

Jersey State of Mind



Left, faded signs depicting various products are visible on the side of this building at Springfield Avenue and South 11th Street in Newark. Below, a ghost sign in Irvington advertises 7-Up.

PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER BARTH

Shadowland

**Signs of yesteryear,
painted on buildings, are fading fast**

By Peter Genovese
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

The words — ghostly, evanescent, the stuff of fleeting memories and barely remembered dreams — cover the entire wall of a vacant building behind the NJ Transit Broadway terminal in downtown Paterson.

The message, what can be made out of it, anyway, reads:

*Orpheum
Classy and Refined Burlesque
Matinee Daily
Ladies Day Every Day
Change of Attraction Every Monday*

"There were a number of vaudeville houses in Paterson — the Orpheum, the Majestic (and others)," recalled Ed Smyk, Passaic County's official historian. "Before movie houses came along, that was the most popular form of entertainment."

The Orpheum lives on most memorably in the faded wall sign, one of the scores of such signs in Paterson, Newark, Irvington, Trenton, Plainfield and other New Jersey downtowns.

The signs, known as "ghost signs" because of their faded nature, cling desperately to life on buildings throughout the state and nation. There have been few initiatives to save ghost signs — few are repainted, and if the building is torn down, the sign goes with it — although photographers and artists have documented them in books and exhibits.

One of those photographers is Frank Jump, who saw parallels between his battle with AIDS and the ghost signs.

"I saw the signs more as survivors, as opposed to things that had died," said Jump, founder of the Fading Ad Campaign. "The campaign has become a metaphor for survival for me since, like myself, many of these ads have long outlived their expected life span."

Jump was diagnosed HIV-positive in 1986, when he was 26. In 1997, he returned to college to finish work for a bachelor's degree in music, theater and film. One day, he saw the splendid Omega Oil sign on the side of a building on W. 147th Street in Harlem. The sign reads:

*Omega Oil
For Stiff Joints
For Sore Muscles
For Sun Burn
For Weak Backs*

"As soon as I saw the sign, I knew this was going to

PLEASE SEE SIGNS, PAGE 35

