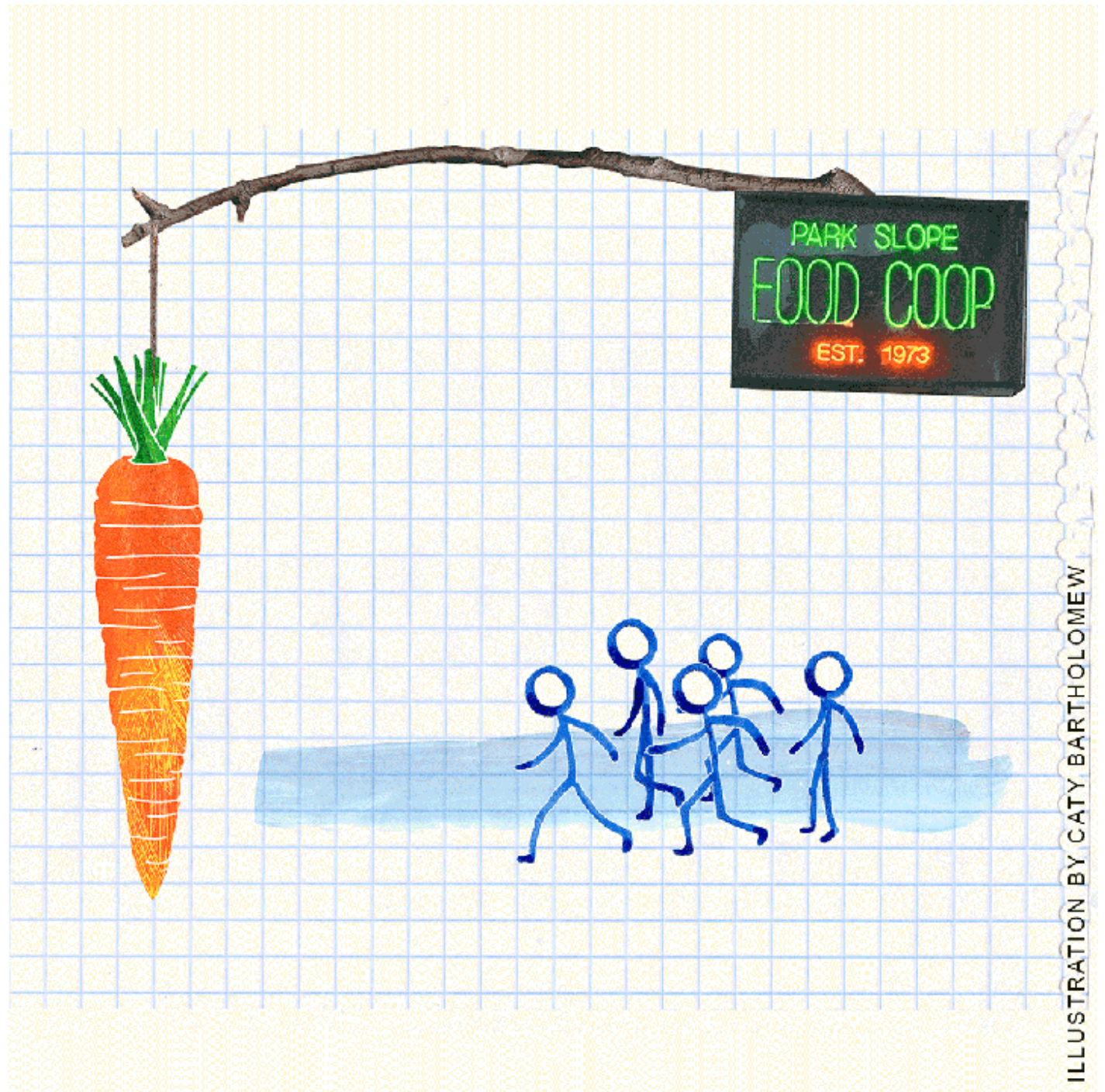


CARROT SHIFTS: MEMBERS EARN EXTRA CREDIT FOR HARD-TO-FILL WORK SLOTS

February 7, 2023



By Walecia Konrad

It's about 8:30 a.m. on a rainy, raw January morning, and as usual around that time, the giant United Natural Foods, Inc. (UNFI) truck is parked outside the Park Slope

Food Coop. Palette after palette filled with dozens of cases of products are lined up on the sidewalk, waiting to be unloaded inside.

Meanwhile, in the Coop basement, member workers on the 8 a.m. lifting shift are on either side of the conveyor belt, lifting and storing boxes of everything from feather-weight toilet paper to hefty cases of bottled beverages. There's fun music on the speaker and Receiving Coordinator Francisco Ferreiro keeps everything moving from the lift to the conveyor belt so lifters can stock shelves quickly.

"It's an enormous amount of goods to move at a dynamic pace," said Ferreiro. "There's enough people today so we can keep it moving."

The fact that workers showed up on this dreary morning may be in large part due to something called the "carrot shift."



Henry Green

Carrot shifts started when member labor returned to the Coop after the COVID-19 lockdown. That's when the previous squad system—wherein members signed up for a specific squad that met at the same day and time every cycle—gave way to the current system, in which members can sign up for any available shift 30 minutes in advance.

“WE USED TO HAVE A HUGE ABSENTEE RATE ON THESE SHIFTS. NOW WE HAVE A REALLY LOW ABSENTEE RATE AND CAN GET THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WE WANT.”

