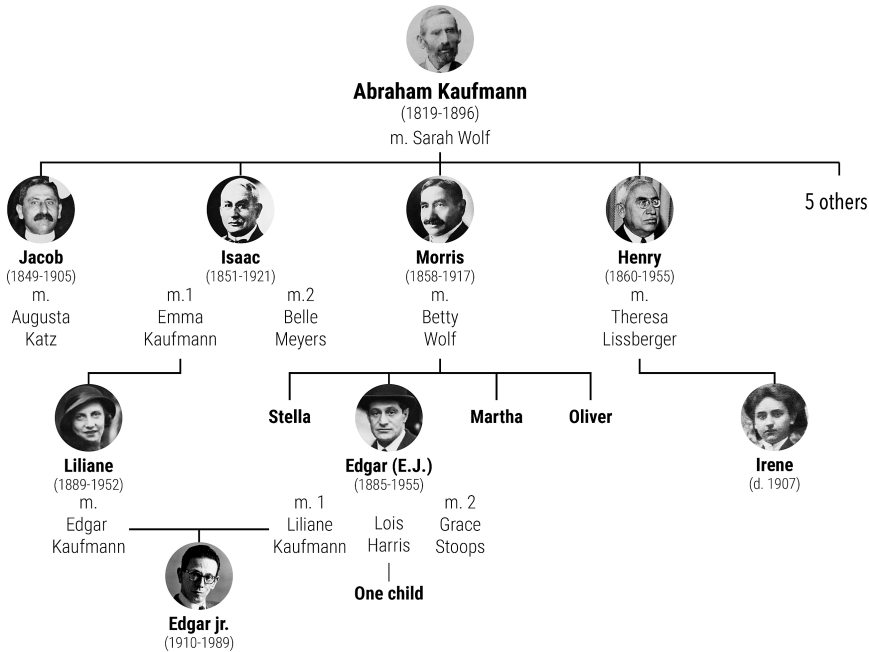




From Peddlers to Prosperity

Jacob Kaufmann stepped off a ship at Castle Garden, New York, on June 10, 1868,¹ his belongings on his back. The nineteen-year-old farmer's son was determined to start his own business rather than follow in his ancestors' footsteps selling cattle and horses in Germany. He made his way, probably by train, west to Pittsburgh. There he joined an immigrant community of German Jews peddling small sewing items such as buttons, needles, and thread to the coal miners and mill workers of Western Pennsylvania. These German Jews were young adventurers who left southern German villages with their wooden trunks aboard a "shaky vehicle" headed toward America.²

Jacob had good reason to leave Germany, though his family had lived there since at least the 1600s. They had settled in Viernheim ("Fern Home"), a rural Rhine River Valley community of nearly 3,350 people near Mannheim in southwestern Germany. The family business had a monopoly on cattle dealing. Bad harvests in 1816 and 1817 fueled violent attacks called the "Hep-Hep riots" in 1819 against Viernheim's Jews and in other German regions. Hard times prompted some peasants to blame Jews for their misery. Fresh attacks on Viernheim's Jews occurred in 1822



1.1 The Kaufmann family tree. Chance Brinkman-Sull.

and 1830. Rioters entered Jewish houses, destroyed furniture, and emptied feather beds into the streets.³ To keep them safe, the Kaufmanns buried their valuables under their dog house.⁴ In 1848, after a failed German revolution, Jews in the region and other parts of what would later become Germany were granted full and equal rights. But Viernheim's mayor battled the new law and refused to grant citizenship to the local Jews. Eventually, he granted citizenship to twelve adult Jewish males, including all men in the Kaufmann family.⁵ Poor harvests and hard times continued. In 1852, ninety-six Jewish families—458 people—left the region. "What good is a Fatherland and home if we starve?" asked one of the emigrants.⁶ The Kaufmann family, however, stayed. The family included the father, Abraham, his wife, Sarah, three daughters, and six sons, including Jacob, Isaac, Morris, and Henry. Abraham was "short of stature, slim, had very thick black hair till his death, brown eyes, dark skin, was strong-boned, and habitually bent forward. He was healthy, very enduring, hot-headed, and energetic," recalled Alfred Kaufmann, one of Jacob's cousins.⁷ Even during an extremely hard winter, while Abraham and his family were driving cattle that sank into deep snowdrifts, he ordered: "Business has to go on as usual," according to Alfred. Abraham's wife, Sarah, "was very religious

and wore a *scheitel* [a wig worn by observant Jewish women]. She was very good-hearted and beloved by everyone," according to Alfred.⁸ In a 1967 family history, he cited "poor economic conditions, coupled with the slow progress in enforcing the political and social equality laws of 1862 for Jews," as the reasons for his family's emigration to the United States in the 1860s and 1870s.⁹

No description exists of Jacob in his youth, but an early, heavily retouched photo shows a square-faced young man with a walrus mustache. He is wearing a suit with notched lapels and a bow tie. Much later, at the height of his

prosperity, he took to wearing suits with diamond-studded cuff links. His son Karl Kaufmann described him as "a nice-looking man, heavy set, loved to have a carnation in his buttonhole. He went to a florist almost every day and had a carnation in the buttonhole of his coat. Loved to smoke cigars."¹⁰ Neither Jacob nor his brothers wore religious clothing, beards, or side curls, as observant Jews did. Jacob began his life in Pittsburgh boarding with a German tailor in what would later become the city's South Side.¹¹

