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A historical study of the relation of theatre and broadcasting to land use in midtown Manhattan in the years 1925 through 1928. (Volumes I and II)

Zvonchenko, Walter, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1987

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A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE RELATION OF THEATRE AND BROADCASTING TO LAND USE IN MIDTOWN MANHATTAN IN THE YEARS 1925 THROUGH 1928

by

WALTER ZVONCHENKO

Volume I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The City University of New York

1987

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE RELATION OF THEATER AND BROADCASTING TO LAND USE IN MIDTOWN MANHATTAN IN THE YEARS 1925 THROUGH 1928

by

Walter Zvonchenko

Adviser: Professor Margaret Mary Knapp

The purpose of this study is to trace the history of the relationship between major theatrical organizations and land use in midtown Manhattan in the years 1925 through 1928. The term theater or variants thereon is used to include theater proper, motion pictures, music, and broadcasting. The study attempts to delineate the role played in theatrical land development by factors such as transportation facilities, nontheatrical real estate firms and financial organizations. The years 1925 through 1928 were chosen for study because they were a period of particularly dynamic growth in the theatrical industry, including growth in its need for various kinds of realty developments. These included theaters, broadcasting studios, production or rehearsal spaces, and office space.

The geographical area covered by the study is

midtown Manhattan from 34th to 63rd Streets. It was selected because it was the area within which most major theatrical facilities in New York City, including new theatrical developments, were located, and was the projected site for many major theatrical projects which were not built.

The study proceeds primarily in chronological sequence, and then, within each major time segment, geographically from south to north, exceptions being made when a specific event affects an area larger than a single parcel or block, or when necessary to clarify a point.

PREFACE

This study stems from my interest in theatrical and broadcasting production and operation seen as an integral part of its larger environmental setting, i.e., the manner in which production and operation are affected by specific location and vice-versa. The study is concerned with trying to identify the links between specific sites and specific production and operational incidents, and with trying to identify the development of trends in the locational movement of production and operation in midtown Manhattan from 1925 to 1928 inclusive.

The study attempts to identify the location of major theater and broadcasting facilities in the period 1925 through 1928, and tries to suggest the complex of relationships which led to the use of a given location. It takes into account also those projects which were planned, reported or rumored for preparation for specific sites, but which never had result in actual development, in order to examine further locational trends and factors influencing those trends.

In attempting those identifications, the study is in part a survey of theatrical and broadcasting land use in the period, and it is hoped that the work here will be suggestive of avenues of approach for any future analyses of the question of the relationship between performing arts and location.

The questions of paramount concern to me have been:

1. where a specific activity, organization or building having to do with theater or broadcasting was located, or was intended to be located.

2. why these locations were chosen or considered.

3. the nature of the relation between theater or broadcasting production and location.

The study is an effort to grasp the pattern of locational movement of theater and broadcasting organizations in the subject time and place, and to see the pattern of the relationship between these organizations and real estate interests. The study attempts to identify, describe and analyze the circumstances having to do with the locational decisions within its scope, and the relation between the locational decision and the general mode of theatrical or communications production of the organization in question.

The study examines the hypothesis that there was a reciprocal influence exerted between theater and communications organizations and real estate interests in

the time and place of concern. The area defined in this study as midtown Manhattan is Manhattan from 34th to 63rd Streets, and between the Hudson and East Rivers. This area was chosen because it appeared to contain the locations of the primary activities of most of the theater and broadcasting organizations in New York City at the time of concern, and was the area of Manhattan within which most of the components of these organizations either moved or considered moving.

This section of Manhattan also contained the area which was developing in the 1920s as the rival and perhaps successor in overall importance to the financial and commercial center in lower Manhattan, and which came to be, in the later 1920s, the undisputed center for broadcasting and all other aspects of the communications industry, in addition to its older role as center of the worlds of theater and music in New York City. The study attempts to identify the relation between theater and broadcasting organizations and the general commercial development of midtown Manhattan, and tries to suggest the manner in which the worlds of theater and broadcasting were an integral part of this development.

The year 1925 was chosen to begin the basic study because it was a year in which several organizations announced, or made substantial progress toward, decisions which would or could have affected the locational concerns in the area of study in a significant way. This was true

both of organizations in the theatrical industry, and of other organizations which were involved with considerations of land use.

The year 1928 was chosen as a closing point because developments occurred which were important climactic points for the events considered in this study, most importantly, the commitment made by the Rockefeller interests in September 1928 to the project which ultimately became Rockefeller Center; and the organization at very nearly the same time of Radio-Keith-Orpheum, which combined theater and communications interests in a major new structure, and which, a little more than a year later, would be involved in an agreement committing it to tenancy in Rockefeller Center, the biggest land development of the period in midtown Manhattan.

I have chosen to end the study with events that took place prior to the onset of the Great Depression, and to confine it to a time within which general economic conditions favored the broad developmental processes with which the study essentially is concerned.

The methodology for this study has been a matter of particular concern because of the complex set of interrelationships which are at its base, and because of the difficulties encountered in the attempt to effect a proper balance of the major elements.

The elements have been:

1. location.

2. locational trends.

3. production.

4. organization.

5. chronology.

Because the location of theater and broadcasting organizations is the paramount consideration, it was decided to pursue the study essentially from a locational standpoint so that events are seen as cohering primarily around a given location and only secondarily around questions of production and organization. After much experimentation, it was decided that introduction of the locational element on an annual basis, permitting a survey of location developments in a year-to-year manner, would help to simplify a very complex battery of circumstances.

But location is a complex variable in itself. It has the advantage, when used as the primary, or ruling, component of a scheme, of providing an overall framework which can be very clear if a proper progression of locational focus for the study can be contrived. For purposes of this study, the simplest and most effective arrangement seemed to be examination of location according to a street-by-street pattern whenever possible. This has permitted consideration both of specific, small sites, and also of the larger contiguous areas of which the smaller sites are part, in order to see more clearly the relation between locational impact on the smaller site and concomitant impact on the larger area.

This study has moved primarily in a south to north pattern, a pattern which has the advantage of following the general trend of movement of theatrical and broadcasting activities in New York City. Within the south/north movement, side streets have been surveyed west to east. Strict adherence to progression based on street addresses in a given block sometimes has been set aside in favor of a pattern which places together like events occurring in that block. Similarly and very importantly, strict adherence to the general movement west to east within a larger south to north pattern on occasion has been set aside when a larger piece of land such as the Rockefeller Center area has been the subject of immediate focus, or when a sequence of events arises which ties together a locational element which is larger than a block, and requires a unity of attention the lack of which would render harm to the very locational basis and concern of the study.

The normal sequence has been broken when it has appeared to me to be necessary to clarify a given point, but such instances have been kept to a minimum so as to insure greater overall clarity of presentation, and to afford the reader easy reference from area to area when once the plan, a simple one, has been understood.

The primary sources of information for the study have been published land records; the theatrical trade paper, Variety; and the Otto Kahn and Owen D. Young

collections. A substantial amount of the time taken in preparation for this study has been used in analyzing land records against the reports and suggestions found through a very close reading of the pertinent issues of Variety from 1925 to 1928.

I want to thank Mary Ann Jensen and her staff at the William Seymour Theater Collection at Princeton University for their exceptional courtesy and assistance. Mr. and Mrs. Everett Case were most kind and generous in opening both their home and the Owen D. Young Papers to me, and in affording me an unusually pleasant and informative period of research.

The staff of the interlibrary loan office of the New York Public Library made my labors much easier, as did Christopher Wright of the Loan Division of the Library of Congress. Sam Brylawski and Pat Sheehan of the Motion Picture and Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress offered generous assistance, and the staffs of the Newspaper Division and the Microform Reading Room in the Library of Congress were very considerate and helpful.

I owe thanks also to the Congressional documents section of the National Archive in Washington for assistance in obtaining materials and in guiding me through the Archive facilities.

Stanley A. Waren, former Executive Officer of the Ph.D. Program in Theatre at the Graduate School of the

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Finally, my greatest debt of thanks is to Regina Krzemienski Zvonchenko and to Victor Peter Dyni, without whom there would have been nothing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1920s, midtown Manhattan has been the national center for the communications industry, encompassing the fields of advertising, publishing and broadcasting. Earlier, as the 1920s began, theater, motion pictures and music activities already were centered in midtown, and these, together with the communications industry, formed a complex which has done much to make midtown the cultural center which it continues to be.

The period of the most significant phase of growth of this complex coincided with, and was part, of a marked increase in real estate activity in midtown in the 1920s. This increase was influenced by a multiplicity of factors, particularly important among which were the general economic prosperity in the nation following the recession of the early 1920s, and the establishment in midtown Manhattan of an especially complex portion of the city's subway public transportation network.

As a result of the vigorous real estate activity and the growth and expansion of industries which were

housed in the area, midtown Manhattan came to rival the financial district in lower Manhattan as the city's--and the nation's--commercial capital. A considerable amount of land development space was given over to the various areas of communications and to theater, music and motion pictures. It is the relationship between the real estate activity in midtown Manhattan primarily in the period 1925 through 1928 and the fields of theater, music, motion pictures, and broadcasting, hereafter collectively referred to as the theatrical industry for the sake of brevity, which is the concern of this study.

The first decades of the twentieth century were a time of enormous expansion of the theater industry, an expansion which saw the industry grow from a small factor in economic life in New York City to become one of the largest sectors in the nation's economy by the mid-1920s. Particularly significant was the growth of the motion picture field which, in the 1920s, became one of the most important factors in the national commercial world. And it was in the early 1920s that the broadcasting world was beginning to a major economic factor in its own right.

At the turn of the twentieth century, although New York City was, far and away, the most important theatrical center in the United States, theater was a relatively minor business activity and of little concern to the general financial and corporate world which was centered then, to a greater extent than is true today, in lower

Manhattan. The theater world was controlled by theater people whose concerns almost exclusively were with the management and production of theatrical presentations, and with the administration of theater buildings. The theater building usually consisted almost entirely of space given over to production concerns--the auditorium, stage and public spaces, and offices for management and production staff. Theatrical real estate was needed for theatrical purposes, and was not acquired for general investment purposes, to stimulate a nontheatrical interest, or to achieve a nontheatrical end. Nor were theatrical affairs a significant factor in general land use and realty concerns in New York City.

But by the end of the 1920s, a considerable portion of the theatrical industry was part of enormous corporations, and these corporations seemed to be on the verge of combining into one or two monoliths of staggering size and power. During the 1920s, the land requirements in midtown Manhattan of these corporations had made real estate activity an important aspect of their concerns. Some of these corporations had sizable real estate offices, and, in addition, a number of nontheatrical realtors and land developers began to work with the theatrical industry in efforts to meet its need for various kind of facilities, including theaters, studios and office and production space.

The substantial increase in demand for land for

new facilities for the growing theatrical industry and the increased flow of people accruing from theater attendance and the operation of new offices and spaces used by the theatrical industry began to make theater-related activities attractive to nontheatrical land developers and realtors.

As is no less true today, real estate activity in Manhattan in the early decades of the twentieth century was a major business. As the theater-related industry grew to vast proportions and as its land use requirements in Manhattan grew with it, the relation between the theater and broadcasting industries and the real estate industry grew also, and many of the large financial and corporate forces which had an interest in the real estate industry became involved in theater and broadcasting related activities. Developers saw income potential in theater and broadcasting development itself, and saw theaters as vehicles to attract public attention to developments which might not be entirely theatrical in nature.

The relation between the growing theatrical industry and the real estate industry involved interplay with a number of factors. As the industry grew, the major corporate structures controlling it expanded also, and this expansion required increasing sums of money. Even before World War I, at least one of the major banking houses in New York City, Kuhn, Loeb, reportedly became

involved with motion pictures.[1] Other banks and nontheatrical organizations followed, and by the late 1920s, there were significant interrelationships among many of the major theatrical and corporate and financial offices in New York City.

The real estate transactions undertaken by the theater and broadcasting industries, often supported by the financial advice and assistance of major banking houses, grew larger and more complex. One result of these transactions was the creation of great chains of motion picture theaters which spread across the country in the 1920s. These chains had as their primary showcase theaters the so-called "flagship," or premiere theaters in midtown Manhattan, some of which became important locational landmarks helping to give identity and form to their neighborhoods.

Transportation concerns played a large role in the direction of expansion of theatrical organizations long before the time of the most intense growth period. The theaters in the Times Square area were, and are, close to a number of the city's subway lines, and the size of the audience population brought into midtown by way of the subway system was a clear indication of the interrelationship between theater, real estate and transportation.

Development of major theaters in midtown Manhattan began to parallel the development of the subway

lines from the earliest years of the history of the first realized subway line (there were some earlier attempts in Manhattan to build subway lines which failed), the Interborough Rapid Transit which opened in 1904. It ran from lower Manhattan under Fourth Avenue to the Grand Central Station area, west under 42nd Street to Broadway, then north along Broadway to 145th Street. Ground for the line was broken in 1900.

The most important management and production firm in legitimate and musical comedy theater at the turn of the century was run by Abraham L. Erlanger and Marc Klaw, who opened their flagship theater, the New Amsterdam Theater, on October 26, 1903 at 214 West 42nd Street, very near a station at the corner of 42nd Street and Broadway for the new subway line which would open almost exactly a year later. Klaw and Erlanger opened their Liberty Theater which, like the New Amsterdam, was a major musical comedy house, at 234 West 42nd Street on October 4, 1904, the month of the opening of the subway line.

The New Amsterdam and the Hippodrome may have been the best known among the theaters built in midtown Manhattan in the first years of the twentieth century. The Hippodrome opened on April 12, 1905 on the east side of Sixth Avenue between 43rd and 44th Streets, and was just above the midway points between the Grand Central Station and the Broadway stations of 42nd Street portion of the new subway line. It had the largest seating

capacity of any theater in New York City at the time it opened. In 1905, there were only four theaters on and just off Times Square--the Criterion, New York, Hudson, and Lyceum--while 42nd Street appeared to be developing as the primary new theatrical artery. The location of the subway line route and the growth of 42nd Street may have encouraged theatrical developers to feel that a broader stretch of 42nd Street than the block between Seventh and Eighth Avenues was destined to accommodate theaters. But in fact, the Hippodrome was relatively isolated, having been built in a location which never saw construction of another theater nearer to it than those built in the Forties between Sixth Avenue and Broadway.

In 1911, there were no theaters, apart from Carnegie Hall and the Majestic on Columbus Circle, located on or near Broadway between Times Square and Columbus Circle, but the Shubert brothers chose the east side of Broadway between 50th and 51st Streets as the site for their Winter Garden Theater which opened in March 1911. The site of the theater was located directly next to the entrance to the 50th Street subway station for the IRT subway line, and the theater soon became popular as the home of the Passing Show revue series, the Shuberts' response to Florenz Ziegfeld's increasingly prestigious Follies series.

Crawford Livingston and Felix E. Kahn opened the Rialto Theater at the corner of 42nd Street and Broadway

very near a subway station, and then built the Rivoli just below the Winter Garden and the subway station at 50th Street and Broadway. The Rivoli was opened on December 28, 1917, and for a brief period, with the Rialto and Strand, opened in 1914, was one of the three major theaters in the city built to be motion picture theaters.

In 1919, Famous Players-Lasky, later Paramount, and on the way to becoming one of the most prominent motion picture organizations in the country, bought the Rivoli. This entry into theater ownership in New York City was the beginning of a major program of land development which culminated in the creation of the Paramount Theater chain. Famous Players-Lasky received assistance for its expansion program from its investment banking house, Kuhn, Loeb, which thereafter was connected with Famous Players-Lasky for many years. This interrelationship in the affairs of Famous Players-Lasky of financial organizations, growing corporate power, the real estate industry, the public transportation systems, and stage and film presentation exemplified the general trend seen in the years immediately following World War I in the theater industry toward levels of organizational complexities unheard of prior to 1900.

The growth of the subway system and the development of major railway terminals in midtown Manhattan had a broad impact on general land development and locational considerations as well as on theatrical

real estate activities. Until 1918, the IRT subway line which had opened in 1904 was, with the trans-Hudson River tubes, the only subway line in Manhattan. The development of the first IRT line coincided with other than theatrical land developments. In 1902, Altman's became the first major department store to locate on Fifth Avenue in the Thirties, moving to the corner of 34th Street and Fifth Avenue a short time before the opening of the IRT subway station at 33rd Street and Fourth Avenue not far distant. It was shortly after 1904 that Fifth Avenue in the Thirties and as far as 42nd Street became a major retail center, along a line that paralleled the new subway route. The power of the public transportation routes to influence development seemed strong indeed.

In 1910, Pennsylvania Station was opened at 33rd Street and Seventh Avenue, bringing a new transportation nodal point to the west side with the extension of the Pennsylvania Railroad's track system under the Hudson into New York City. But significant development of the area did not follow until the Seventh Avenue IRT subway line was opened from Chambers Street to Times Square in 1918. A large part of the development of the west Thirties after that date was the expansion of the garment center, and the strength of that expansion became a factor which helped to push the theater district northward into Times Square and away from the old "Great White Way" which was Broadway in the Thirties.

In 1913, a new Grand Central Station was opened, and its development, combined with the creation of Park Avenue in the later 1910s over what had been the exposed New York Central railroad yards north of Grand Central Station, and the opening of the Lexington Avenue subway line northward from Grand Central Station in 1918, led, after the recession of the early 1920s, to a massive building expansion around the transportation connections. A further positive influence for development along East 42nd Street was the removal in 1924 of the spur of the elevated train system from Third Avenue to Grand Central Station.

The building expansion that followed these developments on the east side and on the west side of Fifth Avenue included construction of many of the structures which came to house the major broadcasting organizations.

In the years 1918 through 1920, the Brooklyn and Manhattan Transit Company opened sections of a line which ran through midtown. Among the subway stations serving the line were those located at 42nd Street and Broadway, 49th Street and Seventh Avenue, 57th Street and Seventh Avenue, and 59th Street and Lexington Avenue.

In the early 1920s, preliminary plans were made for the new Independent subway system which would have main lines in midtown Manhattan running under Eighth and Sixth Avenues, and under 53rd Street from the Eighth and

Sixth Avenue lines to the East River where it was to continue to Queens. When the Independent system would be completed, it would constitute, together with the older lines, a network especially dense in midtown from 42nd to 59th Streets. The overall system would make midtown an area very well served through public transportation, and would help to render attractive for development purposes a large quantity of real estate in the area.

All of these transportation developments were to have a profound impact on locational considerations for theatrical facilities in midtown. As the twentieth century progressed, larger audiences were at hand to attend performances of various kinds, and the organizations which produced and controlled presentation of the performances were eager to locate their theaters in the areas and on the sites most likely to attract the public and to be convenient to it.

As the 1920s progressed, interest in large scale land development in Manhattan increased. Ever larger office buildings and other kinds of buildings were being planned and executed, and some of these came to house organizations in broadcasting. The development of the broadcasting industry in midtown Manhattan was due in large part to the existence in midtown of the musical and theatrical centers. These furnished the talent used by radio as it began to become a prominent entertainment form. It was logical and convenient for the broadcasting

studios to be near the talent source, and, if the studios were going to be so located, might it not be wise to locate the executive offices in the same building?

As late as 1926, every important aspect of the radio industry was located on Broadway just above or below City Hall, with the exception of facilities which the radio group (a term used often to identify General Electric, Westinghouse and the Radio Corporation of America) had installed in Aeolian Hall at 33 West 42nd Street and in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel at Fifth Avenue and 34th Street. But, within two years time, as network radio became big business, virtually every operation of primary importance in the radio industry was in midtown Manhattan. As the broadcasting and general entertainment industry became one of the most prominent factors in the American economy, its needs for office space and for other facilities had a significant impact on development in the midtown area. It began to be very attractive to real estate operators and land developers as they began to see theaters and their stage policies as attractions for promotion of larger real estate developments, or as aids to betterment of a given area.

On the other hand, some large organizations which were essentially theatrical in nature began to move in the direction of fostering land use projects which were not wholly devoted to theatrical concerns.

But a primary concern to all such organizations,

whether directly or tangentially involved in the theater, was the degree to which their particular location would be successful, either from the point of view of box office success, or success in land development. A result of this concern was rigorous efforts to promote specific locations, and an ensuing competition for land, office tenants, theaters, and effective theatrical personnel and attractions. Stage policies and theater personnel seen as particularly prestigious and/or successful began to be sought after by theater operators, as might be expected, but also by others such as the Hearst group who wanted attractive tenants in land developments.

Theater production was undergoing a marked change in the 1920s under the stress of the combined impact of economic and technological developments. Out of all of this change emerged the popularity of variety forms which were, at base, combinations of vaudeville and revue. These were popular both on the stages of legitimate theaters as evenings of entertainment in themselves, and also on the stages of the large first-run motion picture theaters in the Times Square area such as the Roxy, Paramount and Capitol Theaters, where such entertainments were combined with motion picture presentation.

