

**Around the Corner:
The Life and Death of Grandview's Corner Grocery Stores**

By

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ABSTRACT

The corner grocery store stands as a venerable urban landmark in cities across North America yet the history of these businesses is often absent from the stories of our cities. The neighbourhood of Grandview in Vancouver, Canada's east side was, at varying points in time, the site of many corner grocery stores. While some research has been conducted on Grandview's main street (Commercial Drive), a thorough investigation into the corner grocery stores of "back-street" Grandview is needed. This paper attempts to map out the neighbourhood's old corner grocery stores and seeks to reveal the multiple layers of history that lie beneath each building. To do so, the paper discusses the changing pattern of grocery retailing in Vancouver from small independent corner stores to large 'modern' supermarkets to argue that the demise of the corner grocery is a result of these shifting consumer patterns. By investigating the history of these often-neglected businesses, this paper argues that we can begin to see the changing shifts in demographics that characterize Grandview today.

Introduction

When people think of grocery stores they invariably picture a large supermarket surrounded by acres of empty asphalt. They picture a variety of items from deli meats to soups and all manner of products now sold at grocery stores. The grocery stores of today have become one-stop shopping centres. Yet the grocery store of yesterday was something much different. Vancouver's old corner stores were once venerable landmarks in neighbourhoods across the city. Now, as many of these stores struggle to stay in business, Vancouver's corner grocery stores stand as an urban palimpsest revealing the multiple layers of history that lie beneath it.

These businesses represented many different things for many different people. For many children who grew up in Vancouver the corner store represents their childhood.¹ For others the corner store served as a focal point of the community, a place to meet, and a place to catch up. Grocery store proprietors were well known in the community and often served as "public characters".² Still others saw the corner grocery as a chance to earn a living in Vancouver. Many immigrant families, particularly Chinese-Canadians used the grocery store as a source of income and housing – a trend that would garner these stores the nickname of "Chinese groceries".³

Over the past several decades, however, these corner stores have all but disappeared. In the face of competition from supermarkets, 7-11's and gas station convenience stores, small family run grocery stores have been overrun by shifting

¹ The corner store was often the first place parents allowed their children to go to on their own.

² Jane Jacobs proposed the idea of "public characters" and argued that local storekeepers perform a variety of informal community tasks that help strengthen community. See J. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* New York, 1992.

³ M. Kluckner, *Vanishing Vancouver: The Last 25 Years*, Vancouver, 2012, 72.

consumer patterns. This shift has seen shoppers move away from their local greengrocer, butcher and baker in search of modern convenience. Enormous shopping carts, laser checkout scanners and thousands of different items in any number of sizes characterize today's supermarkets. The corner store does not stand a chance.

The neighbourhood of Grandview in Vancouver's east side was, at varying points in time, the site of many corner grocery stores. Although the heart of the neighbourhood runs along Commercial Drive and Hastings Street, there were a variety of corner grocery stores in residential areas along non-commercial streets. While the retailing history of Commercial Drive is well documented,⁴ a thorough investigation into the neighbourhood corner stores of "back-street" Grandview – that is, not Commercial Drive or Hastings Street – is needed. Thus, this project will attempt to map the historic corner stores of Grandview in order to create an introductory history of this quickly vanishing urban landmark. Moreover, I will examine the shifting pattern of store proprietors from primarily Anglo-Canadian to predominantly Chinese-Canadian storekeepers that are reflected in the shifting demographics of Grandview still witnessed today. In the process, I argue that the death of Grandview's corner grocery stores is the result of shifting consumer patterns in search of supermarket convenience and that contemporary policy-makers ought to work to resurrect the neighbourhood store.

To do this, I will first examine the idea of the grocery store as an urban palimpsest. Next, I present a brief community profile of Grandview. Following this, I look at how corner grocery stores came to be and their architectural styles. Before presenting the history of individual stores, I will document the evolution of grocery

⁴ See J. King, *The Drive: A Retail, Social and Political History of Commercial Drive, Vancouver, to 1956*, Vancouver, 2011.

retailing in Vancouver to help contextualize the demise of Grandview's corner grocery stores. Together, these narratives will create a story that highlights the importance of corner grocery stores and what cities and their residents can do to help resurrect them.

The Grocery Store as an Urban Palimpsest

In the introduction of Patrick Cummins' photographic book, *Full Frontal T.O.: Exploring Toronto's Architectural Vernacular*, Shawn Micallef states that, "every change to [a] building is attached to a human narrative."⁵ This idea, that our buildings can be read for their layers of history, is one that runs throughout this paper. A change in ownership or a change in signage is attached to a human narrative and although they occur on the peripheries of our lives, these changes have significant impacts on the way we experience our cities. Think for example of how corner stores have become engrained into our mental maps of our neighbourhoods. A change in signage alters our view of the city. Thus, this project is a reminder that cities are constantly changing, always fluid. Our non-descript streets and stores have a story to tell and it is my hope that this project will begin to do that.

Grandview: A Community Profile

Grandview, one of Vancouver's first suburbs, slowly developed following the introduction of the Interurban in 1891. Early residents were primarily of British origin and

⁵ P.Cummins and Shawn Micallef, *Full Frontal T.O.: Exploring Toronto's Architectural Vernacular*, Toronto, 2012, 6.

the building boom that began in 1905 quickly ended by 1912.⁶ Following both World War I and II, an influx of Italian, Chinese, and Eastern European immigrants moved into the neighbourhood. The Italian-Canadians in particular made a significant mark on the neighbourhood, “renovating old homes with stucco and masonry and noticeably changing the face of Commercial Drive with their shops, restaurants and lively conversations.”⁷ However it was not long before the Italian population began moving east into Burnaby. At the same time the Chinese population dramatically increased so that by 1981, 18.7% of Grandview’s population was Chinese speaking.⁸ These changes are reflected in the shifting ethnicity of grocery store proprietors as listed in Appendix I.⁹

The Emergence of the Corner Grocery Store

Prior to the introduction of zoning in Vancouver, commercial buildings were interspersed throughout many of Vancouver’s residential neighbourhoods. Much of the development of Grandview occurred prior to this adoption in 1928,¹⁰ and as such, corner stores popped up along many residential streets. When zoning was adopted, ‘intrusions’ in residential areas were outlawed but allowed existing commercial

⁶ Development in Kitsilano, Point Grey and Shaughnessy contributed to the building decline in Grandview. See Vancouver Planning Department, *Grandview-Woodland Area Policy Plan*, Part 3, 1983.