As Jacob made the journey to Pittsburgh, what he saw upon his arrival probably appalled his rural sensibilities. By 1868, smoke billowed from sixty-eight glass factories, fifty-two breweries, fifty-one refineries, forty-eight foundries, thirty-two iron mills, and nine steel mills.¹² Barges packed with coal floated southwest from Pittsburgh on the Ohio River to Cincinnati. In 1875, the Edgar Thomson Works in Braddock rolled the first steel rail and the Bessemer process was first used to make steel. With the advent of steelmaking, pollution only worsened. Journalist James Parton saw the steel mills along the Monongahela River and heard the noise of "hundreds of steam hammers." When the wind blew aside the smoke, he



1.2 Jacob Kaufmann in an undated photo, showing the carnation he was known to wear in his jacket lapel. Kaufmann's Department Store Photographs, MSP 371, Rauh Jewish Archives, Detre Library and Archives, Heinz History Center.

saw "the whole black expanse . . . dimly lighted with dull wreaths of fire." Writing for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1868, he branded Pittsburgh as "hell with the lid taken off."¹³ His article captured his contempt for the city's industrial gloom:

There can never be any dandies here. He would be a very bold man indeed who should venture into the streets of Pittsburg with a pair of yellow kids upon his hands, nor would they be yellow more than ten minutes. All dainty and showy apparel is forbidden by the state of the atmosphere, and equally so is delicate upholstery within doors. Some very young girls, in flush times, when wages are high, venture forth with pink or blue ribbons in their bonnets, which may, in highly favorable circumstances, look clean and fresh for half a mile; but ladies of standing and experience never think of such extravagance, and wear only the colors that harmonize with the dingy livery of the place. These ladies pass their lives in an unending, ineffectual struggle with the omnipresent black. Everything is bought and arranged with reference to the ease with which its surface can be purified from the ever-falling soot. Lace curtains, carved furniture, light-colored carpets, white paint, marble, elaborate chandeliers, and every substance that either catches or shows this universal and all-penetrating product of the place, are avoided by sensible housekeepers. As to the men of Pittsburg, there is not an individual of them who appears to take the slightest interest in his clothes. If you wish to be in the height of the fashion there, you must be worth half a million, and wear a shabby suit of fustian.

Parton, however, had missed Pittsburgh's lively cultural scene, vividly described by J. Ernest Wright in "Pittsburgh Seventies." To Wright, the city was a place of music, theater, art, and books. Its interiors were dominated by slick horsehair furniture, deep carpeting, and dark wood. In one telling line, he suggested that Pittsburgh life in the 1870s had "a light and color and sheen that glowed steadily through the film of industrial soot and scum."¹⁴ He also noted that men kept their doeskin trousers free of creases, "for a crease in those days was held in universal distaste as a sign of the store shelf."¹⁵

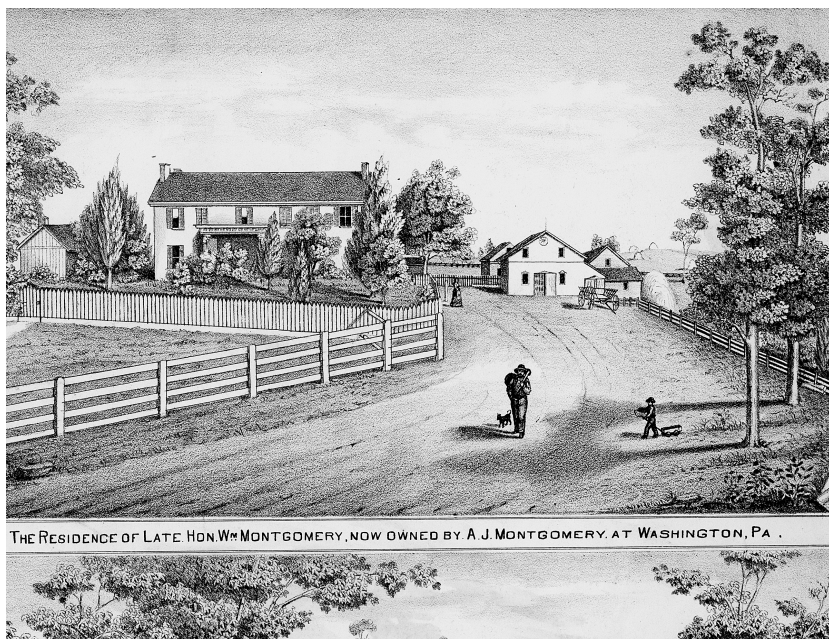
Pittsburgh's lack of beauty or taste "didn't deter opportunity seekers."¹⁶ Jacob Kaufmann was one of those seekers who became a peddler. By 1860, the United States had fifteen thousand to sixteen thousand peddlers, most of whom were Jewish.¹⁷ Half of the Jews in Pittsburgh in 1860 operated or worked in seventeen clothing houses.¹⁸ In Western Pennsylvania, many peddlers eventually left the road and opened successful clothing stores in

towns like Braddock, Johnstown, and McKeesport. Some peddlers succeeded so brilliantly that their family names became synonymous with their businesses, including William Filene, Gerson Fox, Adam Gimbel, Isaac and Jacob Goldsmith, Simon Lazarus, Al Neiman and Herbert Marcus, Morris and William Rich, Alex and Philip Sanger, and Lazarus Straus.