Perhaps the most famous names in the field of variety theater production were Florenz Ziegfeld and S. L. Rothafel, popularly known as "Roxy," both of whom produced spectacular stage presentations, and whose names were

known to the general public. It was these two men in particular who were especially sought after to lend their names and talents to major land development projects which were connected with the theater. Spectacle was capable of being produced in the very large theater which film presentation was making more and more common, and which was of interest to the theater promoter because of the income to be gained from a very large capacity, especially if the nature of the production allowed it to be seen several times daily as were film/stage presentations.

Perhaps it was Rothafel more than any other person who typified a movement toward a kind of entertainment which included advanced dance and music components, and which placed these in the context of large-scale stage production for a vast audience which might be interested in seeing new departures in performing arts. In other words, Rothafel's stage policies suggested a movement toward appealling to a mass audience with a "class" entertainment, which usually included ballet and often included operatic excerpts.

Even at the time with which this study begins, 1925, vaudeville, which had been the major source of American entertainment prior to World War I, was in marked decline, perhaps primarily as the result of the growth of the motion picture industry which afforded a more inexpensive means of mass entertainment. Its important stage personalities soon would be at least as well

employed in radio or sound motion pictures, and lesser stage attractions seemed no longer to attract audiences. And, as the number of vaudeville houses decreased and the number of larger motion picture theaters with stage presentations grew, the primary Times Square motion picture houses became the dominant homes of the remaining variety stage entertainment on a major scale.

The tendency toward use of large motion picture theaters and their stage productions was fostered by the realtors and theater operators who saw value in maintaining the importance of their so-called flagship motion picture theaters as centers of mass entertainment in order to be able to tour throughout the country a motion picture which would be advertised as having had success at the Paramount or Strand or Roxy theater in the Times Square area of Manhattan. This stress on the importance of Times Square would appear to have worked its effect in achieving the long-lived image of Times Square as theater center, absolutely superseding 42nd Street which had become the center in the first decade of the twentieth century.

There are reasons, sometimes more, sometimes less fully rational, why a given site is found attractive, but basic to land use is that some sites are more or less interesting and valuable for different kinds of undertakings. The nature of the theater insists that producers take an interest in locational considerations,

but, as this study suggests, the producer will by no means always be successful at choosing a site which will bring an audience into his or her theater.

During the 1920s, the center of gravity of the theatrical center was moving slowly northward. On the eve of 1925, there still was a fair amount of major theatrical activity along and just off Broadway between 34th and 42nd Streets. There were twelve major theaters in the area, all of which still were standing at the end of 1928, although there were various reports during the course of the later 1920s that a few of them would be demolished to make way for office structures. The largest of these theaters after the Metropolitan Opera House and the Manhattan Opera House was the Broadway on the south side of 41st Street between Broadway and Seventh Avenue, and it did close after the midnight show on New Year's morning, 1929, and was demolished. The Casino and the Knickerbocker followed soon after.

Especially during the course of the later 1920s, the area below West 42nd Street experienced a marked expansion of activities connected to the garment center which had been firmly established in the earlier 1920s in the west Thirties, but the center's growth was only just beginning to affect theatrical activity in the Thirties at the end of 1924.

In 1924, 42nd Street still was a major artery for the theater world, but Times Square already was

superseding it at the time as the primary center for theatrical activity in New York City. The Times Square and Apollo Theaters, opening in September and November, 1920, respectively, were the last theaters to be built on 42nd Street prior to 1960. There were projects reported under consideration for 42nd Street during the later 1920s, but none of these was realized. By the end of 1924, a great many theaters already had been built in the immediate Times Square area, two of which, the Criterion and the New York (as it was called in 1924), having opened only two years after the oldest of the 42nd Street theaters, the American. But while there were no theater building activities along 42nd Street in the 1920s after the opening of the Apollo and the Times Square, theaters in the Times Square vicinity continued to grow in number after 1924, the eleven theaters opening between 1925 and 1928 inclusive and between 43rd and 48th Streets strengthening considerably the degree of theatrical concentration in the area.

And in the area above Times Square between 49th and 63rd Streets, eight theaters were opened between 1925 and 1928 inclusive, and two theaters in that section opened very near the end of 1924. In addition, the only major theaters to be opened in midtown between 1929 and the time of construction of Lincoln Center were located in the area between 49th and 63rd Streets. These were five in number, which, added to the eight built between 1924

and 1928 in the section, suggests a continuation of the pattern of northward movement of major theatrical activity in New York City. The reasons for these and other locational trends in the theatrical industry were many and complex, becoming especially so in the course of the hectic economic history which characterized the 1920s.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1] Robert T. Swaine, The Cravath Firm and Its Predecessors 1819-1948, vol 2: The Cravath Firm since 1906 (New York: Privately printed at Ad Press, 1948), pp. 85-86.

CHAPTER II

THE BACKGROUND TO THE PERIOD 1925-1928

By 1925, the recession of the early 1920s had ended; plans for the new Independent Eighth Avenue subway line had been announced; motion pictures had become a major industry; and radio broadcasting was beginning its period of great expansion. All of these factors were to play major roles in the development in midtown Manhattan in the later 1920s of the nation's foremost communications center, a center which land developers would nurture very assiduously. Land demand for new theaters, studios and related building complexes was growing, and financial institutions were underwriting more and larger issues of securities for use for expansion of theater concerns.

The year 1925 by no means signalled a beginning of these kinds of activities, but was a time when the degree of intensity increased markedly. The influences which governed locational concerns had been at work earlier. The involvement of nontheatrical people with the theater was not new in 1925. Some of the names and organizations

which figured prominently in questions of theatrical location in the period 1925 through 1928 were similarly involved in years immediately precedent. The nature of the involvements and the kinds of problems which they manifest are part of trends which continue and are magnified in the later 1920s.

In the later 1920s, one of the most significant theatrical landholders was Famous Players-Lasky, which eventually became known as Paramount. Famous Players-Lasky appears to have become a prominent land owner and lessee in midtown Manhattan in 1919, and to have received financial counselling in the matter from the investment banking firm of Kuhn, Loeb, of which Otto Kahn was senior partner. Kuhn, Loeb, through Kahn, had been interested in the motion picture industry at least as far back as 1912 when Kahn looked into the Mutual Film Corporation. Kuhn, Loeb appears to have had a substantial involvement in the affairs of Famous Players-Lasky, an involvement which seems to have been the first instance in which a major financial concern took so great an interest in the affairs of a motion picture organization.

40th Street

Famous Players-Lasky was a growing organization in the 1910s and 1920s. On July 2, 1919, it acquired control of Charles Frohman, Inc., the theatrical producing company which controlled the Empire Theater on the east

side of Broadway just below 40th Street, and the Lyceum Theater on 45th Street a short distance east of Times Square. The Frohman organization had under constract such stage personalities as Maude Adams, William Gillette, Ethel Barrymore, and Otis Skinner. Famous Players-Lasky acquired as part of Charles Frohman, Inc. an important supply of film scripts, and there was talk about a possible arrangement whereby Frohman scripts would be seen on Famous Players-Lasky screens, and Famous Players-Lasky screen material would be translated into Frohman stage presentations. Charles Frohman, Inc. was to be maintained as a separate entity of which Adolph Zukor, head of Famous Players-Lasky, would be President.[1] But this acquisition was part of a sequence of events in 1919 which resulted in the accumulation by Famous Players-Lasky of a considerable amount of property immediately on and just removed from Times Square, and was an important sign of interest and faith in the worth of the area as a theatrical center.

43rd Street

In the same year, Zukor met Robert Simon, who became a well known realtor, and who engineered the purchase in 1919 of the Putnam Building and Westover Court on the west side of Broadway between 43rd and 44th Streets for Famous Players-Lasky. Famous Players-Lasky held the property for a few years before deciding to move ahead with plans for construction of a major new film theater

and office building for the site. During the course of the postwar economic difficulties, and in the face of opposition and urgent appeals from some members of the board of Famous Players-Lasky who wanted to dispose of the property, Zukor is said to have insisted on holding it, and in this, he had the support of Otto H. Kahn. Zukor said at one point that Kahn encouraged him and agreed with him about the future of Times Square.[2]

Kuhn, Loeb came to acquire considerable influence in the affairs of Famous Players-Lasky, to the extent that, approximately at the time when plans were being made for the new Paramount building and theater, Kuhn, Loeb appointed H. D. H. Connick of their firm chairman of Famous Players-Lasky Finance Committee so that he might report on the conduct of the firm. When word spread that Kuhn, Loeb had insisted that Connick be placed on the Famous Players-Lasky payroll, Adolph Zukor stated that Kuhn, Loeb had not made such a request, but that he had engaged Connick because he had been so impressed with his abilities when Zukor met him at Kuhn, Loeb's offices. There also were four other Kuhn, Loeb representatives on the board of Famous Players-Lasky.[3]

During the course of the 1920s, the power of the major banking concerns in Manhattan in the affairs of the theater and film concerns grew steadily as these firms themselves reached toward ever greater growth and need for ever larger capital outlays. The matter of the plan for

the construction of the new Paramount Theater and office building is an example of the close relation between one large film firm, Famous Players-Lasky, and the financial community. The Paramount Theater building was reported originally to have been intended for construction in 1923. According to one report, the structure was to have included two smaller theaters rather than the single large theater which eventually was built.[4] There is a listing in a 1922 compilation of building projects for a sixteen-story theater and store for 1485-1491 Broadway, architects designated as "W. + Geo. L. Rapp."[5] While the building eventually constructed was much taller, the address is part of the address for the Paramount Theater and Building built in 1925 and 1926, and the Rapp firm was the architect used at least for the theater portion of the project. At the earlier point, an effort was made to finance the project through placement of a $4,000,000 bond issue, but only $2,000,000 was realized. Famous Players-Lasky then structured a new financing plan and cleared away its outstanding debts by December 31, 1924, after which it was able to raise the funds necessary for the new building.[6]

44th Street

Another major real estate parcel acquired by Famous Players-Lasky interests very shortly after it purchased the projected Paramount site was 1514-1526

Broadway, title to which passed to the Seneca Holding Corporation, controlled by Famous Players-Lasky, on January 20, 1920.[7] The parcel was on the east side of Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets diagonally across Times Square from the site which later contained the Paramount Theater and included the New York and Criterion Theaters, built by Oscar Hammerstein and opened in 1895 as the first theaters on what then was called Long Acre Square.

In 1920, the New York Theater was under the management of Marcus Loew, founder and head of the Loew theater chain. Loew's affairs long were involved with those of Adolph Zukor, head of Famous Players-Lasky. The New York was the chief Loew theater in 1920, but the purchase of the site by Famous Players-Lasky from Klaw and Erlanger was reported to have caused Loew to plan and build the State Theater across the street at the northeast corner of 45th Street and Broadway and to relegate the New York to a secondary position because Loew thought that Famous Players-Lasky intended to build a major new theater on the New York/Criterion site.[8]

The Criterion Theater became the third legitimate theater to be acquired by Famous Players-Lasky after the Empire and Lyceum, acquired with Charles Frohman, Inc. The Criterion was used both for film and for legitimate production and helped place Famous Players-Lasky in competition with the established large legitimate theater

organizations, the Shubert and the Klaw and Erlanger concerns.

45th Street

Loew's State, with approximately 3,000 seats, opened in November 1921 with a policy of vaudeville and film, the policy that was the basis for the successful Loew theater chain. It was located within two blocks of the Keith-Albee flagship Palace Theater which was on the east side of Broadway just below 47th Street, and, as the Loew chain increased in size and power, the State, which began as a well-located family or popular vaudeville house featuring lesser-known acts, slowly moved into the area hitherto dominated by the Palace and Keith-Albee, the area of "Big Time," or major name vaudeville, the competition between the two theaters helping to make of Times Square the most vital theatrical center in the city.

Otto Kahn of Kuhn, Loeb was connected with a number of theater projects over the course of the early decades of the twentieth century. This involvement was sometimes a reflection of his abiding concern with the fostering of cultural life in New York City; and at other times was more a function of relationship with Famous Players-Lasky.

In 1923, he spoke about a major theater project which was said to be planned for some point between 42nd and 57th Streets, as near to Times Square as possible. On

January 28, 1923, he announced plans for a new theater which would be devoted to the encouragement of American opera, drama and music, as well as to introducing to New York foreign productions which might not appeal to other producers. The announcement was made at a dinner held at New York's Colony Club in honor of the Moscow Art Theater and the Chauve Souris players which were being presented in New York by Morris Gest, who was to build the new theater, apparently with just such foreign attractions in mind. The theater was to be large and plain. Gest stated that he hoped to have the theater completed for use in November 1923 and that it would be located, as mentioned above, somewhere between 42nd and 57th Streets, as near to Times Square as possible. Gest said that the theater building probably would be approximately 150 feet by 200 feet, that the theater would have a seating capacity of 2,200 and that the project also would include an elaborate studio for rehearsals and preliminary tryouts and for use as a small theater for "amateur nights" and the presentation of promising novelties at which private audience reaction would be studied.[9]

A few months later, however, Gest announced that the project had been abandoned. He said that he had received $250,000 from a patron of the arts and that a real estate company had arranged a loan of $1,000,000 to cover construction costs prior to deciding to halt all work on the matter.[10]

The project was one of many demonstrations over the years of Kahn's interest in theaters which would present a variety of kinds of fare, but above all, fare of an operatic nature. The announcement of Gest's project had been preceded by rumors that Kahn, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera, had decided that there ought to be more opera in New York to meet demand. The Metropolitan Opera season was sold out and thousands were being turned away, suggesting to Kahn the need for a second opera company. Kahn had said in response to questions on the matter that "there was something of the kind in contemplation but it is rather vague to discuss at present."[11] By 1925, Kahn was seriously investigating sites for another new theater, a projected new home for the Metropolitan Opera.

In 1924, a new force was entering the business of the development of legitimate playhouses. The Chanin brothers were completing their first playhouse, Chanin's 46th Street Theater, beginning with it a short, but active, career in theater development which added five legitimate playhouses to the Times Square area in the period 1925 to 1927, helping to strengthen the position of Times Square as theatrical center. Three of these theaters were very near an entrance to a station of the announced Eighth Avenue subway line, and the others were not far from subway stations. The Chanins also were involved in the later 1920s in the realization of the Roxy

Theater, the largest theater project built in the period under study.

47th Street

The era of the large motion picture theater was begun in New York in midtown Manhattan in 1914 with the opening the Strand Theater on Times Square. The Strand was the first of the larger theaters to be opened as a film theater, and was one of the three largest theaters opened on Broadway as a film and stage show house prior to 1925. The Strand was on the west side of Broadway between 47th and 48th Streets, and was built by Moe and Mitchell Mark. The theater seated approximately 2,900 and opened for the first time to an invited audience on April 11, 1914.

The Strand was located between two nearby subway stations of the IRT line: the station at the corner of 42nd Street and Broadway, and the station at the corner of 50th Street and Broadway. The theater building was not especially tall, but did include rental office space, the structure extending extending 155 feet on Broadway, and 277 feet on 47th Street. The stage presentations for the theater were under the direction of Samuel L. Rothapfel, as his name then was spelled, and consisted primarily of music entertainments, with little suggestion of the scenic spectacle and balletic and dance emphasis that were to characterize his presentations at the Capitol and Roxy

Theaters in later years. But the quality of his work was such that his reputation and popularity continued to grow.[12]

The early plans for the Strand were uncertain. In October 1913, Moe and Mitchell Mark stated that the Metropolitan Opera would become the tenant for the theater, a statement denied vigorously by Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the general manager for the Opera.[13]

By the time the Strand was opened, the Palace, Gaiety, Criterion, New York, Globe and Winter Garden Theaters were operating with entrances on Times Square and/or Broadway, while an increasing number of theaters were occupying sites on the side streets just off Times Square, securing for Times Square a position as early as 1914 as rival, if not equal, in degree of theatrical activity to 42nd Street and to Broadway in the area between Herald Square and Times Square. The Strand proved to be a very successful operation, and through its location in an anchoring position at the north end of Times Square, suggested the possibility and advisability of new theatrical construction farther north.

49th Street

A very short distance above the Strand, Crawford Livingston and Felix E. Kahn opened the Rivoli Theater on December 28, 1917 with stage presentations under the direction of Rothapfel, who moved from the Rialto at 42nd

Street and Broadway for which he had been hired away from the Strand in 1916. The Rivoli seated 2,200 and worked as an effective bridge between the Strand and Winter Garden one block north to bring more activity and life to Broadway immediately above Times Square.

In 1919, in addition to other acquisitions, Famous Players-Lasky purchased the Rivoli, and it became one of their two preeminent outlets in the Times Square area. (The other was the Rialto.)

50th Street

The Rivoli was built just below the 50th Street subway station for the IRT line which ran under Broadway, having opened in 1904. This vicinity proved to be very popular for theater construction in the 1910s and 1920s, and was the location for two of the four major theaters built in midtown Manhattan in the 1930s: the Hollywood, erected on Broadway above 51st Street, and the rebuilt Earl Carroll on the corner of 50th Street and Seventh Avenue.

The vicinity was very near stations for two major subway lines--the IRT and the BMT--and, during the course of the 1920s, progress was made on plans for the Independent Eighth and Sixth Avenue subway lines which would have stations with entrances on 50th Street not far from the stations on or near 50th Street of the other subway lines.

The Winter Garden was on the east side of Broadway between 50th and 51st Streets and was doing well and rapidly becoming something of an institution with its annual Passing Show series, helping to bring theater traffic to Broadway above Times Square. Nearby, the large realty and development firm of Bing and Bing was moving toward involvement in late 1924 in theatrical affairs with plans for several theaters to be built on the site of the Seventh Avenue Railway Company's carbarn between 50th and 51st Streets and between Sixth and Seventh Avenues.

By this time, the BMT had been operating its completed line in midtown for five years. Part of the route of this line ran from Times Square to 57th Street and Seventh Avenue with a stop at 49th Street and Seventh Avenue, intensifying the capability of the public transportation system to bring large numbers of people--including potential audience members--into the area.

Bing and Bing eventually disposed of the carbarn site, and the western portion became the site of a new hotel and the Roxy Theater, an indication of the strength of attraction of theatrical development to large non-theatrical interests.

51st Street

The Capitol Theater was opened in 1919 adjacent to the 50th Street station of the west side IRT subway line, and was the largest theater built for film presentations

prior to the opening in 1927 of the Roxy. It had its origins in a search by theatrical producers Crosby Gaige and Archie Selwyn for a site for a new theater above 42nd Street where they would build both a theater comparable to the Strand and also a legitimate theater. Edward Bowes had been a company manager for Gaige and Selwyn and, at this time, was their general manager in charge of booking attractions. Bowes had a real estate background as well, which, according to Gaige, caused Gaige, to think in realty terms.

The property which Gaige and Selwyn chose was owned by the Jacob Wendell Estate, which controlled a considerable amount of real estate in Manhattan. The lawyers of the heirs of Jacob Wendell agreed verbally to a long-term lease of the southwest corner of 51st Street and Broadway, and Gaige requested assistance in obtaining financing for his theaters from Messmore Kendall who was an attorney for the Du Pont interests. Gaige introduced Bowes to Kendall and left them to make the proper arrangements for the project, but Bowes agreed to work for Kendall instead and the two made other plans to build a single theater on the site, while Gaige and Selwyn were removed from developments.[14]

Kendall secured the Wendell lease and built the Capitol which opened with 5,300 seats on October 24, 1919 with policy under the direction of Edward Bowes. The opening presentation included an elaborate revue, The

Demi-Tasse Revue, devised by Ned Wayburn and featuring Mae West. The theater's policy was not successful and, in June 1920, S. L. Rothafel was hired to supervise the presentations, while Bowes still was given credit as managing director. The theater became very successful and was the base for Rothafel's attainment of extraordinary popularity, augmented with the introduction of his "Roxy and his Gang" radio program in 1922 from the stage of the Capitol and broadcast over the radio station of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, WEAF.[15]

The Capitol was the showcase for the films of the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation which was consolidated with William Randolph Hearst's Cosmopolitan Productions and Distinctive Pictures in 1923.[16] The following year, on April 17, 1924, Marcus Loew, head of Metro Pictures, became the head of an organization which consisted of his Metro, Goldwyn Pictures and the Louis B. Mayer Company, a major new film company which would have support in the Loew chain of theaters and the several theaters across the country including the Capitol. The consolidation made the Capitol the principal Loew presentation house, although the theater continued to be owned by the Moredall Realty Corporation, controlled by Kendall and the Du Ponts.[17]

The success of the Capitol, located across Broadway from the Winter Garden, which had been the most northerly point of the primary theater district before the Capitol was opened, strengthened the attractiveness of the

lower Fifties in the Broadway area as a likely location for theatrical development, and in the next few years a number of major theaters opened in the vicinity of the Capitol.

