Patsy Calpeter bought the clock when it was a lost piece of her youth. Almost 60 years ago, she was a student in a work-study program at the old North Syracuse High School, and her teachers would let her out a little early so she could catch a bus to her job.

Calpeter was a clerk at F.W. Woolworth’s, a five-and-dime department store at South Salina and Fayette streets, in the heart of downtown Syracuse. Getting there on time was important, said Calpeter, now of Salina. The manager was Margaret Hampton, a woman whose name Calpeter recalls distinctly. While the clerks liked and respected her, Hampton was all business. “You didn’t want to test her,” Calpeter said.

The teenager would jump off the bus near the old E.W. Edwards department store, and she’d hurry toward the front door of Woolworth’s. It was easy to check to see if she’d made it on time: There was a big clock above the door, visible on nearby streets, a kind of counterpoint for warm memories from Calpeter’s youth. She’s 75. She remembers when Woolworth’s closed in the 1970s, part of the sweeping loss of retail in those years in the center of the city. Rite Aid took over the building.

The drugstore chain had a different response. Auwaerter said Rite Aid has worked out an agreement with the city: The drugstore chain agreed to begin construction in the spring. In downtown Syracuse, for the fourth comes, the city is building a complex of major national design teams to come up with a new plan for the area known as Perseverance Park.

Beth Crawford, a designer and senior project manager with Crawford & Strmns, said the old Woolworth building when her company was studying the landmark. She said the empty upper floors offer a well-preserved and spacious “opportunity for development.”

While Rite Aid has not announced its plans for the entire building, officials dream of new apartments above the heart of downtown. “We’d love to see the lights go on uptown,” Crawford said.

Jefferson County’s Frank Woolworth built an empire of five-and-dime stores. In the 1940s, the chain put up this landmark store (in an undated photo on the left) at Fayette and South Salina streets in Syracuse. It became a popular place to grab a bite at the lunch counter or do some shopping. Rite Aid bought the building in 1979 and covered up the clock and much of the facade. At right is the Rite Aid building as it appears today.

Calpeter remembers when Woolworth’s was closed with shoppers. She remembers with Crawford & Strmns, when her company was studying the landmark. She said the empty upper floors offer a well-preserved and spacious “opportunity for development.”

In what could be a late-summer day, shoppers stroll past Woolworth’s, a local department store, across the street from Woolworth’s.

At Syracuse landmark,

Turning back time

“If truly was a gorgeous downtown.”

— Patricia Calpeter, 75, of Salina, who worked as a clerk at the downtown landmark when she was a student at North Syracuse High School.

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