

Geno's Steaks

Cities 185



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**Design and function
of Geno's Steaks**

Susan Colgan, in her 1987 book *Restaurant Design- Ninety-Five Spaces That Work*, puts forth that a quick-service restaurant's design should be "inspired by purely pragmatic motives: to attract customers to an attention-getting facade; to provide an efficient, easy-to-care-for kitchen, and a dining area that would speed customers in and out quickly- nothing too comfortable, lest the restaurant's turnover be slowed and its margin of profit reduced." Geno's Steaks, a three-story structure located on the triangular crossing of Ninth and Passyunk, is a South Philadelphia

institution that, through "pragmatic motives," obeys the tenants of restaurant design enumerated by Colgan.

Colgan's phrase "attention-getting" aptly defines, if not understates, Geno's exterior. The one-hundred year-old building stands apart from its South Philadelphia surroundings for several reasons: first, it is painted both stark white and crossing-guard orange. This scheme was introduced in the 1980's, having been previously blue and white, and originally only white. Then, laid upon the upper level walls are nearly one dozen neon signs proclaiming "GENO'S STEAKS," "G-E-N-O-'S," "PEPSI," and "'The' BEST" numerous times. Furthermore, it is open twenty-four hours a day, seven

days a week, which is atypical for a Philadelphia establishment. The triangular building has become a "little piece of Vegas in the heart of South Philly," as described by Mr. Vento (one should note that the singular destination of Joe's five-days-per-year vacations is Las Vegas). Whether found to be exciting, endearing, obnoxious,



◀ *Geno's exterior.*

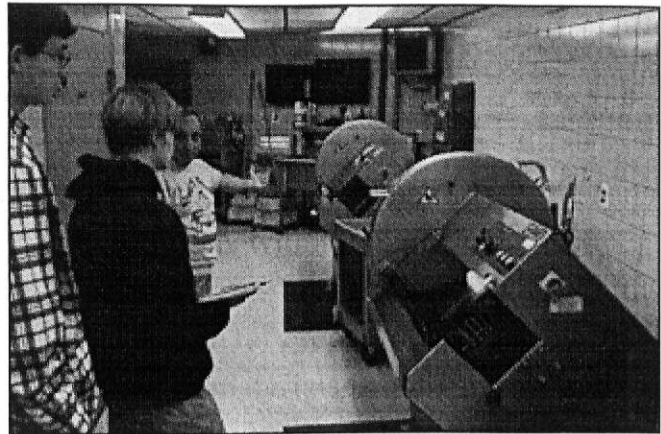
or hideous, the restaurant will inevitably be found. As Colgan puts it, "In the quick-service or fast food dining category, no look is too classic or too far out" (65). Geno's is both.



▲ *The bright and clean kitchen space.*

Geno's Steaks has an "efficient, easy-to-care-for kitchen" (Colgan, 1987) as it easily serves up any given item within, at most, ninety seconds. This efficiency can presumably derived in part from the restaurant's layout (see **layout diagrams**). The plan for the first floor is as follows: the southernmost triangle is both the kitchen as well as the serving area. Moving one room to the North, one finds both storage space and the employee bathroom. In the third and northernmost space are located the three meat freezers (two deep-freeze and one for cooling the week's supply, which amounts to 3,000 lbs.), the steak cutters, and the janitorial supplies. With those plans in mind, the operation is as follows: the food supplies come in from either a truck or the storehouse across Passyunk at

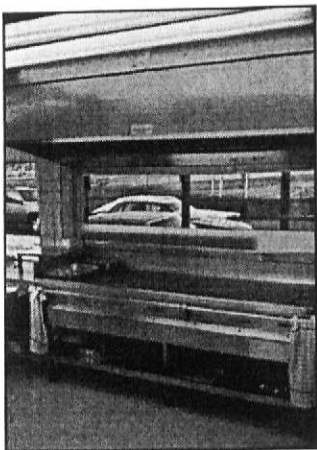
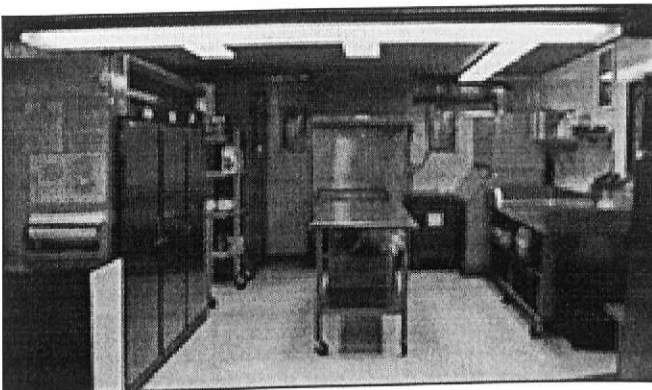
northernmost section, are then placed in their proper locations within the kitchen and freezers, and finally are brought forth to the southernmost section for preparation. This unidirectional-flow of materials is both simple and, as evident by both Geno's serving time and hours of operation, effective. The upper floors, unseen by this author, contain additional storage space, the owner's office, and sleeping quarters for occasions when the upkeep of a never-closed business keep Mr. Vento, the owner, from go-



▲ *Twin steak cutters, \$31,000 each.*

ing home.

There are two aspects of the interior work space that distinguish it as operated by the unique, efficient, and stringent eye of Joe Vento: First, there is a duplicate, contingency, or counterpart for every appliance in the kitchen (4 freezers, 2 steaks cutters (\$31,000 each), 2 lunch meat cutters, 2 coffee machines, 2 grills, 2 fryers, etc.). As confirmed by Joe Vento, there could conceivably be two complete and autonomous Geno's Steaks operating simultaneously. However, such a scenario would be in direct con-



▲ *Geno's primary fryer (top), and workspace (above). Note both cleanliness and luminosity.*

◀ *Primary grill. Note the cleanliness and accessible view from street.*

dated with softer, brighter fixtures within the week. This luminosity, coupled with the expansive windows, is both inviting and eye-catching amid the dimly hued streets of the South Philadelphia neighborhood. However, when under such light, judgments by customers are more prevalent. Thus, the grills, windows, floor, freezers, countertops, and even the publicly-unseen employee bathroom and storehouse across Passyunk are all spotless, as per Mr. Vento's demands. The cleanliness serves as both an ethic for efficient operation as well as a selling point, used in the official slogan of Geno's,



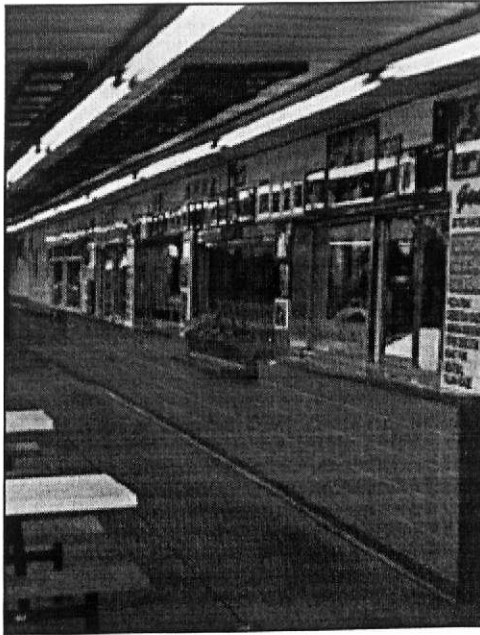
▲ *A workspace inside the Passyunk storehouse. Note how the cleanliness pervades a space so far from public scrutiny.*

flict with Mr. Vento's belief in being prepared for the worst

"#1 for Quality & Cleanliness".

The ordering and dining spaces, also in accordance with Colgan, are designed to "speed customers in and out quickly- nothing too comfortable," (65). One orders only sandwiches at the southernmost window of the west-facing side and only beverages three windows away. This setup reduces lines and allows the serving

► The foreground's window is for sandwich service only. Three windows away, only drinks.



staff to concentrate on one segment of the menu at a time. The exterior's orange and white benches are spartan and minimalist, as is the building's peripheral counter space. Furthermore, no one save celebrities and Cities 185 students may sit at Geno's interior corner booth.

HISTORY OF GENO'S STEAKS

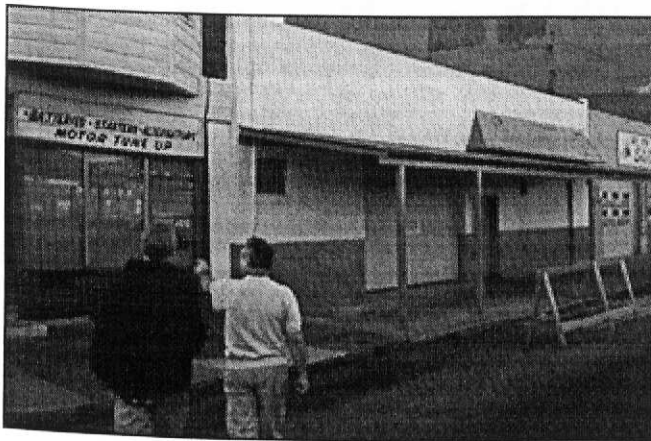
In order to fully understand why Geno's Steaks exists as it does today, a brief recounting of both Geno's history and the character of owner Joe Vento is necessary. Before the 1966 opening of Geno's, Mr. Vento had already spent several years in the steak business, starting at age seven. By age 12, he was working for his father Jim by helping him manage his five Jim's Steaks (unrelated to the existing Jim's Steaks restaurants) locations, which were operated out of carts. At that young age, Joe was put in charge of hiring and firing employees, indicative of his keen, if not obsessive sense for busi-

ness operation. After his father's finances became defunct, Joe, out of both need to support himself as well as restore family honor, decided to give Pat's, "the only game in town," (Vento, pers.communication, 1997) a run for its money. With filial obligation in mind, one could conclude that the audacious, proclamatory facade reflects Joe's desire to prove himself as a respectable member of the Vento family.

