

Design by Drinking:
Seattle's Comet Tavern as "Marketplace Vernacular"



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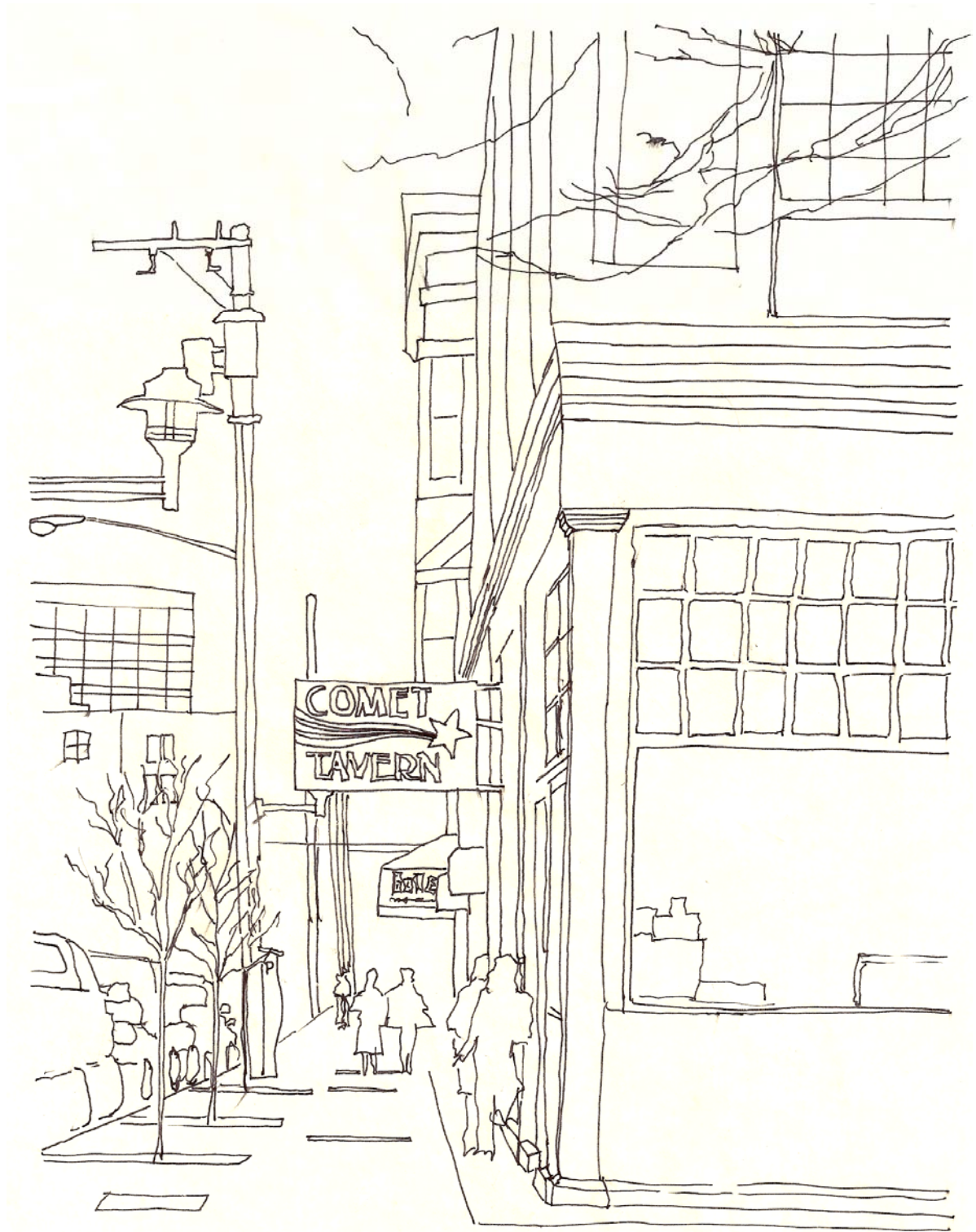


Figure 1: Sketch looking west down East Pike St., towards Broadway Ave. East. Source: author.

INTRODUCTION

The Comet Tavern is located at 922 East Pike Street in the Capitol Hill area of Seattle, Washington. The dilapidated 100 year old building it shares with a nightclub and two stories of vacant apartments sits on the north side of Pike Street, in the midst of a rapidly gentrifying block of auto repair shops, take-out restaurants, clubs, and tattoo parlors. The Comet has long been associated with hard drinking, loud music, and Seattle's counter-cultural movement. A long time patron tells the story of his first vivid memory of the Comet this way:

"I had gone with some older (and much cooler) friends to see a show at Moe's. This was iTchkung!, a local industrial-percussion-punk outfit known for their anarchist theatrics, and especially for their pyromania. When the show ended, the band members kicked open the side door of Moe's and we concert-goers spilled out behind them into the alley and onto the street. Within moments, people were standing on cars, shouting at the sky; someone lit the contents of a dumpster on fire, and someone else shoved it out toward the street. No one seemed to know exactly what to do, least of all me, but I watched with awe as people hurled flaming hunks of cardboard down the street in a pretty peaceful outburst of youthful energy. As the cop cars and fire trucks began to arrive, my friends and I retreated to the relative safety of the Comet. Somehow we landed a seat beside the window, and soon the place was crowded with other refugees from the night's events. I remember the smell of fire, the softness of the spring air, the taste of beer. Without realizing it, I found I was grinning – at the flames and the arrests just beyond the window, and at the good natured chaos in the Comet. I knew definitively that I had left the antiseptic suburbs of my high school behind."¹

