The Legacy of T. S. Martin
The Legacy of T. S. Martin
This catalogue was published on the occasion of the exhibition
From the Store Window to the Gallery: The Legacy of T. S. Martin,
organized by the Sioux City Art Center, Sioux City, Iowa.

Todd Behrens, Curator


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front cover:
Photograph of T. S. Martin Company's store windows, ca. 1920–1930
Courtesy of the Sioux City Public Museum; Gift of Mrs. Hubert H. Everist, 1997.

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Foreword
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The *Legacy of T. S. Martin* project is due to Thomas L. Seamster and his passion for preserving the story of T. S. Martin. As a trustee of the M. A. Martin Everist Foundation, Tom invited the Art Center to submit a proposal on how it might tell T. S. Martin's story. Tom's enthusiasm for the project reflects the same dedication his mother, Margaret Ann Martin Everist, had in recognizing her grandfather. It was his vision and entrepreneurship that made it possible for her to support worthy causes during her lifetime and beyond through her foundation.

The *T. S. Martin* project seems especially fitting at this time since the Art Center recently celebrated the centennial of its initial inception as the Society of Fine Arts in 1914. As a local businessman, T. S. Martin supported the newly founded society with a $100 donation, making him one of its first "life members". Continuing and expanding that support a thousand fold, Martin's granddaughter Margaret Ann would provide the lead gift of $3 million to build the Art Center's present landmark facility.

While T. S. Martin passed away in 1915, and Margaret Ann in 2003, their legacy lives on in the many organizations that Margaret Ann supported in her lifetime and that her foundation continues to nurture with its gifts.
I want to express my appreciation to the M. A. Martin Everist Foundation for its support, the Art Center’s curator Todd Behrens for his leadership of the project, and publications coordinator Lyle Listamann for his work on designing this publication.

In addition, I want to thank the staff of the Sioux City Public Museum for their assistance with photography and research.
Figure 1. T. S. Martin, ca. 1905–1910, taken at Genell Studio, Sioux City, IA
Courtesy of Tom Seamster
The Legacy of T. S. Martin

Introduction

T. S. Martin’s Department Store first opened in 1880 in downtown Sioux City. Over the next thirty years, the store would change locations a few times, before settling on Fourth Street between Nebraska and Pierce Streets and expanding their footprint to become one of the most prominent department stores in town. The success and growth of T. S. Martin Co. coincided with that of Sioux City. The success and growth of Sioux City came from the laborious efforts of the meatpacking industry. However, as the city prospered, residents developed a taste for finer things, and thus retailers like Martin, Frank Pelletier, and the Davidson Brothers opened their department stores in the early 1880s. All three enormous stores would continue to operate into the 1940s, bringing Sioux City into the mainstream of American cosmopolitanism.

By the second decade of the 20th century, all three stores, located within a block of each other, had staked out specialties to benefit Sioux City consumers. Pelletier featured a large department of home furnishings, in which buyers could find things such as carpets and drapes, and even home entertainment items such as pianos and phonographs. Davidson Brothers operated the largest store not only in Sioux City, but in the state of Iowa. Their store featured not only the widest possible assortment of items, brought from across the country and around the world, but also had an actual “Bargain Basement,” designed to make sure that clients from all financial classes could afford what they needed.
T. S. Martin Co. aimed to present the best merchandise to its customers, and purposefully committed itself to carrying the largest selection of women’s apparel available.

Given their prominent locations, the downtown department stores made full use of their banks of first floor windows to entice customers. Coinciding with the increase in attention paid to the displays of fashionable, visual beauty, the idea began to bloom that Sioux City deserved an organization that would commit itself to exposing the community to the best in terms of the visual arts. Alice K. Lawler, with the support of local bankers and industrial leaders, led the effort to found the Sioux City Society of Fine Arts, which was incorporated in May 1914. In due time, the Society of Fine Arts would work with the federal Works Progress Administration to open the Sioux City Art Center, and would rename itself the Art Center Association of Sioux City.

Within a year of the founding of the Society of Fine Arts, men such as T. S. Martin, Ben Davidson, and F. M. Pelletier donated $100 each to become “Life Members” of the organization, helping to ensure that the Society’s efforts would be long-lasting. The Martin family would continue to support the Society through financial donations and volunteer work. This integration of the Martin family and the Society of Fine Arts at the beginning of the century would reach a new level toward the end of the century. The granddaughter of
T. S. Martin, Margaret Ann Martin Seamster Everist, would lead directly and by example in a manner that would transform Sioux City’s access to the visual arts. Margaret Ann led the way through monetary donation and through her planning efforts to help the Art Center commission and build its world-class structure, which has served as its home since 1997. What began as T. S. Martin’s determination to make the finest clothing and products available to the people of Sioux City culminated in a permanent structure dedicated to making the visual arts accessible to everyone.

It is in celebration of the longstanding efforts of the Martin family that this project has come to life. This exhibition honors this continuing dedication by the family by presenting a selection of artworks that were donated to the Art Center by Hubert and Margaret Ann Martin Everist, and placing a number of them within imaginary store windows—the form of display that T. S. Martin’s store used so beautifully and effectively to highlight its offerings. The Art Center has partnered with Sioux City retail and design firms to showcase these artworks in unique, creative settings.

The essays in this publication introduce T. S. Martin and his store to a 21st-century audience. While the era of major department stores in downtown Sioux City has come and gone, the valuable role they played in shaping Sioux City is undeniable. Thomas Morain presents T. S. Martin to readers in his essay, “Martin’s
Department Store: Knowing the Territory. Morain traces Martin's industrious and ambitious career path that began with him as a traveling salesman and culminated as the wealthy owner of a spectacular department store. Morain astutely point out that the local importance of T. S. Martin Company was not merely in the quality merchandise they made available. "Martin's was neither the first nor even the largest department store in Sioux City," Morain writes. "It did, however, hold a unique place in the city's history. It sold assurance and confidence. It sold pride. It sold community."

Richard L. Poole's essay, "How Theatre Influenced Downtown Department Stores," traces the links between the growth of live theater in Sioux City and the prosperity of department stores. Poole discovers a number of ways in which theater and the stores benefitted each other. One connection between the two was the merchandise. Theatre-goers, particularly women, would delight in the costumes of the women on stage and then hunt for similar fashionable items in the department stores. Another connection, though, was in the stage setting itself: Poole quotes Norman bel Geddes, who worked both as a window trimmer and a stage designer, as saying, "The store window is a stage where merchandise is presented as the actors."

In her essay "The Role of the Department Store in Early Twentieth Century American Life," Sara B. Marcketti discusses
the role of department stores in expanding the roles of women as consumers and in accelerating the evolution of fashion. She writes, “As women’s interest and participation in mass consumption increased, the apparel industry promoted the use and importance of fashion.” The place where middle-class women gained access to the latest fashion was the department store. Thus began the desire to wear only the latest fashion; the growth of department stores marked the beginning of the time when, as Marcketti comments, "a woman would almost rather be 'caught dead' than wear last year’s style or gaze on another woman wearing the same dress."