Jacob's peddling meant walking ten to twenty miles a day. He bought goods from wholesalers in Pittsburgh or McKeesport, then traveled a sixty-mile trail through the Youghiogheny River Valley and as far south-east as Connellsville, Pennsylvania.¹⁹ His wares provided an alternative to the company stores of mine patches and mill towns around Pittsburgh.²⁰ He trudged across the region's hills and deep valleys, carrying a pack that likely included buttons, combs, lace, mirrors, pins, needles, ribbons, and thread.²¹ He endured damp, gray winters and hot, humid summers. At night, if a nearby Jewish family offered, he might eat at their table and sleep in their home. Failing that, he might have received shelter from his last customer of the day, or he might bed down in a ditch, field, or forest.²² If invited to eat at a customer's home, some Jewish peddlers ignored the Jewish dietary laws, but usually they refused to eat anything except eggs, bread, fruit, and vegetables.²³ Peddlers customarily offered liberal credit, allowing homemakers on farms and in mining camps to buy on the installment plan.²⁴ Peddlers also moved into moneylending so their impoverished customers could pay for their purchases.²⁵

Eventually, Jacob acquired a horse-drawn wagon, which served as a mobile store and a place to rest. He relied on the Wholesalers' Credit Association, a network of fellow Jews who extended credit and goods to sell, as well as hospitality and a place to observe the Sabbath. Each Sunday after the Saturday Sabbath, Jewish peddlers settled their accounts, restocked, and resumed work. In buying a wagon, Jacob was following a path upward: with no overhead and few expenses, unmarried pack peddlers could save money so they could transition from foot peddling to peddling by wagon to opening a store.²⁶

Together with his goods, Jacob carried a key principle from his father, who advised: "Sell to others as you would buy for yourself. Good merchants make small profits and many sales. . . . Deal fairly and be patient and in time dishonest competitors will crowd your store with customers."²⁷ Peddling also forced Jacob to quickly learn his customers' various cultures and languages.²⁸



1.3 An itinerant peddler leaves a farmhouse in Washington, Pennsylvania, in this nineteenth-century print. Courtesy of Marylynne Pitz.

A year after immigrating, in 1869, Jacob had saved enough money to send for his brother Isaac. Isaac had an earnest, narrow face, thick hair that he kept all his life, and a bushy mustache. He favored bow ties, and in later years he wore round spectacles. The brothers began peddling together. Two years later, in May 1871, they used almost all their money—\$1,500—to open a tailor shop called J. Kaufmann and Brother. They rented space from J. Shafer²⁹ at 1916 Carson Street, the main commercial district of Birmingham, a municipality that Pittsburgh annexed as its South Side the following year. The shop measured a cramped seventeen by twenty-eight feet, give or take a foot.³⁰ "I could have stuck the whole shop—lock, stock and barrel—into my present office, and used the remainder space for a bedroom," Isaac recalled decades later.³¹

The store joined at least six other merchant tailor shops, most on Carson Street, on the South Side as of 1871.³² Although more than forty clothing merchants congregated downtown, particularly around Wood Street and Liberty Avenue,³³ the Kaufmanns catered to workers at Jones & Laughlin Steel Company and their families.³⁴ Jones & Laughlin was just starting to move from iron production to steel and had already begun a massive expansion. Nearby coke works, an iron mill, a glass works, a lum-

ber yard, and a rolling mill employed other potential customers.³⁵ One of Jacob's nephews, Oliver Kaufmann, described those early beginnings on the South Side. "The store on Carson Street sold men's wear and yard goods," he said.³⁶ "Women made their own clothing in those days, and yard goods was a big business. We also sold notions [small sewing supplies]. The men's clothing were work clothes." The store was "dominated by a large cutting table surrounding [*sic*] by bolts of fabric. The shop carried a limited inventory of men's and boys' ready-to-wear."³⁷ The two brothers were so busy that they kept a small couch



1.4 Young Jacob and Isaac Kaufmann, probably circa 1871. Kaufmann's Department Store Photographs, MSP 371, Rauh Jewish Archives, Detre Library and Archives, Heinz History Center.

under the cutting table in case they had to spend the night in the shop. They placed their first newspaper advertisement headlined "New Store, New Goods, New Prices at Jacob Kaufmann and Brother" on the front page of Birmingham's *Weekly Courier* in May 1871.³⁸ That first year, the store had sales of \$21,585.³⁹