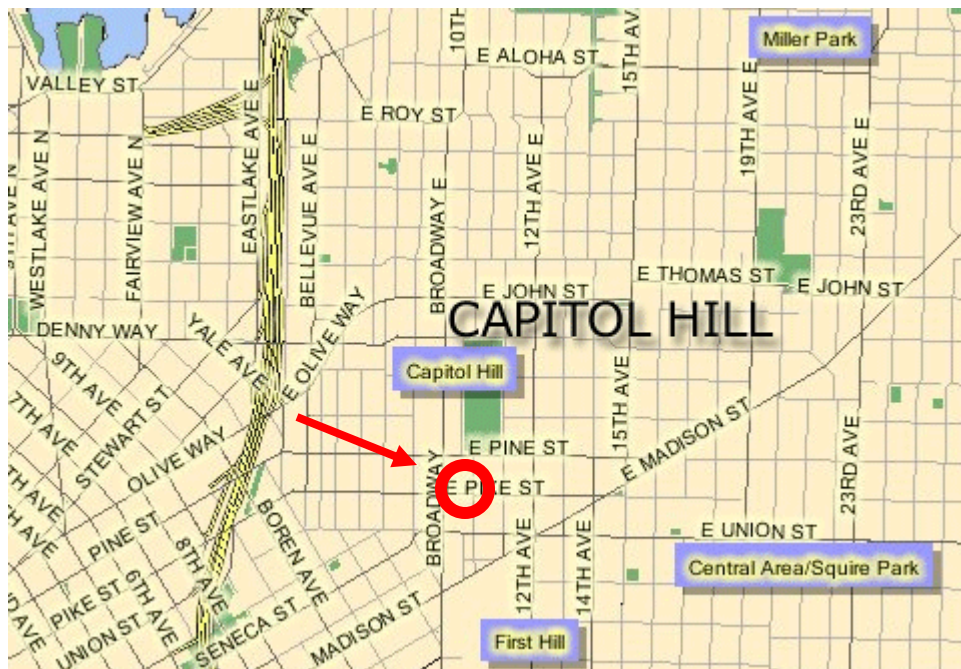


Figure 2: Map of Capitol Hill and Comet location.

Source: City of Seattle: http://www.pan.ci.seattle.wa.us/tour/capitol_map.htm

¹ Eric de Place, email correspondence on a memory from 1995, March 9, 2007.

In recent years the blocks around the Comet have experienced rapid urban renewal, as has the whole of Seattle. As this has happened, taverns like the Comet have grown fewer and fewer, either being reincarnated as more upscale "pubs" or "alehouses" or losing their leases as properties are demolished and redeveloped.² The tendency among established residents and patrons of these businesses is to blame wealthy newcomers and real estate developers for the change.³ However, this "us versus them" mentality misses the fact that redevelopment is often only the next step in a series of ongoing negotiations that have led to the design of vernacular buildings in Seattle. Using the microcosm of the tavern form, and its particular iteration in the Comet, this paper will trace the way this particular type of vernacular building has developed and continues to develop in Seattle.

Methodology

Using cultural geographer Paul Groth's concept of "marketplace vernacular", Section One of this paper will argue that the Seattle tavern is an established building type, developed as a result of give and take between building owners, tenants, and tavern patrons over the course of the past 60 years. Section Two will review the history of the Comet and the way in which it matches the building type and development pattern of a typical Seattle tavern. The paper will conclude by exploring preservation issues as they relate to the Comet as a model of "marketplace vernacular".

"Marketplace Vernacular" Defined

Popularized by UC Berkeley cultural geographer, Paul Groth, the term "marketplace vernacular" refers to the ongoing negotiation, building iteration by building iteration, between large faceless developers, building tenants, and the cultural and social norms that encase them both. As Groth argues for his primary object of study, downtown rooming houses:

"Although clerks and secretaries living in rooming houses did not directly influence the form of individual buildings, owners and managers paid careful attention to what the most reliable tenants wanted. Thus, tenants exerted distinct market pressure on building forms. Although they could not demand changes or additions in structures, they could do "design by moving".⁴

Tavern patrons and business owners can and do exercise this "design by moving" influence just as readily as Groth's boarders, and are also a strong force in the marketplace.

"Marketplace vernacular" should be distinguished from more traditional ways of categorizing vernacular architecture, in which it is assumed that structures are built

² "There used to be 120 little drinking holes in and around downtown Seattle," Reynolds says. "You know, real places where working-class poor and neighbors and slumming rich would come and hang out together. Now they've almost all gone upscale." The Reverend Rick Reynolds as quoted in "Jesus Gets a Toehold at Taverns," Danny Westneat, *The Seattle Times*, December 31, 2006. Online at http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/dannywestneat/2003503227_danny310.html, [accessed March 10, 2007].

³ "Briggs, voicing the sentiments of many longtime residents, says he's "furious" about what developers are doing to Pike/Pine. 'They're pushing out what has made this the neighborhood that it is.'" As quoted by Erica C. Barnett, "The Death of Pike/Pine," *The Stranger*, November 29, 2006. Online at: <http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/Content?oid=111746> [accessed March 10, 2007].

⁴ Paul Groth, "'Marketplace'" Vernacular Design: The Case of Downtown Rooming Houses", *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 2. (1986), 189.

by the same people who will ultimately live in them. "Marketplace vernacular", by contrast, is a less romantic conceptualization of the way ordinary people in contemporary urban and suburban environments shape and change the ordinary spaces that shelter them, without being directly involved in their design and construction.

