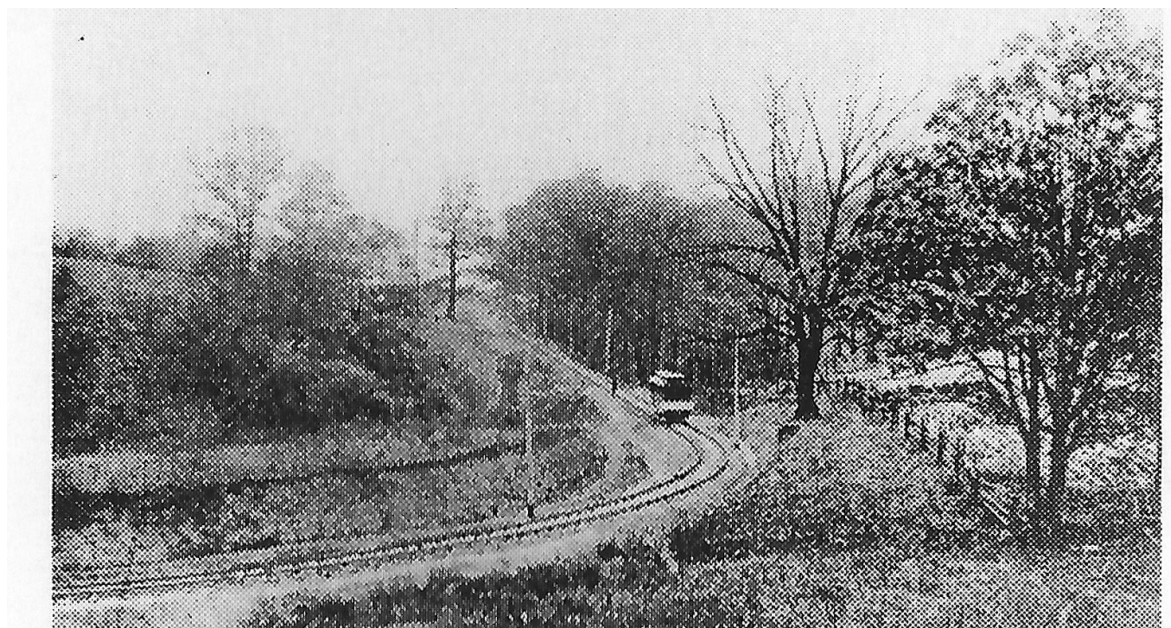


The Development of Squirrel Hill's Business District

Until the late 1800s, Squirrel Hill was a quiet place of farms and country estates. Then, in 1883, electric trolleys came along and changed Squirrel Hill forever.

Unlike animal-drawn carts and carriages, trolleys could climb hills. Their arrival sparked a real estate boom. Land speculators bought up large tracts of land and divided them into small residential lots. Several trolley routes converged at the corner of Forbes and Murray Avenues, so the area became the business hub of Squirrel Hill. When automobiles came along in the early 1900s, the Forbes/Murray corridor expanded east to Shady Avenue and south to Morrowfield Avenue, a distance of over a mile. That mile soon filled with grocery stores, drugstores, clothing stores, restaurants, shoe stores, bakeries, movie theaters, bowling alleys, and a host of other businesses, mostly owned by Jews.

Here is the story of how Squirrel Hill's renowned business district developed.

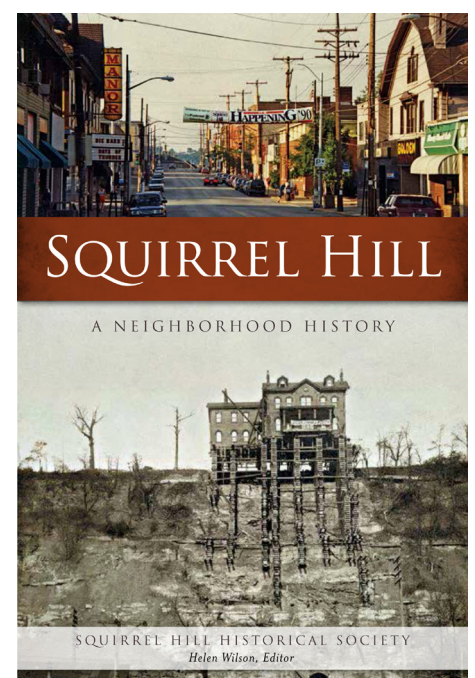
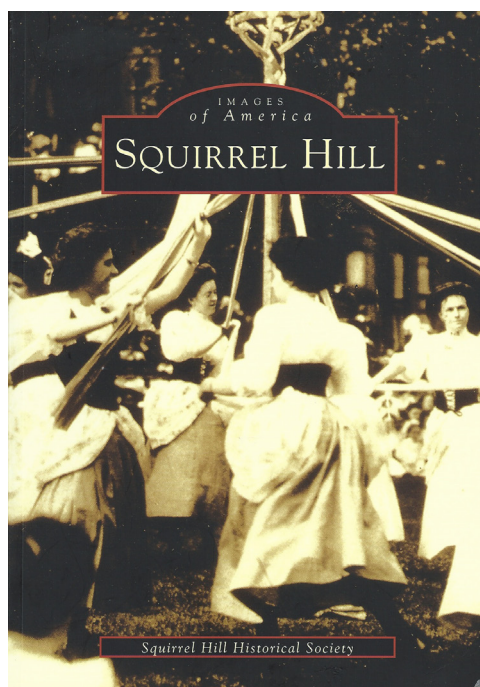


