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Counter culture: Halper's at lunchtime in the 1940's.

Goodbye to All That

Henry Halper established his first drugstore in the Bronx in 1905 and, as the ways of the world changed, moved it down to Broadway and 165th, then to Broadway and 72nd, and finally, in 1929, to the Hearst Magazine Building at the corner of Madison Avenue and 56th Street. There were trolleys on Madison Avenue then, Parke-Bernet was across the street, A. T. Stewart's department store was around the corner where Bonwit Teller is today, the Hotel Langdon stood where there is now Corning Glass. The items on Henry Halper's shelves included Sloan's Liniment, Obtundia Surgical Dressing, and Ingersoll Dollar Stropping Outfits. The names in his heavy ledger included Vanderbilts, Brokaws, Baruchs, and Van Rensselaers.

Out of the Hearst Magazine Building came *Harper's Bazaar,* and its models came into Halper's. And not for just eyelashes and perfume. They flocked to the fountain: a long green marble counter, with a backdrop of oak-and-walnut paneling, where one could have a malted or a meal, look out at the street through clean glass windows, and be seen.

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Herbert Hoover came in for orangeade. Brenda Frazier and Jacqueline Bouvier, Mrs. Douglas MacArthur and Ali Khan, Helena Rubinstein and Artur Rubinstein came in for other things. One lady regularly left radishes and carrots instead of tips. Countermen and customers knew each other's names. A floorman helped people into their seats.

In the forties and fifties, Halper's also employed four pharmacists and five uniformed porters. One of them, Willie Neal, who's been with the store for 35 years, used to deliver prescriptions to Winston Churchill when he stayed at the Drake and breakfast every morning to Tommy Manville in his Park Avenue apartment.

Danny Smith, the chef, who's been with Halper's for 30 years and says he's never taken a day off, is proudest of his meat loaf and peas in winter, and his watercress-cucumber-and-tomato sandwiches all year round. His kitchen has always been in the basement, and his food comes up by dumb-waiter. "The nice thing about that," says a lady from Bonwit's who's been having her breakfast and lunch here for 25 years, "is there's no greasy smell."

A hand-lettered sign has hung for years on the back wall above the fountain. "Because of an increasing number of requests we must ask you not to smoke during luncheon. Thank you."

It's been like that.

Sometime this summer Halper's drugstore will close. Sometime this fall the building will be demolished. And Richard Halper, who started delivering for his father at sixteen, became a pharmacist at 21, and is now 58, has dreams but no plans for the future.

"All I can say is I feel terrible," says a lady from *Town & Country* who has been having her breakfast and tea at the counter every working day since Halper's moved downtown. "I hope they decide to open somewhere else, because I don't know what we're all going to do."

HALPER'S DRUGSTORE/*570 Madison Avenue (at 56th Street)/PL 3-2828*