Having seen several Pat's clones fall in and out of business, Mr. Vento decided that he would only succeed were he to run his steak house on his own terms, not those of Pat's (i.e. grease-stained windows and sidewalks, unsanitary kitchen space, all under a decaying, subdued facade). Joe opted instead for the pristine, eye-catching style that pervades the Geno's experience. For example, while Pat's uses sawdust to soak up the grease from its sidewalks, Geno's steams its concrete each morning. Whereas dozens of pigeons congregate atop the awning of Pat's, not a single bird, through the disincentives of cleanliness and heaved ice, resides around Geno's. This distinctive approach has been successful, as Geno's itself stands in testimony.

In 1966, Geno's occupied only the small, southernmost point of the ground floor when opening (up to only the present day primary grill). The space had previously been both a shoe store and fruit stand. In the early years, one-hundred hours weeks put in by Joe were answered only by police harassment through parking tickets on his customers (holding a

grudge against Joe's irreputable brother) and lines of Pat's customers crowding around his sidewalk out of ignorance. As the business began to prosper and move out from Pat's Steaks' seventy-year old shadow, Joe proudly expanded into the spaces further north which had been a chicken stand and two dress shops, respectively. His business now occupies a storehouse across Passyunk where extra supplies, replacement appliances, two Harley-Davidson motorcycles (his new hobby), and a brand-new, six-wheeled John Deere snow plow are kept. Adjacent to



▲ To the left, the auto parts store tha Mr. Vento plans to buy. To the right, Geno's Passyunk storehouse.

that space is an aged auto parts store that Joe is planning to buy. As clearly illustrated by Geno's history, Mr. Vento's philosophy is to "buy neighbors whenever possible." (pers. communication, 1997)

Beyond its physical structure, Geno's Steaks also functions as a piece of 20th century Philadelphia iconography. As a representative of the "Philly Chesse Steak," the site has appeared in the Boyz II Men video, "Motown Philly," the

Omniverse Theater's opening film, "Anthem," and a segment of "How to Make a Cheese Steak" on the Oprah Winfrey Show.

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Urban Context

Geno's is found at the South end of the Ninth street Italian Market. Ninth street is lined with open air produce markets, fish-mongers, "knick-knack" vendors, and stores that sell shoddy clothing for a dollar an article. The market area is very pedestrian oriented and the few cars on Ninth street inch along, forced to dodge the broken down boxes and throngs of people. Shopping here is a sensory experience. Sounds of haggling and friendly exchanges pervade the air as would never happen in a sterile suburban shopping mall. These noises compete with the Italian opera and Oldies, which emanate from various radios as well as with the caged animals, which screech and quack unhappily. The air is filled with the distinct smell of seafood mixed with the aromas ripe fruit and burning trash. However, the visual experience is the most striking. Between the litter covered sidewalks and rusty corrugated tin overhangs is the most spectacularly colored merchandise and mouth-watering food.

The neighborhood surrounding Geno's is in the process of undergoing demographic changes. Area residents reported that the Italian population which had inhabited the Ninth street market area since the turn of the century is being replaced by Asians as well as blacks and Puerto Ricans. Italian butchers and produce

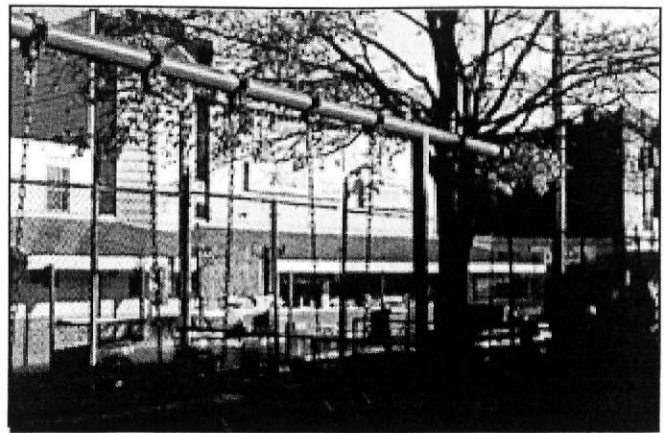


► *Vietnam Marketing, a group that aids Vietnamese merchants in the neighborhood.*

markets are interspersed with a handful of stores bearing Asian signs. One gentleman told me that the older generations are either dying or moving out and the majority of their children are not settling in the area.

One man said that the market is going "down hill." He complained of vacant stores and "junky" merchandise. With people's demanding careers and hectic lives, the convenience of supermarkets often lures people away from the Italian Market, he explained regretfully. Another South Philly resident clarified that many of the Italians who once lived in and around the market have moved away, but continue to shop and work in the market. In fact, Joe Vento moved to New Jersey roughly twenty-five years ago. The majority of buildings which comprise the market are three stories high. However, a significant number of the second

and third stories are abandoned and boarded-up. It appears that the top two stories were once housing for the shop owners and the vacancies supports the theory that merchants are tending to commute more than they once did. Though the market itself has managed to maintain a traditional Italian flair, the surrounding area is much different than it was in past decades. Although the heart of the Italian market is thriving, the section closest to Geno's is laden with vacancies. This creates a sense of separation between Geno's and the rest of the market.



▲ *Geno's Steaks, as viewed from the park across Ninth Street.*

The area immediately surrounding Geno's is not residential. It is bordered by not only the Italian market, but also Sam's—an out of business clam bar, a large neighborhood park, and most importantly, Pat's—its competition.(this sentence might need help, but I'm not sure what to do) The park could be an asset for Geno's , however, it was nearly vacant when I visited both on a beautiful sunny Wednesday afternoon and a rainy Saturday morning. Residents claim

that the park is more bustling in the summer. There are also near-by residential areas in all directions. The houses appear to be middle class and show minimal signs of exterior decay. Few are abandoned.



▲ *The modest homes of Geno's middle class neighborhood.*

Although several of the Geno's patrons I interviewed lived in the neighborhood, the majority of customers told me that they came from elsewhere. One retired local claimed that he goes to Pat's every morning and Geno's every afternoon. He drinks coffee and meets with friends. He explained that Pat's makes better coffee in the morning, but it gets "rank" in the afternoon. Geno's, on the other hand, doesn't brew as good a cup, but is more reliable in terms of freshness. Tony, a Geno's employee, was clearly well-acquainted with the locals. He was able to prepare coffees for a group of regulars before they even reached the window, demonstrating that he knew immediately exactly what each wanted.

The non-locals fall into several categories: workers on lunch break, tourists, and former

residents of the area who were coming back to visit their old neighborhood. A group of roofers with whom I spoke said that they come to Geno's a couple of times a week during the lunch break. They devoured their sandwiches, always keeping their eyes on their truck, which they parked illegally on a cross walk. The fact that they had to park on a cross walk is indicative of the fact that Geno's has a potential parking problem. However, because business moves so quickly, it doesn't really seem to be a significant deterrent.

Another "lunch breaker" ate a leisurely lunch — reading a newspaper and enjoying a cheese steak. He told me that he goes to Geno's about once a month when he has business in the area. The Geno's clientele included a tourist contingent even on a Wednesday afternoon. I spoke to a Canadian woman and two men—one from Florida and one from Atlanta. The Floridian came to Geno's at a cabby's recommendation and the woman said that she needs have a couple of Geno's steaks every time she is in the area.

A significant number of patrons said that they grew up in the area and were returning out of nostalgia and to show their children and grand children the Italian market. Though the customers were diverse in that they came from many different places and they represented different racial groups and socio-economic backgrounds (their cars ranged from mini-vans to fancy sports cars to beat up "old clunkers"), they were similar in two respects. Almost everyone

I saw ordered by saying two simple words. "Steak with," one man grunted. The next man ordered: "cheddar without." As all cheese steak fans know, the "with" and "without" are in reference to onions. All of them demonstrated a certain familiarity with the ordering process. Secondly, the vast majority of the customers I interviewed either volunteered and explanation for their preference of Geno's over rival Pat's, or were at least willing to comment when I inquired. Several people commented that they prefer the sterile cleanliness of Geno's to the authentic, but somewhat dirty ambiance of Pat's. One older gentle man elaborated saying that he used to go to Pat's before Geno's opened, but when he found out that they were using horse meat during the war (WWII) he was "grossed out," and hasn't been back since. "They should have at least put up a sign," he complained. Several people claimed that Pat's is too greasy, which is probably becoming an increasingly important consideration as people get more and more health conscious. Another man was pretty harsh, saying that he couldn't understand how Pat's stays in business. Others said that Geno's just tastes better, and one honest man admitted that Geno's is closer and he has never bothered to cross the street.

After having talked to these zealous Geno's customers, I decided to venture over to Pat's and get another perspective. Unfortunately, there were no customers to be found, so I had to explore on my own. I did notice the filth of which people had complained. There were also

more pigeons eating scraps than at Geno's, which probably has something to do with the fact that Geno's employees threw ice cubes out the window to scare off unwanted birds. In other respects, the two steak stands are quite similar. Their menus and prices are virtually identical except for the fact that Geno's serves Pepsi and Pat's coke. The direct competition affects the two vendors in several ways. It forces both businesses to strive for perfection in order to win loyal customers, while creating a "cheese steak center" which attracts more customers than either could individually. While customers are often divided between the two businesses, the rivalry is almost certainly mutually beneficial.



Service Space

This discussion will focus on five service spaces that are especially significant in showing Geno's in its urban context. The services that I will describe are: (a) the Italian Market; (b) Vince the produce dealer; (c) The South Philadelphia Older Adults Center; (d) Acme Supermarket and CVS drugstore and (e) Capitolo Park. Each of these service spaces tells a story about how the neighborhood was, how it has changed, and how it now functions. The Italian Market is absolutely the most dominant and important service space in the neighbor-

hood around Geno's because it is the center of daily goods shopping activity for much of the South Philadelphia neighborhood. Refer often to the street map and photographs to get a visual picture of the individual service spaces in relation to Geno's and the Italian Market area.