Film companies were beginning to build office space in the 1920s in the far west Forties and Fifties of Manhattan. In 1920, William Fox, whose interests and influence were growing rapidly, built a large facility for film production and for office space on Tenth Avenue between 55th and 56th Streets, and in subsequent years, other firms, notably Famous Players-Lasky and Warner Brothers, would build in the far west Forties.

Subsequent to the opening of the Lexington Avenue subway line in 1918, Fifth Avenue in the Fifties began to become very attractive to developers. In addition to the Lexington line, a line of the new Independent subway system was announced for placement under 53rd Street from Eighth Avenue to the East River. During the course of the 1920s, there grew in the Madison-Fifth Avenue area around and above Grand Central Station the broadcasting and general communications center in midtown Manahttan.

John D. Rockefeller's interests purchased several pieces of property during the 1920s in the Fifties just west of Fifth Avenue, and intensified their involvement in land development in the area in 1928 when a lease was signed which led to the development of Rockefeller Center.

58th Street

The IRT subway line which opened in 1904 included a station at Columbus Circle, an area which came to be of great interest to William Randolph Hearst. On April 21, 1914, title to the site which included the Park Theater on Columbus Circle between 58th and 59th Streets passed to the Veronica Realty Corporation, controlled by the Hearst group.[18] This purchase was one of the earlier manifestations of Hearst's interest in the possibilities for development of the Fifties in general, and for the area around Columbus Circle in particular. Hearst was interested in developing attractions for the theater which would bring it to public attention in order to foster the area's attractiveness as a center for other projects. Hearst tried several policies at the Park (which had opened in 1903 as the Majestic) including engaging Victor Herbert in 1922 to conduct the theater orchestra as a presentation in conjunction with the showing of his Cosmopolitan Pictures films.

But the theater, renamed the Cosmopolitan in 1923, was too far removed from the theatrical center and was not successful. On the eve of 1925, Hearst was about to make an offer to Florenz Ziegfeld whereby Hearst would build at least one new theater for Ziegfeld if Ziegfeld would take charge of the Cosmopolitan and present his productions there. This began a relationship which was one of the most important manifestations of the use made by non-

theatrical interests of a celebrated theatrical institution for the advancement of real estate interests.

62nd Street

A short distance above Columbus Circle in the 1920s was the first new theatrical project with which Otto Kahn had become involved. The New Theater was opened in November 1909 on Central Park West between 62nd and 63rd Streets. Initial discussion concerning the project began shortly after the first IRT subway line was opened in 1904. This line included a station at Columbus Circle, just below the New Theater's site.

A number of prominent men from the business and financial worlds of New York were behind the New Theater project which was intended primarily as a home for drama. But it failed to attract audiences, and saw a number of different policies beginning in 1911 when it was renamed the Century Theater.

By 1924, the Century was being operated by the Shuberts who had been involved in its affairs from its beginnings as the New Theater and who owned it. The Century featured a variety of kinds of presentation, but never found a successful policy, hampered, like the Cosmopolitan, by its distance from the theatrical center.

The Century played a role in the considerations in the later 1920s given the matter of a new home for the Metropolitan Opera, the board of which was chaired by

Kahn. The Century was the only theater project ever realized by Kahn which approximated the new, or supplementary, home for music and other performance arts of a higher caliber which he pursued in other forms over the years. Original plans called for a theater seating capacity greater than the 2,200 which was the capacity of the theater when it opened in 1909 as the New Theater, intended primarily for the drama. Kahn may have had the intention of building a replacement for the Metropolitan Opera House even then, but the plans were revised by Harley Granville-Barker and the smaller capacity was the result. It did house some productions of the Metropolitan Opera for a short while, functioning as a second house, but the relation between the Opera company and the theater soon ended and the theater changed its name.

The Century had occasional successes such as The Century Girl, a collaboration in 1916 of Victor Herbert, Irving Berlin and Florenz Ziegfeld. But for the most part, it never found a successful policy nor a large audience and ended its days as part of a real estate game. It was demolished in 1930 to be replaced by an apartment house built by the Chanin brothers, who by that time, had removed themselves from further theatrical development.

Interrelationships among theater operators and producers, realtors and financiers already were influencing questions of theatrical location on the eve of 1925, and as the decade continued, these kinds of

interrelationships grew more frequent in occurrence and more complex. Entertainment fast was becoming big business, and, as an industry, was expanding rapidly. Prior to 1926, the only major broadcasting facility located in midtown was station WJZ, the outlet of the Radio Corporation of America, located in the Aeolian Building at 33 West 42nd Street. But soon, all such major operations would be in midtown, adding to the locational trend which created in midtown the nation's theatrical, musical and broadcasting center.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1] "Players-Lasky Takes Frohman, Inc." New York Times, July 3, 1919, p. 16.

[2] "Zukor, Idealist, Persisted and Won," New York Times, November 19, 1926, p. 22.

[3] Gertrude Jobes, Motion Picture Industry (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), pp. 214-15.

[4] "To Build on Putnam Site This Summer; Adjoining Tenants Must Vacate June 1; 27-Story Building on B'way," Variety, March 11, 1925, p. 31.

[5] Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged for the Period January--December (Inclusive), 1922, 94 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corporation, 1923): 689.

[6] "Famous' 27-Story Structure in Times Square Starts June 1," Variety, February 18, 1925, p. 24.

[7] Real Estate Directory of the Borough of Manhattan New York City Containing a Geographical Classification of Properties and an Alphabetical Classification of Owners Together with a Listing of All Properties to Which Each Owner Holds Title: 1931 (New York: Real Estate Directory Company, 1931), p. 467 (hereafter cited as RED).

[8] "Loew's N.Y. 100% Duals," Variety, January 16, 1934, p. 25.

[9] "Great Art Theatre Planned by Gest for Native Talent," New York Times, January 29, 1923, p. 1.

[10] "Gest Postpones Art Theatre Plan," New York Times, June 5, 1923, p. 24.

[11] "Great Art Theatre Planned by Gest for Native Talent," New York Times, January 29, 1923, p. 1.

[12] "New Strand Opens; Biggest of Movies," New York Times, April 12, 1914, p. 15.

[13] Ben M. Hall, The Golden Age of the Movie Palace published in 1961 under title: The Best Remaining Seats (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1961), p. 37.

[14] Crosby Gaige, Footlights and Highlights (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1948), pp. 120-21.

[15] Hall, pp. 57-67.

[16] "$25,000,000 Merger of Movie Interests Aims to Rival Famous Players-Lasky," New York Times, May 23, 1923, p. 1.

[17] "$65,000,000 Movie Merger Completed," New York Times, April 18, 1924, p. 21.

[18] RED, Part II, p. 476.

CHAPTER III

1925

The year 1925 was one in which there were announced several plans of major importance to considerations of location and theater in midtown Manhattan: the Paramount Theater and office building; the Roxy Theater and adjoining hotel; several theaters to be built by the Chanins; a complex to be built by the Hearst interests which would include a large theater for the use of Florenz Ziegfeld; and a more general commitment from Ziegfeld to the Hearst interests. In addition, by year's end, Otto Kahn had chosen a property on West 57th Street as the site for a projected new Metropolitan Opera House.

There were new projects and events on a smaller scale which also would have have locational impact, but the larger projects shared three characteristics which made of them important indicators of future direction:

1. Their sites were north of 42nd Street, and more than half of them were north of 50th Street.

2. They involved in a very important way nontheatrical interests and organizatons.

3. They were larger in scale than most theatrical projects had been to that point in time.

Ground was broken for the new Independent Eighth Avenue subway line on March 14, 1925, beginning the several years of construction before the opening of the first phase of the Independent system from Chambers Street to 207th Street on September 10, 1932. A considerable amount of theatrical development activity around subway stations for the new line ensued.

The year 1925 also was one in which major new theatrical organizations were formed. Famous Players-Lasky and Balaban and Katz, a large theatrical chain with headquarters in Chicago, committed the operation of their theaters to the new Publix company; and William Fox restructured his Fox Theaters Corporation. Both of these companies would have a significant impact on locational aspects of theater in midtown Manhattan.

In 1925, the nature of nontheatrical land use was bringing to an end the period of importance of Broadway in the upper Thirties as a center of theatrical activity, an importance it had known since the opening of the Casino Theater in 1882. The garment district was continuing to expand vigorously in the upper west Thirties and was beginning to threaten the theaters which were located along Broadway.[1] The expansion of the garment district was all the more vigorous and problematic for the lower theater district because that expansion appeared to be

the result of an agreement reached between the garment industry and the Fifth Avenue Association according to which the garment industry agreed to restrict and concentrate itself in the west Thirties and not encroach upon the retail stores along Fifth Avenue. There was value to the agreement for the garment industry which then was assured lucrative outlets for its goods in the fashionable shopping areas.

There were several theaters below 40th Street street which appeared to be in the path of the growing industry, among the larger of which were the Broadway, Casino, Knickerbocker and Empire. In 1925, none of the theaters below 40th Street was affected by the changes in the area, but several of them would be gone within ten years' time.

40th Street

In the early years of the twentieth century, as the theater center moved into a position around the 42nd Street corridor, many music and film organizations also located on or near 42nd Street, and as broadcasting began to emerge as a new power in communications and performance, some of its outlets were placed in the same area. Certainly the growing complex of public transportation lines helped further along the growth of the area as a communications center, and, by 1925, the west side IRT line below 42nd Street had been in operation for some years, making the Times Square connection with

the line to the east side all the more powerful an inducement to location in the vicinity of the corner of 42nd Street and Broadway.

One of the new buildings which became a home to at least one large broadcasting organization was 1440 Broadway at the northeast corner of 40th Street and Broadway, which, in 1925, housed a control studio for radio station WOR, owned by the L. Bamberger Department Store company of Newark, New Jersey, and, like the department store, based in Newark. But the operating company found it convenient to maintain a control studio near the theater district. Subsequently, the entire operation of WOR was moved to 1440 Broadway where it remains to this date.

Variety reported that the Producers Distributing Corporation, a motion picutre firm, was seeking space in the area around 42nd Street and Broadway and was considering moving into 1440 Broadway.[2] Although the move was not made, the fact that apparently it was seriously considered is indication of the continuing attraction which the area exercised for film organizations, an attraction it had had for at least ten years, dating from the earliest days of maturity of companies such as Famous Players-Lasky.

In the 1910s, a more easterly section of the 42nd Street area had proved attractive to some film organizations. In 1916, Famous Players had moved from 729

Seventh Avenue, the southeast corner of 49th Street and Seventh Avenue, to 485 Fifth Avenue on the east side of Fifth Avenue between 41st and 42nd Streets when it became affiliated with the Jesse Lasky and Samuel Goldfish, later Goldwyn, interests. Lasky and Goldfish had moved to that address when they formed their film organization in 1913, the same year in which the new Grand Central Station was opened nearby. Theirs was the first of the major film organizations to move to Fifth Avenue.

Very shortly after the Famous Players move to Fifth Avenue, Samuel Goldfish withdrew from the new organization and took offices in the building at 469 Fifth Avenue on the east side of the avenue between 40th and 41st Streets, quite near Famous Players, but the Goldfish, now become Goldwyn, offices were moved to the Loew Building at 45th Street and Broadway when its interests were merged with the Loew's Metro Pictures and Louis B. Mayer's organization to form Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in 1924. In 1925, the Will Hays organization occupied the former Goldwyn offices at 469 Fifth Avenue.

One of the largest of the film organizations in the 1910s and early 1920s was First National which had been located at 6 West 48th Street, but in 1925 was at Madison Avenue and 48th Street. Universal had long been in the Bond Building at the northeast corner of 48th Street and Broadway at 1600 Broadway, near the former offices of Famous Players, but in 1925 had gone to 57th

Street and Fifth Avenue.

But in 1925, Famous Players-Lasky was planning to return to the Times Square area. The company moved ahead with its project for the construction of a new headquarters building at 43rd Street and Broadway which was scheduled to open in 1926 and would occupy the full block width to 44th Street on the west side of Times Square. This building, even in its early stages, especially because it would be so large and the first major office building in Manhattan to include a large theater, was a major new focal point for the area just above the corner of 42nd Street and Broadway, and became a landmark with its opening in November 1926.

West 42nd Street

The indicators for the locational attractiveness of West 42nd Street as a theater street were mixed in 1925, but the oldest of the theaters contained in the block bound by Seventh and Eighth Avenues and 41st and 42nd Streets, Loew's American, as it then was known, and its roof theater, the American Roof Music Hall, were faring well. Built in 1893, the American had been Marcus Loew's flagship theater, eventually superseded as such, first, by the New York Theater on the east side of Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets, and then by Loew's State Theater at the northeast corner of 45th Street and Broadway. But the American and its roof were sufficiently

profitable Loew operations that, in 1925, Loew renovated the American at a reported cost of $20,000 without closing the theater.

However, the American and its roof were small time, or popular vaudeville houses, running a presentation policy of film and stage presentations on a continuous, or "grind," basis, as opposed to the policy of two shows a day at elevated prices at the Palace. While it was a popular location in 1925, the American cannot be said to have been a prominent theater, or an indicator of 42nd Street's position as a preeminent theater street in 1925.

The American and Wallack's were the most westerly by far of the theaters on 42nd Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, removed from the busier middle and east ends of the block. Wallack's was not doing well in 1925 when John Cort relinquished control of the theater after having assumed it only several months previously. The theater had been known as the Frazee until Cort's tenure. Frazee sold the lease which still had ten years to run to Samuel Brenner, a realty operator, who later disposed of it to Meister and Company, whose tenant John Cort had been. Meister and Company was said to be associated with the Chanin interests.[3]

In December, the Chanin Construction Company was reported to have bought Wallack's and the Lyric Theater at 213 West 42nd Street. Wallack's was said to have been on the real estate market for some time.[4] The

then current Lyric lease to J. Oppenheimer would continue in effect, but the Chanins were thought to intend ultimately to demolish both buildings in order to replace them with new theaters. This would give the Chanins eight theaters, making them formidable competitors to established organizations such as the Shuberts and the Erlanger and Albee groups.

In addition to overseeing their interests in a number of theaters farther north, the Shuberts also maintained a presence on 42nd Street as they did in a large number of other sections of midtown Manhattan, holding both theatrical and nontheatrical properties. In September 1925, they began to book the Eltinge (built in 1912), with Al Woods continuing to conduct the general affairs of the theater. The Shuberts were to pay Woods $60,000 per year and 50 percent of the profits. The agreement was to be in effect for a period of nine years, which also was the length of time remaining on the ground lease for the theater.[5]

The Shuberts had also had discussion with the Selwyns about the Selwyn Theater (built in 1918) which was across 42nd Street from the Eltinge, but nothing came of these talks.[6] At this time, the Selwyns' Apollo Theater (built in 1920), adjacent to the Selwyn, was under lease to George White for $120,000 per year and housed White's annual Scandals. But, like many other theaters on 42nd Street at this time, it often housed first-run motion

pictures. For example, in late 1925, the motion picture Stella Dallas was experiencing a very successful engagement at the Apollo, providing a significant profit to the theater operators.[7]

It is difficult to gauge the degree of good or harm done 42nd Street as a primary theatrical location by the use of its theaters as film houses. But it would appear that, in 1925, just as 42nd Street appeared to be about to become a street of major film, and not legitimate, theaters--William Fox was said to be considering taking the New Amsterdam for his films--two of the largest film theater projects in the city were announced for the Times Square area, and film producers shifted their attention to Times Square and away from 42nd Street, forcing the 42nd Street theaters back to stage entertainments after several years during which many of them had functioned at least intermittently as film theaters. But, by the time that 42nd Street again was dependent on stage fare, the theaters in the side streets immediately off Times Square had developed to the point at which they were full rivals to the 42nd Street houses, and there was no rush of producers back to 42nd Street and away from the generally newer Times Square theaters.

There were other troubling signs for 42nd Street in 1925. In the early years of the century, Murray's Roman Gardens had been a restaurant of some note after its opening in 1909 at 230 West 42nd Street, between the

future sites of the Candler and the Eltinge Theaters. Murray's had featured an unusual variety of decorative motifs which prompted considerable attention.

In 1925, in the lower levels of what had been the restaurant, Hubert's Museum was opened, featuring a group of carnival-like attractions such as Zip, the "Whatsit?", a woman who wrote with her feet, and two heavy women who engaged in a sparring bout. The proprietors of the museum, Schaeffer and Shork, also ran a shooting gallery next to the New Amsterdam Theater, the most prestigious of the theaters on 42nd Street.

A Mr. Shapiro, who had Murray's under lease, had been unable to rent the space in which the museum became located for more than a year. Apparently, the hall proper was closer to the 41st Street side of the block, because when Schaeffer and Shork leased it from Shapiro, they broke through to 42nd Street through what had been a book store, giving themselves an entrance on the street with greater traffic. Schaeffer and Shork payed $20,000 yearly for a ten-year lease.[8]

But in 1925 West 42nd Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues certainly remained a vital and popular theater street, and, despite Hubert's Museum, continued to be the home of important first-run presentations.

While Famous Players-Lasky was proceeding with its plans for the new Paramount Theater on Times Square, it still had a primary showcase on 42nd Street, the Rialto

at 42nd Street and Broadway. In 1925, Famous Players-Lasky decided on a change in presentation policy for its two first run theaters in New York City, the Rialto at the northwest corner of 42nd Street and Broadway and the Rivoli farther uptown between the Strand and the Capitol, both of which were larger theaters than the Rivoli as well as its primary competition. Ben Bernie signed a contract with Famous Players-Lasky to install his orchestra into one of the two theaters and to announce, or present, the film program of the evening.

Bernie's appearances at the Famous Players-Lasky theaters would be the first use in a major theater in Manhattan of the band policy which achieved enormous success in the middle and later 1920s. The policy was a weapon used by the midtown film theaters in their competitive combat. The band policy placed the band on the stage of the theater rather than in the orchestra pit, and the bandleader or conductor acted as master of ceremonies and general interlocutor for the evening's stage entertainment which was centered on the band.

Famous Players-Lasky appeared determined to provide strong competition for the stage presentations at the Capitol and Strand Theaters, each of which was the primary showcase for one of the film companies considered at the time to be, along with Famous Players-Lasky, one of the three most important American film concerns in existence. The Capitol was the house for Metro-Goldwyn-

Mayer, controlled by Loew, and the Strand was the theater for First National's film product.

Bernie's salary was to be $2,500 per week, a handsome sum for the time. There was initial uncertainty as to whether Bernie would be at the Rivoli or the Rialto.[9] If it was to be the Rialto, he would supplant the large orchestra of Dr. Hugo Riesenfeld, whose musical programs were similar to the semi-classical music program devised by Rothafel for the Capitol Theater. In fact, it was Rothafel who first had devised the program for the Rialto when he had been hired away from the Strand by Famous Players-Lasky.

Earlier, Riesenfeld had introduced programs, under the title of "Riesenfeld's Classical Jazz" which were orchestrations for large ensemble of currently popular music. The contract with Bernie's popular band suggested that Famous Players-Lasky intended to experiment further with more generally popular styles of entertainment. Bernie's first engagement with Famous Players-Lasky was given to the Rivoli, and the degree of his success was such that he was transferred down to the Rialto after several weeks to improve business there, arriving in August.

Riesenfeld was responsible overall for the Famous Players-Lasky stage presentations and his office had been in the Rialto Theater building where his own orchestra was located. With Bernie's arrival into the Rialto,

Riesenfeld's orchestra moved to the Rivoli, as did his whole office and staff, making the Rivoli the business headquarters for the stage presentations.[10] The move also suggested a downgrading of the position of the Rialto, possibly in anticipation of the opening scheduled for late 1926 of the new Famous Players-Lasky flagship theater, the Paramount, which would be less than a block above the Rialto.

