MAIN STREET AND THE ALUMINUM FAÇADE: A CASE FOR SIGNIFICANCE

by

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(Under the Direction of Mark Reinberger)

ABSTRACT

The mid-twentieth century was a period of transition in the United States. Technological advances in all fields of study changed the way Americans lived. The invention of the automobile allowed increased mobility for all citizens and altered traditional patterns of life within historic town centers. Downtown businesses were most impacted as retail activity shifted from Main Street to shopping centers on the outskirts of town. Property owners across the country took on modernization projects meant to update the appearance of their buildings to compete with shopping centers. Aluminum façades became the new face of downtown buildings. Aluminum provided a modern aesthetic competitive with shopping centers. While these façades are reaching fifty years in age, preservation organizations generally advocate their removal in favor of exposing the original building front. In some cases these façades possess their own aesthetic and historic integrity, and therefore worthy of recognition in the preservation field.

INDEX WORDS: Aluminum, National Register eligibility, Secondary façades, Recent past, Historic preservation.

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INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century saw dramatic changes in American society. Technological advancements in every field of study helped to change the way people lived. Inventions ranged from the automobile, to cell phones and the Internet. Throughout all of this, architecture in America has been steadily reflective of societal changes. Art Deco and Art Moderne expressed the new streamlined equipment that simplified life in the early part of the century. The shapes and materials of new home appliances reiterated the detail and design of buildings of this style. Modernism reflects many pivotal international events in the twentieth century. It was deeply rooted in political thought and ideas of social change. However, from a design standpoint, modernism also reflected the range and abilities of new building materials that became widely available at the time. The open expression of structure provided an entirely new concept of design and beauty across the globe.

Throughout the century change was the only common theme. The quintessential American townscape was an unwilling victim of these changes. In the midst of population growth and prosperity after World War II, American city planning went in a new direction. Suburbs became commonplace because many Americans now had cars and were mobile enough that they did not have to live in close proximity to the community center. On the outskirts of city limits new shopping centers introduced a different kind of shopping. In addition, new residential subdivisions were constructed close to the new shopping areas and at a greater distance from the town center. This pattern repeated itself in every part of the country. The size of the town did

not make it more or less prone to this phenomenon. It was truly a change in the way Americans lived.

As a result of societal changes, many historic town centers fell into neglect. Most hurt were the businesses on America's Main Streets. The loss of business to shopping centers meant that downtown buildings no longer made large profits. Life downtown changed also. Where once downtown property owners would use and rent the upper floors of their buildings, they were beginning to close off those levels because it was too expensive to maintain the extra space under their tight budgets. Zoning changes in many places during this period banned mixed use of downtown buildings, which kept upper floors from residential use. By 1960 downtowns were struggling to survive or at least beginning to feel the pressure of development and their solution was to change their appearance to regain attention and business. Downtown buildings no longer had use for their upper floors, and their aesthetics were considered outdated, so a popular decision was to put a new slipcover façade over the existing building. Across America, there were many different materials and methods used in this effort. Perhaps the most common and longest lasting was aluminum.

Aluminum façades still exist in almost all towns across America and are a visible mark of the societal changes that dominated the twentieth century. However, in the last twenty-five years initiatives across the country have aimed to remove these slipcovers and restore the historic appearance of America's town centers. There is generally little debate as to whether these secondary façades should be removed. The question is more of developing the initiative, collecting the funds, and gaining private and public support to undertake the project. There is little information available about aluminum façades and they are quickly disappearing as a result of downtown revitalization projects. While aluminum has lived up to its manufacturer's promise

and aged well in varying climates across the country, the time has come where it seems irrelevant to our current needs as a society and as out of fashion as were the historic storefronts it covered up in the 1950s and 1960s. Historic preservation is a big industry in the United States today, and the most influential preservation organizations advocate removal of these aging façades.

The following pages attempt to demystify the aluminum façade. It was a common sight in American downtowns during the second half of the twentieth century. Sometimes it was installed by a single business owner who wanted a new look or less maintenance for their building, and other times it resulted from a community-driven effort to give a modern and cohesive appearance to downtown. Either way, it quickly went from being a simple solution to a common problem. It became *passé*; today community leaders and preservationists could easily do without the aluminum façades.

Remodeling projects have yet to gain total respect in the design field. In their January 1960 issue, *Architectural Forum* refers to remodeling as an activity that "goes on all the time, but only as building's stepchild and architecture's bastard."[1] This reputation has made it difficult for any remodeled building to claim respectability in the architecture field. During the Art Moderne movement, many of America's storefronts were remodeled to present a sleeker aesthetic. Art glass, namely Carrara glass, was the material of choice. It was disputed as anything of interest or importance after the popularity of Art Moderne faded away. However, today Carrara glass is considered to be a historically significant material worthy of preservation. The National Park Service has published a Preservation Brief on its behalf to highlight its significance and advocate for its preservation. Carrara glass façades predate the aluminum trend by nearly thirty years. So

[1] "America Rebuilding: A Problem in Continuity," *Architectural Forum*, Vol. 112 (January 1960), 133.

its cycle of popularity, abhorrence, and newfound appreciation is one that aluminum façades may also experience. It is difficult to say what causes a certain trend to fall in or out of public favor, and in the case of aluminum it is one worthy of investigation while there are still examples to study.

This thesis describes the specific architectural and societal trends that allowed aluminum to become a reasonable choice as a façade material. Beyond that it will investigate two small American cities that experienced development pressures and consequently decided to install aluminum façades in an effort to invest in their community. Niles, Michigan and Guymon, Oklahoma are each American towns in the 8,000-12,000-population range. Their patterns of growth and development are similar and fit the profiles of cities their size across America. They have had far different experiences with the aluminum façades in their towns and currently have different issues to confront for successful future community development. The following analysis of their circumstances and experiences will highlight cases for and against preservation of aluminum façades. Like any alteration to a historic structure, aluminum façades can serve to compromise or enhance the integrity of the building. This thesis will examine aluminum, and determine in which circumstances it may be worth preserving by constructing an argument for its cultural significance using current preservation programs and literature.

The focus of this thesis is to find a place for aluminum within the existing preservation infrastructure. Defining a position for these façades is a critical starting point for the material in terms of recognizing it as a significant historic building material. The following discussion looks at the aluminum movement in general and does not attempt to establish significance within that by defining separate styles, regional differences, or aluminum companies and their specific products. Research on those topics is necessary to determine the most valuable and endangered

examples, as well as further determining where the aluminum should be preserved. However, this thesis is trying to establish the cultural significance of the entire movement. When that is complete it will be necessary to take the next step in developing more thorough guidelines to determine the most significant examples of aluminum façades.

CHAPTER 1

AN ENVIRONMENT FOR ALUMINUM

Architecture

By the end of the nineteenth century the architectural world was beginning to undergo a great transformation--the modernist movement. The sources of modernism are complex, but can best be narrowed to a combination of different design theories mixing with new building technology and complex social ideology reflective of the political environment at the time. If not for modernism, architecture would certainly be a different discipline today. Modernism made the use of mass-produced and standardized building materials a legitimate method of construction. Without this development there would have been no place for quickly assembled shopping centers and neighborhoods. The rapidly growing nation needed to move forward with styles and building materials meant for quick construction. The demands of a growing nation helped to create a market for modern design and construction techniques, therefore, widespread acceptance of this movement was as much driven by economic demands as the theory behind it.

Modern architects believed strongly in functionalism. This philosophy follows the lead of Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, one of the fathers of modernist thought. On the first page of his 1841 book *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture,* he succinctly put the idea in print. Pugin wrote "there should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, construction, or propriety."[2]

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[2] Pevsner, Nikolaus, *The Sources of Modern Architecture and Design* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publishers, 1968), 9.

This idea of function was rooted in the minds of nineteenth century architects and theorists alike. They struggled with the desire to create a new architecture, and to eradicate excessive ornamentation, but could not conceive of what aesthetic it would take on.[3] Eugene Viollet-le-duc was among these theorists. He was aware of the growing use and availability of building materials like iron and plate glass, and felt this was the direction that the new architecture should take. Viollet-le-duc encouraged the shape of new design to embrace the capabilities of these building materials.[4] While Pugin and Viollet-le-duc were theorizing, others were expressing the same attitudes in built form.

Joseph Paxton designed and built the Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition in London in 1851. This building was all iron and glass and marked the first big change toward a new way of

Figure 1: Crystal Palace,
photo courtesy of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*.[5]

[3] Curtis, William J.R., *Modern Architecture Since 1900*. 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 11.
[4] Ibid., 24.
[5] Ibid., 20.

thinking about architecture.[6] The building succeeded in confusing many architects and critics (especially those hoping for change), who were not sure what to think of the structure. Pugin referred to it as the "glass monster,"[7] while Gottfried Semper had the more insightful fear that it exuded "the depreciation of material that results from its treatment by machines."[8] Despite the criticisms, the Crystal Palace stood as an exhibit itself of the limitless potential of mass production. The Crystal Palace was not immediately appreciated in the architectural community. However, more traditional structures employed iron and managed to garner some support. Henri Labrouste's Bibliotheque Ste. Genevieve in Paris preceded the Crystal Palace by one year (1849-

Figure 2: La Bibliotheque Ste. Genevieve,
Photo courtesy of *Modern Architecture Since 1900*.[9]

[6] Pevsner, 11.
[7] Ibid., 13.
[8] Curtis, 37.
[9] Ibid., 38.

1850). The library was successful for its exploitation of the properties of iron. Although the exterior of the building maintains a traditional Renaissance inspired style, Labrouste was able to create a large open space using iron supports that could remain well lit and ideal for reading. A masonry structure never could have accomplished this because it would have required breaking up the space and reducing the amount of windows. This building impressed the same people who criticized the Crystal Palace, which seemed like nothing more than an oversized green house. The Bibliotheque Ste. Genevieve, however, effectively used iron to improve an existing monumental building type. Labrouste's articulation of the iron emphasized the need for its use. The iron columns are thin, but rest on large masonry piers. This juxtaposition reinforces the capabilities of iron and makes its use compelling. The combination of craft and technology that came together in the library proved that the newer materials could create beautiful and functional spaces and were useful for reasons more than just mass production. However, the overall style still had not made any changes.

Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century the use of iron and glass in architecture remained isolated to exhibition halls, train-sheds, and factories. Designers continued using Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque styles. Most did not seriously consider the possibilities offered by new technology.[10] Perhaps the largest catalyst for change was the American invention of the skyscraper. The first skyscrapers were masonry structures that had little to offer in terms of design innovation. However, everything changed in the late 1800s when Louis Sullivan, William Le Baron Jenney, and Burnham and Root began inching their buildings higher, and learning to articulate and emphasize the verticality.[11] Finally, iron became necessary. The last masonry skyscraper was Burnham and Root's Monadnock building, completed in 1893.

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[10] Pevsner, 18.
[11] Ibid., 38.

Masonry supports are not appropriate for tall buildings because of the extreme wall thickness they require. An iron frame allowed for thinner walls, increased height, and more windows. The early innovators began working with this principle and changed preconceived notions of design. While experimentation and innovation was initially unique to skyscrapers, the entire field of architecture soon took notice.

Art Nouveau was the first major style change approached by architects. It rejected historic ornamentation and blatantly denied the Beaux-Arts style. Art Nouveau wanted to express something new: "Instead of ponderous monumentality it proposed fresh inventions exploiting the lightness and airiness permitted by glass and metal construction, and drawing inspiration from nature. As such it was a major step towards the intellectual and stylistic emancipation of modern architecture."[12] Art Nouveau is best recognized by its delicate free flowing forms, which are largely found in the details of the building. In fact, Art Nouveau decoration is the focus of the buildings that use it. For that reason it has been all but denied as a legitimate architectural style. The life of Art Nouveau was relatively short, from 1880-1900. However, the impact lingered and gave way to more experimentation with style.

By 1900 architects were continuing to look beyond just Renaissance and Gothic styles for their design inspiration. While the popularity of Art Nouveau waned, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society was beginning to publish journals.[13] The Arts and Crafts movement in America began nearly when Art Nouveau died. The ideology behind it was different in that its aims were to reintroduce and emphasize craft in architecture. Arts and Crafts did not have a direct impact upon modern architecture, but it indirectly affected the movement through its ideas

[12] Curtis, 54.
[13] Pevsner, 115.

of expressing honesty of materials and of total building design.[14] While the aesthetic of Arts and Crafts bears no resemblance to that of "modern" architecture, the above ideas did manifest themselves in the creed of modernity.

Before modernism could be fully realized, another step had to be taken. Perhaps the most important contributions to the rise of modernism were the social changes instigated by World War I and World War II. The biggest force of change was the rampant new technology that was rapidly altering human perceptions of transportation, home life, and construction. Technology that went into weapons development was redirected toward domestic life when the war was over. Automobiles became more common and necessary, requiring new ways of looking at cities. In the American home, many daily tasks could be handed over to machines. This was especially true in the kitchen. Refrigerators and stoves streamlined the interiors of homes and made women's work less laborious.

