

Who Remembers...Building #19?

The very first Building 19 location in Hingham. (Jared and Corin)

Here is another installment in our *Who Remembers?* series. You can browse previous articles by using the search bar on the right or by clicking **here**. These articles are strolls down memory lane. In some cases the buildings, but new businesses have replaced them. In other instances, the buildings or even the properties have been razed. Instead of a building, it may be a TV show, personality, or commercial that no one longer exists. Either way, it can't stop us from taking the Memory Lane stroll!

As always we would rather this be a discussion. No one knows this area better than those who grew up here! Please, leave constructive criticism, feedback, and corrections. We'd love to hear your anecdotes. Please share!

The Building 19 at 19 Hathaway Road is responsible for a **lot** of great memories. Say the words "Building 19" and it immediately conjures up memories of the comic-style murals, newspaper inserts, and amazing deals.



*Building 19's slogans always screamed "fun."
(Michael Killoran)*

Their advertising style may have been joking, but their deals

were no laughing matter. Serious deals. On top of that it was just plain fun to visit. When my mom said she was going heading to Building 19 and asked if I and my brother wanted to tag along, the reply would be a universal and coordinated “DUH!” For parents, it was all about fantastic deals, that frequently rotated inventory (often very oddball) which always meant surprises, and an attempt to tire the kids out with all the walking and excitement. Fat chance.

For kids, the savings meant you were more likely to get a “Yes.” to a request to get something for yourself. The energy, hustle and bustle of that store was contagious. Heading to Building 19 was like heading to the mall. It was exciting.

So, writing a “Who Remembers?” article on such a place doesn’t come without melancholy. I’d rather **not** be writing an article recalling Building 19. I’d rather be visiting it.

The mill building responsible for these memories was built in 1917 and encompassed 13.2 acres. The Building 19 company was founded at Hingham in 1964 by Jerry Ellis (born Gerald Elovitz) and Harry Andler. Before long ten locations across Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island would open with the slogan “Good stuff cheap!” and use adverts that would use pithy statements like “If you can’t find what you’re looking for, buy something else.” Of course, everyone fondly recalls the free coffee while shopping, which was accompanied with “Free fake cream.” He would use this sense of humor to label many of the goods, including what would be considered today to be incredibly un-PC, white tank top t-shirts called “Wife beaters.”



A quintessential ad showcasing Mat Brown's artwork. (Matt Brown)

While Ellis himself was behind the creation of these soundbites, it was Scituate native Matt Brown who was responsible for the popular artwork. He simply answered an ad placed by Ellis in 1967. He was hired for \$5 an hour and worked part-time when he wasn't teaching Math at Scituate High School. Brown wouldn't find out for years, that he was actually the only cartoonist to answer the ad.

Often the artwork would depict Ellis being pushed about to work harder and find better products for customers by the taskmaster, co-founder Jerry Andler.

The idea behind the name? It's in perfect line with the slogan and brand of the store: Mr. Ellis just used the name of a sign that was already on the building – a mill at Bethlehem Hingham Shipyard. Since he didn't feel that the store would be open long enough to matter, he didn't feel that putting much thought behind it would be practical.

Ellis was just taking advantage of what he thought was a temporary opportunity to purchase a bunch of products that local merchants were trying to discard because of overstocking, irregularities – often unnoticeable- or because they had some defects.



Typical inside of one of the ten locations. (Jared and Corin)

A book with torn or bent page, a box on a small appliance that had been opened, an item that was outdated or discontinued – who knows what the reason was? All that mattered is that they were drastically reduced in price for very minor reasons.

If the stores were so popular, why did they close down? The reasons were because of an ever evolving consumer market, cheaper goods because of overseas wholesaling and competition from many similar close-out style stores and dollar themed shops.

In addition, the internet flattened the world, allowing people to find even cheaper prices from poorer countries. Ellis absolutely loved the stores and operating them, but after almost a decade of not generating profit, he reluctantly had to close the doors. The company would eventually file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2013 and slowly close all ten locations to the disappointment of many locals.

I would give my left arm to have some of that cheap watered coffee and fake cream.