GENERAL COORDINATOR ANN HERPEL

The new system immediately worked well for member labor and staff alike. But coordinators soon noticed that, just as in pre-pandemic times, they were having trouble getting enough members to work early morning slots starting at 5 a.m. and late evening weekend shifts for hard-to-fill jobs like lifting, cleaning and bathrooms.

Prior to the pandemic, coordinators tried to incentivize members to work those shifts by making them shorter—two hours instead of the usual two hours and 45 minutes. But even with the shorter hours, the Coop still had trouble with no shows, forcing staff to fill the gaps themselves. Then, those same no shows would crowd more appealing slots to do their makeups, causing an oversupply of labor during popular times.

So the staff decided to incentivize workers in a different way. Each carrot work slot completed is worth 1.2 shifts. In other words, work five shifts, get a sixth free.

“We used to have a huge absentee rate on these shifts, like 20 percent cancellation when it was squads,” explained General Coordinator Ann Herpel. “Now we have a really low absentee rate and can get the number of people we want for these shifts,” she said.

Missing work at the Coop used to mean a punishment, explained Herpel. But with the new system, members choose the shifts they can work and are able to cancel without penalty. “We’re hopeful that we’re moving away from the punitive thing,” Herpel said.

In other words, the Coop is using the carrot instead of the stick.

MEMBERS LOVE CARROTS

If the recent rainy day lifter shift is any indication, some members prefer carrots. Julia Foote, who joined the Coop this past summer, said, “I like to know where everything goes, and I’m not really a people-facing person, so this job is great for me. And I only have two more to go before I get the extra credit.”

Terry Brooks, a member since 2004, said she did the same shift pre-pandemic, “so now the carrot is a nice bonus. I’ve already earned an extra shift!”

New member Henry Green joined the Coop two months ago. He had some free days in January, so he tried out a carrot shift. “Why not? Who doesn’t want a free shift?” He said that enthusiastically while lifting and stocking the lightweight boxes of pretzels that came down the conveyor belt. To his credit, his exuberance dimmed only slightly when he started hoisting cases of Field Day canned pumpkin. “These are heavy!” he said, still smiling.

“HONESTLY, THE LATE-NIGHT HOURS WORK BEST FOR ME. MY KIDS ARE ASLEEP AND I CAN’T REALLY COME MANY OTHER TIMES. AND THIS CARROT THING IS GREAT! I’VE ALREADY GOTTEN ONE OR TWO EXTRA SHIFTS.”

MEMBER OFER WOLBERGER

Noah Rott, a three-year PSFC member, summed up the general feeling on the squad when he said, “It gives you a good feeling to earn an extra shift.”



Noah Rott

WEEKEND CARROTS WORK THE NIGHT SHIFT

Carrot shifts are also available late at night on weekends. On a recent Friday evening, flex workers started signing in at 8:30 p.m., just as the last shoppers were leaving the Coop. Ofer Wolberger, a member for more than 10 years, was one of them. “Honestly, the late-night hours work best for me. My kids are asleep and I can’t really come many other times,” he said. “And this carrot thing is great! I’ve already gotten one or two extra shifts.”

Wolberger likes the variety of duties on the flex shifts. Workers often start out on checkout or stocking and then move to cleaning and maintenance jobs once the Coop

is empty of shoppers. “I can do cashier, I clean the shelves, I don’t care, whatever needs doing,” said Wolberger. Later he added, “Sometimes they let you drive the Zamboni, that’s really fun,” referring to the Zamboni-like floor cleaning machine.

That night Wolberger was starting at the bread bins, where membership coordinator Karina Gee explained how to gently pull out and clean the bins and how to wrap up and label tomorrow’s day-old baked goodies.

They were joined by another carrot worker, Polly Thistlethwaite, a Coop member for about 10 years. “I only work carrot shifts, and I love the night shift,” she said. “Once you earn that extra credit, you never go back!” She differed a bit from Wolberger on the Zamboni job, though. “I was really disappointed. I thought you got to ride it, but really, you push it. And it’s a big heavy machine!”



Julia Foote

Both Thistlethwaite and Wolberger appreciate the fact that workers can come early to shop and store their groceries during their shift. Or, if it’s just a few items, staff will stay a little later to check workers out.

“WHEN WE SEE A SHIFT ISN’T ATTRACTING ENOUGH PEOPLE, WE MAY ‘CARROTIZE’ IT.”

GENERAL COORDINATOR ELINOAR ASTRINSKY

Herpel has noticed that carrots make weekend night shifts more attractive to members with all types of schedules. Even the most social member may find themselves with a rare weekend evening without plans, she explained. If they do, they can sign up and earn extra credit.

With the online signup system, carrot workers and regular workers can now plan their work slots around their schedules instead of having to plan their schedules around their work slots, she added.

CARROTS TAKE A LOAD OFF STAFFERS

“The reason I’m most excited about the carrot shift,” said General Coordinator Joe Szladek, “specifically with early morning shifts, is that the staff needs consistent support and now we are almost certain to have enough people. If we don’t have enough people, we do all the lifting, and it is really hard on our bodies,” he explained.

Ferreiro agreed. “When workers don’t show, it’s a full-on workout—we’re just lifting boxes non-stop to get everything unloaded.”



Terry Brooks, Iver Cleveland, Margo Johnston

SIGNING UP FOR CARROT SHIFTS IS EASY

If you want to get in on the work-less-for-more-credit bandwagon, go to the shift calendar, use the drop-down menu to find “Only Carrots” at the bottom of the list, and see what’s available.

