

First the War, Then the Future: Younkers Department Store and the Projection of a Civic Image during World War II

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“WAR IS HELL. But for millions of Americans on the booming home front, World War II was also a hell of a war.” So wrote Mark H. Leff to introduce his article analyzing the politics of sacrifice on the American home front during World War II. He continued, “The politics set in motion by a peculiar blend of profits and patriotism, of sacrifice and unprecedented prosperity, gave a distinctive cast to American wartime life.”¹ Leff’s article cast a wide net, covering numerous applications of the politics of sacrifice, while suggesting the potential for micro-level case studies. One such area that has received little attention in the World War II literature is the role of department stores during the war.

For the Younkers Brothers department store in Des Moines, it was a “hell of a war,” as the war affected the store and its staff. Younkers’s management, while generating patriotic enthusiasm, was able to project an image of sacrifice and civic engagement while simultaneously creatively planning for the postwar years. Not only did Younkers adapt to the rationing and price controls commonly associated with American businesses during the war,

1. Mark H. Leff, “The Politics of Sacrifice on the American Home Front in World War II,” *Journal of American History* 77 (1991), 1296.

but the store also engaged in the kinds of promotion and activities retailers sponsored as pillars of their local communities.

ON THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE, regionally identifiable department stores grew in reputation by the turn of the century, following the advances of consumer culture. Historian William Leach notes that department stores took on different forms in cities from New York to San Francisco, acting as a check against the standardizing and homogenizing push of modern capitalist industry. Sarah Elvins's study of department stores in western New York between the wars also highlights the importance of regional identity, describing how retailers played a crucial role as culture brokers and civic leaders.² While promoting a regional identity, department stores drew on a common set of materials. Retailers organized street fairs and carnivals, "ritualizing the passage of time," while "resurrecting old holidays and dreaming up new ones" to create shopping opportunities. Combining the technologies of electricity and glass with color and fantasy added to the allure of individual stores. By the 1920s, Leach notes, the typical department store was a zoo, a library, a barber and butcher shop, a world's fair, a restaurant, a museum, a post office, a botanical garden, and a beauty parlor.³

The Younkens department store traces its origins to 1856, when three immigrant brothers—Lipman, Samuel, and Marcus Younkens—founded a family-run dry goods store in Keokuk, Iowa. A younger sibling, Herman, came to America in 1870 and entered the employ of his brothers' store. In 1874 Herman was sent to Des Moines to open and manage a branch store. Following Samuel's death in 1879, the surviving brothers closed the Keokuk store and relocated their inventory to Des Moines. Readying for the new century, the brothers moved their store to 7th and Walnut in 1899. There Younkens became a fixture in the Des Moines retail landscape for 106 years, until the downtown location closed in 2006. Younkens steadily expanded its retail

2. William R. Leach, "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption," *Journal of American History* 71 (1984), 319–42; Sarah Elvins, *Sales and Celebrations: Retailing and Regional Identity in Western New York State, 1920–1940* (Athens, OH, 2004).

3. Leach, "Transformations in a Culture of Consumption," 322.

footprint, acquiring Grand Department Store in 1912, Wilkins Department Store in 1923, and J. Mandelbaum and Sons in 1927. In 1928 Younkers merged with Harris-Emery Company to become the largest department store in Iowa.⁴

During the 1920s and 1930s, Younkers was at the forefront of modernization efforts, including the advent of air conditioning in 1934 and the installation of Iowa's first escalator, known as "electric stairs," in 1939. Such modernization efforts, along with dazzling window displays and special holiday sales by which one could mark the seasonal calendar, cemented Younkers's reputation as Des Moines's flagship department store. Equally important to establishing its iconic status, however, was the attention Younkers paid to creating a place, literally a physical space, for civic engagement. The Younkers Tea Room became not only a gathering spot for customers and a site for Younkers employee events, but also a meeting place for many civic-minded groups in the greater Des Moines area.⁵ The combination of these factors makes the Younkers Department Store an ideal case study in the nexus of civic engagement and patriotic consumption during World War II.

WORLD WAR II encouraged widespread consumer enthusiasm that required "a great mobilization of American society, directed and financed by the federal government and conducted through businesses, the media, and numerous local institutions."⁶ Younkers Brothers department store possessed both institutional tradition and civic-minded leadership, which enabled it, as a private institution in the business of serving consumers, to serve as a conduit between government and citizens. During the war, Ross Dalbey, editor of the *Younker Reporter*, described Younkers as "several times larger than any other store in Iowa." Dalbey also seized upon the centrality of the store to

4. A general history of Younkers, "The Younkers Story," can be found in Younkers, Inc. Records, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

5. For the growth and significance of tea rooms in American department stores, see Jan Whitaker, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn: A Social History of the Tea Room Craze in American History* (New York, 2002).

6. Terrence H. Witkowski, "The American Consumer Home Front during World War II," *Advances in Consumer Research* 25 (1998), 568-73.

the state. "Located in almost the exact center of the state, with railroads, bus lines, and good paved roads leading from every direction to the capital city, Younkers has made the whole of Iowa its trading territory."⁷ Younkers's civic push was promoted from the top, perhaps never more so than during the management tenure of Henry B. Frankel, who was president of Younkers throughout the war. In 1943 the *Des Moines Tribune* gave Frankel its Community Award "because of his day-to-day record of having supported actively, morally, and financially, every civic project in Des Moines."⁸

Henry Frankel had a record of civic-minded projects that served him well after President Roosevelt and the federal government embarked on the process of mobilizing America's economy for war. The mobilization effort began as early as 1939, gaining steam after Germany's triumph in Western Europe in mid-1940, and expanding again after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The mobilization targeted industry, human resources, agriculture, money, and, following Pearl Harbor, military recruitment.⁹ The effort produced an alphabet soup of committees prone to political wrangling, especially over just how much power the federal government would assume.¹⁰ Even as the president and the federal government kept busy managing this range of issues, they extended their concern to

7. Ross Dalbey, "Younkers Makes Plans for Post-War Expansion!" *Younker Reporter*, 12/17/1943.

8. "Younker President Honored with 1943 Service Award," *Younker Reporter*, 2/18/1944. For Frankel, community engagement was a family affair; his wife, Margo Kohn Frankel, served on the state Board of Conservation. The Board of Conservation, among its other charges, planned and developed Iowa's state park system. When the board merged with the Fish and Game Commission in 1935, Margo Kohn Frankel chaired the new Iowa Conservation Corps. Henry and Margo's daughter, Margo Frankel Osherenko, continued the family tradition, albeit in Los Angeles, as a founding member of the Music Center in downtown Los Angeles and the Pauley Pavilion on UCLA's campus.