SECTION 1: SEATTLE'S TAVERNS AS MARKETPLACE VERNACULAR

History of Seattle Taverns

Washington State has had a strong temperance movement since before its inception. As early as 1855 a bill was proposed to the territorial legislature titled "An Act to Prohibit the Manufacture or Sale of Ardent Spirits in the Territory of Washington."⁵ While the act narrowly failed, it did not stop the formation of a legion of temperance organizations in the ensuing years. Jason Lee's Temperance Society, Sons of Temperance, the Independent Order of Good Templars, Woman's Christian

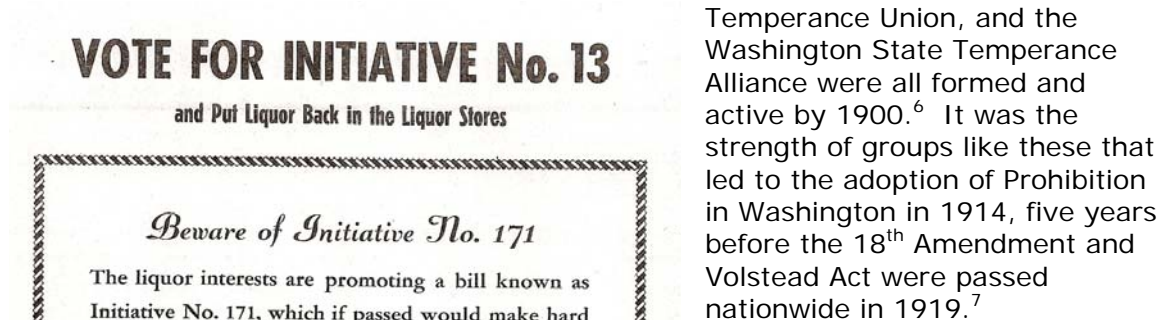


Figure 3: From a pamphlet against Initiative 171 and for a competing temperance initiative, No. 13. Source: "What is Initiative No. 13?", Friends of Decent Living. 1948. UW Special Collections.

Temperance Union, and the Washington State Temperance Alliance were all formed and active by 1900.⁶ It was the strength of groups like these that led to the adoption of Prohibition in Washington in 1914, five years before the 18th Amendment and Volstead Act were passed nationwide in 1919.⁷

The unique institution that is the Seattle tavern developed after the repeal of Prohibition with the 21st Amendment to the U.S.

Constitution in 1933. In keeping with Washington's strong temperance leanings, a series of laws known popularly as "Blue Laws" heavily regulated the

manufacture and purchase of all alcoholic beverages in the state, even after the end of the "Noble Experiment." The Blue Laws mandated that all distilled liquor would be sold through state-owned and operated liquor stores, and that only beer and wine could be sold by the glass or bottle in taverns and restaurants. For the first few years after the institution of the Blue Laws, it seems that "tavern" referred to a range of establishments catering to different socio-economic groups. As a temperance pamphlet distributed by the "Friends of Decent Living" in 1948 described it under the heading "Seductive Settings":

"The most enticing places in town to many are the taverns with their glass brick fronts, bright neon exteriors, expensive modern interiors,

⁵ Paul Vogel, "Temperance Activity and Liquor Legislation in Washington State," date unknown, University of Washington Special Collections pamphlet, 5.

⁶ Vogel, "Temperance Activity", 10.

⁷ Magnuson, Warren G. (1905-1989), HistoryLink.org Essay 5569. Online at: http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=5569 (accessed February 14, 2007).

comfortable leather lounges, subtle indirect lighting, soft music, and alluring bar maids and percentage girls.

They're glamorous spots all right, and they're successful too! They are recruiting our sons and daughters as customers as young as possible. They are inducing us to spend a constantly increasing amount of our time and money in the "Friendly Taverns."

Of course, there are plenty of filthy beer joints, too, that regularly capture a substantial part of many a workman's pay check – money that is desperately needed by his wife and children for food, clothing and rent."⁸

It was with the passing of Initiative No. 171 in 1948 that a strong division between "taverns" and other establishments selling alcohol appeared. Initiative 171 mandated "liberalization of the distribution of spirituous liquors by permitting a stated number of licensed places – mostly hotels, restaurants, and licensed carriers – to dispense them on a by-the-drink basis."⁹ Note that Initiative 171 did *not* allow the sale of distilled spirits at taverns. Tavern owners and operators had introduced their own initiative in 1948 that would have granted them "the privilege of serving distilled liquors to their customers as well as beer and wine"¹⁰, but they were not able to gather enough signatures to place the measure on the ballot.

The differentiation between taverns and establishments serving liquor subsequently crystallized around the "70/30 rule". An establishment serving distilled liquor had to receive 70% or more of its proceeds from food sales, and no more than 30% of its proceeds from alcohol. Those tavern owners that were able to do so installed kitchens, while tavern owners that did not have the space or the capital to expand continued to sell only beer and wine. In a self-perpetuating cycle that lasted through the latter 50 years of the 20th century, those places that only offered the option to drink increasingly attracted patrons interested only in drinking. By the time the ban against selling alcohol on Sunday was overturned in 1964, Seattle's taverns had acquired a social stigma as dark, lower-class, and a large part of the societal problem of alcoholism. As one critic put it, "I feel [Sunday drinking] would



Figure 4: The cigarette and beer glass in the foreground of this newspaper photo reinforce class cues about tavern goers. Source: "The People's View of Liquor on Sunday", *Post-Intelligencer*, June 28, 1964, p. 1, col. 6

⁸ "What is Initiative No. 13?", Friends of Decent Living, 1948. UW Special Collections.

⁹ "The Liquor Initiatives", *Argus*, October 23, 1948.

¹⁰ "Liquor: Cocktail Initiatives", *Argus*, August 28, 1948.

pose a problem for those who are inclined to just sit in the taverns and drink.”¹¹ By the early 1990s, when most of Washington’s “Blue Laws” were overturned, Seattle’s taverns had taken on a distinctive architectural form reflecting their socially marginal status.