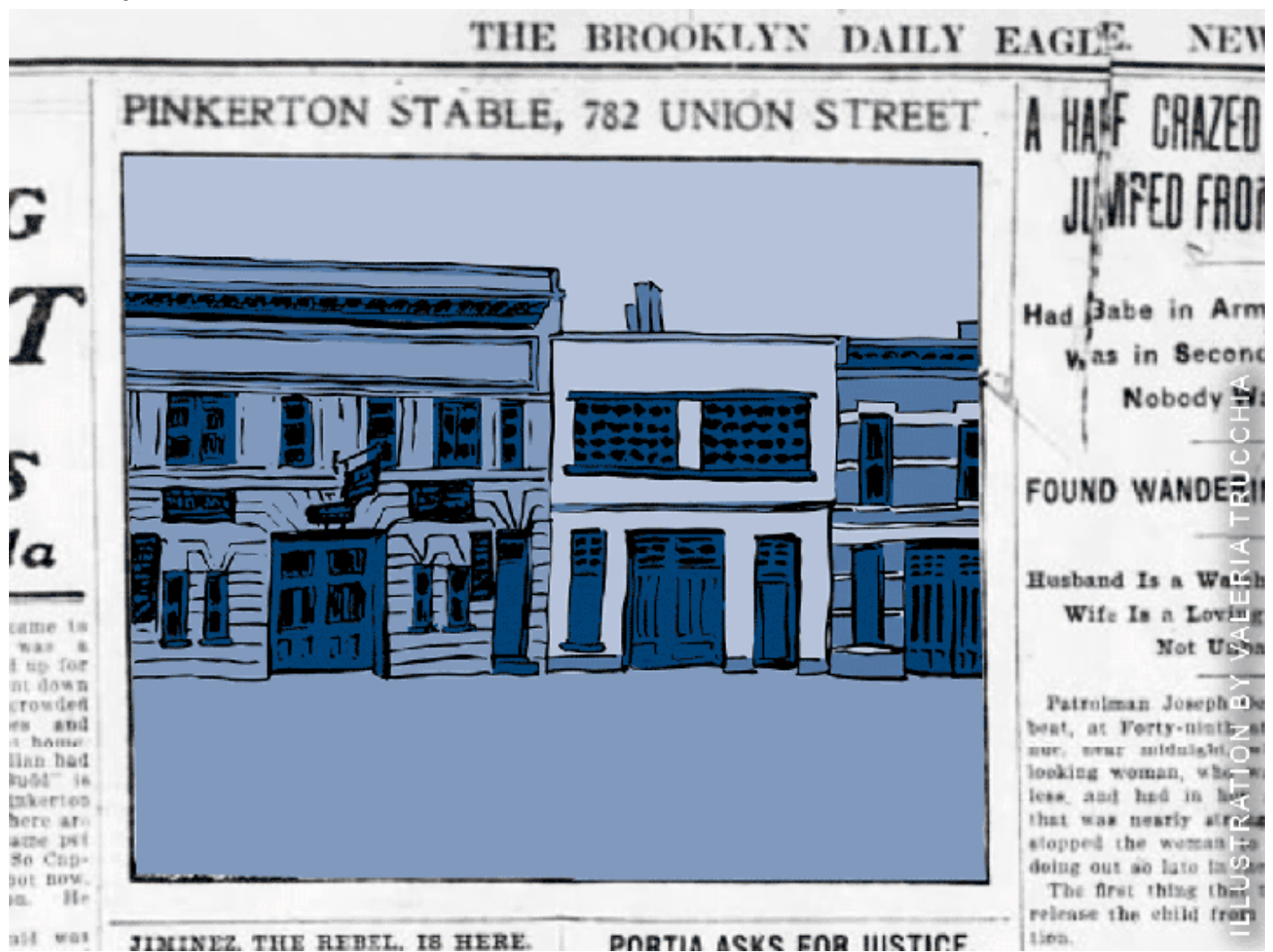
Keep in mind carrot shifts are very dynamic. Many of them fill up fast, so scheduling ahead may give you more options. At the same time, “when we see a shift isn’t attracting enough people, we may ‘carrotize’ it,” said General Coordinator Elinor Astrinsky, meaning shopping for last-minute carrot shifts can pay off, too. This is especially true during the holidays, said Astrinsky, “which is the time the fewest people come to work, but the most people come to shop.”

While there may be changes in which shifts are incentivized—Astrinsky said the coord-

inators are looking at taking the 8 a.m. lifting shift off the carrot list if there continues to be good turnout—the carrot itself seems here to stay. “We’ll always have them,” said Astrinsky. “It’s working really well, and we’re filling shifts we wouldn’t fill otherwise.”

AN ARCHITECTURAL PREHISTORY OF THE COOP

February 7, 2023



By Dan Bergsagel

Members may feel that they know about the Coop’s inauspicious start upstairs in the

Mongoose Community Center at 782 Union St. in 1973 and its subsequent expansions west into 780 Union St. in 1988 and east into 784 Union St. in 1999. These last 50 years represent the Coop's history as an organization and the physical structure that houses it. But what about the Coop's architectural prehistory? What took place beforehand in the three buildings that were consolidated to make up the present Coop building? The story of these three buildings can be seen as a microcosm of the recent development of the United States: from horses to cars and beyond.