Todd Behrens has written the final essay in this publication with "Stockrooms, Showrooms, and Galleries: The Growth of Visual Culture in Sioux City." He discusses the importance of T. S. Martin Company in which the origins and success of the Sioux City Society of Fine Arts are linked to the growth of the department stores in Sioux City. He states that a trip to Martin's store "required the visitor to have cultivated a clear sense of taste." Department stores were recognized by their owners and museum professionals as places to see the most vivid, exciting exhibitions of products. Behrens concludes by declaring, "The Sioux City Art Center exists in large part through the Martin family's century-long commitment to improving Sioux City's taste for style and art."
Figure 2. T. S. Martin’s store, 1904, 515-519 Fourth Street. Courtesy of the Sioux City Public Museum; Gift of Mrs. Hubert H. Everist, 1997.
“But ya gotta know the territory” insisted one of the "Music Man" traveling salesman in the opening scene of Meredith Willson’s tribute to the Iowa small town life. Siouxland’s T. S. Martin would have agreed. He too spent several years on the road taking orders from frontier merchants and arranging deliveries before setting up his own store in Sioux City, and he was a man who indeed knew his territory. As Martin understood well, to the successful merchant, “territory” includes more than the “where” of geography. It also includes the market, the “what,” and a cultural landscape of the community one serves, the “who.” In all three, Martin was sure-footed. T. S. Martin and his sons grew up with Sioux City and knew it well. The Martin family not only responded to the needs of their townfolk; they shaped them. From 1880 until its sale in 1948, the department store he founded played a critical role in the growth, development, and identity of Sioux City, providing not only quality goods but the assurance that those who purchased them had good taste.

Knowing the Territory: The Where
Iowa’s “Territory” days were only two years in the past when French–Canadian traders built cabins in 1848 where the Big Sioux flows into the Missouri River. Iowa had become the 29th state of the Union in 1846. Ten years later, in 1856, the first steamboat arrived in the frontier town of Sioux City on Iowa’s western border. Unsettled relations with Indian tribes to the north made its docks the end of
the line for river shipments and a magnet for merchants ready to supply successive waves of gold prospectors headed for California, Colorado or the Dakotas. The town's location along the important transportation routes of succeeding eras—rivers, railroads, highways—proved to be one of the town's most valuable assets.

In the same year of that first steamboat, plans took shape for a second connecting link with the east. In 1856, Congress authorized the sale of public lands to subsidize the construction of four east-west rail lines across Iowa. All but one of them had Council Bluffs as the western terminus; the Illinois-Central did not. That line stretched across the incredibly fertile prairies of northern Iowa reaching Sioux City in 1870. A link to the south connected it with Council Bluffs and the future transcontinental rail line. More important at the time, the train provided the region with a direct link to Chicago, the fast-rising economic powerhouse of the Midwest and the source of factory-produced consumer goods, and from there to markets in eastern cities.

In 1868, when he was only 16, Thomas Samuel Martin (Tom to associates) moved with his family to Sioux City from Galena, Illinois. For five years, he worked as a clerk in a local grocery store, learning the retail trade and managing to save $450. With that nest egg, he and a partner opened a store in Akron, a small river town some thirty miles north of Sioux City. The venture
prospered until the grasshopper plagues of the early 1870s devastated crops, pastures, and the livelihoods of farm families and those whose businesses catered to them. Martin returned to Sioux City and worked for another four years as a grocery clerk and traveling salesman. Gold was discovered in the Black Hills of South Dakota in 1876, but prospecting wasn’t Martin’s interest; feeding and outfitting prospectors was his focus. He set up a store in Deadwood, South Dakota, ran it for almost two years, but returned in 1880 to the river town that would remain his territory until his death 35 years later.

Martin’s arrival back in Sioux City was fortuitous. It came at the beginning of a decade of explosive growth. In 1870, the population of the Woodbury county seat he had left stood at 3,401 souls. The Sioux City to which Martin returned in 1880 had more than doubled, now with 7,366 residents. Yet, while that growth was impressive, it paled in comparison to what was coming. In 1884, the population stood at 15,514, and the climb continued at an even faster pace: in 1886, 22,358; in 1887, 30,842; and in 1890, 38,700. By that point, Sioux City boasted street cars, water works, electric lights, and other infrastructure improvements. Its newly-opened stockyards proclaimed its prominence in the growing meatpacking industry. It had clearly become the economic hub of northwest Iowa and the bordering regions of Nebraska and South Dakota.
Martin's business success paralleled the growth of the city. For the first six months after his arrival, Martin bought and sold produce. When a storeroom became available on Fourth Street between Pearl and Douglas, he went into the dry goods business and opened a store. What followed was a series of store expansions, always staying on Fourth Street. By 1889, the store had moved to a new location on the north side of Fourth between Nebraska and Pierce. In 1894, Martin expanded with the purchase of two adjoining buildings and hired local architect William McLaughlin to design a unifying store front. From then on, the store began a series of expansions that gave it an ever-larger command along Fourth and Nebraska Streets. The capstone investment came in 1919, four year’s after Martin’s death, when his three sons designed and opened a five-story shopping shrine that remained an anchor of the community for next half century. T. S. Martin knew the territory and helped to shape it.

Knowing the Territory: The What
When T. S. Martin was working as a traveling salesmen in Nebraska and the Dakotas, his stops were small-town general stores that dotted the landscape to provide goods to the surrounding farm population. They carried both dry goods and produce and attempted as much as possible to offer a one-stop shop. Historian Lewis Atherton describes the typical general store this way:
Figure 3. T. S. Martin Company, ca. 1911, 515–521 Fourth Street.
Courtesy of the Sioux City Public Museum; Gift of Mrs. Hubert H. Everist, 1997.
In good weather, racks of brooms, seed potatoes, and other seasonal items were set outside on the front platforms, but merchandise in the windows flanking the front door remained unchanged for long periods....Both sides of the interior were lined with shelves... It was possible to identify the distinctive smells of molasses, vinegar, damp cellar floors, fish, cheese, freshly ground coffee, rope, rubber boots, dress goods on bolts, leather goods, or kerosene, depending on one’s location, but the mingled odors permeated the whole of the store (44).

According to Atherton, the store displayed the merchant’s efforts to emphasize the store’s “range of stock than on style, price, or other competitive possibilities” (44). The merchant bought in bulk and often broke down the order to the quantity the customer desired. Unless the town had competing general stores (most small towns did not), customers had little choice.

The railroad sparked several dramatic changes in Midwestern retailing, and T. S. Martin learned his lessons well. The railroad was a two-way street. It carried cattle, hogs, and grain to Chicago markets, but on the return trip, it brought consumer goods from the booming eastern factories: before the Civil War, items like shoes, clothing, textiles, groceries, and machinery, sold as generics, without a brand name. But with the rise of factory manufacture of commercial goods—and, significantly,
with the advertising that accompanied them—consumers began to request particular models or labels. Furthermore, price comparisons became possible. A can of A&P Coffee was the same as the competitor’s down the street. One merchant could not charge more by claiming his was superior. Atherton explains it this way:

Manufacturers gradually learned that newspaper advertising could force storekeepers to carry specific brands of goods. Once Singer Sewing Machines had been widely advertised, for instance, [and could be delivered cheaply to the local train depot], women demanded to see them before making a final choice, and retailers had to carry Singer models or lose trade to stores which did. Any item whose quality and price had been widely praised in advertising literature had to appear in local stores even though merchants felt that a competitive product was better. In this way, manufacturers and wholesalers influenced selection of goods, prices, and even methods of salesmanship in retail stores (222).

The railroads imported another challenge to the local retailer: the mail-order catalog. It should be no surprise the first mail-order business was the brain child of a Midwestern traveling salesman, Aaron Montgomery Ward. He observed that
rural customers often wanted “city” goods but their only access to them was through rural retailers who had little competition and offered no guarantee of quality. Ward also believed that by eliminating intermediaries, he could cut costs and make a wide variety of goods available to rural customers, who could purchase goods by mail and pick them up at the nearest train station (Wikipedia, “Montgomery Ward”).

Montgomery Ward opened his business in 1872 and struck such a motherlode. Competitor Sears & Roebuck paid him the ultimate compliment by opening a competing firm in 1886 closely reflecting Ward’s operation (Atherton 231).