9. John W. Jeffries, *World War II America: The World War II American Homefront* (Chicago, 1998).

10. See, for example, Eliot Janeway, *The Struggle for Survival: A Chronicle of Economic Mobilization in World War II* (New Haven, CT, 1951); David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Democracy and War* (New York, 1999); and William L. O'Neill, *A Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II* (Cambridge, MA, 1993).

two additional areas: managing the civilian economy and mobilizing morale and support for the war effort. In both instances, the government relied on local leadership; and in both instances, Younkens excelled.

Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Roosevelt administration created the Office of Price Administration and Civilian Supply, replaced in August 1941 by the Office of Price Administration (OPA), headed by Leon Henderson. Although the OPA is best known for rationing goods, including gas, rubber, sugar, coffee, meat, canned goods, and shoes, it was also responsible for combating excessive price increases and ensuring the equitable distribution of consumer goods, while keeping the potential for ruinous inflation under control. Changing the nation's tax structure and promoting bond sales were additional ways to counter inflationary pressures by reducing disposable incomes that were on the rise.¹¹ Although both methods ultimately diverted purchasing power, Younkens was able to turn the politics of shared sacrifice to its advantage, hosting all seven of the nation's war bond drives, thus bringing customers to its store, where they could dispatch their patriotic duty while shopping. Frankel himself chaired the Retailers for Victory Drive, the Iowa chapter of the War Loans campaigns.¹²

The war bond drives dovetailed with the federal government's goal to involve citizens "in the war effort both psychologically and practically with a host of other home front initiatives."¹³ Acting on lessons learned from the American experience during World War I, Roosevelt and his administration consciously sought to distance themselves from the activities of the Committee of Public Safety. The goal, as it was for the Selective Service boards and the local proxies of the OPA, was to rely on local organization so as not to appear heavy-handed from the

11. See, for example, W. Elliot Brownlee, ed., *Funding the Modern American State, 1941-1945* (New York, 1996).

12. Frankel's activities as chairman of the Retailers for Victory Drive, Iowa Chapter, are found in box 41-OS9: Scrapbooks, War Bond Drives, Younkens Records.

13. John W. Jeffries, "Mobilization and Its Impact," in *World War II and the American Home Front: A National Historical Landmark Theme Study* (Washington, DC, 2007), 30.

federal level.¹⁴ Historian Lizabeth Cohen notes that, when combined with “new rituals of patriotic citizenship,” this strategy of employing “community voluntarism at the grass roots mobilized citizen consumers on the home front.”¹⁵ Frankel was adept at supporting the national cues, linking the familiar institution of Younkens, reputable as a civic gathering place, to consumers in a time of war.

Addressing his employees immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Frankel argued, “In wartime as in peace, it’s the spirit that wins the battles or gets the work done.” To build such a spirit by involving Des Moines citizens in a host of home-front activities required the psychological and practical support of store employees. “Now is the time to hold the morale of the Younker family at its highest level,” Frankel reasoned. “Younkers has a duty to perform in wartime greater than it ever has in peace time.”¹⁶

FRANKEL used the weekly employee newsletter, *Younkers Good Morning*, as management’s mouthpiece to build morale, highlight upcoming events, and spotlight patriotic efforts. Another weekly, *The Younker Reporter*, shared store news with the shopping public, highlighting the store’s patriotic efforts while calling on members of the public to fulfill their duties, conveniently underscoring that they could do so by visiting Younkens, where they could buy bonds, attend educational forums, purchase holiday gifts for soldiers in the family, and, of course, shop.¹⁷

Stories from the Younkens newsletters published during the war attest to the creative spirit Younkens engendered in support of the war effort. For nearly a year after Pearl Harbor, however, the tone was one of cautious optimism as management supported federal initiatives, even when they went against free-market principles. Immediately after the bombing of Pearl Har-

14. Allan M. Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942–1947* (New Haven, CT, 1978).

15. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2002), 67.

16. “Mr. Frankel’s Message to the Store,” *Younker Reporter*, 12/9/1941.

17. Runs of both newsletters are in Younkens Records.

bor, Frankel reflected on the necessity of sacrifice through a restructuring of America's tax codes. "Federal taxes will be paid in 1941 and probably for years to come and will be heavy for business and individuals," Frankel reflected. Yet the sacrifice was necessary to support the war. "The cost of the job will be immense. No matter what the price, we're committed to pay it—and we will not with grumbling and complaint, but with sincere feeling that we're all partners in America, ready and happy to do our part."¹⁸

Younkers's wartime responsibilities included walking a tightrope between encouraging patriotism and promoting purchasing. "We shall try to exercise common sense and calm judgment in our purchasing and wholesale markets," Frankel wrote to his employees, "and we shall not unduly urge our customers to purchase goods for the sake of additional sales."¹⁹ It was not long, however, until the promotion of patriotic activities intertwined with and supported the promotion of Younkers the business. The intersection should not come as a surprise. As internationalist Republican Henry L. Stimson, newly appointed as Secretary of War, stated, "If you are going to try to go to war, or prepare for war, in a capitalist country, you have to let business make money out of the process or business won't work."²⁰

From the outset of the war, the Association of National Advertisers picked up on Stimson's cue, merging jingoistic patriotism with product placement. At the conclusion of the war, Theodore S. Repplier, president of the Advertising Council, noted, in an article titled "Advertising Dons Long Pants," that after Pearl Harbor, the advertising industry "had been to the tailor's and was clothed in adult raiment."²¹

Midway through the war, a marketing trade journal addressed the challenges faced by department stores as they adjusted to the promotion of sacrifice amid a wartime economy. According to the journal, "90% of the troubles came in three

18. "Mr. Frankel's Message to the Store," *Younker Reporter*, 12/9/1941.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Cited in Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 622.