THE PERMIT FOR THE BUILDING WAS GRANTED IN 1889 TO ROBERT A. PINKERTON, FOR A TWO-STORY STABLE. PINKERTON WAS THE HEAD OF THE EPONYMOUS PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY RENOWNED FOR TRACKING JESSE JAMES AND BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID IN THE 1870S AND FOR CONDUCTING OPERATIONS AGAINST ORGANIZED LABOR.

Brooklyn's Union Street, Sixth Avenue, and Seventh Avenue were laid out by 1849. Insurance maps of the City of Brooklyn in 1888 record the site of the Coop as undeveloped, although the buildings' future lot sizes and addresses had already been assigned. By 1898, 10 years later, all three of the Coop's buildings were complete but still with open lots to their east and west. By 1903, the closest tenement buildings to the west—774 and 772 Union Street—were constructed, and the firehouse to the east was active by 1908.

782 UNION STREET—EGGS THROUGH CHEESE

The original 782 Union St. building stood in the area of the present-day Coop that houses the egg case through the frozen foods and bread aisle and back to the cheese cabinets. The permit for the building was granted in 1889 to Robert A. Pinkerton, for a two-story stable. Pinkerton was the head of the eponymous private detective agency renowned for tracking Jesse James and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid in the 1870s and for conducting operations against organized labor.

PINKERTON STABLE, 782 UNION STREET,
WHERE POLICE STOPPED A COCK FIGHT.

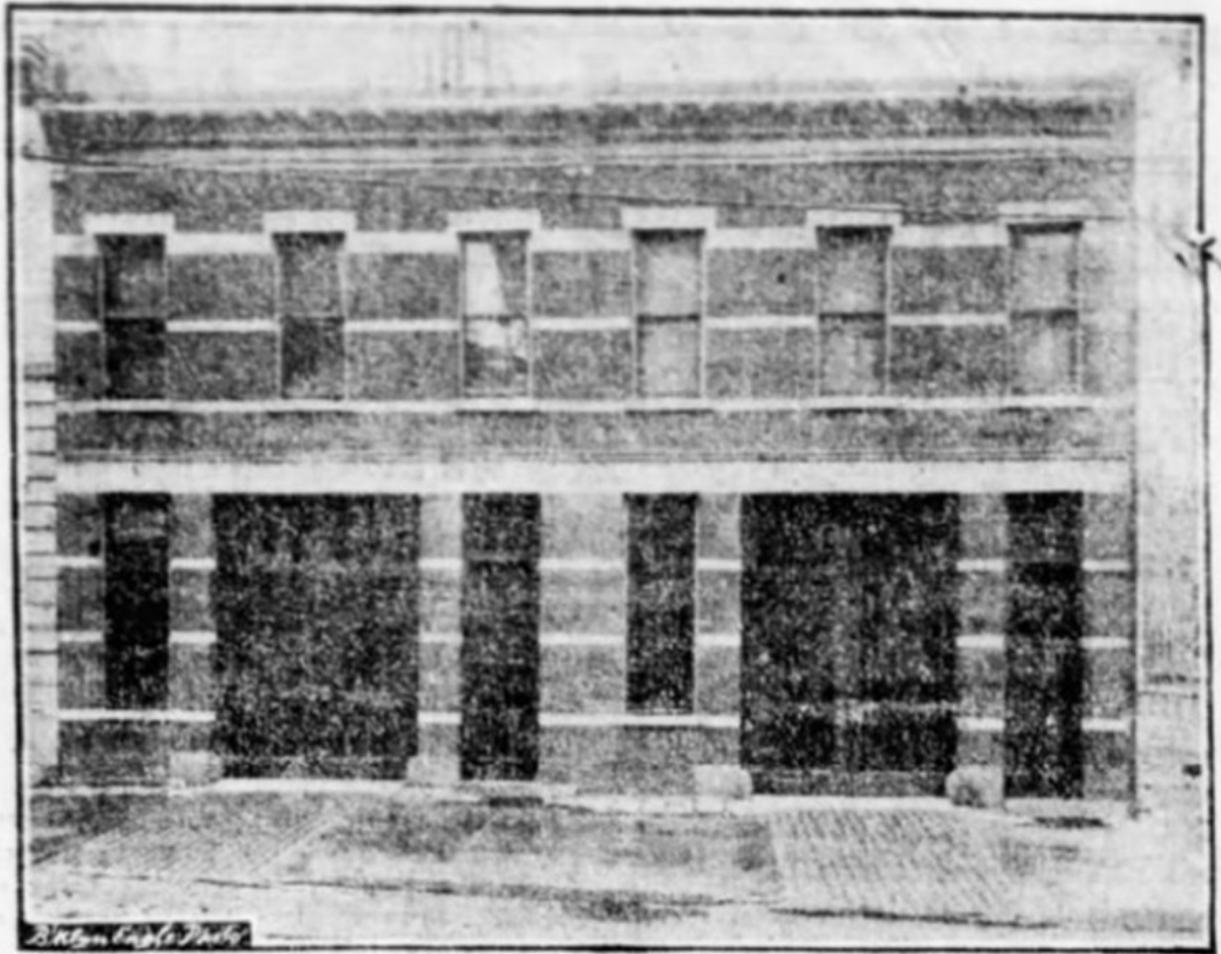


PHOTO FROM BROOKLYN DAILY EAGLE

(Fig 1): The original facade of 780 and 782 Union St. (B'klyn Eagle Photo, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Apr. 11, 1904)

Construction of the Pinkerton stables at 782 Union St. was complete by 1891. While it was built as a private stable, records suggest that the building was the site of horse-play as well as horse racing. The early history of the stables was marred by encounters with police: In their first year, area residents Matthew McMahon and William Crowley were each fined the princely sum of \$1 for street fighting. In 1904, the stables

were in trouble with the law again: A well-publicized raid for illegal cockfighting resulted in 33 men arrested.