The railroads changed retailing in yet another important way, one that was very significant for a major urban department store like Martin’s. Railroads not only moved goods; they moved people. Passenger trains made possible roundtrip visits to distant cities. Rural residents within a broad radius of Sioux City could board a passenger train in the morning, shop for four or five hours, and still be back home in the evening. Such trips were not for ordinary goods or the weekly shopping. They were still major outings, perhaps once or twice a year, but the market was there for things that a local country store could not or did not carry. Such an opportunity was not lost on one like T. S. Martin who knew the territory well.
Figure 4. T. S. Martin Company catalogue, Fall and Winter 1909–1910, front cover. Courtesy of the Sioux City Public Museum; Gift of Mrs. Hubert H. Everett, 1997.
Knowing the Territory: The Who

From its very earliest days, frontier retailing was a risky business. River transportation was expensive and the market was unsteady. In 1859, an announcement of a sheriff’s sale signaled the demise of the Heineman & Gumbert, a Sioux City dry goods store. Some of the items listed were no surprise on the Iowa frontier: dirk knives, long boots, fish hooks and lines, pistols and playing cards. But the inventory also carried products associated with a more genteel crowd: artificial flowers, fans, fancy soaps, umbrellas, glove stretchers, and violins (Lee qtd. in Schwieder 161).

Maybe the roots of Mr. Heineman and Mr. Gumbert’s demise lay in their overestimation of the cultural sophistication of their clientele, but one historian points in a different direction: the “cultural complexity” of this frontier town on the eve of the Civil War. He argues that from its earliest days Sioux City included a stratum of residents who attempted to maintain the trappings of sophistication and refinement and to refute the assumptions of their eastern cousins that all on the frontier “are little better than semi-barbarians” (Lee qtd. in Schwieder 165).

Horace Greeley may have proclaimed “Go West, young man” as the formula for success, but in terms of establishing one’s cultural credentials, “Look East” was more credible. Early
American colonists along the Atlantic Coast tried to imitate British styles and cultural norms, even while Londoners were aping the latest fashions from Paris and Italy. The advent of magazines and newspapers with nationwide readership, like *Godey's Lady's Magazine*, became arbiters of taste and provided their readers, especially the female ones, with the latest fashions.

How could a lady in Sioux City, Iowa buy a hat or an outfit that would be in style wherever she went? A local storekeeper might say that a dress looked very nice, but what did he know?

Enter T. S. Martin. A large department store with a frequent turnover of stock and whose wholesale buyers frequented the fashion houses of Chicago, Philadelphia and New York could provide just that assurance. One description of the store claimed that the store "is often called the Marshall Field's of the west" and has the reputation of doing the largest women's apparel business and of carrying the most lines of national advertised goods of any store in the state of Iowa. Everything for the home from a paper of pins to oriental rugs and draperies can be had under this one roof. The newest and most beautiful creations in clothes for men and women are always found at Martin's. It has become the one store for thousands of homes in the great trade territory (Adams 123).
“I bought it at Martin’s” became a code word throughout Siouxland that one’s purchases reflected good taste. Martin’s staff knew the cultural landscape of the community they served. They knew how to tap into the Midwestern anxiety of being snubbed by the social elites of the East as “semi–barbarians.” They knew their shoppers were willing to pay a little more for quality goods that came with the stamp of style that the store’s name imparted.

Knowing the Territory: The How

Three years after his return to Sioux City, at the age of 31, Martin married Agnes Murphy from Davenport. Their three sons would all follow their father not only into the retail industry but into the management of T. S. Martin and Company. They did not arrive in the bosses’ offices by a direct route, however. Their father required them to “know the territory,” to learn the business on their own, as he had, before they put their feet behind a boss’s desk.

The three sons of T.S. and Agnes Martin arrived at well-spaced intervals: J. Earl in 1884, Jules Thomas in 1889, and Howard Vincent in 1893. Each eventually found his way into management of the family enterprise but none by a direct route to the executive suite. All three attended public grade schools in Sioux City and did various odd jobs in the store while living at home, messengers and stock boys. They all left home after their elementary years for private schools.
J. Earle enrolled in Christian Brothers College in St. Louis, a private Catholic prep school, followed by commercial courses at Sioux City Business College. He also spent a short time in New York as a floor walker in a department store, rising to assistant manager in the ready-to-wear department and living on his $15-a-week salary. However, home was Sioux City and he returned to take an apprenticeship under his father’s guidance, learning the family business in great detail. In 1909, he was taken into the partnership, became treasurer in 1911, and vice-president, at age 31, in 1915.

In that same year, second son Jules became the company’s secretary-treasurer. His childhood was similar in some ways to J. Earle’s but had some distinctions of its own. Like J. Earle, Jules attended public schools in Sioux City but then enrolled in Tome Preparatory School in Port Deposit, Maryland, a nonsectarian institution. He followed this with two years at the University of Wisconsin. In the meantime, Jules and his younger brother Howard spent some time in Europe. When Jules was 19, he returned to Sioux City, and like his older brother, learned to make his own living outside the family business. His job, however, was not in a department store. He left home at 5:30 in the morning to a job packing meat at a local slaughter house and loading it onto rail cars. He too eventually returned to a job at Martin’s, starting on the sales floor in the children’s department but climbing his way up the management ladder.
Third son Howard had a more white-collar career path but not always a more lucrative one. He followed his brother to Tome Prep but transferred to the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. While in Philadelphia, he worked for Wanamaker's Department Store, one of the oldest, most distinguished and progressive establishments of its kind in the nation. His interest was in the accounting end of the business.

Within less than a year of J. Earl and Jules' promotions to vice president and secretary-treasurer respectively, T. S. Martin died. The oldest son became president, Jules vice-president, and Howard, at the age of 22, became secretary-treasurer. The three sons had been well groomed for their new responsibilities. With their father's instinct for seizing opportunities, the trio embarked on a bold business plan to make Martin's a landmark for Siouxland.

While the nation was engaged in WWI, Martin's finalized plans for the construction of a flagship store on the northeast corner of 4th and Nebraska that would become an icon of Sioux City pride for the next 40 years. It was not the largest of the three downtown department stores. That was Davidson's that employed 800 workers and occupied a full half block. Davidson's was said to do the largest per capita business of any department store in the nation. Nor did Martin's promote its mail order business the way
Figure 5. Preview Event at T. S. Martin Company's new location at the NE corner of Fourth and Nebraska Streets, March 18, 1919. Behind the counter are Howard V., Jules T., and J. Earle Martin. The men with overcoats are Iowa Governor William L. Harding (left) and South Dakota Governor Peter Norbeck. Courtesy of the Sioux City Public Museum; Gift of Mrs. Hubert H. Evertst, 1997.
Figure 6. T. S. Martin Company, NE corner of Fourth and Nebraska Streets, 1928. Courtesy of the Sioux City Public Museum; Gift of Mrs. Hubert H. Everist, 1997.
Pelletier’s Department Store did. Martin’s claim was not that it served the most but that it served the best.

On March 17, 1919, the palace of shopping opened and quickly cultivated an audience that appreciated quality . . . and would pay for it. Dark paneling throughout its four floors, an open mezzanine, and above all its inventory of high-end merchandise established its pedigree for Sioux City shoppers. Throughout the establishment, clerks dressed somberly in dark colors, like servants in a manor house, and never tried to outshine the customers. There was a "men’s grill" where businessmen could stop in the morning for a cup of coffee. They could shop for elegant sartorial brands like Kuppenheimer’s in its quietly classy men’s department.

