

## Burnside – The Center of my 1955 World

We are all walking-talking history books. I have put down a few of my early memories for my grandson of an era long gone and mostly forgotten.

Anyone living in the North-East quadrant of East Hartford during the 1950s would have traded at Burnside Center. This was before the advent of the 1965 strip mall. Shopping and services would be grouped on a major street car line until about 1940 and on a bus line after that. Not everyone owned a car even in 1950.

There were other neighborhood and business centers in town that could be memorialized from this era such as the Main Street, The Meadows, Hockanum, Silver Lane and more. I spent my childhood in Mayberry Village and Burnside so this is what I am familiar with.

Burnside was one of the earliest business centers in the State. The mills at the natural water falls on the Hockanum River at Forbes Street were home to the earliest saw mills in the Colony. These mill sites have been continuously utilized for almost 400 years.

The area around the mills grew to serve the mill workers with stores, taverns and boarding houses. With the advent of railroads in the 1840s, the marshalling yards and ware houses to the west of the center on Park Avenue added to the growth of the Burnside area. Burnside Avenue was the major route to the East and this is where the center was established in proximity to the mills on present day Church and Forbes Streets.

The mid 1950s were the zenith years for Burnside. There were two major super markets, First National and Stop and Shop. There were two highly regarded meat markets present - and they delivered. In the area were three service stations, three taverns, two drug stores and two barber shop / beauty salons. There was an eight-room grammar school, Catholic junior high (1955) and substantial public library. A modern movie theatre and world championship soft ball diamond were available for entertainment.

Many eating options were in the area as well as many specialty establishments such as hardware, shoe repair and of course the local “package” stores. There was still a railroad station on School street with

service to the east and railroad express availability. We were better served locally in 1955 than we are with today’s strip malls of bad pizza, cell phone plan sales and toe nail decorating salons.



*67 Church Street*

### Early Burnside Memories

My Mom had ended up living at 67 Church Street when she moved to CT from the Berkshires in the mid-30s. Her father had died, their farm was subsequently lost during the depression, her mother re-married and Hartford had work for her new step-father. My Aunt Phyllis was born on Church Street in 1939.



1930s First National. My Dad is 3rd from left.

My Dad had worked at the First National in Burnside during the 30s as well as many other of their stores. He was living on Bissel Street with his older sister and her family. The six dollars a week (for 60 hours) was able to feed the family during the height of the depression. My Dad's family had come apart when his mother died in 1930 and their house was lost on Naubuc Avenue due to the depression.

My folks married on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1939. They lived for a while on Bissel Street with my Aunt before moving to 887 Burnside Avenue. My Dad was managing a First National

on New Britan Avenue in Hartford and my Mom was working at Brown Thompson's.

We moved into the Village in the Fall of 1941. We were the second or third family to take up residence as my carpenter grandfather was apparently buddies with the local administrator from the 1920s Hartford construction days. My Dad had his choice of lots and we ended up at 64 Woodlawn with the huge lot behind the Community Building as our side yard. Mayberry Village deserves an essay of its own.

My earliest memory of Burnside was People's Drug Store. For some bizarre memory reason, I think it was owned by Marvin Weinstein as I see a liquor permit with that name on it as Permittee. I didn't know what a Permittee was. It was like a modern super department store to my young imagination. I also remember that it contained the Burnside Post Office and large luncheon counter. I always looked forward to trips to Burnside.

After television came into vogue in 1950, we spent much time testing vacuum tubes at Peoples. It was the only tester around and you might avoid an expensive service call by replacing a failed tube. It was at the front of the store to the right of the cash register.

I remember Dagon's Garage next to People's and on the School Street Corner across from the library. My Mom's brother Ray Ferris had married Caroline Dagon, the owner's daughter right after the war.

A few other Burnside Avenue early memories were Frank Molinski's garage at the entrance to the Village. I remember going with my Dad for servicing and repairs. It was hanging out with the guys. I kept in contact with Frank until his death. The other stand out was Bergren's Ice Cream Bar across from Molinski's where I developed an early addiction for cherry sundaes and "soda" water. My Uncle Dick Ferris delivered for Bergren's and was our milk man so I suspect that also heightened my memory.