In a newspaper advertisement fifty years later, Isaac reflected on the humble beginnings of the store. "We couldn't have picked out a worse stretch of years for a start," he wrote. "The average family could afford but the barest necessities of life. A dollar was a big piece of silver—sufficient to feed and clothe and house a man, a wife, and children." Despite living in poverty, Isaac remembered how he and his brothers were "millionaires in hope and confidence."⁴⁰ The year 1871 was a bad one to start a business because just two years later, the Panic of 1873 sent the nation's economy into a steep depression that lasted five years—the worst financial crisis until the Great Depression of the 1930s.⁴¹ The panic began when two major banks that had invested heavily in railroad expansion failed. In 1877, Baltimore and Ohio Railroad workers from Pennsylvania to Missouri went on strike to protest three wage cuts in one year. The strike turned brutal, and Pittsburgh experienced the worst violence with an uprising that led to forty deaths. Rioters burned down the Strip District's Union Depot, as well as some thirty-eight other buildings and more than fifteen hundred rail-

cars. The economic downturn also slowed Jewish immigration to Pittsburgh. The outlook was grim, according to a local historian: "How could the newcomer be expected to make a living in Pittsburgh then? The iron mills were down; unemployment great. The local Jewish community was experiencing 'hard times.'"⁴² The downturn led one German Jewish peddler to take his own life, leaving behind a wife and two children.⁴³ On the other hand, the Kaufmanns could not have picked a better time to start their business: In 1869, Thomas Mellon established T. Mellon and Sons, the banking powerhouse that would underwrite many of the significant industries that generated Pittsburgh's industrial wealth. While Mellon Bank did not finance the Kaufmanns, it backed many industries whose employees shopped at the store.

After less than a year in business, Jacob and Isaac began the first of many expansions by moving to larger quarters, twenty by forty-five feet, at 1932 Carson Street.⁴⁴ They lived above the store.⁴⁵ In 1873, they brought their fourteen-year-old brother Morris from Germany.⁴⁶ As the youngest of the three brothers, he was assigned the responsibility of night watchman. He also had to empty buckets that collected water from a leaky roof. Every night, he would tie a string around his toe and let it drop through a second-floor window. If he overslept, one of his brothers tugged on the string to rouse him. In 1874 or 1875, the brothers opened a second store at Allegheny and Federal Streets in Allegheny City, now Pittsburgh's North Side, and moved their South Side location downtown to 634 Market Street. Two years later, in 1876, the Kaufmanns brought over a fourth brother, Henry, age sixteen.⁴⁷ Like Isaac, he wore round spectacles, suits, and often a serious expression. During this time, the Kaufmann brothers brought other family members from Germany to Western Pennsylvania. Later, those relatives would compete with the Kaufmanns by establishing their own store.

While the brothers expanded their family in the United States, they also reaped the benefits of Pittsburgh's growing population. Business began to boom, fueled by European immigration from the British Isles, Germany, and Lithuania, which pushed the city's population from 49,221 in 1860 to 86,076 in 1870, a jump of nearly seventy-five percent. The city's population jumped again in 1880 to 156,389. Pittsburgh's immigrants hailed from Central and Eastern Europe. Each ethnic group brought a distinct culture and opened its own churches, where worship was often conducted in Czech, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovak, Slovenian or Ukrainian. Eastern European immigrants formed their own banks, ethnic clubs, and even singing societies, some of

which still exist. To cater to this growing customer base, in 1879 the Kaufmann brothers moved their Market Street store to a prime downtown location at Fifth Avenue and Smithfield Street. They called their new business "Kaufmann's Cheapest Corner," stocking only men's and boys' clothing and "furnishings,"⁴⁸ meaning men's suits, shirts, and neckties. The brothers now employed three salesmen, and they and the Kaufmanns took care of everything: all the office work, selling, wrapping, window displays, and delivery.⁴⁹ That same year, the brothers closed their South Side and North Side locations, probably to concentrate on their downtown headquarters at a time when people flocked downtown to shop. To recognize Morris and Henry, in 1880 they changed their name to "J. Kaufmann and Brothers." Also that year, they rented the first floor of the adjoining building at their downtown location. Within a year, they were renting the second, third, and fourth floors,⁵⁰ and the number of salesmen gradually increased to seventy-five.

As it changed locations, Kaufmann's also revised some of its business practices, reflecting new trends in a burgeoning industry of "department stores." By printing the cost of an item for sale on cards that accompanied merchandise,⁵¹ they could offer goods at consistent prices, an approach pioneered by New York retailer Alexander T. Stewart.⁵² Before, salesclerks had to assess, based on someone's appearance, how much a customer could afford to pay for an item, then haggle with him or her over the cost. In an October 26, 1881, newspaper advertisement, Kaufmann's touted the new pricing system: "When we advertise a price, we charge no more."⁵³ During this profitable decade, the Kaufmanns had caught the wave of a new type of merchandising. According to one source, the phrase "department store"



1.5 Kaufmann's advertised its one-price policy, meaning that prices were marked on tags rather than forcing shoppers to haggle with clerks. Kaufmann's Department Store Records, MSS 371, Rauh Jewish Archives, Detre Library and Archives, Heinz History Center.

