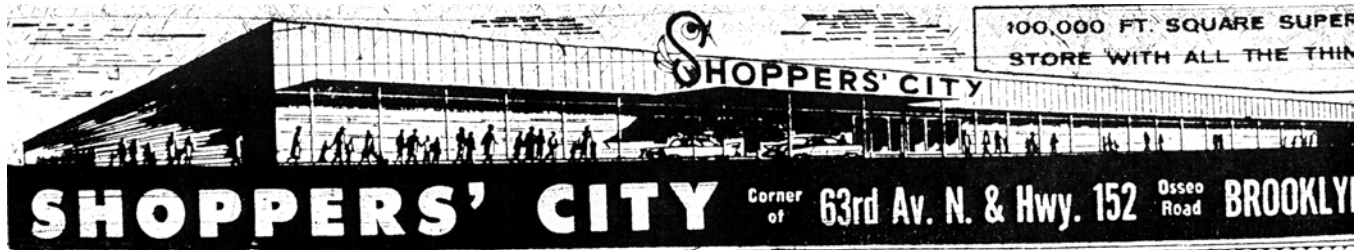


# \* Shoppers' City Story

The Early Days of Big Box Retail



Around 1960 or thereabouts, big-box discount retail stores began taking up vast parcels of land across the United States, surrounded by huge parking lots to accommodate the automobile culture and a society *on the move*. The big boxes were adorned with giant electric signs that could be seen from far away and could catch an eye even at 60 or 70 miles an hour. Practically every new store that opened had an incredible Grand Opening with promises of *excitement* as well as low, low prices. Everything was big, big, big and cheap.

These huge, over-the-top stores were a product of the ever-sprawling suburbia that began in the years following World War II. As Americans moved further away from the downtowns and main streets, and into neighborhoods of newly-built houses on vast parcels of previously undeveloped land and former farm fields, a giant store with just about everything and plenty of parking space (as cars became a necessity rather than a luxury) was just what everyone thought they needed in their new communities. And just like the little boxes for houses they all lived in, the big-box stores were filled with tacky-tacky, to paraphrase an old folk song.

The well-known retail stores of today, Wal-Mart, Target and Kmart all got their start in that era, but only as regional chains in different parts of the country. It would take years for them to become nationally known. But in addition there were many other discount department stores that ultimately lost out and went away, such as Spartan-Atlantic, Zayre, Topps Discount City, Warwick, White Front, Shoppers World, Woolco and Shoppers' City.

These discount department stores had practically

everything—housewares, appliances, clothing, toys, sporting goods, records, stereo equipment, gadgets, hardware, novelty wastebaskets, sometimes even complete grocery departments, cafeterias and optical centers, all under one giant roof, and at prices lower than the traditional stores that had those things. Whatever you needed was right there in that same convenient location. Quality, however, was sometimes lacking, especially in the early days of discount retail. Plastic crap that didn't last, cheap clothing that fell apart or faded after one or two washings, etc.

One of the forgotten discount department stores, Shoppers' City, was a Minnesota-based chain started in 1959 by Melvin Roth and Seymour Rothstein. Until they combined with the Massachusetts-based Zayre chain in the early seventies,



Shoppers' City signage featured a cartoon bird shaped like capital letter S for a logo. The stores boasted 100,000 square feet of floor space, and were combination discount center and supermarket, with a lunch counter as well, and over time different departments within the stores were leased out to other businesses to provide an incredible range of services from furniture to optical to beauty parlors to barber shops. Even dance studios could be found (among many other things) in Shoppers' City stores.

You could even find a tiny no-frills gas station in the parking lot of some stores, where one could