

Five-and-ten stores were immensely popular during the middle of the twentieth century, selling cheap, dependable goods to people from all walks of life. Now the product of a bygone era, these stores were revolutionary in their time, but few today appreciate how important they were in creating our present-day consumer culture. In this sensitive yet honest look at one of the best-known chains of five-and-tens, Jason Togyer traces the history of the G. C. Murphy Company, headquartered in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. Though not the largest chain, nor the first, Murphy's is remembered today as a commercial trailblazer—a corporation run with honesty and integrity, and, at its peak, a retailer whose more than five hundred stores managed to outsell those of the giant F. W. Woolworth Company by a factor of three to one. Making extensive use of both the company archives and anecdotes from former employees and customers, McKeesport native Togyer re-creates with outstanding detail the world in which the G. C. Murphy Company emerged; its survival and growth during the Great Depression; its response to a strained economy during World War II; its fight against rapidly expanding competitors, such as Kmart; its struggle and recovery in the 1970s; and its unsuccessful battle to stave off Wall Street raiders in the 1980s. Though modern-day shoppers may not know the Murphy name, they know its legacy. From its adventurous selling tactics to its strict code of corporate ethics, the G. C. Murphy Company should be remembered not as a dusty relic, but as a pioneer in the American business world.

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