first appeared in print in *The New York Times* in 1888⁵⁴ about a store opening in Los Angeles. Another source claims it first appeared in 1887 in the *Evening Wisconsin* newspaper in an advertisement for a Milwaukee store.⁵⁵ In the 1880s, department stores sold clothing for men and boys. For women, they sold notions—ribbons, lace, needles, and thread—as well as fabric. Women made their own clothes because it was less expensive than buying them. Homemade dresses lasted longer because fabrics for sale at the time were of high quality. But department stores offered more than goods. These commercial venues provided entertainment and leisure for their customers, chiefly women, a place where they could spend hours meeting friends, browsing, and relaxing, perhaps buying nothing.⁵⁶

By the fall of 1882, Kaufmann's had doubled in size and underwent remodeling, including "a fine Passenger Elevator" and "Electric Lights,"⁵⁷ plus a grand staircase and electric chandeliers. These innovations were made possible by a new technology, electricity. Strawbridge and Clothier in Philadelphia was the first department store to house a passenger elevator, pulled up and down by hand, in 1865. In 1881, Kaufmann's elevators allowed customers better access to the building's upper floors. A few stores preferred electric wooden escalators, which took up less space, carried more people, and cost less than elevators. Wanamaker's flagship store was the first to use electric lights, followed by Macy's in New York in 1878.⁵⁸ Because these lights cast an ugly blue-violet tone, altering the hues of fabrics, stores also relied on large windows to brighten their interiors. Shoppers had to take clothing to the windows to judge their true colors, and salesclerks could only murmur that a dress would "look better when you get it home."⁵⁹ Despite these technological advances, salesclerks at Kaufmann's and other department stores of the time did not have access to cash, so transactions relied on children called "cashboys" or "cashgirls" who ran money from the counters to cashiers with payment, then back again with change. Store interiors were noisy places, filled with shouts of "Here, boy!" Kaufmann's advertised for cashboys as early as 1888, when it needed twenty-five in January and another fifty in May, and it started recruiting cashgirls in 1892.⁶⁰ To convey cash to cashiers, Kaufmann's had a system of baskets and pulleys, and later, a pneumatic tube system with hand bellows to provide air pressure that would suction tubes from one spot in the store to another.⁶¹ The earliest mention of the store's pneumatic tube system is from 1891, so it must have gradually replaced the cashboys and girls and baskets and pulleys.⁶²

In addition to interior upgrades, the exterior of Kaufmann's, like other department stores of the era, grew in an improvised fashion, with additions in various styles constructed alongside the original buildings. Ever mindful of opportunities to expand and stay competitive, the brothers bought land in downtown Pittsburgh near street corners, speculating that development and streetcars would spring up there, and they were right. Department stores would be among those developments, and the advent of electric streetcars made downtown a shopping mecca. The city's compact downtown is a small piece of real estate, just 0.64 square miles. For a time, department stores seemed to spring up in this concentrated area almost every few years. Joseph Horne opened the first downtown department store. He originally did business on Market Street in 1849, but in 1871, he moved to busy Penn Avenue between Sixth and Seventh Streets.⁶³ In 1893, he built his flagship upscale store at Penn Avenue and Stanwix Street. Kaufmann's followed, moving downtown in 1874 or 1875.

Soon, more department stores opened downtown, making it the retail shopping destination, as in many American cities. Max Rosenbaum opened a shop in 1868 on Market Street as a wholesale and retail store. By 1880, he moved his retail business to Market Street and Liberty and then in 1915, opened a new store with two thousand employees at Sixth Street between Penn and Liberty Avenues.⁶⁴ A flurry of commercial activity accompanied the turn of the century. In 1904, McCreery and Company opened at Wood Street and Sixth Avenue.⁶⁵ In 1907, Russian Jewish immigrants Jacob Frank and Isaac Seder opened what would later be named Frank & Seder at 344 Fifth Avenue, the former location of department



1.6 The Christmas tree display goes up at Joseph Horne's department store, downtown Pittsburgh, in 1979. Ross Catanza/*Pittsburgh Press*, Courtesy of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.



1.7 The bustling corner of Fifth Avenue and Smithfield Street in downtown Pittsburgh shows Frank & Seder's department store. Courtesy of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

store Solomon and Ruben.⁶⁶ Bennie Neiman merged his Lower Hill store with that of Hugo Lewin in 1913, forming Lewin-Neiman at 305 to 307 Smithfield Street.⁶⁷ The Jenkins Arcade, a precursor of the modern indoor shopping mall, opened across the street from Horne's on Stanwix between Penn and Liberty Avenues in 1911.⁶⁸ Elsewhere, upscale Boggs & Buhl expanded time and again across the Allegheny River on Federal Street in Allegheny City. Mansmann's had already opened in East Liberty in 1888,⁶⁹ catering to that upscale neighborhood. On a more modest scale, the Murphy Company, owner of the G. C. Murphy Company five-and-dime stores that would become ubiquitous nationwide, was formed in nearby McKeesport, Pennsylvania, in 1906.⁷⁰

