

For the Love of Murphy's: The Behind-the-Counter Story of a Great American Retailer. By JASON TOGYER. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008. 292 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$34.95.)

G. C. Murphy Company was one of the great retailers headquartered in Pennsylvania. Its first store opened in 1906 in McKeesport, just outside of Pittsburgh, and like its competitors F. W. Woolworth and S. S. Kresge companies, Murphy's operated a chain of "Five and Tens" in cities and towns. Murphy's particular strategy was to locate many of its stores in small towns where it could be the leading retailer. At one time, Murphy's stores blanketed rural Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia and eventually extended to small towns throughout the South and Midwest. It was an innovative retailer as well. During the 1950s, it was the first "Five and Ten" to advertise on television; it eventually used computers to track its inventory and sales, and by 1970 it was opening massive Murphy Mart stores. By then the company operated over five hundred units. Ironically, the chain's demise was a result of its success. In 1985, Ames Department Stores acquired the highly profitable Murphy Company during the merger and acquisition boom. Ames, however, declined under deep debt and increased competition and, after two bankruptcies, closed its remaining units in 2002.

Jason Togyer, a magazine editor based in Pittsburgh, used the resources of the McKeesport-based G. C. Murphy Company Foundation to produce a well-illustrated and interesting chronicle of the rise and fall of this once seemingly ubiquitous Pennsylvania retailer. The foundation partially funded the project and helped coordinate the collection of the employees' and customers' stories that Togyer uses to bring life to his narrative. It is these reminiscences that make this book special, and they come from retired executives and shop assistants and from customers in small towns in the mining region and in large cities like Pittsburgh and Baltimore. They effectively turn this book into an invaluable oral history project.

Using the foundation's records and photographs, newspaper articles, and the stories of workers and customers, Togyer tells the tale of G. C. Murphy from its founding in 1906 to its demise in the 1980s. Other than a few problems in the first five years, Togyer finds a series of uninterrupted successes; it even remained profitable during the Great Depression. After World War II, Murphy's enlarged its stores, built branches in suburbs and malls, and used technology to remain competitive. As detailed in this work, missteps were few and successes many.

This rosy view of G. C. Murphy Company is one of the book's two weaknesses. Likely because of the sources used, there is little unbiased perspective on the store. To a large degree, this is an insider tale crafted twenty years after the fact by people who truly miss the world of "Five and Tens." The book lacks the scholarly distance of a work like Susan Porter Benson's *Counter Cultures* (1988),

which notes the warts and all of department stores.

The other weakness is Togyer's lack of engagement with the scholarly literature. Like a good journalist, he tells his story well, but there is no broader contextualization. This is a shame because there are many scholarly works on department stores and very few on "Five and Tens." *For the Love of Murphy's* missed an opportunity to bridge that gap. As it stands, the book is a nicely written, if overly glowing, account of a plucky little retailer. Someone else, however, will have to ponder what role stores like Murphy's played in the twentieth century.

Despite these two criticisms, this is a very good and imaginative book. The story it tells is an important one, and its extensive use of employee and customer reminiscences make it a valuable work for scholars of retailing and both urban and rural culture. It is also a fun look back on an era now passed.

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Pivotal Pennsylvania: Presidential Politics from FDR to the Twenty-First Century. By G. TERRY MADONNA. (Mansfield, PA: Pennsylvania Historical Association, 2008. 125 pp. Illustrations, table, notes, suggested further reading, bibliography. \$14.95.)

Political junkies know Professor G. Terry Madonna, director of the Center for Politics and Public Affairs at Franklin & Marshall College and director of the Franklin & Marshall Poll. Madonna's media appearances, revealing polls, and astute political observations have enlightened and guided Pennsylvanians over the past several decades. He is splendidly qualified, therefore, to evaluate political trends, shifts in the balance of political power, and the vital contributions by the Pennsylvania electorate to determining who, since 1932, occupied the Oval Office.

This compact, fact-filled study traces realignments within Pennsylvania's electorate. It begins in 1932 by examining a slight inconclusive shift toward the Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt and then looks at a seismic pro-New Deal movement in 1936 that ended the Republicans' post-Civil War dominance and converted Pennsylvania, thereafter, from a one-party state to a swing state or "battleground state." Madonna systematically analyzes Pennsylvania's vote in each presidential election from 1932 to 2004, adroitly assaying the salient issues, dominant personalities, and political cleavages across the state. Many factors contributed to the creation of a "genuinely competitive two-party state" that kept elections close (36). The switch of Pittsburgh (during the New Deal) and Philadelphia (after 1951) into Democratic strongholds and the continued Republican dominance of two-thirds of the rural and the non-Philadelphia suburban counties set the stage for competitive presidential elections into the twenty-