### The 1953 Move

We moved to a brand-new cape cod on Hudson Street in March of 1953. Hudson is the first street on the left on Forbes coming up from the mill. I was now officially a Burnsider.

I was attending Woodland but was transferred to Burnside Grammar. I think the teacher was Mr. Gedney. New friends at Burnside familiar to EHHS 59 were Beverly Giordano who lived on Forbes at the corner of Hudson, Sal Lamesa from Burnside Avenue near Hillside and Bill Lee who lived on the beginning of Roberts Street. Bill had the huge mill reservoir in his backyard and many hours were spent tormenting blue

gills and bass until the reservoir disappeared in the 1955 flood. Another favorite fishing spot was below the lower Hockanum River falls reached through a hole in the fence on Cottage Street.

Grant Smith moved into his new house on Oliva Court which was a short dead-end off of Hudson St. in 1954. We became good friends and belonged to the East Hartford YMCA rifle club. We often took the bus to Hartford to shoot at the State Armory. The 22 target rifles were in soft covers but were unmistakable. No one gave a second look but today we would be surrounded by a SWAT team.

I developed an after-school cherry coke addiction at Kocum's antique marble soda fountain. This was before Kocum built his new business block to the East of his original location. Requests for extra cherry syrup were always answered. I believe a glass of coke was a nickel.

I picked Fall squash for Fred Leone on his Roberts Street fields. Al Quattrapani (EHHS 58) lived next door and was related to the Leones and Futtners so we had occasional farm work. I think we made 25 cents an hour (cash money) and the squash crop was destined for First National on Park Avenue.

The Futtner and Leone families owned much of the farm land on both sides of the highway from Forbes Street to almost Main Street. Roberts Street was all farm fields. The Silver Lane Pickle Factory needed huge quantities of produce and the flat, well drained East Hartford fields were an ideal place to grow it. Silver Lane Pickle was a major supplier to First National.

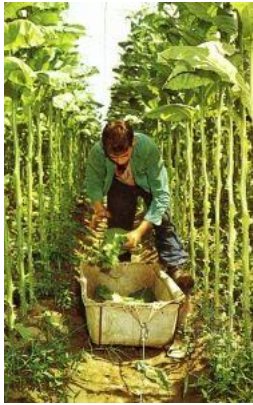
East Hartford was mostly tobacco and truck farming until the great 1950s rush to build suburbia made the land too valuable for farming. The Route 15 highway was built in the early 50s and I can remember my Dad driving down the unfinished road. The Futtner and Leone farm land was bisected by the new highway.

East Hartford was in a class room shortage crisis. As soon as the high school moved from the center to the new Burnside Avenue location, the old high school was turned into a consolidated 8<sup>th</sup> grade. We were given a stack of bus tickets every week to take the regular busses to school. In good weather I rode my bike to the center from Hudson Street to conserve the bus passes for forays into Hartford. We had a wood shop that was left over from the high school which was fun for an eighth grader.



I went to work for Cullman Brothers Tobacco in 1955. They still had huge fields of shade tobacco on School Street where Chesslee Drive and the surrounding housing development is today. They also had fields north of Goodwin Street at Ellington Road. We at times would be bussed to other plantations like Melrose (East Windsor) - but mainly worked in East Hartford.

We worked in three-man teams. Two pickers would each pick the 2 or 3 lowest leaves from the plants on either side of their row and slide the pads of leaves through to the middle row where the "dragger" would place the leaves in a large canvas basket with hard wood runners. The full basket would be dragged to the end of the row for transport to the drying sheds and an empty basket dragged back in to repeat the process. At that time Pickers were paid 6 cents a bent (the distance between the netting support poles) and Dragers were paid 7 cents.