Squirrel Hill in 1893, from *Pittsburgh, The Story of a City*, by Stefan Lorant

The Development of Squirrel Hill's Business District

The Squirrel Hill business district has included hundreds of establishments over the years. In the 1970s alone, the Squirrel Hill business district boasted eight banks, four pharmacies, twenty-seven food and beverage stores, five bakeries, twenty-one salons and barbershops, eighteen restaurants, thirty-three clothing and accessories stores and sixteen healthcare providers. Then, as many of the businesses closed or moved to other locations, different types of businesses moved in, including Chinese and other Asian restaurants, high-tech firms, dance and yoga studios, medical facilities, and ethnic stores, while a few long-term stores such as Little's Shoes and the Squirrel Hill Flower Shop, survived.

This display gives only a brief glimpse of the development of Squirrel Hill's retail history. For a lot more information, check out the chapters about the business district in the Squirrel Hill Historical Society's two books. Both books can be checked out from this library or purchased from the Squirrel Hill Historical Society. Go to www.squirrelhillhistory.org for details or purchase. The books are also available in bookstores.



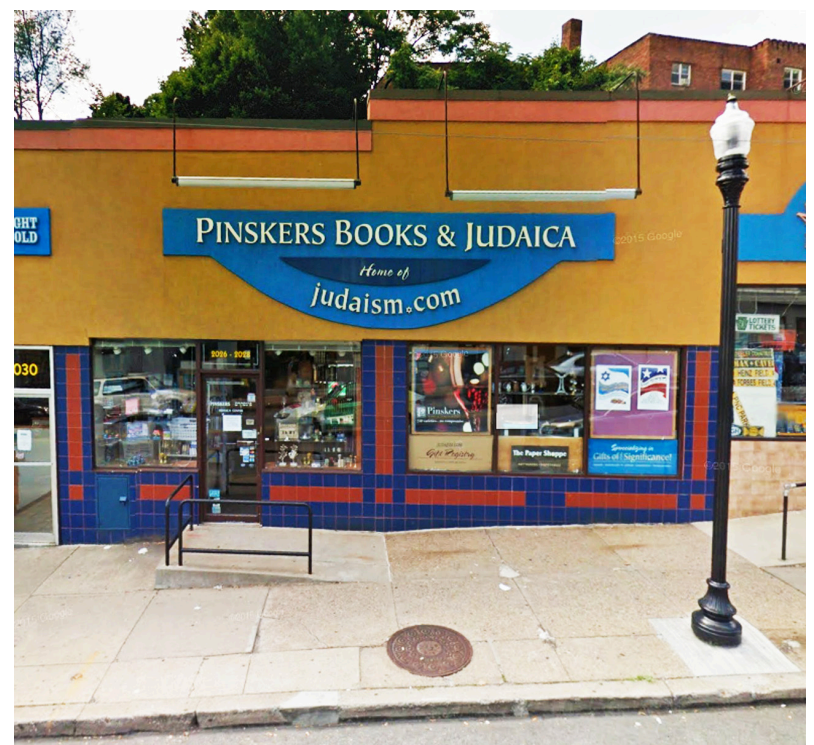
This display was created by Helen Wilson and Michael Ehrmann of the Squirrel Hill Historical Society..

Jews and the Squirrel Hill Business District

In the chapter, “The Squirrel Hill Business District: A Story of Change,” in the SHHS’s book, ***Squirrel Hill: A Neighborhood History***, Michael Ehrmann writes, “From the first store opening in 1911, Jewish ownership of commercial retail establishments has been a prime characteristic of the business district ... The percentage of Jewish ownership of businesses substantially exceeded the Jewish residential percentage in the area.”