In reviewing one of the stage presentations at the Rialto, Variety observed "shows in this house are handicapped by the lack of stage facilities," a real problem in a period when stage presentations were getting ever more grandiose. The Rialto's difficulties were compounded when the New York City Fire Department ruled that only draperies could be used in the stage settings,[11] contending that the theater had not been designed for elaborate stage productions, but had been licensed primarily for film showings.[12]

Ben Bernie and his band, transferred to the Rialto during the summer after a successful engagement at the Rivoli, left the Rialto in late December, and the film Siegfried was presented over the holiday period. Because Siegfried required a large orchestra for performance of an orchestrated version of the Richard Wagner score, the Rivoli house orchestra was transferred to the Rialto for the film engagement.[13]

At year's end, it was learned that, when the new

Paramount Theater was opened, the Rialto would have a top ticket price of fifty cents, reduced from ninety-nine cents, and, although stage presentations would continue to be offered with the films, these would be restricted to the drapery stage settings allowed by the Fire Department, and would be rather intimate in scale.[14] The Rialto was to lose the large orchestra brought in for Siegfried, the replacement to be a fifteen-piece Hungarian orchestra which would play both for presentations and for films. The general policy of the Rialto would be revised with short film subjects to be emphasized.[15] Dr. Riesenfeld's resignation as director of the Famous Players-Lasky theaters in New York City was to be effective January 1, 1926.[16]

But, although the Rialto itself was losing its status as a primary theater for Famous Players-Lasky, land value in its immediate area was proving attractive to realtors and developers. For several years, the Longacre Building at 1476 Broadway, at the northeast corner of 42nd Street and Broadway, was one of the most popular office sites for theater and related organizations. In 1925, the fee for the building was bought by the Schulte interests, a group very prominent at the time in real estate activities in New York City.[17] The purchase suggested the attractiveness of the site, located at a major subway station at 42nd Street and Broadway, but it was not clear whether the attraction was the present building's income

potential or the possibilities inherent in the site as a location for another office building for the expanding garment center.

In 1925, a short distance east of the Rialto Theater, the Radio Corporation of America continued operating radio station WJZ from the Aeolian Building at 33 West 42nd Street, and in that year, RCA and the Shuberts were reported to have arranged a series of experimental broadcasts of Shubert productions from the studios at WJZ. From the point of view of location, such an arrangement could be contrived more easily by WJZ, situated very near the theater area, than by its primary competition of the time, WEAF, station of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, which was located at AT&T headquarters at 195 Broadway at Fulton Street.

In 1926, WJZ would come under the management of the new National Broadcasting Company, and would be moved in 1927 to its new building at 711 Fifth Avenue in an area which was to become the communications center of the city. Also in 1927, Famous Players-Lasky would move its main offices to the new Paramount Building on Times Square, but in 1925, it continued operating from 485 Fifth Avenue, just below 42nd Street.

East 42nd Street

In 1925, Famous Players-Lasky and the Balaban and Katz organization of Chicago, a major theater circuit in

the midwest, moved toward an agreement which would culminate by year's end in the creation of Publix Theatres, a corporation to be controlled jointly by Famous Players-Lasky and Balaban and Katz and which in turn would control the theaters of both groups.

Famous Players-Lasky was a large and growing organization and had close ties to the investment banking house of Kuhn, Loeb, and especially to Otto Kahn, a partner in Kuhn, Loeb. One story that circulated at the time of the preliminary discussions that led to the creation of Publix Theatres was that the management of Famous Players-Lasky was of the opinion that the formation of a new corporation to oversee their theaters would make the overall organization more attractive to bankers from whom Famous Players-Lasky needed capital to finance a large theater building program.[18] The scope of Publix covered all aspects of the operations of the theater holdings of Famous Players-Lasky and Balaban and Katz, but it did not own the theaters. Sam Katz of Balaban and Katz arrived in New York from Chicago on November 1, 1925 to become head of Publix, while his partner, A. J. Balaban, remained in Chicago.

Harold B. Franklin had been in charge of the Theater Department at Famous Players-Lasky and in October had overseen the opening of the large new Metropolitan Theater in Boston, for which Famous Players-Lasky had signed John Murray Anderson to devise the initial stage

presentation. The production was reported to have been a success and it was thought that Anderson would head a production department for Famous Players-Lasky in New York in the Paramount Theater when it was completed.[19]

But Anderson's style placed emphasis on an attractive stage picture, whereas the variety of stage presentation which Balaban and Katz had made successful in their theaters was more varied, and closer to a form of popular vaudeville, but on a larger scale in conformity with the larger stage and film theaters which they were building in the midwest.

Rumors circulated in late 1925 that there already was friction between Katz and Franklin and that Franklin would leave. (He did, but not until a year later.) Katz was placed at the head of Publix and Franklin was named his assistant. Herschel Stuart was to be head of the stage presentation department, John Murray Anderson was named principal producer, and Nat Finston was to be in charge of all house orchestras. The Rivoli was to close for a short time before Christmas to permit enlargement of the stage, Riesenfeld would leave and Joseph Littau would become conductor of the Rivoli orchestra.[20]

Katz told a meeting of Balaban and Katz executives in Chicago in December that all Publix presentations would be mounted and built in New York, and all bookings and engagements would be handled in New York. Publix would have its own scenic studio, costume house, rehearsal space

and run-through stage. A. J. Balaban, Frank Cambria and Will Harris of the Balaban and Katz staff in Chicago would go to New York to sit in for discussions on stage presentations with Katz, Franklin, Anderson, and James Cowan who would be doing the booking. Katz also noted that theater organists would be used heavily in the east, and that Jesse Crawford, a popular organist in Balaban and Katz theaters, would be making appearances in the east.[21]

There was some question about the location of the booking offices for the Publix theaters. Adolph Zukor appears to have felt that the location of the headquarters for Famous Players-Lasky at 485 Fifth Avenue between 41st and 42nd Streets would not inhibit visits there from producers wanting engagements with Publix. But others felt that that location was too far distant from the theatrical center and that that would impede Publix' ability to see all potentially worthwhile performers and material.

> . . . Famous had better provide buses from Broadway and 47th street to take the hourly callers over there to prevent them losing their way and to be certain they will go.[22]

Eventually, the booking office was established in the New York Theater building on the east side of Broadway between 44th and 45th Street, across the street from the Loew booking office and a short distance below the Keith-Albee booking office.

It was quite clear that ambitious plans were being

made for the stage productions for the new Paramount Theater in Times Square as well as for other major theaters in the new theater circuit, and that Publix was determined to make its locations as attractive as possible, both through production efforts, and also through the mechanism of a major public relations campaign designed to lend prestige to Famous Player-Lasky products and name.

In late 1925, Florenz Ziegfeld and others close to him confirmed that he had been offered $1,000,000 to sign a four-year contract to stage revues in Famous Players-Lasky motion picture theaters. The offer, which Ziegfeld was said to have rejected, would have allowed him to produce on his own also, but the motion picture theater productions would have had the right to carry the Ziegfeld name.[23] As it happened, earlier in the year, Jesse Lasky had announced that Famous Players and Ziegfeld had signed a five-year contract for production of film versions of Ziegfeld presentations which would feature many Ziegfeld performers,[24] suggesting what might have been part of a larger effort by Famous Players-Lasky to involve Ziegfeld in a substantial way in its affairs.

But in 1925, Ziegfeld was involved with interests connected with Willliam Randolph Hearst and Arthur Brisbane, one of the most important of Hearst's employees, in several theatrical undertakings, including possible production responsibilities at a theater project at 57th

Street and Eighth Avenue, the construction of at least one theater at the corner of 54th Street and Sixth Avenue, and during part of 1925, a leasehold on and production at the Cosmopolitan Theater on Columbus Circle. All of this was in addition to his other producing activities on 42nd Street, a workload which may have had something to do with his rejection of the offer made by Publix.

The stage presentations which began to be produced through Publix in 1925 to be seen with a full length motion picture usually were about one hour in length and were changed weekly. Prior to the opening of the Paramount in 1926, the Rivoli was the New York house for these presentations, often called units, on the Publix circuit. The units were planned with care and were given sufficient time for dress, orchestra and lighting rehearsal. Corrections were made after the first performance at a meeting of all department heads.

The various producers had different presentation styles. Frank Cambria specialized in productions built on classical music themes. Jack Partington was expert at installation and utilization of elevators and mobile stages. Boris Petroff stressed ballet. Anderson was especially adept at visual beauty. He worked with such designers as James Reynolds, Herman Rosse, Clark Robinson, and Reginald Marsh.

Lighting was important in the presentations, and many new lamps and shades of gelatin were invented in the

course of Publix' unit history. Jack Partington was said to have been particularly adept in this area, and many of his inventions were said to have come into regular theatrical use.[25]

Apparently, a considerable amount of effort went into these units. The number of personnel employed seems to have been high, and production descriptions suggest a considerable amount of money was spent for personnel and equipment. Many of these units made use of performers and production people who had, or later would have, major standing in the theater.

Publix was well financed, and, in its efforts to make its locations attractive, it often permitted a degree of freedom to its producers who created a number of unusual, or unusually lavish and beautiful, pieces. Anderson's The Pompadour's Fan, based on the Ballade of Austin Dobson with sets by Clark Robinson and costumes by James Reynolds, was one of the most noteworthy.[26]

But Famous Players-Lasky also took great care that its theaters, both before and after the creation of the Publix organization, were well located. The Famous Players-Lasky theaters were very convenient to public transportation facilities, and the new Paramount would be almost adjacent to the 42nd Street stations of the IRT and BMT subway lines, and very near the planned 42nd Street station for the new Independent Eighth Avenue line.

Kuhn, Loeb was involved in the financing of the

new Paramount Theater and Building. In 1925, Otto Kahn, senior partner at Kuhn, Loeb, was involved with two new theater projects: as financial adviser to Famous-Players Lasky, with the plans for the new Paramount Theater and office building; and as chairman of the Metropolitan Opera Company, with a search for a site for a new Metropolitan Opera House with the aid primarily, but apparently not exclusively, of Brown, Wheelock: Harris, Vought and Co., one of the foremost real estate brokerage firms in New York City.

Apparently, Kahn was considering sites for the opera in the east Forties, among other possible locations. The east Forties in the area around Grand Central Station were experiencing extraordinary growth at this time. With the end of the recession of the early 1920s, the effect on land use in the area of the new Lexington Avenue subway line, opened in 1918, was being felt. An impact on the area also was being had by the large developments which were accruing from the creation above Grand Central Station of Park Avenue over what had been the open railroad yard of the New York Central, and a number of large commercial structures began to rise on and near East 42nd Street around the transportation network. The first of the very large office structures in the area, the Graybar Building, abutting onto the east side of Grand Central Station, opened in 1925. It had been financed through the S. W. Straus company and built by the Todd,

Robertson, Todd Enginnering company, both of which groups would continue to figure prominently in real estate development in the period under study.[27]

The intensity of development activity in the area well may have given rise to consideration of construction of a new Metropolitan Opera House in the vicinity. In a letter dated October 15, 1925, William Wheelock of Brown, Wheelock: Harris, Vought & Company discussed one possible location for an opera house, a location which, apparently, had been the subject of earlier discussions with Kahn, and which, a few years afterward, became the site of the Chrysler Building. The leasehold on the property owned by Cooper Union at the west end of the block bounded by 42nd and 43rd Streets and by Lexington and Third Avenues was available, but there was uncertaintiy about the availability of the east end of the block.[28]

Apparently, Kahn was investigating other locations in the area as well. He received a letter, dated December 11, 1925, from F. J. Lowe of the real estate concern, M. L. Hess, Inc., in which Lowe discussed a site for the opera house in the block between Park and Madison Avenues and 41st and 42nd Streets, a site which became the location of the large Lincoln Building a few years thereafter as land development in the immediate Grand Central transportation area grew more intense in the course of the general building boom of the late 1920s. Apparently, Kahn had inquired in November 1925 about the

availability of property on the block and Lowe advised him that approximately 60,000 square feet could be obtained at a good price, suggesting that the Park Avenue frontage could be used for a "high building with entrance, studios and offices above."[29]

The letter to Kahn from Lowe is noteworthy, not only because it indicates that Kahn seriously considered a site for the new opera house in the rapidly developing east Forties section of Manhattan, but also because it indicates that Kahn already may have been thinking about combining the opera house proper with other kinds of studio and office space, a theme which continues through the period of his inquiries into possible sites for the opera in the Fifties section of Manhattan.

43rd Street and Broadway

The idea of the combined office building and large theater was evident in 1925 in the plans for the new Paramount Theater which Famous Players-Lasky intended to build on Times Square. This building, which was to be the main office for Famous Players-Lasky, would include a theater which was to become one of the most famous in New York City. The Paramount probably was the first major realty development completed in the years 1925 through 1928, and soon became one of the leading film and stage presentation houses in the city.

In 1925, preparations for work on the building, on

the west side of the block between 43rd and 44th Streets, were well in hand and the 3500-seat Paramount Theater was scheduled tentatively to open in October 1926.[30] In November, Variety discussed the potential impact on the theater situation in the Times Square area of the increase in overall theater seating capacity in the general location due, in part, to the imminent opening both of the new Famous Players theater, to be called the Paramount, and the even larger Roxy being planned by S. L. Rothafel for the northeast corner of 50th Street and Seventh Avenue. At base, the article was concerned with what might happen to older film theaters such as the Strand, opened in 1914, when the newer and larger theaters were completed, stressing the economic advantage had by the larger capacity theaters, and questioning whether the older theaters might become legitimate or revue theaters, or whether they might be replaced by office buildings, which, in 1925, were becoming more prevalent in the areas proximate to the theater district.[31]

The popularity of the larger theaters was reflected in the considerable financial return being realized at the biggest film theater in New York of later 1925, the Capitol, despite the departure of S. L. Rothafel who had come to have a large following during his years at the Capitol. The second largest of the regular first-run film theaters in the Times Square area, the Strand, was much smaller, with 2,900 seats. When it was

built in 1914, there was uncertainty as to the prospects of success for the planned policy of stage presentation and film, leading the theater's promoters to install a full stage. Variety speculated that, if the competition for films from the newer theaters reduced the importance of the Strand in that sphere of activity, the theater therefore would be suited to a revue policy and could be an appropriate home for Ziegfeld's Follies, giving the Follies management a potential gross box office figure considerably greater than the figure possible at the 1,650 seat New Amsterdam Theater, the usual home of the Follies. Similarly, the new B. S. Moss' Colony, opened at 53rd Street and Broadway in December 1924, which also had a full stage, might do well under revised circumstances, whereas the Rialto and Rivoli, with no stages to speak of, would be at a severe disadvantage.[32]

When it is remembered that the theaters in question all were quite near one another and in marked competition with one another, Variety's analysis can be seen to be about the relation of theatrical locations to one another and to the factors of theater size and policy. The imminent opening of the new Paramount was bound to be a critical new consideration in the complex of locational considerations.

The investment in the new Paramount Theater and office building was said to be in the neighborhood of $6,000,000, a significant amount for the time and a

significant share of the $20,000,000 overall which Famous Players was reported to be spending on twenty-two new theaters, including four to be built abroad.[33]

There can be little doubt that the investment banking firm of Kuhn, Loeb had a role in the investment decision, its name appearing prominently in documents concerning the new structure. Adolph Zukor, head of Famous Players-Lasky, often gave credit to Kahn for encouraging him and supporting him in his plan to build the large theater which would be the first major office building to be built in New York City with a contiguous theater.

During the same period, there were reports of another theater realty project involving New York financial institutions for a site very near the Paramount. In 1925, Carl Laemmle, head of Universal Films, which had no large film theater of its own in the Times Square area, organized an $11,000,000 corporation to acquire theaters for Universal. The organizations providing the financing for the effort, said to be financial institutions in lower Manhattan, reportedly secured a location on Broadway for a theater for Universal.

There was speculation that the site might be the block front on the east side of Broadway between 43rd and 44th Streets, directly across Times Square from the Paramount Theater to be opened the following year. Given the public transportation network in the area, the

selection of the site would not have been surprising. The Cadillac and the Yates Hotels then were on the site of the reported project said to be for a large office building and theater combination along the lines of the new Paramount complex across the street. The theater was said to be intended to accommodate 5,500 to 6,000 seats, a figure closer to the Roxy project's capacity than to the Paramount's. So large a seating capacity would allow a very low regular admission price for entry to an elaborate stage production to be presented with the film.[34] And the public transportation network would be able to bring a large number of people into the area cheaply and quickly. The validity of the concept would be demonstrated in large measure by the Roxy a short time later, although the Roxy's admission price was higher than the standard fifty cents price mentioned for Laemmle's project.

Another site considered for the Universal project was the southwest corner of 46th Street and Broadway on the sites of the Gaiety and Fulton theaters, then standing. The Fulton was located at 210 West 46th Street, the Gaiety at 1539-49 Broadway. Both properties were owned by the Clevehanna Realty Corporation which was controlled by A. L. Erlanger, who was said to be open to negotiation on the matter.[35]

It is noteworthy that these reports postdate the announcement of the Paramount Theater and office building which would be directly across the street from one of the

two sites suggested; and postdate also the announcement of plans for the Roxy Theater which was to be built at the corner of 50th Street and Seventh Avenue and which would have a capacity exceeding 6,000 people.

43rd Street and Sixth Avenue

Little more than one long block east of the Paramount site was the Hippodrome, occupying the entire east block front between 43rd and 44th Streets on Sixth Avenue, and which, until the opening of the Capitol Theater at 51st Street and Broadway in 1919, was the theater with the largest seating capacity in New York, holding approximately 5,300. It had been opened in April 1905 as a home for spectacular productions and was commercially fairly successful, often very successful, through a variety of management and policy changes.

It began operation less than six months after the first Interborough Rapid Transit line was opened, a line which ran north to the Grand Central Station area, then west under 42nd Street to Times Square and then north from Times Square. At that time, there was no significant theatrical development in Times Square and the Hippodrome's promoters might have thought that the theater occupied a site with marked potential for development because of its position approximately half the distance between the 42nd Street theatrical center and the transportation complex developing around Grand Central

Station. After World War I, the Grand Central area did give rise to substantial office building and other commercial construction, but never to any further major theatrical development, although, as mentioned above, Otto Kahn does appear to have considered the east Forties as a location for the Metropolitan Opera.[36]

On December 17, 1923, when it first became concerned with the Hippodrome, Keith-Albee instituted a policy of two-a-day, or straight vaudeville and, in early 1925, the theater was sold to the Keith-Albee organization by U. S. Realty. It was said that Keith-Albee planned "to have unusual programs."[37]

After the Hippodrome had become a Keith-Albee house in 1923, Mark A. Luescher had developed for it a stage policy which differed from the policy of the other Keith-Albee houses, one perhaps better suited to its very large stage and seating capacity. It was known as the built-up show. In it, one or more of the vaudeville acts on the bill would be used as the base for a larger ensemble or production number, giving the overall performance a format which would be a cross between spectacular revue in which performers often appeared more than once, often in ensemble pieces, and standard vaudeville in which a series of acts made single appearances in sequence and alone. An additional element from revue and musical comedy in the Hippodrome shows was the use of a line of dancers, known as the Hippodrome

girls, thirty in number, under the direction of Alan K. Foster who had come to the Hippodrome in 1923.[38]

The Hippodrome policy was successful and there were reports that Keith-Albee was considering using the policy in other theaters. Its evolution came about at a time when the larger motion picture theaters such as the Strand and Capitol clearly were becoming competition, or "opposition," to the Keith-Albee theaters. In 1925, no other theater had a policy quite like the Hippodrome policy, but in later years, at least one, the Times Square Paramount, moved toward a similar style.

In the summer of 1925, despite the earlier report that the Hippodrome soon would feature "unusual" programs, a continuation of the policy then current under Luescher's direction was announced for the theater's new season beginning August 21.[39] At this time, apart from the Hippodrome, only the Capitol had the facilities to offer large-scale spectacle, but within less than two years, the Hippodrome would suffer from considerably increased competition from new spectacle houses on or near Times Square, houses which would reinforce the strength of appeal of Times Square as theatrical center, and thus intensify the isolation of the Hippodrome from the main theatrical traffic pattern.

44th Street

Groundbreaking for the new Eighth Avenue subway

line in March 1925 brought promise of increased density for the public transportation network in and around Times Square because of the new subway station centered at 42nd Street and Broadway which would have entrances near Eighth Avenue as far north as 44th Street, and the station farther north at 50th Street. A number of new legitimate theaters were built near these stations, the first of which, the Martin Beck, opened on November 11, 1924, prior to the public announcement in December 1924 of plans for the new subway line.

In May 1925, the Chanins, through their company called Theater Zone Realty, gained control of the east side of the Eighth Avenue blockfront from 44th to 45th Streets. Over the next two years, they constructed the Lincoln Hotel (now the Milford Plaza), and the Majestic, Royale and Masque (now the John Golden) Theaters.[40] The Chanins were reported to intend operating independently these theaters and two others, the Biltmore and the Mansfield, which they then were building on West 47th Street between Eighth Avenue and Broadway.

When they began building theaters in the Times Square area, the Chanins had been affiliated with the Shuberts who leased the Chanins' first theater, Chanin's 46th Street Theater, built in 1924. But the Shuberts were said to be withholding rent, complaining that the theater's specifications were not in accord with those set out in the agreement signed with the Chanins. It was said

that, when they realized the amount of profit being earned for the Shuberts by the Chanin's 46th Street Theater, the Chanins decided to operate their newer theaters themselves.[41]

Apart from the Erlanger, later named the St. James, these were the last theaters to be built in the 200 block of West 44th and 45th Streets until the Minskoff was opened in 1973. They contributed to creating a density of theater buildings which, overall, was as great as the density of the 200 block of West 42nd Street, the other great concentration of theater buildings in New York City. A locational advantage of the West 44th and 45th Street blocks over the 42nd Street block, however, was their greater proximity to the dense concentration of theaters on Times Square itself, which, with the theaters on the immediate side streets, generated a theatrical traffic pattern and ambience difficult to equal. This theatrical density created an image of Times Square as theater and entertainment center, an image which itself became a powerful locational factor.