The first stoves and refrigerators had a sleek and futuristic look. This began to mimic itself in built structure. Art Deco and Art Moderne developed in the 1920s. These styles were the first in America to completely reject classical influences. They introduced new proportions and rhythms to building façades that ignored previous ideas of style. Art Deco and Art Moderne became popular for their use of new materials that were simple and sleek. In the business world, this new aesthetic helped to express the advancement of the company operating out of buildings with these new styles. An art deco façade symbolized a company who was keeping up with the times. The association of simple streamlined design to a modern approach to things created a niche for modernism and gave it an audience. It did not take long for change to take hold in a world where advancement is the driving force behind society.

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[14] Curtis, 93.

Art Deco and Art Moderne were short lived. Some historians minimize their importance in the history of architecture. However, it is undeniable that in America they were part of the ideological transition leading to modernism, which had been fully realized in Europe in the 1920s. European modernists wanted modern technological capabilities to come together in a new kind of architecture. They wanted craft superceded by mass-produced building and wanted the machine age to be reflected in new designs. Modern buildings stood in stark contrast to more traditional architecture, which for centuries had relied heavily on ornamentation and details to add interest to the design. The popularity of modernism was no doubt perpetuated by the technological advancements of the time. It was difficult to deny the ease of constructing new buildings in the "International Style." The Modernist movement is much more complex than the image it developed. The aesthetic of the movement is what is most remembered today.

The simple lines and blank surfaces popularized by Modernism and the International Style continue to be adapted to every building type. For the purpose of this thesis it is fair to say that the flat surfaces provided by aluminum panels would not have been accepted were it not for the uncluttered look that Modernism so boldly introduced.

Society

Perhaps the most significant change in American society following the World War II was the proliferation of the automobile. By 1930, there was one automobile for every ten Americans (this statistic was most closely matched by Canada, who reached the same ratio in 1952).[15] When the war was over and life was beginning to assume a level a normalcy in America, the impact of the automobile was truly felt. In 1944 the United States National System of Interstate Highways was authorized. This provided for construction of 40,000 miles of high speed travel

[15] Gosling, David, *Design and Planning of Retail Systems* (Whitney Library of Design: New York, 1976), 22.

routes over the next twelve years. In 1968 the program was expanded to include 44,000 miles of road.[16] When the federal government made this concession to the automobile, it was a huge gesture of recognition that life would never be the same.

The automobile gave Americans a new freedom. They were now able to take day and weekend trips to different places. A vacation did not have to involve leaving home for several weeks at a time. In larger cities it meant that people were not confined to shopping strictly in their own neighborhoods. They were able to seek out other parts of town and other merchants. The scale of business competition changed dramatically at this point. Local business was not solely concerned about their competition within eyesight; they now had to worry about rivals within driving distance. For the American people this meant that they had the ability to search for higher quality products, better customer service, and low prices at their leisure. For business, it meant that store-owners would have to find new ways of setting themselves apart.

The shopping center was first fully realized in the late 1940s, and it changed the way Americans shopped. It developed as a result of the ingrained American idea of conquering the frontier,[17] combined with a new ability to do so using the car as his tool. Prior to the development of the shopping center, most shopping was done in town. In general, buildings along America's main streets followed a similar pattern. Typically, they were two or three story structures with retail space on the first floor, and office and living space above. This system was perfectly functional, but with the invention of the car, it was not necessary for all of the city shops to be gathered together.

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[16] Ibid.
[17] "America Rebuilding: A Problem in Continuity," 86.

Shopping centers offered something different. They were usually located at major road intersections on the outskirts of residential areas.[18] Shopping centers were new buildings that you could drive to. The appeal of newness was popular after the war. People wanted to forget the previous years, which included World Wars I and II, as well as the Great Depression. Americans were relieved that they could shop for things other than the bare necessities to sustain survival in their homes. The idea of a place meant for leisurely shopping was appealing and exciting.

Shopping centers can be categorized by the area they serve: local; community; and regional centers. A local center is large enough to draw customers from a section within a city. A community center services an entire city, and a regional center will draw customers from several surrounding cities. The size of these centers varies depending upon the population of the region. A regional center in some places may be equal to the size of a community center somewhere else. However, the purpose of shopping centers is not to achieve a certain size, but to have enough amenities to act as a magnet. They aim to draw all customers within reasonable distance to shop at their stores. The shopping center was conceived as another way of making life more convenient for Americans. The decades immediately after the war were years of streamlining daily tasks and seeking out all methods of making life easier. This new life of convenience included everything from kitchen appliances to automobiles. The idea of crunching tasks that once took hours or days down to minutes or even seconds was both addictive and infectious. Americans looked for any way possible to condense their day-to-day work.

While the shopping center was a new convenience for the public, it also held many benefits for the businessman. A developer could build a center from the ground up and then rent

[18] Gosling, 28.

retail space to many different vendors. This venture was highly profitable to the developer and builds a case that the rise in shopping centers came as a real estate phenomenon resulting from the post-war changes in society.

The shopping center also helped to promote another idea that had been brewing in America for one hundred years before the war, the department store. First realized in the early 1800s, Lord and Taylor became the first American department store, opening its doors in 1826[19]. Others followed suit, such as Marshall Field's and Carson Pirie Scott. Initially, these department stores were operated in one location and carried a wide variety of merchandise. They were essentially shopping centers piled into a single store, offering anything from high-end fashions to home appliances. Sear's and Roebuck and Montgomery Ward exploded in business and popularity because of the mail order houses they offered. In 1924, J.C. Penney's became the first department store to have multiple locations and become designated as a chain. Penney's was soon followed by Marshall Field's, Macy's and others. The department store industry reached its peak in 1929 when they accounted for 9-10 percent of all retail sales in the United States.[20] Department stores and shopping centers grew together because the department store became a key part of the design of shopping centers.

In the planning of a shopping center, a department store is called an anchor store. The anchors are strategically placed far from one another and then are connected by sidewalks or enclosed halls that are lined with a variety of other stores. The anchors are supposed to draw people from one end to the other and make them look at all of the offerings in between. In the case of a strip mall, there may only be one anchor, but it is used to pull people into the shopping area, and the smaller stores are able to survive on the traffic pulled in by the larger store. This

[19] Gosling, 10.
[20] Gosling, 13.

symbiotic relationship between department stores and shopping centers turned design and planning of shopping centers into an entire industry. The same idea is used in contemporary shopping center design, and continues to be effective.

The shopping center industry began before World War II but mushroomed afterwards. By 1949 there were a total of 49 in the United States. Just sixteen years later, in 1965, that number had swelled to 11,000.[21] This development changed the lifestyles of Americans, but also impacted the evolution of cities. Up to this point, downtown was the life of a city. Local government and shopping were centralized in that core area. However, the construction of new retail establishments meant that downtown was no longer the center of activity in a city. The new and different places to shop took business away from pre-existing shops downtown and made it a struggle to maintain a healthy operation downtown. *Architectural Forum* was writing about this problem as early as 1953, when it was apparent that the shopping centers were taking over. Their stance was that shopping centers were the answer to downtown shopping, which had become a "heart-breaking failure."[22] *Forum* suggests that the inventors of shopping centers took all of their ideas from main street and improved the failing system by establishing themselves as community planners as well.[23]

Planning was a critical piece of the success of shopping centers. After the war, the economy grew steadily, and people had financial freedom that they had not had in years. A huge number of families were growing along with that. This was the era of the baby-boomers because it was an ideal time to raise a family during this time of peace and prosperity. Along with the economy, cities were growing and thus there was an increased need for housing. Subdivisions

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[21] Gosling, 28.
[22] "New Thinking on Shopping Centers," *Architectural Forum*, Vol. 98 (March 1953): 122-145.
[23] Ibid., 125.

and new neighborhoods were being constructed at an astounding rate. These were built outside of the historic centers of town and closer to the big highways and intersections. Developers who took this new planning into account stood to gain by placing their centers within convenient distance of the new neighborhoods.

The development of shopping centers and widespread use of the automobile are two of the biggest changes that took place in the twentieth century. Jim Gabbard, the National Register Coordinator for the Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, has dealt with many downtowns in communities across Oklahoma. He mentions that the development of city planning as a field of study was another equally important change in the middle of the twentieth century. The growth of planning resulted in increased building code regulations as well as standardization of those codes. New regulations could make it nearly impossible for downtown buildings continue supporting mixed uses. When these regulations were in place it forced many residents and offices out of downtown buildings, and contributed to the loss of activity on America's Main Streets.[24]

Looking at the trends in growth and development in the 1950s, it is easy to see how life in downtown centers was going to need to change drastically if they were to survive. By 1960 the outlook was bleak, and downtowns were suffering. A big change was about to take place.

[24] Gabbard, Jim, telephone interview by the author, Fayetteville, AR., 01 December 2004.

CHAPTER 2

DOWNTOWN FIGHTS BACK

The Need for Modernization

Downtown centers needed a way to sustain business so they would remain viable amidst the rampant growth within their communities. One simple answer was to try and compete with businesses in the shopping centers. Downtown business owners recognized that the fresh look and new experience of going to a shopping center was a large part of their appeal. So, in order to gain attention of their own, shop owners updated the look of their buildings. In 1960, *Architectural Forum* addressed this idea. The January 1960 issue, titled "America Rebuilding" was dedicated to modernizing America.

Forum's contention in 1960 was that "at the tender age of fifteen, often less-every building in the country is a candidate for remodeling; but not all are worth the cost."[25] They profess that there is money to be made in the business of modernizing buildings, and advocate modernization as a financially responsible practice. According to *Forum* there are three ways modernization can save the viability of a building. First, it can change the function of the building resulting in higher rental income. Second, it can pull a building out of a downward spiral. Finally, converting a building to a new purpose can hold substantial savings to the new occupants (the savings are calculated by the amount modernization costs versus new construction). *Forum's* second and third benefits of modernization related directly to problems that buildings in America's downtowns were facing.

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[25] "America Rebuilding: A Problem in Continuity," 115.

The problems in downtowns were based on loss of business, which would eventually lead to neglect. Modernizing the structures would deter business owners from moving to a new location in a shopping center and would attract new attention to their location, hopefully pulling them out of their lull in business. Thus, it made sense for property owners to look into updating their buildings.

Architectural Forum lists three types of obsolescence that contribute to a structure requiring modernization: physical; mechanical; and economic. Physical reasons include considering if the structure and plan of the building are appropriate for the function. For example, a building should be tested to ensure that the supports are strong enough to hold office equipment and supplies or any other needs it may have. Mechanical modernization dealt with new technology including appliances and wiring. This was mostly an issue shortly after the war when technology was rapidly improving, and new structures could include it in their buildings, but older structures had to be updated to keep up. Finally, economic factors included the physical location of the building and its function. Would the intended purpose work well within the neighborhood where it is located?[26]

America's Main Street buildings were facing all of these problems. They were in need of physical upkeep, and as they were slowly losing business, less money was available to perform the necessary repairs. Mechanically speaking, they were far behind the new shopping center buildings, which utilized the best new technology. On the economic front, they were slowly finding that their intended function was no longer relevant in their location. Shopping activity had moved to the outskirts of town, and was continuing to have success there. The best solution

[26] Ibid.

to this crisis in America's downtowns was to begin modernizing and try to regain their lost customers.

The difficult decision for these shop owners was to try and decide how to approach the modernization project. Because storeowners were losing business, there was not much money available to do a thorough job of modernizing the buildings. They had to approach the problem practically. The initial changes would have to be effective and prove that further modernization would be a wise investment. The solution adopted in many towns across America was a façade update or "skin job."[27] This was the application of a new façade over the original. There were several benefits to this process, but the most alluring was the cost. The new materials available after the war were mass produced and inexpensive, so putting a slipcover over the building front was an accessible solution. Most of the modernization of downtown buildings in America was done in the 1960s. American's spent $20 billion on maintenance and repair in 1960 alone.[28]

The new look these downtown buildings wanted to achieve was meant to compete with the aesthetic of the new shopping centers. Early post World War II shopping centers often had a modern stylistic influence. They were void of excessive detail, and made use of the new building materials. Aluminum sidings, steel, concrete, and glass were prominent materials in the construction of these new centers. As a result, downtown buildings attempted to emulate this aesthetic. Aluminum was a popular choice because it was cheap, lightweight, durable, and easy to install. Aluminum façades could be erected in a matter of minutes and succeeded in changing the look of the building.

Such façade treatment had an even stronger impact when every building on the street put up a similar façade. Typically, downtown buildings had different owners. In the early 1900s

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[27] Ibid., 130.
[28] Ibid., 133.

many buildings along America's main streets were owned by the individual families who built them. This characteristic of downtowns helped to protect them from being dominated by one person or company, and meant that individual buildings and shops developed their own styles reflective of both their owners and product. Conversely, a shopping center's design had a cohesive style for many different kinds of stores. This visual continuity was a new way for people to shop and reinforced the idea of streamlining and convenience. Applying aluminum over the original façade allowed downtown buildings to adopt the look of shopping centers and seem more modern.