21. Theodore S. Repplier, "Advertising Dons Long Pants," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 9 (1945), 269–78.

words—merchandise, manpower, and regulation.”²² It is not surprising that Frankel’s position as chair of the Iowa Retailers for Victory Drive led him to go out of his way to underscore the need for increased government regulations. Younkens apparently did not suffer much from merchandise shortages during the war, although the newsletters occasionally mentioned nylon shortages, thus setting up a postwar celebratory sale day when nylons were reintroduced to the store, with store management giving Younkerites (a name used to describe store employees) first consideration before making the nylons available for public sale.²³

During the early months of the war, Younkens management and employees were quick to look for cues from outside, pursuing a strategy well honed over previous decades of following modern department store trends. At the weekly management and employee gathering at the end of January 1942, beauty department employee Irene Adair read from an ad published by the Revlon cosmetics company touting the contributions beauty salons across America made to the war effort: “Have you forgotten MORALE is a woman’s business now, more than ever?” “The way you look,” Adair continued, “affects so many people around you—your family, your friends, even strangers who pass you in the street. To them a woman’s beauty stands for courage, serenity, a gallant heart . . . all things that men need so desperately these days.” “So,” Adair concluded in support of her own department at Younkens, “the time spent in your favorite beauty salon every week isn’t selfish or frivolous. It’s part of your job as morale. It’s a woman’s way of saying we won’t be beat.”²⁴ The Revlon appeal, as passed on by Adair and Younkens, exemplifies Robert R. Westbrook’s claim that a number of war-time practices relied heavily on appeals to private activities.²⁵ In this case, Adair’s department stood to profit.

22. Morris Thompson, “Department Store Problems,” *Journal of Marketing* 8 (July 1943), 21–24.

23. “Younkerites Offered Nylon Stockings Ahead of Public Sale,” *Younker Reporter*, 2/7/1946.

24. “Morale Is a Woman’s Business,” *Younkers Good Morning*, 1/26/1942.

25. See Robert C. Westbrook, “‘I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Harry James’: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II,” *American Quarterly* 42 (1990), 587–614.

Younkens florist Ernest Streisinger echoed Adair's enthusiasm, putting in a pitch for flowers and other luxury goods. Addressing another employee gathering, he noted, "The civilian job in wartime is to carry on just where we are—to produce and distribute flowers, perfume, jewelry, and deluxe furs and fabrics as long as we can." Streisinger reasoned that the government would let department stores know when such activities were obstructing the war effort. "Until then, the best way to win the war is to carry on in our accustomed way. Saving and hoarding will cripple our civilian life and will then throw off our economic balance completely."²⁶

IN APRIL 1942 Younkens announced the opening of Liberty Hall, a spacious room within the store touted as a "clearing house where people may come for information about the many confusing details of the war program and civilian defense."²⁷ Liberty Hall boasted what was reportedly Iowa's largest map depicting the latest action on the war's multiple fronts. It was kept updated throughout the war. Liberty Hall thus served as a focal gathering space, complementing the already popular Younkens Tea Room, where various civic organizations met to support the civilian war effort.

Typical of the programming sponsored throughout the war, in 1944 *Younkens Good Morning*, the employee newsletter, announced a presentation of the WAColony Club, hosted by the Des Moines Junior League. "All civilian women of Des Moines and surrounding areas" were invited to the Tea Room, where they could meet WAC members stationed at nearby Fort Des Moines.²⁸ The event's organizers promised to provide "comfortable lounging chairs, refreshments, and free entertainment," including newly released war department films.²⁹ On another occasion, the Tea Room hosted Iowa State Extension Professor

26. "Morale Is a Woman's Business," *Younkens Good Morning*, 1/26/1942.

27. "Now Open, Liberty Hall," *Younkens Good Morning*, 4/13/1942.

28. During World War II, Fort Des Moines housed the first formation of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), later renamed Women's Army Corps (WAC). Younkens was quick to let visiting WACs know about shopping opportunities and services such as shoe repair, uniform fittings, and beauty parlors.

29. "Younkens Presents WAColony Club," *Younkens Good Morning*, 9/11/1944.

L. C. Grove, who gave tips to home gardeners. Younkens's guests also received a useful guide put together by *Better Homes and Gardens* experts in support of the Victory Garden program. The event was sponsored by the Des Moines schools and the Polk County Office of Civilian Defense.³⁰

Early in the war, Younkens proved that selling merchandise and supporting the war effort were not mutually exclusive. In May 1942 Younkens announced the opening of a Gift Package Center for those with loved ones in the armed services. At least 64 different packages were available, including foodstuffs, playing cards, shoe-shine kits, picture frames, and writing paper.³¹

With a number of initiatives to support the war in place, Younkens turned to some old traditions to merchandise its goods. In the employee newsletter, Manager Murray Sostrin cited the ongoing challenges, writing, "Price ceilings, rationing, strict credit extension, shorter installment term selling, constant urging to buy War Bonds and Stamps, possibly compulsory savings plans, and taxes . . . have the tendency to confuse the consumer and to slow up retail purchasing." Sostrin noted that Younkens had already sacrificed the annual Blue Ribbon Sale and Iowa Days Sale since the beginning of the war. It was time to reconcile sacrifice with shopping. According to Sostrin, holding a Capacity Days Sale, an annual clearance sale, was a way to move in the right direction. Projecting a patriotic image, Younkens argued that it was helping the government battle inflation by encouraging planned spending that balanced purchasing goods and services with the sacrifice of purchasing war bonds.³²

Madeline White, a clerk in the store's china section, underscored the service Younkens was providing in the war effort. She noted that for months the government and business managers had been warning of a battle that needed to be met head on—the battle against inflation. Authorities warned that inflation could bring about as much potential disaster as any enemy. At Younkens, White warned, "We have seen the battle gain a foothold right here in Des Moines this last year, with fewer

30. "This Is Garden Week at Younkens," *Younkers Good Morning*, 4/10/1944.

31. "Gift Package Center," *Younkers Good Morning*, 5/11/1942.