The Italian Market

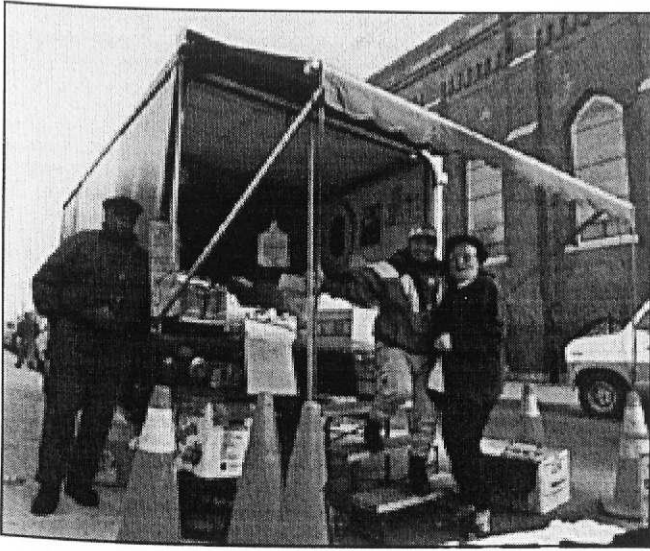
After walking twelve blocks south on 9th Street from Market East train station on 9th Street, the pedestrian suddenly feels cramped as the awnings which signify the entrance into the Italian Market at Christian Street hover above. Though the names of the street vendors are not painted on the overhangs, it is clear that many of these mini-entrepreneurs have set up businesses in this high density for both the competition and the extra business that is achieved when numerous gather in a central space. There are numerous butchers, produce stands, discount clothing and trinket shops, and eat-on-the-go restaurant stands. These businesses are most densely clustered on 9th Street, between Christian Street on the north and Washington Street on the south. Residual shops and complimentary businesses fan out for a couple of blocks on all sides of center of the Italian Market on 9th Street.

Geno's Steaks is located about three blocks south of Washington Street, at the intersection of 9th and Passyunk. Geno's and its competitor, Pat's Steaks, are outside the hub of the Italian Market, though it is advantageous for these

two restaurant be associated with the Italian Market, because it adds to the nostalgic and authentic aura of the holy Philadelphia cheesesteak experience. The Italian Market is really one large integrated service space, because it serves as a destination, just like the Pennsylvania Job Center, St. Morans Church, or even Geno's. Tourists and locals alike journey to the Italian Market to take advantage of the integration of services, which are all densely compacted into a couple blocks along 9th Avenue. While it is possible to think of Butcher A and Vegetable Vendor B as separate entities, they are very much codependent; in that they attract customers by grouping their services into a compact area. This results in a more efficient shopping experience. The Italian Market is the most critical service space to the neighborhood around Geno's Steaks because the community is clearly defined in relation to the market.

Vince, the Produce Seller

Vince is the thirty-one year old fresh produce vendor, who parks his business across from Annunciation Church, on the corner of Dickinson Street and 9th Street, three blocks south of Geno's. When I arrived, Vince was shooting the breeze with three other neighborhood residents outside his stand. As I walked up to Vince in order to buy a couple of apples, he jumped up from his perch on the truck and introduced himself as Vince. He saw my camera and proudly pointed to the giant Italian flag painted on the side of his truck/store. I told



▲ *Vinny the produce dealer, across from Annunciation Church.*

Vince that I was doing a project about Geno's and asked him two strait-forward questions: (1) What is your role as a produce vendor in this neighborhood?; and (2) How has the neighborhood been changing? Vince represents only one view of the street vendors around the Italian Market, yet his status as a permanent neighborhood fixture in the community is common among many of the local merchants.

Vince has been selling fruits and vegetables at the same corner for eleven years. The first two descriptions of the residential Italian Mar-

► *Italian Neighborhood Watch sign.*



ket neighborhood was that it is still friendly and family oriented. This is supported by the Italian Market neighborhood watch signs I saw prominently displayed in the windows of many homes. Vince forms a cohesive bond with the neighborhood in two ways. He is a neighborhood landmark, as a local vendor of produce, and he is purveyor of the neighborhood news to those who stop by and chat. Vince is very representative of the close-knit Italian neighborhood which surrounds Geno's. He remarked about the "widely known" demographic change of neighborhood residents from Italian to Asian. 1 Vince stated that as the aging Italian population dies, their children, who do not want to maintain their parents' homes or live in the neighborhood, sell their houses to incoming Asian families. It is not clear that this scenario is accurate upon a closer examination of the census data, however it is important to acknowledge this perception among Vince and others. Vince did not seem antagonistic or bitter about the "decline" of the Italian population, probably because his presence on the corner is such a constant that it matters little whether those living in nearby houses are Italian or Vietnamese. His business will survive as long as people need fresh produce and appreciate a friendly smile.

The South Phila. Older Adults Center

This senior citizen recreation and support center is located about two blocks southwest of Geno's on Passyunk Street, next to the Acme



▲ *The South Philadelphia Older Adult Center*

supermarket and across the street from the CVS drugstore. The center is supported by a large grant from the Philadelphia Department of Recreation. This is a mostly public service space:

seniors must only pay \$5 a year in membership dues. Members are often served hot lunches and a very popular form of entertainment is bingo. While there is a welfare case worker on premises, one of the directors of the center said that few of the se-



◀ *View of CVS Drugstore from the Acme Supermarket parking lot.*

niors qualify for welfare. While the center is open to any senior citizen of Philadelphia, the director stated that most members come from a thirty block radius around the center. The older adults center was probably integrated into the construction plans of the Acme and CVS to making shopping more convenient for the seniors, when the three buildings were constructed in the late 1970's.

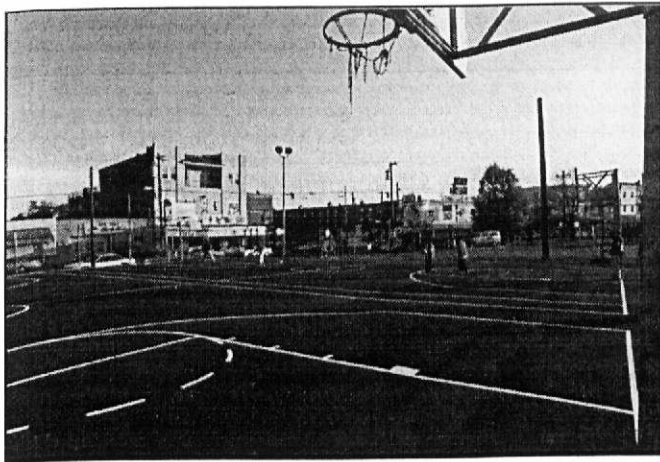
Acme Supermarket and CVS Drugstore

The Acme and CVS are located on East Passyunk Avenue and Reed Avenue, about three blocks from Geno's. Both these stores are part of large Northeastern chains. While these superstores are not at all unique to South Philadelphia, they serve as the local supermarket and drugstore for the residents around the Italian Market. The fresh produce and meats available at the Italian Market supplement the huge selection of foodstuffs and pharmaceuticals available at Acme and CVS. When Acme opened up in the late 1970's it probably took away busi-

ness from the neighborhood grocers in the Italian Market, yet the Italian Market has adapted sufficiently by carving out a niche of supplying fresh and ethnic food products. The Acme, CVS, and the South Philadelphia Older Adults Center were all built on the site of the old Mayamensing Prison. Looking through the news-clippings at the senior center, the director found that the large fortress prison was

razed in the late 1960's. The area around the intersection of Passyunk and Reed was redeveloped about ten years later. Vince, the produce dealer, remembers playing football and tag in the stone ruins of the prison when he was a kid. The transformation of this site, from the landmark Mayamensing Prison into two chain superstores is an example of how a place can become "delocalized," while still serving as an integral space in the neighborhood.

Capitolo Park



▲ View of Geno's Steaks from Capitolo Park.

The only open entrance to this park is located on 9th Street, about twenty steps from Geno's. Capitolo Park covers a large city block, and is bordered by 9th Street, 10th Street, Passyunk Avenue, and Wharton Avenue. The park complex includes a large grassy baseball field, two basketball courts, and a new playground. On the sunny, late fall weekday afternoon, there were about twelve people in the entire park. There were no people eating at the

picnic tables near the playground, right by the Genos' street entrance. I was told that during the warmer months, however, these tables and the grassy field become very popular spots to enjoy a cheesesteak al fresco. In the summer, the basketball courts and baseball field would also serve as a feeder of customers hungry for a cheesesteak after their games, to Pat's and Geno's. Geno's Steaks is a primary sponsor of the little league baseball and football teams which play in the park. A Geno's mini-billboard, promoting "quality and cleanliness" is the largest of the signs, and is placed prominently in the middle of the other local business advertisements in left field. Pat's does not advertise on the baseball field.



▲ Geno's is a primary supporter of the neighborhood little league teams.

Locating Geno's Steaks in service space is critical in linking the urban and quantitative context of the neighborhood. The five service spaces discussed above tell bits of the story of the perceptions and the reality of a changing Italian Market neighborhood. Vinny's truck

produce stand, CVS/Acme superstores, the South Philadelphia Older Adults Center, and of course Geno's are linked by stories and bonds that hold this cohesive neighborhood together.