The addition of aluminum changed the proportions of the buildings as well. Where once the buildings were visibly two to three stories, they now appeared to be just a storefront with a blank wall above. The trend of covering the second and third floor windows was also expressive of another change in downtowns. While these floors were once used as residential and office space, they were closed off and ignored when the towns focus moved away from downtown. It reduced maintenance costs to close off the upper floors, and completely covering them with a façade material was a physical sign of the lifestyle changes occurring across America.

Why Aluminum?

Aluminum became a popular material for all types of building façades after the war. Aluminum's first documented use as an architectural building material was in 1884. It was cast in a pyramidal shape and used as the cap for the Washington Monument.[29] Aluminum was expensive at the time; it was considered a semi-precious metal and was more rare than silver. It was used for tableware at the French court and to make a crown for the king of Denmark. The distillation process to obtain pure aluminum was tedious and expensive, which is why it was so

[29] Jester, Thomas C, *Twentieth Century Building Materials* (Washington D.C.: Archetype Press, Inc., 1995), 47.

rare. Aluminum is the most common metal in the earth's crust, however it does not occur naturally as a metal.[30] In 1852, aluminum was selling for $545 per pound; improvements in the process dropped the price to $17 per pound in 1869[31], and by 1885 the price had dropped again to $11.33.[32] However, the real change in the aluminum industry came in 1886. Charles Martin Hall of Oberlin College and Paul T. Heroult of France simultaneously discovered a simpler way of producing aluminum. By passing an electric current through a solution of alumina dissolved in molten cryolite, metallic aluminum could be produced. This method, called the Hall-Heroult process, is still used today and allowed for production of large quantities of aluminum at reasonable prices.[33] By 1892 the price of aluminum had dropped to just $0.57 per pound.

Charles Hall sought out financial backing to further develop his new method and product. A group of six financiers from Pittsburgh teamed up with Hall and formed the Pittsburgh Reduction Company. With the help of his first employee, Charles Hall oversaw the first commercial aluminum produced on Thanksgiving Day of 1888.[34] In 1907, the Pittsburgh Reduction Company changed their name to the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA). The company had great success and grew to include mines and smelting factories across the country; the name change reflected the efforts of these new locations. In 1930, ALCOA counted 2,000 uses for aluminum and the cost was reduced to $0.20 per pound. There was a huge military demand for aluminum during World War II. The federal government helped to fund construction of new plants, and production of aluminum doubled. When the war ended these

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[30] "It All Starts with Dirt," (Aluminum Company of America, accessed 26 June 2004); available from http://www.alcoa.com/global/en/about_alcoa/dirt.asp; Internet.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Jester, 47.
[33] Ibid.
[34] "It All Starts With Dirt"

factories were sold to ALCOA's competitors who focused on manufacturing aluminum for new domestic purposes. [35]

Architecture quickly became one of the largest markets for aluminum production. Aluminum made an ideal building material because it is lightweight and durable, but is not prone to rust or deterioration. It first became popular in architecture following World War I, when it was used for doors, window sash, railings, trims, grilles and signs. The silver color increased its appeal.[36] Before World War II there were only a few high profile buildings clad in aluminum. Spandrel panels of cast or pressed sheets of aluminum could be set into a masonry backing. The Chrysler Building (1930, William Van Alen) and Empire State Building (1931, Shreve, Lamb, and Harmon) both used this technology. In 1930, Holabird and Root built the A.O. Smith Corporation Research and Engineering building, and clad it entirely in aluminum. [37]

After World War II, there were several changes that supported the use of aluminum in architecture. One of the biggest was the development of the curtain wall. The curtain wall was an invention made possible by the use of cast-iron or steel columns as a building frame. These frames were thin and light on their own, and when combined with a thin and lightweight building skin, the building's interior space could be increased and the load born by the building structure was much lighter.[38] Aluminum was an ideal curtain wall material, and is one of the most popular materials in this architectural expression. When the curtain wall was invented it became the new face of American building. A structure could have any façade desired, and the skeleton of the

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Jester, 48.
[37] Ibid., 49.
[38] Davison, Robert L. and Henry Wright, "Curtain Walls." *Architectural Forum*, Vol. 92 (March 1950), 81-83.

building was completely independent of it. This allowed for the standardization of building structure pieces, with interchangeable exteriors.

Figure 3: ALCOA Advertisement, 1960.

The curtain wall is a direct forerunner of the aluminum façades put on America's main street buildings. The concept was the same, with the exception of structural advantages. The same technology that went into developing aluminum panels for curtain walls was applied to the abundance of products available to use as secondary façade materials. Nearly every architectural aluminum production company developed some sort of cladding system that could be easily applied to an existing building. The exact purpose was to provide a clean flat surface that expressed an updated modern appearance. This is precisely how aluminum came to be the material of choice for modernization projects in America's downtown areas.

CHAPTER 3

CHANGES IN STOREFRONTS

Earlier Modernization Methods

Aluminum made its way into the field of storefront design long before aluminum panels rose to popularity. Francis J. Plym founded the Kawneer Aluminum Company in 1906. Kawneer is credited with performing the first major changes in storefront design. In the early 1900s, Francis J. Plym and his wife were standing outside of a store in Kansas City, Missouri waiting on a bus. Francis commented to his wife that the storefront's wooden window frame was rotting and would soon fail and require replacement.[39] Mr. Plym was challenged by the problem this storefront presented and he began formulating solutions.

Francis Plym was an architect. He enjoyed working through complicated problems, which is why he determined to solve the problem of wooden window frames. After several months of experimentation, Francis Plym developed a prototype of a new frame for plate glass windows. The trouble with wood is that its expansion and contraction is so great that it can cause large sheets of glass to crack. Wood is also prone to rot and requires frequent maintenance and replacement. Plym's prototype was a frame built of copper. This invention included a built-in gutter system to direct water away from the frame and a series of ventilation holes to equalize the temperature and prevent the windows from fogging.[40] This invention changed the appearance of Main Street America. Now, there could be large picture windows to display all of a shop's merchandise. Walls could be nearly solid glass at street level. Older storefronts had to

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[39] Stritch, Thomas, *The Kawneer Story* (Kawneer Company: Niles, Michigan, 1956), 8.
[40] Ibid., 12-13.

keep glass panes small so that the expansion and contraction rate of the wood could support the weight of the glass. The wood mullions disrupted a complete window display, but Plym's invention changed all of that, and in effect invented "window shopping". It was issued a United States patent on 15 May 1906, and the first building to fully utilize the new system was the Johnson Department Store in Holdredge, Nebraska. Shortly after installation, these new windows survived a tornado that destroyed many of the other storefronts in Holdredge. This was Plym's signal to continue working with his invention.[41] Plym's discovery was the foundation of the Kawneer Company. He founded Kawneer shortly after receiving his patent. The success of this invention allowed Kawneer to grow as a company and continue to be innovative in the field of storefront design.

Figure 4: Johnson Department Store, Holdredge, Nebraska, photo courtesy of *The Kawneer Story*.[42]

Francis Plym decided that to effectively market and sell his new invention he would have to move his company east to be closer to more densely populated areas. He settled upon Niles, Michigan while looking at small towns near Chicago. Niles is just ninety miles northeast of Chicago and easily accessible by rail. Niles' citizens and businessmen had been seeking industry

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 16.

for their community and jumped at the chance to be the new home of Kawneer. Niles offered to construct a factory for Kawneer and allow them to use the facility rent-free for five years. They also agreed to deed the factory to Kawneer if their wage payouts reached $100,000 within the five-year period. Francis Plym found this an offer that he could not refuse. He agreed to the deal and moved to Michigan in late 1906 to begin operations. Kawneer was immediately successful as a business and earned the deed to the factory after only two years in operation. By 1912 Kawneer had grown enough that they opened another plant in Berkeley, California and by 1914 they employed more than two hundred and fifty people. The company was mainly interested in architectural products but learned to manufacture some airplane and automobile parts as well, a profitable sideline when World War II came about.[43]

In 1927 Kawneer began to abandon the use of copper and bronze as the primary metals used in their work. The 1920s were a decade that appreciated detailed ornate metal works. Elaborate bank teller cages, fixtures, and hardware were popular during this decade, but decoration was not what Plym had in mind for Kawneer. He acquired a company that specialized in this work, the Adelbert E. Coleman Company, already in the decorative metal market. However, the popularity of ornamental metal faded in the early 1930s and by 1933 Francis Plym had to use his personal funds to bail his company out of financial ruin.[44] By 1937 the first order came into Kawneer for the construction of warplane parts, and the company was again able to do good business.

By 1937 Kawneer was using aluminum for 75 percent of their business. Kawneer was the first manufacturer to rely on aluminum for their business, and it proved to be a wise move. The company continued to manufacture storefront parts with aluminum throughout the 1930s,

[43] Ibid., 28-30.
[44] Ibid., 52-53.

but had to abandon those efforts during the war, when they were contracted to build airplane parts for more than sixty different clients. Kawneer focused completely on the war effort and did not manufacture any storefronts during 1942-1945. However, they expanded their plant to accommodate all of the new orders, so by the end of the war Kawneer was prepared to manufacture and distribute to a much larger customer base. In addition to business expansion during the war, another big change allowed the Kawneer Company to expand: changing ideas of architecture lent themselves to the clean and simple aesthetic that Plym's plate glass storefronts could achieve.[45]

Following the war, Kawneer focused on this idea. Their timing could not have been any better, as this coincided with the rise of shopping centers in America. The Kawneer Company specialized in designing and innovating American storefronts throughout the next several decades. They improved framing, door hinges, doorframes, signage, and many other components of storefront design. Niles and the surrounding communities were outfitted with aluminum panels manufactured by Kawneer during the 1960s and 1970s. Kawneer abandoned operations in Niles in 1975 and relocated their headquarters to Norcross, Georgia, where they continue to operate.

The Kawneer Aluminum company was the first to begin simplifying storefronts, and turning the storefront into a field of design on its own. While Kawneer was in the early stages of development, there were others who recognized the importance of what they were doing, and created similar products. Kawneer took the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company to court in 1912 to defend their patent. Pittsburgh Plate Glass developed and manufactured a product called "Easyset", which was a near exact copy of Plym's product. Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company

[45] Ibid., 56.

succeeded in significantly cutting Kawneer's profits before they went to court. Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis ruled that Kawneer's patents had been infringed upon, and judged in favor of Plym's company. Between 1912 and 1916 Kawneer won twenty-nine court battles defending their patents. By 1920 they were firmly established as the producer of this plate glass holding system, however, this evidence also points to the fact that storefront design was a profitable business that many people wanted a piece of.[46]

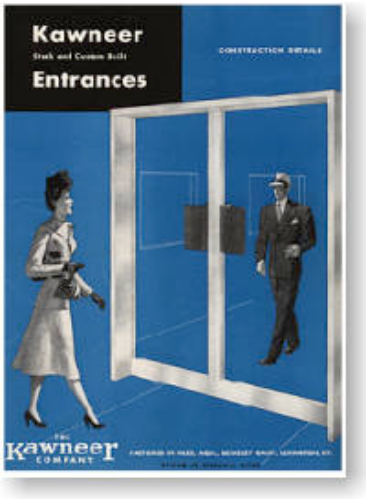

Figure 5: Kawneer Advertisement, 1948.

Installing the Kawneer storefront system involved removing much of the original material at ground level, and replacing it with plate glass. This system was used extensively on downtown buildings, as its popularity rose while most shopping was still taking place in town centers. It was the first of many changes these buildings would undergo during the twentieth century. These storefronts dramatically changed the appearance of the structure with relatively

[46] Ibid., 44-47.

little effort. In the following years, many more methods of storefront alterations were developed to modernize building façades.

Carrara glass is one of the most prestigious in this generation of storefront changes. Officially, it is called structural pigmented glass, but is more commonly called Carrara glass, after its most popular manufacturer. It was originally coined "Carrara" because of its resemblance to the white marble that comes from the Carrara quarries in Italy. Carrara glass rose to popularity as a secondary façade material in the 1930s. When Art Deco and Art Moderne were the prevailing architectural styles, the brick storefronts that Americans were used to seeing looked dated. In 1935 the Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company sponsored the "Modernize Main Street" competition in cooperation with *Architectural Record* to invite designers to create a new look for aging main street façades.[47]

This competition was the catalyst for the ensuing widespread use of Carrara glass. The material was originally developed as an alternative to marble that could be used as a sanitary surface in hospitals. However, it quickly made its way to the exterior of buildings as a cladding material. The glass was produced through a vitrification process using silica, feldspar, china clay, cryolite, manganese, and other materials. These were heated upwards of 3,000 degrees and then rolled into sheets. It was then cooled over a period of three to five days and finally polished to a mirror-like shine.[48] This process resulted in a material that had the texture and shine of marble, but could be manufactured in many different colors and molded to hug the curves of the new Art Moderne buildings. It could also easily be installed to nearly any flat surface. Installation only required a good adhesive and scored surface for attachment.