32. Murray Sostrin, "War Time Capacity Day—What About It? *Younker Reporter*, 6/6/1942.

commodities to sell, and more people to buy." She continued, "If we were working for an unscrupulous fly by night concern we might enjoy seeing our day turn into a veritable auction sale, with the refrigerator . . . dishes, or coat going to the highest bidder, and would take no heed of historians or economists."³³

During a November Capacity Days Sale, president Henry Frankel noted, "It's downright good patriotism for everyone to do his or her best job in wartime. And the best job of anybody in a store is to sell all of the goods—not needed for the war—that can be sold." He reasoned, "The more a store sells of the goods not needed to help win the war, the more of the huge war tax burden it can share."³⁴

Nearing a year into the war, Younkers appeared comfortable supporting the war effort by linking sacrifice and sales. In October 1942 the employee newsletter announced, "Our air conditioning goes to war!" The article detailed how the store turned its air conditioning equipment over to the government for the duration of the war.³⁵ The cooling unit was deemed a necessity for expanding the production of synthetic rubber. A few weeks earlier, store advertising had linked sacrifice and sales, moving up the Christmas holiday advertising so that the troops sacrificing for the country could receive their gifts on time. Younkers highlighted its gift center and noted that the shipping schedule for those sending gifts to soldiers targeted the window of October 1 to November 1 to purchase and send gifts, allowing seven weeks for shipping.³⁶

The theme of sacrifice benefited the store in additional ways. For example, throughout the last half of 1942, the employee newsletters were filled with small "Save-O-Gram" reminders. The store formed an anti-waste and recycling committee, and the store served as the gathering point for community paper and scrap metal drives. Internally, employees were reminded to "re-use the tissue paper sent first by manufacturers

33. Madeline White, "Savings Prevent Ruin," *Younkers Good Morning*, 9/28/1942.

34. Henry Frankel, "Sell All the Goods You Can," *Younker Reporter*, 11/14/1942.

35. "Our Air Conditioning Goes to War!" *Younkers Good Morning*, 10/5/1942.

36. "Now Comes an Extra Christmas Shopping Month for You!" *Younkers Good Morning*, 9/21/1942.

in sending merchandise," for "this can be used again in many departments."³⁷ Another Save-O-Gram stressed the importance of customer service on the initial sale, noting, "Exchange and returning of merchandise causes an unusual amount of wasted motion, damage to merchandise, and unnecessary expense." Wasted paper, delivery costs, and clerical expenses were unnecessary at any time, but especially during the war. Employees were urged to "be sure to give the customer the right style, color, size, and design to keep the merchandise from returning."³⁸ Thus, the store saved money by invoking patriotic sacrifice. Likewise, the government called on the notion of patriotic sacrifice to support the sale of war bonds to pay for the war.

WARS ARE EXPENSIVE. It cost the United States \$304 billion to fight the Axis countries and supply the Allied powers during World War II. Increasing taxation was one way of funding the war, providing 45 percent of the total cost.³⁹ The remainder was secured by borrowing, with a heavy reliance on the sale of government bonds, which also served as another quiver in the attack against inflation. As historian David Kennedy reminds us, bond purchases "provided revenue and soaked up purchasing power."⁴⁰ Because the purchase of bonds "illustrated the fine line between volunteerism and compulsion," a fair amount of debate preceded the rollout of the first sale.⁴¹ In 1942 most of President Roosevelt's advisors, hoping to avoid the hysteria and indoctrination associated with the World War I bond campaigns, favored a compulsory savings plan. Roosevelt, however, decided to follow the advice of Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, who favored voluntary bond purchases in which there would be "no quotas . . . no hysteria . . . no appeal to hate."⁴²

37. "Save-O-Gram," *Youunkers Good Morning*, 10/19/1942.

38. "Save-O-Gram," *Youunkers Good Morning*, 12/7/1942.

39. Alan S. Milward, *War, Economy, and Society, 1939-1945* (Berkeley, CA, 1980), 107.

40. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 626.

41. Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (New York, 1972), 29.

42. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 626.

In addition to raising needed revenues and curbing inflation, Morgenthau envisioned mass bond sales as “the spearhead for getting people interested in the war.”⁴³ Morgenthau preferred Treasury Series E-bonds in denominations of \$25 or \$50. The \$25 bonds, issued at a cost of \$18.75, were registered in the purchaser’s name and thus were replaceable if lost. Historian David Kennedy points out that this was a popular and important feature, especially given the increased mobility of the American population during and after the war.⁴⁴

All told, the government sponsored seven drives, each lasting approximately one month. At the national level, a variety of celebrities, including Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra, Marlene Dietrich, and Bette Davis, were enlisted to generate enthusiasm. From a strictly financial view, the results were mixed. The seven war bond campaigns raised \$200 billion, with only a quarter of the sales coming from individual bond buyers; banks and other financial institutions purchased the remainder. Some 25 million workers did, however, sign up for payroll savings plans that supported the purchase of bonds.⁴⁵ Moreover, Morgenthau’s goal of creating support and enthusiasm for the war found a positive outlet in the bond campaigns. This was certainly the case with Younkers.

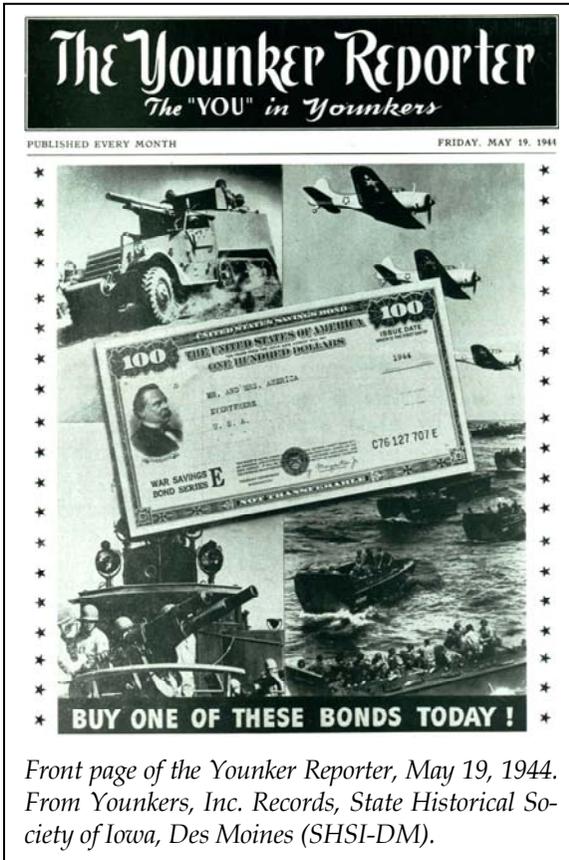
Younkers participated in all seven war bond drives, all of which relied on store employees to purchase bonds, sell bonds to customers, and contribute to an overall spirit supported by pep rallies, marches, sales brigades, themes, and creative display windows. Younkers’s contributions to the individual drives ranged from \$500,000 to \$1,700,000 in sales, with contributions from employees and customers. Employees were given the opportunity to support the purchase of E-bonds through payroll deduction. During the first and second drives, 97 percent of store employees subscribed to payroll allotment deductions in support of bond purchases.⁴⁶