Service Spaces (see attached map)

1. *Geno's Steaks*
2. *Pat's Steaks*
3. *Third and Fourth District Police Station*
4. *Acme Supermarket*
5. *CVS Drugstore*
6. *South Philadelphia Older Adults Center*
7. *Capitolo Park*
8. *Pennsylvania Jobs Center*
*the jobs center for all of Philadelphia
9. *Wing Phat Market*
10. *Annunciation Church*
11. *St. Paul Catholic Church*
12. *St. Morans Church*
13. *Greater Philadelphia Health Action Service*
*not-for-profit health insurance for uninsured and disadvantaged citizens.
14. *Southwark Station Post Office*
15. *Andrew Jackson Episcopal School*

Not listed:

University of Pennsylvania Hospital Branch
Broad+Ellsworth Subway Station

1 — The census section of this paper shows that the Italian population in some census tracts has risen from 1970 to 1990.

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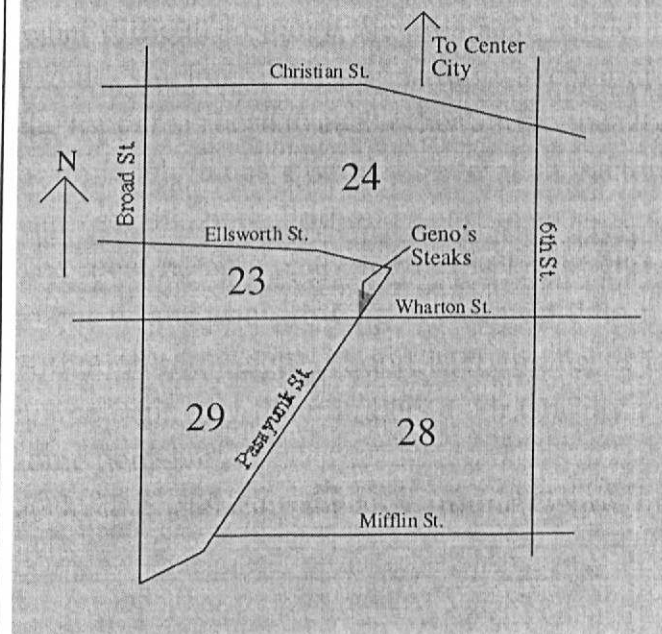
Census Data

The neighborhood immediately surrounding Geno's Steaks consists of four Census tracts (see map). Although this makes it somewhat difficult to judge the area as a whole, it provides an interesting opportunity to compare the four areas both to each other and to the city of Philadelphia as a whole. Several characteristics set this neighborhood apart from others. The most notable of these are the large white majority and the growing Asian population. Although the neighborhood is changing, it is not changing by the numbers as drastically as some perceive.

In characterizing the area around Geno's, it

Figure 1

Census Tracts around Geno's Steaks



is useful to compare the data for the Census tracts around Geno's to the entire city of Philadelphia (for this section, see Table 1). The most notable thing about the area is that it is very white by Philadelphia standards. Of the 19,825 people in the region in 1990, 84.8% (16,829) were white. The city as a whole is only 53.5% white. Correspondingly, the percentage of blacks is much lower around Geno's than elsewhere. The neighborhood is 6.2% black, while Philadelphia is 39.8% black. In contrast, the neighborhood has a relatively large Asian population. The city as a whole is only 2.7% Asian or Pacific Islander, while the area is 6.8% Asian. This consists mainly of a large Chinese population to the southwest (tract 28) and smaller Chinese and Vietnamese populations to the north (tracts 23 and 24). Another notable thing about race in this area is the very large population of persons of Italian ancestry. While Philadelphia as a whole is 9.3% of Italian ancestry, the four tracts around Geno's are 55.8% Italian. Despite the historic nature of the neighborhood as the Italian Market, it still very striking that the neighborhood is as racially dominated as it is.

Beyond race, the area is unique in several other ways. It is a strong working-class neighborhood with a median household income of about \$20,500 per year. Although Philadelphia has a median household income of \$24,600, it is not correct to characterize this area as poor. In fact, while 20.2% of the city is below the poverty line, this neighborhood is only 18.8% officially poor. The area to the south of Geno's, in

fact, is only about 14% poor. The median rent in this area is also below the median for the city. Along with income, the education level is consistent with a working class area. Traditional manufacturing and retail jobs, on which the neighborhood was at one time based, are not very education-needy. In accordance, while 64.3% of the city has a high school diploma, only 54.5% of the residents of these tracts have graduated from high school.

The built environment is also well described in the Census materials. The most notable feature of the housing stock in the area is its age. The building that houses Geno's is about 100 years old, which is probably about average for the area. An overwhelming majority of the housing units in the area were built before 1940 (the earliest division used in the Census) (1990 Census Table 32). In Philadelphia as a whole, the median date of housing is 1939, which means that almost the entirety of this neighborhood is older than half of the housing stock in the city. This neighborhood, like many in the city, is struggling with vacant housing and its deteriorating effect on the neighborhood. In fact, there are vacant houses less than a block from Geno's. This struggle is reflected in the fact that 10.2% of the housing is vacant, compared to 10.6% for the city as a whole.

Table 1

Selected Characteristics of Tracts Around Geno's Compared with the City of Philadelphia*

Population	% Asian/PI
All 4 Tracts:	4Trcts: 6.76%
19,825	Phila.: 2.72%
Philadelphia:	
1,585,577	Italian
	4Trcts: 11,060
White pop.	Phila.: 147,183
4Trcts: 16,829	
Phila.: 848,894	% Italian
	4Trcts: 55.79%
% White	Phila.: 9.28%
4Trcts: 84.89%	
Phila.: 53.54%	Median
	household
Black pop.	income
4Trcts: 1,229	4Trcts: \$20,513
Phila.: 632,430	Phila.: \$24,603
% Black	% below poverty
4Trcts: 6.20%	4Trcts: 18.84%
Phila.: 39.89%	Phila.: 20.27%
Asian/Pacific	% High School
Islander	Grads
4Trcts: 1,340	4Trcts: 54.45%
Phila.: 43,174	Phila.: 64.31%

Housing Units

4Trcts: 9,473

Phila.: 674,899

% vacant

4Trcts: 10.24%

Phila.: 10.64%

*1990 Census, Tables 8,9,16,17,19 and 32

**I have summed the characteristics for the four tracts to create these data. The median income calculation is a weighted average of the four tracts (weighted by population)

The four tracts around Geno's differ very greatly from one another (for this section, see Table 2). While they are all very white, Tract 24 is only 75% white, while 29 is 97% white. The other two are about 85% white. The difference between 24 and 29 is very evident also in the percentages of the population that are black and Asian. Tract 29 is only 1.3% black and 0.9% Asian, while 24 is 15% black and 6% Asian. In the overall statistics for the area, these effects cancel each other out, but when examined individually, they stand out as major differences between the tracts.

A similar range exists in the percentage of the population that has Italian ancestry. Tract 24 is only 39% Italian, while Tract 29 is 73% Italian. This is quite interesting, considering that tract 24 contains the most bustling part of the

Italian Market, while tract 29 is almost completely residential. Traditionally, store owners lived above their stores, but today's Italian population either does not work in the market area or lives separate from their workplace.

Tract 28 has a very large Asian population, 9.8% of the total, compared to 6% in tract 24 (which adjoins it to the north). This alone would not be that significant if it were not for the incomes of these two Asian populations. Of the 879 Asians in tract 28, not one has an income below the poverty line. In direct contrast, 219 of 261 Asians (84%) in tract 24 are below the poverty line. Tract 29 has so few Asians that data are not available, while tract 23 fits in the middle with 2/3 of the Asians below poverty. In Philadelphia as a whole, 29% of Asians are below the poverty line, but given the evidence of these tracts, it could be hypothesized that this 29% comes as an average of a few 0-5% neighborhoods and a few 50+% neighborhoods.

As mentioned earlier, poverty in the area around Geno's is near, but below, the city average. However, this too varies by tract. The tracts to the north of Geno's are much poorer than those to the south. They both have 26% of the population below the poverty line, as compared to 17% in tract 28 and 9.6% in tract 29. Variation is also evident in median household income. It ranges from \$18,136 in tract 23 to \$23,672 in tract 29.

Education levels also vary between tracts. 62.7% of adults in tract 29 have a high school diploma, while only 49.8% of those in tract 28

have one. One interesting fact of this trend is that the poorest and most racially diverse tract, tract 24, has a relatively high level of education — 56.5% of adults have a high school degree.

Table 2

Selected Characteristics of the Four Census Tracts Around Geno's Steaks*
(Tracts 23, 24, 28 and 29)

Population	% Black
23: 2,450	23: 4.73%
24: 4,390	24: 15.13%
28: 8,968	28: 4.38%
29: 4,017	29: 1.39%
White pop.	Asian/Pacific Islander pop.
23: 2,094	23: 164
24: 3,303	24: 261
28: 7,535	28: 879
29: 3,897	29: 36
% White	% Asian/PI
23: 85.47%	23: 6.69%
24: 75.24%	24: 5.95%
28: 84.02%	28: 9.8%
29: 97.01%	29: 0.90%
Black pop.	
23: 116	
24: 664	
28: 393	
29: 56	

(Table 2 continued from last page)

Italian pop.	% High School Grads
23: 1,260	23: 52.78%
24: 1,722	24: 56.54%
28: 5,140	28: 49.84%
29: 2,938	29: 62.73%
% Italian	Housing Units
23: 51.43%	23: 1,252
24: 39.23%	24: 2,158
28: 57.31%	28: 4,022
29: 73.14%	29: 2,041
Median household income	% vacant
23: \$18,136	23: 9.19%
24: \$19,104	24: 11.82%
28: \$20,437	28: 9.08%
29: \$23,672	29: 11.51%
	* 1990 Census Tables 8, 9, 16, 17, 19, 32
% below poverty	
23: 26.45%	
24: 26.31%	
28: 17.27%	
29: 9.51%	

is distinctly steeper than the drop for the city as a whole (19%). Most of these drops occurred between 1970 and 1980.