Tavern Survey

At the time of writing, the Seattle Dex Yellow Pages Directory listed 142 establishments under the category of “Tavern.”¹² Of those 142 businesses, only nine were verified through phone calls and online reviews as serving neither hard alcohol nor food. Information on another ten of the 142 taverns listed was not available, so the eight should be viewed as a sample, and not a comprehensive list of all remaining taverns in Seattle. A table with King County parcel information on the nine taverns is below¹³:

	Name	Location	Year Built	Condition	Building material
1	Al’s Tavern	2303 N 45th St	1948	Average	Masonry
2	Knarr Tavern	5633 University Way NE	1908	Poor	Wood frame
3	Streamline Tavern	121 W Mercer Street	1900	Poor	Wood frame
4	Targy’s Tavern	600 W Crocket St	1906	Average	Wood frame
5	Shanty Tavern	9002 Lake City Way, NE	1932	Average	Wood frame
6	Eastlake Zoo	2301 Eastlake Ave. E	1924	Poor	Masonry
7	The Buckaroo Tavern	4201 Fremont Ave N	1908	Average	Wood frame
8	Blue Moon Tavern	712 NE 45 th St	1923	Average	Masonry
9	Angie’s Tavern	4915 Rainier Ave S	1905	Poor	Wood frame

Figure 5: King County Assessor’s Office parcel data on nine taverns.

A review of the table reveals much about the economic status of the taverns. Of the nine buildings, all are listed in King County parcel records as being in either Average or Poor condition, out of a possible range of Poor, Average and Good. In addition, only three of the buildings are masonry, with the remaining six all inexpensive wood frame construction. Finally, the majority of the buildings are single story. All of these factors indicate that the businesses pay relatively low rents for space that is likely to be somewhat dilapidated, given its age and construction method.

Additionally, of the nine surveyed, all but Al’s Tavern were built before the end of Prohibition, and so were not built *as* taverns, in their particular Seattle iteration. Any change in the building form since that time would seem to be the result of negotiation between tenant business owners, building owners, and patrons. And it is that negotiation that indicates that taverns in Seattle are an example of “marketplace vernacular.”

¹¹ “The People’s View of Liquor on Sunday”, *Post-Intelligencer*, June 28, 1964, p. 1, col. 6

¹² Seattle Dex Yellow Pages. Online at: <http://www.dexonline.com/search.ds> [accessed February 10, 2007].

¹³ All data from the King County Assessors Office parcel data, online at: <http://www.metrokc.gov/ASSESSOR/eRealProperty> [accessed February 5-March 10, 2007].

Taverns as “marketplace vernacular”

The social response to Washington’s Blue Laws eventually translated into an architectural response, as well, involving a process of give and take between tenants, patrons, and building owners.



Figure 6: Exterior of taverns. Numbers in upper left corner of each photograph correspond to matrix on page 7. Source: author.

First, tenants exercised influence on tavern built form by seeking out and maintaining as taverns commercial spaces with minimal square footage. Given the low profit margin on selling only beer and wine, tavern owners often were not able to afford the rents on large spaces. In addition, because food was not served, space for a kitchen, cold storage and wait staff break rooms was unnecessary, enabling building owners to keep footprints small in response to tenant demand.

Second, tavern patrons also exerted their influence on the built form and interior arrangement of taverns. As negative associations of alcoholism and drunkenness grew to be paired with taverns after 1948, the businesses became increasingly insular, with patrons choosing taverns where they were shielded from the

judgmental gaze of the street.¹⁴ All the businesses surveyed shrank noticeably from interaction with the street. Eight of the taverns employed either darkened or painted glass to make the inside of the bar relatively impenetrable to passers-by. The one tavern that did not employ darkened glass, The Eastlake Zoo, has its interior furniture arranged at the farthest distance from the door, with the bar and two pool tables in between. In fact, only one of the taverns surveyed (The Buckaroo) has tables and chairs directly next to the windows. Instead, that space is typically used for ATM machines, jukeboxes and video games.

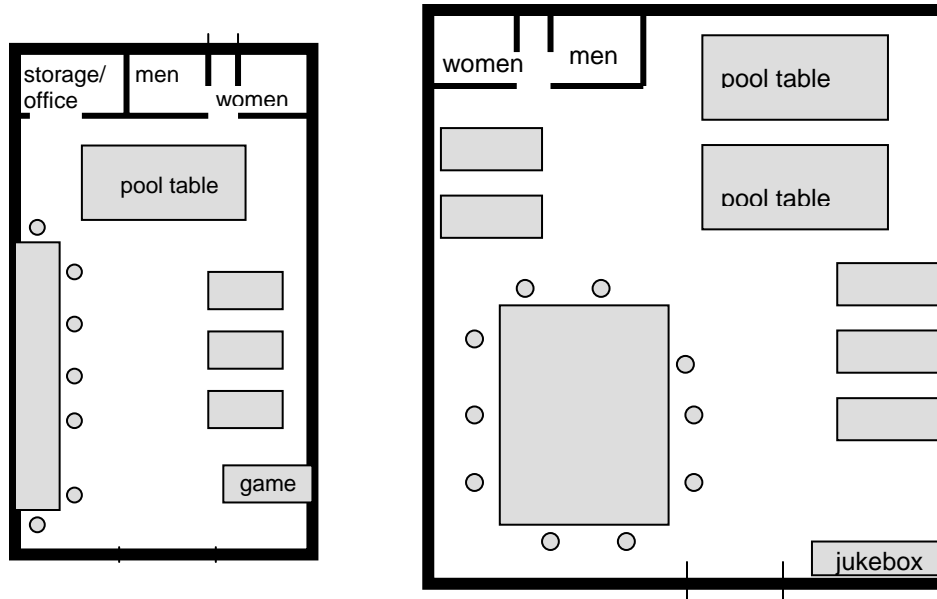


Figure 7: Floorplans for AI's Tavern (left) and the Streamline Tavern (right). Note defensive position of bar, and distance between furniture and windows. Source: author. Diagrams not to scale.