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York, 1976), 107–9.

46. “Bond Results Exceed Goal!” *Younker Reporter*, 3/17/1944.



Front page of the *Younker Reporter*, May 19, 1944. From *Younkers, Inc. Records*, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines (SHSI-DM).

Employees were also expected to be on the front line of bond sales as departments vied with one another to post the highest sales figures. A bond sales shelter, centrally located on the store's ground floor, was set up to register bond purchases from the general public. The employee newsletters often cited individuals and departments for their accomplishments. Harry Pargas, from the shoe repair department, often led the way for individual sales, boasting \$209,675 in bond sales during one drive alone. Pargas had arrived in America in 1912 and started work at Younkers in 1931. The war was a very personal affair for the Younkers shoe repairman, who had a mother and two sisters still living in Greece and a brother in the U.S. Navy.⁴⁷

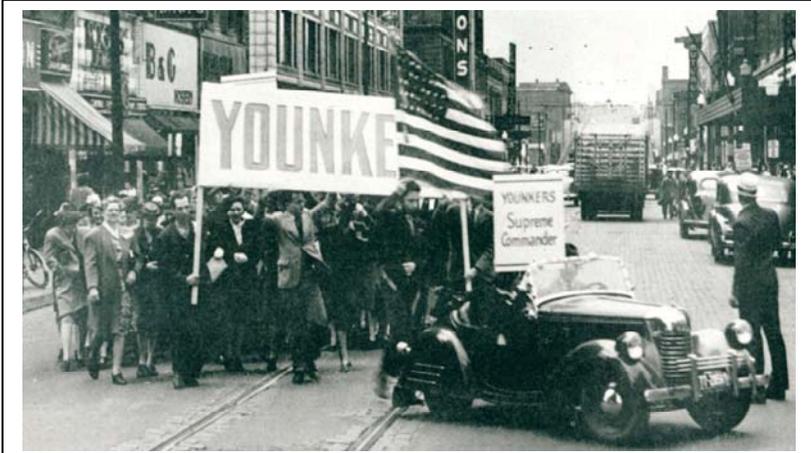
47. "Champion War Bond Seller at Younkers," *Younker Reporter*, 3/17/1944.



Younkers employees kicked off the third war bond drive with a parade for which they divided into five teams representing the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Air Corps. From Younker Reporter, September 17, 1943, in Younkers, Inc. Records, SHSI-DM.

Bond sales were extravagant events for the Younkers store, which served as a nexus where the general public, Frankel's Retailers for Victory Committee, and the U.S. government met. During the third drive, for example, captured German war equipment lined an entire block outside the store. The equipment was procured courtesy of the U.S. Treasury Department. During the fourth drive, two tanks were parked outside the store, with an outside booth accommodating sales of bonds to the general public. Catchy slogans and sales pitches often accompanied the drives. For example, after investing in the \$18.75 for a war bond, employees and customers were asked to "label a bomb to your favorite enemy." "This amount buys a parachute for a fragmentation bomb," an ad encouraged, continuing, "Decide which enemy—Hitler or Hirohito, you would like to receive your bomb. You fill out the label, available at the bond booth, and it will be sent to the Pacific or Atlantic war theatre, through special arrangement with the War Finance Committee."⁴⁸

48. "Captured German War Equipment Show at Younkers," *Younker Reporter*, 2/18/1944; "Label a Bomb for Your Favorite Enemy," *News of the Week*, 1/24/1944, 2, in Younkers Records.



Younkens employees staged another parade on D-Day to kick off the fourth war bond drive. From Younker Reporter, July 21, 1944, in Younkens, Inc. Records, SHSI-DM.

For the fourth war bond drive, the U.S. Treasury Department used American poet Joseph Auslander's recently published poems addressed to the German-occupied countries of Europe. Auslander had collaborated with his second wife, poet Audrey Wurdemann, on a series of poems dedicated to the Greeks, Poles, Czechs, Dutch, and Norwegians. The poems were first published in September and October 1943 in the pages of the *Saturday Evening Post* and subsequently titled, in book form, *The Unconquerables: Salutes to the Undying Spirit of Nazi-Occupied Countries*. Auslander enthusiastically loaned his work to the patriotic cause of the fourth war bond drive.⁴⁹

Working with the national theme, Younkens seized the opportunity to build local and regional ties across Iowa.⁵⁰ During the six-week campaign, Younkens-sponsored rallies devoted attention to each of the countries named by Auslander. Governor Bourke B. Hickenlooper, who had connections to Cedar Rapids and its Czech population, officially opened the program for Czech Night. Costumed Czech-American folk singers re-

49. Joseph Auslander, *The Unconquerables: Salutes to the Undying Spirit of Nazi-Occupied Countries* (New York, 1943).

50. "Prelude to the 4th War Loan Tribute," *Younkens Good Morning*, 1/10/1944.

galed the guests, including Bernard B. Nowack, state director of the Citizen Service Corps of the Iowa Defense Commission, and Theodore B. Hlubeck of Cedar Rapids, president of the regional branch of the Czech-American National Alliance. Pella's Burgomeister, T. G. Fultz, and the Tulip Festival Singers and Dancers provided entertainment for Dutch Night.⁵¹