Table 3

Population over time

The years 1970*, 1980**, and 1990***	All 4 Tracts
	1990: 27,881
	1980: 22,463
Tract 23	1990: 19,825
1970: 3,345	
1980: 2,908	
1990: 2,450	
	Philadelphia
	1990: 1,948,609
	1980: 1,688,210
	190: 1,585,577
Tract 24	
1970: 6,588	
1980: 4,760	
1990: 4,390	
Tract 28	
1970: 11,990	
1980: 9,632	
1990: 8,968	
Tract 29	
1970: 5,958	
1980: 5,163	
1990: 4,017	

*1970 Census Table P-1

**1980 Census Table P-7

***1990 Census Table 8

The neighborhood around Geno's has undergone large changes in the time since the 1970 Census. Most importantly, there has been a very large drop in population (Table 3). Total population of the four tracts dropped by 29% over the twenty years from 1970 to 1990. This drop

Many strong opinions based on beliefs about the neighborhood were voiced by people interviewed for this report. However, they are not fully supported by the U.S. Cen-

sus data for the region. The most important of these opinions are that: one, there has been a large influx of Asians and Puerto Ricans into the area; two, the black population is growing; three, the area is becoming less Italian as the older Italians die and their children leave the area.

First, to address the growing Asian and Puerto Rican populations. The percent of the population that is Asian more than quadrupled from 1980 to 1990, from 1.6% to 6.7% (Table 4). The opinion is quite well supported by the census data, although the Puerto Rican population is not growing at this rate. The Puerto Rican population has grown from less than 1% in 1970 to 2.6% in 1990 (Table 5). However, it is still a very small part of the population.

Table 4
Asian population
as a percentage
of the total over
time*

The years 1980**
and 1990***

Tract 23
1980: 2.06
1990: 6.69

Tract 28
1980: 1.80
1990: 9.80

Tract 24
1980: 2.39
1990: 5.95

Tract 29
1980: 0.29
1990: 0.90

*Asians are not distinguished among the "Other" category in 1970.

**1980 Census Table P-7
***1990 Census Table 8

All 4 Tracts

1980: 1.61
1990: 6.76

Philadelphia

1980: 1.05
1990: 2.72

Table 5

Puerto Rican population as a percentage of the total over time

The years 1970*,
1980**, and 1990***

Tract 29
1970: 0
1980: 0.33

Tract 23
1970: 0
1980: 2.27
1990: 3.22

All 4 Tracts
1970: 0.77
1980: 1.69

Tract 24
1970: 1.62
1980: 1.95
1990: 4.03

Philadelphia
1970: 1.37
1980: 2.78

Tract 28
1970: 0.89
1980: 2.11
1990: 2.93

1990: 4.10

*1970 Census Table P-2
**1980 Census Table P-7
***1990 Census Table 8

Second, the percent of the population that is black has not actually grown over time. The population declined from 6.3% in 1970 to 4.6% in 1980, and has climbed back up to 6.2% (Table 6). Perhaps the decline was not very noticeable, but the rise is visible, so it feels as though the percentage is higher than it was in 1970.

Table 6

Black population as a percentage of the total over time

The years 1970*,	Tract 29
1980**, and 1990***	1970: 0.13
	1980: 0.08
Tract 23	1990: 1.39
1970: 6.97	
1980: 4.71	All 4 Tracts
1990: 4.73	1970: 6.27
	1980: 4.64
Tract 24	1990: 6.20
1970: 20.63	
1980: 15.61	Philadelphia
1990: 15.13	1970: 33.55
	1980: 37.84
Tract 28	1990: 39.89
1970: 1.23	
1980: 1.65	
1990: 4.38	

*1970 Census Table P-1
 **1980 Census Table P-7
 ***1990 Census Table 8

Thirdly, and most interestingly, the neighborhood is actually more Italian now than it was in 1970 (Table 7). In 1970, only 45% of the population was categorized as Italian, while in 1990, the proportion had risen to 55%. Although it is true that the percentage rose to 63% in 1980, it is still higher in 1990 than it was in 1970. In tract 29, the percentage has risen steadily over 20 years, from 54% to 70% to 73%. This is not

what the general perception is, and illustrates that appearance and thought are not always reality.

Table 7

Italian population as a percentage of the total over time

The years 1970*,	Tract 29
1980**, and	1970: 54.6
1990***	1980: 69.6
	1990: 73.1
Tract 23	
1970: 44.8	All 4 Tracts
1980: 52.3	1970: 45.4
1990: 51.4	1980: 63.0
	1990: 55.8
Tract 24	
1970: 35.0	Philadelphia
1980: 53.7	1970: 5.3
1990: 39.2	1980: 7.9
	1990: 9.3
Tract 28	
1970: 46.7	
1980: 67.4	
1990: 57.3	

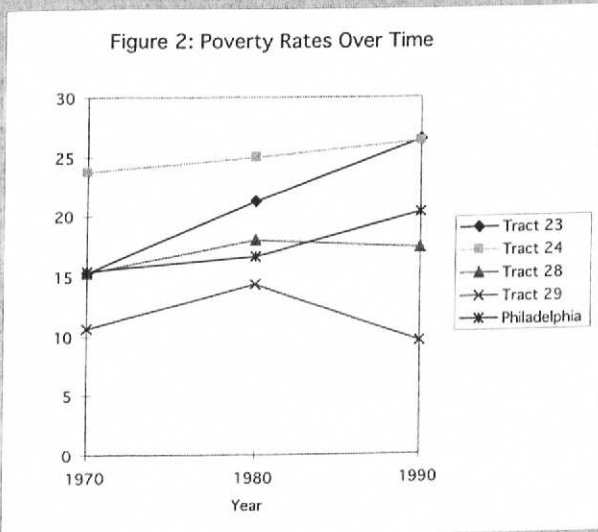
*1970 Census Table P-2
 **1980 Census Table P-8
 ***1990 Census Table 16

Poverty statistics allow for the comparison of the tracts' relative incomes over time, as illustrated in Figure 2. As Philadelphia's poverty rate has risen from 15.4% in 1970 to 16.6% in 1980 and 20.3 % in 1990, the rates in the tracts have behaved differently. In tract 23, the rate

rose from the same as the city in 1970 to 25% higher than the city in 1990 (15.3% to 26.4% in 20 years). Tract 24 has always been poorer than the city, and is in fact converging as the city becomes poorer. It has risen from 23.7% (50% above the city) in 1970 to 26.3% in 1990 (25% above the city). Tract 28 has done better than the city overall, although its percent poor grew faster than the city from 1970 to 1980, because its poverty rate actually fell from 18% to 17.3% from 1980 to 1990. Tract 29, the richest tract of the four, has always been below the city totals. However, its poverty rate grew faster from 1970 to 1980, before falling back to below its 1970 level in 1990.

In conclusion, the area around Geno's Steaks is a very interesting area, and its' interest carries over into the Census materials that describe it. The neighborhood is changing, from an extremely white area to simply a very white one, and the ethnic diversity is increasing. The area remains a strong working class area, facing the problems that face urban working class neighborhoods across the country. However, the changes are not as great as they are made out to be by the residents. There are distinct differences between the four tracts that surround Geno's, which are somewhat surprising given their geographic proximity, most notably in income and racial make-up and changes over time. The neighborhood continues to be a stable, relatively cohesive neighborhood despite racial change, and appears to be well-equipped to deal with whatever changes the future might bring.

Figure 2
Poverty Track



Source: 1970 Census Table P-4, 1980
Census Table P-11, 1990 Census Table 19

Alternative Use of the Space

When examining possible alternate uses of Geno's Steaks, two main things must be considered: first, how feasible it is to completely change the use of the building currently occupied by Geno's, and second, what might be done to Geno's to improve its use of the space.

In a strictly physical context, the building currently occupied by Geno's Steaks could probably take on various alternative roles. Its unique triangular shape and the ability to see most of the first-floor establishment from the street through windows would make the building a good space for a restaurant or bar. The ability to see into the establishment would draw people to the interior, and its shape would provide something different than most other buildings in Philadelphia. The building was gradually built up and adapted to best suit the business that is there today, however, so it undoubtedly best serves in its current use.

When one considers factors other than Geno's physical space, however, it becomes apparent that changing the current use of the building would be detrimental both to the site as well as the neighborhood. First of all, the removal of Geno's Steaks would significantly alter the context of the neighborhood. "This is a cheesesteak neighborhood," commented Joe Vento, the owner of Geno's. Furthermore, Geno's Steaks has a competitive relationship with Pat's Steaks, the establishment directly

across from Geno's. The two establishments have become famous, in part for the idea of competition between two businesses that provide the same service, albeit in very different ways. This air of competition is very visible, bordering on an obsession. It is very much ingrained in the atmosphere of the intersection, and so by removing either Geno's or Pat's, the other establishment would be greatly effected as well. Looking beyond the short-term gains that would be made by picking up the other's patrons, it is clear that by losing that sense of competition, the environment would be changed, and long-term business would probably decline.

Aside from altering the context of the neighborhood, there is the distinct possibility that another business moving into Geno's building would not be successful. First, the Italian market provides for various shopping needs in the area, so if a grocery store were to be opened, it may not be seen as necessary. In addition, a business that was not "one of a kind" or famous would be expected to rely heavily on foot-traffic to attract business. Although the building that holds Geno's is in close proximity to the Italian Market, the foot-traffic from the market really does not bring people past Geno's. This is probably the result of a combination of two boundaries separating people in the Italian Market from Geno's. The first boundary, is Federal St., a reasonably busy street that would have to be crossed in order to get to Geno's. The other boundary is the out-of-business establishment

on the corner of Geno's closest to the market, which does little to draw people across the street. Geno's can thrive without a large amount of foot-traffic because of its great fame. This fame allows Geno's to serve as a destination more than an establishment frequented by chance. Mr. Vento describes his patrons as a good mix of locals and tourists. The local patrons of Geno's are already aware of its existence, and those who are tourists go actively look for it. In the end, few people go to Geno's because they happen to be passing by.