⁷ W. Buholzer, *Grandview-Woodland: An Information Handbook*, City of Vancouver Planning Department, 1975, 6.

⁸ C. Nielsen, *The People of Grandview-Woodland and Strathcona: A Community Profile*, Vancouver, 1984.

⁹ See Appendix I for a complete listing and inventory of Grandview’s corner grocery stores.

¹⁰ Vancouver’s zoning came at the recommendation of Harland Bartholomew’s Plan for Vancouver, 1927 and sought to establish the separation of land uses, whereby commercial activity was funnelled onto high streets, as in the British tradition. See, for example, L. Berelowitz, *Dream City: Vancouver and the Global Imagination*, Vancouver, 2005, 215; B.A. Petit, *Zoning and the single-family landscape: Large new houses and neighbourhood change in Vancouver*, (PhD), The University of British Columbia (1993), 16.

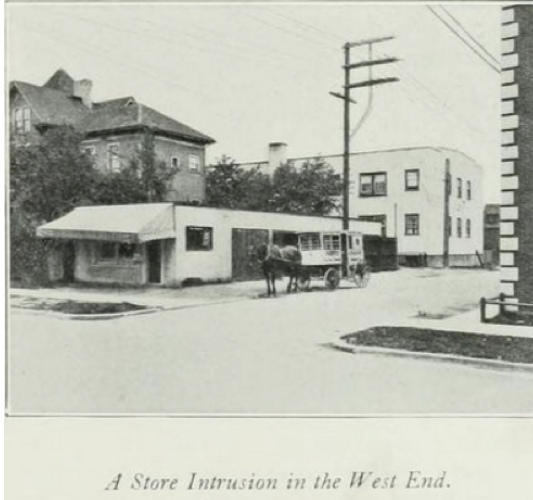


Figure 1 A picture taken from the Harland Bartholomew Plan for Vancouver depicting a 'store intrusion' that would soon be outlawed by zoning (p. 211).

storefronts to continue (see Figure 1). So began the process known as the “grandfather clause,” which allowed non-conforming uses to operate in residential areas provided they were not substantially altered. This clause has become policy in the Vancouver Charter of 1953 and has allowed many of Grandview’s corner stores to continue.¹¹

When Grandview’s corner grocery stores were first built they generally took on one three forms. The modified house design as seen at Scott’s Grocery (see Figure 5) had a main floor business with a suite above. The apartment style grocery store was also prevalent in Grandview, and featured a main floor grocery and several suites above (see Figure 4). The final design often seen in Grandview was what Michael Kluckner described as “boxy additions occupying the front yard of an ordinary house”¹² (see Figure 7).

Grandview’s corner grocery stores, like so many in Vancouver, often featured sheltered corner doors and transom windows designed to let in maximum sunlight. The stores were often recognizable with their decaying metal or neon Coca-Cola signs. As Kluckner notes, neighbourhood grocery stores often became magnets for the

¹¹ The clause states that, “If such non-conforming use is discontinued for a period of ninety days, any future use of these premises shall be in conformity with the provisions of the bylaw. The Board of Variance may extend the aforesaid period of ninety days to a maximum of 180 days.” The grandfather clause was originally limited to thirty days, however, in 1959 Council recommended a change to ninety days and an application to amend Section 568 of the Vancouver Charter was approved. See City of Vancouver Archives, Minutes of Vancouver City Council, November 1959, vol. 72, 26, 241; Vancouver Charter, SBC1953, Chapter 55, Section 568.

¹² Kluckner, *Vanishing Vancouver*, 70.



Figure 2. A Shelly's 4X Bakery advertisement asking where it is safe to send your children. The changing nature of grocery retailing brought about racial anxiety (Source: William Curtis Shelly Fonds, Scrapbook 3, CVA, AM 163, Box 558-G).

surrounding school children, selling candy and other various goods.¹³ Oftentimes children were sent to the local grocery to pick up food but as the advertisement depicted in Figure 2 shows, the changing nature of grocery store proprietors often brought about community anxiety. As the corner groceries were gradually taken over in large numbers by Chinese-Canadian proprietors

beginning in the 1950's, these racial anxieties were heightened. The 'middle-class', convenient, and modern supermarket provided a more desirable shopping experience for many

Vancouverites and the slow demise of the corner grocery continued.

From Corner Stores to Supermarkets

The evolution of Vancouver's shifting retail is a rich and varied history similar to changes seen in cities across North America. The early general stores and public markets eventually gave way to the independent grocer, characterized by full-service shopping and elaborate displays behind the counter of the store clerk.¹⁴ Two

¹³ Kluckner, *Vanishing Vancouver*, 71.

¹⁴ See, for example, J.M. Mayo, *The American Grocery Store: The Business Evolution of an Architectural Space*, Westport, CT, 1993, for a summary of the evolution of grocery retailing.

developments helped contribute to the demise of the corner grocery store: the opening of department stores and the rise of supermarkets.

The opening of department stores in downtown Vancouver signalled a drastic shift in the very idea of shopping. When Woodward's Department store opened in 1892, and later moved to its iconic location at Hastings and Abbott in 1903, and with the opening of Spencer's Department Store on Hastings in 1906, Vancouver shoppers were "offered an experience of aristocratic grandeur"¹⁵ never experienced before. According to Rachel Bowlby, "as a palace, the department store offered a spectacle of opulence accessible to anyone who cared to enter and participate in an image of aristocratic life."¹⁶ The very nature of shopping had changed and according to Jak King detailing a news article from Grandview's local newspaper, *The Highland Echo*, "many women habitually do their buying in the larger stores for a variety of reasons the chief is that they enjoy the experience."¹⁷ Vancouver's department stores quickly became competition for Grandview's corner grocery stores. They offered twice a day deliveries and because of their size, the department stores were able to adopt an economy of scale.¹⁸ As consumers began demanding lower prices, self-service shopping was introduced as a way to reduce grocery costs. In 1919 Woodward's was the first store to

¹⁵ R. Bowlby, *Carried Away: The Invention of Modern Shopping*, New York, 2000, 8

¹⁶ Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 10.

¹⁷ King, *The Drive*, 17.