In 1925, the Shuberts filed plans for a two-story theater to seat 800 to be built at 234-236 West 44th Street on land owned by the William Astor estate which still owned the larger share of frontage on that block of 44th Street in 1925.[42] The theater never was built. At the end of 1925, there appeared a report that the Shuberts had disposed of several parcels of property adjacent to

Broadway, selling them with the stipulation that theaters were not to be built on the sites. The Shuberts or related firms had been the successful bidders for a number of parcels on 45th and 46th Streets which the Astor interests had been selling a few years earlier, at a time when the prospects for profitable new theaters seemed favorable.

By late 1925, however, the Shuberts were said to feel that there were as many theaters available as production demanded, and had not built any in the period immediately prior to 1925, although they had acquired several via rental, Chanin's 46th Street being one. But the restriction placed by the Shuberts on the land which they were selling would prevent the construction of new theaters which might depreciate the value of those already in existence.[43]

Because of the development of the public transportation network very near it, the Criterion Theater, on the northeast corner of 44th Street and Broadway, occupied a particularly valuable corner, and there was persistent talk over the course of the later 1920s that the site would be redeveloped with a major new Publix theater. The Criterion, built by Oscar Hammerstein as part of a larger complex in 1895, had been a legitimate theater, but now was owned by Famous Players-Lasky and run by it as a film theater with stage presentations on a rather modest scale. It seated 608 people. With the

coming of Sam Katz and the Publix organization, its future became uncertain. There were reports that it might revert to use as a legitimate theater and be turned over for that purpose to the Charles Frohman Company, a subsidiary of Famous Players-Lasky.[44] In mid-1925, it was still under the direction of Hugo Riesenfeld, along with the Rialto and Rivoli. An interesting effort under Riesenfeld's overall direction was the presentation of a play written by Dorothy Parker and George S. Kaufman to function as a prologue to a special screening of the film version of Beggar on Horseback, written by Kaufman and Marc Connelly. The play was entitled Business is Business, and extensive use was made of the house orchestra for musical punctuation for the play's points. It was acted before black drapes with props, and made use of well known actors from New York's legitimate stage.[45]

The building that contained the Criterion Theater also housed the much larger New York Theater, then under lease to Marcus Loew as a second-run film theater, and the New York Roof theater. Famous Players-Lasky reportedly refused an offer of $4,500,000 for the building, and was said to be unwilling to sell even if offered $6,000,000, the value which an appraisal that Famous Players-Lasky had had made had attributed to it, having paid $2,500,000 to A. L. Erlanger and Associates for the building in 1919. The Erlanger group had purchased the theaters from the New York Life Insurance Company, which held a $1,250,000

mortgage on the building after it foreclosed on Oscar Hammerstein. Adolph Zukor and Jesse Lasky were said to have purchased additional property behind the building on each of the side streets.[46]

The Broadway block front, 200 feet long, had a valuation of $30,000 per foot placed on it by the City of New York, a figure exceeded in midtown Manhattan only by the $37,500 per foot value given the Vanderbilt Mansion then located at 57th Street and Fifth Avenue on the site now occupied by the Bergdorf Goodman department store.[47]

These valuations underline the importance which apparently was being attributed to the Times Square location. The opening the following year of the Paramount building diagonally across Times Square from the New York Theater could only intensify the importance of the location.

In the fall, another new theater, the Mayfair, the first small theater to be built in the Times Square area since Winthrop Ames opened the Little (now the Helen Hayes) Theater in 1912, was nearing completion at 136 West 44th Street. The theater was to seat 300 and was being built by Ed Margolies in conjunction with an office building which would include a number of studio apartments.[48]

45th Street

In June, Walter Reade[49] acquired full ownership of

the Astor Theater property at the northwest corner of 45th Street and Broadway.[50] The theater had an assessed valuation of $1,400,000 placed on it by the City of New York for 1925. Reade earlier had purchased a half share in the property from E. R. Thomas, and now was buying the remaining half from the estate of Henry Bimberg (whose Bimberg's 52nd Street Theater then was located on the south side of 52nd Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues).[51]

According to a report current at that time, after Reade was in full possession of the Astor property, he began negotiating for the purchase of the Fulton Theater on 46th Street and the adjacent Gaiety, on the southwest corner of 46th and Broadway, adjoining the Astor, working on the assumption that Keith-Albee would take the Fulton and Gaiety sites for the construction of a new "Big Time" (reserved seat two-a-day) vaudeville theater.[52] Such a theater would have increased the value of the Astor Theater property itself. But the report also is interesting because it suggests that the Keith-Albee interests might have been beginning to think in terms of a new Times Square theater, probably a good bit larger than their flagship house of the time, the Palace, near the southeast corner of 47th Street and Broadway. Such reports would persist for the next few years, and make sense in light of the powerful competition in the form of the large film theaters being faced by Keith-Albee, once

all-powerful in the world of New York variety theater.

Shortly after he gained control of the Astor Theater and building, Reade raised the rent to be paid by the Hilton clothiers who occupied the corner at street level; and leased the Astor itself to Marcus Loew for a period of ten years at a better rental figure than the previous landlord had received for the theater. Loew intended to showcase special Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer films in the Astor.[53]

Across Broadway, at the northeast corner of 45th Street, Loew's State Theater continued to be the primary theater for Loew policy of vaudeville with films, the policy which had brought Loew into prominence. Up to that time, the theater had not featured the kind of major performers whose names characterized the bills at the Palace, still very important as the country's leading vaudeville theater. But the crowds seemed to come to the State on a regular basis, the way they might to one of the neighborhood houses.[54]

Perhaps it maintained a high degree of popularity because, despite its Times Square location, the State was essentially a small time vaudeville film theater, and provided a comfortable atmosphere, certainly in contrast to the nearby Palace where expectations ran much higher. And perhaps it was the State's location, providing, as apparently it did, a refuge from the otherwise highly charged Times Square air, which helped maintain its

popularity over the course of many years.

The Lyceum Theater was, and still is, east of and immediately adjacent to the State Theater. In 1925, David Belasco controlled a 40 percent share of the Lyceum, and 60 percent was controlled by Charles Frohman, Inc. which also controlled the Empire Theater near the southeast corner of 40th Street and Broadway. Charles Frohman Inc. was a subsidiary of Famous Players-Lasky which itself controlled a significant amount of property on Times Square. All of this gave Famous Players-Lasky a prominent position and investment in a very tight area on or near the corner of 44th Street and Broadway very much in the center of the theatrical district of the time. With such a mass of property so convenient to a large number of subway connections, Famous Players-Lasky was in a position to influence patterns of development in the area, depending on the manner in which it used its land holdings.

46th Street

Walter Reade also was beginning to amass signficant land holdings on Times Square. As noted above, the Fulton Theater at 206-212 West 46th Street and the Gaiety Theater at 1539-49 Broadway and their sites were owned by the Clevehanna Realty Corporation which was controlled by A. L. Erlanger. The combined sites were one location reportedly having been considered by Universal

for its motion picture theater which would seat 5,500 to 6,000 people.[55]

Farther east in the Forties, there were in 1925 signs of the emergence of a new kind of performance center in midtown. During the course of 1925, broadcasting activity continued to expand at a signficant rate, and increasingly, that activity was centered in midtown Manhattan, away from the downtown central offices of the largest broadcasting corporations. But no major broadcasting studios of significant size had yet been built, either in the downtown area or in midtown. Such studios as there were occupied existing space which had been modified for broadcasting, but no building yet had been constructed exclusively for it.

In 1925, the competition between the radio station of the Radio Corporation of America, WJZ, and the station of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, WEAF, was keen. At the time, WJZ broadcasts originated either in studios in the Aeolian Building at 33 West 42nd Street, or in the Waldorf-Astoria at 34th Street and Fifth Avenue, both midtown locations not far from the theater district and its resources.

WEAF had more elaborate studios, but these were downtown near City Hall. On more than one occasion, WEAF chose to broadcast from locations farther uptown. On August 3, 1925, for example, there was a "pageant" launching "Greater Movie Season" from the Crystal Room of

the Ritz-Carlton on Madison Avenue between 46th and 47th Streets, a short distance from the central theater district. The location made it convenient to assemble a few musicians from each of the five major motion picture houses on Broadway, the Strand, Piccadilly, Rivoli, Capitol, and Rialto. They were combined into a single orchestra conducted alternately by Hugo Riesenfeld of the Rialto and David Mendoza of the Capitol. Irene Franklin and "Bugs" Baer were featured, and Major Edward Bowes, managing director of the Capitol Theater, having just succeeded S. L. Rothafel in that position, was master of ceremonies.[56] It is noteworthy that WEAF featured such a program. That it did suggests that the WEAF management might have had interesting plans for the station prior to the termination the following year of the broadcasting activities of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company.

On June 12, 1925, diagonally across Madison Avenue from the Ritz-Carlton, WRNY, the new radio station of Radio News, opened in the Hotel Roosevelt on the east side of Madison Avenue between 45th and 46th Streets with a program on which were heard Chauncey Depew, Dr. Lee deForest, Elsie Janis, "Bugs" Baer, and Ben Bernie's orchestra.[57] WRNY appears to have been the first radio station with studios on the east side of midtown Manhattan, an area which was becoming a center for various aspects of the communications industry.

47th Street

The Biltmore, the first of the new theaters being built by the Chanin Construction Corporation, opened on December 7, 1925 with a play by Owen Davis, Easy Come, Easy Go, transferred from the George M. Cohan Theater. The Biltmore was at 261 West 47th Street, between Eighth Avenue and Broadway, and had 1,000 seats.[58] The Chanins opened their next theater, the Mansfield, located across the street from the Biltmore, two months afterward.

These theaters were a short distance from the three Chanin theaters in various stages of planning and construction on 44th and 45th Streets. While all five of these Chanin houses were located just at the edge of the tight theater district of the time, nevertheless they all were close enough and sufficiently within safe block boundaries, i.e., between Eighth Avenue and Broadway, so as to be able to function locationally as extensions of that theater district.

Martin Beck, on the other hand, created a problem house when in 1924 he built his Martin Beck Theater to the west of Eighth Avenue, even though on a popular cross street, 45th Street. And yet, the Martin Beck is very near the theater district proper. But the location proved to be unpopular and a poor choice. Eighth Avenue seemed to function as an insurmountable barrier, perhaps, in part, because no other theater builder followed Beck's lead. Land price may have been a factor in Martin Beck's

decision as might have been talk about construction of a new Eighth Avenue subway line. In addition, a significant number of motion picture industry facilities were located in the Forties and Fifties west of Eighth Avenue. But the area never became an extension of the theater district. Even after the Eighth Avenue line opened in the area in 1932, the theater continued to be an unpopular house.

But the factors which influence a locational decision are many and are interrelated in complex fashion. There are those location decisions which appear to be pioneer efforts for some industries, and which may appear to be foolish to some. In 1910, for example, the Shuberts decided to build a music hall (or, in imitation of the name of the well known Berlin music hall, "Wintergarden") for Lew Fields on the site of the American Horse Exchange at 50th Street and Broadway with a seating capacity of about 2,000 and a large stage.[59] The theater, with a seating capacity closer to 1,500, opened the following year.

The Winter Garden is three blocks above Times Square, and, in 1911, there were no other major theaters in the Broadway area between 48th Street and the Park Theater on Columbus Circle, with the exception of Carnegie Hall, and many fewer than in 1925 in the Times Square area. But the Winter Garden was very successful, certainly helped by the series of Shubert revues such as

the Passing Shows; by the fact that the site was still just a few blocks above Times Square, and so not too removed from general theatrical activity; and by the entrance to the Fiftieth Street station for the Seventh Avenue subway line which was adjacent to the theater.

Then too, the three most prominent film theaters on Broadway up to the time of the opening of the Paramount Theater in 1926 had opened just above and below the Winter Garden: the Strand in 1914 at 47th Street; the Rivoli in 1917 between 49th and 50th Streets; and, perhaps most critically, the very large Capitol in 1919 across Broadway at the 51st Street corner, with the result that these blocks of Broadway became extensions of the theater center. All three film theaters lay north of Times Square proper. Land price and the site size needed may have dictated a search for somewhat cheaper land prices than could be found on Times Square itself.

Shortly before the Strand Theater had opened in April 1914, Lee Shubert had bought another site at 758-60 Seventh Avenue at the southwest corner of 50th Street in the block which shortly became the site of the Famous Players-Lasky Rivoli Theater. The transfer date of the property to Shubert was February 20, 1914. While the property did not become part of the Rivoli site, the transaction is suggestive of the degree to which the Shuberts were involved in realty affairs, whether or not there seemed to be a specific theater project being

considered.[60]

The Strand, with its entrance on the west side of Broadway between 47th and 48th Streets had been built by Mitchell and Moe Mark and Max Spiegl. It was credited with having been the first of the so-called deluxe motion picture theaters in the country, and in 1925, was surpassed in size among the first-run film theaters only by the Capitol, although the Capitol was much larger and there was new competition for the Strand shortly to open. But the Strand's site on Times Square was an extremely good one, and was the subject of rumors of new theater construction plans during the later 1920s.

In July 1925, there were reports that Moe Mark was having discussions with William Fox about the possible acquisition by Fox of the Mark theaters, called Mark-Strand, an acquisition which would give a major Times Square showcase to Fox for his film product.[61] To that date, Fox had no film theater of his own in the Times Square area. At the time, the Strand was principal outlet for First National films, then one of the three largest film producers. But there were rumors that First National might go to the larger Roxy, expected to open in 1927, in which case the Strand would need film product on a regular basis.

Nothing came of the Mark-Fox talks and the Strand remained a primary outlet for First National and organizations which subsequently subsumed First National

including Warner Brothers, while Fox himself acquired the Roxy just prior to its opening. But there were repeated rumors over the period of the late 1920s that the Strand's site would be used for a considerably larger theater able to take maximum advantage of the excellent location on Times Square.

48th Street

The year 1925 was a busy one for planning and construction of several new theater projects, some quite large, some small, such as the small theater which was being constructed by Edythe Totten Theatre, Inc. on a site at 247-249 West 48th Street. The company had offices at 1521 Broadway which was the Astor Hotel.[62] In July, there appeared an announcement that Joe Byron Totten and Earl Simmons had formed Totten-Simmons Productions, had taken offices in the Strand Building and had plans at that point for two productions, Love's Call, a drama with music by Totten and Arthur Bergh, and Arms and the Woman, with book by Totten and music by Bergh and Vincent Valentini.[63]

Another active participant in the growing business of theater was Joseph Leblang whose theater ticket agency was a successful and well-known part of the theater scene at the time. On October 5, 1925, title to the 48th Street Theater property at 155-61 West 48th Street was conveyed to Leblang[64] who purchased the theater from William A. Brady and Lawrence Weber.[65] Leblang also owned the

George M. Cohan Theater on the east side of Broadway between 42nd and 43rd Streets.

49th Street

In June 1925, the entire stage in the Rivoli Theater was remodeled and enlarged, and a new proscenium installed. The proscenium was designed with an eye to adaptability for novel scenic effects by John Wenger who was the scenic designer for Famous Players-Lasky stage productions. Wenger's designs replaced the stage curtains which had been designed by Joseph Urban at the time of the theater's opening in 1917.[66] These design modifications were coincident with the installation of an air-conditioning system, one of the few at the time, and with major changes in stage policy, all of which were calculated to make a major draw of the Rivoli, which had not been faring particularly well in box office terms.

Ben Bernie and his band were made the major attraction at the Rivoli, but a change in policy was the introduction of the use of the organ for film accompaniment instead of an orchestra. Bernie was to produce and appear in the stage presentations for which he hired Al Boasberg, "Bugs" Baer, Harry Kalmar, and Dick Ruby to provide his material.[67]

Bernie's efforts were immediately successful, his initial appearance setting a box office record for the summer season. The presentation scheme followed a pattern

in which each evening's entertainment was set in a different night club, with the entertainers from one of the Broadway night clubs making appearances.[68] The use of occasional talent on a night-to-night basis in addition to the material established for the week's presentation suggested the influence of the Sunday night vaudeville concerts in such theaters as the neighboring Winter Garden, in which a given performer would decide to invite the participation of other performers who were in the audience, either spontaneously or only apparently so.

Another innovation introduced through Bernie was the appearance for the first time on a major stage in New York of radio announcers as performers, an indication of the rapidly growing strength of the new medium. WOR, WHN (which was the Loew station), WNYC, and WEAF, the AT&T station, were represented. Bernie himself appeared regularly on WEAF. During the course of Bernie's appearance at the Rivoli, one of the sets used included a huge microphone structured on a stiff drop curtain. One of the musicians was in each of the circular apertures which was lighted from inside when the musician was the central player.[69]

At the end of a four-week period, Bernie moved to the Rialto, and the Rialto orchestra moved to the Rivoli.[70] After Bernie had transferred to the Rialto, Riesenfeld, still in charge of stage presentations for Famous Players-Lasky, announced that Bernie would remain

at the Rialto indefinitely. Apparently, Riesenfeld thought that the Rialto was a better house for Bernie because of its 42nd Street location, the character of the house, the nearness of the stage to the audience, and other "contributory" factors, the precise nature of which was not made clear.[71] But it was clear that Bernie and his band presentations were capable of drawing attention to their theatrical location.

On December 19, the Rivoli closed for further alterations in the form of interior decorations to concord with a new stage elevator system which would permit the orchestra pit and organ to be raised and lowered. The new stage would be used first by another band attraction, Eddie Elkins and his orchestra, to debut Christmas Day, while concurrently, John Murray Anderson was to introduce his first Rivoli stage presentation.[72]

The Rivoli house program for a week in late November announced the changes in policy, and placed particular emphasis on the large amount to be spent on the stage presentations, and on the fact that the presentations, which would be changed weekly, would be as elaborate as the major Broadway revues. The Greenwich Village Follies and the Music Box Revue were mentioned by way of comparison,[73] and as it happened, Anderson had staged six of the eight Greenwich Village Follies series, and the last of the Music Box Revues.

This stress on extravaganza for its units suggests

that earlier reports that Famous Players-Lasky had sought Ziegfeld's services for its stage productions were based in fact and that the basic Famous Players-Lasky concept, probably fostered by Harold Franklin before the arrival of Sam Katz, well might have been to create a Famous Players-Lasky institution in the manner of the then famous Broadway revues in order to focus public attention on the organization's theatrical locations, most importantly, on the new flagship theater being built on Times Square.

Anderson's initial presentation was entitled "The Melting Pot," and was a series of five units of dance and song in which various nations were represented.[74] The emphasis in the production appeared to be on the visual, an area in which Anderson had earned a fine reputation, but the basic format did not differ much from the style which Rothafel had developed at the Capitol, a style characterized by emphasis on visual elements and introduction of balletic and modern dance and concert music.

In September 1925, it was reported that Famous Players-Lasky had purchased a site at 133 West 49th Street running through to 50th on which a theater was to be built.[75] Concurrently, it was reported that Famous Players-Lasky would begin production of full musical shows to be presented without film accompaniment, and that these might be staged at the new theater.[76] Both reports circulated at about the same time that it became known

generally that John Murray Anderson, well known for his work in musical revue, had signed a contract for stage production with Famous Players-Lasky.

There were factors which suggest that there might have been substance to the several reports. Famous Players-Lasky had begun with film versions of legitimate stage productions, the basis for its link to producer Charles Frohman, and may have been planning production of musical comedies and/or revues which it could film after they had been seen on stage. This became a common practice among motion picture organizations a short time thereafter.

Famous Players-Lasky was reported to have been involved in discussions concerning legitimate stage productions with a number of producers in New York City. Some other film organizations were reported to be proceeding along similar avenues. William Fox was said to have made arrangements with the Robert Milton Company, Inc. whereby Fox would finance stage productions to be produced by the Milton Company, and would own the rights to film use of the productions, while Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Brothers, First National, and Producers Distributing Company were said to have been planning comparable arrangements.[77] If the several organizations were looking into the same kinds of possibilities, there would be reason to assume that Famous Players-Lasky, as a leading firm in the industry, would be remaining

competitive.

Furthermore, title to property at 127-135 West 49th Street was conveyed on December 8, 1925 to the Federated Trading Corporation, of which George Zauderer was president, at 425 Madison Avenue; and, on October 25, 1926, almost a year later, title to the property at 136-146 West 50th Street was conveyed to Georgetown Holding Company, care of George Zauderer, at 425 Madison Avenue.[78] While I have not been able to determine whether there was a connection between these firms and Famous Players-Lasky, the coincidence of the reports remains, as well as the fact that Famous Players-Lasky used subsidiary companies to hold title to some of its properties.