The suggested lack of success of a different business is illustrated in the surrounding buildings. Next to Geno's is a flower-shop that, in comparison with those in the Italian market, is far from thriving. Next to that, at the corner of Geno's block closest to the Italian market, there was a fast-food chicken establishment that went out of business four months after it opened. Also, on a corner between Geno's and Pat's there is a clam bar that has also gone out of business.

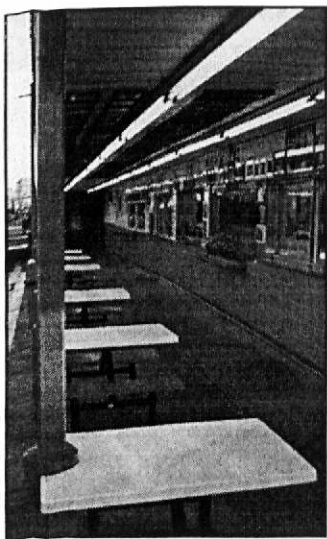
Thus, in addition to providing boundaries between Geno's building and the Italian Market, the lack of thriving businesses illustrates the concerns involved in opening a different establish-

ment.

Assuming that Geno's should continue to occupy the space, there are a couple things that Geno's could do to improve their use of space. First of all, the awning that covers the sidewalk outside of Geno's does not completely cover the tables that are outside (see picture of awning). The result is that whenever there is a combination of rain and wind, half of the tables get wet. If this awning was extended to cover these tables, they would be more desiring to sit at in the rain. There was also potential for problems when it snows, and the sidewalk being blocked by the plowed snow. This problem was taken care of last year, however, when Mr. Vento purchased a huge 6x4 snow plow to clear off both the street and the sidewalk to allow customers convenient access, even in heavy snow.

One other problem with Geno's is that it is not easily visible from the direction of the Italian market. Whereas Pat's Steaks juts out into the intersection and thus can easily be seen by those in the Italian Market, Geno's is much more shielded by other buildings on its block. Because foot traffic is not heavy in the area of Geno's, increased visibility from the Italian Market may bring more patrons. This problem could be solved with a sign that would project out from the building over the street, allowing Geno's to be seen from the north end of 9th Street (see picture).

One last problem with Geno's is its lack of available parking (see picture of Geno's parking area). There are few available parking



◀ *The awning for Geno's tables does not adequately shield patrons from the rain.*

spaces on the street outside of Geno's. Due to the high-speed nature of the service and the fact that most patrons return directly to their cars and depart, however, it is really not a major problem.

Other than these minor changes, however, Geno's is a well-used site. Altering it extensively would neither be necessary nor practical, as the space was previously adapted for it's purpose and continues to be adapted as new needs are recognized.

○○○

Conclusion

Geno's Steaks has tailored a building to serve their needs in both an efficient and stylish fashion. The unique exterior design coupled with the efficient and clean interior make for an ideal fast-food establishment. It holds a prime location near the hub of the Italian market and its fame attracts an abundance of both local and visiting patrons. While the neighborhoods around Geno's have begun to diversify, the population remains much the same as it has been. This population is served by a variety of services located in the vicinity of Geno's. Perhaps most important,

Pat's and Geno's



▲ (top) An overhanging sign, like those seen on Pat's Steaks, would help make Geno's more visible from the north end of the street.

(above) The lack of available parking around Geno's poses a potential problem during peak hours.

however, is that Geno's has made history of itself. From its early days as a small corner establishment, Geno's has grown and expanded to become the home of one of the world's most famous cheesesteaks.