¹⁸ Vancouver's Department stores were famous for their food floors displaying thousands of products from all around the world. Customers were able to phone in a grocery order and they would receive their delivery that afternoon. See C. Davis, *The Vancouver Book*, Vancouver, 1976, 345.

introduce self-service in Vancouver.¹⁹ As most corner grocery stores continued to operate as full-service businesses, the department stores gained a decided edge with consumers desiring an engaging and cost-saving grocery experience.²⁰

The second development that led to the decline of independent grocers' is the rise of chain stores and supermarkets.²¹ The depression created a climate well suited to the development of these stores, as businesses looked for ways to reduce prices for price-conscious consumers. The result was the removal of services in stores, meaning the elimination of home deliveries and the introduction of self-service in order to reduce grocery prices. This change meant that, "instead of the pleasures of being served, consumers could congratulate themselves on saving money by doing the work themselves."²² Following the Second World War, the wide adoption of the private automobile meant that auto-oriented supermarkets, with easy highway access and ample parking space gave supermarkets a decided edge with consumers. The introduction of home refrigeration also increased this edge, as together the private automobile and home refrigeration meant that families could shop for more and less often, eliminating the daily trip to the grocer around the corner.

¹⁹ Clarence Saunders first introduced self-service at his Piggly Wiggly chain store in Memphis, Tennessee in 1916. Saunders promised his customers that, "he would slay the dragon of high prices." Incidentally, Piggly Wiggly operated stores in Vancouver before being bought out by Safeway. See A. Seth and G. Randall (Eds), *The Grocers: Rise and Rise of the Supermarket Chains 2nd Ed.*, London, 2001.

²⁰ By adopting self-service, grocery stores were able to allow shoppers to handle the products and suggest similar products, thereby increasing sales. Full-service grocery stores did not provide this option, so shoppers merely bought what they intended to buy without discovering new products.

²¹ J.L. Brock, *A Forecast for the Grocery Retailing Industry in the 1980's*, Ann Arbor, MI, 1981, 11.

²² Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 8.



Figure 3. 1700 block Commercial Drive. The new 'modern' Safeway at the corner of First and Commercial. Dominion Photo Co., January 19, 1941 (Source: VPL 25516).

In Grandview the shift to supermarkets began with the opening of Safeway at First and Commercial in 1941. The *Highland Echo* carried a large news article announcing its opening titled "Safeway Accents Modernism in new Grandview Store."

In it the author says:

[Safeway] will embody the most modern of merchandising methods. Adequate lighting and specialty designed fixtures bring the new store into line with the best practice, as can be said for the adjacent parking lot, arranged for convenient use of the store's auto-driving customers.²³

In 1954, Super-Valu opened across the street, representing the first 'true' supermarket in Grandview. The store was built with parking for fifty cars, and as an 8,000 square foot store, represented the largest retail operation in Grandview.²⁴ Both stores eliminated home-deliveries and adopted self-service as a strategy for keeping prices low. In 1953 chain stores and supermarkets only represented 32% of grocery retail

²³ The *Highland Echo*, 9 January 1941. In the following weeks edition, Safeway took out a 2-page advertisement showcasing their discounted prices and modern products.

²⁴ King, *The Drive*, 219.

business in Vancouver, but by 1963 that number had increased to 56%, with independent businesses declining from 68% to 44% during that time (see Appendix II).²⁵ With the acceptance of supermarkets in Grandview, we begin to see a shift away from the local greengrocer, butcher, and baker in search of modern convenience. As a result, corner grocery stores retreated into candy-pop-cigarette convenience stores that we know them as today.

Grandview's Corner Grocery Stores

The following stories depict just some of Grandview's grocery stores and help to show the challenging nature of owning such a business. The full list of grocery stores is available in Appendix I. The intention of telling these stories is to provide a glimpse into Grandview's past. Rather than any political or economic storytelling, these histories discuss Grandview's social history. That is, a history of the mundane day-to-day activities of store proprietors and their customers.

Thus far I have presented the 'death' of Grandview's corner grocery stores. The overall shift in consumer patterns towards modern supermarkets is reflected in the research presented thus far. But this next section delves into the history of individuals and their stores, as they existed. In the process, I hope to reveal the multiple layers of history that lie beneath the façade of each building. While Grandview's stores are not unique in the Vancouver context, they were integral parts of the community and their demise has had a significant impact on the way Grandview residents shop.

²⁵ H.M. Begg, Factors in the location of the wholesale grocery industry in metropolitan Vancouver, (Masters), University of British Columbia, 1968, 55.



Figure 4. The Odlum Grocery, seen here in the early 1990's and again in 2015 as an apartment (Photo courtesy of Brendan Jang; Kevin Shackles, 2015).

1007 Odlum Drive

An apartment style commercial building, 1007 Odlum Drive is first listed in the City Directories in 1912 but was hooked up to water service in 1904.²⁶ Daniel and Joseph Mass were the first to operate a grocery and confectionery here in 1912 but as with many early grocers', their business did not last for long. From 1922 until 1936 Kate Manson ran a grocery and confectionery here. Kate and her husband John, who was a motorman for B.C. Electric Railway, lived above the store. It was quite typical to see wives running grocery stores during these years, as it was one of the few accepted forms of employment and also provided housing above.

In 1939, Genji Yada and his wife Yoshiko opened the Odlum Grocery, a name that would last until the mid-1990's when it closed. Following their internment during World War Two, Genji and Yoshiko moved back to Vancouver in 1951 and ran the Berkeley General Store at 2396 E 41 Avenue. By 1952 Lum S. Way operated the Odlum Grocery at a time when large numbers of Chinese immigrants were moving into

²⁶ City of Vancouver Archives, Water Applications, MCR 26, RG 14, Series B, Roll No. 8, Application No. 7007.

Grandview. After twenty-one years in business, Lum S. Way handed the business over to his son, Lee Hong Way.



Figure 5. Scott's Grocery at the corner of Victoria Drive and East Georgia, seen here in 2013 and again as the Found and the Freed repurposed goods store in 2015 (Photo Courtesy of Heritage Vancouver Society; Kevin Shackles, 2015).

706 Victoria Drive

This modified house was built in 1921 for Thomas Givens, who had applied for a building permit the year before. It remained a grocery store for its entire existence and was the last grocery store of its kind in Grandview (see Figure 5). Givens, born in 1875, immigrated to Canada with his wife Annie in 1909 from Ireland.²⁷ The couple operated the Thomas Givens Grocery here from 1922 until 1933 before moving to the West Side to operate a dry goods store. Between 1933 and 1953 the store changed hands several times, becoming the Norman Elliot Grocery in 1933, the Hamilton Grocery in 1940, the Maxwell Grocery in 1945, and eventually the Caravan Grocery in 1950, where William R. Caravan ran his grocery along with his son William Caravan Jr.²⁸

²⁷ Ancestry.com, 1921 Census of Canada. Reference Number: RG 31; Folder Number: 19; Census Place: Ward 4, Vancouver Centre, British Columbia; Page Number: 7.