The influx of Jews during the first quarter of the 1900s had been the impetus for the growth of a thriving business corridor along Forbes and Murray Avenues, with mostly Jewish-owned restaurants, bakeries, butcher shops, restaurants, clothing stores, greengrocers and other establishments. The business district grew larger when Jewish merchants such as **Little’s Shoes** from Homestead moved their businesses there.

In more recent times, the children of the Jewish business owners have generally not chosen to continue in the family businesses, so Jewish ownership of Squirrel Hill shops has fallen considerably, even though the buildings are still mostly owned by Jews. One of the few stores still selling specifically Jewish merchandise is **Pinskers Judaica**, established in 1954, and today it has a Jewish restaurant, **Cafe Eighteen**, within it. Nevertheless, even though the majority of the Jewish-themed stores are gone, Squirrel Hill still retains its Jewish identity because of the strength of the Jewish synagogues, temples, schools, and organizations which still call it home.



1965

The “Fashion Center”

From 1950 to 1990, Squirrel Hill was known as the “**Squirrel Hill Fashion Center.**”

Many upscale retail clothing stores lined Forbes Avenue, among them **Adeles, Bartlett Furs, The Coach House, Dale’s Maxima, Fashion Hosiery,**

Florence Sheer, Frank’s Men’s Wear, Freedman’s Men’s Wear, Klynnes, Grace Miles, Linton’s, The London Dock, Reich/Frank Clothes, Tweed Shop, Inc. and many, many more. There simply isn’t enough space in this display to name them all!



Besides men’s and women’s clothing stores, Squirrel Hill boasted children’s clothing stores such as **Newman’s Youth Center** and **Tic Toc**, accessory stores such as **Hostess House** and **Added Touch**, and home furnishings stores such as **Arthur Moser** and **Weisshouse**.

Squirrel Hill had some great shoe stores, including **Karen’s Shoes, Sherman Shoes, Joyce Shelby Shoes, Sigal Shoes**, and **Little’s Shoes**, which deserves special mention because it is the only shoe store left in the business district. When Joel Sigal took over ownership of Little’s Shoes, he closed Sigal Shoes to focus his attention on Little’s.



Memorable Restaurants

Oh, those Squirrel Hill restaurants! There are way too many to list here, so here are a few of the most memorable ones. **Weinstein’s**, at the corner of Murray and Beacon, was considered one of the three top-end restaurants in Squirrel Hill in the ‘40s and ‘50s, along with **Poli’s** on Murray near Forward and **Joseph’s Steak House** in the middle of the Forbes Avenue. Joseph’s reportedly saw patron lines out the door. It was replaced by **Bubbles and Sherman** in 1962 and **Sir Loin** in the 1970s. The property was taken over by the Charles Spiegel Men’s Shop in 1981, which has now closed as well. Another restaurant, **Sodini’s Bar and Grill**, operated between 1932 and the 1990s on Wilkins Avenue. The site now has a medical office building.



1962



Squirrel Hill also had a variety of other restaurants. The **Murray Avenue Grill** and **Squirrel Hill Cafe** have been mainstays for years. **Rhoda’s** deli became **Kazansky’s** and is now an Indian restaurant, **Coriander**. **Isaly’s** opened in 1929 on Murray Avenue and remained in Squirrel Hill until 1987, moving to Forbes Avenue in the early 1940s. Since Isaly’s closing, the building has had multiple tenants, including **Vie de France** and **Uncle Sam’s**

Gourmet Subs, which is still in operation. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Isaly’s operated a **Sweet William** restaurant on Murray.

And we can’t leave out **Mineo’s Pizza House** and its rival, **Aiello’s**, which have waged a friendly “pizza war” for the loyalty of customers in the neighborhood. Other pizzerias have also opened in Squirrel Hill through the years.

The **Canton Tea Garden** was one of the first Chinese restaurants to open in the business district. The **Peking Kitchen** later took its place. Today Squirrel Hill has many Chinese restaurants, such as **Rose Tea Cafe**, **Everyday Noodles**, and **How Lee**, reflecting the increasing Chinese population in Squirrel Hill. Other Asian restaurants have also opened—Thai (**Bangkok Balcony**, **Curry on Murray**, (**Silk Elephant**), Korean (**Green Pepper**), and Japanese (**Chaya Japanese Cuisine** and **Raman Bar**).



1941

Forbes and Murray also offer an array of other ethnic cuisines from all over the globe, serving patrons from their native countries as well as people eager to experience the diversity of Squirrel Hill’s culinary offerings.