There were good reasons for interest in such property for theatrical use. During this period, the area around 50th Street was becoming a center for production of large scale and often lavish musical stage presentations. The Capitol, Strand and Winter Garden were near the site reported to have been bought by Famous Players; according to plans announced by S. L. Rothafel just prior to the time when the reports about the Famous Player-Lasky purchase became current, the new Roxy Theater would be built on the block which was immediately to the north of the reported Famous Players-Lasky site; and the Earl Carroll theater was in the same block as the reported Famous Players-Lasky site, almost next door.

In addition, there were IRT and BMT subway

stations very near, and growing expectation that a new Sixth Avenue subway line would be built by the Independent system. Concurrently, there was rapid expansion of commercial land development in the Forties and Fifties in the vicinity of Fifth and Madison Avenues, development which well might have stimulated the idea among theatrical and nontheatrical realtors that the areas between Times Square and Fifth Avenue might be ripe for new construction.

50th Street

In February 1925, it was reported that Thomas Lamb, the architect, would be designing four theaters to be built on the site of the surface transit carbarn of the Seventh Avenue Railroad Company on the east side of Seventh Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets and that these theaters would be part of a large project which would include a hotel. The project reportedly was being developed by Bing and Bing, a prominent realty firm in New York City.[79] Plans for the four theaters were reported completed in mid-February, and Bing and Bing was said to be planning to build them at a cost of approximately $437,500 each.[80]

In April, a prospectus on the proposed theaters circulating through theatrical offices in the city indicated that the theaters would would have seating capacities of 1,119, 1,121, 1,400, and 1,650.[81] But only

a few weeks later, it was reported that Edward F. Albee, head of the Keith-Albee vaudeville circuit, would build a 5,000-seat popular vaudeville house on the carbarn site if negotiations which then were underway with the stockholders of the Seventh Avenue Railroad Company were successful. Plans for the theater were said to have been drawn up and completed. Keith-Albee was to have the theater on leasehold with an option to buy, while the hotel was still to be part of the overall plan.

During the course of earlier considerations for reuse of the site, a minority of the stockholders was said to have blocked an effort by John Ringling to build the new Madison Square Garden on the site. Albee reportedly was associated with Ringling in the plan and was said to plan to build a theater on a portion of the property as part of the overall project.[82]

In January 1925, Albee had opened the large Albee Theater in Brooklyn, seating close to 3,000 people. It was one of the larger theaters that Keith-Albee was building in the United States during that period of time to serve as houses for presentation of vaudeville and film as part of a move to meet the powerful competition of the film circuits. There were several reports of Keith-Albee interest in sites in the Times Square area for a new theater, and Albee well may have been considering the carbarn site, which probably would have been a less expensive piece of property either for purchase or lease

than comparably-sized properties on Times Square itself.

At this point, in 1925, the carbarn site was still thought to be too far removed from Times Square itself to be considered prime theatrical land, but the status of the property would change when Rothafel's Roxy theater project neared realization.

At the Capitol, Rothafel was in the final months of a contract that would expire on January 1, 1926. Rothafel had been director of the theater since 1920, and during that period of time there were only three weeks when the house failed to show a profit, a record far and away superior to the record of any comparable theater in the vicinity. He had come to the Capitol when, having opened only the previous year, 1919, it was far from successful, and had made it a major attraction.

Through the agreement of 1924 when Loew entered the affairs of the Capitol, the films of MGM, controlled by Loew, became the presentation basis for the theater. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer held Rothafel's contract, according to which MGM had the option of being able to renew the contract for an additional year on July 1, 1925, an option it chose not to take.[83] If Bing and Bing, as developer of the carbarn site, was seeking a successful theater director, Rothafel certainly would have qualified as a candidate.

Rothafel was said to have signed a contract at the end of May with the developers of a new theater to be

called the Roxy, Rothafel's familiar name. The theater was to be built on Seventh Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets on a portion of the carbarn site. When questioned on June 1 about the reported contract, Rothafel refused to confirm or deny it. Formal announcement had not yet been made. The structure was to be the largest theater in the world, seating 6,000, and was to feature films. Arthur Sawyer and Herbert Lubin, who previously had been producers only, were the promoters of the theater which was backed by capital from various sources.[84]

Rothafel was said to have secured release from his contract with MGM after lengthy negotiations. MGM was said to have decided to forego its option for additional service from Rothafel when it learned of the "tremendous offer" that Rothafel had received from the promoters of the new theater, a set of circumstances not likely if MGM truly had wanted to continue with Rothafel and not see him begin a large competing operation on a site only several hundred feet from the Capitol. It is not known whether Rothafel began to experience difficulties with the Capitol management after Loew came into the operation in 1924, whether there had been problems earlier with Messmore Kendall who owned the Captiol or Edward Bowes who subsequently succeeded Rothafel as managing director of the Capitol, or whether it truly was an amicable separation.

Walter W. Ahlschlager, a Chicago architect, was to

plan the Roxy with the assistance of Thomas Lamb who was mentioned as the architect of the four smaller theaters planned, according to earlier report, for the site, and which still were reported to be part of the project. But the reported seating capacities were modified. There was to be a theater seating 1,600 for musical comedy, the others seating 1,100, 950, and 850. Because the Roxy was to occupy a large space beginning at the northeast corner of 50th Street and Seventh Avenue, the four smaller houses were planned to occupy sites closer to the Sixth Avenue end of the carbarn property than had originally been intended for them. The hotel was to rise on the Seventh Avenue frontage and would incorporate the main entrance to the Roxy.

The combination of the hotel and Roxy would be only the second project in New York City in which a large theater would be built in conjunction with a large structure of other use. The other project was the Paramount Theater and office building, the site for which was being prepared several blocks south on Broadway between 43rd and 44th Streets at the time of the initial reports of the Roxy. The New Amsterdam Theater was built with an office tower, and some other theaters included varying amounts of office space, but the nontheatrical space in these was much smaller than the nontheatrical space in the buildings constructed over the Roxy and Paramount Theaters.

From the standpoint of location, the four theaters planned for the carbarn site would have been on the edge of the theatrical center, although, by mid-1925, the Hearst interests had announced plans for at least one theater to be built for Florenz Ziegfeld at 54th Street and Sixth Avenue, a site even farther removed from Times Square. But completion of the Ziegfeld would serve to introduce major theatrical activity into the area above the east end of the carbarn site, and would thus help to establish the section just below it, if not the Ziegfeld's corner, as a viable location for theatrical activity. There already were several playhouses just south of the Roxy carbarn site in the blocks between Sixth And Seventh avenues, especially on the 48th Street block.

It is noteworthy that the plans for the four smaller theaters proposed for the carbarn site were generally similar in size to the five Chanin houses west of Times Square, one of which, Chanin's 46th Street, had opened by mid-1925. The others were planned on schedules which would have run parallel to the schedules for the development of the theaters on the carbarn property. The Chanins' Majestic was built with 1,650 seats, the Royale with something over 1,000 and the Masque with 800, and it was the Chanins who, soon after announcement of the Roxy plan was made, took charge of its development at which time one smaller theater on 51st Street was said to be planned for operation by the Chanins. None of the smaller

theaters was built on the carbarn site.

Bing and Bing sold the Roxy site to the owning corporation organized by Sawyer and Lubin in late spring, and demolition of the carbarns was scheduled to begin in mid-June. The theater was not to be connected with any large film producing or distributing concern, but its developers were said to believe that Rothafel's then enormous personal popularity with film and with radio audiences would assure them both of an audience for their theater, and thereby, would make it difficult for film concerns to withhold decent film product from the new Roxy in the face of "public demand that the people's favorite get a fair break as far as features were concerned."[85]

50th Street was unusually well served by the public transportation subway lines in 1925, and would be even better served in the years to come as plans for the Independent system's Eighth and Sixth Avenue subway lines came to fruition. It cannot be surprising, then, that there came to be considerable interest in theatrical development in the vicinity, just a short distance from Times Square, and interest also in nontheatrical development.

Prior to the appearance of the reports concerning Rothafel and the carbarn site, there had been rumors that the Chicago theatrical firm, Balaban and Katz, which owned or managed a large chain of theaters in the midwest, was considering coming into New York and was talking to

Rothafel about direction of a theater to be built on the southwest corner of 50th Street and Broadway, just across 50th Street from the south end of the Capitol and a few hundred feet west of and across the street from the carbarn site. The site in question ran approximately seventy-five feet south on Broadway from 50th Street and extended 100 feet west, beyond which four additional parcels were being assembled which would provide an additional space approximately 100 feet by 150 feet, all of which would be sufficient to accommodate a theater of 4,000 seat capacity.[86]

The Balaban and Katz organization soon after came into New York via its affiliation with Famous Players-Lasky in the form of the new Publix corporation which had for its flagship house the new Paramount on Times Square, but Fox and Warner, neither of which had a major Times Square outlet at the time, were said to be negotiating for the property at 50th Street and Broadway.[87] Most of the land needed for the project was said to have been assembled, but it was reported that in consequence of the interest in the properties, land values within and around the site had climbed considerably.[88] In 1925, Warner acquired control of the Piccadilly on the east side of Broadway between 51st and 52nd Streets, but it seated only 1,350, and Warner well may have been seeking a more competitive house.

The reported interest in the property at 50th

Street and Broadway, the Warner move into the Piccadilly and the various plans said to have been considered for the carbarns site indicate that the area just above Times Square was attractive to potential theater developers prior to the realiztion of plans for the Roxy, and that Rothafel's popularity at the Capitol, a failure before his arrival, and the success of the productions at the Winter Garden and Earl Carroll Theaters which were very near the Capitol, might have helped to bring the district to the attention of theater audiences and organizations. But the establishment of the Roxy, and the enormous success which attended its opening, certainly did much to add a major new focal point to the world of theater in New York City in the area just above Times Square.

Rothafel made the first public announcement of his intention to leave the Capitol Theater and his plans for the new Roxy theater in mid-1925 at a Rotary Club dinner at the Hotel McAlpin in New York City.[89] Rothafel said that he would leave the Capitol at some point between September 1 and January 1.[90]

Rothafel's involvement with the Roxy was his first opportunity to have an influence on the basic form of the theater in which he would be working. Apparently, the desire to be actively involved in the design of a new theater in which he would stage presentations had been with him for some time. There is evidence that Norman Bel Geddes designed a film theater for him in 1922.[91]

Several offers to aid in the financing of the theater were reported to have been received by the managers of the development, Arthur H. Sawyer and Herbert Lubin, from independent film producers who wanted to secure the new theater as a showcase for their film product. But the offers were said to have been refused because sufficient capital for the project was in hand. There were reports that the Standard Radio Corporation of Worcester, Massachusetts was financing the theater, and that the theater was to be designed and constructed with the future of radio and the broadcasting of motion pictures in mind.[92]

In July, Rothafel, Sawyer and Lubin announced completion of arrangements to build five large film theaters in New York City in addition to the Roxy, which, with the Roxy, would form a circuit.[93] But it is highly doubtful that any of the other theaters was intended to be as large as the Roxy which, as the project evolved, was planned to have 6,210 seats, with 3,200 in the orchestra, 910 in the loges, and 2,100 in the balcony. Three elevators were to service the balcony and loge patrons would have the use of private stairways.[94] The Roxy was to feature four performances daily. Early plans called for a 110-piece orchestra, ballet corps of fifty, and chorus of forty. The theater was to contain a suite of rooms for Rothafel.[95]

S. W. Straus and Company was to market $4,250,000

in mortgage bonds to cover the costs of the Roxy. Rothafel was named president of the Roxy Theatre Corporation, the company receiving the funds; W. E. Atkinson, vice-president and general manager; and Irwin S. Chanin, whose firm was to build the theater, treasurer. Cushman and Wakefield estimated that the value of the project when it would be completed would be $6,925,000, and the estimate by W. Albert Pease, Jr. was $8,950,000.[96] The highest valuation figure placed on a theatrical location in 1925 by the City of New York was $4,350,000 for the Metropolitan Opera House. The new Paramount Theater and office building had been given an estimated value in 1925 of $6,000,000.

The Chanin group was reported to be planning a legitimate theater to be built at 51st Street and Seventh Avenue adjoining the Roxy. This may have been a residue of the earlier plan for the site which included accommodation for four legitimate theaters, but the project was not realized, perhaps because the Chanins were involved with a number of other legitimate theaters in the same period of time.[97]

After some delay, reportedly due to financial difficulties,[98] work on construction of the Roxy was begun around November 1,[99] and Rothafel leased interim office space through Douglas L. Elliman and Company.[100]

Rothafel was said to have received a weekly salary of $1,250 at the Capitol.[101] During his five-year tenure there, he achieved enormous popularity for his presentations and for the theater itself which became one of the eminent showplaces in New York City.

In the years subsequent to the Capitol's opening in 1919 and the coming of Rothafel to the theater in 1920, a number of theaters were built in the area immediately around the Capitol. The Capitol's presence in the area may not have been the only inducement to further theatrical activity, but the success of the stage policy and the physical plant itself surely was an aid in fostering further development.

An example of the kinds of presentation produced by Rothafel at the Capitol is one of the last such under his guidance, presented during the week of June 14, 1925, which included a ballet, sixteen minutes in length, set to Schumann's Papillons and featuring the popular Maria Gambarelli. There were several other singers and dancers, including Frank Moulan, a balladeer whom Variety called the "Colossus of the Capitol," and who, along with most of the other performers at the Capitol, was part of the regular group seen week to week in different presentations.[102]

After Rothafel made known his intention to leave, there was a great deal of uncertainty at the Capitol as to

what the future would hold for the theater.[103] Rothafel was released from his contract in July and Edward J. Bowes, later well known as Major Bowes, succeeded him as managing director.[104]

The theater's policy under Bowes was a general continuation of Rothafel's, and it did well until the opening of the Paramount in November 1926 and the opening of the Roxy in March 1927 provided competition which weakened its box office position, leading to the introduction of a new policy.

The Capitol, which opened in 1919, was the last major theater to be built in the immediate vicinity of 50th Street until 1924 when the Piccadilly and B. S. Moss' Colony Theater began operation. These were the first of a number of theaters to rise in the area from 1924 until 1932. All of the theaters were built very near stations for existing or planned public transportation facilities. None of them was built by large, essentially theatrical organizations, but either by smaller, independent producers, or by nontheatrical land developers. While there were many rumors of theatrical projects being planned for the area by major theatrical organizations, none of these plans were realized.

The Shuberts and Erlanger continued to be concerned primarily with new developments for the Times Square area, but the Shuberts also maintained realty

interests in many other sections of the city. The Shuberts had ventured several blocks beyond Times Square when they opened the Al Jolson Theater in 1921 on the west side of Seventh Avenue between 58th and 59th Streets, not far from the IRT Columbus Circle subway station, but the Jolson was not successful in attracting tenants or audience that far uptown, a problem shared by the Park and Century Theaters a short distance to the west and northwest, respectively, from the Jolson.

In the early 1920s, the country was experiencing a period of economic recession, and there was little theater development activity. But by 1925, the end of the recession and the promise of a greater public transportation network helped to make feasible an extension of the primary theatrical center from Times Square into the immediately adjacent vicinity of 50th Street through the efforts of nontheatrical and smaller theatrical interests.

The subway network provided the area with an IRT station at 50th Street and Broadway, and Brooklyn and Manhattan Transit (BMT) subway stations at 49th Street and Broadway and Seventh Avenue, and at 55th Street and Seventh Avenue. The newly announced Independent system would add a station at 50th Street and Eighth Avenue, and at 50th Street and Sixth Avenue; and a subway line beneath 53rd Street running from Eighth Avenue to Queens, with Manhattan stations along the way. The 53rd Street line

was expected to replace the elevated train which then ran on 53rd Street between Ninth and Sixth Avenues. Farther north, there was expectation of a major interchange at Columbus Circle between the new Independent and the older IRT systems, an interchange which some expected would result in major redevelopment in the Columbus Circle area, no less than the redevelopment expected in the lower Fifties as consequence of the more complex public transportation web.

And an enormous amount of redevelopment did occur in the Fifties, although it did not reach the Columbus Circle vicinity with anywhere near the degree of intensity that areas farther southeast experienced. But expectations of growth fostered many major plans. It was in 1925 that Otto Kahn selected a location between 56th and 57th Streets and between Eighth and Ninth Avenues for a new Metropolitan Opera House, a location near one of the entrances to the planned Columbus Circle subway interchange. William Randolph Hearst had plans for a theater for a location immediately adjacent to Kahn's, as well as plans for other theater and nontheatrical buildings elsewhere in the Fifties, buildings to be located in areas made newly attractive either because of the removal of elevated trains, or because of the promise of the installation of underground trains.

The first major new theater to open in the Fifties after 1921 was the Piccadilly Theater, built by Lee Ochs

and opened in 1924 on the east side of Broadway between 51st and 52nd Streets. The theater featured first-run films, a small orchestra and modest stage presentations on a very shallow stage which was designed primarily for film exhibition. The seating capacity was approximately 1,350. The ground on which the Piccadilly stood was under lease to the theater corporation for nineteen years, with renewal option of an additional twenty-one years.[105]

During the theater's first year of operation, Ochs featured films from small independent producers. But, despite the theater's location in a vital and growing district along Broadway, Ochs soon was reported to be having difficulty getting adequate film product.[106] Around July 1, 1925, Ochs signed an agreement with Warner Brothers whereby the Piccadilly would feature only Warner Brothers films for a year, thus making the Piccadilly the primary showcase for Warner Brothers in New York City, and insuring adequate film product for the Piccadilly.[107]

The Capitol, diagonally across the street from the Piccadilly, had had a connection with broadcasting since 1922 through the transmission of S. L. Rothafel's radio program, "Roxy and his Gang," a program featuring regular performers from Rothafel's production ensemble for the Capitol Theater stage presentations. When Rothafel left the Capitol in 1925, Major Eward Bowes continued the program which provided advertising value for the theater, helping to bring audiences to the corner of 51st Street

and Broadway, and making that corner part of the world of radio.

The Piccadilly also had connections with radio, which fast was becoming a potent force in the world of performance. Around August 1, the Piccadilly, just two blocks north of the Rivoli, featured a stage presentation reminiscent, at least in theme, of one just seen on the Rivoli stage under Ben Bernie's direction. The Piccadilly production was presented with the aid of the Radio Corporation of America which designed and executed the stage setting, a detailed enlargement to stage width of a radio on the curtain, above which was an outline in brilliants of a loudspeaker. The audience heard a brief history of radio from the loudspeaker as well as the first musical number of the production, after which the front panel of the radio cabinet was raised and a radio studio revealed.[108] The stage set was said to be a replica of the WGBS studio over which Piccadilly programs were broadcast regularly at the time.[109]

The connection between RCA and a theater which soon was to be owned by Warners is particularly noteworthy in light of subsequent rumors concerning a new company which would include both Warners and RCA. But equally interesting are the manifestations on stage of the power of the new medium, radio, which would soon come to have an impact direct and indirect on locational circumstances in midtown Manhattan, particularly through the movement of

offices and facilities of the radio group which included RCA and the new network, the National Broadcasting Company.

In August, 1925, Warner Brothers bought the Piccadilly from Ochs and two partners,[110] and on August 31, the theater was renamed the Warner Theater.[111] Shortly thereafter, Warner Brothers organized its own radio station, WBNY, which broadcast from a studio in the Warner Theater, thereby terminating the theater's link with WGBS.[112]

52nd Street

There was activity in theatrical development on West 52nd Street in 1925. In June 1925, it was reported that Joseph Toch and Vanity Realty Corporation had bought the property at 244-254 West 52nd Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue and planned to build a 1,300-seat theater to be named the Clair Eugenia Smith Theater, a seven story studio and commercial space. The Alvin Theater eventually was opened on the site in November 1927.[113]

Across the street from 244-254 West 52nd Street, the Guild Theater, at 245 West 52nd Street, was opened on April 13, 1925.

53rd Street

B. S. Moss opened the Colony Theater on the southwest corner of 53rd Street and Broadway on December

24, 1924 with a policy of film presentation and modest stage presentations which consisted for the most part of orchestral and song performance. The policy was similar to the one at the Piccadilly, although the Colony had a much larger stage than the Piccadilly and was capable of housing full stage productions. The Colony, like the Piccadilly in its earliest period, had difficulty getting adequate film product, and, unlike the Piccadilly, never did acquire a permanent connection with a major film company.