*Dragging Shade Tobacco*

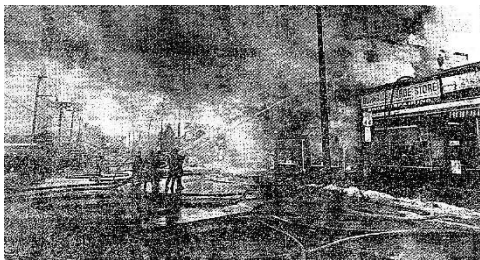
Al Brannan (EHHS 58) from St. Regis Street, Dorothy's older brother, and Wes Kurt? were my pickers and the fastest in the field. We often completed 140 bents a day. I would drag 2 baskets at a time and still couldn't keep up on the largest fields where a (half) row was over 20 bents in length. You were soaked through in a few minutes in the early morning from the dew and you tried to get most of your work done before noon - as the heat of the afternoon was so intense you had to slow down. Al Brannan later turned into a good ham radio friend and was instrumental in getting me involved in my lifetime electronic journey. Thanks Al.

You were constantly downing salt tablets and large amounts of water from the water buffalos (two wheeled carts with attached water barrel) that followed us everywhere. You were covered with black tobacco sap that was very hard to remove. We still managed to go swimming at Martin Park most nights. Oh, to be young again. George Zervais, who taught my freshman algebra class, was our straw boss during tobacco season.

I went to work at First National in Burnside when I turned 16. It was soon clear that I probably wasn't a candidate for life time employment in the retail trades. Our manager was consumed with worries that a district manager might find something amiss or a shortage too large and summarily execute him. It showed in his heavy-handed management style. First National was a union shop and I had to pay dues to enjoy a minimum wage part time job with no benefits.

In 1955 I probably believed that Burnside would remain as it was for another fifty years. Waves of change were on the near horizon. By the early 60s both super markets were gone, First National to its new FINAST home at the new strip mall on Route 5 at the end of School Street. Stop & Shop was at the new strip mall that bordered the south side of the highway at Forbes Street. A "Top Notch" super market opened in Woodland.

The farming families cashed in their land holdings to the land developers. The land that was bought earlier in the century turned into a retirement windfall. Jim Futtner was the only remaining farming presence on Silver Lane. My wife worked at his stand and in the green houses. I don't know if any of his kids will carry the tradition on but his rented pick your own field was lost to development. Everything is raised in South Windsor.



*January 1966 Fire*

Savage market took the First National space but it was never the same. My freshman civics teacher opened Calano's furniture store in the old Stop & Shop building.

A new multi-screen theatre was built to the west of the Shop & Stop plaza on Silver Lane. The days left for the Burnside Theatre were quickly numbered.

The center building on the north side of the Avenue burned in January 1966. Manierre's meat market, Peterson's Package Store, the Rambler Tavern and Burnside Restaurant were gone and replaced with an empty lot.

2019 and 60 years later, Burnside is a wide spot in the road with a few convenience stores and too many barbers and beauty salons – and little else. There are no groceries, drug stores, meat markets, taverns and the many other businesses that added to the magic and vitality of the Burnside Center of my youth.

### 1953 - Burnside Avenue

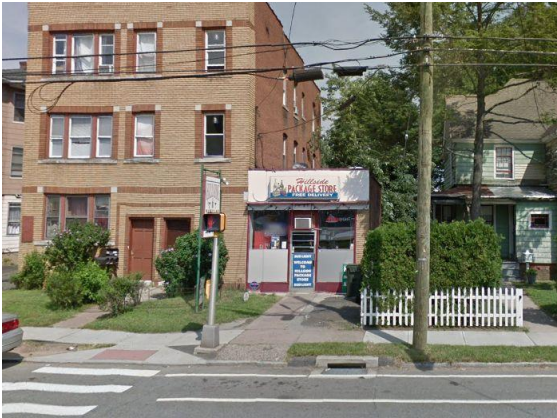
I extracted all the Burnside Avenue businesses between Hillside Avenue and the Manchester line from the 1953 Hartford Directory. Even numbers were on the North side and odd numbers on the South. I've included a few known EHHS 59 class mate's addresses.