Soon after, the Pinkerton stables were back to producing winning race horses, but by 1912, Pinkerton sold the building to Messrs. Nicholas H. Cady and Brothers. We don't know much about the Cady Brothers' ownership, which lasted 12 years. In early 1924, Cady appears to have suffered a change in fortune and was forced to sell all his assets at auction, presumably including 782 Union St.

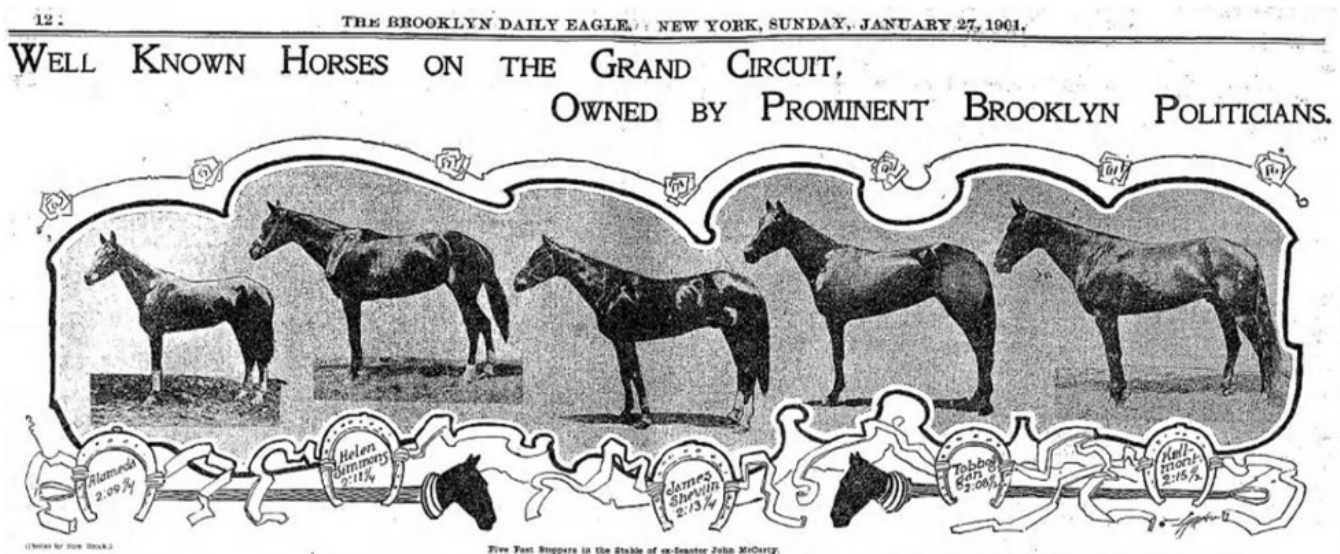


PHOTO FROM BROOKLYN DAILY EAGLE

(Fig 2): The race horses of John McCarty from the private stable at 780 Union St. (Photos by Sam Brook, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Jan. 27, 1901)

Comparing photographs from this period suggests that significant changes were made to the facade of 782 Union St. around the time of the Cady Brothers' ownership. The brickwork was painted white, loft-style second-story windows were added, and an ornate cornice at roof level was removed. Together, these changes gave the building a more modern appearance than its direct neighbors. These changes are clear when comparing photographs from the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1904 (Figure 1) and New York City Tax photographs taken 1939–1941 (Figures 3–5), but we don't know who ini-

tiated them, or why. Could it be the expense of these renovations that bankrupted the Cady Brothers?

780 UNION ST.—PRODUCE THROUGH MILK

As for the area of the Coop that now houses the produce aisle back to the milk cabinet, that's the site of the original 780 Union St. building, which the Coop purchased in 1988. The 780 edifice was also originally constructed as stables, an identical sister building to 782 (Figure 1). The two-story stables at 780 were constructed for John McCarty, a Democratic politician and New York State Senator, from 1892–1893. Unlike its rowdier neighbor, 780 Union St. appears to have quickly achieved success as a serious stable. In a 1901 spread in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* showcasing “Well Known Horses on the Grand Circuit, Owned by Prominent Brooklyn Politicians,” five of the eight horses hailed from McCarty's stables (Figure 2). However, the stables' fame was short-lived. Less than 10 years later, in 1910, 780 Union St. was being rented out as a simple two-story brownstone with basement, with no further mention of horses.

The McCarty estate sold the property in 1916 to the automotive innovators the Sage Brothers. Through the late 1910s and early 1920s, the Sage Brothers were inventing new technology to assist with a rapidly developing industry: the functioning and fueling of automobiles. They produced strainers to filter gasoline entering the carburetor and new-fangled air pressure gasoline delivery systems that were popular throughout the city.

In 1930 the 780 Union St. building was sold again, this time explicitly as a garage to a client of the Hayward Manufacturing Company. Articles from the time suggest that Park Slope real estate was seen as a desirable investment—a trend that may sound familiar today. The building's use as a garage ended in 1938 when the property became the founding home of Reynolds Electric Company, an electrical equipment and contracting company. St. Francis Xavier's Roman Catholic Church took the building over in 1959, and they owned it nearly until the Coop bought the building in 1988.