Bibliography

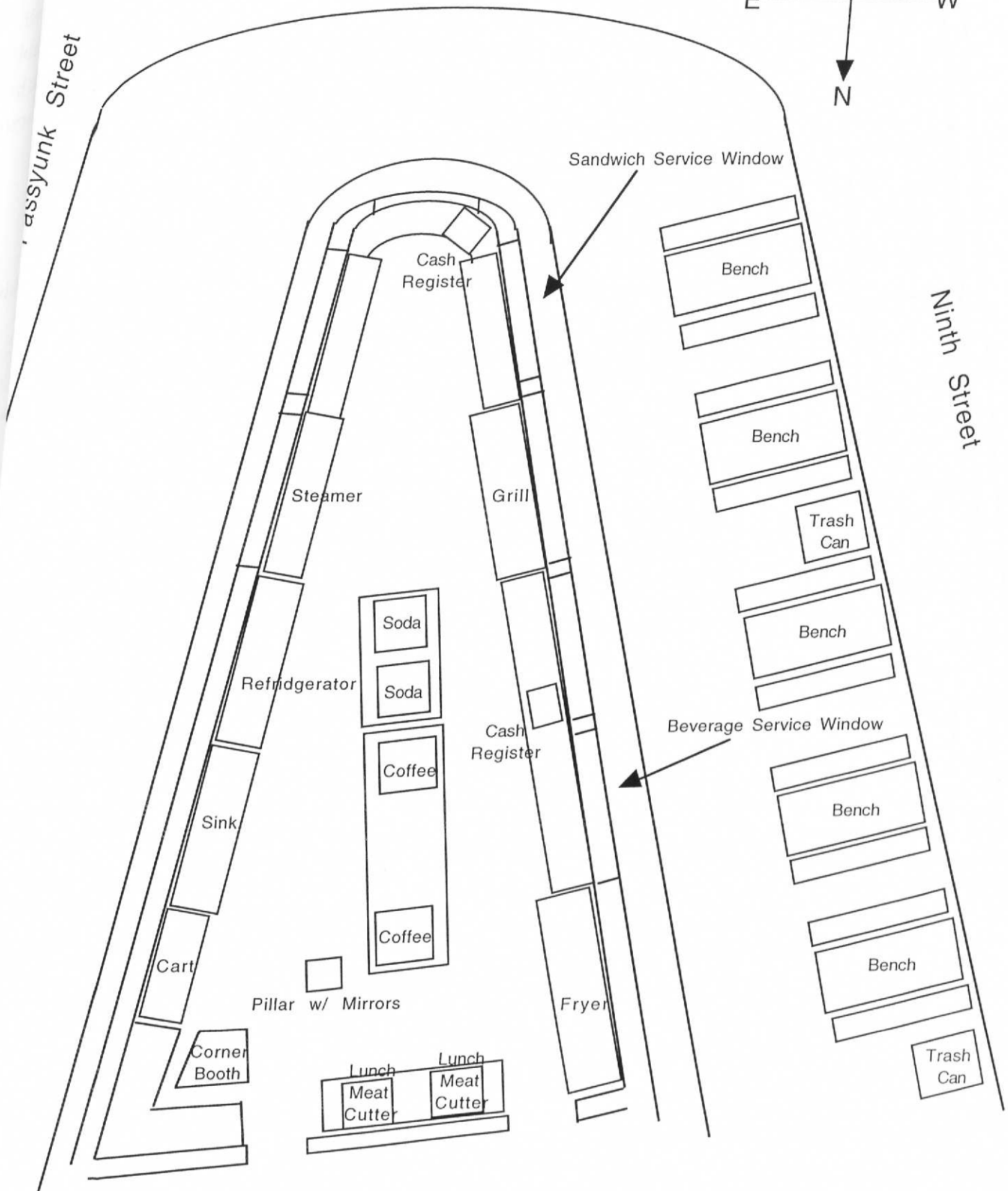
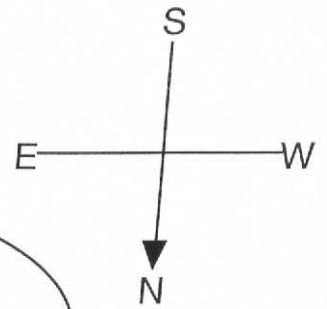
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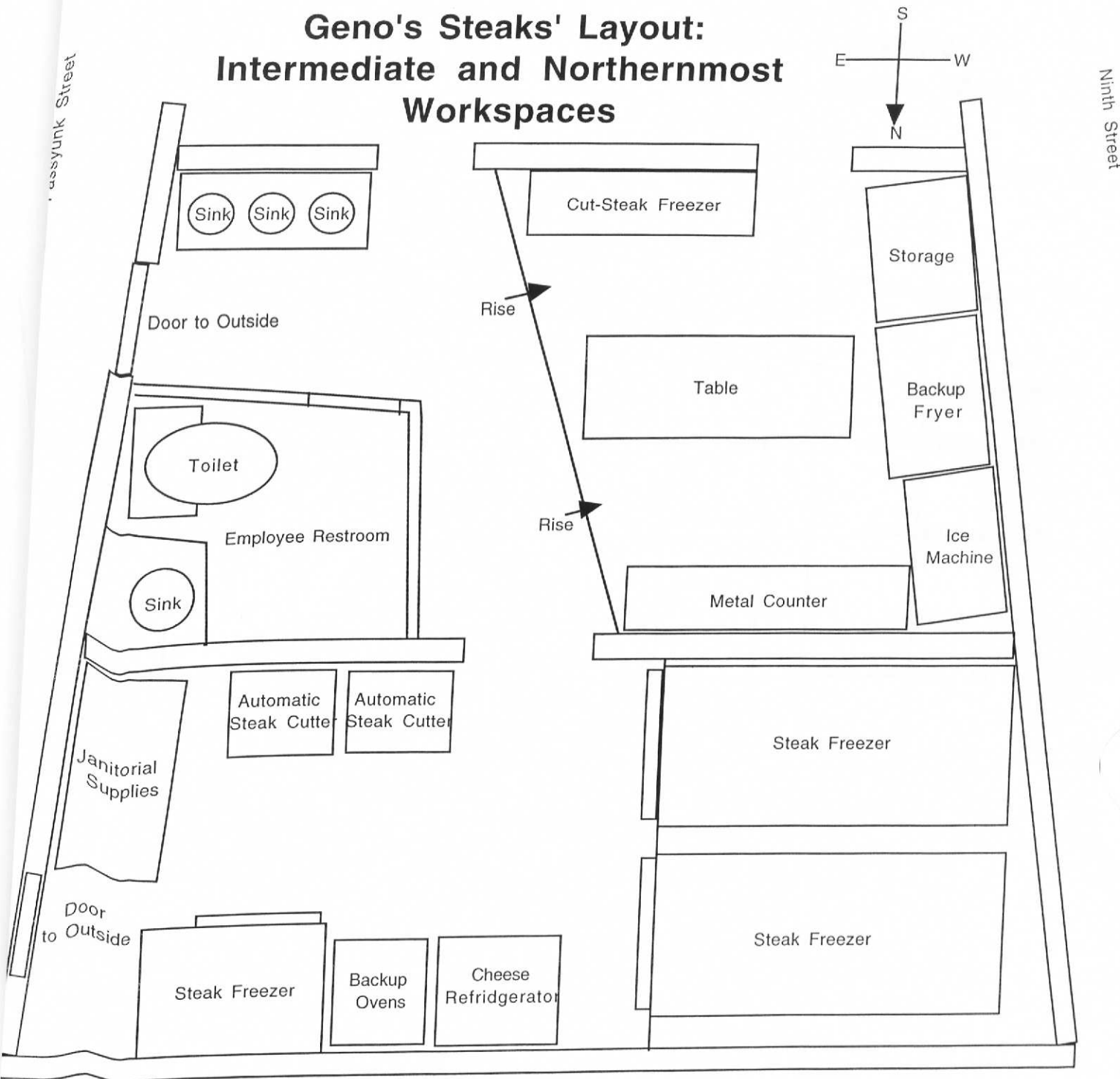
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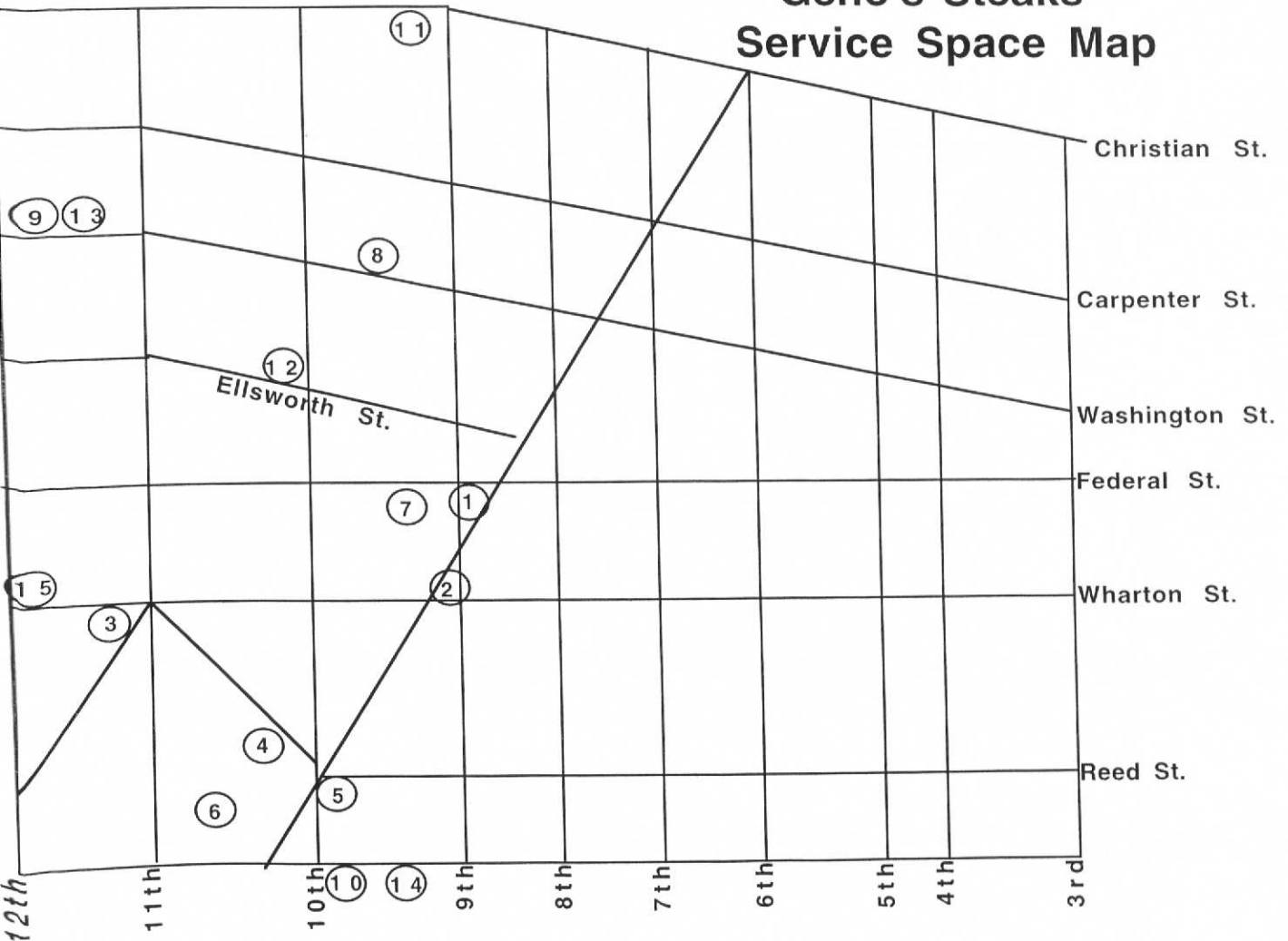
Geno's Steaks' Layout: Southernmost Workspace



Geno's Steaks' Layout: Intermediate and Northernmost Workspaces



Geno's Steaks' Service Space Map

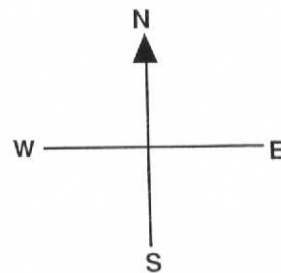


Service Spaces Key:

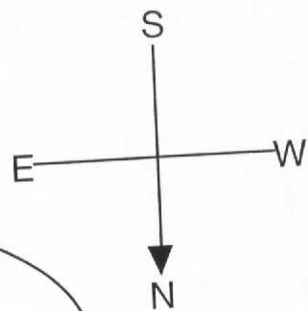
1. Geno's Steaks
2. Pat's Steaks
3. Third and Fourth District Police Station
4. Acme Supermarket
5. CVS Drugstore
6. South Philadelphia Older Adults Center
7. Capitolo Park
8. Pennsylvania Jobs Center
*the jobs center for all of Philadelphia
9. Wing Phat Market
10. Annunciation Church
11. St. Paul Catholic Church
12. St. Morans Church
13. Greater Philadelphia Health Action Service
*not-for-profit health insurance for uninsured and disadvantaged citizens.
14. Southwark Station Post Office
15. Andrew Jackson Episcopal School

Not on the map:

- University of Pennsylvania Hospital Branch
- Broad+Ellsworth Subway Station
- *at least a six block walk from Geno's.