Additionally, tavern patrons and business owners have jointly influenced the interior form of the tavern through the placement of the bar. In all of the taverns surveyed except the Buckaroo, the bar is located within close range and visibility of the front door in a defensive position. The bartender often acts as a gatekeeper, sizing up and greeting patrons as they enter, and ushering out those patrons that threaten to become violent or too unruly. It seems that patrons seek out establishments that feel relatively secure, while tavern owners make interior changes in order to offer that same security.

Third, building owners did their part by modifying the façade of taverns to further enhance the “cocooning” effect away from the street, sought after by both patrons and business owners. Eight of the taverns surveyed were located in pre-1950 commercial strips where stores front directly on the sidewalk. Of those eight, five have had the historic floor-to-ceiling shop front windows replaced with smaller and higher versions. The windows clearly do not match the much larger windows in adjacent businesses.

¹⁴ There is some evidence that, despite their reputation as working class haunts, people from all ends of the class spectrum frequent taverns, further increasing the need for privacy from the street. See “Jesus Gets a Toehold at Taverns.”

SECTION TWO: THE COMET AS EXAMPLE OF THE “TAVERN” BUILDING TYPE

Site Inventory

Ironically, the Comet Tavern was not included in the tavern survey because of the introduction of hard liquor sales in the fall of 2006.¹⁵ However, its built form shares the characteristics of “cocooning” from the street, dilapidation, and defensible interior space typical of the nine taverns surveyed.



Figure 8: Comet Tavern. View looking northwest from intersection of East Pike St and 10th Ave East. Source: author.

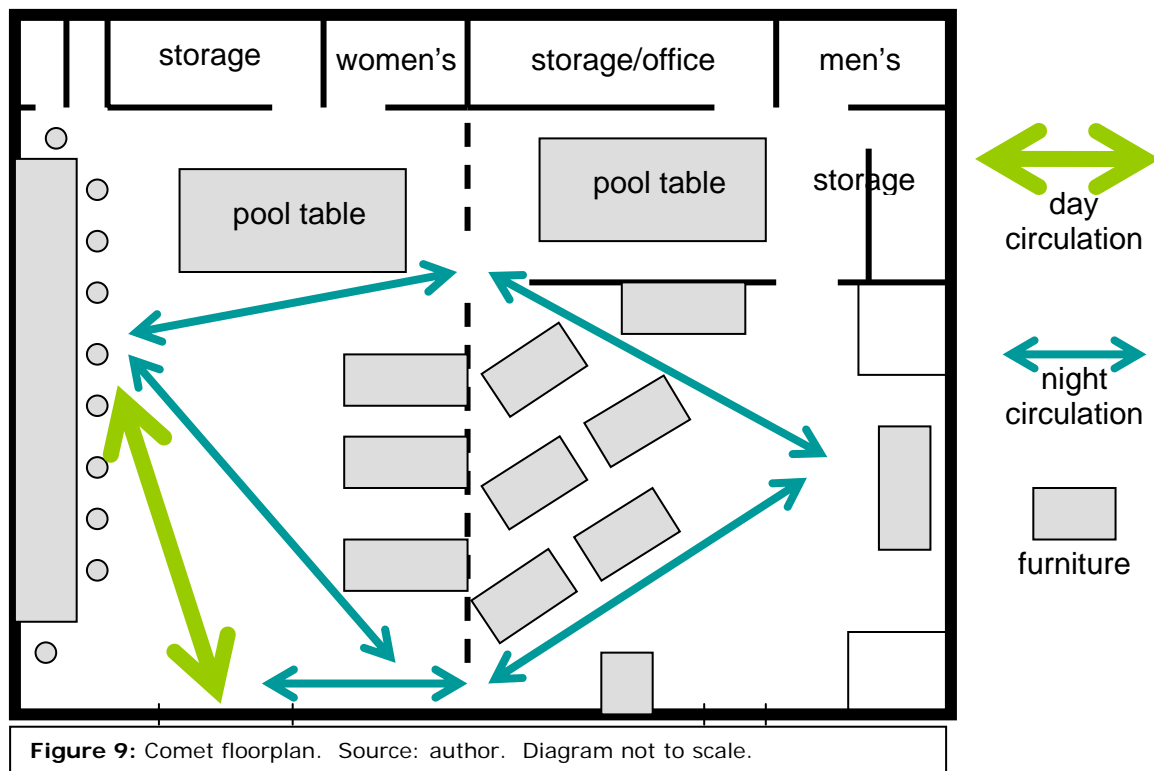
First, from the outside, the Comet’s 2,400 square feet appears larger than many of the spaces surveyed. It has two entrances, an indication that two formerly discrete storefronts have been joined. Like the other businesses, however, the interior of the space is difficult to discern from the street. This is due in part to the fact that the bulk of the street-level windows have been painted black, while those that have not been painted start at eye-level. In a break with the bulk of the other taverns, the Comet does have one table next to a window. However, the remaining window frontage is given over to storage and an ATM machine.

Second, the Comet is dilapidated like the other taverns. In fact, it appears to be in an even more intense state of disrepair than any of the other taverns surveyed. It is

¹⁵ In fact, it should be assumed that they survey failed to capture many establishments that still “read” as taverns because of the rush among taverns to offer hard alcohol when the “70/30 rule” was finally overturned in 2006.

masonry construction, with a plaster façade and the remnants of a cornice on the upper stories that is peeling in huge patches. The windows in the upper stories of the building are boarded up with aging plywood or are broken. County records list the building as a whole in “Poor” condition and the upper stories as “uninhabitable.”¹⁶

Third, the interior of the Comet shares the defensible aura typical of the other taverns. As the floor plan and circulation patterns below show, the bar is located extremely close to the front door, providing the bartender with a post from which to monitor entrances and exits. In addition, the eastern half of the tavern is approximately three feet higher than the western half where the bar sits, providing an elevated stage for the bartender to monitor.