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[47] United States National Park Service, *The Preservation of Historic Pigmented Structural Glass (Vitrolite and Carrara Glass)*, Preservation Brief 12 (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1984, accessed 20 September 2004); available from http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/brief12.htm; Internet.
[48] Jester, 202.

Carrara glass was used on both new and old buildings, however, in this discussion it is important because it marks a point at which property owners were beginning to see the potential that a total façade change could have for their buildings. The "Modernize Main Street" competition encouraged designers to think of ways to transform more dated façades in to a more modern building that would be expressive of the business occupying the structure. These designs were whimsical in their attempts to convey the products, however, the bottom line was to create an image that would attract attention and advertise.

The lesson of Kawneer and Carrara glass is that storefronts were aggressively becoming machines for selling products. The Kawneer glass system allowed business owners to more openly advertise their product to people passing by, and Carrara glass gave outdated building façades a method of looking more modern and advertising their product with the building design. The invention of the shopping center was the ultimate expression of these ideas. Shopping centers used the above ideas and built them from the ground up to create a destination designed specifically for shopping.

Modernizing with Aluminum

Installing aluminum façades on downtown buildings was an easy method of bringing them to a competitive level with shopping centers. The companies that marketed these panels were the same companies providing the materials used on new buildings. In essence, it was the same product. This means that the financial benefits of using a mass-produced building material could also apply to downtowns. By putting an aluminum façade on the building, store owners made cost effective and dramatic changes in a matter of days.

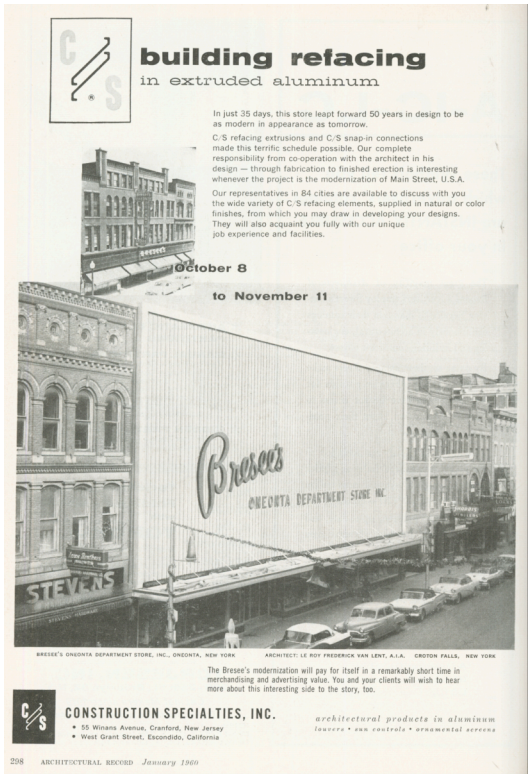

Figure 6: Construction Specialties, Inc. Advertisement, 1960, image courtesy of *Architectural Record*, January 1960.

The aluminum panels used for these modernization projects are applied over the existing building façade. Many different companies manufactured the panels put on downtown buildings, but most employed the same basic principles. The panels affix to a flat building surface outfitted with furring strips running horizontally across the length of the storefront. The panels are attached to the strips with screws and locked into place. Aside from drilling holes to attach the furring strips, this system did not inflict any structural damage upon the original building. In some cases the installation required that architectural details be removed in order to provide a level surface. The process of removing details is the most harmful effect that installing aluminum façades had on historic buildings, because it meant these decorative elements were usually broken off and discarded. In cases where this was done, the original façade design was extensively damaged.

Figure 7: Butler Monopanl Advertisement, 1960.

The panels themselves were molded of anodized or enamel coated aluminum. Anodizing is a process of coating the aluminum finish with an electro-chemical bath. These anodic coatings were first developed in the 1920s, but not available for architectural purposes until after World War II. Anodized coated aluminum is highly resistant to atmospheric corrosion. These coatings can be transparent or dyed silver, gray, or brown. Baked enamel coatings and porcelain enamels first became available around 1950.[49] This coating is also resistant to environmental conditions, and allowed for a wider variety of colors. ALCOA's product was called Alumalure, and was available in eleven different colors. Alumalure came in sheets forty-eight inches wide and as long as thirty feet.

In addition to covering the existing building front, these projects often involved installing a new awning. Canvas rollout systems were popular for awnings before modernization. These were retractable but also prone to weathering. The awnings used as part

[49] Ibid., 48.

of the modernization projects were permanent structures also constructed of aluminum. There are two common ways these awnings could be installed. In some cases the awnings drew support from the building itself, through a suspension system. In this system the awning is directly attached to the building on one side, and the other side is attached to the façade above using cables. This allowed for a canopy with no supports interrupting the sidewalk. The second system used thin aluminum columns to support one side of the awning, while the other is attached directly to the building. The major advantage to this type of awning is that it could include a drainage system. The columns acted as gutters, and drained water directly from the awning roof to the street. Awnings helped to protect downtown shoppers from uncomfortable weather conditions, and shaded the front end of the storefronts. Pre-existing retractable awning systems were inconsistent in their ability to protect shoppers because business owners could leave them rolled up, or choose not to repair them if they deteriorated. The new aluminum awnings solved this problem and were a seemingly welcome change toward making downtown shopping more comfortable and similar to shopping centers.

A host of problems faced downtown businesses in the 1960s. While aluminum façades would not solve all of their problems, it seemed to be a means of improving deteriorating conditions. The benefits of these systems tried to address the specific advantages that developing shopping centers were able to provide for customers, and help to keep downtown competitive in retail trade.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDIES

Introduction

The two cities profiled on the following pages each experienced the impact of aluminum façades in their most comprehensive form. Niles, Michigan and Guymon, Oklahoma each had aluminum façades installed on their Main Street buildings in the early 1970s in order to modernize the appearance of the street. In each town the façades covered enough of the existing structures to completely alter the experience of going downtown. This was the idea behind performing modernization projects with aluminum façades. The material succeeded in creating a uniform aesthetic for every building along the streetscape, making it look more like a shopping center. Articles like "America Rebuilding" in *Architectural Forum,* written at the time, champion the benefits of modernization in downtowns. This literature explains why the appearance of traditional downtown storefronts would not continue to generate profits for business owners and how modernization could help. Consulting firms reiterated these sentiments when towns approached them with concerns about keeping their downtowns a vital part of the city. In the 1960s, downtown revitalization meant modernizing the buildings in question in order to make them competitive in the local market.

Both Niles and Guymon were successful growing communities in the early part of the twentieth century. They are similar in size and their population demographics are nearly identical. Niles, however, is just outside of a metro area and less than one hundred miles from one of the largest cities in the country, Chicago. While Guymon sits alone in the plains, and the

closest large city is Amarillo, Texas, which is still a two-hour drive. Both towns employ most of their work force in the manufacturing or retail/trade fields, and have a population with diverse income levels. When looking at the histories of these two cities there is little room to wonder why the aluminum façades came to be the dominating theme of their downtowns. They each were small and feeling the pressures of development from surrounding communities. This pressure was enough to inspire them to make changes of their own that would hopefully compete with newer shopping experiences.

The following studies examine circumstances leading to the installation of aluminum façades in each city, the experiences of each town with the façades, and present conditions. Information in the case studies is gathered from city officials and residents, the community master plans, and various publications (including newspapers, newsletters, and magazines) with articles pertaining to events in each town.

Niles, Michigan

Niles has a much deeper heritage than the Kawneer Aluminum Company. The city of Niles is part of Berrien County in the southwest corner of Michigan. It sits on the St. Joseph River within thirty miles of Lake Michigan and is just three miles north of the state's border with Indiana. The town site was laid out in 1829, and incorporated as a city in 1835. It is considered part of the South Bend, Indiana, metropolitan area.[50] Niles is known as the "City of Four Flags," because during its three hundred years of settlement, it has been ruled by France, Spain, England, and the United States. It was a rest stop and trading center for pioneers heading west in the

[50] *City of Niles, Michigan: A Community Master Plan* (Williams & Works: Grand Rapids, MI March 2004, accessed 28 May 2004); available from http://www.ci.niles.mi.us/Default.htm; Internet, 7-8.

nineteenth century, and a large railroad crossing. The original train depot, built in 1892, still exists. The railroad connected Niles to Toronto, Chicago, and Detroit.[51]

Originally, Niles was platted in a regular grid street pattern on the east bank of the St. Joseph River. It now covers five and a half square miles which extend to the west side of the river. Niles initially grew and developed as a frontier town. It was settled by a few people who catered to the needs of others passing through the area. Niles hit its peak population of 13,842 in 1960.[52] The population of Niles had been increasing until the 1960s. It suddenly dropped during that decade to 12,988 in 1970. The loss of population was consistent with all of Berrien County, Michigan during the 1960s. The flight out of southwest Michigan can be attributed to the energy crisis as well as loss of local manufacturers. Downsizing plagued the area and it has never fully recovered. The population has continued to decrease to just 12,204 in 2000. Niles experienced some growth during the 1970s but lost it again the following decade. The population statistics in Niles also help to define the nature of their economic development during those decades.

Industry and manufacturing are by far the largest employers for Niles. Today, Niles is host to ABB Flakt Garden City Fan Company, French Paper Company, Hess Engineering, National Standard, United Fixtures, Simplicity Pattern Company, and Tyler Refrigeration. French Paper Company, Hess Engineering, National Standard, and Tyler Refrigeration are all headquartered in Niles. The industry in Niles employs over 1,500 people, meaning that 28.6% of the workforce is employed in manufacturing. These companies have dictated the success of the community throughout its history. All have been operating out of Niles since the early twentieth century and have shaped the current community profile. Niles is an ideal location for business headquarters because it is within easy reach of several large cities including Detroit; Chicago;

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[51] Ibid., 8.
[52] Ibid., 21.

Grand Rapids; South Bend; Indianapolis; and Cleveland. However, Niles is a small community, which is less expensive to operate out of.

Kawneer is another company that helped to shape Niles throughout the twentieth century. Although the company abandoned production there in the 1970s, they left an impression on the city. While there, Kawneer donated several public facilities including a golf course, stadium, and money toward construction of a hospital. As one of Niles's first and largest industries, Kawneer helped to shape the character and appearance of the town. Ironically, they also contributed to the demise of downtown Niles when they left the city.

The prosperous decades before 1960 allowed Niles to develop a large town center. This included several commercial and residential blocks, which the city is now working hard to revitalize. During the population decline in the 1960s, the entire community experienced financial hardships. With the loss of jobs and tighter incomes, local business began to suffer. Business owners in downtown Niles found it difficult to maintain their aging buildings. In the early 1970s the Niles Chamber of Commerce made the decision to reinvest in downtown Niles by installing aluminum façades over the existing brick structures. The Chamber of Commerce proposed a similar project in 1942, but it was ignored until economic circumstances were more desperate. The choice to install aluminum façades in the early 1970s did not include public input, and was paid for by local business owners.[53]

Installation of aluminum façades in downtown Niles took place in 1972-73. The material applied to the buildings in downtown Niles was manufactured by the Kawneer Aluminum Company, which was continuing to operate out of Niles. The product was called Shadowform, and it came in sheets that were four to five feet in width. The installation involved leveling the

[53] Croteau, Lisa, telephone interview by the author, Fayetteville, AR., 26 August 2004.

existing building façades. This meant that any cornices or ornamentation on the building fronts were removed to achieve a flat surface. Builders then attached horizontal 2"x4" furring strips in regular intervals on the building façade. The aluminum panels were affixed to the furring strips and locked into place. The panels also held together by sliding one over the other. This system served to further strengthen the façade. All of the aluminum panels put up on Main Street in Niles were a dark brown color and provided a uniform aesthetic.[54] The project also included awnings suspended from the individual building fronts. Building fronts in downtown Niles on average are approximately thirty-four feet wide and three stories tall. The average price of the Kawneer façades for each building front totaled $15,000.[55] Amy Arnold, Preservation Planner for the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, is from Niles and recalls large orange signs on each storefront along Main Street as another component of the installation project.[56]

Figure 8: Niles Aluminum Façades, before and after,
100 Block of Main Street, photos courtesy of Juan Ganum.

[54] Ganum, Juan, telephone interview by the author, Fayetteville, AR., 28 August 2004.
[55] Croteau.
[56] Arnold, Amy, telephone interview by the author, Fayetteville, AR., 01 December 2004.