The war bond drives also provided advertising opportunities for Younkers. In advance and throughout each campaign, Younkers took out full-page advertisements in the local Des Moines newspapers. Often, Younkers's advertisements during World War II played on emotions and guilt, encouraging support for the bond sales. Typical of the tactic, one large ad featured two-year-old Paul Nuel III, son of Lieutenant Paul Nuel Jr., with the simple caption, "I want my dad." Another large ad featured a soldier with the headline "While Men Die." The text of the ad read:

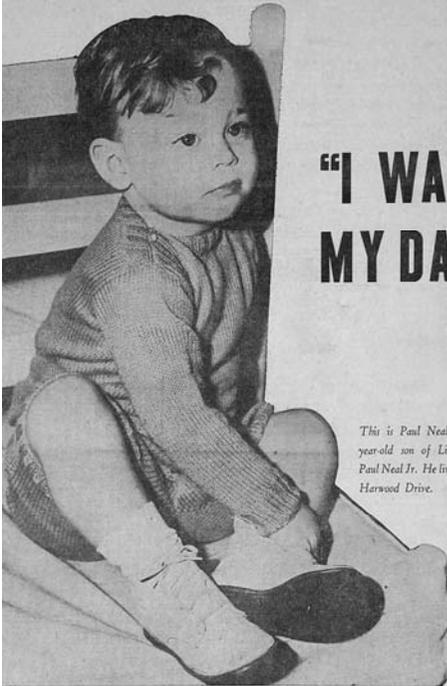
This minute battles rage on many fronts. Cannons go about their deadly business, bringing screaming, sudden death to American boys . . . bringing pain and writhing anguish to others. In this mechanized war, death strikes by chance. . . . As we sit in our comfortable homes, can we visualize war? We think of men fighting, but do we know as they do, that "fighting" is "killing and being killed." We are asked to do little by way of comparison. Let's really put our shoulders to the wheel . . . and do our part to bring about an earlier victory.⁵²

YOUNKERS made creative use of display windows to support the various themes associated with the war bond drives. The windows also effectively paired the promotion of patriotism with the promotion of consumption. The advent of display windows at the street level for department stores owed a debt to the creative energies of L. Frank Baum. As curator of Baum's

51. *Younker Reporter*, 2/18/1944.

52. *Des Moines Register*, 2/12/1944; clipping in file: 4th War Loan: Jan.-Feb. 1944, box OS-9: Scrapbooks,, Younkers Records. According to Vicki Howard, "Department Store Advertising in Newspapers, Radio, and Television, 1920-1960," *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 2 (2010), 61-85, between 1920 and 1960, department stores kept their advertising dollars in local newspapers even as radio and later television presented new advertising outlets.

“... that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth”—ABRAHAM LINCOLN



“I WANT MY DAD”

This is Paul Neal III, two-year-old son of Lieut. (j.g.) Paul Neal Jr. He lives at 3822 Harwood Drive.

THIS pensive little chap when interviewed had one emphatic statement for publication: “I want my dad!” Had he been able he would have continued: It’s hard to remember what he looks like he’s been gone so long . . . but I miss the guy. I’d like to have him bouncing me around instead of bouncing himself around on some battleship in the South Pacific. Mother’s swell and all that, but a fellow needs a father too. And, that’s where you can help me if you will. If you buy an extra War Bond during this Fourth War Loan I’ll be seeing him all the sooner. You know what that means to me . . . and a million other kids just like me!

WAR BONDS FOR IMMEDIATE DELIVERY **YOUNKERS**

From Des Moines Register, 2/12/1944.

Bazaar in Aberdeen, South Dakota, during the 1890s, Baum was well aware of the power of “smoke and mirrors” to attract customers. Advances in plate glass and electrical lighting technology added to the tool kit window dressers could use. By World

War II, window dressing was a full-fledged art form practiced by Marcel Duchamps and Salvador Dali and promoted in a number of advertising trade journals.⁵³

At Younkers the window dressing department was led during World War II by Maurice Swander and his assistant, George Rackelman. The store often boasted of two full blocks of display windows, using the multiple street- or sidewalk-level access points to the fullest extent. During the bond drive highlighting the unconquerable nations, for example, the displays contained stirring tributes to the various countries in Auslander's poems. Additional national themes were also used. An earlier bond drive urged purchasers to help build the mystery ship *Shangri-La*. A three-dimensional cutout titled "Doolittle Will Do It Again" combined the images of a ship and a plane. During the nationwide "Back the Attack" war bond drive, a coffin containing Adolph Hitler was lowered from the ceiling to the ground as bond purchases were made. A sign urging "Help Us Bury Hitler" stood next to a devil with a pitchfork emerging from the ground to take a jab at Hitler's lowering coffin. Walt Disney's "Victory through Air" provided yet another theme picked up in the Younkers display windows.⁵⁴

Not every window dressing theme was tied to a bond drive. Every September Santa made an appearance in the Younkers window displays. Other displays offered pedestrians gazing at the windows from the sidewalks handy lists of items to purchase for those serving overseas under the title "Suggested Gifts for Soldiers." Examples of the items, including pipes, lighters, fountain pens, playing cards, socks, stationary, wallets, and wristwatches, were laid out in full display. Another creative window dressing tied into the store's promotion of the home-front civilian war effort, specifically encouraging the planting of Victory Gardens.⁵⁵

53. Stuart Culver, "What Manikans Want: The Wonderful Wizards of Oz and the Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows," *Representations*, No. 21 (Winter 1988), 97-116.

54. File: Displays—Special Events and Promotions—World War II: "Back the Attack," box 39: Photographs, Younkers Records.

55. Image in file: Special Events and Promotions, Homefront and War Effort Rationing, Victory Gardens, etc., box 40: Photographs, Younkers Records.



This Younkers window display promoted the planting of Victory Gardens. From Younkers, Inc. Records, SHSI-DM.