Pharmacies, Soda Fountains, and Ice Cream Shops

Pharmacies were an important part of the Squirrel Hill business district, catering to people's need for medicines and medical supplies. Other merchandise was sold there, too.

One of the earliest pharmacies was **Lacrone and Sims Pharmacy** on Murray Avenue. An iconic one that many people fondly remember was **Rosen's Drugs**, now How Lee restaurant and some other businesses.

Sunns Drug Store, which later became **Sun Drugs**, was at the corner of Forbes and Murray. It closed in 1980, and the space is now Coldstone Creamery. **Beacon Pharmacy** was at the corner of Beacon and Murray. **Morrowfield Pharmacy** was near the corner of Forward and Murray. Today **Rite Aid** and the pharmacy in the Giant Eagle are the only drugstores left in Squirrel Hill.



Many of the old drugstores had **soda fountains**, where you could while away the time with a milkshake or sundae—the forerunners of coffee shops today. Beacon Pharmacy was a gathering place for Taylor Allderdice students in the early 1940s.

A side note to pharmacies is the connection between them and the fanciful castle-like wall at the corner of Shady Avenue and Beacon Street. On the lot behind the wall sat the now-demolished mansion of E. E. May, who owned **May Drug Stores**, a chain of Pittsburgh drugstores that were frequently advertised in the *Squirrel Hill News* newspapers.



Bakeries

When Squirrel Hillers talk about the “good old days,” memories of bakeries such as **Rhea’s Bakeries**, **Waldorf**, **Silberberg’s Bakery**, and **Rosenbloom’s** are mentioned with nostalgia. Their luscious concoctions were the stuff of dreams.



And in those days, if you wanted bagels, you had to come to **Bageland**.



1940



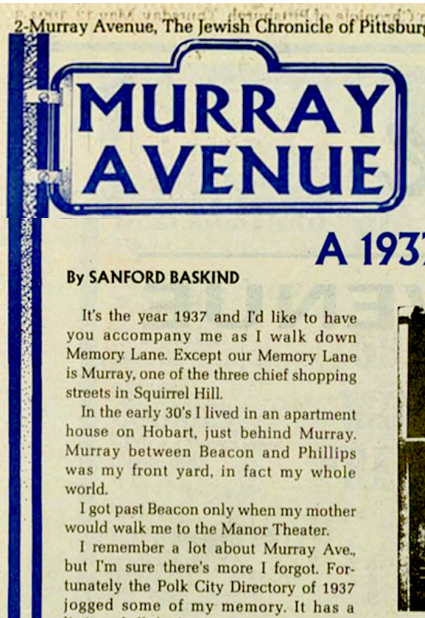
The corner of Murray and Hobart has seen a succession of bakeries. First was **Feldman’s Bakery**, which became **Rosenbloom’s** in the 1930s, which closed after a fire in 1994 and was replaced by **Baker Street**. It’s now **Allegro Hearth**. A few doors down from where **Silberberg’s Bakery**



used to be is now **Sumi’s Cakery**, a Korean bakery. And on Forbes, **Gaby et Jules**, a French bakery, offers marvelous *macarons* and other delicacies.



Old-Style Jewish Food Markets



As Jews moved into Squirrel Hill in the first quarter of the 1900s, stores catering to their particular needs sprang up along the Forbes/Murray business corridor, many of them relocating from Homestead as well as the Hill District.



Beginning around 1912, mom-and-pop grocery stores, fruit and vegetable markets, and kosher and non-kosher meat markets opened along the two avenues.

One of the earliest was **M. Schwartz Meat Market** on Murray Avenue in 1915, which a few years later became **Hoechstetter Brothers**. One of the last to exist was the **Green Grocer**, which operated until 1998. A few others were **Catalano’s Fruit Market**, **Donahoe’s Groceries**, **Forbes-Shady Food Market**, and **Weitz Kosher Meat and Poultry**. Across the street were **Whitman’s Fruits**, **Cohen’s Kosher Meat Market**, **Seewald’s Poultry**, and **Glick’s Food Market**.

In 1994, The Jewish Chronicle featured a section entitled “A 1937 Stroll Down Murray Avenue,” by Sanford Baskind.

Supermarkets



Besides the small family-owned stores, a few supermarkets were also part of the Squirrel Hill business district. **OK Grocery** opened in 1925 on Murray, which merged with dome other groceries to become **Giant Eagle** around 1950 where Eat’n Park is now. Giant Eagle later moved

to its present location across the street, which had been occupied by **Perl-Richman**, the first large grocery in the area, since 1935. Giant Eagle also had a second location near the corner of Murray and Forward, the previous location of the **Star Super Market** and **Loblaws**. A small **Kroger’s** was next to Rosen’s Drugs on the corner of Forbes and Shady in 1930.