The decade of the 1970s was the only one of growth that Niles has experienced in the last forty years. The attention that downtown received for the aluminum installation gave a brief glimmer of optimism to Main Street in Niles. However, by 1980, Niles had fallen into another slump and the city's downtown buildings were ignored. This trend continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In their *Community Master Plan* of 2004, city staff cited downsizing of Simplicity Pattern Company, National Standard, Garden City Fan, and Tyler Refrigeration as major reasons for the economic downturn in the community.[57] Transportation statistics imply that many of the working citizens in Niles were traveling greater distances to work in 2000 than they were in 1990. In 2000, the members of the labor force who walked to work had decreased 85.4% from 1990, and those using public transportation decreased by 59.6%.[58] These statistics suggest that the downsizing of major local industries during that decade had a dramatic impact on the work force of Niles. Many of these residents were forced to seek jobs outside of the city and, in turn, were not contributing as much to the community.

In 2000, the outlook for the city of Niles was bleak. However, at the same time concerned citizens took an active role in trying to restore pride in their community. In an effort similar to that of the Chamber of Commerce in 1970, the citizens of Niles began seeking out ways to improve their community. They launched a downtown revitalization project, quickly coined "The Big Brown Take Down". Project leaders cited the Kawneer aluminum façades as the number one thing they wanted to change. The project began in late 2001 when Tim Batton, the Executive Director of the Niles Community Development Corporation (CDC), discovered a grant opportunity. He and four other officials formed the pilot committee of the Niles Main Street Revitalization Project. The remainder of the team included Sharon Witt, the Executive

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[57] *City of Niles, Michigan: A Community Master Plan*, 36.
[58] Ibid., 36.

Director of the Southwestern Michigan Economic Growth Alliance (SMEGA), Lisa Croteau, the Marketing Director of the Niles Downtown Development Authority (DDA), Terry Bull, the City Manager, and Juan Ganum a city planner (now the Community Development Director).[59]

The funding that made this project possible was a $780,000 loan from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) and the city of Niles. If the results from the project can create thirty-nine jobs on Main Street, the loan will be turned into a grant. The project costs nothing for the business owners on Main Street. The only thing the city asks of them is that they continue with building maintenance and restoration on their own by completing paint and trim work on their buildings. Since the project funding is all coming from one place and dealing with separate business owners and many unknown building conditions, the project bidding was a complex process.

There was very little documentation of the installation of the Kawneer façades, so the project committee had no idea what to expect when the removal process began. There was no indication as to whether all of the façades were installed the same way, and no one knew what conditions to expect of the original building structures. Thus, determining the project budget was a difficult task. The committee hired the Troyer Group to handle the business end of the project. The Troyer Group ended up assigning "scope agreements." This meant that each building had its own agreement, which itemized the work anticipated. These forms helped to establish a cost estimate for the project. They also allowed work to be modified on an individual basis considering the discoveries made when removing the aluminum. Work could then be reevaluated as the project moved along, and proper adjustments could be made to ensure that

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[59] "Niles Michigan 'Big Brown Take Down' Revitalization Project Running on Schedule On Day 30," *Transitions*, Volume 1, Issue 1, June-July 2003 (City of Niles, accessed 28 August 2004); available from http://www.ci.niles.mi.us/BusinessFrame.htm; Internet, 1-2.

work stayed within cost and time limitations. The removal portion of the project was given a $450,000 budget and work commenced on 16 June 2003.

The first stage of the project involved removing the aluminum façades from seventeen buildings along two blocks of Main Street. Mark 1 Restoration of Howell, Michigan won the bid to complete the project. The construction teams put up scaffolding in front of one building at a time and proceeded to remove the aluminum panels. It took only one day to remove the panels from one storefront. The rest of the work involved replacing windows and windowsills as well as completing paint and trim work. The entire project came in within time and budget limits. Community Development Director, Juan Ganum, noted that everyone expressed surprise that the buildings were in excellent shape beneath the aluminum. The façades had actually performed as a protective barrier from the weather. The brick on the covered structures was in far better condition than brick on surrounding buildings that had not been covered with aluminum. The biggest disappointment in the project turned out to be the loss of many architectural details due to the initial leveling of building fronts at the point of installation. It was clear in removing the aluminum that the construction crew who carried out the installation work had no regard for the ornamented buildings along Main Street. There were countless carved limestone and terra cotta details on the buildings that were destroyed and discarded as a part of the modernization.[60]

After removing the façades, Niles is hoping to reinvest in their historic downtown area and once again make it the town center. In addition to removing the aluminum façades, Niles has launched several other community improvement projects meant to invigorate pride in their architectural heritage and community spirit. Following the Big Brown Take Down, Niles plans to embark on a streetscape improvement for Main Street. In addition, they are constructing a

[60] Ganum, personal interview.

new criminal justice facility, firehouse, and skateboard park. The city is also expanding the Berrien County Courthouse and improving their municipal parks.

Figure 9: Niles Main Street, before and after, photos courtesy of Lisa Croteau.

There is a supply and demand equation that works in real estate, and those involved in the revitalization of downtown Niles are hoping to increase the demand for property along Main Street.[61] Ideally this would mean increased traffic and healthy business downtown. The cooperation among downtown business owners and Niles city officials has so far been successful in helping the city with its revitalization goals. In addition to raising the property values by increasing business in downtown, this project also involves an effort to increase residential density in downtown Niles. The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) gave Niles a $250,000 grant to help property owners maximize profits from their buildings,

[61] "Niles, Michigan Downtown Revitalization and Other Major Projects Strengthen Local Economy," *Transitions*, Volume 1, Issue 3, September/October 2003 (City of Niles, accessed 28 August 2004); available from http://www.ci.niles.mi.us/BusinessFrame.htm; Internet, 1-3.

increase housing options in Niles, and put more "feet on the street" in downtown (another move that will help increase traffic for downtown businesses).[62]

The city of Niles is almost entirely built out at this point, so in order to support new residents they have to be creative with housing options. Less than 5% of residential land in Niles is available for development, and the need has not arisen for construction of new housing stock.[63] Yet, in 2002 when the aluminum façades were removed, nearly every building on Main Street Niles was only occupied on the first floor for business. Most of the buildings are three stories tall, and the upper floors of these buildings were initially built as additional offices or apartment space. Long-time Niles resident Gloria Cooper remembers when Dr. P.I. Lawson, Foot Specialist, was on the upper floor of the building at 201 East Main Street. She recalls: "it occurred to me that back in those days, we didn't hesitate to hike long flights of stairs even to visit the foot doctor."[64] Thus, in an effort to add more depth to the revitalization project, and to efficiently add more housing stock to the community, Niles took on the job of rehabilitating these neglected upper floors and created apartments.

The initial round of creating apartments included ten units in two buildings. The grant given by MSHDA allows $25,000 per unit, provided that the building owner will pay for one fourth of the work done. For example, the MSHDA grant is paying for $125,000 of work done at the Van Riper building on the three hundred block of Main Street. The entire project cost is $170,000 for the construction of five separate units. Since the owner is paying for at least one

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[62] Ganum, Juan, "Ahead Of The Curb," *Transitions*, Volume 1, Issue 3, September/October 2003 (City of Niles, accessed 28 August 2004); available from http://www.ci.niles.mi.us/BusinessFrame.ht; Internet, 2.
[63] *Niles, Michigan: A Community Master Plan*, 28.
[64] Cooper, Gloria, "Historically Speaking: 201 East Main Street…The Busiest Corner in Town," *Transitions*, Volume 1, Issue 3, September/October 2003 (City of Niles, accessed 28 August 2004); available from http://www.ci.niles.mi.us/BusinessFrame.htm; Internet, 3.

fourth of the work, she will get assistance from the grant. The grant will pay no more than $25,000 per unit, so any luxury amenities that extend beyond that price will be the responsibility of the owner. There is space for roughly thirty-six new apartments along Main Street. If all of this space can be utilized for residential purposes it should succeed in substantially altering the property values, as well as the amount of traffic downtown.[65]

The revitalization project in Niles is ongoing, but the immediate results have been overwhelmingly positive. The activity downtown has generated a great deal of interest both from Niles' citizens and residents from surrounding communities. The Riverfront Café is one of the premier new businesses in downtown Niles. They have experienced good crowds and steady business since opening in September 2003. Other businesses are continuing to occupy the storefronts along Main Street and the aesthetic has begun to return to its pre-aluminum look. The groups involved in Niles improvement project have tried to cover all elements of completing a successful downtown revitalization. They have been patient, and invested in quality workmanship. They have also made a conscious effort to continually invest in the local economy outside of downtown businesses throughout the project. The carefully planned project has moved quickly and seems to be sending Niles on a track toward growth and prosperity. However, the real test of their success will be waiting to see if the immediate results will be lasting.

Guymon, Oklahoma

Guymon, Oklahoma sits in the middle of "No Man's Land," officially known as the Oklahoma Panhandle. The term "No Man's Land" was coined in the 1800's when the western territories one-by-one became states. The western boundary of the panhandle was determined by

[65] Ganum, "Ahead Of The Curb," 2.

the boundaries of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. When Texas decided to become a state they gave up their land north of the 36°30' parallel, because the Missouri Compromise forbade slave states to extend north of that mark. Kansas only extended as far south as the 37th parallel, leaving a strip of land just thirty four miles wide. This strip of land touched the states of Colorado, New Mexico, Kansas, and Texas, but was claimed by no one. To the east, its neighbor was the Indian Territory.[66] Thus, No Man's Land existed as unclaimed territory with no laws controlling it.

The panhandle was originally designated as one county within the Oklahoma Territory. Originally called Seventh County, it was renamed Beaver County on 08 August 1890. Beaver County was divided into Beaver, Texas, and Cimarron counties when Oklahoma became a state in 1907.[67] The city of Guymon sits in Texas County, Oklahoma. It was founded shortly before statehood was achieved. The original plan for the town site was filed with the Beaver County deed registry on 10 November 1904. The plan called for a grid pattern of seven by seven blocks with the railroad cutting off the grid in the southeast corner. The east to west running streets are numbered First through Seventh and the north to south streets were given community related names. Guymon's original town plan is still intact in the center of town. The grid expanded as the town grew, but the oldest part of Guymon is still the chosen area for community services. Main Street remains the center of business downtown and the blocks immediately east and west also serve primarily business and government related functions. The remainder of the original town grid is residential, most of which is concentrated on the three west blocks. Residential

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[66] *Guymon Comprehensive Plan*, (Oklahoma Economic Development Association: Beaver, OK. 1991), 7.
[67] Ibid., 9.

growth has also extended beyond this grid in all directions, with most of the density to the north and west.[68]

Figure 10: Guymon, Oklahoma, photo courtesy of Jay Stanfield.

The original settlers in Guymon were pioneers on the western frontier, who were mostly involved in the cattle industry. Guymon made up only 9% of the Texas County population in 1910. In 1940, however, it was 23% of the population. The population of Texas County dropped from 14,100 in 1930, to just 9,896 in 1950.[69] The depression and Dust Bowl droughts had a profound effect on those living on farms in western Oklahoma. By 1950 the population of the county had risen again to 14,235, however, the population of Guymon more than doubled in that decade as well. While life on the farm was still popular in the panhandle, it was apparent

[68] *City of Guymon, OK.*, Map (Guymon Economic Development Commission: Beaver, OK, 1991).
[69] United States Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth census of the United States taken in the year 1910. Vol. 3. Population 1910: Reports by states, with statistics for counties, cities and other civil divisions. Nebraska - Wyoming, Alaska, Hawaii, and Porto [sic] Rico* (Washington: GPO, 1913, accessed 05 October 2004); available from http://www.lib.utulsa.edu/govdocs/census/1910/tables/vol3/chapter01/chapter01b.htm; Internet, 434.

that life in the panhandle was becoming a more even combination of city and farm life and an increasing number of people were dependant upon the amenities Guymon had to offer.[70]

Figure 11: Guymon During the Dust Bowl,
photo courtesy of Jay Stanfield.