The Younkers window dressings also served as a medium between the national and local war efforts. Establishing such a conduit underscored the goal of Roosevelt and his top advisors to avoid appearing as heavy-handed as the government's actions during World War I. Window dressings praised the efforts of the local WACS, WAVES, and SPARS, while also recruiting for the various women's branches of the military. Another window dressing theme used multiple windows to praise the Des Moines industries that had taken on government contracts to support the war. The display also served as a recruiting effort as the various industries found themselves in the midst of a labor shortage. Companies with separate display windows included Firestone, Des Moines Glove Company, Eagle Iron Works, Globe Hoist Company, Monarch Machine and Stamping Company, Solar Aircraft Company, C. E. Erickson and Company, Pittsburgh Des Moines Steel Company, the Des Moines Ord-



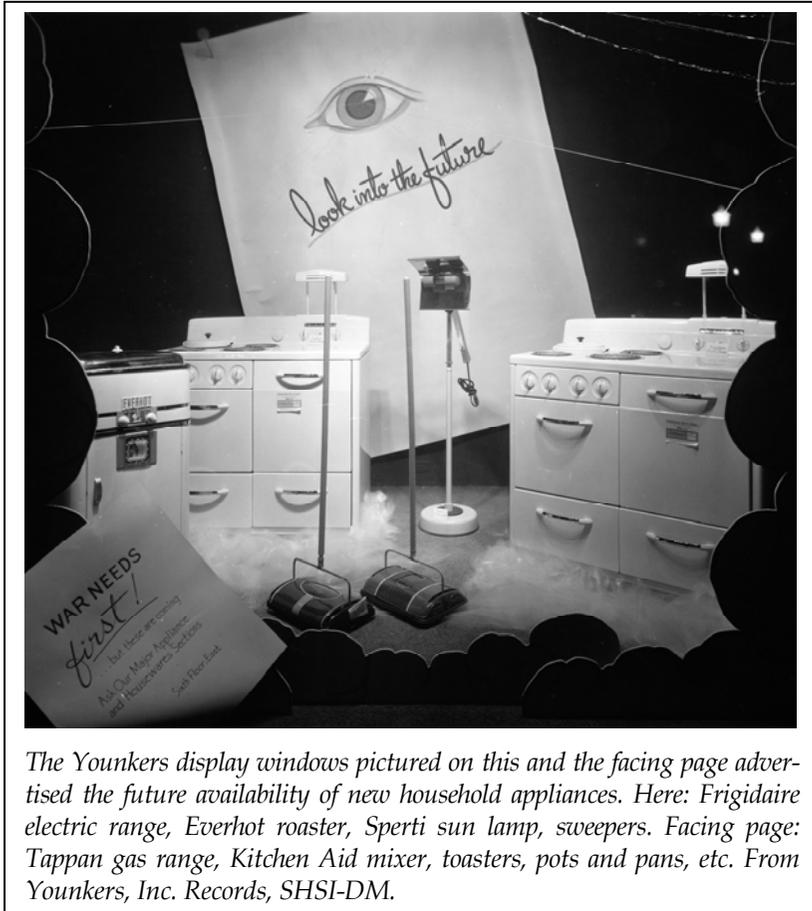
This Younkers display window celebrated products of Des Moines industries that contributed to the war effort. From Younkers, Inc. Records, SHSI-DM.

nance Plant, the Armour (meatpacking) Plant, and Old Homestead Frankfurts—the last two boasting that “food too is a weapon of war.”⁵⁶

YOUNKERS used the magical aura of the window displays to transition to the postwar era. During the last two weeks of July 1945, the store invited 50 manufacturers to display their wares in the Younkers street-level window displays. Titled “Look into the Future,” the displays, which took over two blocks of show windows, was a rousing success. Writing in the store’s newsletter, Hazel O’Neal noted, “More than a thousand persons placed electric refrigerators and washers and smaller electrical gadgets on their ‘I want’ list.”⁵⁷ According to O’Neal, the most popular items on display were the electric refrigerator and the electric stove, the washers, and the all-steel, modern kitchen.

56. See photos pertaining to the recruitment of home-front workers in file: Displays—Special Events and Promotions, box 40: Photographs, Younkers Records.

57. Hazel O’Neal, “Two Blocks of Windows Give Magic ‘Look Into the Future,’” *Younker Reporter*, 8/17/1945.



The Younkers display windows pictured on this and the facing page advertised the future availability of new household appliances. Here: Frigidaire electric range, Everhot roaster, Sperti sun lamp, sweepers. Facing page: Tappan gas range, Kitchen Aid mixer, toasters, pots and pans, etc. From Younkers, Inc. Records, SHSI-DM.

In the smaller housewares category, electric irons and electric toasters were the most popular articles. O'Neal noted, "Maurice Swander and his staff of window experts spared no efforts to make the windows prophetic of the future. The large corner windows showed a huge hand and crystal ball painted on the glass through which the window shopper looked to see the magic sights within."⁵⁸

Preparation for the "Look into the Future" display had begun in 1944. Months after the D-Day invasion, Morey Sostrin, set to transition from vice-president to president of the store,

58. Ibid.



took stock of Younkers's position while projecting into the future. "As we conceive it," he suggested, "the ending of the European phase may make it possible to resume our [store's] general direction." "In its 88 years of history," he continued, "Younkers has been through the Civil War, the Spanish American War, and 1st World War, and the present situation in this greatest conflict of all insures our getting through this one." Younkers not only made it through the war, but did so with the future looking bright. "Despite restrictions, regulations, and obstacles, real and imaginary, this business and retailing in general has risen to record heights," Sostrin proudly noted in late 1944.⁵⁹

By the end of 1943, the war's fortunes had begun to turn in a positive direction for the Allied armies. Even though victory appeared distantly over the horizon, serious postwar planning assumed a new level, culminating at the end of the year at the Tehran Conference, held between November 28 and December 1.

59. Morey Sostrin, "Survey of Younkers Position and Outlook for the Future," *Younker Reporter*, 9/25/1944. See also Morey Sostrin, "What's Ahead at Younkers, Now That the War Is Over!" *Younker Reporter*, 9/21/1945.

The conference was the first meeting of the Big Three: Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt. Its goal was to set the final strategy to defeat Nazi Germany. While the Big Three gathered in Tehran, Henry Frankel outlined his thoughts of a future divided in two parts: first, the interval that lies between the present and the end of the war; and second, the postwar period.