²⁸ The Norman Elliot Grocery was most likely named as such so as to differentiate from the chain grocery stores known as Elliot's Grocery, with one located at 1432 Commercial Drive (Vancouver Public Library. British Columbia City Directories, 1933-1953. <http://www.vpl.ca/bccd/index.php>).

In 1953 May Elizabeth Scott opened Scott's Grocery, which Scott ran until she retired in 1986. Scott's father, Ernest, came to Vancouver in 1912 from England and worked as a shoemaker on Robson Street.²⁹ May Scott grew up next door (at 710 Victoria Drive) to the store she would later run. Winnie Leung took over the business for close to a decade before Steve and Aster Ng ran Scott's Grocery, keeping the name that had been familiar to Grandview for so long. By February 2014, Scott's Grocery closed its doors for good after sixty-one years of serving Grandview, and with it the last corner grocery in Grandview was lost.

2075, 2085, 2095 Victoria Drive

The area around East Fifth and Victoria quickly became a commercial hub with a variety of businesses locating around the B.C. Electric Railway's Burnaby Lake Line, which cut across what is now McSpadden Park towards Victoria Drive at East Second (see Figure 6). The most well known of these businesses was Irwin's Grocery and Confectionery, which served the neighbourhood from 1916 until it was demolished in 1970. The store was built by Thomas L. Hughes in 1915 for Mrs. Edith Rachael Irwin³⁰, whose family immigrated to Ontario from Ireland before moving to Vancouver.³¹ Irwin ran her grocery store here from 1919 until her death in 1949. Walter Wong took over the grocery store, keeping the name that was familiar to so many Grandview residents.

²⁹ Ancestry.com, 1921 Census of Canada. Reference Number: RG 31; Folder Number: 19; Census Place: *Ward 4, Vancouver Centre, British Columbia*; Page Number: 2

³⁰ Heritage Vancouver, Building Permit 7704, Retrieved from <<http://permits.heritagevancouver.org/>>.

³¹ Death certificate for Edith Rachael Irwin, 14 December 1949, File Number B13202, Province of British Columbia Department of Health and Welfare, B.C. Archives, Vital Events.



Figure 6. This 1927 Fire Insurance map depicts the row of commercial storefronts between 2075 and 2095 Victoria Drive (Source: The British Columbia Underwriters' Association. CVA, "Fire Insurance Plan of the City of Vancouver," September 1927, Map 599, Sheet, 338).

Next door at 2085 Victoria Drive a number of different stores set up shop. The original owners first operated the London Grocery, which eventually gave way to the Victoria Grocery. After changing hands several times, Charlotte Louise's Beauty Salon operated out of this address until its closure. Beside the Salon at 2095, Home Meat Market served the neighbourhood for several years before George Robertson took over the business in 1935, renaming it what many locals remember it as, Supreme Meat Market. Ownership of Supreme Meat Market was in a constant state of flux, however Louie Sun and Lui Quing and later Chuck and Doreen Quan would eventually run the butcher shop, paralleling the influx of Chinese immigrants into Grandview. However, on August 24, 1965 Council approved authorization for the negotiation of purchase of properties on the proposed park site.³² After more than fifty years, the commercial hub around East Fifth and Victoria now ceased to exist.

³² Irwin's Grocery, along with other buildings on the proposed Park Site 20, were acquired by the City of Vancouver for \$21,000. See Minutes of Vancouver City Council, 27 February 1968, CVA, Vol. 97, 919, 947-948.

1902 Victoria Drive



Figure 7. The A & B Grocery, seen here in the early 1970's, again in the early 1990's, and finally in its current state of vacancy in February, 2015 (CVA 780-330; Photo Courtesy of Brendan Jang; Kevin Shackles, February, 2015).

The building at 1902 Victoria Drive is a front-yard style grocery store that is first listed in the City Directories in 1912. The area around 1902 Victoria was a bustling neighbourhood with a grocery store across the street at 1896 Victoria Drive, and for fifty-five years the businesses on what is now McSpadden Park contributed to the many storefronts in the neighbourhood.

John Boscott ran his grocery business here briefly but it was not until 1926 that a grocery store was firmly established. From 1926 until 1948 Charles F. Rogers ran the Third Avenue Grocery and lived in the house next door. After several years as a Fish and Chips shop, Charles and James N. McCready operated the McCready Brother's Grocery for close to thirteen years.

In 1969 Mrs. Doris Fong took over the grocery store along with her husband Earl, and together the couple renamed the store A & B Grocery (Figure 7). Earl worked at the store as a clerk but Doris was the main proprietor until handing the business over to Leo Yat Chan in 1989.



Figure 8. The old Victoria Drive Grocery, seen here in 2015 as Via Tevere Restaurant, adorned with the 1930's Shelly's 4X Bakery Products advertisement. This was one of the few grocery stores that retained the same name throughout its existence (Kevin Shackles, 2015).

1190 Victoria Drive

The Victoria Drive Grocery was an apartment style grocery store, with several rooms located above. The store was built in 1922 and first operated by Peter Pappas in 1923. Pappas emigrated from Montenegro in 1908 and would run the store until 1946 when he passed the business on to his two sons, George and John.³³ After leaving the Victoria Drive Grocery in 1949, George operated a grocery store at 2828 Turner Street while John became a manager of National Dairies at 1132 East Hastings Street.

In 1949 Mrs. Victoria Chow was the first in a long line of Chinese-Canadian grocery store proprietors, all of whom kept the Victoria Drive Grocery name. Yod Ho and York Wai Ho operated the store for nearly two decades and by 1974 Hung Woo Cheung took over the Victoria Drive Grocery. Cheung would be the last proprietor of the store, which closed in 1990. When the owners of the Via Tevere restaurant began restoration work before they opened in March 2012, they revealed a 1930's Shelly's 4X Bakery Products sign that had been a part of the Victoria Drive Grocery until the store

³³ Peter's family name changes between Pepyanovich, Pepianovits, Pepjanovich, and Pappas. His immigration records show his last name as Pappas and his sons took on the name Pappas as well; Ancestry.com, 1921 Census of Canada, Reference Number: RG 31; Folder Number: 19; Census Place: Ward 4, Vancouver Centre, British Columbia; Page Number: 8

was modernized and covered up with stucco (Figure 8). Most likely, the Victoria Drive Grocery was supplied by Shelly's Bakery, which had become Canadian Bakeries Limited in 1925. At this time, the bakery was serving 100,000 B.C. families.³⁴ Most grocery stores were supplied by one of three wholesalers in downtown Vancouver: W.H. Malkin Co., Kelly-Douglas, or H.Y. Louie. Today the sign exists as reminder of the building's storied past.