By all accounts, life in Guymon was good in the mid-twentieth century. The population was steadily growing and the agriculture industry stabilized after the tumultuous years of the Dust Bowl droughts. Guymon prospered as a small town with an economy based in retail and agriculture. Other communities in Texas County were small and lacked any commercial areas of consequence, so it is fair to say that Guymon supplied all farms and communities within a reasonable distance. Bob Johnson, Guymon City Council Member for Ward 3, managed the Oliver's Shoes store on Main Street in Guymon during the 1960s. Mr. Johnson remembers business on Main Street during that decade as busy and healthy.[71] An article

[70] *Guymon Comprehensive Plan*, 20.
[71] Johnson, Bob, Personal interview by the author, Guymon, OK., 28 September 2004.

in the February 1971 issue of *Glass Digest*, suggests that there were "several vacancies" in the central business district, but maintains that there was plenty of activity downtown.[72]

While activity on Guymon's Main Street was healthy in the 1960s, the town anticipated the problems plaguing other small towns across America and felt the pressures of development. Mr. Johnson said they could see the benefits of shopping centers, and saw them going up in area communities like Norman and Moore, Oklahoma. He oversaw several Oliver's Shoes stores in other Oklahoma towns and was familiar with current trends in development. He and fellow downtown business operators did not want that kind of development to come to Guymon, so they began looking into measures of prevention. Oliver's Shoes was next door to the C.R. Anthony Company on the west side of the Main Street block between Fifth and Sixth Streets. Charles Wilson was the manager of C.R. Anthony Co., and along with Johnson sought ways to modernize their downtown.[73]

In 1967 the Huggins, Thompson, Ball and Associates group of Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Washington D.C. compiled a report for a growth plan for the city. The report called for improvements in the central business district. According to the aforementioned article in *Glass Digest*:

> At the time, the downtown area was a prime example of the creeping degeneration typical of the central area in many small cities over the nation. The irregular, uncoordinated hodgepodge of storefronts, together with their garish, outdated signs hanging at varying levels dominated the scene and gave the area a look of decadence and neglect.[74]

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[72] "Guymon is Getting Better Every Day," *Glass Digest* (15 February 1971), 52.
[73] Johnson.
[74] "Guymon is Getting Better Every Day," 52.

While business was not yet waning in Guymon, there was concern that the appearance of downtown would soon give developers a reason to build outside of downtown.

Bob Johnson agreed with the opinion advanced by *Glass Digest*. Mr. Johnson's opinion of Main Street in 1968 was that it looked "cluttered." He cited the lack of uniformity as the largest problem. All of the stores on Main Street had their own canvas roll out awnings. The awnings varied in color, size, and state of repair. Above all of that, there were no controls to guarantee that all of the awnings would be out for use, meaning that customers walking down the street would experience inconsistencies in the environment in front of each individual store. The clutter on Main Street also included large signs on each storefront. There were no regulations governing the size, shape, or orientation of the signs. This gave Main Street a wide variety of signage along the street, with few similarities among them. Mr. Johnson also noted that Main Street in Guymon is also State Highway 54, making for a high volume of vehicular traffic through downtown who were not necessarily interested in the business district. This traffic made shopping more difficult because pedestrians had to compete with cars to visit the shops on both sides of the street.[75]

When asked why he wanted to change things in downtown Guymon, Bob Johnson's first response was "customer comfort." He wanted to appeal to the same things that shopping centers were striving for. In order to be satisfied, customers should be able to easily identify the stores they want to shop in, they want to be protected from environmental elements, and move about freely without having to fight vehicular traffic. The project that Bob Johnson and Charles Wilson proposed bore all of these things in mind and remained centered on the idea of keeping the customer happy. They visited other communities and looked at different solutions before

[75] Johnson.

arriving at the conclusion to use aluminum façades. Aluminum seemed like the best choice because of its ease of installation, price, and durability.[76]

Their approach to customer comfort was first to unify the storefronts along the two busiest blocks of Main Street. This involved covering the existing brick structures with enamel-baked aluminum panels. In addition, they required that all signs be flat and lie flush with the aluminum panels and proposed putting up an aluminum canopy to replace the canvas awnings. Finally, they replaced the sidewalks in front of the stores so they were flat. As part of the sidewalk improvement they widened and upgraded the gutter along the street, and added an extra step to lessen the distance between street level and sidewalk level. These relatively simple projects dramatically altered the experience of customers on Guymon's Main Street. The other part of their proposal included rerouting the highway so that it no longer ran down Main Street. Bob Johnson was in favor of possibly installing a larger canopy that would cover the street as well as the sidewalks. This would enclose Main Street, much like a mall, but would still allow for parking directly in front of the stores and let traffic move through at a lower speed.

Approval and initiation of this project was long and difficult. Bob Johnson, in cooperation with the Retail Trade Committee and Chamber of Commerce set out to get approval from all involved parties. They decided to start small with just one block of Main Street. The strip including Oliver's Shoes and C.R. Anthony Co. was chosen as the first block of the project. The project required agreement of every storeowner in order to be fully realized. This meant that the storeowners not only had to agree to the alterations to their storefront and new requirements for their signage, they also had to pay for all of the work. They held group meetings to determine the wants and needs of all storeowners on the block. Mr. Johnson describes these

[76] Ibid.

meetings as a disaster where very little was accomplished. His solution was to individually speak to each storeowner and compile a list of all of their concerns. His compiled notes became the basis of the next round of proposals. This cycle of negotiations went on until finally an agreement was reached.[77]

The final agreement included all of the original suggestions with the exception of installing a canopy over the street and rerouting the highway. The Oklahoma Department of Transportation would not agree to either of those suggestions, therefore Main Street still plays the role of a state highway and central business district artery. All owners agreed to install aluminum panels, rework the sidewalks, put up new signs, and take down their awnings in favor of new aluminum awnings. The storeowners sent out a request for bids and settled upon the local company Lumber Mart to do the installation.[78] Mr. Johnson stated that no materials or services would be selected for the project if they were not supporting local businesses.[79]

Figure 12: Guymon Streetscape with Aluminum, photo by the author.

[77] Ibid.
[78] "Guymon is Getting Better Every Day," 53.
[79] Johnson.

Glass Digest refers to the modernization as "Project Upgrade." Project Upgrade was underway as soon as all of the storeowners in the first block agreed to the contracts. Each storeowner had to sign a separate contract with Lumber Mart. Lumber Mart owner Ken Rothschopf was in charge of carrying out the project for this block. Lumber Mart hired Fashions Incorporated from Kansas City to complete the project design. A representative from the company came to Guymon and sketched the project plans. The storeowners were then allowed to select the color and style of the panels that would be put on their building. Each store received an estimate for the work on their storefront and paid for the project individually.[80] The project cost was $47.00 per linear foot. The installation of panels and the awning made up $36.00 of the cost, and the sidewalk replacement was an additional $11.00.[81] The average storefront is twenty-five feet wide, so the approximate cost to a storeowner totaled $1,175.00. That price did not include the cost of a new sign, which the storeowner had to account for as well.

After the first block was completed, the reaction from the community was positive leading Johnson to continue negotiations for the remaining blocks. The same agreement was met with each block of storeowners.[82] Johnson followed the same method of negotiations. The street was divided into continuous linear sections and the 400 and 500 blocks of Main Street on both the east and west sides were eventually completed. The only difference with the remainder of the project was that another local company won the bidding. Jerry Guthrie's Guymon Glass Company won the remaining three blocks, however the price and project handling were nearly

[80] Rothschopf, Ken, Personal interview by the author, Guymon, OK., 28 September 2004.
[81] "Guymon is Getting Better Every Day" 53.
[82] Johnson.

identical. Mr. Guthrie explained that the installation process was both simple and quick. It only took three men a total of three days to complete an entire storefront.[83]

The installation of aluminum façades is not a labor-intensive project. It does not involve intrusion into the structure of the building. Both Lumber Mart and Guymon Glass used the same methods of installation. First the new awnings were installed. They were sturdy enough to support the weight of a man, so their presence made installing the aluminum above much simpler. The building owners were responsible for preparing their buildings for installation. This involved removing any remaining signage from the building front and providing a flat surface for the façade to be placed over. Lumber Mart and Guymon Glass affixed horizontal strips to the building front at regular intervals. These strips were then used to bolt the aluminum panels to the building. The panels were interlocking to help ensure a stronger seal. The biggest concern when installing the panels in Oklahoma was the impact of the wind. Guymon sees wind speeds of ninety miles per hour, and the aluminum panels needed to be able to withstand that force.[84] The awning was also designed for weathering. It can withstand a force of forty pounds per square foot of wind or snow. In addition, the awning was built with an internal gutter system. The posts supporting the canopy are also downspouts with drainage holes at the base.[85]

The aluminum itself is a product called Navaco supplied by the Homet Company.[86] Navaco is designed as a façade system. Meaning it is meant to be attached to a previously constructed surface and handle weathering. The Navaco panels are baked enamel aluminum,[87] which came in about twelve different colors. They are a single layer of aluminum molded in

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[83] Guthrie, Jerry, personal interview by the author, Guymon, OK., 28 September 2004.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Rothschopf.
[86] Guthrie, Jerry.
[87] "Guymon is Getting Better Every Day," 53.

individual sheets. This is consistent with most other brands advertising aluminum façade materials in the 1960s. The baked enamel coating was resistant to weathering and deterioration, and the aluminum itself was resistant to corrosion, making it an ideal material for building exteriors.

Figure 13: Aluminum Downspout, photo by the author.

Shortly after the installation, community response was very positive. Harold Martin, owner of a store called The Vogue, was quoted by *Glass Digest* as saying "I was originally against the project because I was afraid that it might make my store look exactly like every other shop in town. But, now that it is completed, I'm delighted." He went on to say that there had been increased traffic and that shoppers stopped and looked in the windows longer because they were protected from the weather beneath the new awning. [88] Other reports of increased traffic came from downtown storeowners, as well as comments that the aluminum was a good insulator. Storeowners reported that the aluminum façades helped them save on heating and air

[88] Ibid.

conditioning costs because the extra layer acted as insulation for their building. In addition, the new awning helped to block the sun from damaging items displayed in the front windows. For business owners in downtown Guymon, the aluminum façades were not only generating more interest in downtown, they were also helping business to operate more efficiently.

Figure 14: Under the Awning,
photo by the author.

The aluminum façades on the buildings in downtown Guymon were popular as soon as they were installed. Jerry Guthrie was contracted to put up more aluminum façades along Main Street beyond the scope of the Project Update perimeters. He also reports having gotten calls from drivers along Highway 54 who wanted to know more about the façades, and how they could get them on their buildings at home.

Figure 15: Guymon Streetscape, photo by the author.

In Guymon, downtown existed as the primary shopping destination for citizens until the late 1980s. When asked what has been the largest threat to downtown Guymon in the past fifty years, both Ken Rothschopf and Jerry Guthrie answered that the arrival of Wal-Mart destroyed local business. Wal-Mart came to Guymon in 1987 and was the first rival to local business. In addition to Wal-Mart's arrival, Swift's Packing Plant and Adam's Hardfacing closed at about the same time, leaving near 1200 people unemployed.[89] These numbers were significant in a community of just 8,492 people. By 1990, the population had decreased to only 7,803, largely because of the loss of jobs.[90] The higher unemployment rate combined with the arrival of low prices available at Wal-Mart meant that downtown businesses were going to have to begin fighting an uphill battle. Downtown business owners were allowed to remove their aluminum façades at any time following the completion of the project. However, the façades have largely remained intact through the last thirty-five years. Of the original two full blocks that underwent

[89] Guthrie, Jerry.
[90] *Guymon Comprehensive Plan*, 20.

Project Upgrade, most of the visual continuity achieved from the aluminum façades still has an impact.

While Guymon has managed to maintain some life along Main Street, the corridor has lost the draw that it once had. Recently there have been initiatives in Guymon to develop a revitalization project. "Guymon On The Move" is the name of the most recent effort to rally community spirit. Guymon On The Move is in its beginning stages, but appears to be taking hold and may become a successful project within the near future. Sara Hitch, Guymon's Community Development Specialist, explains that the project was initially led by the Oklahoma Community Institute, hired by the city, to facilitate meetings with all interested citizens to discuss issues that they felt were important. They organized the resident's ideas into separate categories, and citizens were allowed to join committees based on their major interests. Topics of discontent among Guymon citizens range from removing junk cars from yards to suggestions of removing the aluminum façades on Main Street's buildings. There are now ten committees that developed from Guymon on the Move.[91] The Economic Development and Beautification committees are currently applying Guymon to the National Trust's Main Street program, to encourage downtown revitalization in the city.[92] The future of Guymon's downtown is in the hands of the community and possibly the Main Street program to determine the best method of expressing the city's history and providing services to residents. Preserving the aluminum façades should be a serious consideration for Guymon when they are weighing their options.

The aluminum in Guymon, is in remarkably good condition and the streetscape maintains the uniform look that the project originally intended. Aluminum resists corrosion, so the only real damage to the remaining façades is a dull patina that has accumulated over the years due to

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[91] Hitch, Sara, "RE: Guymon," Email to the author, 11 November 2004.
[92] Morgan, Sharon, Personal interview by the author, Guymon, OK., 28 September 2004.

dirt and air pollution. Restoring these façades is a simple process that mostly involves cleaning. In most cases a mild or moderate detergent will effectively remove the build-up of residue on aluminum. After the surface has been thoroughly cleaned, the finish can be enhanced and maintained by applying a wax or varnish.[93] In a town like Guymon with minimal air pollution from automobiles and industry, residual build-up will take much longer to accumulate than in a large city. This process of cleaning and waxing should be done as often as the façades begin to look dull. This allows years between cleaning, so it is a relatively relaxed maintenance schedule.