The Kaufmann brothers wanted to stay ahead of the surge in department store popularity. Having just expanded their store, they now embarked on the wholesale rebuilding of it, which was finished in 1885. They demolished a "row of shanties"⁷¹ at Fifth Avenue and Smithfield Street, and began construction on an all-new store called the Grand Depot, which took up an entire city block. The name may have been inspired by John Wanamaker, who opened his Philadelphia department store in a former



1.8 The Liberty Avenue side of the Jenkins Arcade in 1955, showing a billboard for its next-door neighbor, Horne's. Courtesy of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

railroad depot called the Grand Depot. Outside the Kaufmann's store, atop a towering cupola, stood a fifteen-foot-high statue called the Goddess of Liberty, holding a natural gas torch in her hand that "could be seen at night over the entire city."⁷² An employee had to go on the roof to light the flame each night. The Goddesses of Commerce and Justice, both eight-foot-high bronze statues, flanked the building's main entrance. The entire building, inside and out, was illuminated by electricity, so bright that "the interior is as bright by night as day," and the exterior lights had "2,000 candle power

each," according to the *Pittsburgh Daily Post*.⁷³ Inside, store decorations reflected the rousing theatrical success of "The Mikado," a comic Gilbert and Sullivan operetta set in Japan that opened in England earlier that year. Displays featured parasols, umbrellas, and countless fans. Kaufmann's new furnishings matched the elegant ambience of department stores such as Wanamaker's and Paris's Le Bon Marché with "Vienna chairs, plush-velvet settees and handsome mirrors."⁷⁴ The *Post* reporter expressed astonishment at the quantity of goods for sale, describing "160 large counters which fairly sway beneath the weight of suits piled upon them."⁷⁵ In addition, the store had movable wax mannequins, rotated by hand in its windows that attracted public admiration a forerunner of the wonderment inspired by festive Christmas displays.⁷⁶

"Kaufmann's Magnificent Business Palace Formally Opened," announced the *Pittsburgh Daily Post*.⁷⁷ The cool, fair opening day, on Saturday, October 24, 1885, drew large crowds, and the *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* reported the store was ready to handle business with one hundred and fifty clerks, seventy-five cashboys, bookkeepers, and three cashiers.⁷⁸ The *Commercial Gazette* called the Grand Depot "a magnificent clothing palace" and carried on with breathless hyperbole, signaling the start of local media's long love affair with Kaufmann's. "The jam at the building throughout Saturday was something simply terrific. Thousands were constantly streaming in and out," the *Commercial Gazette* reported.⁷⁹ To draw in shoppers, the store gave away roller skates and baseball uniforms with every boy's suit sold, as well as a cookbook and a souvenir for every woman customer. Selling women's clothing remained a small part of the business and took off only gradually. Its ready-to-wear offerings for women were largely limited to shoes and gloves.⁸⁰ In 1885, the Kaufmann brothers hired their first woman salesclerk, Emma Pfarr, the daughter of the restaurant owner across the street from their store.⁸¹ The brothers ate hot cakes there in the mornings and admired her business sense as she worked the cash register. She opened Kaufmann's first infant wear and women's underwear departments. Also in 1885, Kaufmann's began selling women's shirtwaists, a fitted high-necked blouse with long sleeves.⁸² Kaufmann's specifically targeted women in its advertisements, such as its "Ladies' Day" sales in 1886. As its stock of women's goods increased, the store began hiring many more women as salesclerks. By 1886, Kaufmann's was advertising its "salesladies" in the women's shoe department.⁸³ Nationally, the number of female salesclerks went from fewer than 8,000 in 1880 to more than 58,000 in 1890.⁸⁴

Early on, the brothers showed a flair for recognizing marketing oppor-



1.9 In the 1880s, Kaufmann's had a statue of Lady Liberty (upper left) as its focal point. Kaufmann's Department Store Photographs, MSP 371, Rauh Jewish Archives, Detre Library and Archives, Heinz History Center.

tunities. The teeming influx of immigrants to Pittsburgh offered a way to win new customers' loyalty. The number of potential customers for Kaufmann's increased as the city's population rose to 238,617 by 1890. Every Saturday, about a hundred thousand mill workers received their pay in cash, and they were looking for places to spend it. They dressed up, took the newly electrified streetcars downtown, and enjoyed a day off shopping at Kaufmann's and other department stores. To help the non-English speakers, Kaufmann's opened its "foreign department," staffed by fourteen people who could speak such languages as Croatian, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, "Jewish" (meaning Yiddish), Polish, Russian, Ruthenian, and Serbian.⁸⁵ This department opened in 1915⁸⁶ and marked a continuation of Kaufmann's outreach to foreign-born shoppers. The store gave away picture calendars in various languages, exceeding a print run of fifteen thousand for the year 1926, and even got an appreciative letter—written in Slovak—from a Slovakian inmate at Western Penitentiary.⁸⁷ As early as 1893, the store included testimonials from German-language newspapers in its advertisements⁸⁸ and also placed ads in German-language newspapers. By 1918, Kaufmann's was advertising in an Italian newspaper its "Italian Department" in its "basamento" (basement), where Italian speakers could read Italian-language newspapers, socialize, and shop with the assistance of an interpreter.⁸⁹ "In our Italian Department," the ad read, "you will find a beautiful room where, in addition to resting, you can leave your packages, meet with your friends and read the latest Italian newspapers, to which we subscribe for your convenience."⁹⁰

