

# History by Horsman: Columbus Ave. shopping



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A few weeks ago, we looked back at the history of the old Sloane House hotel, which was demolished in the 1940s to make way for LaSalle's department store.

By the time LaSalle's opened, in October of 1949, there were already multiple retail stores on that same block of Columbus Avenue:

- JCPenney opened in March 1929 and was a Columbus Avenue mainstay for nearly half a century before moving out to the Sandusky Mall in the 1970s.
- Another store on that block that lasted even longer was Byer Brothers clothing shop, later known as Marv Byer Clothiers, which opened in 1947 and closed in the early 1990s.
- Right next to Byer Brothers was Caryl Crane, which, upon its opening in 1947, the Register wrote it was "considered one of the most beautiful specialty shops in northern Ohio."
- Further down the block was Montgomery Ward, and at the corner of Columbus Avenue and Market Street was a store that many Sanduskians undoubtedly have many memories of: Gray Drugs.

As downtown retail declined, these stores moved out, and, eventually, the buildings that housed these businesses were demolished.

In their place, the Erie County parking garage was constructed, which is what stands on this block today. As you walk along the bare walls of the parking garage, it's hard to imagine what this stretch of Columbus Avenue was like decades ago - full of life and activity.

But it's exciting to see the growing retail scene in downtown Sandusky today. And while it's unlikely big department stores will ever be downtown again, we are well on our way to having a full and vibrant downtown once again.

Editor's note: Tom Horsman works for the city of Sandusky's department of community development as serves on the board of trustees for the Erie County Historical Society.