Guymon has an interesting opportunity to experiment with the idea of trying to revitalize their downtown by incorporating the existing secondary façades. While preservation in the United States does not currently advocate this strategy as an effective method of revitalization, there looms the fact that aluminum façades in Guymon had nothing to do with the disappearance of downtown businesses. Downtown Guymon historically developed as a shopping destination for Guymon residents, nearby farmers, and residents of smaller surrounding communities. Guymon may be better off focusing on what their downtown does best, which is cater to shoppers. Project Upgrade project bore that idea in mind and experienced failure due to circumstances they could not control. However, a second effort may prove that their ideas were valid from the beginning. For Guymon, it is irrelevant to try and develop Main Street for any other purpose. Tourism, for example, could never be a viable industry in the city. They have never been dependant on tourism dollars of any kind, nor is that something they can feasibly seek out as a reasonable source of income. In the past Guymon generated sizeable local income from the businesses along Main Street. In the coming years they should work on developing it

[93] Jester, 51.

for shopping convenience rather focusing on changing their look to adhere to recent trends. The buildings beneath the aluminum façades say less about the city than the aluminum façades.

General Observations

The previous case studies followed two communities whose appearance and character of downtown was altered by community leaders in an effort to improve business along their respective Main Streets. While this effort seemed like the best decision at the time, the last three decades have proven that cosmetic changes were not enough to sustain business along Main Street in either location. However, the last three decades also show that many different factors within the community contributed to the loss of business downtown and aluminum façades are not the only cause. Interestingly, today a similar effort to change the aesthetic has been completed in Niles and proposed in Guymon. It is fascinating to wonder if these efforts at restoration and rehabilitation will yield permanent success for these communities, or, if like the efforts of the previous generation, these more recent attempts at revitalization will prove to be simply a fashion change that will not outlast another thirty years.

The different methods that each town employed in installing their aluminum façades has probably affected their present day sentiments toward it. There is very little information about the installation of the aluminum façades in Niles. Lisa Croteau, the DDA Executive Director, conducted extensive research into the history of the original façades before the Big Brown Take Down began. The DDA wanted to have some idea of what to expect beneath the aluminum façades, but could not find any information about how the aluminum was installed, exactly why it was decided, or who performed the installation. She managed only to find indications that the Chamber of Commerce made the decision without community input. Croteau searched every issue of the local paper spanning the years she suspected the installation occurred, but only found

pictures indicating that construction had been done between 1972-73. Lisa believes that the decision was made out of necessity because business owners were struggling to maintain their buildings, and the aluminum would be a low maintenance alternative that would also update the look of their stores and increase traffic in the area.[94]

The installation process in Guymon was a far different situation. Community involvement and cooperation was not only important, it was also necessary in getting the project completed. Community meetings were held over a period of several years, and the project required 100 percent cooperation and funding from business owners. The project in Guymon was truly an example of business owners collectively making an effort to improve their town the way they felt was best. Business owners did not hesitate about the decision when the contracts were signed, and the city was proud of the project when it was completed. There were also several newspaper articles citing the modernization of downtown and celebrating business re-openings and grand openings. *Glass Digest* magazine even published an article on the city, explaining the impressive cooperation and effort put into improving downtown Guymon.

These different approaches to aluminum installation projects foreshadowed the reactions that the community has had to them in subsequent years. Niles removed their façades without a second thought and launched into an overall community revitalization program. Once funding for the project was secured, there was no controversy about removing the façades, and bids immediately went out for the project. The citizens of Niles had no attachment to the appearance of their downtown, and it is probably because it was a decision made without their involvement. While the idea of removing the façades in Guymon has been suggested, there are many people who like the way they look and enjoy the protective covering from the awning. Unlike the

[94] Croteau.

citizens of Niles, Guymon residents were involved in the decision to put up the façades, which are a point of pride for them. It was a complex effort made by former community leaders and business owners that is still solidly in place.

Thousands of communities across the United States were affected by the trend to install aluminum façades on their Main Street building fronts in the middle of the twentieth century. Today, these communities are questioning whether those façades are holding them back from healthy business development. Most of this questioning stems from different shopping options outside of downtown leading to an overall neglect of downtown storefronts. The experiences of Niles, Michigan and Guymon, Oklahoma, suggest that aluminum façades are less likely the cause of such neglect, but more likely a by-product of it. Both Niles and Guymon experienced pressure from outside sources, which led to their loss in downtown business. Both had the unfortunate experience of losing local industry, which in turn hurt their economies, and each faced pressure from new shopping developments in surrounding communities.

There are two profiles defined by these case study towns. Any city that fits the Niles profile ought to consider removing their aluminum façades and embarking on a large revitalization project. Niles has the proximity to large metropolitan areas that give it the potential to pull in heritage tourism dollars as well as new residents of varying incomes who will be able to contribute to the further development of the city. The Niles profile marks a city that has potential to improve from within, as well as make progress through increased traffic from outsiders. Niles has made substantial changes in the last few years simply by making solid efforts at improving the city by reinvestment. Niles also has a remarkable stock of architecturally interesting buildings with the city. The original storefronts in downtown Niles are

attractive, and blend with the surrounding architecture, exposing them helps to encourage a cohesive look within the historic center of town.

The Guymon profile is different. While Niles has neighbors in the area that will likely patronize new businesses and help stimulate their economy, Guymon depends more on its current residents and their incomes. The lack of shopping selections in Guymon mean that citizens have to go elsewhere to find the things they need. If more options were available in the city, then they could benefit from the revenue dollars generated by those purchases. Communities that will adhere to the Guymon model are those that need to remain stable, and want the money they spend to cycle through their community rather than flowing out to larger companies or shopping destinations in other cities. These communities should focus on finding ways to encourage local citizens to occupy the Main Street storefronts with businesses that both provide for the community and offer different options for consumers.

This profile is largely meant to be practical. The aluminum façades along Guymon's Main Street offer several benefits to shoppers. Those advantages would quickly be lost if the awnings and façades were removed. The arguments for removing the façades are not compelling when put into context. The biggest argument is beautification, which looks at contemporary taste and would alter the façades of downtown Guymon to conform to them. The second argument is more legitimate as it pertains to history. Removing the aluminum façades would expose the original brick storefronts and would thus showcase the architectural heritage that early Guymon citizens took care in creating. However, both of these arguments reject the idea that the aluminum façades have any relevance to the city.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF ALUMINUM FAÇADE PRESERVATION

Treatment of Historic Buildings

In recent years there has been a backlash against aluminum façades and subsequently many examples have been lost. Removing aluminum façades is often done under the veil of historic preservation. Meaning that destruction of the aluminum façades becomes a means of restoring the traditional appearance of Main Street. However, historic preservation is a lenient field that does not require a structure to exist in its original built form to have integrity.

Historic preservation in the United States is structured to allow properties to achieve historic value in a number of ways. The overriding requirement is that they demonstrate a level of significance. This idea was born out of the earliest historic preservation debates. In the nineteenth century John Ruskin and Eugene Emmanuel Viollet-le-duc had fierce disagreements over the preservation of Gothic cathedrals. Viollet-le-duc practiced a more strict method of restoration. Amidst great controversy, he restored many French cathedrals to their original built form. He removed later additions without sentiment and suggested that one should "put oneself in the place of the original architect and try to imagine what he would do if he returned to earth."[95] John Ruskin, however, offered the conflicting viewpoint that it is the nature of buildings to change over time and while alterations may create "another spirit…given by another time" he maintains "the spirit of the dead cannot be summoned up, and commanded to direct

[95] Price, Nicholas Stanley, ed., *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage* (United States: Science Press, 1996), 318.

other hands, and other thoughts.[96] Fortunately, current preservation policy allows for adoption of both policies, and provides for it to change on an individual case basis, allowing for acceptance of structures with aluminum façades so long as they are arguably significant to the history of the building or community.

An important tool in determining proper treatment for historic structures is the United States *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation*.[97] The standards are issued in four different categories. There are standards for preservation, restoration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction. These are lists of rules to follow when performing work on an historic structure to ensure that the work is sensitive. Proper treatment to historic structures helps to ensure that the integrity will remain intact. In discussing aluminum façades it is the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* (Appendix A) that are most appropriate. In preservation, rehabilitation is essentially the use of an historic structure for something other than its original purpose. While most of the buildings along America's Main Streets have historically been shops, the type and needs of each building change periodically, and the interiors need to be altered as a result. These extensive changes qualify the buildings to fall under rehabilitation rather than the other recognized categories.

Guymon is a good example of a community with an extensive collection of aluminum façades that pose significance to the community's history and have a case for preservation. Their remaining aluminum façades are unique to the community. Many cities have aluminum façades that were installed during the same era, but few have a fully intact awning and nearly all of the façades still in place. The *Standards* can be interpreted a number of ways. *Standard for*

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[96] Ibid., 322.
[97] United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1979).

Rehabilitation number four, recommends that changes to a property that have acquired their own significance should be retained and preserved.[98] Since their installation, there have been no serious efforts to argue historic significance for aluminum façades, so the notion that these façades in downtown Guymon may have value is almost unheard of.

The process of a material, style, or technique gaining any sort of respect in the design world varies. Some things gain immediate notoriety, while others must wait decades and become nearly extinct before anyone notices their value. Aluminum has not yet gained any value as a façade material however; it has predecessors that experienced a similar cycle. Carrara glass is one of these materials. Rising production costs and changing tastes caused it to disappear toward the middle of the twentieth century. Yet, in its short life it managed to make a mark all across the United States. Structural pigmented glass is no longer manufactured in the United States, so preservation of those façades can be difficult. Many were lost throughout the century because the style became obsolete and the materials were too difficult to obtain for repairs or replacement. The National Park Service issued a Preservation Brief advocating the preservation of Carrara glass façades because the aesthetic has gained historic importance over the last eighty years.

The parallels between Carrara glass and aluminum as secondary façade materials are striking. Each rose to popularity as a result of a need to update the look of downtown buildings to a more contemporary aesthetic. They both experienced neglect from society, which allowed countless examples to be lost. Carrara glass is more mature in its fight for survival and historic importance. The remaining examples are much safer now that the National Park Service has chosen to recognize its significance. Aluminum façades still have an uphill battle to fight for

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[98] United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *The Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. Rev. Ed.,* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1992).

preservation, but there is no time better than the present to begin to understand the importance this material holds.

In his book *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice*, Norman Tyler gives his commentary on each of the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*. His explanation for number four (requesting that changes to a property with historic value should be preserved) uses Carrara glass. Tyler states:

> As an example, a black Carrara glass front was put on an 1880s Italianate commercial building when it was converted to a jewelry store in the 1930s. This glass front may have developed historic significance of its own; hence, the building may be most appropriately restored as a 1930s artifact, leaving the glass in place.[99]

While aluminum has not yet gained the same stature as Carrara glass, there is no reason to assume that it will not in the next few years. According to these very fundamental guidelines of historic preservation, aluminum closely follows the model of Carrara glass, and in theory should one day share the same regard.

While the *Standards for Rehabilitation* can be interpreted to build a case for preserving aluminum façades in Guymon, they can be used to justify their removal in Niles. The historic buildings along Main Street in Niles date back to 1860. The buildings were originally ornate high style examples of Romanesque and Italianate styles. The aluminum façades in downtown Niles were less important than the original storefronts because they said little about the community. The original storefronts in Guymon are simplistic to begin with, so the modernization in their town is merely a transition from one basic finish to another. However, the structures in Niles went from an ornate style to a strict conservative image. In Guymon, Main

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[99] Tyler, Norman, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practic*e, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 147-48.

Street is important as a regional commercial center that was designed to accommodate shoppers and little else. However, the buildings in downtown Niles were three stories tall and had more diverse usage than the buildings in Guymon. The aluminum façades in Niles served to reduce the functions of their buildings to a single purpose, thus making them less relevant to the Niles residents.

Standard for Rehabilitation number five states: "distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved." The removal of aluminum façades in Niles was necessary for the preservation of distinctive features and examples of craftsmanship on their Main Street buildings. However, during the Big Brown Take Down the revitalization committee discovered extensive damage inflicted on the original building details, thus compromising the integrity of the original building design. Instead of restoring architectural features, the city had to find other ways of enhancing the appearance of the buildings when the aluminum was gone. They replaced windowsills where it was both possible and necessary, but have yet to approach the problem of the missing decorative details. In addition to windowsill replacement, the project included paint and sign replacement. This initial work helped to re-expose part of the architectural heritage of Niles and restored public interest to that area of town. However, Niles needs to ensure that their work on downtown buildings from this point forward will adhere to remaining preservation standards so that they are accurately representing the history of their community.

Standard number two requires that the "historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive material or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided."[100] Now that removal of the façades

[100] *The Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. Rev. Ed.*

has taken place, the buildings can regain historic status. *Standard* number six requires that deteriorated features be repaired and not replaced; unless the degree of loss is great enough that repair is impossible.[101] In the case of the structures in downtown Niles, many of the building features have vanished entirely, meaning that replacement is the necessary course of action.