The theater's difficulties were compounded by its location. At first glance, it would appear that the theater should have been successful. It was only two short blocks above the successful Capitol Theater and was fairly large, seating 1,980. But it lay under the 53rd Street elevated train tracks and was the most northerly Broadway house below Columbus Circle until 1927 when Arthur Hammerstein opened his Hammerstein Theater across 53rd Street.

The new Independent subway line under 53rd Street was some years away and the theater had no great advantage which might have made it unique or would have allowed it to stand out as a new landmark, as could the new Roxy when it opened in 1927 because of its great mass, opulence and a fairly strong flow of film product from the William Fox organization.

The Roxy and Capitol before it, as mammoth

spectacle houses, were able not only to exist on the periphery of the theater district in their opening years, but actually had been able to function as new theatrical focal points, and had helped to extend the boundaries of the theatrical district. But B. S. Moss' Colony was in a different category as a theater, and was not able to achieve anything like comparable success.

54th Street

Farther east in the Fifties, new development was being influenced by the removal of a portion of the elevated train system of the same kind that still ran past B. S. Moss' Colony. In early 1925, there were reports that real estate interests controlled by William Randolph Hearst and his associate, Arthur Brisbane, would build two theaters at the corner of 54th Street and Sixth Avenue for the use of Florenz Ziegfeld. The smaller theater would be located on the northwest corner and would be called the Billie Burke; the larger would be on the northeast corner and would be called the Ziegfeld. It was said that the reports were "not contradicted."[114]

At nearly the same time that these preliminary reports about the Sixth Avenue Ziegfeld theaters made their appearance, there were reports that Ziegfeld would lease the Hearst Cosmopolitan Theater on Columbus Circle for his productions and that the Hearst interests would build two theaters for him in the vicinity of 56th and

57th Streets between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. This followed on rumors that Ziegfeld and A. L. Erlanger had had a severe argument, the cause for which was not clear, but the fact remained that Ziegfeld was discussing with the Hearst group a possible agreement which led to the construction of one theater for his use on Sixth Avenue.[115]

In June, Ziegfeld and the Hearst/Brisbane group made public announcement of their plans, but the only theater mentioned was the one intended for the northwest corner of the site. It was said that this theater would be called the Ziegfeld.[116] The development company was known as the Reclamation and Building Corporation. Four structures in all were to be built at or near the corner of 54th Street and Sixth Avenue including an apartment hotel to be called the Warwick which was to occupy the site earlier said to have been intended for the larger Ziegfeld Theater. If there had been something to those earlier development reports, it is not clear what happened between June and January to cause the change in plans.[117]

In late August, however, Variety reported that Ziegfeld had said that Hearst and he would build another theater on Columbus Circle. If this was true, the project said to be planned for Columbus Circle may have effected a change in plans for the 54th Street area.[118]

An article in a June 1925 issue of Variety

indicated that tha agreement between Hearst and Ziegfeld to build a theater for Ziegfeld at "Sixth Avenue and 55th street" had Ziegfeld putting money into the project. The article also reiterated the report that, originally, two theaters had been planned by Hearst on Sixth Avenue, and mentioned that the "deal" to build the theater at "Sixth Avenue and 55th street was reliably reported consummated prior to A. L. Erlanger boarding a liner for Europe,"[119] implying that Erlanger's concurrence in the matter may have been necessary. Ziegfeld long had been a close business associate of Erlanger, having been a primary tenant of the Klaw and Erlanger flagship theater, the New Amsterdam on 42nd Street. Ziegfeld's new theater conceivably could reduce his need for the New Amsterdam and, given Ziegfeld's prominence in theatrical production in New York City, could thereby be harmful to the standing of 42nd Street as a primary theatrical artery. That could only be harmful also to Erlanger as a major landlord on 42nd Street.

The item in Variety also mentioned the removal of a portion of the Sixth Avenue elevated trainway. The Hearst/Brisbane interests began development of their Sixth Avenue site immediately after the closing on June 16, 1924 of the portion of the Sixth Avenue elevated that served as a shuttle between 53rd and 58th Streets.[120]

During the 1920s, there was a great deal of agitation, frequently from organizations in realty, for

removal of various sections of the New York City elevated train system, largely because the elevated was considered harmful to land use for more expensive residential and commercial buildings. Especially in the area of Manhattan from the upper Forties to Central Park was this true because land concerns wanted to extend the commercial expansion being experienced in the Grand Central area northward into immediately adjacent areas, and they succeeded. There were rumors that a major traffic bridge might be built across the Hudson River at 57th Street, a possibility which only added to realtors' interest.[121]

Hearst and interests affiliated with him had been acquiring property in the Fifties for some time. Hearst had bought the Park (formerly Majestic) Theater on Columbus Circle in 1914, eventually renaming it the Cosmopolitan, the name of his film production organization. But it was in the 1920s, often in conjunction with his editor-in-chief at the Evening Journal, Arthur Brisbane, that Hearst became particularly active in realty in the Fifties, both east and west of Fifth Avenue. Brisbane was a very active investor in real estate in Manhattan as well as in other locations, and actually was a developer of properties, often working closely with Hearst.

Two developments which the Hearst interests were fostering in the west Fifties were connected with Hearst's publishing activities. Toward the end of 1925, Hearst had

negotiated a $15,000,000 bond issue through S. W. Straus for construction of a new printing plant for the Evening Journal, to be built at the corner of 54th Street and Eleventh Avenue--the plant then was located on William Street in lower Manhattan--and for another building for the Evening Journal to be built at 58th Street and Eighth Avenue where the newspaper's business offices then were located, in addition to a third building for the same publication to be built in lower Manhattan.[122]

Prior to the 1920s, Sixth Avenue above 42nd Street was not a street of costly residential and commercial structures, but it was strategically located between arteries such as Broadway and Fifth Avenue that were developing well. With the removal of the elevated system above 53rd Street, the Hearst interests began work.

Hearst had a long-standing interest in variety theater and was familiar with Ziegfeld's work and reputation. He met Marion Davies after having seen her in an edition of Ziegfeld's Follies.[123] Apparently Hearst thought that the Ziegfeld name had value, just as Famous Players-Lasky had when it reportedly offered a contract to Ziegfeld for stage production and signed a contract with him for film work, also in 1925.

Contracts for the construction of the Ziegfeld Theater were signed on June 10 by Hearst and Brisbane who was president of the developing corporation, the Reclamation and Building Corporation. Wreckers had begun

to demolish buildings on the site two weeks earlier.[124]

The Ziegfeld Theater was one of several properties covered by a $7,000,000 bond issue through S. W. Straus and Company, there being no suggestion that the theater was any more important to the Hearst interests than any other property. According to an advertisement published by Straus, Hearst guaranteed unconditional prompt payment of interest and principal. The bonds covered a direct closed mortgage on: the Ziegfeld theater and land, leased to Ziegfeld for a period of five years; a 20-story apartment hotel and land on the northeast corner of 54th Street and Sixth Avenue opposite the Ziegfeld Theater; an 18-story building and land at 20 East 57th Street; a 20-story office building and long term leasehold estate at 5 East 57th Street; and two completed commercial buildings and land at 9 East 57th Street. The Straus advertisement stated that these first four structures were to built at once.[125] The fact that all of the proposed structures were located in a fairly narrow area underlines the close focus of the real estate activity of the Hearst/Brisbane interests.

Excavation work for the Ziegfeld Theater began on September 28, 1925. The James Stewart Company had the contract; it was the same company which Variety, in its issue dated September 30, 1925, reported holding the contract for construction of another "Brisbane theatre at 6th avenue and 56th street."[126] This is the only mention

of a theater at Sixth Avenue and 56th Street and may have been a misprint since Eighth Avenue and 56th Street apparently was the Columbus Circle site which Ziegfeld, a few weeks earlier, had referred to as the site for a second theater. But, whether Sixth Avenue or Eighth Avenue was the street name intended, the reiteration of a report of a second theater is noteworthy for the support it lends to reports that the Hearst interests were talking with Ziegfeld about a relationship which went beyond construction of only a single theater for him.

The Ziegfeld was to seat 1,650 people (a figure very close to the capacity of the New Amsterdam Theater), with no provisiion for nontheatrical office space. It was to include a roof apartment for Ziegfeld. (Plans for Rothafel's apartment to be built in the new Roxy Theater had been announced earlier.) Thomas Lamb was to be the chief architect, and Joseph Urban, long associated with Ziegfeld as a scenic designer, was to design the interior.[127]

The Hearst plan for development of a number of structures including a theater on sites very near one another was a concept close in spirit to the theme of combining a large theater and large office building. The practice would begin to gain popularity in the middle and later 1920s, and would culminate in the early 1930s with Rockefeller Center which brought together in one vast project manifestations of virtually all areas of

performing arts and communications, its promoters consciously utilizing the theaters as an attraction for potential tenants and transients. The redevelopment of large sections of Manhattan's east and west Fifties was characterized, especially after 1925, by a gradual increase in the degree to which performing arts and communications organizations were becoming a part of a rich fabric consisting of a wide variety of organizations from the fields of art, advertising, publishing, and radio, as well as the performing arts. These organizations were increasingly interdependent, utilizing many of the same personnel and practices, and this interdependence brought with it a tendency for them to be located ever more closely together, a tendency which fostered an increasing number of large developments to accommodate the density.

Since it was the realtors and developers who were the promoters of these developments, it was they who came to play a significant role in determining the shape and location of the facilities which housed organizations in the performing arts and communications, as well as other kinds of groups. Especially in the middle and late 1920s, these realty interests began to alter radically the shape and function of development on either side of Fifth Avenue in the Fifties, moving it toward the thickly-layered complex of activities which it has been ever since and which is best epitomized, perhaps, by Rockefeller Center.

There was a marked increase during the 1920s in the number of night clubs in the Fifties, many of which were located in the section between Broadway and Fifth Avenue. The properties in this section were less expensive than the land on Fifth Avenue and on Broadway, and may have been more attractive for that reason to the night club entrepreneurs, who can be expected to have wanted to be near the theater district, if possible, in order to benefit from the street traffic occasioned by the theaters and restaurants in the Times Square area, but who also may have found it equally attractive to be not far from the affluent sections on and east of Fifth Avenue. Many of these clubs were extensions of the Times Square area in the kinds of entertainments featured: floor shows and revues similar in style to the productions on the stages of the major theaters and utilizing many of the foremost talents active in the theaters.

The commercial redevelopment of Fifth Avenue was reflected in the conversion to new use or demolition of many of the mansions which still were on Fifth Avenue in the Fifties in the early 1920s. In 1925, the Empire Trust interests which were active in real estate activities in New York City sold the mansion which had been built for William K. Vanderbilt on the northwest corner of 52nd Street and Fifth Avenue to Benjamin K. Winter who intended to use the property for commercial purposes.[128] Concurrently, one of the more important music

organizations, the Aeolian Company, was planning to leave its old building at 33 West 42nd Street when the fourteen story office building under construction for its use on the northeast corner of 54th Street and Fifth Avenue was completed.[129]

From the period of the last decades of the nineteenth century, art galleries and luxury hotels and apartment buildings began to open in and around Fifth Avenue in the Fifties, and, especially after the first Manhattan subway line was opened in 1904 with a major stop at Grand Central Station, the concentration of these special service sectors in the Forties and Fifties increased in strength. When the spur of the elevated train that had run along East 42nd Street was removed, the development of large office structures began. This concentration of office space extended its effect northward, reinforcing the earlier trend toward some commercial development and usage of land for other than single-family residences and creating the commercial and communications center that exists to this day along Fifth and Madison Avenues.

The development of the new Independent subway lines in the mid-1920s was another spur to development in the Fifties. The train line that would run under 53rd Street created great interest in the land along its route, particularly the section around the Fifth and Madison Avenue corners, while on the west side the Eighth and

Sixth Avenue lines engendered developments, or plans for development on or near those Avenues. The Hearst development at 54th Street and Sixth Avenue was favorably situated to benefit from the effect of the new transportation lines, and, farther west, Otto Kahn was investigating purchase of a property near Eighth Avenue and Columbus Circle.

56th Street

Kahn devoted considerable effort to fostering the development of a new Metropolitan Opera House to replace the building built in 1883 on the west side of Broadway between 39th and 40th Streets. It was generally acknowledged that the opera house had insufficient office and stage space for its needs. Kahn's efforts reached a critical phase in 1925, during which a number of sites for a new opera house were investigated, with reports appearing at year's end to the effect that a site had been chosen on the block between Ninth and Eighth Avenues and 56th and 57th Streets, and, in fact, title to a site on that block did pass to a company controlled by Kahn the following year.[130]

Until 1940, the corporation which owned and controlled the Metropolitan Opera House site and building, the name of which was the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, was wholly separate from its tenant organization, the Metropolitan Opera Company. Kahn was

chairman of the board of the Metropolitan Opera Company and was far and away its greatest shareholder, having full controlling interest. But he had no formal connection with the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company beyond his company's tenancy.

Kahn seemed very much to want a new opera house and spent a great deal of time in negotiation with the board of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company trying to convince the board members to go along with his plans for the new theater. He did not seem interested in removing his opera company to another site without the real estate company's permission and participation. It is not clear whether his reluctance might have had something to do with the large cost of such an undertaking, or whether Kahn wanted to be certain that the socially prominent families and friends of the board members of the Real Estate Company would come to the new house. In his early days as head of the Metropolitan Opera Company, Kahn had seen the effect that a second major opera house in New York City could have on the fortunes of both during the course of his dealings with Oscar Hammerstein and his Manhattan Opera House on 34th Street west of Eighth Avenue. There often were rough moments for both opera companies until Kahn bought out Hammerstein and regained for the Metropolitan Opera Company a virtual monopoly both on major opera production in New York City and on New York's most fashionable circle.[131]

As a major partner in one of the most important investment banking houses in New York City, Kuhn, Loeb, which had gained a fine reputation as advisors to railroad interests, Kahn might have been expected to be familiar with realty matters as an extension of his expertise in railroad land concerns and to have seen the possibilities for development in the near term in Manhattan's west Fifties. Carnegie Hall had been built on the east side of Seventh Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets as long before as 1891 and was succeeding as a music center, a success which might have encouraged Kahn to believe that a site not very far west of Carnegie Hall, and touching the same cross streets, might prosper as the location for a new opera theater.

Prior to purchasing the site between Ninth and Eighth Avenues and between 56th and 57th Streets, Kahn considered other sites in the west Fifties as well as sites in the Grand Central Station area. But negotiations for the 57th Street site apparently were under way at least for a few months prior to the end of 1925. On October 15, 1925, William Wheelock of Brown, Wheelock: Harris, Vought & Company, the realty firm which Kahn employed for the project, wrote to Kahn that his firm's representatives were in contact with the owners of parcels on 57th and 56th Streets, and saying that most of these parcels had not been able to be purchased in the previous spring, suggesting thereby that negotiations for the

property had been proceeding for some time.[132] These negotiations ultimately were successful, probably before year's end, since the first piece of the property is listed as having been conveyed on January 13, 1926 to the Wolab Realty Corporation, which Kahn organized to acquire and manage the property pending action by the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company.[133]

Kahn's 57th Street site was contiguous with a portion of a site which was under the control of the Hearst interests. The block front on the west side of Eighth Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets was listed as a property title to which was conveyed to William R. Hearst on April 10, 1924,[134] and apparently was the site discussed in an item in Variety's edition of September 30, 1925 in which Alexander Pantages, head of the Pantages vaudeville circuit, was said to be bringing his "California Vaudeville" into a theater to be built by Hearst at Columbus Circle. Plans called for construction of a theater with more than 3,000 seats, an office building and stores, to be built on "8th Avenue between 56th and 57th streets."[135]

This item followed the report in Variety of September 2, 1925 in which Ziegfeld said that Hearst and he would build a second theater together on Columbus Circle.[136] In two instances, Variety referred to sites on the block bound by Eighth and Ninth Avenues and between 56th and 57th Streets as sites on Columbus Circle which

suggests that the reference made by Ziegfeld to a second theater to be built on Columbus Circle may have been the theater mentioned above as the one in which "California Vaudeville" would be presented. This seems all the more likely to be the case in light of another item in Variety published shortly thereafter according to which plans had been filed for a $3,000,000 theater project to be built by Hearst for operation by Ziegfeld on the west side of Eighth Avenue, between 56th and 57th Streets.[137]

These several references strongly suggest that, whatever form the plans for this theater and its stage policy might have taken, the Hearst interests did at least consider building a theater at the corner of 57th Street and 8th Avenue, directly adjacent to Kahn's site for his projected opera house, and that the two sets of plans were being formulated at approximately the same time. The references also suggest that the stage policy, whether under Ziegfeld's or Pantages' direction, was going to be variety or musical comedy, theatrical forms considerably different from the kinds of productions usually seen at the Metropolitan Opera House in the 1920s.

The variety theater never was built at 57th Street and Eighth Avenue, but instead, in 1927, a store and office structure was constructed on the site by the Hearst interests in accord with the plans of the architects, Joseph Urban and George E. Post & Sons.[138] Hearst employed Urban as architect and designer for many of his

projects, but his employment for work on an office structure is noteworthy. The office structure stands today and does suggest, with its rather dramatic facade, that the project originally might have been meant for a theatrical purpose.

Kahn also had employed Urban who designed a number of sets for productions at the Metropolitan Opera House. In 1926, Kahn hired Urban to work as associate architect with Benjamin Wistar Morris on plans for the opera house project for 57th Street, and on February 26, 1927, when plans for the opera house project were being formulated, Kahn wrote to Edward Ziegler, his general manager at the Metropolitan Opera, reminding him to get Urban to suggest to the Hearst people the advantage of constructing an arcade through their property, running from the new Opera House to Eighth Avenue, suggesting that they might be able to secure some revenue thereby.[139]

Prior to engaging him as associate architect for the new Metropolitan Opera House project, Kahn had not employed Urban in any other capacity than as a scenic designer at the Metropolitan Opera House. Although circumstantial, evidence suggests that Urban might have been of importance to Kahn as much as for anything else as a bridge between the Hearst interests and Kahn to mediate difficulties which might arise because of the proximity of their 57th Street properties. Coordination of effort to make their projects as attractive as possible would be

particularly helpful to both parties in view of the fact that they did have cause for concern that the area might not be attractive to theater patrons, considerably removed as it was from the primary theatrical district.

Farther east, however, the mid-Fifties was the site of increasing numbers of night clubs frequented by fashionable New York society and people from the world of the theater. The entertainment at Ciro's on West 56th Street exemplified the ever more elaborate floor shows which became more and more prominent in Manhattan in the middle and late 1920s, and especially in the 1930s after the end of prohibition. The presentation at Ciro's included a "Rhapsody in Blue" finale, a semi-ballet under dim lights to the accompaniment of excerpts from the Gershwin score directed and choreographed by Sammy Lee; a comedy sketch, which was a departure from normal practice in night club entertainment; and at least one full production number apart from the "Rhapsody in Blue." Frances Williams and Sterling Holloway were among the cast members. The presentation reportedly got a very enthusiastic audience response.[140]

Another new club was reported as being prepared for opening on West 56th Street between Ciro's and Harry Richman's Club Richman,[141] while the group which formerly had run Delmonico's was said to have secured the former Huntington mansion on 56th Street just east of Fifth Avenue for use as a night club. The mansion recently had

been purchased by the Schulte realty group.[142]

Leon Volterra, a prominent Parisian producer and director of the Casino de Paris in Paris, was said to be interested in a night club in New York which would be called the Perroquet de Paris.[143] This club did open, but without Volterra's involvement, at 140 West 57th Street under the direction of Roger Wolfe Kahn whose orchestra was the prominent regular attraction. Roger Wolfe Kahn was one of the sons of Otto Kahn, who had a financial interest in the club.

These clubs catered to an audience composed of people from the theater and art worlds as well as the affluent and socially prominent. Increasingly during the course of the 1920s, they were centers of activity for the residents of the expensive apartment buildings and homes on the east side of Manhattan between Central Park and Lexington Avenue. The streets in the Fifties west of Fifth Avenue were convenient to the east side and the land prices were not exorbitant, factors which may have spurred the growth in the number of clubs in the area.

Many of the night clubs began to become highly theatrical attractions in themselves. Elegant interior decoration reflecting current modern styles, with features such as smoked-glass dance floors, intricate lighting and carefully tailored color arrangements became a necessity. An example from 1922 of the use of highly trained and gifted architects for the decor in these night clubs was

the work done by Norman Bel Geddes in the Palais Royal, a nightclub on the east side of Broadway between 47th and 48th Streets which featured Paul Whiteman and his orchestra.

The decorative scheme was built on simple curves and angles. The ceiling curves swept across the room from box to box. An elliptical canopy of curved sections was positioned over an elliptical dance floor. The overall color scheme for the room was gold and gray, with vermillion in the chairs and in the boxes where there were gradations of color from deep vermillion to pale gray.