784 UNION ST.—CASHIERS THROUGH MEAT

The current Coop's main entrance through the cashier zone and stretching back to the meat and yogurt cabinets was formerly the site of 784 Union St. Unlike the narrow neighboring stables of 780 and 782 Union St., 784 featured a spacious, uninterrupted 44-foot internal space and a distinctive cream brick facade.

THE SHIFTING USE OF THE THREE BUILDINGS TELL A STORY OF TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS IN SOCIETY AND THE CHANGES IT BROUGHT TO UNION STREET.

Despite the physical grandeur of 784 Union St. and the presumption that the developer who built it was likely wealthy, it is not as well recorded as the other Coop buildings in the available archives. This may have to do with its many alternate historic addresses as a double-wide lot: From 1888, the building has been listed as 784, 786, 784-786, and the delightfully Hogwarts-esque address of 784-786-6½.

One of the first records of the address is an advertisement from a 1910 edition of *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*: The resident business, Union Garage, lists an s-cylinder Ford for sale in "A1 condition." Local maps and advertisements continue to show the building in use as a garage throughout the 1910s and early '20s—just like its neighbor 780 Union St.



PHOTOS FROM CITY TAX RECORDS

(Figs 3-5): City-wide tax photographic records of 780, 782 and 784 Union St. 1939-1941

In 1930, commercial tragedy struck the resident of the site, General Electric Company. A fire gutted the store, causing damages of \$5,000 (equivalent to approximately \$90,000 today). It's not clear whether this fire spelled the end of the General Electric Company at that site, but they were gone by the 1940s, replaced by Cline's Rug and Furniture Service. Cline's seems to have had more success at 784 Union St. Throughout the 1940s and '50s, Cline's was actively recruiting workers, typists and chauffeurs, as well as advertising prolifically in the local newspapers. The company lasted longer in the space than most occupants: Incredibly, they remained at 784 Union St. right up until the building's sale to the Coop in 1999.

What can we conclude from this archival investigation? The shifting use of the three buildings tell a story of technological progress in society and the changes it brought to Union Street. The architectural prehistory of the Coop was initially equine and competitive, based on the finances of prominent wealthy Brooklynites living nearby. In parallel with the development of commercial automobiles in the United States, the horses and private stables were soon replaced by cars and public garages. After the

garages had gone, businesses found the wide, street-level doorways of the three buildings, initially designed for easy horse access, were equally well-suited for machinery related to light-industrial manufacturing and contracting services.

Architectural mysteries remain: Who was responsible for the initial, grand 1890s construction at 784-786-6½ Union St.? How much of that building survived the fire in 1930? Who instigated the major renovations at 782 Union St., which significantly changed the character of the facade? As the first owner at 782 Union St., Pinkerton Detectives, may have said: We are open to anonymous tips and leads.

SHAPESHIFTER LAB IS MORE THAN A MUSIC VENUE

February 7, 2023



By Leila Darabi

The Coop is getting a new neighbor. Across the street at 837 Union St., in the space once occupied by the Tea Lounge, the performance venue and music nonprofit ShapeShifter Lab will open later this year. The two-story complex will house a cafe and performance space on the ground floor, as well as an upstairs workshop area and offices in what was last used as a yoga studio.

THE ORIGIN STORY

ShapeShifter Lab's co-founders, Matthew Garrison and Fortuna Sung (both Coop members, Garrison for more than 20 years), first met at an international high school in Rome in the 1980s. They came from artistic families that had relocated to Italy: Garrison's father played bass with John Coltrane, and his modern dancer mother taught and choreographed; Sung's father produced and directed films in Hong Kong, and her actor mother worked with Bruce Lee.

After high school, Garrison went on to study at the Berklee College of Music and began touring as an electric bass player. Sung went to college in San Francisco and returned to her native Hong Kong. The friends lost touch until 2010, when they reconnected on Facebook and later met up in Tokyo while Garrison performed as part of Whitney Houston's band.

"I was working in Hong Kong and looking for what to do next," Sung said. "Hong Kong didn't have many opportunities for artists." She wanted to apply her business skills to something creative and independent. "I was done working for other people."

"WE DISCOURAGE MUSICIANS FROM COMING TO OUR SPACE TO PLAY A 'GIG.' WE WANT YOU TO COME TO PRESENT AN EVENT, TO PRESENT YOUR WORK. AND WE'RE GOING TO BE THERE TO FACILITATE THAT AS MUCH AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE."

SHAPESHIFTER CO-FOUNDER MATTHEW GARRISON

Garrison, meanwhile, had put down roots in Brooklyn while traveling as a sought-after touring musician. He played with jazz greats including Herbie Hancock, Steve Coleman and John McLaughlin and, in addition to Whitney Houston, popular artists ranging from Paul Simon to Joni Mitchell. In Brooklyn, he founded a record label and put out several records, the second of which he titled *ShapeShifter* in reference to his genre-crossing musical interests.

During a visit in Brooklyn, he and Sung decided to join forces to create an experimental musical startup that would provide artists not only with a space to perform but a platform to promote their work.

“For us to start up a music-type business made sense. It was easy, given all the people we knew,” Garrison said. Explaining the full range of the business plan proved slightly harder, given the pair’s wide-ranging interests and passions. “It was hard to get people to understand what we were trying to do in that first phase,” Garrison said. “People kept asking, ‘Is it a studio?’”