Resurrection of the Corner Grocery?

The demise of the corner grocery store has led to a wave of nostalgia for these simple businesses. But should we, as citizens, and our cities help resurrect corner grocery stores and other small businesses? Stacy Mitchell makes the case for independent businesses in her book, *Big Box Swindle*, arguing that, "local retailers help sustain a network of informal relationships that help nurture community" and that "every dollar spent at a locally owned store sends a ripple effect of benefits through the local economy supporting not only the store itself but many other businesses too."³⁵ So despite their highly fluid nature, independent businesses are vital social institutions embedded within communities. Ironically, the Grandview-Woodland Area Plan from 1979 acknowledged the importance of corner grocery stores and policy number 21 sought to "investigate methods to allow upgrading and new construction of corner

³⁴ William Curtis Shelly Fonds, Scrapbook 2 and 3, CVA, AM 163, Box 558-G

³⁵ S. Mitchell, *Big Box Swindle: The True Cost of Mega-Retailers and the Fight for America's Independent Businesses*, Boston, 2006, 78, 39.

grocery stores in residential areas.”³⁶ So what can we do now to encourage the continued use of corner groceries?

Corner groceries must develop a niche to supplement their grocery business. Two successful examples in Vancouver are Wilder Snail in Strathcona and Le Marché St. George in Riley Park, both of which focus on local products and have added a coffee shop to their businesses.³⁷ Two ways cities can encourage these businesses is by relaxing parking restrictions and relaxing the grandfather clause. The Board of Variance oversees these matters in Vancouver, and on occasion relaxes the bylaws. By supporting such businesses over larger supermarkets, residents have the ability to encourage the continued operation of neighbourhood stores.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this project I argued for seeing Grandview’s corner grocery stores as an urban palimpsest. Throughout this paper I have attempted to peel back the layers of history hidden in these urban institutions. While the day-to-day life of corner grocery stores often occurred on the periphery of our lives, the changes in ownership and changes in signage are attached to a human narrative. The gradual shift of a primarily Anglo-Canadian Grandview to these corner groceries becoming “Chinese-groceries” is reflected in the research conducted here. Interestingly, very few Italian proprietors are noted as operating the “back-street” corner grocery stores, which

³⁶ Grandview-Woodland Area Plan: Grandview-Victoria (single-family duplex and conversion areas), Standing Committee of Council on Planning and Development, 1979.

³⁷ Wilder Snail is known for their locally sourced products and adjoining coffee shop. Le Marché St. George also operates a coffee shop alongside their grocery businesses, but also sells ceramics, textiles and other home amenities. These added products have helped each corner store develop a niche in the grocery retailing business enabling the stores to survive in what is a competitive retail industry.

perhaps illustrates how Chinese-Canadian storekeepers were relegated to these stores with the Italian population concentrated on Commercial Drive. Such changes speak to the fluid nature of Grandview. Rather than a static moment in time, the research presented here illustrates the constantly changing, highly varied cultural mix that continues to characterize Grandview today. It is my hope that this research will begin a conversation around the importance of independent and local businesses and how these businesses have changed in conjunction with broader population shifts witnessed in Grandview. While the history presented here is by no means comprehensive, it points towards future avenues of research, such as a detailed history of Vancouver's changing retail scene and a comparison of Grandview's corner grocery stores to those seen elsewhere in North America. Grocery stores are only one part of a rich and varied history in Grandview, and its uniqueness lies in this diversity of housing, people and land use.

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Figure 5(1).

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Appendix I:

Table 1: Grandview's Corner Grocery Stores

Store Address	Year	Store Name	Owner/Operator	Notes
706 Victoria Drive	1921-	Not listed; but constructed	Thomas Givens listed as living here	
-1918	1922-1933	The Thomas Givens Grocery	Thomas Givens	
	1933-1940	Norman Elliot Grocery	Norman E. Elliot	
	1940-1944	Hamilton Grocery	Arthur S. Hamilton	Lived at 3692 W 29 Ave; proprietor of Franklin Grocery 1719 Franklin
	1945-1948	Maxwell Grocery	Mrs. S.M. and A.M. Maxwell	
	1948-1950	grocery	L.E. Barrie	
	1950-1953	Caravan Grocery	William R. Caravan	His son, William R. Caravan Jr. worked as a clerk at the store
	1953-1986	Scott's Grocery	Mrs. May E. Scott	May Scott grew up next door at 710 Victoria

	1986-1995	Scott's Grocery	Winnie Leung	May E. Scott retires in 1986; lives above
	1995-2014	Scott's Grocery	Steve and Aster Ng	
1902 Victoria Drive	1912-1922	grocery	John Boscott; later run by his wife	
-1908	1922-1926	grocery	Arthur F. Soole and Charles Soole	Arthur Soole would later co-own Soole and Young Grocery at 3630 W 16 Ave
	1926-1948	Third Avenue Grocery	Charles F. Rogers	Lived at 1904 E 3rd; from 1927-1955 Clark C. Shoe repair operated at 1902 1/2
	1948-1953	Balmoral Fish and Chips	J.L. and L. Scott Balmoral	
	1953-1966	McCready Brothers Grocery	Charles Franklin McCready and James N. McCready	Listed as 1908 Victoria Drive
	1966-1969	Betty and Ken's Grocery	Ken Zuch and Elizabeth A. Smith	Ken was a painter; store operated by Elizabeth A. Smith; lived at 1904 E 3rd
	1969-1989	A & B Grocery	Mrs. Doris Fong	Husband Earl worked as clerk at the store; lived

				at 1904 E 3rd
	1989-1992	A & B Grocery	Leo Yat Chan	
	1992-	A & B Grocery	Chi Koo and Cindy Chow	
1302 Victoria Drive	1923-1945		John Blaine	Lived Above
-1912	1945-1946		O. Branes	
	1946-1953		George Platt	
	1953-1954	Lynes Grocery	William J. Lynes	Married to Joyce Lynes; Mrs. Florence M. Lynes worked here as clerk
	1954-1968	Home	C. Brandt	Worked as an electrician
	1969-1971	Dimorn Confectionery	A. Dimorn	Lived above
	1971-1977	Bruno's Grocery	Pasquale Bruno	Lived above
	1977-1996	Bruno's Grocery	Chung Tam	Chung Tam and Sau Han Tam operated store
	1996-1997	Chuck and Vicky's		
	1997-	Point In Time Inc.		