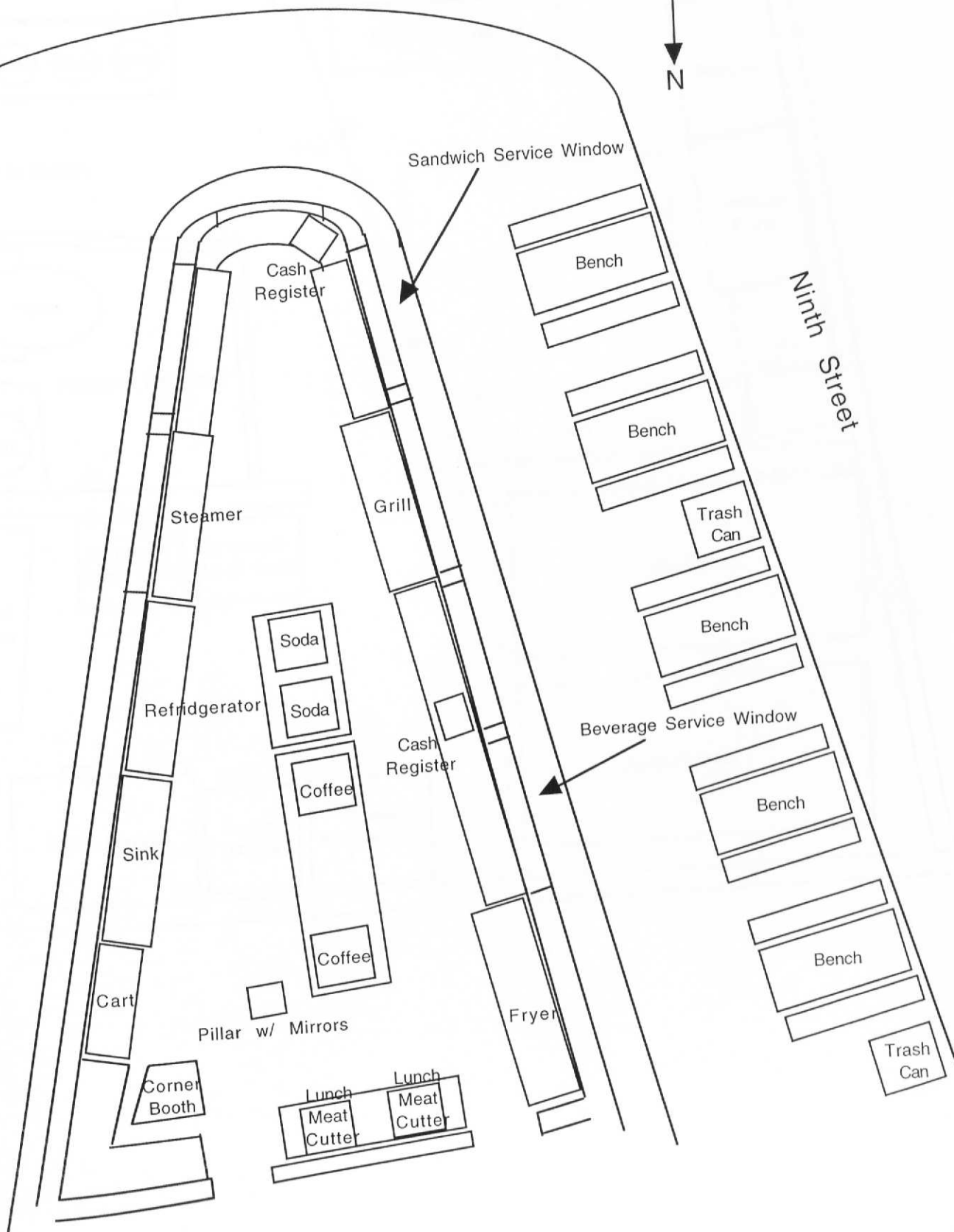


Geno's Steaks' Layout: Southernmost Workspace

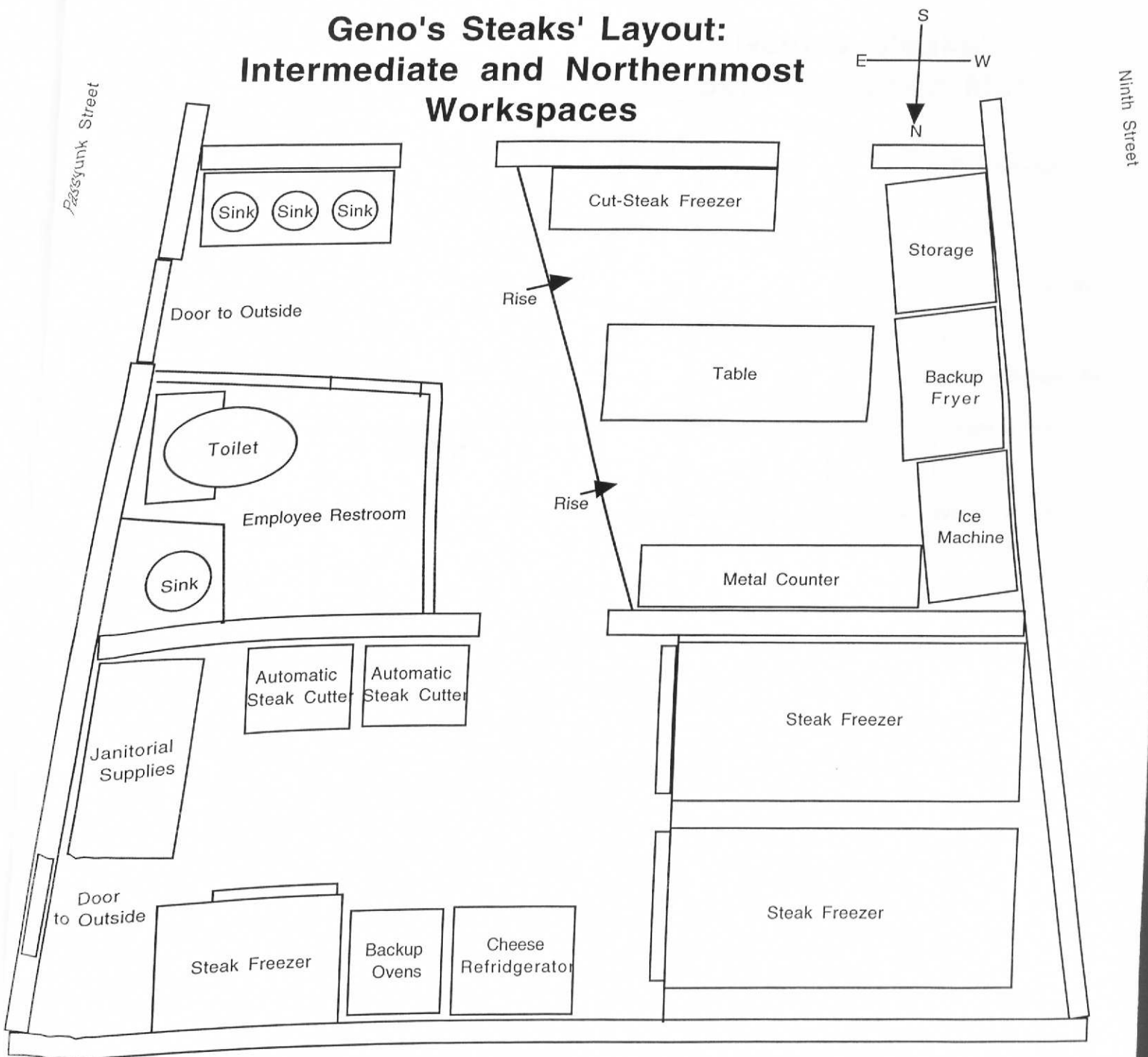


Passyunk Street

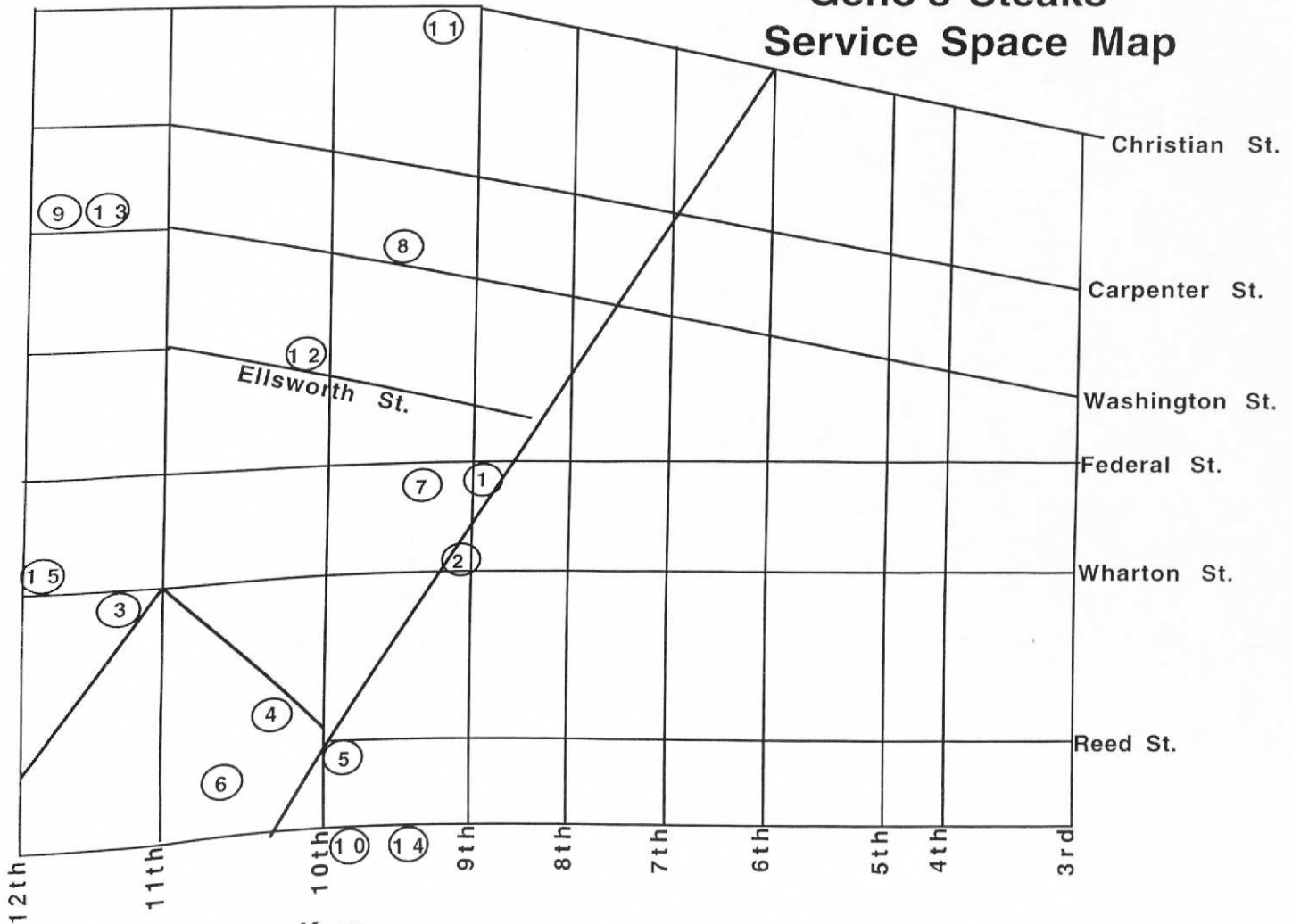
Ninth Street



Geno's Steaks' Layout: Intermediate and Northernmost Workspaces



Geno's Steaks' Service Space Map



Service Spaces Key:

1. Geno's Steaks
2. Pat's Steaks
3. Third and Fourth District Police Station
4. Acme Supermarket
5. CVS Drugstore
6. South Philadelphia Older Adults Center
7. Capitolo Park
8. Pennsylvania Jobs Center
*the jobs center for all of Philadelphia
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