The city and building owners have a philosophical choice to make on this issue. They could choose to try and accurately regain the historic integrity of the building façade by replacing the missing features, or they could choose to leave the lack of features as a detail in and of itself. *Standard for Rehabilitation* number four states: "Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved."[102] As these alterations to the building front are approaching fifty years in age, and mark an important change for the city of Niles, there is no reason they cannot be interpreted as a property change with some historic significance.

Architecture is more than aesthetics. It is also an informational guide into the past. Preservation standards in the United States have been developed to ensure that buildings undergoing treatment continue to accurately represent the history of the structure, which generally parallels the history of the community in which it is located. For example, the missing details on the buildings in downtown Niles tell a story about the history of the community. Their very absence is expressive of a period in the buildings' life in which the upper floors were considered obsolete and ignored. Yet, in the case of Guymon the presence of aluminum façades can be considered a more compelling expression of the city's history. Accurate portrayal of history is probably the most important part of a revitalization project, and preservation guidelines

[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.

in the United States are written loosely enough to allow each community to define their heritage according to individual interests.

International preservation policies reflect this idea as well. The *Nara Document on Authenticity* and *Burra Charter* are two respected preservation publications advancing the opinion that resources of any kind can be significant to a certain place or people. The *Nara Document* was drafted in 1994 at the Nara Conference on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention. It involved cooperation of several international organizations concerned with preservation and conservation. The Document states: "judgments about values attributed to cultural properties…differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgments of values and authenticity within fixed criteria."[103] The *Burra Charter* was originally drafted in 1979 and has undergone several revisions throughout the years (most recently in 1999). It is a reference document for those in charge of managing places of cultural significance. The *Burra Charter* also encourages examining historic resources within their context in order to determine significance. Article 6 of the *Burra Charter* is titled "The Burra Charter Process." It says, "The policy for managing a place must be based on understanding of its cultural significance." The *Charter* continues, in Article 15, to say, "emphasizing or interpreting one period or aspect at the expense of another can only be justified when what is left out, removed or diminished is of slight cultural significance and that which is emphasized or interpreted is of much greater cultural significance."[104]

This international perspective on historic preservation policies helps to emphasize the point that significance can be assigned to nearly anything, so long as it is important to the people

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[103] International Council on Monuments and Sites, *Nara Document on Authenticity* (Nara, Japan, 1994).
[104] International Council on Monuments and Sites, *Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance* (Sydney, Australia, 2001).

in the community, region, country, or even the world. A case can be made for the cultural significance of aluminum façades, as long as it is an important representation of the community's history that citizens can continue to relate to.

The National Register of Historic Places

A critical step in establishing aluminum façades as a legitimate historic building material is to build an argument for recognizing them within existing preservation infrastructure. In the United States, the National Register of Historic Places was established in 1966 as part of the National Historic Preservation Act.[105] The National Register recognizes places of historic significance. Its criteria and guidelines are recognized as the authority on determining those properties in America. The National Register lists many different types of resources as historically significant, but they must be accepted through an application process conducted by the state in which they are located. In order to successfully nominate a resource for the National Register of Historic Places, the resource must meet established criteria. There are four criteria for consideration, and a resource may qualify for one or more of them.

Aluminum façades can be eligible for National Register nomination under Criterion A or C.[106] Criterion A requires that a property be associated with events that have contributed to the broad patterns of history. Criterion C is more complicated. It confronts the architectural integrity of a property. There are several parts making up this criterion, but for the purposes of aluminum façades, it requires that the property display distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction. Criterion C also provides for properties that may represent a

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[105] National Historic Preservation Act, Pub. L. 89-665, 80 Stat. 915 (15 October 1966).
[106] United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 2002, accessed 28 November 2004);
available from http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/; Internet.

"significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction." The National Register generally requires that properties are fifty years old before they are eligible. However, the program allows exceptions to this rule if the property is of "exceptional importance."[107]

The National Park Service has issued several texts meant to explain National Register nomination and eligibility. These are called National Register Bulletins. In a Bulletin titled *Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Properties That Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years* the National Park Service states that fifty years is "obviously not the only length of time that defines 'historic.'"[108] The bulletin goes on to discuss that the fifty year benchmark was chosen as a reasonable period of time to allow for a "dispassionate" judgment of the value of a resource. This text also explains that the National Register does not define "exceptional" for properties less than fifty years old. That determination is left to the individual State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) around the country, who have the power to determine significance within a smaller context.[109]

Although the National Register will accept properties under fifty years in age, it is unlikely that buildings with aluminum façades will be listed before reaching the age standard. Jim Gabbard, National Register Coordinator for the state of Oklahoma, reiterates that in order for a building to be accepted prior to reaching fifty years in age, it must demonstrate "exceptional importance." For the most part Oklahoma reserves this "exceptional importance" for properties

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[107] Ibid.
[108] United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *National Register Bulletin: Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Properties That Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years,* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1998. rev. ed., accessed 23 November 2004); available from http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb22/; Internet.
[109] Ibid.

with association to significant persons or events. They typically refrain from nominating structures for architectural significance until they are fifty years old and there is proper perspective on them. The aluminum façades in Guymon will not reach that age for another twenty years. Gabbard suggests that in twenty years the best chance for listing these properties would be under Criterion A or C. He also believes that there will be a number of examples of aluminum façades listed on the National Register of Historic Places when they have reached the proper age.[110]

It will vary by state and resource as to how soon aluminum façades will be widely accepted on the National Register. When the façades in Guymon reach an acceptable age for consideration by the Oklahoma SHPO the next important step will be arguing for their significance. The façades in Guymon are important for their expression of changes in commerce along Main Street. This is reflective of a local and national trend and thus exhibits the "broad patterns of our history," as required by the National Register Criterion A.[111] Guymon has historically been an important retail center in the Oklahoma panhandle, and the community has developed because of that industry. The buildings in downtown Guymon were originally built as commercial structures and continue to evolve as such, therefore, it will be important to determine whether the aluminum period is most significant in the lives of the buildings. The National Register is flexible in accepting different arguments of significance, so it is feasible that the community could list their downtown buildings with the aluminum façades intact or they could remove them and construct an entirely different significance argument.

In cities with aluminum façades, like Guymon, it is important for the community to determine the importance of the façades. The Main Street buildings in Niles, Michigan

[110] Gabbard.
[111] Ibid.

experienced aluminum façades in a much more negative way than Guymon did. The city later determined that Main Street's appearance prior to installing the Kawneer façades was much more important to their history. Niles can now build a case to list their damaged downtown buildings while Guymon can list their aluminum-clad storefronts. The National Register can be a valuable tool to support the preservation of historic buildings. It can help property owners receive income tax credits from federal and state governments as well as increase awareness of valuable historic resources. If aluminum façades are to become a recognized historic building material, it is important for examples to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The installation of aluminum façades on Main Street buildings in America left a visible mark of the country's social and economic climate. These façades are indicative of a period when newer meant better, mass-produced architectural products hit the market with force, and shopping trends turned Americans away from their former routines. These factors, combined with new design ideas, succeeded in driving people out of the historic centers of American cities, leaving the lingering businesses to try and sustain themselves with decreasing traffic. One of the most popular solutions in these situations was to complete a modernization project involving a façade update. Modernization is meant to do several things, the overriding effect being increased attention for the building, and consequently the business. *Architectural Forum*[112] mentions that modernizing a building can pull it out of a downward spiral and thus help the business regain lost financial ground. Initial projects to install aluminum adhered to the same ideas that cities are now considering in dealing with the lingering secondary façades. The projects undertaken by the above case studies in 1970 are hauntingly familiar to the ones they have embarked upon in recent years. The basic premise of these projects is modernization, meaning city officials and business owners sought out ways to alter the structures in their historic centers in order to make them more appealing and economically viable.

The most important observation coming from this parallel is that cities now have the luxury of studying the installation projects and assess their successes and failures as a guide in

[112] "Rebuilding America: A Problem in Continuity," 115.

determining a path to take for future development. The period in history marked by the installation of aluminum façades is significant as a part of the recent past. Historic preservation theory suggests that properties should be preserved when they represent cultural significance at some level. This link has not been established for aluminum façades, meaning that the material is currently in danger. In cases where aluminum may have architectural or historic integrity (or both), this material is worthy of preservation and should fall within regular preservation guidelines. However, not all things old have value simply because of their age. This idea sits central in the development of the field of historic preservation. Preservation has developed theory and standards to help determine where there is significance beyond age. In dealing with aluminum façades the two above ideas should be central to the decision-making process in determining whether they should be kept or discarded. In some cases the façades are insignificant, but in other cases they have their own integrity which may have more to offer than the original building front. In determining where these façades have value, communities should consult literature on evaluating significance for historic structures as well as their State Historic Preservation Office to discuss the possible merits of a building.

A simple conclusion for cities or business owners to draw is that the installation of façades was simply a poor idea to begin with. Thus, removing the façades would in theory reverse the negative trends plaguing their downtown since the installation. It is easy to make this decision because removing the façades is a cheap and easy project that does not necessarily require full community involvement. Removal of these façades also has a dramatic scenic effect because they have, in most cases, been in place for a generation and many people do not remember the former look of these towns. The impact that removal has is strong, and there are few, if any, advocates for the material, meaning that there is little controversy with these

projects. It can also be an easy choice because it will not require changes beyond removing the aluminum. If cities come to the conclusion that the aluminum itself was a bad decision, it would mean they did everything else right and have relatively little other improvement work to perform. However, the studies above highlight the fact that aluminum façades were not the sole culprit in causing loss in business traffic downtown. Therefore, removing the façades today in hopes to reverse the trends of the past thirty years is a decision that should only come after these façades can be legitimately targeted as the source of lost business, and as part of a community revitalization project involving more than aesthetic changes to downtown buildings.

In some cases aluminum façades are arguably more significant than the concealed façades beneath them. It is important to recognize this significance to assure that aluminum façades are not all systematically destroyed in preservation efforts over the next twenty years. There is room for aluminum façades in the existing historic preservation framework and it is time to critically consider the integrity of this material. There is, however, more work to be done in determining the most valuable examples of aluminum façades as well as the most rare and endangered.

This thesis focused on the question of how the trend of aluminum façades came about why they may be worthy of preservation in certain instances, and where they fit into the historic preservation infrastructure. However, it has only begun to explore the phenomenon of aluminum façades in the United States. There are many more issues that deserve attention, which fell outside of the perimeters of this project. This is due in large part to the age of the material. Because aluminum façades are generally only thirty to forty years in age, they are not yet old enough to force preservation organizations to consider them as a legitimate historic building material. Over the next decade the question of dealing with aluminum façades will change as the

façades get closer to the fifty year age requirement. New questions will rise, and further research into this subject will be necessary. Following are questions raised throughout this project worth investigating in the future.

Information on aluminum façades is limited. Most of the early aluminum manufacturing companies have dissolved, been absorbed by larger organizations, or changed the focus of their business. ALCOA now owns Kawneer and several companies that were influential early in the twentieth century. Since these companies are no longer operating as they did when the aluminum was produced, it is difficult to find specific information about the products. If aluminum is ever to become an important historic material, it will require extensive research into the products themselves. There were many different varieties and styles of panels available, which this thesis did not include information on. In many cases, aluminum façades were applied as packages for towns, it would be interesting to know how these packages were marketed and how intense competition was. Many towns, like Guymon, hired consulting firms who recommended the installation of the façades. An important question concerning this is whether aluminum manufacturers advertised directly to these firms, and how that relationship may have perpetuated the widespread use of aluminum façades across the country. Extensive research into these aluminum manufacturers will yield new information about this trend and hopefully contribute to legitimizing its place in history.

Another important part of this investigation is a study of locations successfully working with their aluminum façades and finding ways to develop a constituency for the material. Other architectural styles and trends that successfully transitioned into favor did so because they had groups supporting them. There are many people who collect Carrara glass and independently research it. Aluminum needs people to begin doing that work, to make a case for its

preservation. If no one appreciates the material nor takes the time to investigate it, there will never be a reason to justify preserving it. When guidelines for the product's historic value have been established, it will be easier to locate important examples of aluminum façades and initiate efforts to maintain them.

Completing product research and mobilizing people who value aluminum façades are the first steps in bringing it into view as a historic building material. A set of guidelines should be developed to determine which aluminum façades are the most interesting, rare, or endangered. These issues are outside of the scope of this project, but are necessary in firmly establishing the overall importance of this material. Over the next ten years, preservation organizations ought to look into these questions to ensure that they make responsible recommendations regarding aluminum façades when the material reaches fifty years of age.

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APPENDIX A

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR REHABILITATION

1. A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, feature, spaces, and spatial relationships.

2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive material or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relations that characterize a property will be avoided.

3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or elements from other historic properties, will not be undertaken.

4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.

5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.

6. Deteriorated historic feature will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.

7. Chemical of physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.

8. Archeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources muse be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.

10. New additions and adjacent or related new construction will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.