For women especially, Martin’s became a tradition. A panel of local residents who remembered Martin’s was remarkably unified in their recollections of what a shopping excursion there was. It was “stately,” “elegant,” “stylish,” “an occasion.” Women put on hat and gloves to shop at Martin’s. They were met on the first floor by clerks who greeted them by name when possible and asked how they could be of assistance. There was a cloakroom where one could leave a coat and hat that would be cumbersome when one wanted to try on potential purchases. There was a soda fountain and a very stylish tea room for lunch or a pastry after a shopping tour. They well remembered the candy store, often the
last stop. It became a rite of passage for Central High School girls to be invited to be models for the seasonal style shows. Bargains on last year’s styles or clothing out of season could be found in the basement. There was no shame in hunting for bargains in Martin's basement. Anyone could be proud to find a quality product at a reduced price.

For one of Sioux City's most well-known personalities, shopping at Martin's was life-changing. In the obituary of her former husband, Esther Lederer (later famous as Ann Landers) recalls her unique connection with Martin's.

While selling hats in Sioux City, Iowa, in 1939, [Jules Lederer] met Ms. Landers, then known as Eppie (Esther Pauline) Friedman, who was engaged to another man and was shopping with her twin sister, Pauline, who later became known as the advice columnist Abigail Van Buren. The two were looking for wedding veils for their double wedding.

In a statement yesterday, Ms. Landers said: “Jules was a world class salesman. At age 21, he sold me on himself when I went to the T. S. Martin Department Store to buy a wedding veil. I was engaged to marry Lewis Dreyer, a Beverly Hills law student. I broke the engagement and married Jules in a double wedding with my twin sister, Pauline” (King).
Not everyone, of course, could claim a similar shopping experience of such significance, but at the very least, the store gives claim that Martin’s could boast at least one young man with outstanding sales skills.

In 1930, Martin’s promoted its Golden Jubilee Celebration, not of the opening of its flagship store in 1919 but of its founding in the young Sioux City in 1880, and followed it up five years later in 1935 with its 55th anniversary. Clearly proud of its Sioux City roots, the store management understood its ties with the community and the pride shoppers took in its local connection. Therefore, it came as something of a shock when news was announced in 1948 that Martin’s had been sold to the May Company, ending the family’s 68-year management of the Sioux City icon. Another shock came nine years later when the May Company sold out to Younkers and changed the name of the store to Younker-Martin’s. It still sold quality goods, but the local pride in “one of its own” was no longer there for an operation with its roots in Des Moines. Competition from shopping malls and changing shopping patterns forced the closing of the store in 1969. In 1970, after 90 years on Fourth Street, the tangible legacy of Tom Martin and his sons ended when the store was razed, making room for a J. C. Penney’s.
The panelists assembled to recall their love affair with Martin’s. They recalled the event with sadness. “It was ours,” one recalled. “It was a Sioux City store.”

Serving the Territory

Over its long career, Martin’s served the shoppers of Sioux City in three ways. First and most obvious, it sold quality merchandise. Beyond that, however, Martin’s sold validation and confidence. When you purchased at Martin’s, you could be assured that the goods would be recognized by others as in good taste and the latest style. “I got it at Martin’s” was a stamp of quality among local residents, a point mentioned over and over by the panel.

In addition, however, Martin’s itself engendered local pride and met a need evident from Sioux City’s earlier days. Those who saw themselves as community and social leaders in Sioux City were anxious to assure themselves and outsiders that theirs was not a lawless frontier town devoid of refinement and culture.

There was not a large enough market in the 1850s for the fancy soaps, glove stretchers and violins on the shelves of Heineman & Gumbert’s dry goods store, and the store’s inventory ended up in a sheriff’s sale. But a man with the keen business instinct of a Tom Martin and a growing middle class could find common ground. Martin provided Sioux City with what it wanted: quality
goods and self-assurance. Could a cultural wasteland support not only a store like Martin's but two other large department stores and a whole street of quality boutiques and specialty stores? Hardly. Sioux City knew and experienced the finer things in life, as the inventory of Martin's testified, and the connection with the source of that touch of class. When the location passed into the hands of outsiders, first to the May Company and then to Younkers and then to J.C. Penney, the community lost one of its own that had served them well for ninety years.

Martin's was neither the first nor even the largest department store in Sioux City. It did, however, hold a unique place in the city's history. It sold assurance and confidence. It sold pride. It sold community. Its dark panels quieted any anxieties about the self-worth of Siouxland shoppers. After all, they were shopping in Martin's.

(Author's note: The author wishes to extend his gratitude to a panel of Sioux City shoppers who met on June 18, 2015 and provided valuable information about Martin's from their own experiences. Panelists included Helen Suttie, Helen Glazer, Jeanne Wissing, Joan Krage, Mary Ellen Frakes, Mary Post, and Mona Kelly. Much of the data for the article was drawn from the "Martin's" archives at the Sioux City Public Museum, made available to the author through the Sioux City Art Center.)
References


How Theatre Influenced Downtown Department Stores: Commerce performed on and off stage in Sioux City, Iowa, 1870–1919

Richard L. Poole

Between 1870 and 1919, American theatre and downtown department stores enjoyed a fruitful, commercial connection in large cities and small towns. Sioux City was among the most fertile communities for that connection.

After Sioux City was incorporated in 1857, a range of theatres took shape near its Missouri Riverfront. Most influential were the Academy of Music, built in 1870, and the Peavey Grand Opera House, which opened in 1888 and emerged as Sioux City theatre’s crown jewel.

The Peavey Grand was conceived as a Chamber of Commerce building with a small theatre within it. However, the theatre soon eclipsed the Chamber of Commerce. After its debut, the Peavey Grand was hailed as one of the nation’s most elegant theatres. It also was called the “Peavey Grand Opera House,” the “Grand Theatre” and the “New Grand Theatre.”

The spectacular four-story theatre, designed by Oscar Cobb, was located at Fourth and Jones streets. Its sumptuous interior was matched only by its ability, at least at the outset, to bring to Sioux City the best theatre in the nation and, indeed, the world. The Peavey Grand was the foremost western Iowa facility on the Theatrical Syndicate which controlled and booked productions for hundreds of theatres across the country.
The presence of top-drawer theatre helped shape a community image SiouxCityans were eager to promote. Their burgeoning Northwest Iowa community was no backwater stop on the rail lines. It was a rising economic power destined, they thought, to rival Chicago.

**East Coast inspiration**

Between 1880 and 1890, Sioux City's population grew more than 400 percent. Business, industry and land sales boomed. The world's first Corn Palace opened in downtown Sioux City in October 1887. A week of entertainment, parades, fireworks, and dances aimed at celebrating the area's abundance and enticing East Coast capitalists to invest in Sioux City.

The attraction drew superlatives from thousands of visitors, including President Grover Cleveland and railroad baron Cornelius Vanderbilt. Four more Corn Palaces followed. The 1889 event brought 100 capitalists by train from Boston.

Thanks to the lavish Peavey Grand, the latest theatre productions also were coming to town. Each production served up exciting new fashions, accessories, hair-styles and beauty products touted by glamorous actresses who traveled the East Coast-to-Midwest circuit. Theater-goers wanted to look like the stars of the Peavey Grand stage. Sioux City retailers saw economic potential in that connection.
Advertisements for basic as well as extravagant items promised revenue for local newspapers, chiefly The Sioux City Journal and later The Sioux City Tribune. When the Academy of Music presented The Two Orphans in 1875, ads trumpeted it as the "first production ever in this city of Monsieur D'Ennery's great Parisian sensation." The drama had played more than 180 times at none other than New York City's Union Square Theatre.

Publicity pushed the show's elegant costumes as inspiration for department store fashions in Paris, New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Chicago. If Paris and New York department stores could have stylish theatre-inspired fashions, why couldn't Sioux City?