The Comet does break with the other taverns in some important respects. Most noticeably, it is far larger than the other businesses. It is also slightly more transparent from the street, particularly the eastern half, and has not had its historic windows modified. Finally, the building in which it sits is a grander and more imposing structure than the single-story wood frame structures that tend to house the other taverns.

Despite these differences, The Comet still clearly “reads” as a tavern. In addition, the imposing size of the building is offset by its extremely poor condition, in all probability forcing the building owner to charge rents comparable to those charged for the other tavern spaces.

¹⁶ King County Assessors Office Parcel data, online at: <http://www.metrokc.gov/ASSESSOR/eRealProperty> [accessed February 5-March 10, 2007].

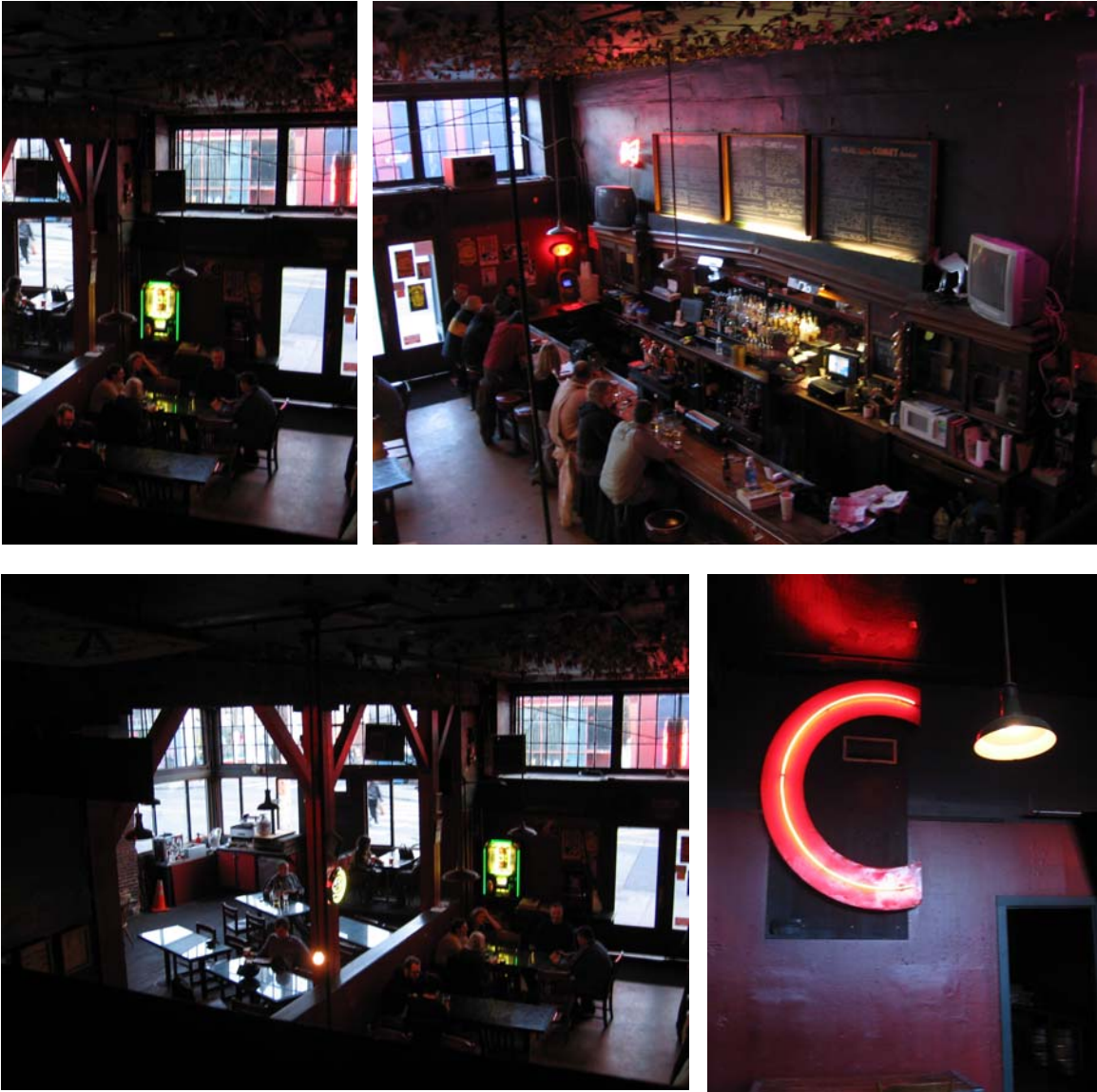


Figure 10: Interior views of the Comet. Source: author.

History

A review of the history of the Comet in more detail than that given to the other tavern examples reveals clearly how it embodies “marketplace vernacular.”

1893-1933

A series of Sanborn fire insurance maps dating from 1893-1916 give the viewer a sense for the rapid changes in the neighborhood at the time of the Comet’s construction.