1107 McLean Drive	1910-1920		Mrs. Minnie Robitaille	In 1910 name listed as Robitaiulle; her name is first listed as Minnie in 1916 directory; Marion Robitaille lived here too (daughter)
-1905	1921-1922		George W. Belford	
	1922-1924		Mrs. Annie MacBeth	
	1924-1926	Confectionery	Elizabeth G. Johnston	
	1926-1935	Confectionery	Mrs. Annie M. Bowyer	
	1935-1937	Confectionery	H.C. Smay	
	1937-1941	Confectionery	Robin Longmuir	Widow
	1941-1943	Confectionery	Mrs. Agnes B. O'Brien	Widow
	1943-1946	Grocery	L. Erickson	
	1946-1955	Grocery	Helen M. Crabtree	Married to Horace Crabtree
	1955-1961	Towle's Grocery	Mary S. Towle	Married to Robert S. Towle, an electrician
	1961-1962	McLean Grocery	Carl Gertz	Married to Gertrude Mertz
	1962-1966	McLean Grocery	Tim Leong	Married to Suk Fong; lived above
	1966-1975	McLean Grocery	Jim Hing. Chow	Married to Wai Lun Chow

	1975-1980	Store vacant	Jim Hing. Chow	
1007 Odlum Drive	1912-1915	Daniel and Joseph Mass Grocery	Daniel and Joseph Mass	
-1912	1915-1920	Grocery	Pasqual Masi	Owned cigar store as well at 700 Main
	1920-1921	Vacant		
	1921-1922	Grocery	Oscar Bisailon	Lived Above
	1922-1936	Grocery and confectionery	Mrs. Kate Manson	Husband John Manson was a motorman for BCER
	1936-1939		Mrs. A.M. Winter	
	1939-1943	Odlum Grocery	Genji Yada	Married to Yoshiko Yada; went on to run Berkeley General Store at 2396 E 41st beginning in 1951
	1943-1947	Grocery	James E. Hammond	Married to Nellie Hammond
	1947-1949	Grocery	Norman J. Lowe	Married to Lillian A. Lowe
	1949-1952	Grocery	George F. Cochrane	Married to Salie

	1952-1973	Odlum Grocery	Lum S. Way	
	1973-1977	Odlum Grocery	Lee Hong Way	Son of Lum S. Way
	1977-1993	Odlum Grocery	Gun Fong Lee	Lived Above
	1993-	Odlum Grocery	Benson Ko	
1190 Victoria Drive	1923-1926	Grocery	Peter Pepjanovich	Lived at 442 Salsbury; His name is listed as Pepjanovich, Pepyanovich, Pepianovits, and Pappas
-1922	1926-1946	Victoria Drive Grocery	Peter Pepyanovich	Married to Annie; Victoria Beauty Shop (1940-), Victoria Shoe Renew (1945-) also operated from this address
	1946-1949	Victoria Drive Grocery	George L. Pappas and John Pappas	Sons of Peter Pepyanovich (Pappas); Annie listed as widow in 1946 (still lives there); In 1949 George becomes grocer at 3828 Turner; John becomes a manager of National Dairies 1132 East Hastings Street
	1949-1955	Victoria Drive	Mrs. Vlctoria Chow	Lived at 821 Keefer Street

		Grocery		
	1955-1957	Victoria Drive Grocery	Chow Hall and Chow Foo	
	1957-1974	Victoria Drive Grocery	Yod Ho and York Wai Ho	
	1974-1990	Victoria Drive Grocery	Hung Woo Cheung	Lived in rear
2075 Victoria Drive	1914-1916	Home	Mrs. Edith Irwin lives here	
-1915	1916-1918	Grocery	Operated by Mrs. Janet Forse in 1916; by Alfred E. Martin in 1917	
Built by Thomas L. Hughes and designed and owned by Edith	1919-1950	Irwin's Grocery and Confectionery	Mrs. Edith Irwin	In 1918 she's listed as widow to William T. Irwin

Irwin				
	1951-1953	Irwin's Grocery and Confectionery	Managed by Thomas L. Hughes	The same gentleman who built the store in 1915
	1953-1956	Irwin's Grocery and Confectionery	George H. Gilbert	Married to Gladys A. Gilbert
	1956-1970	Irwin's Grocery and Confectionery	Walter and Della Wong	Lived at same address
2095 Victoria Drive	1933-1934	Home Meat Market	Edward Molley	Lived at 1816 E 13th; son John J. Molley helper/clerk at Home Meat Market
	1934-1935	Home Meat Market	Boris Nemets	Lived at 968 W 13th
	1935-1945	Supreme Meat Market	George S. Robertson	
	1945-1955	Supreme Meat Market	Jesse A. Hyndman	Lived at 2059 Graveley
	1955-1958	Supreme Meat	Louie Sun and Lui Quing	

		Market		
	1958-1959	Supreme Meat Market	Chuck and Doreen Quan	Lived at 6250 Lougheed Highway, Burnaby
	1959-1962	Supreme Meat Market	George G. and Vicky Lowe	Lived at 1881 E 5th
	1962-1964	Buck and Dell Grocery	Eric and Delia Buckman	Lived at 1881 E 5th
	1964-1970	Supreme Meat Market	Chuck and Doreen Quan	Lived at 1881 E 5th
1142 Semlin Drive	1910-1911	Shop	Hugh McDonald	
-1910	1911-1923	Acadia Grocery	Theodore H. Burpee Witter	Lived at 747 Lakewood Drive; Married to Ann Witter (widow in 1926)
Built by W. Acorn; Owned by Hugh	1923-1927	Acadia Grocery	Thomas E. Collins	Lived Above

