

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

**LIKE A REAL HOME:
THE RESIDENTIAL FUNERAL HOME
AND AMERICA'S CHANGING VERNACULAR LANDSCAPE, 1910 – 1960**

by

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demonstrate how an awareness of both the symbolic value of material culture and the larger consumer marketplace led enterprising undertakers to mansions as a tool to legitimate their claims to professional status and as a setting to stimulate demand for luxury goods, two objectives often at odds with one another.

Chapter Five also explores the funeral home as a barometer of rising pressures within retail culture, from its emphasis on merchandising and democratized luxury to the industry's early exodus from the downtown as a harbinger of the postwar decentralization of shopping to the suburbs. Amidst perennial concerns over rising burial costs and calls for greater simplicity, funeral directors created spaces that married simplicity to luxury, a paradox that became a hallmark of modern consumer culture.

Notwithstanding their success as retail spaces, funeral homes struggled for acceptance as ritual spaces. Chapter Six follows the industry's aggressive campaign to dislodge the home funeral using advertisements that showcased the funeral home's privacy and homelike comforts. In the end, a heightened emphasis within consumer culture on convenience and the funeral home's ability to balance sales and ceremony solidified its enduring and iconic place within the vernacular landscape.