448	Lamesa, Joseph (Sal)		680	First National Stores
453	Bevier - Plumber		686	Manierre, A. - Grocer
455	Hillside St. Begins		690	Peterson's Package Store
456	Hillside Package		691	Church St. Begins
473	Schaefer Trucking		692	Rambler Tavern
475	Chomick, Donald		694	Burnside Restaurant
494	Romanaczewicz, W. - Meat		694A	Pardy, F. - Variety
498	Wishes' Tavern		694B	H & L Appliance
500	Bidwell Shoppe - Confectionary		696	Burnside Drug (Kocum's)
512	Bidwell Ave. Begins		696.5	Hanmer St. Begins
514	Jean Soda Shop		711	Tine, S. - Barber
526	Lord's Service Station		711	Anita Beauty Salon
526.5	Moore Ave. Begins		716	Let & Gene Cleaners
557	Wind Rd. Begins		716.5	Williams St. Begins
573	Terry Rd. Begins		717	Superior Hardware
580	Burnside Theatre		740	Francis St. Begins
585	Kasler, W. - Dentist		750	Leone, V. - Artesian Wells
603	Hartford Kirby Co. - Appliances		760	Larrabee St. Begins
607	Galeota's Pizza & Grinder		793	Jergensen, H. (Sally)
610	Elmer St. Begins			<b>Woodland</b>
612	Fire Co. #3		1016	Long Hill Drive Begins
643	Finkle, N. - Dentist		1024	Polowitzer's Package
645	Burnside Plumbing		1034	Laurel Park Drive In
653	Tischofer, C. - Gasoline		1067	Mayberry Barber
656	Wickham Library		1069	Andy's Package
657	Jolly Restaurant (Tavern)		1069	Brooks, A. - Grocer
663	Butler, H. - Dentist		1073	Moir's Service Station
665	Falcone Shoe Repair		1083	Molinski, F. - Gasoline
668	School St. Begins		1100	Bergren Dairy Farm
669	Alexander's Diner		1110	Williams & Kralik Gasoline
669	Stop & Shop Grocers		1122	Goba's Flowers
671	Vicki, A. - Package		1500	Redmer's Esso Service
672	Dagon, J. - Gasoline		1500	Woodland Auto Painting
673	Gulotta, J. - Barber		1550	Marco Polo Restaurant
673	Rita's Beauty Salon		1560	Frankie's Drive In
678	People's Drug Store			



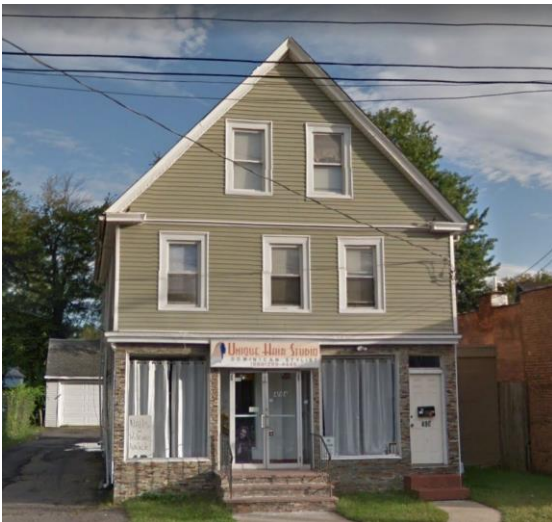
## The Businesses

I've found no early pictures of the Burnside area on line. I've captured the Google street views of the historic Burnside Avenue addresses even though most of the buildings have been re-purposed. I had a few of my own pictures of the taverns taken for a book I'm involved with. This web site ([www.ehhs59.com](http://www.ehhs59.com)) has been captured by the Internet Archive and its Wayback Machine so maybe we are creating our own set of (future) historic pictures.



457 Burnside Ave.

Hillside Package Store – Hasn't changed in 60 years.



494 Burnside Ave.

This was the Romanaczwicz Meat Market in 1953.



### 498 and 500 Burnside Ave.

Wishes' Tavern and Bidwell Shoppe (Confectionary) in 1953. My Dad said they played set back (a card game) at Wishes in the 1930s.