McDonald				
	1927-1928	Acadia Grocery	Frederick H. Knight	Previously owned a confectionery on 2165 East Hastings
	1928-1931	Acadia Grocery	Frank Smith	
	1931-1937	Acadia Grocery	Elizabeth Smith	Widow
	1937-1938	Grocery	William D. Dobi	
	1938-1940	Grocery	Mrs. Anne Vieau	Daughter Frances worked at the store
	1940-1941	Grocery	George M. Melville	Married to Violet Melville
	1941-1943	Lighthouse Grocery	Mrs. Sharen Lawes	Widow to P. Lawes
	1943-1944	Lighthouse Grocery	Mrs. Mary Kerr	
	1944-1945	Lighthouse Grocery	Mrs. Ethel E. Dunn	
	1945-1946	Lighthouse Grocery	Miss M. T. Greensword	
	1946-1947	Lighthouse	Mrs. Hilda Curtis	

		Grocery		
	1947-1948	Lighthouse Grocery	Mrs. Daisy Dyer	
	1948-1949	Joan's Grocery	W. Lloyd and Mrs. Joanna McEwen	
	1949-1956	Joan's Grocery	Alex W. Mah	
	1956-1961	Beaucamp Grocery	Mrs. Cora Beaucamp	Married to J.E. Beaucamp
	1961-1962	Semlin Drive Grocery	Elmer Melsted	
	1962-1963	Semlin Drive Grocery	George L. Watts	Married to Maybelle Watts
	1963-1968	Semlin Drive Grocery	George L. Munro	
	1968-1970	Semlin Drive Grocery	N.F. Jee	
	1970-1973	Semlin Drive	Miss Karen. Stromsmoe	Lived Above

		Grocery		
	1973-1974	Semlin Drive Grocery	E. Lew	
	1974-1986	Semlin Grocery	Mrs. Marney Raynier	
	1990-1992	Semlin Grocery	No proprietor listed	
1896 Victoria Drive	1949-1951	Listed as new house		
-1948	1951-1953	House	Albert F. Gill	
	1953-1956	House	Erick P. Sczesny	
	1956-1961	Friendly Grocery	Erick P. Sczesny	Married to Miyoko Sczesny
	1961-1962	Friendly Grocery	Ernest Peters	Wife named Lori; Store listed at 1894
	1962-1966	Mira Monte Grocery & Delicatessen	Silvio and Elizabeth Lucchin	Elizabeth Lucchin ran the store; Silvio worked for Parks Canada
	1966-1985	Friendly Grocery & Delicatessen	Erick P. Sczesny and Miyoko Sczesny	

	1985-1992	Friendly Grocery	Frank Dias	Lived above; by 1992, the Grocery Store closed
	1996-1999	Figaro's Garden		
	1999-	Art Knapp Plantland		
	Present	Figaro's Garden		
1602 Victoria Drive	1911-1914		First resident was Ernest Ebbage; moved to North Van	
-1912	1915-1919	Royal Grocery	Mrs. Millie A. McComber	Lived same; Married to John A. McComber, a wireman for Vancouver Power Company and later B.C.E.R
	1919-1923		Julius G. Gordon	Lived same
	1923-1927	Bell's Grocery and Meat Market	William C. Bell	Lived same; William Bell grocer at 2510 Commercial Drive in 1928; National Grocery; then became manager at Stop and Shop Meat Market at 1608 Commercial Drive (owned by

				Mrs. Hazel Little; Bell and Little both lived at 1602 Victoria Drive)
	1927-	McMullin's Grocery		
	1934-1938	Dad's Grocery	Albert W. Stauffer	Lived at 1928 Graveley
	1938-1939	Crown Grocery	Jack Elstyne	Lived same; married to Fannie Elstyne
	1939-1948	Crown Grocery	Max Levinson	Married to Bella Levinson
	1948-1952	Crown Grocery	Jack.H. Campbell	Married to Margaret Campbell
1191 Victoria Drive (1155 Victoria Drive)	1926-1928	Miller's Grocery; Miller's Confectionery	G.H. Miller	
-1926	1929-1931	Sunrise Dairy	George Ramsell	Lived above
	1931-1933	Grocery	Mrs. O. Miller	
	1933-1934	Confectionery	John Adams	
	1934-1936	Confectionery	John A. Rodgers	

	1936-1937	Grocery	Leroy A. Carlson	Married to Leona Carlson
	1937-1938	Confectionery		
	1938- 1939	Confectionery	George R. McCabe	Married to Florence E. McCabe
	1939-1940	Royal Grocery	Charles P. Honeybourne	Lived same; Robert A. and Lyle C. Honeybourne listed as his children
	1940-1955	Four Star Cleaners	Alfred Barnes	Married to Louise Barnes
	1955-1956	Four Star Cleaners	Sam Corbin	
	1956-1958	Four Star Cleaners	L.F. Gurney	
	1958-1962	Star Brite Cleaners	R. Steir	
1185 Victoria Drive	1962-1982	Velvetone Cleaners	F. Farrell	
	1982-1993	Ray's Repairs and Installations		

1191 Victoria Drive	1995-	K & K Grocery	Andy Nguyen	
1904 Grant Street (now 1502 Victoria Drive)	1912-1916	Nothing	Carmen Ciccone the first occupant of the building	Foreman for City water works
-1912	1916-1918	Grocery	Frederick J. Cody	
	1918-	Vacant		
	1919-1920	Cleaners	Percy E. Snook	Lived at 5673 McKinnon
	1920-1921	Cleaners	Mrs. R. T. Bassett	Lived at 1976 Grant Street
	1921-1922	Confectionery	M. Jopko	Lived same
	1922-1923	Confectionery	Mrs. M.A. McDonald	
	1923-1924	Grocery	Allen Arsenault	Lived same
	1925-1926	Grocery	John W. Head	
	1926-1927	Confectionery	Samuel Soames	
	1927-1931	McFarlane's	William McFarlane	

		Grocery		
	1931-1932	Grocery	Sydney H. Godden	Lived at 1928 Grant Street
	1932-1938	Grocery	William E. Godden and Amelia Godden	Married to June Godden; Pearl Godden listed as child
	1938-1939	Grocery	Charles M. Colby	Married to Catherine Colby
	1939-1940	Grocery	Ian B. Allan	Married to Edna Allan
	1940-1941	Confectionery	James M. Hope	Married to Isabelle G. Hope
	1941-1942	Confectionery	Christine Damon	Widow to J. Damon; Lived same
	1942-1944	Grocery and confectionery	Mrs. Elizabeth Maughan	
	1944-1946	Confectionery	Norman MacDonald	Married to Florence MacDonald
	1946-1948	Confectionery	R. Hayter	Lived same
	1948-1951	Confectionery	John Hardy	Married to Violet Hardy
	1951-1953	Confectionery	Operated by Q. Hoy Chong	Owned by John J. Hardy
	1953-1989	Hardy's Grocery Store	Operated by Lin Ng Chuck	Married to Kwan Chuck; Owned by John J. Hardy

