



Sales and Celebrations: Retailing and Regional Identity in Western New York State, 1920–1940

Sarah Elvins

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Between The Two World Wars, the retail world experienced tremendous changes. New forms of competition, expanded networks of communication and transportation, and the proliferation of manufactured goods posed challenges to department store and small shopkeeper alike. In western New York, and in Buffalo and Rochester in particular, retailers were a crucial part of urban life, acting as cultural brokers and civic leaders. They were also cultivators of area pride. Even as they adopted the latest merchandising techniques or stocked the newest items, merchants emphasized their local roots and their ability to put a local spin on national trends and innovations. Regional identity became a powerful selling tool not only during the prosperity of the 1920s but also through the economic crisis of the Great Depression. affected the evolution of American consumer culture. It expands our understanding of American consumerism, demonstrating that local particularities and loyalties could often coexist with, and occasionally challenge, the spread of mass consumption. In her award-winning study, Professor Sarah Elvins provides new insight into the relationship between America's largest metropolises and its smaller centers. Retailers in Buffalo and Rochester did not simply imitate the practices of their counterparts in Manhattan and Chicago; they highlighted their unique ability to serve the wants and needs of their particular markets. By drawing attention to this persistent power of the local, *Sales and Celebrations* illuminates a neglected aspect of the story of American culture in the interwar period.

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