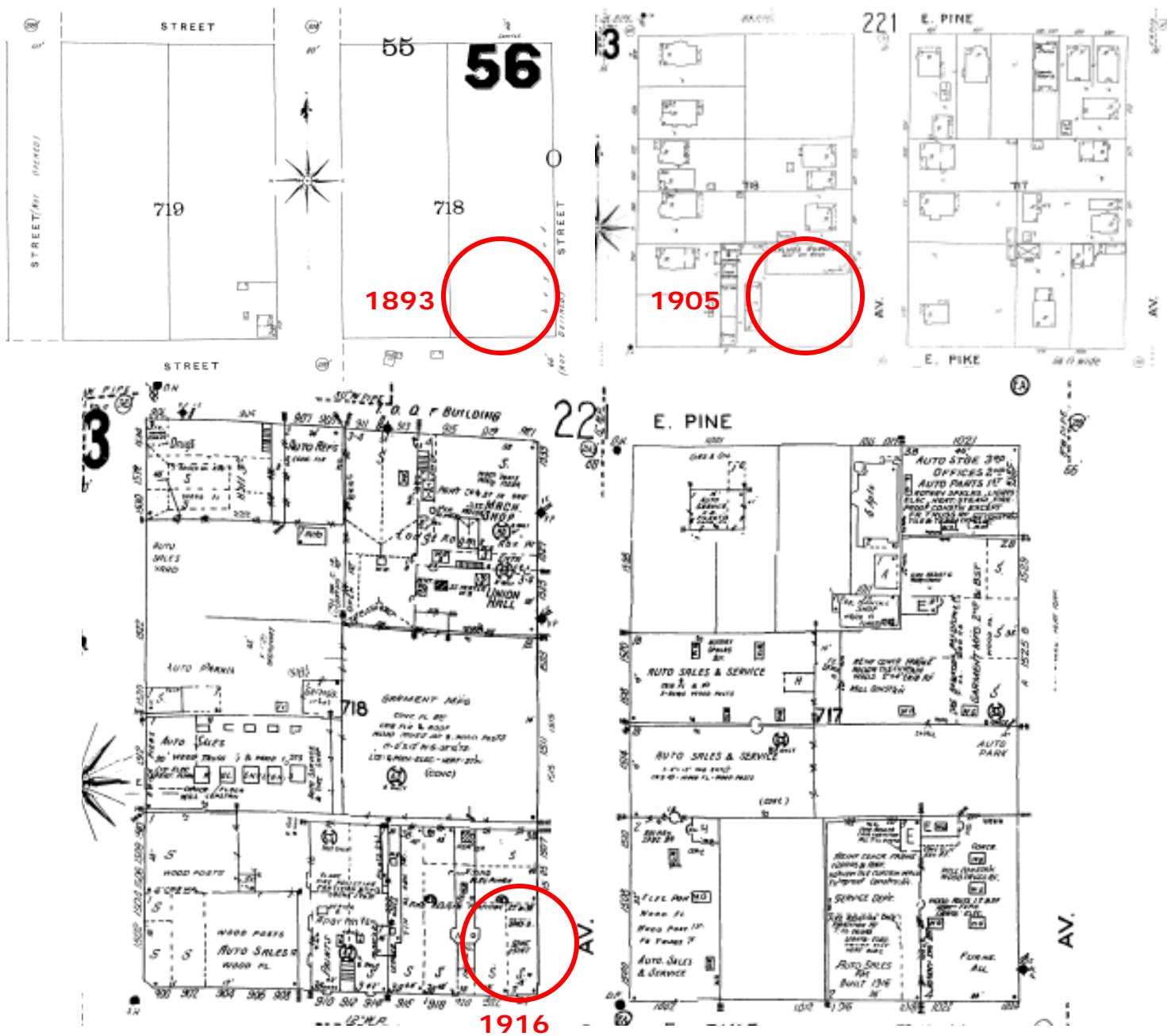


Figure 11: Historic Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1893, 1905 and 1916, location of Comet marked in red. Note rapid development of neighborhood. Source: Online at http://www.spl.org/default.asp?pageID=collection_db_subscription [accessed February 20, 2007]. Modified by author.

City records indicate that the building was constructed in 1910. However, Sam Wright, former owner of the Comet, ascertains that the building was built in 1907. In addition, the UW archives hold two photos of the building dated November 6, 1909 (see Figures 12-14). At the time of construction the upper stories of the Comet had 28 apartment units, with the average size being 649 square feet. Historic photographs indicate that the building included at least four separate commercial spaces on its ground floor. In addition, a network of tunnels used to smuggle liquor

during Prohibition leading from the Comet's basement is substantiated by city utility records.¹⁷



Figure 12: View looking north east up Pike St. The Comet building is on the right. Photo dated 11/6/09. Source: University of Washington Special Collections.



Figure 13: View looking north west down Pike Street at Comet building. Note steps from mud street. Photo dated 11/6/09. Source: University of Washington Special Collections.

¹⁷ Conversation with Todd Kelly at the Comet, January 27, 2007.



Figure 14: View looking east up Pike Street during streetcar line construction. Comet building is on the left. Note dramatic rise in street grade from 1909 photos. Photo dated 3/6/11. Source: University of Washington Special Collections.

The Comet's role as "marketplace vernacular" during these years is evident in three ways. First, in its construction as a multi-use building it was responding to a huge housing crisis for young, single people in Seattle. The city in 1910 was flooded with recent migrants ready to make their fortune, and many of them were seeking a low-cost alternative to the single-family home. Second, the small footprints of the four commercial spaces speak clearly to the need for space for small business enterprises. Third, and perhaps the most fun, is the partial evidence that the semi-secret tunnels radiating from the basement met a need of a more visceral kind for the people of the city from 1914 to 1933.

1933-1970s

The Comet's history becomes less clear in the period after Prohibition. It was an Irish-themed neighborhood tavern called "The Wee Dock and Doris" until the mid-1950s, at which point its name changed to the Comet Tavern.¹⁸ At some point in the 1960s the windows were covered in plywood and painted black, black lights were installed, and it became "a hippie place to drop acid."¹⁹ In 1976 the Comet expanded into the space to the east, which had been a tool supply store, Anderson Tools.²⁰ The raised platform on which the table by the window sits is a remnant of the window display from Anderson Tools.

¹⁸ Phone interview with Sam Wright, March 8, 2007.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

The Comet's role as "marketplace vernacular" during these years is evident primarily in the way it changed to reflect the changing taste of its patrons during the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s. While the Comet has never been an explicitly gay bar, Capitol Hill began to be a national center of gay culture during this time period. As in many cities, marginalized behaviors, such as gay and "hippie" culture, shared the same urban neighborhood in Seattle.



Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle

Figure 15: Students overturning a car on Broadway Avenue and Pine Street on Earth Day, 1970.
Source: University of Washington Special Collections.

1970s-2007

At some point in the early 1970s, John Kusakabe bought both the Comet business and the building at 916-922 East Pike St.²¹ Mr. Kusakabe sold the business to Mr. Wright in 1982, but retained ownership of the building until his death in 1993.²² The building and business appear to have changed very little in the time that Mr. Kusakabe and Mr. Wright owned them, in keeping with a period of economic stagnation and population loss in Seattle as a whole.

The thirty years that Mr. Kusakabe and Mr. Wright owned the Comet seem to have been characterized by an eccentricity and freedom that are the brighter side of living in the forgotten corner of a depressed city. Research for this paper uncovered

²¹ He apparently raised his children in the building, and is reputed to have been an unwilling landlord to other residential tenants. He is rumored to have never recruited a tenant, and to simply lock the door each time another person moved out, without even bothering to empty the refrigerators. Sam Wright, March 8, 2007, conversation.

²² Phone interview with Kent Kusakabe DDS, nephew of John Kusakabe, March 5, 2007.

countless personal stories from these years. People such as Ethel, the long-time Comet bartender whose ashes are lovingly encased in her regular barstool, and Ed, the regular with the beer named after him, are still spoken of with fondness.²³ In addition, the Comet is closely related for many people to the stirrings of Seattle's music scene in the early 1990s, particularly through association with the local punk band, The Gits.²⁴

As Seattle pulled itself from its long economic slump in the mid-1990s, the neighborhood and tavern both began to change. The change was slow at first, and much of it welcomed as a way to make the neighborhood safer, particularly after the violent murder of The Gits' front woman, Mia Zapata, in 1993. However, since 2000 the pace of change has greatly accelerated. Since January 1, 2005, permits for twenty new residential (duplex and multi-family) developments and eight new commercial developments have been applied for in the ten square blocks surrounding the Comet.²⁵ In addition, the once-marginalized neighborhood began to be marketed with a kicky new brand name, "The Pike-Pine Corridor", and even its own logo. And the Comet changed hands once again, with Mr. Wright selling the business in the fall of 2006.

CONCLUSION: PRESERVING THE COMET AS "MARKETPLACE VERNACULAR"

All of the new growth seems likely to impact the Comet. Given the derelict state of the building, an absentee landlord, and the escalating value of land on the corridor, there is open speculation that when the Comet's lease is up in 2010, so is the Comet. It is growing increasingly difficult to imagine a scenario in which the neighborhood's changes do not significantly impact the dilapidated building and business at 922 East Pike St.

There are cultural changes that also seem likely to impact the Comet and all Seattle's traditional taverns. Seattle's view on drinking has changed dramatically since 1948, and loosening liquor laws have reflected that change. While escalating land

prices do put intense pressure on neighborhood taverns, there is a possibility that these establishments would continue to die out or morph



Figures 16 & 17: (Top) Neon signs from local brewery Hales Ales, in honor of Ethel and Ed. (Bottom) Ethel's final resting place. Source: author.

²³ Phone interview with Phil O'Brien, Hales Ales Brewery, February 19, 2007.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development Activity Locator, <http://web1.seattle.gov/dpd/GoogleDPD/default.aspx>

simply due to relaxed views on alcohol consumption and a corresponding lack of desire to continue to cordon it off from other social activities. In addition, in a society where unhealthy calorie consumption has become the new “demon liquor”, calorie heavy beer and wine continue to decrease in popularity compared to cocktails, striking a further blow to beer-dependent taverns. Finally, and perhaps most surprisingly, Washington State’s 2005 ban on smoking in indoor public spaces has unintentionally perforated the cocoon around the tavern. Through requiring patrons to step outside to the street to smoke, the privacy of the tavern disappears. In fact, six of the nine taverns surveyed had patrons outside smoking and interacting with the street at the time photos were taken.



Figure 18: Artwork used for Ed’s Ale from Hale’s Ales brewery, in honor of longtime Comet Patron, Ed.
Source: Phil O’Brien, Hale’s Ales.

Given all these pressures on the Comet, the questions then become: should it be preserved? And, if it should be preserved, how?

There are multiple strikes against a traditional preservation effort succeeding for the Comet. First, preservation’s emphasis on the “historic integrity” of a preserved structure makes the structural changes in the building problematic.²⁶ Second, the Blue Moon Tavern, one of the nine taverns surveyed and another legendary Seattle watering hole, attempted to gain historic status in 1990 and failed.²⁷ It is highly unlikely the Comet would succeed where the better-known Blue Moon failed. Finally, traditional preservation efforts,

which tend to “pickle” a building at a past point in history, would not respect the ongoing process that made the Comet the prime example of “marketplace vernacular” that it is. Traditional preservation would, in essence, miss the entire point.

What is more likely, and perhaps more appropriate, is that the Comet and the building it is in will continue to change to match the changing face of the neighborhood in the coming years. The most pressing goal, and one which preservation-minded friends of the tavern should make their first priority, is that the structure itself not be demolished. While it is the subject for another paper, it can then be argued that even in its likely reincarnation as a more polished venue in a rehabilitated structure, the Comet would continue to reflect the neighborhood in which it now sits as a perfect example of ongoing “marketplace vernacular.”

²⁶ See Judith Wellman, “The Underground Railroad and the National Register of Historic Places: Historical Importance vs. Architectural Integrity,” *The Public Historian*, Vol. 24, No. 1. (Winter, 2002), 11-29.

²⁷ Timothy Egan, “Vanishing Species: The Local Hangout,” *Special to the New York Times*, February 1st, 1990. Online at: <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F3061FF83E540C728EDDAB0894D8494D81> [accessed March 12, 2007].

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