**Department stores take shape**

By April 1880, T. S. Martin, his brother, J. P. Martin, and partner Milo Bullock, were advertising products available at their New Dry Goods Store at 49 Fourth Street, between Pearl and Douglas streets. Shoppers were wooed with ads for an "elegant line" of hosiery, parasols, dress goods, table linens, napkins, towels, and other dry goods.

Determined, adventurous, hardworking, and far-sighted T. S. Martin was first a Deadwood, SD, pioneer grocer and a Sioux City retailer. In the last decade of the 19th century, he ventured into building a department store in Sioux City. Meanwhile, other
Department stores were taking shape downtown, chiefly Pelletier and Davidson Brothers.

Brothers Ben, Abe, and Dave Davidson were Jewish immigrants. Ben arrived first in Sioux City and worked door-to-door, selling notions, needles, thread and other wares. By 1884, Abe and Dave had arrived and B. Davidson Bankrupt store opened at 822½ Fourth St. Within ten years, the Davidsons’ two-story clothing store at the southwest corner of Fourth and Pierce streets was operating as one of Sioux City’s largest department stores.

Pelletier, in the Massachusetts Block at the southwest corner of Fourth and Jackson streets, was a major competitor in the 1890s, but fire destroyed it on Dec. 23, 1904. Less than a year later, it reopened at 413–415–417 Pierce St. Other department stores arrived, including Orkin Brothers, but T. S. Martin and Davidson’s remained the largest. Theatre-inspired fashions were a grand slice of their business.

**Stage-to-store fashions**
The passenger train boom fueled the theatre-department store connection. By the end of the 19th Century, commercial theatrical offerings poured out of eastern urban centers, particularly New York City. From the 1890s through 1920, many productions targeted the matinee audience: women who wanted to see gorgeously costumed actresses.
Women of means could have dress makers replicate theatrical costumes for their own wardrobes. Women of less means could count on department stores for ready-made, theatre-inspired fashions. Women unable to afford retail could use department store show windows as references for making their own patterns and sewing the latest fashions at home.

Department store managers and theatre managers were the essential collaborators in the stage-to-store fashion business. They enjoyed a financially fruitful relationship. Advertising agencies, women's magazines, fashions designers and clothing manufactures also figured into the connection. Popular actresses appeared in ads promoting stylish outfits, fashionable accessories and beauty products. As the 19th turned into the 20th century theatre and department store advertising became even more prominent and creative.

At the center of the story, however, were the theatre productions themselves that featured costumes reflecting the latest in Paris or London styles. In some cities, department store window “dressers” or “trimmers” created a theatre “stage” within the store where fashions, on mannequins or live models, were displayed.

“The store window is a stage where merchandise is presented as the actors,” American stage designer Norman Bel Geddes wrote in his book *Horizons.*
Bel Geddes himself worked as a department store window trimmer before he became a stage designer. He reinforced the connection between the stage and department show window in the Nov. 19, 1927, edition of Women's Wear Daily: "...what is needed is an adaptation to the store window of the lighting resources now available for the theatre."

**Peter Pan collar**

By the beginning of the 20th century, theatrical productions, female stars, advertising agencies, periodicals, Paris and London fashions, department store show windows and the nationwide railroad system allowed New York City to become "... the nation’s social, economic and cultural hub," according to Marlis Schweitzer in *When Broadway Was the Runway*. Theatrical touring companies "direct from New York," also played a pivotal role in the distribution of information, ideas and fashion throughout the United States.

Sioux City theatres and department stores enjoyed similar relationships to those in the bigger eastern cities, especially New York, albeit on a smaller scale. Due to the Peavey Grand’s connection to the Theatrical Syndicate, famous New York actresses starred in productions in Sioux City. Among them were Olga Nethersole, Ethel Barrymore, Lillian Russell, Ada Rehan and Maude Adams who used their theatrical fame to
promote fashions and accessories, copies of which became available to the public.

“One of the most famous and enduring examples of this promotional strategy was the Peter Pan collar created for Maude Adams, who originated the title role in the J. M. Barrie play in 1905...,” according to Schweitzer. “Manufacturers and designers also named sleeves, hats, slippers, coats, and various other fashion articles after popular actresses, hoping that the star endorsement would equal big profits.”

Adams did not like this practice. In the March 23, 1913, Sioux City Journal, she claimed that “one has yet to see her name on an indorsement of a beauty recipe or to hear of her commending a purchasable commodity.” While big-city theatres and department stores could count on the impact of fashion houses, costume rental businesses, advertising agencies, dressmakers and other fashion accessory creators, Sioux City relied on advertisements and articles in The Journal.

“Twentieth Century Girl”
Beginning in 1875, many plays were advertised as having been staged in London, Paris or New York City. Costumes were touted as the latest Paris fashion or “used in large eastern cities.” From the start of the 20th century, articles in The Journal’s Sunday
“Style” section focused on the latest in fashionable creations. Ads for dress patterns available from The Journal and local department stores ran weekly and sometimes daily.

Perhaps the most startling ad connecting Sioux City department stores with professional theatre occurred at the Pelletier in October 1896 when a silver statue of famous actress Ada Rehan was placed on display. The statue was Montana’s contribution to the World’s Fair. Weighing 8,073 pounds, it “conjured into the queenly image of fair Ada Rehan, the most perfect form known in womankind,” according to The Journal. The statue stood on a golden pedestal which cost $224,000 and was shaped into a globe “which rests on the back of an American eagle.”

Some ads appearing in Sioux City newspapers used testimonials from up-and-coming New York performers, such as Della Knight, Queen Roselle, and Clint Ford who promoted Newbro’s Herpicide, a dandruff and hair-restoring product. International actress Julia Marlowe endorsed Peruna, a “nerve” product. T. S. Martin Company was the first, and perhaps the only, Sioux City department store to connect a theatre production with a specific product.

On Thursday, April 16, 1896, the Grand Opera House advertised “New York’s Newest Production Intact – THE TWENTIETH CENTURY GIRL.” The illustration showed a woman wearing
Figure 7 (left). Promotional advertisement for *The 20th Century Girl* at the Grand Opera House. *Sioux City Journal*, April 16, 1896, p. 8.

Figure 8 (right). Promotional advertisement for T. S. Martin Company. *Sioux City Journal*, April 17, 1896, p. 8.
pantaloon-like trousers and a puffy-sleeved blouse. The next day, a Martin’s ad showed “The Twentieth Century Girl” on a bicycle, wearing “handsome ready-made garments.”

The Martin Department Store advantage
Sioux City’s big three department stores promoted their buyers’ connections to the Paris and New York fashion scenes but with the advantage of lower prices. Martin also could promote an even closer tie to the big city.

Four years after founder T. S. Martin died, the new flagship department store opened on the northeast corner of Fourth and Nebraska streets. All three of Martin’s sons were involved in the business, but J. Earle became the president.

Early in his clothing store career, J. Earle lived in New York City where he worked in a department store, first as a floor-walker, then as assistant manager of ready-to-wear. He was perfectly situated to participate in the department store-theatre connection and bring his experience back to Sioux City’s Martin’s department store.

He saw that many New York theatres were in close proximity to large department stores. Shoppers admired on-stage fashions. After the show, they headed to a department store to see and perhaps purchase a copy.
J. Earle gained marketing and advertising experience that would enhance Martin Department Store’s performance in theatre-inspired fashions and accessories sales. He learned to create eye-catching show window displays and developed his ability to meld trendy appeal with the T. S. Martin image of a Sioux City landmark and an upper-Midwest retail titan.

By 1920, live theatre was waning in Sioux City and across the country. It remained successful for a time in “combination houses” which presented live theater, but mostly movies. Talkies, radio, and television all but replaced live theatre as providers of fashion trendsetters who starred in downtown department store windows.