Kaufmann's careful placement of its ads in *La Trinacria*, a Pittsburgh-Italian newspaper, linked the store with Italian patriotism and shared values. In 1926, the store was deliberately targeting Hungarian-born customers with an in-store Hungarian Day.⁹¹ This tradition of courting ethnic groups carried into the 1950s, when Kaufmann's presented a nine-day exhibition in 1951, beginning on Columbus Day, of Italian food, fashion, furniture, arts, and crafts. Highlights included a huge replica of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, blessed by the pope, and a hand-carved, hand-painted peasant cart given to Uniontown native General George Marshall to mark the liberation of Sicily in World War II.⁹²

While the brothers were skilled at marketing, not every gimmick succeeded. In one 1883 promotion, Kaufmann's promised to toss free clothing from its roof. A crowd estimated at fifteen thousand blocked traffic on Smithfield between Fourth and Fifth Avenues on the appointed evening. Children were crushed and crying, some held high over the throng by their parents. On November 30, 1883, twelve clerks on Kaufmann's second floor began tossing paper-wrapped parcels out of the windows at 6:45 p.m., their actions lit by two calcium lights. The parcels contained fifteen hundred suits, twelve hundred pairs of pants, eight hundred overcoats, and hundreds of caps and hats. The crowd scrambled for each package, with fights breaking out. Police feared a riot. It took thirty-five officers to dispel the crowd and put a stop to the "clothing shower." The clothing that had not yet been tossed was donated to charity.⁹³ One misstep didn't stand in the way of progress, however. As it attracted more customers, Kaufmann's added to its offerings. By 1889, the store was carrying custom-made women's clothing purchased in London and Paris. By 1890, the store began selling corsets; in 1892, a jewelry department opened.⁹⁴ In 1902, furniture was being sold. Clothing salesmen also worked two-hour shifts turning a crank in the basement that rotated a window mannequin.⁹⁵ Isaac Kaufmann judged the volume of each day's business by the amount of twine the package wrapper had used.⁹⁶

Generous as the Kaufmanns could be, they took a hard line with thieves. Store employees at Kaufmann's kept track of shoplifters in a leather-bound ledger.⁹⁷ They noted the name of offenders, what they stole, the items' prices, and the sentences imposed, often stints in the Allegheny County Workhouse and Inebriate Asylum. The asylum—a grim-looking prison and 1,100-acre farm adjacent to Blawnox, a community northeast of downtown—operated for more than a century, from 1869 to 1971. Newspapers of the time described one well-dressed woman who shoplifted by dropping items on the floor, standing over them in her voluminous

skirts, using a hook on her shoes to lift them, and then attaching them to fish hooks hanging inside of her skirt.⁹⁸

Kaufmann's kept pace with technology, expanding its stock, its square footage, and its customers' loyalty. In the same year that George Eastman introduced Americans to the Kodak film camera, Kaufmann's capitalized on photography's growing popularity. In 1888, the store offered every patron of the boys' department or ladies' cloak parlor six free photographs. The pictures, an ad promised, were "not one tin or ferro-type, mind you, as some of our baboon rivals have the generosity . . . to present you with, but six fine, faultless and first-class Photographs." One year later, Kaufmann's celebrated its eighteenth anniversary with an addition to its downtown building. By this time, the store had 90,000 square feet, \$500,000 worth of merchandise, resident buyers in Paris, London, and Berlin, and three hundred employees.⁹⁹ The weekly payroll was \$4,500.¹⁰⁰ Around this time, the brothers also installed a freestanding, four-faced clock at Fifth and Smithfield, said to have had a sign that read MEET ME UNDER THE CLOCK.¹⁰¹ This expression would become ubiquitous in Pittsburgh for later iterations of both the store and the clock. Like the clocks at Hecht's in Washington, DC; Holmes in New Orleans; Loveman's in Birmingham, Alabama; Marshall Field's in Chicago; Meier and Frank in Portland, Oregon; and Stix, Baer and Fuller in St. Louis,¹⁰² the clock marked an easy place for people to meet.

