

Way We Were
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The Golden Rule
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Today "350 Main" is known as one of Park City's finest restaurants. Let's explore this building's illustrious past.

In 1902 James Cash Penney opened his first retail location in Kemmerer, Wyoming. It was called the Golden Rule Store. The name embodied his belief: "do what is right and just for your customers." In 1909, "J.C." decided to relocate the corporate offices for his fledgling company to Salt Lake City, as he wanted better access to banking and railroads. In time J.C. Penney would become the largest retail and catalogue merchant in the country.

That same year, Penney built and opened a splendid retail store located at 350 Main Street here in Park City. His cousin Mrs. Belle Brand and her husband Scott B. Brand operated the store. The Brands embraced Penney's customer-focused philosophy and one of their favorite mottos was "do unto others as you would have done unto you." In what they felt was a reflection of their motto, they closed the store on Sundays to allow employees to attend church.

In 1933, Mr. Brand died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Mrs. Brand leased the business to Safeway but retained ownership of building. She moved to Denver. Safeway renovated the store and opened for business on May 1, 1934.

Safeway had been founded in 1926 when Merrill, Lynch, and Co. orchestrated the merger of two retailing firms - the Sam Seelig Company and the Skaggs Family of retailers. Marion B. Skaggs became CEO of the combined entity. The Skaggs and Safeway names continued to be used interchangeably for some time.

Skaggs's philosophy was different from Penney's. He abhorred providing credit to customers, even describing it as an "evil." "Cash and carry" was his motto and his idea of service was to let customers serve themselves. His focus was a low-cost, minimal service enterprise. This approach proved successful and Safeway prospered. By 1929 the company was operating 2,400 stores in twenty states, Canada and Hawaii.

The advent of World War II benefitted the local economy and mines operated at capacity, but the economic surge was not sustainable. In 1942, Safeway conducted an internal study to determine their least profitable stores and the Park City store was on that list. In 1943, Dick Gurr, local manager since 1940, was abruptly transferred to Provo. His replacement, Mr. Nichols, moved to town and rented a home from Gilbert J. Kimball. Based upon conversations between the two men, Mr. Kimball developed a "feeling" that Mr. Nichols's true assignment was to close the store.

That "feeling" was confirmed by an advertisement in the October 5, 1944 edition of the Park Record announcing "Safeway's Big Closing Out Grocery Sale - Everything Must Go - Store Closes October 14." On October 14, the store was boarded up and Mr. Nichols departed town as quickly as he had arrived. He moved

to Cedar City to manage another Safeway Store. Times were no longer “golden” for 350 Main.

Join us next week to learn about the resurrection of the Golden Rule.



Image ID: digi.2.2121

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Himes-Buck Digital Collection
Caption: May 1, 1934 was the grand opening of the Safeway Market at 350 Main Street. Notice in this undated photo the Safeway sign on the back wall and the neatly arranged inventory.