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The Role of the Department Store in Early Twentieth Century American Life
Sara B. Marcketti

Before the 1860s, for either geographical or economic reasons, clothing consumption meant personal production for most American women. “Babies” or dolls dressed in European styles and fashion drawings illustrated in magazines such as Graham’s, 1826–1857, Godey’s Lady’s Book, 1830–1898, and Peterson’s, 1842–1898, informed seamstresses of the latest styles. Homemade clothing, created from patterns, or based on existing styles, often did not fit well or look good, partly because of the great complexity of the fashionable styles and the lack of training and skill of the maker. Wealthier clients could order clothing directly from Europe or commission tailors and dressmakers to faithfully copy the fashions. Clients often insisted that gowns follow the fashionable silhouette and idea, yet were adapted to the particular form and personal characteristics of the individual woman. In large cities there were custom businesses that catered to the elite. Yet, for the majority of American citizens, while custom made clothes were the most fashionable and had the best appearance, workmanship, and fit, they were often prohibitively expensive (Allinson 18; Cranor 230–233; Funderburk; Walsh 299–313).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, ready-to-wear clothing, offered in a variety of styles, quantities, and prices, became available in almost all markets. Ready-to-wear clothing mass produced by garment manufacturers, transformed clothing
“made for somebody” to clothing “made for everybody.” Ready-to-wear apparel followed fashionable trends but was not specific to individual tastes and preferences. The growth of the ready-to-wear industry exploded in the United States due to increased opportunities for consumption, expanding societal roles of women, and the simplification of garment styles. In addition, the telephone, the wireless, a transatlantic cable, and the appearance of the first steam lines and cruise liners made swifter transmission of ideas and apparel styles possible, intensifying the tempo of fashion (Leach).

Linked to a growing economy and increasing opportunities for consumption, mass production in the women’s ready-to-wear apparel industry accelerated (which was both a cause and a result of increased mass consumption). Women’s roles expanded through increased opportunities to earn a higher education, for wage-earning employment, and through participation in sports. These roles were celebrated by more ready access to shopping, cultural events, and recreation. Shopping rituals changed as department stores became centers for display and entertainment, and clothing became available from more various and more convenient sources. As opportunities for interaction

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1 These are the titles of two chapters in the book: Claudia Kidwell and Margaret Christman, *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America* (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974).
with high fashion images in the form of advertisements and retail shop displays increased, women desired more frequent style change and became increasingly interested in fashionable clothing (Schorman). By 1915, American women purchased from 80 to 85% of clothing for themselves and their families. These purchases often occurred in department stores in large and smaller cities across the United States (Drake and Glaser 25).

Women bought more clothing than before, but they chose simpler, looser fitting garments in keeping with the fashionable trend. Awkward, cumbersome styles such as those proposed in the French haute couture, would impede fulfillment of their new roles in life. Attitudes toward time, budget, and fashion influenced the growth, promotion, and acceptance of ready-to-wear clothing. Long working hours coupled with greater opportunities to fill leisure time meant less time to sew. The struggle to make a well-fitted acceptable garment made home sewing even less appealing. Active women increasingly wore separate skirts and shirtwaists and one-piece dresses, purchased in retail stores rather than wear custom or home-made intricately designed dresses. Women of most economic classes simply had more places to go, for which they needed and desired a greater variety of clothing that was comfortable, convenient, practical, and in-fashion (Leach, “Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890–1925”)
As women's interest and participation in mass consumption increased, the apparel industry promoted the use and importance of fashion. By the turn of the twentieth century, manufacturers, particularly in the cloak and suit industry, began to use style changes as a way to both compete with each other and to appeal to customers at various income levels. They changed styles rapidly and used decorative trims to hide otherwise poor quality fabrics. Manufacturers generated sales by offering many garment variations and by changing their styles frequently from season to season and even within seasons. Manufacturers and department stores even manipulated what constituted style change by advertising simple changes such as sleeve lengths or placement of trim as being the most up-to-date (Tortora and Marcketti) (Figure 9). The multitude of offerings stimulated constant production and consumer demand (Parsons, “Dressmakers: Transitions in the Urban Production;” Smith).

A new organizational structure of retail stores catered to consumer demand. Before 1880 there were small, dry goods firms and small neighborhood shops that offered only a limited number and variety of items. There were also department stores such as Bon Marche, begun in Paris ca. 1850, Jordan...
Figure 9. A McCall pattern illustrated the great variety of sleeve styles possible for the home sewer. While sewing became less and less important in the twentieth century, women could “update” their store-bought goods by changing sleeves and adding decorative trims, thus altering and refreshing their overall look.
Marsh in Boston, and Wanamaker’s founded in Philadelphia, ca. 1860. Department stores flourished after the 1880s and were large retail establishments that offered women the choice of purchasing ready-to-wear garments, custom-made garments, or a selection of fashion fabrics to be created into garments elsewhere. Women had many opportunities to purchase clothing at various price points in the department stores; from the lowest dollar available to several thousands (Mamp and Marcketti). Women were encouraged to shop in departments that fit their economic means and social status (Leach, Land of Desire).

Department store consumers were encouraged to browse, and shopping became a new pastime for many women (Figure 10). Manufacturers and retailers increasingly offered a greater diversity of products and changed their product offerings often. To make a profit, retail stores relied on the rapid turnover of a large volume of merchandise. Manufacturers needed to simultaneously differentiate their goods from all rival brands, as well as distinctly position their own brands from previous seasons. Sellers tried to sell products more frequently than their rivals by means of carrying the newest styles. With the department store's power to generate demand through advertising and special promotions, and the ready-to-wear manufacturer's ability to constantly change styles to differentiate their products, the small custom producer became
less important. The department store became the “palace” of consumption for the majority of Americans (Leach, *Land of Desire*; Coffin; Funderburk; Gamber).

Figure 10. T. S. Martin Company, ca. 1913–17, 515–521 Fourth Street. Courtesy of the Sioux City Public Museum; Gift of Mrs. Hubert H. Everist, 1997.
Importance of Style and Fashion Change

Style changes increased in frequency, and style variety grew in extent in the 20th century. The apparel industry utilized mass media to encourage consumers to respond to new styles and advertisers began to emphasize fashion as the most important motive to purchase a product rather than reasons of health or durability (Norris 104). Fashion stimulated sales by encouraging obsolescence and premature replacement of goods. Apparel industry trade publication Women's Wear Daily noted:

This feature of the business is a radical departure from the old time system of turning out good, staple styles in quantities, when the idea of "dressing in uniform" as it is now called, was not regarded as objectionable, but contrarily, the more one saw of any special style and color, the more fashionable it was considered (Women's Wear Daily, November 30, 1910).

An atmosphere was created wherein a woman would almost rather be "caught dead" than wear last year's style or gaze on another woman wearing the same dress (Holbrook and Fogarty). Obsolescence set in, not because a product became worn or unusable, but because it was out of date; it was no longer fashionable. The public compulsion for continual style creativity, evinced by the number of styles introduced each season by various manufacturers, was encouraged by the ready-to-wear
apparel industry. Rapid obsolescence was a means for increasing consumer demand and expanding sales, and enabled firms an equal opportunity to create successful sellers and achieve maximum profits. Even if a woman sought to purchase outdated styles, manufacturers and retailers only produced and stocked salable fashionable goods (Gregory).