And yet, despite Kaufmann's successes, as evidenced by its ever-expanding storefront and product lines, its very existence challenged the Protestant work ethic ingrained in the American culture of thrift and careful maintenance of possessions. Women maintained their clothes as long as possible, altering them to match the fashion and cutting them down to be worn by smaller family members until they could no longer be worn and were turned into rags. The idea of having a "love of dress" and staring at shop windows was denounced, because it caused people to waste valuable resources and planted within the lower classes the idea that they could be equal to their betters. In certain circles, love of dress, on which department stores built their empires, was associated with prostitutes and the path to ruin.¹⁰³ Stores like Kaufmann's, in stark contrast, catered to and promoted fads, valuing all that was new and disposable. The late nineteenth century was rife with fads, not just in clothing but also in products devoted to leisurely activities, like bicycle riding and piano playing. To attract customers, store owners started to display merchandise in their win-

dows, a practice they had avoided in the past. To keep their competitors from knowing what they stocked, they displayed at first just a few bolts of fabric in the window with no thought to aesthetics. But by the late 1890s, they were hiring window dressers to design attractive displays, and a new profession was born. This was the era of cheap goods sold in quantity, or what social historian Jan Whitaker called "combs by the carload."¹⁰⁴

With new window displays to lure customers inside, shopping as an experience underwent a transformation. Women's clothes were becoming easier to buy as separates, and during the 1890s, women began wearing suits consisting of wool blazers and skirts. The shirtwaist became popular partly because it was cheap and readily available. Inside the store, owners did everything possible to make their places of business comfortable and inviting. Before electricity cooled building interiors, summer shopping posed challenges. The heat made stores, especially bargain basements, stifling. Candy melted and stuck together, while high temperatures wilted the clothing stock. "The frocks look dejected," one clerk lamented.¹⁰⁵ To compensate, store staff distributed handheld fans to customers. When electric fans arrived, they only blew the air around, which did little to help. Around 1900, store owners began installing huge ventilation and air-cooling systems in their subbasements, which cooled the lower floors by a few degrees and circulated some of the still, hot air. But no department store would be fully air-conditioned until after World War II.¹⁰⁶ Once inside, after being greeted by a doorman in uniform, shoppers could browse the merchandise, but not handle it themselves. Each department, separated by a partition, had drawers and cabinets that kept stock under lock and key until a shopper asked to see something of interest. Most customers had to pay in cash, but for a prosperous patron, purchases were billed to a customer's "account," often delivered to her home, and the bill settled monthly. A staff of maids kept the store tidy for the day's clientele.

To keep shoppers in the store longer, Kaufmann's began serving refreshments. It installed a soda fountain, offering free soda or mineral water to anyone who bought something and charging three cents to anyone who did not.¹⁰⁷ Kaufmann's also debuted its first restaurant, following the industry trend to open "tea rooms." These restaurants offered simple, attractively presented meals, white tablecloths, and a kind of clubby elegance that enticed women and allowed them to extend their shopping experience. The oak-trimmed Vienna Cafe, with seating for 250, opened in March 1893. In a marketing ploy, the store invited journalists from local newspapers to a sumptuous dinner the night before the café welcomed the public. The evening featured toasts, speeches, and singing; the menu in-

cluded oysters, quail, and terrapin (turtle) "à la Kaufmann."¹⁰⁸ The gala celebration may have inspired a local reporter to publish this item in *The Pittsburgh Press* on May 15, 1893: "Ladies have often asked where they could lunch at a place quiet, retired and refined. The answer is at Kaufmann's Vienna Cafe, where only moderate prices are charged."¹⁰⁹

The brothers anticipated further growth, buying the old Chronicle-Telegraph building in 1887, the "Old Home" church in 1892, and then other parcels on the block, referred to as "Power Hall" and "the Liggett property."¹¹⁰ They expanded the store yet again in 1898, commissioning architect Charles Bickel for the work and noting that they only used union contractors.¹¹¹ The *Pittsburg Post* claimed only the department stores in Boston, New York, and Chicago were bigger than Kaufmann's.¹¹² In 1901, the brothers made public their plans for a warehouse on Forbes Avenue between Stevenson and Pride Streets, the site of an old brewery in Pittsburgh's Uptown neighborhood just east of downtown.¹¹³ The four-story warehouse would hold goods, stalls for 250 horses (which were needed for the delivery of store purchases), and space for delivery wagons. If customers sent their purchases home, they could continue to shop.¹¹⁴ Store sales rose steadily, from \$2.6 million in the year ended January 1, 1895, to \$6.8 million for the year ended January 1, 1904.¹¹⁵ The store sought "150 salesladies" in just one 1901 advertisement.¹¹⁶ In one 1904 store promotion for sportswear, Kaufmann's brought in handsome, muscle-bound Dal Jeffries, the champion bag puncher of the world. For two weeks, Jeffries gave boxing exhibitions in an arena on Kaufmann's fourth floor sporting department and in the store windows fronting Smithfield Street.¹¹⁷ Kaufmann's promised to host many more exhibitions in the sporting department.

The brothers achieved success with attention to detail, a strong work ethic, and a belief that every employee should look busy at all times. Jim Busis, publisher of the *Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle*, related Kaufmann's working conditions at about this time. His grandfather, Sam Amdur, then a young immigrant salesman, was working in the men's clothing department circa 1900 to 1910. In those days, pants were folded and arranged on tables. One day, when there were no customers in the men's department, Amdur was standing by his table of pants. "Old Man Kaufmann"—it is unclear which Kaufmann brother he meant—came by and said with a heavy German accent, "What's the matter? You got nothing to do?"

"Yes," Amdur said. "All my pants are arranged."

Kaufmann pulled back his arm and swept it along the table, knocking all the pants to the floor. "There!" he said. "Now you got something to do."¹¹