Automobile Dealers and Service Stations

Do you remember when Squirrel Hill had a gas station on nearly every corner of the business district? That’s because Squirrel Hill had a lot of cars. CMU history professor Joel Tarr writes that the Squirrel Hill District, “an affluent area that had the highest amount of automobile ownership and use in the city, had its fastest rate of development in the 1920s ... Squirrel Hill’s population increased 85 percent compared to 13.8 percent for the city.” Squirrel Hill’s population was affluent. They could afford cars. Car dealerships sprang up along the entire length of the business district.



Here are some of the car dealerships and service stations that used to be in Squirrel Hill, along with the businesses that replaced them.

Constantin Pontiac—Forbes between Shady and Denniston (now the Starbucks corner)

Kamin Chevrolet—Forbes and Shady (Dunkin Donuts corner)

McKinley-Gregg Ford Lincoln—Forbes and Murray (Black’s Gulf Station, Rite Aid)

New Manor Garage Chrysler/Plymouth—between Phillips and Hobart (New Dumpling House)

Horvitz Motor Sales, then **McKean Olds**—Murray and Forward (Poli’s and Howard Levin Clubhouse)

Samson Buick—Forward between Shady and Murray (now Lord Duncan Cleaners)

Murray Beacon Garage—Murray between Bartlett and Beacon (Giant Eagle)



Theaters and Bowling Alleys

Squirrel Hill's business district boasted six movie theaters during the 1900s. The earliest was the **Orpheum**, located near the corner of Forbes and Murray. The entrance was where **Uncle Sam's Gourmet Subs** is now. It was showing silent films before 1916.

The luxurious **Manor** theater opened in 1922 and put the Orpheum out of business. The Manor is the only Squirrel Hill theater still open, having undergone a complete state-of-the-art renovation.



The **Princess Theatre** was renamed the **Beacon Theatre** in 1937 and became the **Guild Theatre** in 1954. It closed in 1979 and became the **Guild Deli**, which became **Gullifty's** in 1982, and is now **Friendship Circle**. A pool hall called the **Hawk's Nest** reportedly operated in the basement of the theater.

The **Squirrel Hill Theatre** opened in 1940 and closed in 2010. It was the first theater in Squirrel Hill to be built expressly for sound projection. An older theater might have occupied the same site because the Morrowfield Apartment-Hotel advertised a theater in that same location as an amenity in the 1920s.

The short-lived **Forum**, or **FORVM**, theater opened in 1963 and closed in 1978, carving a niche as an arts film venue.



Along with theaters came **bowling alleys**. The word "Bowling" appears near the top of the building that had housed the Orpheum. **Beacon Lanes** was in the building adjacent to the Guild Theater. That bowling alley later became **Funland**, with lanes on the first floor and basement. In the hippie years of the 1970s, that basement was **Heads Together**, and bowling was out. **Forward Lanes**, in the building next to the Squirrel Hill Theater, stayed open until 2018. Its future is uncertain.

Hardware Stores

With all that construction going on in Squirrel Hill in the 1900s, hardware stores were a necessity. One of the earliest was **Lupton’s Hardware** on Murray Avenue in the 1920s. **Bonn’s Hardware** opened on Murray Avenue near Hobart Street in the 1930s, along with **Forbes Hardware** on Forbes Avenue and **Ratner’s Hardware** at the corner of Murray



and Phillips Avenues. **Squirrel Hill Hardware and Locksmith** later occupied that space, now utilized by Schoolhouse Yoga. The hardware stores carried everything anyone could possibly want for home repairs, as well as an assortment of odd stuff that appealed to hobbyists and kids. None of the hardware stores remain in Squirrel Hill.

Banks

Today new banks are sprouting all over the Squirrel Hill business district, but banks have come, and sometimes left, for a long time. Others are still there but have undergone name changes. **Pittsburgh National Bank**, now **PNC Bank**, opened in the 1930s and is still at the same imposing location on Forbes. **Dollar Bank** opened downtown in 1855 as **Pittsburgh Dollar Savings Institution**, changed its name to **Dollar Savings Bank**, and in 1984 became **Dollar Bank**. It has had a long-time presence in Squirrel Hill. **Parkvale Bank** was subsequently acquired by **First National Bank**. **Mellon Bank** on Murray Avenue is now **Citizens Bank**. The **Guaranty Savings and Loan Association** was located where **Orr’s Jewelers** is now. **The American Legion Post 577** building was demolished to build the savings and loan association, but the post still meets on the second floor of the Orr’s building, with the entrance in the rear.

