Standing at a Crossroad

Salt Lake's

Commercial Pocket

Perhaps diverse elements are drawn to an area like Ninth and Ninth because, unlike the soulless strip mall, the area is alive. It is organic, with a history and a personality.

AN OASIS FOR ALTERNATIVE LIFESTYLES

With an apt metaphor, Deedee Seed ties the Ninth and Ninth locals' present concerns to their sense of the area's history: "Ninth and Ninth is a crossroad in more ways than one." As one of Salt Lake's few pedestrian-friendly commercial pockets based around individualistic, owner-operated businesses, Ninth and Ninth is the same cultural crossroad as the rest of the city: big box development (and subtle forms of corporate encroachment) against small business. The locals care about this issue because they intuitively understand that, in a neighborhood with an evolutionary, organic heart like Ninth and Ninth's, they and the businesses—together—are a community.

The connection between a sense of history and a sense of community is almost tangible at Ninth and Ninth. The Salt Lake City Architectural/Historical Survey of January 1983 compared the intersection to an appearance that today's patrons would recognize. This similarity was also mentioned in the Architectural/Historical Survey: "The scale and commercial activity of the early suburban corner continue to the present, with little modification having occurred after 1920."

One of the defining additions to this neighborhood-commercial pocket was the Tower Theatre. Built in 1921, the theater was called the Tower because it was designed to look like London's Tower Bridge, replete with twin castle turrets. The excitement over sound in movies in the late 1920s led to a new nickname for the theater (at least through 1935): the "Tower Talkies." With its status as the first air-conditioned theater in Salt Lake City, the Tower Talkies was thoroughly modern. But 30 years later, the fanciful façade (just right, no doubt, for Douglas Fairbanks and Lon Chaney) must have seemed dated. The theater was revamped in the mid-1960s with the more subtle, art-deco façade we know today.

Salt Lake has changed outwardly since the Tower's face-lift, though the business community has been in an almost constant state of flux over the last 40 years.

A few Ninth and Ninth businesses, however, have enjoyed great longevity. On the southeast corner, the King-Jolley Pharmacy (later Jolley's Corner) replaced a Walgreens Drugstore in 1954. Although the soda fountain inside only lasted a few more years, the Jolley family's classic corner drugstore endured for over four decades. Across the street, Harry Olsen opened his Texaco on the northeast corner in 1952 and stayed there for 22 years. He was bought out by a poorly received 7-Eleven that was soon replaced by the Great Harvest Bread Co.

Eldridge's lawn mower store stopped selling bicycles and moved from one side of Ninth South to the other about 25 years ago, but it just might be Ninth and Ninth's...
The Birth of 9th & 9th

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iven Ninth and Ninth's reputation as Salt Lake City's alternative scene, it is interesting to recall that the area was once the outside edge of the city. During Salt Lake City's early history, Ninth and Ninth effectively marked the southern tip of the city. Few residences were built above Ninth East until the late nineteenth century, and Ninth South was the southern boundary of the city limits. Pursuant to the original Mormon concept of cities as centralized communities for farmers and artisans, the land south of that boundary was reserved for city residents at five-acre-sen farms. This rural area was called "the Big Field."

One of the first commercial structures at Ninth and Ninth was largely responsible for increasing development there. It is also the oldest structure remaining at Ninth and Ninth: The Leffler Floor Mill (also spelled "Lester"). The floor mill building is behind and attached to the Woodman Building at 859 East 900 South, the birthplace of Brachman Bros. Bagels. The successor to Brachman Bros., Einstein Bros. Bagels, now resides in the first floor of the Woodman Building.

Built in about 1878, the Leffler Floor Mill was located at the city's southern corner to keep its coal-fired steam engine away from the more populous commercial and residential areas. Although later sold to another owner (the mill business switched owners and names several times), the Leffler family operated the mill until it closed in 1904. After the mill closed, Alma F. Thomberg used the building for the Thorschern Steam Carpet Cleaning Works until 1925, Thorschern's nephews, John A. and Frank H., Woodman owned the mill building after 1911. (Another uncle, Frank Higginbotham, purchased the building as an investment property for the Woodman brothers.)

The Leffler Floor Mill marked the intersection of Ninth and Ninth as a commercial center. The area's commercial and residential expansion, however, was fueled primarily by the arrival of railroad and streetcar lines. In 1888, the Salt Lake and Fort Douglas Railroad opened a railroad line along Ninth South. The railroad was followed in 1890 by a streetcar line along Ninth East. The railroad and the streetcar system opened Sugar House to development of suburbs. The Ninth and Ninth neighborhood reflects the gradual evolution of the old suburb to its mixture of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Victorian homes and bungalows. The community includes a few homes built as far back as the 1870s, many built in the 1890s and many of the brick bungalows that have been cited as representative of the arts and crafts movement of the 20th century's first two decades.

