it was joined by a refrigeration supplier run by Joseph A. Canavan. At this time, the upstairs residents were Allan W. Hogan and Gilman C. Boardman along with Wilcox (*Directory 1946*). In 1961, the ice cream shop was called Farmers Store Ice Cream, but it is unclear whether this is the same business Manos was running. At this time, Walt's Barber Shop, owned by Walter LaFerrier, was in the other storefront and Manos was recorded as the owner of the building and an upstairs resident, along with four residential tenants (*Directory 1961*). In 1968, the barber shop was still in business but Manos and the ice cream store were gone and only two residents were left, Ferdinand I. Fournier and Stephen L. Tucker (*Directory*

1968). In 1975, Fournier was recorded as the building's owner, and the Walt's was still the only business in the building (*Directory 1975*). By 1980, Walt's had been replaced by Lavogue Beauty Salon, though Fournier still owned the building and two other residents besides him were still upstairs (*Directory 1980*). It remained this way until the end of the 1980s when American Building Improvement and Burlington Auto Repair joined Lavogue's on the premises (*Directory 1989*). Today, both of these storefronts are occupied by beauty salons that, as recently as 2019, have coexisted in an unusual informal partnership in this building (*Esckilsen*).

469-471 South Union Street

Built in 1911, this slender brick building was built as Fire Station Number 5 (*Directory 1911*). The fire station operated here until 1931 when it was vacated (*Directory 1931*). However, a resident named Carl D. Stockwell was recorded living here in 1933, perhaps upstairs. By 1946, the



station was still vacant, and the residence had changed hands to Donald P. Russell (*Directory 1946*). Between 1952 and 1954, the School for Retarded Children opened in the building, then 1957 or 58 it vacated the building (*Directory 1954, 1958*). From then, two residents occupied the building; Peter C. Bernardina owned the property while Robert Harkins rented a flat. Bernardina remained as an owner and resident through to the 1990s, and this two-residence arrangement appears to be how the building remains today (*Directory 1992*).

524-526 South Union Street

Located at the oddly-shaped junction of South Union, St. Paul, and Shelburne Road, this building was the long-time grocery store of the McGrath family. McGrath's Food Market was in business as early as 1901, while the family of William M. McGrath lived upstairs (*Directory 1901*). In 1946, the



head of the household was recorded as William E. McGrath, evidently a child of William M. This remained until the early 1960s when the residence was instead occupied by Charles E. Stewart, though McGrath's was still in business. However, in 1971, the store went out of business (*Directory 1971*). The McGrath family moved into the nearby 516-518 South Union, owned by William T. McGrath Sr. with a unit occupied by his son William T. McGrath Jr. Three residents were in the store building at this time, remaining this way through the 1990s (*Directory 1992*).

54 Spruce Street

Information about this building is more elusive. It has been around since at least 1906 according to a Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, and it appears to have had a grocery store in the main-floor corner unit where a remnant cornice is still attached to the façade, but no more information could be found about the



name or the owner of the store. However, the Burlington City Directories from the late 1910s claim that there was a vacant store (*Directory 1914, 1918*). The Sanborn Maps from 1919 and 1926 label the building as “Tenements.” In 1914, in addition to the vacant store, there were three households, named as Stella Saltus, John W. Daley, and W. Vettters. In 1918, there were four: Mrs. Kate Doyle, Albert McGowan, Charles Armel, and Daley. In 1926, there were five: Ernest Greeno, William P. Cassell, Marcus I. Medlar, Daley, and Armel (*Directory 1926*). This five-residence layout continued until circa 1950 when the number increased to seven units, which is how it exists today (*Directory 1951*).

While the findings of this research seem to be all over the timeline of the 20th Century, most of them nevertheless reflect the slow demise of corner-store, neighborhood-focused commercialism after the popularization of automobiles. Though the buildings at the five-way intersection on Saint Paul Street still hold active retail businesses, most of these properties were converted into residences after it became less viable for a business to operate in the given location due to the gravitational pull of new shopping centers outside the crowded city center. In some cases, such as McGrath’s Food Market, long-running family businesses managed to hang on for a considerable amount of time but eventually succumbed.

The continued use of 121 Maple Street as an educational facility makes a point about the way schools tend to be placed within communities. Schools are one of the few types of public spaces that, in the suburban method of separating land uses into different zones, still end up relatively well mixed into residential neighborhoods. The use of the former Fire Station No. 5 as a school for children with special needs, although very short-lived, also echoes this pattern, as it is completely surrounded by residences. There’s a further lesson that can be derived from this

about the relative safety of residential areas for children, as opposed to a car-centric commercial district subdivided by four-lane roads where the stakes for accidents involving children and vehicles are much higher.

The buildings that are closer to Burlington's commercial core have tended to have active businesses the longest, lasting until the 1980s, 90s, or early 2000s. The apparent reason for this is its proximity to the downtown core where the density of commercial establishments makes them more viable to reach on foot. Even with this benefit of proximity, there nevertheless has been a shrinkage in small commercial spaces around the periphery of downtown. This trend increases the amount of distance residents need to travel to access goods, decreasing the transportation efficiency of the city especially where and when walking may not be viable.

While the patterns of American urbanism are being reevaluated, it is important to consider the role that corner-store structures used to play, and can play in the future, in allowing urban areas to densify more comfortably and sustainably. Cities like Burlington could benefit from the rehabilitation of these historic neighborhood stores to add new commercial spaces into the city's inner residential neighborhoods, helping to reduce car traffic between these neighborhoods and shopping centers and to increase local opportunities to incorporate exercise into daily errands. Furthermore, these structures make a case for allowing small stores to be built in post-World War II suburban neighborhoods that are normally for residences only, bringing the same transportation efficiency and exercise opportunities into those areas. There is no wheel to reinvent here because Burlington developed and matured as a city before the advent of cars, and the lessons for developing an efficient, pedestrian-accessible city are already here in the city's architectural past if we look closely and learn from them.

Sources

“Burlington City Directory.” 1901, 1907, 1909, 1911, 1914, 1917, 1918, 1920, 1921, 1922, 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1933, 1934, 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940, 1941, 1943, 1944, 1946, 1948, 1949, 1951, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1961, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992. University of Vermont Special Collections.

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