For Garrison and Sung, ShapeShifter goes beyond performance space and recording studio, though they offer both. “It’s for you to perform and present your art, and we will make sure to facilitate that,” Garrison clarified. Eventually the concept caught on, and crowds wrapped around the block of their former venue near the Gowanus Whole Foods. “It kind of blew up all of a sudden, and almost every musician in New York came through.”

As a musician, Garrison believes strongly in ShapeShifter supporting musical artists beyond a single performance. “We discourage musicians from coming to our space to play a ‘gig.’ We want you to come to present an event, to present your work. And we’re going to be there to facilitate that as much as humanly possible.”



Matt Garrison and Fortuna Sung in the new location of their music venue, Shapeshifter Lab, across from the Food Coop on Union Street.

NOT A VENUE, BUT A COMPLEX

Today, the ShapeShifter multiverse includes ShapeShifter Lab, the music venue; ShapeShifter+, a nonprofit entity; and ShapeShifter Lab Productions, a music label.

Garrison and Sung registered ShapeShifter+ in 2014 but didn't start nonprofit programs until they were forced to shut down their in-person events in March 2020. Having operated out of a space in Gowanus for several years, they found themselves in the middle of a pandemic saddled with a competitive Brooklyn rent and no revenue from ticket sales. "We just couldn't keep pulling out of our own pockets. It became completely unsustainable," Garrison said.

“NEW YORK CITY CONCERT PRICES ARE VERY EXPENSIVE. IT’S UNREAL. WE’RE HOPING [THE NONPROFIT] HELPS US MAKE THAT EASIER FOR EVERYONE.”

SHAPESHIFTER CO-FOUNDER FORTUNA SUNG

The nonprofit model provided tax incentives for investors. With the new venue in Park Slope, they intend to fundraise to offset performance prices with the goal of making entertainment more accessible to people of all economic backgrounds. “New York City concert prices are very expensive. It’s unreal. We’re hoping [the nonprofit] helps us make that easier for everyone,” Sung explained. “Having a nonprofit helps for future fundraising,” she added.

ShapeShifter+ also collaborates with other nonprofits. Garrison serves as a mentor to young musicians through community programs. In addition, when the space opens in a few months, they will offer a home to the Fat Cats, a youth ensemble organized by the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance (ALJA). Fat Cats’ Sunday workshops and rehearsals will be open to the public on the ground floor.

Sung, the operations and logistics lead, has designed a café space for the ground floor and plans to include yoga in the programming for the upstairs workshop space. She herself attended yoga at the studio that shut down during the pandemic, which was part of the appeal of this site for the new incarnation of ShapeShifter Lab. She and Garrison both liked the former Tea Lounge space, but didn’t think their concept would work on the ground floor with another business just above it.

“I almost gave up the idea of the space, because the upper space was occupied,” she recounted. When businesses began to reopen after pandemic shutdowns, Sung sought out her former yoga studio but saw it had shut down. While she missed the classes, she saw an opportunity in the building.

A DIGITAL LAB

Beyond the walls of the Union Street venue, Garrison and Sung plan robust digital programming. They had already invested in the latest live streaming functionality at their original venue, and those live streaming skills came in handy during the pandemic.

Garrison has also spent considerable time learning to code and has created two iOS apps. His first, the self-titled Matt Garrison app, allows him to release his own music on his own terms as well as share lessons and chord charts. He hopes to expand the technology to support other musicians in taking the same innovative approach to releasing new work.

Garrison gained skills in app design from his friend and fellow bass player Massimo Biolcati. He first asked Biolcati to build him an app. When his friend declined, Garrison proposed he teach him how to do it himself instead. “Because we’re bass players, we would get together, play bass and then we would code,” he said, laughing.

ACCORDING TO GARRISON, THEIR LANDLORDS, THE DIXONS, TURNED DOWN OTHER OFFERS FOR THE SPACE, INCLUDING A BID FROM SHAKE SHACK. “COULD YOU IMAGINE A SHAKE SHACK ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE COOP?”

Garrison—and ShapeShifter Labs’—latest project, TuneBend, takes his vision to the next level. “It’s basically the app that allows anyone to collaborate and build pieces of music together,” Garrison said. He received support from Apple’s Racial Justice and Equity Initiative to create it.

“I can’t even explain how much they’ve done for us. Not monetarily, just in terms of pushing a message, connecting us with their engineers, helping us make decisions on how to build the software. Just really serious stuff—and it’s not over.”



Matt Garrison

SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Both Garrison and Sung have effusive praise for their new landlords, the Dixon family. Proprietors of Dixon's Bike Shop, a few doors down from the Coop, and owners of property around the neighborhood, the Dixon family originally hail from Jamaica. Marie Dixon, the family's matriarch, is a long-time Coop member.

Garrison, whose parents are Black and Jewish, and Sung, whose family is Chinese, expressed special gratitude for the trust bestowed to them by a Black-owned business in taking them on as tenants. According to Garrison, the Dixons turned down other offers for the space, including a bid from Shake Shack. "Could you imagine a Shake Shack across the street from the Coop?"

Instead of fast food, they will offer healthy food options at their café, which Sung

plans to keep open for business during regular hours and not just while performances take place. Coop member and veteran caterer Kim Pistone is advising on the menu.