After the introduction of the streetcar, Ninth and Ninth gradually lost its status as a community on the outside edge of the city.
Greg Tanner: Through his efforts, the Tower Theatre was reborn in 1990 as an art-film theater and video store. What remembers the Ninth and Ninth area as generally "less Mr. and Mrs. Middle America" than at present. As a business owner, Ed Hurd was wary of the area's reputation. "We were trying to duck being labeled with 'hippy business' because of people's image of hippies in those days. But still the perception was that this was 'the hippy mall,'" as it was called at one point."

More traditional than health food or head shops was Warshaw's, a supermarket facing Ninth East. In the mid-'70s, Smith's Food and Drugs moved into Warshaw's building. Within a few years, Smith's expanded, taking away the remaining homes between it and Eighth South and eventually reorienting to face north. Alternative and traditional businesses came and went during the '80s. The decade was tough on the Tower Theatre, which had become a discount theater in the late '70s and finally closed in 1988. Within a year, a "Save the Tower" movement formed, led by Greg Tanner (then the owner of Cinema-in-Your-Face and a former owner of the Blue Mouse). Through Tanner's efforts, the Tower was reborn in 1990 as an art-film theater and video store. Despite the Tower's troubles, it was during the '80s that some of Ninth and Ninth's most successful current businesses got started. Cahoots opened in mid-decade as one of the first adult-oriented card and gift shops in Utah. Western Rivers Flyfisher opened in 1986 and will soon be moving to its own building further east on Ninth South. In 1988, Brackman Bros. Bagels opened in the Woodman Building. Brackman Bros. was founded by a small group of investors, including Dan Colangello, who currently owns the buildings on the north-west corner.

The timing was perfect. Brackman Bros. was the regional herald of the bagel's emergence as the signature fast-food of yuppies. Business built steadily in a way that it never had for the fast-food pasta-and-salad restaurant that had inhabited the Woodman Building earlier in the decade. Brackman Bros. continued to gain popularity in the early '90s, expanding to multiple locations along the Wasatch Front. The owners sold their interest to Einstein Bros. Bagels in March of 1995. Dan Colangello and Lewis Miller (an attorney who had worked for Brackman Bros.) joined the Colorado Einstein corporation for a short time, but have since returned to Salt Lake City, and to Ninth and Ninth.

TRACKING THE BLOCKBUSTER RUMOR

The return of the Brackman's alumni is partially responsible for recent concerns among residents and patrons of the Ninth and Ninth area. The area's alignment with a large corporation has raised suspicions about corporate motives in the area. This is particularly true since Dan Colangello purchased the northwest corner buildings a year ago. Colangello's emergence as one of the primary landlords at the intersection probably led directly to one rumor about the fate of Ninth and Ninth; that Blockbuster Video is moving into the northwest corner.

Lewis Miller, former Brackman Brothers associates, wraps up work on the storefront of the new Magellan's Wraps restaurant.

Tower Theater owner Greg Tanner believes he was present when the rumor began. After Colangello had become landlord across the street, raised rents made some of the business-owners view their own buildings with new eyes. In a meeting of Ninth and Ninth business owners, one of the northwest tenants said to
The future of the Ninth and Ninth intersection and neighborhood has become the focus of two recent developments. The East Central Community Council, one of eight Salt Lake City "planning communities," has been working with volunteer representatives from 16 neighborhoods on updating the East Central Master Plan. The plan involves the addition of new commercial and residential development, with a focus on pedestrian-friendly streets.

Chris Quinn, a project coordinator for an architecture firm, is the Community Council representative for the East Liberty neighborhood, where Ninth and Ninth is located. As leader of the Ninth and Ninth "Task Force," Quinn is working on the neighborhood's Small Area Master Plan. The plan revolves around the aesthetic and practical differences that make urban areas pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly. "The plan aims to enhance the area's charm and appeal to potential investors," says Quinn. It also seeks to integrate new commercial and residential development with the existing neighborhood character.

The City Council this week approved a resolution that would allow the City to purchase the property. The purchase would be used to create a "pedestrian-friendly" environment, within which the city can build new commercial and residential developments.

Along the east side of Ninth and Ninth, a new pedestrian-friendly environment is taking shape. The city has recently added sidewalks and street furniture to the area, creating a more welcoming and accessible environment. The city is also working to improve the visibility of the area, with the addition of new street lighting and improved signage.

Another important aspect of Quinn's plan is the connection of the area to the rest of the city. The city is working to improve the pedestrian access to the area, with the addition of new sidewalks and street furniture to the area.