As the desire to keep up with changing styles began to increase, a philosophy emerged that quality was less important than stylishness. While consumers of haute couture and custom-made goods stressed quality of goods and personalization of their relation with the producer, ready-to-wear consumers seemed more interested in following the every whim of fashion produced in prices they could afford. Women desired a variety of dresses and sought quantity, rather than purchasing one or two good quality, expensive dresses wearable for a number of years. In a U.S. Supreme Court case decision regarding the apparel industry, the presiding justice, Judge Black, expressed the importance of fashion over all other characteristics of a garment:

Women do not buy hats, they buy fashions. They most certainly do not protect the wearer against rain or snow or cold. Virtually their sole function is to make the wearer happy in the thought that she has a beautiful thing which is in fashion. No matter how beautiful, if not in fashion the hat will
not sell. A woman buys fashion, not goods (Women’s Wear Daily, March 4, 1941).

The towering importance of style in the dress industry was incalculable. Some believed rapidly changing styles impeded rational choice by taking women’s minds off of price, quality of materials, and workmanship. These authors contended rapid style changes encouraged wasteful buying for the simple reason that last season’s clothing were discarded after mere months never to be worn again (Gregory 70). Consumer dependence on style change allowed producers of goods to sell inferior goods at exorbitant prices since each season’s offerings were touted as new and different. But were they truly new? The creation and advertising of new styles more often changed the mind of the buyer rather than offering significant style changes, making her dissatisfied with her existing clothes (Gregory 75). Fashion writer Elizabeth Hawes expressed the irony of yearning for new items, differentiated from past offerings only in the smallest detail.

All the filling in is done on the same basic patterns...It is the proud boast of some wholesalers that they make up a whole line with only three dress patterns. The newness, so loudly called for, is new trimming, new collars and cuffs, new glass buttons, new flowers, and all of this, not too new, please (Hawes 108–109).
As the importance of style replaced quality and workmanship with the rise of the ready-to-wear industry, women no longer desired apparel that would withstand the test of time. Instead, many preferred to purchase less expensive garments, in inferior materials, as long as the garments were fashionable. Perhaps exaggerating the importance of style to the twentieth century women, a writer for *Women's Wear Daily* stated, “The woman of today almost does not care if the dress is put together with pins, if it gives her individuality and the fashionable appearance” she will be satisfied (*Women's Wear Daily*, December 13, 1912).

The department store facilitated women’s shopping opportunities. As historian Kathy Peiss stated “The department stores were for and about women, but primarily about women of the middle class” (Peiss 62–67). Even if women of lower means could not afford what was offered in the stores, there were ample opportunities to at least observe fashion and its changes, or shop in the bargain counters and the basement level, or bargain basements of the higher end department stores (Drake and Glaser; *New York Times*, May 17, 1914).

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Stockrooms, Showrooms, and Galleries: The Growth of Visual Culture in Sioux City
Todd Behrens, Curator

As the urban centers of the Midwest grew throughout the 19th century, so too did their desires for art museums. By the turn of the 20th century, the largest cities of the Midwest—Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Detroit, and Milwaukee—each boasted formal art galleries. By 1914, the other large cities of the region—Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Minneapolis—had also opened art museums. With very few exceptions, this meant that every Midwestern city with a population of at least 200,000 had a place for its residents and visitors to view art exhibitions.

In 1910, Sioux City's population was 47,828 and it was increasing rapidly. By 1920, it would break into the list of 100 largest American cities, ranking #99 with a population of 71,227. During this time of immense growth and excitement, a group of citizens began work on forming an art institution that, with growth over time, could elevate Sioux City into the realm of cosmopolitan cities that had a dedicated art museum.

And so, in 1914, the Sioux City Society of Fine Arts was incorporated. Its mission to bring art exhibitions to Sioux City and to encourage the production and collection of art was designed according to the May 17, 1914 edition of the Sioux City Journal, to “furnish the proper stimulus and raise the standards of art in Sioux City.”
This decade of enormous growth in population and prosperity brought about physical changes in the city, embodied by the success of great downtown department stores and a range of smaller nearby shops. With the growth of Davidson Brothers, Pelletier’s, and the T. S. Martin Company, never before did visitors to downtown Sioux City have such an immediate visual exposure to so many different materials and products.

Are these two occurrences—the growth of Sioux City’s department stores and the birth of the Society of Fine Arts—directly connected? Directly...no. But there were a number of circumstances, both locally and nationally, that brought these two things together at the same time.

As Sara Marcketti notes in her essay and as Jan Whitaker detailed in her book *Service and Style: How the American Department Store Fashioned the Middle Class*, the year 1915 proved to be a pivotal moment during the shift from the typically mundane dry goods stores to the more stylish department stores. The shift was visible in the reduction of the amount of space allocated for bolts of fabric and ribbons for women to make their own clothing, while the amount of space for women’s ready-to-wear clothing expanded greatly. It was, at this moment, when the fashion industry and the average middle-class woman met, and the meeting took place in department stores.
With so many products and stores, from massive department stores to intimate boutique shops, a trip to the downtowns of Sioux City and other cities became a feast for the eyes and it required changes in how people made purchases.

Among the major changes was a shift in the way in which people approached a visit to a store. While a visit to a traditional dry goods or grocery store was still a utilitarian task, a visit to a department store became as much an experience as it was a necessity. Since the store was so large, the variety of departments so comprehensive, and the range of styles and designs within each department so overwhelming, a visitor to Martin’s had to be open to the unexpected, yet discerning enough to make a decision. In short, a visit to Martin’s required the visitor to have cultivated a clear sense of taste.

To a large degree, the Martins, their buyers, their display managers, and their sales teams helped guide visitors toward a sense of taste. But before the era of glamour in Hollywood films or slick magazine advertisements influenced the taste of middle-class Americans, consumers relied on department stores to serve as liaison between themselves and the glittery fashion world. Still, the decision was there for the consumer to make, with the salespeople serving to share enough knowledge and affirmations about the suitability of a product to seal the deal.
Beyond the connections between the Society and the department stores cultivating a community-wide sense of taste, were other aspirations shared by their promoters. Within a year of the Society of Fine Arts’ incorporation, men such as T. S. Martin, Ben Davidson, and F. M. Pelletier donated $100 each to become “Life Members” of the organization, helping to ensure that the Society’s efforts would be long-lasting. The wives of both Ben Davidson and J. P. Martin (T. S.’s brother) served on the Society’s first “Entertainment Committee.” The Society’s initial exhibitions were represented in a modest set of three rooms in what was then known as the Carnegie Library. However, that space did not have the visibility or the glamour that the Society wanted for its more important exhibitions and events. The Martin Hotel, built and owned by T. S.’s brothers, hosted an exhibition of paintings from a Chicago gallery in 1915, as well as a “Musicale” and a “Lecture and Tea” in early 1916. Both the Pelletier and Davidson Brothers stores hosted art exhibitions during the first decades of the Society’s existence. Later, during the 1930s as the Society of Fine Arts was preparing to reorganize itself to bring a WPA-funded Art Center to Sioux City, Mrs. Howard Martin (wife of one of T. S. Martin’s sons, who were operating the store) served as an officer on the board at this crucial time in the Art Center’s development.

In addition to the families who owned the department stores, many of the other early prominent donors and board member of the Society were bankers and business owners. These included
presidents or vice-presidents of First National Bank, Security National Bank, Sioux City National Bank, and Toy National Bank. While the men provided most of the cash and board representation, women did the actual work on committees, with the wives of bankers and business owners playing significant roles.

The intersection between those at the forefront of Sioux City's economic growth and those who were founding and overseeing a fledgling art society might seem unusual. However, the economic influence of women's commerce was just beginning to be recognized, primarily through the growth of department stores. As Marcketti notes in her essay, “By 1915, American women purchased from 80 to 85% of clothing for themselves and their families.” Fashion and clothing were becoming important industries, with women the target consumers.