	1989-	Hardy's Grocery Store	Jamie Maynes	
	2001-	Bettykins Coffee Shop		
601 Victoria Drive	1909-1910	Seabrook Bro's Grocery	Herbert and Robert H. Seabrook	Lived at 470 E Hastings
	1910-1911	People's Grocery and Bakery Co. Ltd.	Robert Marsh	Marsh managed both People's Grocery locations (395 Powell and 601 Victoria)
	1911-1913	Lambie and Potter	Hugh Lambie and Albert E. Potter	Lived at 1443 E 11 Ave; 2036 Turner
	1913-1914	Gilt Edge Grocery	Operated by Albert E. Potter	Lived at 1963 Turner
	1914-1919	Meston and Co. Grocers	Alex Meston	Lived at 1137 Semlin Drive; John Meston: clerk at Vancouver Hotel William M. Meston: reporter at Bradstreet

				Company Joseph Meston: clerk at Kelly and Douglas In 1919 Meston and Co move to 1195 Burrard
	1920-1921	Grocery	John R. Snelgrove	Lived at 1365 W 10th; Joseph Snelgrove: clerk at the store Mabel Snelgrove: Musician
	1921-1922	Grocery	Henry W. Ireland	Lived at 1119 Thurlow
	1922-1923	Povey Meat Market		
	1923-1924	Delicatessen	Mrs. Sarah Arnold	Lived at 1956 Venables
	1924-1925	Arnold and Egerton Grocery	Sarah Arnold and Lillian Egerton	Lived at 1956 Venables; 822 Semlin
	1925-1926	Confectionery	Almaer Sigvarsden	Baker at 1549 E Hastings and 601 Victoria Drive
	1926-1927	Quon Bros Produce		
	1927-1928	Nanaimo Market (produce)	F. Way	

	1928-1934	Victoria Produce Co.	operated by G. Woy (until 1929); Fong Yow (until 1930); Yee Lun (until 1934)	
	1934-1945	Lee Loy Produce Company	Lee Loy	
	1945-1947	Square Deal Grocery	Charles Taggart	Lived same; Married to Kay E. Taggart
	1947-1955	Square Deal Grocery	Stephen H. Pesto	Lived same; Married to Dorothy Pesto (would go on to work for Sweet Sixteen Ladies Wear 2315 Main St)
	1957-1958	Galloway Upholstery	George Galloway	
	1958-1959	General Shoe Renew	James Pon	
	1961-1966	Pacific Paper Products		

603 Victoria Drive	1967-1970	Rainbow Grocery	Y.T. Mah	Business now listed at 603 instead of 601
	1970-1977	Italian Grocery	F. Dilanno and M. Mastromonaco	
	1977-1981	Italian Grocery	Charles T. Kam	Married to Shirley Kam
	1981-1986	Steve's Grocery	Steve Chow	
601 Victoria Drive	1986-	James Grocery	James Ngan	Married to Wendy Ngan Business now listed at 601
1328 Lakewood Drive	1911-1912		W.G Dowling	
-1911	1912-1915	Lakewood Grocery	Presley James	Lived same
Built and designed by J.E. Pederson	1915-1917	Lakewood Grocery	George Moir	Lived same

and owned by W.G. Dowling				
	1917-1918	Lakewood Grocery	Charles Hocking	Lived at 339 E 27th, North Van
	1918-1921	Lakewood Grocery	Thomas G. Bertram	Lived same
	1921-1924	Lakewood Grocery	Albert E. Rose	
	1924-1928	Lakewood Grocery	Charles W. Williams	
	1928-1929	Lakewood Grocery	Susie Decker	Lived same; Widow
	1929-1930	Lakewood Grocery	Managed by William E. Jones	
	1931-1932	Lakewood Grocery	Luigi Fuoco	Lived same
	1932-1933	Lakewood	Mrs. Elizabeth Campbell	Lived same

		Grocery		
	1933-1934	Lakewood Grocery	Mrs. Phyllis McLean	Lived at 375 E 14
	1950-1953	Lakewood Grocery	Albert E. Thomas	Married to Margaret H.
	1953-1955	Lakewood Grocery	Lo T. Kim	Lived same; Lee H. Kim works as clerk
	1959-1960	Lakewood Grocery	Hong Lee	
	1960-1972	Lakewood Grocery	G. Choo	
	1972-1974	Lakewood Grocery	John Eng	Married to Foo Yong Eng
	1974-1976	Lakewood Grocery	Leo Zachariadis	
	1979-1980	Lakewood Grocery	Zoi Zachariadis	

2076 1/2	1920-1921	Grocery	Vincent Leo	
Venables				
	1921-1922	Grocery	Joe Pennaway	
	1922-1933	Confectionery	Martha M. Harris	
	1934-1939	Confectionery	Mary E. Davidson	Widow
	1939-1966	Confectionery	Operated by Carl. W. Peterson	Building owned by Anthony Penneway
	1966-1969	Low Lum Chuck Grocery	Chuck Low Lum	Married to Shui May Lum; Chuck is also listed as a cook at Ding Ho Drive-in at 828 E Pender
	1969-1983	Chuck's Grocery	Chuck Low Lum	
	1983-1986	Chuck's Grocery	Sam Cheung	
	1987-1995	Venables Groceries	Choi Boy Lam	
	1995-	Venables Groceries	Hung Nguyen	

Appendix II:

Table 2: Estimated Retail Trade in British Columbia¹

Year	Total Retail Trade (\$ Millions)	Chain (%)	Independent (%)
1953	198,000	32	68
1954	202,000	35	65
1955	220,000	39	61
1956	236,000	41	59
1957	265,000	43	57
1958	289,000	46	54
1959	302,000	50	50
1960	309,000	53	47
1961	317,000	54	46
1962	333,000	55	45
1963	340,000	56	44

¹ Hugh M. Begg, "Factors in the location of the wholesale grocery industry in metropolitan Vancouver." (Masters), University of British Columbia, 1968.