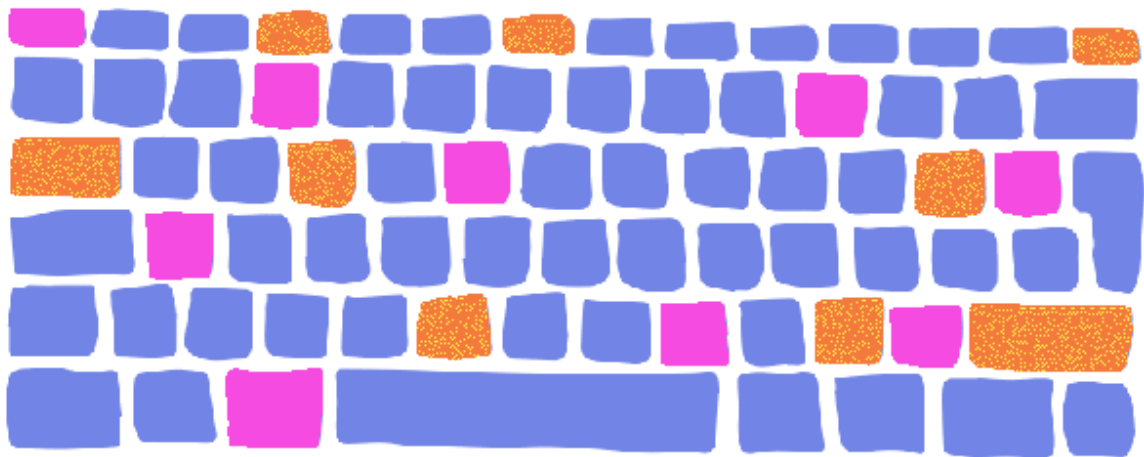
ShapeShifter Lab will open as soon as the Department of Buildings permits clear, Sung said. Coop members can expect updates in future *Linewaiters' Gazette* articles, and Sung hopes to provide a venue for Coop events once open.

Leila Darabi joined the Gazette as a reporter in 2016. She is the cohost of the podcast Cringewatchers and shares photos of the things she cooks with Coop ingredients @persian_ish on Instagram.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

February 7, 2023

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



IS THERE AN OFF-RAMP FOR THE PSFC MASK MANDATE?

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to the article "Mask Mandate, Demographic Survey, Child-care Dominate Discussion at October General Meeting," published in the 12/27/2022

issue of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. Given that the General Coordinators have decided to retain the mask mandate for shoppers and workers, despite the recent majority vote from the membership to make mask-wearing optional, is there any procedural off-ramp for the mask mandate that respects the democratic decisions of the membership? If so, will the General Coordinators please publish and circulate to the membership what this process is? It doesn't seem very cooperative that a small minority (the General Coordinators) have decided to maintain the mask mandate when a large number of Coop members (51 percent of the approximately 4,600 people who voted on the mask policy) voted to make mask-wearing optional.

In solidarity,
Amie Macdonald

MISINFORMATION ABOUT VACCINES

Dear Editor,

Words can't adequately express my dismay at seeing a (Jan. 17) letter presenting anti-vaccine misinformation. The author is not incorrect that public health is vastly improved when people have access to clean water, decent housing, good food, and proper toilet facilities. But to claim that statements about the safety and effectiveness of vaccines are scientific "propaganda" is dangerous nonsense. The chief reason people are able to persuade themselves of these absurdities is that the very effectiveness of vaccines makes the harms they prevent nearly invisible.

I encourage interested persons to read about the horrors of smallpox, for example. Or the experience of post-polio syndrome. Or consider the flu: Many people apply the label "flu" to bad colds and stomach upset. The actual flu, influenza, is something else entirely, as anyone who has had it can tell you: The debilitation is extreme and long-lasting.

The long and the short of it is that you can't be an anti-vaxxer if you know anything about the history of disease or if you know more about the biological underpinnings than will allow you to do more than make vague noises about unspecified "information coming out." People die because of rubbish like this.

Jolanta Benal

SECOND LOCATION (WITH THANKS TO THE SECOND LOCATION STUDY COMMITTEE)

To the Editor:

This multi-year process [to explore adding a second Coop location] deserves continued study, but not as presented. Much has shifted since 2018. Some concerns:

1. Strategic planning. We need it. Second location is an element of it. Bolstering the assertion:
 - a. Exhibit #1: We lack governance integration: a "Committee Oversight Committee," a new committee (which I favor) as oversight to other committees?
 - b. Top structure needs attention—to integrate, clarify decisions, plus put planning into operations. General Coordinatorss are empowered to run our shop (good!). How they report to a higher authority and integrate, feeding into a master plan, is unclear.
 - c. General Meetings average 225+/- [members] voting on behalf of 14,000. There's better response from surveys. Up our digitized game to tweak members' decisions?
 - d. Members have adopted multiple ways to provision pantries since 2020.

This is not second location “stuff.” But it’s all part of a master plan in a changed landscape. Who’s empowered? Are we ready? We need a parallel effort, or we do this with weakness. As evidenced: Our GM will retire, what’s the plan? The Board gave suggestions (its fiduciary role) to a key committee that stonewalled (saga of Personnel Committee & GM).

2. Threats/Opportunities?

a. Do other models serve more geographically? Have we considered: warehouse? services offsite? redeployment of upper floor? experiments in mobile options? Have we actively tested interest of neighborhoods or multiple neighborhoods (food truck mobile market). Is in-person shopping the only model?

b. The future is not assured. Grants pulled us through! “More members, more shoppers” to increase figures is not easy—more flow at 782 Union is not a given. Expansion has large operational and financial implications.

d. Re-examine the marketplace and need, update the survey results (who they represent, and overall findings).

Thank you,
Amita Rodman

See our letter submission policy [here](#).