Local financial leaders took notice of the change. Families like the Martins and Davidsons were not only the owners of the largest retail stores in town; they were also major developers during this time of Sioux City. While the Davidsons built the Davidson Building and developed Sunset Circle, the Martins built the Frances Building and helped finance the Warrior Hotel, the Badgerow Building, the new Orpheum Theater, and the War Eagle building. With the families deeply invested in the future growth of Sioux City, they understood the need to attract new residents and new customers.
How did the department stores compete for these consumers?
One of their primary methods was the display window. As Whitaker notes:

Once customers of all social classes demanded style in clothing and household goods, display windows became artistic showcases critical in establishing a store's reputation for being chic and up-to-date. Their magnificence also testified to the rightness of middle-class living and affirmed the value of time women spent selecting and acquiring the manifold components and trappings of the good life (110).

By the 1940s, Whitaker states that "it was a rule of thumb that one-third of all sales in the average department store could be credited to the store's windows, principally because the displays inspired significant numbers of customers to make unanticipated impulse purchases" (113).

Window designs gradually shifted over time. While low-cost stores typically filled their windows with merchandise, high-end stores began reducing the number of manikins, props, and merchandise to connote sophistication.

As department stores began to take greater care in the presentation of their merchandise to attract the attention of
Figure 11. Photograph of T. S. Martin Company's store windows, ca. 1920-1930
Courtesy of the Sioux City Public Museum; Gift of Mrs. Hubert H. Everist, 1997.
Figure 12. Photograph of T. S. Martin Company's store windows, ca. 1920–1930
Courtesy of the Sioux City Public Museum; Gift of Mrs. Hubert H. Everist, 1997.
prospective customers, some in the industry began to realize that their displays of goods outclassed those in museums. John Wanamaker, one of the country’s earliest founders of department stores, was critical of the lack of sophistication he found in art museums’ displays because they presented paintings too crowded together. In “Everyday Peter Pans: Work, Manhood, and Consumption in Urban America, 1900–1930,” Woody Register quotes Wanamaker: “‘In museums,’ Wanamaker flatly stated, ‘[a]lmost everything looks like junk even when it isn’t, because there is no care or thought in the display. If women would wear their fine clothes like galleries wear their pictures, they’d be laughed at’” (213).

In fact, most art galleries and museums in the United States in the early 20th century presented their artworks for educational and historical purposes rather than to be appreciated as works of great beauty. This followed the tradition of both private salons, where the more art there was to be seen the better, and science museums, where specimens were shown in greater quantity.

The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston began challenging the status quo right at this time, culminating with the 1918 publication of an influential book, very drily titled Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method (Duncan 16–17). Its author, Benjamin Ives Gilman, differentiated the work of art museums from scientific museums:
art museums do not present collections of specimens; they present collections of things that are unique. Their displays, therefore, should make clear that each artwork is on view so that visitors can discover what is special about it (Gilman 80). He declared that a collection of art exists “primarily in the interest of the ideal” and that it represents “a selection of objects adapted to impress” (92). He also stated that art museums can have an added purpose by allowing those who are “less fortunate” to experience what only those who are “more fortunate” might otherwise do (95). Later, he affirmed that the benefit of art museums is that their holdings can and should have a strong social value.

In the same manner, department stores began to realize that style and fashion sense mattered as much to people of all social strata. Buying a modest dress, hat, or household item from Martin’s still brought it with it a special prestige. As Whitaker writes,

Most modern department stores of the twentieth century wanted to wield style authority. A fashion reputation meant that a store was connected with the world, aware of artistic trends, and generally alive to its times...Most worked hard to convince the public they were au courant in fashion, which meant women’s apparel first and home furnishings second (141).
Both art museums and department stores still had work to do to make sure their visitors had the proper visual experiences. Whitaker cites influential designer and architect Frederick Kiesler, who urged department store designers in the 1920s to "make the store interior a showroom instead of a stockroom" (128). Likewise, Gilman conducted countless studies on the impact of lighting, the size and groupings of display cabinet, the height of painting installations, and the traffic patterns of visitors throughout gallery spaces.

While Gilman and others in the art museum profession recognized a difference between displaying art within a museum for the purpose of contemplation and appreciation and displaying merchandise within a store for the purpose of sales, others were not sure that the museums could not learn more from department stores. Stewart Culin served as director of the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania during the 1890s and then became the first curator of ethnology at the Brooklyn Museum. Culin was fascinated by the aesthetic properties of objects from "primitive" cultures, asserting that one need only look to "find evidences of an aesthetic sense, not only at mere utility, but at decoration and ornament" (212).

During his time at the University of Pennsylvania, Culin became friends with John Wanamaker and repeatedly extolled the aesthetic virtues of a visit to a department store. Register quotes Culin:
“Enter one of our great department stores,” [Culin] urged his audience in a lecture in 1900 at the Free Museum of Science and Art in Philadelphia, “and examine the fabrications of cotton and silk, of glass and metal, wood, and lacquer; mere utility is quite insufficient to justify the profusion of form and color with which we are surrounded” (Register 213).

In 1926, Culin would continue to discuss the value of visiting department stores while observing that “the department store stands for the greatest influences for culture and taste that exist today in America.’ For every one person who goes to a museum to gratify his or her curiosity about new things, he said, ten thousand visit the department store with the same motive” (Whitaker 146).

So when the Society of Fine Arts planned its exhibitions during these years, it is not surprising that among the venues it sought were department stores. With an exhibition in a prominent place in a store such as Davidson Brothers, the Society itself gained greater exposure and the store could augment its position as a place for sophisticated shoppers. Martin’s had worked to establish itself as the place for women’s fashion and its new store in 1919 confirmed its standing. However, Davidson Brothers competed by opening a fourth floor tea room in 1922 and hosting a number of the Society’s exhibitions.
These included an impressive collection of 39 paintings from the National Academy of Design in New York. This important exhibition was displayed on the fourth floor in February 1925. While these artworks were available for purchase, prices for them were as high as $5,000, clearly connoting the idea that the store could satisfy the desires of the most refined Sioux Cityans (*Sioux City Journal*).

When the opportunity arose in 1937 for the Society of Fine Arts to find a home of its own, one that would become the first home of the Sioux City Art Center, it explored a number of potential sites in downtown Sioux City. The best location was the large, unused basement of the fur business run by August Williges on Pierce Street. After more than two decades of a relationship between the Society and the most fashionable stores in Sioux City, the Art Center would be formed in a building devoted to the production of furs, the epitome of fashion.

And when the time came in the 1980s to begin the process of planning a building that would be specifically designed to serve as the Sioux City Art Center, the person at the forefront of the effort was Margaret Ann Martin Seamster Everist. Mrs. Everist was the grand-daughter of T. S. Martin and daughter of Jules T. Martin, who served as vice-president of T. S. Martin's & Co. for many years and later as president shortly before his death in 1944. Mrs.
Everist made a significant, initial donation in 1985 toward a fund that would, in time, grow to the point that it allowed the current facility to be constructed and opened in 1997. At the top of the donor list etched in granite in the T. S. Martin Atrium of the Sioux City Art Center is the name Margaret Ann Martin Seamster Everist, who made her donation in honor of T. S. Martin.

More than a century ago, Sioux City leaders determined that the city deserved an art institution. As reported in the *Sioux City Journal* in May 1914, the founders of the Sioux City Society of Fine Arts “do not consider it an extravagant dream that the day will come when among the public buildings to which Sioux Cityans proudly will call the attention of visitors will be the ‘Art Institute’, or some similarly named structure.” The Sioux City Art Center exists in large part through the Martin family’s century-long commitment to improving Sioux City’s taste for style and art.

**References**

*Sioux City Journal*, 17 May 1914; 8 Feb. 1925.