Gazing into the future, Frankel realized, "Our immediate job is for the nation to win the war, and for you and me to keep the store going." He argued, "As citizens we must enter into the spirit of conservation, rationing, and all activities that preserve the welfare of the community. We must work, pray, and sacrifice. We must back the war with the sale and purchase of more and more stamps and bonds." At the same time, Frankel left room for sales, reasoning, "We must keep the store operating on a profitable basis, aside from the purely personal motive of making a fair return for the stockholders, to pay more and more taxes, and to provide a volume supply of merchandise necessary to maintain the standard of living of the people in the community . . . so that we may be an inspiration and example of our will to be good citizens and to win the war."⁶⁰

Looking to the future, Frankel was in a position to note the creative energies brought about by the war. He argued, "Out of this war will come a startling age, with better materials and new products. Just as the radio followed the last war, so the high tempo of this war will bring many new developments in a variety of fields following the cessation of hostilities—many that were necessities of war will serve us in peace." As a result of the creative energies, Frankel predicted, "There will be television in technicolor, new plastics and chemically-born fabrics, magnetic sound recordings, startling transportation—automatic radar controlled automobiles and airplanes, deep freeze and health giving foods." Frankel viewed the proliferation of new products as potential selling opportunities, especially for retail outlets. Selling, however, would become more of a science and less of an art. "Laboratories will provide exact information, salespeople will have more authoritative selling points," he predicted.⁶¹

60. Henry Frankel, "Younkers and the Future!" *New Younker Reporter*, 12/17/1943.

61. *Ibid.*

Frankel also underscored the importance of his position with the Iowa Retailers for Victory War Drive and his overall work linking the store and promotion of the war effort to civic engagement. He noted that besides the store's own plans for the future, local civic leaders gathered to work on a six-point postwar program to ensure an orderly transition from war to peace. Frankel wrote, "All the foresight and imagination of business leaders are being used to collect ideas and information on Industry, Aviation, Wholesale Distribution, Retail Development, Public Works, and Amusement—the making of Des Moines an attraction center, a more interesting city in which to live." The synergy created by the war that pooled together ideas across the civic spectrum would also be good for Younkers. Frankel predicted, "This momentum for Des Moines and Iowa is bound to contribute to the growth and future of our store."⁶²

With the forecast of positive business opportunities on the horizon, Younkers unveiled a three-part postwar plan that included expansion into the nearby Oransky building, the expansion of mail order, and the addition of branch stores across Iowa. The newly acquired Oransky building, an eight-story edifice located across the street from the flagship store on Eighth Street, was targeted as the "Store for Homes," to house furniture, carpets, and other home furnishings "to better serve the tremendous demand for this type of goods after the war."⁶³ Historian Lizabeth Cohen's study of the rise of mass consumption in America following the war underscored the significance of the private home for the vision of postwar prosperity. "At the center of Americans' vision of postwar prosperity," she writes, "was the private home fully equipped with consumer durables."⁶⁴

Younkers's postwar optimism was backed by predictions at the national level. As early as September 1943, S. Morris Livingstone of the U.S. Department of Commerce referred to a building "reservoir of [consumer] purchasing power."⁶⁵ Two years

62. Ibid.

63. Ross Dalbey, "Younkers Makes Plans for Post-War Expansion," *New Younker Reporter*, 12/17/1943.

64. Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 73.

65. S. Morris Livingstone, "Wartime Savings and Postwar Markets," *Survey of Current Business*, September 1943, 12-19.

later, he once again cited a huge accumulation of liquid assets by consumers. Such an accumulation would support the pre-war growth of secular influences propelling goods that either did not exist or were considered luxuries a generation earlier into the realm of consumer necessities, thus increasing the propensity to consume. A third factor would characterize the post-war era, Livingstone added: the conviction that the country would do a better job of managing the economy by distributing national income more equally while the expansion of Social Security simultaneously loosened savings. In the *Journal of Marketing*, in January 1945, Dean A. Worcester Jr. predicted that after the war personal care expenditures would rise 60 percent, while housing expenditures would rise 46 percent.⁶⁶

Younkers's postwar plans spanned numerous areas, ranging from personal care to major and small appliances and the newly opened Younkers Home Planning Center. "Service people are especially interested in the Home Plan services," reported Mary Rodine, home planning director. Working in cooperation with Des Moines-based *Better Homes and Gardens*, the Younkers center quickly sold more than a thousand home plan books. "The interest in home planning is more intense than at any time in the country's history, and we are bringing the building-minded family into Younkers at the beginning of the building program, rather than after the house is completed," remarked Rodine.⁶⁷

IN *V Was for Victory*, John Morton Blum's classic study of the American home front during World War II, he notes, "Gimbel's and Macy's, as well as other mercantile establishments, accommodated skillfully to the affluence of the war years."⁶⁸ The evidence gathered in this study points to a similar conclusion for the Des Moines-based Younkers department store. Mixing support for the war effort with promotions encouraging the public to keep shopping, Younkers's version of the politics of sacrifice

66. S. Morris Livingstone, Joseph J. Spengler, and Edwin G. Nourse, "Working Paper," *American Economic Review* 35 (May 1945), 58; Dean A. Worcester Jr., "Postwar Markets for Consumer Goods," *Journal of Marketing* 1 (1945), 234-38.

67. Hazel O' Neal, "Home Planning Center Prepared for Post-War Building Boom," *Younker Reporter*, 2/15/1946.

68. Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 116.

proved that patriotism and the promotion of purchasing were not mutually exclusive throughout the war. Younkers's president Henry Frankel's standing in the Des Moines and greater Iowa communities enabled the store to serve as a conduit between privately owned business and government initiatives, ranging from recruiting for the military to the sale of war bonds. In turn, Younkers, as a private business, supported the war effort by projecting a civic image, opening up space in the store to support the cause. The opening of Liberty Hall projected a patriotic spirit while serving as an educational center for the shopping public. The famous Younkers Tea Room hosted numerous war-related initiatives that brought together civic groups from throughout the community, while the creative window dressings supported bond drives and other home front efforts. For Younkers, it was a hell of a war, an experience it was able to follow with momentum as evidenced by the creative and successful "Look into the Future" window display and an expansion into areas such as home planning.