### 514 Burnside Ave.

Jean Soda Shop – 1953



### 580 Burnside Ave.

Burnside Theatre – Sally Jergensen and I held hands at a matinee here. It was a beautiful moment but if Sally is asked, she will probably deny knowing me. I helped Don Chomick clean the place a few times as I think he had a permanent job here. The Saturday matinees were very popular with us kids. I think it cost a quarter.



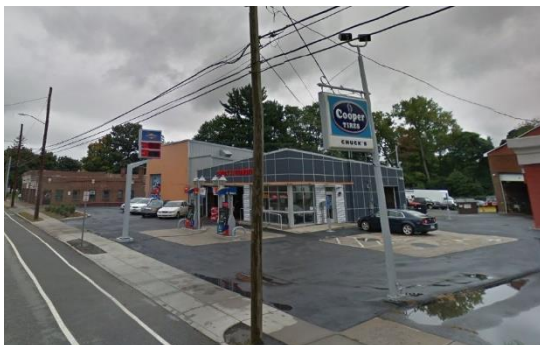
603 - 607 Burnside Ave.

Hartford Kirby Appliances and Galeota's Pizza & Grinder – 1953. I remember a Joey Galeota in grade school.



612 Burnside Ave.

Fire Company #3. Every kid in the north end of East Hartford got to ring the bell on the pumper on school fire safety visits.



653 Burnside Ave.

Charles Tischofer, Jr. "Charlie's Garage" to generations of Burnsidiers. Two large garage buildings were added to the original service station. This is the one business that seems to be thriving – probably on truck repair work.





### 656 Burnside Ave.

The Wickham Library. You could borrow four books for two weeks. You really felt grown up with your own library card. I had probably read 500 books from here by the time I was 10 or 11.



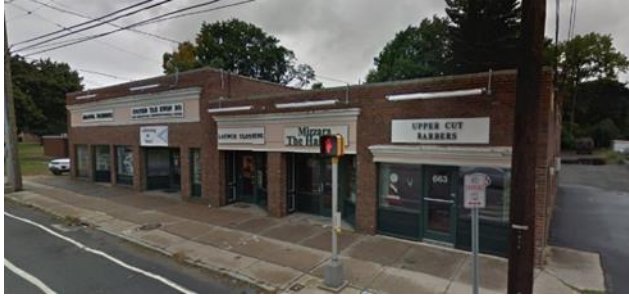
### 657 Burnside Ave.

The Jolly Tavern. Operated by Bill Jolly for many years and later as the Brookside East. Now torn down, it was one of the oldest surviving buildings in the area.



### School Street

The old pre-1900 front building at Burnside School. It was used as offices when I attended 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade here.



### 663-669 Burnside Ave.

Left to Right – Stop & Shop (higher roof section), Alexander's Diner, Falcone's Shoe Repair and H. Butler, dentist. Next to Stop & Shop (to the east) were the Vicki Package Store and Gulotta's Barber Shop. Even as a kid all you saw in Gulotta's were racing papers and forms. Just saying.



### 55 Church Street

Hoffman's Market. Operated by Bill Hoffman who was my Sunday School teacher. We bought all our meat here as my Dad wanted freshly ground "bottom round" hamburger. I often stopped on my way home to pick up an order. Bill delivered and let people run a tab (we didn't) and I suspect that is why the store survived well into the 70s. We still traded here after we were married in 1966. Peggy Chunko lived at 47 Church. Her house is now gone.



### 711 & 717 Burnside Ave.

Superior Hardware owned by Harry Ravalese was on the left in the two-story building. The Tine Barber Shop and Anita's Beauty Salon were to the right. The barber shop was shortly after 1953 known as Arnold's and operated at this location for many years.

It was very convenient having a local hardware store which we patronized a few times a month. It was amazing how much inventory was available.

I will leave the businesses at Woodland for a Mayberry Village reminiscence.

Howard Knickerbocker  
Middlefield, MA  
July 2019