The room was given a complex lighting system equipped with dimmers which allowed easy variance of the intensity of illumination. Spotlights concealed above the boxes threw a soft light over the curving surface of the ceiling, while other lights were concealed at other points around the room. The design suggested a simple, yet elegant modernism, and demonstrated an imaginative use of the effects of color with light. Color also heightened the effect of a group of stylized dancing figures on the walls. The figures were modeled in four flat planes, color emphasizing the most important lines.[144]

For some years, there had been large luxury hotels on Fifth and Madison Avenue in the Forties and Fifties, hotels such as the Plaza, Netherlands, St. Regis, Gotham, and Ritz-Carlton. There were public dining rooms in all of these and in the 1920s, some of the hotels began to

open dining rooms which were somewhat closer in tone to night clubs than previously had been the case. Furthermore, in the years immediately following 1924, there began to appear reports of plans for new luxury hotels to be built on Fifth Avenue from 55th to 63rd Streets. These plans well may have been an additional inducement to the growth of the number of night clubs in the adjacent blocks.

One of the first of the plans to be announced around 1925 for a new hotel on Fifth Avenue was a project for a fifty-six story hotel to be built by interests connected with the prominent realtor, Frederick Brown, on the site of the Cornelius Vanderbilt mansion on the west side of Fifth Avenue between 57th and 58th Streets, a site which became the location of the Bergdorf Goodman department store shortly thereafter.[145] Although the hotel project never was realized, the plan is indicative nonetheless of an active trend which did result in the realization of several other such projects, some of which, such as the addition to the St. Regis and the Pierre, included rooms featuring policies in dining and entertainment which were similar to those in the most fashionable of the night clubs.

In 1925, the old Steinway Hall at 14th Street on Union Square closed and the Steinway piano firm moved to a new building at 109 West 57th Street.[146] The building included a hall, Steinway Hall, seating 250, which was to

be managed by Arthur Judson, one of the most prominent concert managers of the first half of this century.[147] The Steinway Building, as a building constructed for the use of a prominent organizations in the world of music and as a building which attracted as tenants other organizations with interests in music, was a manifestation of the increasing tendency in the period under study for individuals and groups connected with music to cluster in the area in and around 57th Street and around Carnegie Hall in particular. This tendency cannot have escaped Otto Kahn's attention as he continued his investigation of sites for his projected opera house.

In the months before the Wolab Realty Organization made the initial purchase of property for the Metropolitan Opera house project on the block between Ninth and Eighth Avenues and between 56th and 57th Streets, two neighboring sites very near Columbus Circle, one of which also bordered West 57th Street, were being investigated for the project. One of these was a site on the block between Eighth and Ninth Avenues and between 57th and 58th Streets, apparently including the better part of the area from 315 to 349 West 57th Street and from 316 to 346 West 58th Streets. In a letter to Otto Kahn dated July 31, 1925, E. G. Chadwick of Brown, Wheelock: Harris, Vought & Company enclosed a listing and diagram of these properties.[148]

The better part of this same letter was given over

to discussion of the second site near Columbus Circle which was being considered, 315-347 West 58th Street through to 312-338 West 59th Street, in the block between Columbus Circle and Ninth Avenue and 58th and 59th Streets directly west of Hearst's Cosmopolitan Theater. The site was controlled by the Hearst interests through an organization called the Veronica Realty Corporation. A statement and diagram for the site was included in the letter which suggested that Hearst had been assembling that site for at least ten years.[149] The first property in the site is listed as having been conveyed to the Veronica Realty Corporation on April 21, 1914, and the last property was conveyed on March 4, 1924.[150]

The purchase price being asked, $2,000,000, did not seem unreasonable to William Wheelock, president of Brown, Wheelock: Harris, Vought & Company who wrote to Kahn a few months afterward about the matter, referring in his letter to the property as Hearst's, and telling Kahn that he, Wheelock, would further pursue the matter if that was Kahn's wish.[151] But shortly thereafter the property two blocks to the south was selected as the opera house site.

Hearst's investments in real estate in the Columbus Circle area should have been reason enough for him to want to encourage the development of the opera house project, the realization of which certainly would have been an improvement for the section. If Hearst's

price for the site behind his Cosmopolitan Theater was the "least expensive parcel obtainable," it would suggest that Hearst did not want to discourage the project. Hearst had purchased the Cosmopolitan Theater on Columbus Circle in 1914. He is said to have been convinced that the northward movement of various kinds of activities in the city and the erection of a new traffic bridge across the Hudson at 57th Street would make Columbus Circle the primary nodal point in the city, with a result of vastly increased realty values in the area.[152]

The Cosmopolitan had opened in 1903 as the Majestic and was called the Park Theater when Hearst purchased it. Joseph Urban redecorated it for its reopening in 1922 as the Cosmopolitan, a showcase for Hearst's Cosmopolitan motion picture company. The Cosmopolitan had had a number of stage and film policies and never was able to be regularly popular. Columbus Circle simply was not a central theater point in the city.

In early January 1925, there appeared reports that the Cosmopolitan was to be leased to Ziegfeld, reports denied by the Ziegfeld office. There were rumors, mentioned above, that, there recently had taken place a serious argument between Ziegfeld and A. L. Erlanger with whom Ziegfeld had long been associated and with whom he participated in the corporations which administered the New Amsterdam Theater, home of most editions of Ziegfeld's Follies, and flagship theater for the Klaw and Erlanger

theatrical organization; and the Follies itself, which, like many individual productions, was the basis for a corporate organization.[153]

The Hearst group was said to be willing to support Ziegfeld to the extent of securing for him theaters in, at the least, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston. Ziegfeld was reported to have visited the Cosmopolitan several times and to have inspected it closely. He was said to want the house for his production of The Comic Supplement which would go into the Cosmopolitan around February 15, 1925. Hearst was said to want to make Columbus Circle a theatrical center and to have undertaken negotiations with Ziegfeld whereby Hearst was to build two theaters around 56th and 57th Streets between Seventh and Eighth Avenues to be turned over to Ziegfeld on completion. But since construction would take at least a year, and since Hearst was said to want to improve the standing of the Cosmopolitan which never had done well in its operations, he was reported to have insisted that Ziegfeld assume charge of the Cosmopolitan immediately and to assume charge of all three when the two new houses were completed. It was felt that Ziegfeld would not commit himself to Columbus Circle unless he had a promise of new facilities. As it happened, the only new theater built for Ziegfeld by the Hearst interests was the Ziegfeld Theater at 54th Street and Sixth Avenue.[154]

Ziegfeld's tenancy at the Cosmopolitan, now

called the Ziegfeld-Cosmopolitan, began on March 2, 1925 with the opening there of Louie the 14th with a score by Sigmund Romberg. An item in Variety published five months into the production's run carried a report that it would be kept on until January 1, 1926 despite any losses because Hearst wanted to establish the Cosmopolitan as a successful legitimate theatrical house in order to improve property values in the Columbus Circle area.[155] Louie the 14th did in fact stay at the Cosmopolitan for forty weeks before beginning a tour.

Another financially substantial group which had a connection with theatrical land use not far from the Cosmopolitan Theater was the Duke tobacco interests through Durham Realty which was a holding company for the properties of the family of Benjamin N. Duke. An existing building at 202 West 58th Street was being remodeled in 1925 for use as a theater by John Golden who also held a lease at that time on the Little Theater on West 44th Street.[156] The site was owned by the Durham Realty Corporation which had acquired title to the property on May 15, 1925.[157] This site adjoined 914-920 Seventh Avenue, the southwest corner of 58th Street and Seventh Avenue, title to which had passed to the Durham Realty Corporation on November 24, 1915.[158] The John Golden Theater opened the following year on November 1, 1926.

The Duke interests had other property during the 1920s which was located north of 50th Street, at least one

parcel of which had a connection with the performing arts. In 1927, Durham acquired the St. Regis Hotel, building a large addition which included a roof garden called the St. Regis Roof designed by Joseph Urban as a setting for dining, entertainment and dancing.[159] From 1923 to 1929, Durham Realty Corporation also acquired property from 45 to 59 East 61st Street and 540 Park Avenue, the northwest corner of 61st Street and Park Avenue, giving it at least three properties within seven blocks of one another north to south in the Fifties and Sixties.[160]

Whether the Duke interests thought that a theater on their site at 202 West 58th Street would serve to draw attention to the site to aid in more extensive future development is not clear. But if that was the intent, the idea would not have been unique.

62nd Street

The Century Theater was used for various purposes in 1925, and, among the Shubert houses, it was unique. The Shuberts tried in a number of ways to make a success of the building, including building at least three additional performance spaces. The most prominent of these was the Century Roof, designed in 1922 by Norman Bel Geddes. In 1925, there were reports that an original musical production would be staged on the Century Roof, but that there was uncertainty about the identity of the producers. A "foreigner" was said to have made

application to use the roof for his own production.[161]

Shortly thereafter, it was said that a night club would be installed in the former bar at the Century Theater. The night club was to feature a Parisian cabaret show, would be called Chez Fysher, and would be run by Clifford C. Fischer,[162] a Frenchman who had run another night club named Chez Fysher some years before at 121 West 45th Street[163] and who in 1934 would operate the French Casino in a modified version of the Earl Carroll Theater. Then in December, there was a report that the Shuberts would produce the musical A Night in Paris for the Century Roof featuring at least one foreign name.[164]

The Shuberts seemed intent on making the large Century a general attraction despite its location considerably removed from the central theater district. Their efforts suggest that there well may have been a connection between the plans for the Century Roof and for Chez Fysher. The main theater was used for a variety of attractions during the course of its existence. Especially in its last years, productions from other theaters were transferred to the Century when these productions were no longer fresh attractions and the theater in which they opened, usually closer to the heart of the theatrical district, was needed for a new play.

The UFA film, Siegfried, first was presented at the Century on August 23, 1925, its New York premiere, where it was accompanied by an orchestra of sixty,

reportedly the largest ever assembled in a legitimate theater in New York City. The Wagner score was orchestrated for the presentation by Hugo Riesenfeld, then head of production for the theaters in New York City of Famous Players-Lasky. It was conducted by Josiah Zuro, who just had resigned from the production department of Famous Players-Lasky, with which Kahn was closely affiliated.[165] Siegfried was presented later that year at the Famous Players-Lasky house, the Rialto.

The San Carlo Opera Company of Fortuno Gallo followed Siegfried into the Century in September, some time prior to the opening of Gallo's own theater at 254 West 54th Street.[166] Because of its size, the theater could be used for at least two separate activities occurring simultaneously. An item in Variety mentioned that a rehearsal for the Shubert production of Mayflower was taking place in the gym in the upper levels of the Century while a performance by the San Carlo Opera Company was being given in the main theater below.[167] But all of its size and all of the efforts expended by the Shuberts were not able to make a success of the Century, and all succeeding efforts to create an interest in potential audiences or promoters were to be of no avail.

The Century first had opened as the New Theater in 1909, and was a short distance east of the midpoint between the Columbus Circle and Lincoln Square stations of the new IRT subway line. The two stations had been part

of the portion of the IRT line first opened in 1904, and the New/Century Theater might have been expected to have derived benefit from its proximity to excellent public transportation. In 1925, there also was the promise of the new interchange with the Independent Eighth Avenue line at Columbus Circle, but, despite an excellent location vis-a-vis public transportation networks, the theater could not find an audience.

Almost certainly, this was an effect of the theater's remove from the primary theatrical center several blocks to the south, but at one point some years earlier, the Colonial Theater, nearby on the west side of Broadway between 62nd and 63rd Streets had enjoyed success earlier in the century as a vaudeville house under Percy Williams' administration. The theater had been opened on February 12, 1905, a few months after the new IRT subway line was opened, and was very nearly halfway between two nearby subway stations. It was built by some of the same interests who opened the Hippodrome in April 1905, another theater located near stations for the IRT line.

Other neighborhood vaudeville houses such as the 81st Street at 81st Street and Broadway, and the Riverside at 96th Street and Broadway did well prior to the maturing of the film industry and the growing power of the draw of Times Square and its huge film theaters in the 1920s, but by the mid-1920s, neither the Colonial nor the Century were significant theaters.

In 1925, the Colonial was leased by Walter Hampden who intended to remodel it and present a production of Hamlet as the first of a series of legitimate productions in the theater; Hamlet did open at the theater, renamed Hampden's, on October 10, 1925.[168]

Along with the Century, the most northerly theater at the time in New York City used for primary engagements of major productions, was Daly's 63rd Street Theater, located on the south side of West 63rd Street between Broadway and Central Park West, almost immediately west of the Century. In the summer of 1925, A. L. Jones and Morris Green took Daly's 63rd Street Theater from John Cort for an uncertain period of duration. Jones and Green already were connected with Joe Leblang who controlled the 48th Street Theater and the George M. Cohan Theater. Jones and Green reportedly intended to use Daly's 63rd Street as an uptown showcase for the Provincetown Playhouse productions. Love for Love was to be reopened there, with Desire under the Elms coming in later, moving from Leblang's Cohan when the film, Ben-Hur, went into the Cohan.[169]

The Provincetown productions were typical of the kind usually housed in the theaters on the fringe of the theater district in that usually they were not thought to be as viable commercially as the more popular kinds of legitimate and musical fare. Nor were Walter Hampden's productions likely to attract a wide audience. But the

Colonial, Daly's 63rd Street and the Century were fighting a basic locational problem, and it is doubtful that any measures that might have been taken by their managements could have remedied their unfortunate circumstances. But interested parties, such as Hearst and the Shuberts, would continue to make efforts to overcome these circumstances in the years immediately subsequent to 1925.[170]

The overall locational trend for theater and broadcasting development in 1925 appeared to be one of general consolidation of growing industries into fairly narrow districts as Times Square and, to a lesser extent, the area immediately above it and the Grand Central Station area became home to intense concentrations of theaters, studios and other structures housing facilities with connections to theater and broadcasting. The growth of the importance of the Times Square area reflected the increasing importance of first-run theaters, whether for film or stage productions, over neighborhood theaters, a trend reinforced by the ability of the subway system to bring great numbers of people into midtown with great ease.

But the subway network was not a guarantee of success for a location. It seemed to help the growth of areas such as Times Square which had been very near the older theater center at 42nd Street and the blocks just below it when the first subway line was opened in 1904,

with stations just above and below Times Square. However, the subway did not appear to be of aid to theaters removed by many blocks from the theatrical center.

Just as Times Square was able to benefit from immediate proximity to 42nd Street and the new subway line of 1904, so did the area in the Fifties immediately above Times Square grow as a location for theaters as newer subway lines which would serve that section were announced, and as space in Times Square itself became less readily available and more expensive.

Plans announced in 1925 for two major film theaters, the Paramount and the Roxy, were to result in important landmarks which would further strengthen and stabilize Times Square and the area just above it as theatrical center, and would help create the image of Times Square as the nation's primary entertainment center, an image which persists to this day.

These theaters also were to be manifestations of the might of the wealth which was becoming a hallmark of the motion picture industry, a wealth reinforced by the growing ties of the motion picture industry to major investment banking houses in lower Manhattan's Wall Street area. This economic power now would become manifest in the size of new theater projects planned for midtown and would be an important factor in determining the relationship between location and theater for at least the remainder of the 1920s.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 115 (May 23, 1925): 7, 9.

[2] "Back to B'way," Variety, October 7, 1925, p. 38.

[3] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, June 24, 1925, p. 29.

[4] "Chanins Buy 2 B'way Houses," Variety, December 21, 1925, p. 21.

[5] "Big Guarantees to A. H. Woods and Selwyns," Variety, September 16, 1925, p. 23.

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, December 16, 1925, p. 34.

[8] "Dime Museum on 42nd Street," Variety, October 7, 1925, p. 1.

[9] "F. P. Picture Houses Changing Style of Music," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 1.

[10] "Inside Stuff--Pictures," Variety, August 12, 1925, p. 28.

[11] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, December 16, 1925, p. 34.

[12] "F. P.'s Musical Changes; Xmas on B'way," Variety, December 2, 1925, p. 1.

[13] Ibid.

[14] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, December 16, 1925, p. 34.

[15] "New System Is for Publix Publicity," Variety, December 23, 1925, p. 31.

[16] "F. P.'s Musical Changes."

[17] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 115 (May 2, 1925): 13.

[18] "'After' Big Film Combine--'Big Monopoly Report Stirring Commission," Variety, September 23, 1925, p. 31.

[19] "F. P. Theatre Dep't Reorganization in Hands of Katz and H. B. Franklin," Variety, October 21, 1925, p. 25.

[20] "F. P. Operating Merged Houses from Plans in Chart Form," Variety, December 2, 1925, p. 7.

[21] "F. P. Presentations Produced in N. Y.; 20 Weeks of travel--Acts in Them Also," Variety, December 16, 1925, p. 29.

[22] "Abe Balaban Not Heading N. Y. Office," Variety, November 4, 1925, p. 29.

[23] "Million $ Offer for Ziegfeld," Variety, December 16, 1925, p. 1.

[24] "News from the Dailies," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 16.

[25] John Murray Anderson, Out without My Rubbers (New York: Library Publishers, 1954), pp. 101-3.

[26] Ibid., pp. 102-3.

[27] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 116 (August 8, 1925): 7.

[28] William Wheelock to Otto Kahn, October 15, 1925, Otto Kahn Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey (hereafter cited as Kahn Collection).

[29] F. J. Loew to Otto Kahn, December 31, 1925, Kahn Collection.

[30] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 116 (April 18, 1925): 9.

[31] "10,000 More Seats on B'way," Variety, November 11, 1925, p. 34.

[32] Ibid.

[33] "Famous Players' $20,000,000 Theatre Building Program," Variety, July 7, 1925, p. 22.

[34] "U's $11,000,000 for Theatres; B'way House, 6,000 Capacity, 50¢," Variety, December 9, 1925, p. 34.

[35] Ibid.

[36] William Wheelock to Otto Kahn, October 15, 1925, Kahn Collection.

[37] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 115 (April 25, 1925): 15.

[38] "'Hippodrome Policy' May Pervade big Time Vaudeville Generally," Variety, April 9, 1924, p. 5.

[39] "Hippodrome Will Open with the Same Policy," Variety, August 12, 1925, p. 5.

[40] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 115 (May 23, 1925): 12.

[41] "Chanins Operating Own Houses," Variety, November 18, 1925, p. 22.

[42] "News from the Dailies: New York," Variety, June 24, 1925, p. 18.

[43] "Shuberts Sell Plots with Restrictions," Variety, December 9, 1925, p. 23.

[44] "'The Dark' at Criterion," Variety, December 2, 1925, p. 19.

[45] "Presentations: 'Business Is Business'," Variety, June 10, 1925, p. 33.

[46] "$30,000 Front Foot; Millions for New York," Variety, October 14, 1925, p. 1.

[47] Ibid.

[48] "B'way's Newest Little Theatre Opening in Feb.," Variety, November 18, 1925, p. 22.

[49] Walter Reade was born Walter Rosenberg, and was the nephew of Oscar Hammerstein and cousin of Hammerstein's grandson, Oscar Hammerstein II.

[50] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 116 (July 4, 1925): 10.

[51] "News of the Dailies," Variety, July 1, 1925, p. 9.

[52] "Inside Stuff on Vaudeville," Variety, July 8, 1925, p. 8.

[53] "News of the Dailies," Variety, July 15, 1925, p. 10; "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, July 22, 1925, p. 21.

[54] "Vaudeville: State," Variety, September 16, 1925, p. 17.

[55] "Disappointments on Radio Program," Variety, August 5, 1925, p. 33.

[56] "News of the Dailies," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 16.

[57] "U's $11,000,000 for Theatres."

[58] "News of the Dailies," Variety, December 16, 1925, p. 10.

[59] "15 Years Ago [column of selected articles from Variety and Clipper from another time period]," Variety, July 29, 1925, p. 19.

[60] RED, p. 732.

[61] "Mark Strand Theatres May Go to Fox," Variety, July 29, 1925, p. 27.

[62] "New Theatres in Construction,", Variety July 15, 1925, p. 7; Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 115 (June 20, 1925): 12.

[63] "Totten-Simmons Producing," Variety, July 29, 1925, p. 21.

[64] RED, p. 139.

[65] "Leblang Takes 48 St.," Variety, October 14, 1925, p. 22.

[66] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 32.

[67] "Rivoli Experiment of Jazz Bandmaster," Variety, July 1, 1925, p. 23.

[68] "New Rivoli Policy Creates Talk and Summer Record, $30,804," Variety, July 22, 1925, p. 27.

[69] "House Reviews: Rivoli," Variety, July 29, 1925, p. 37.

[70] "Bernie Switching Houses," Variety, July 29, 1925, p. 32.

[71] "Increase of $28,000 at Rivoli from Last Year," Variety, August 12, 1925, p. 23.

[72] "F. P.'s Musical Changes."

[73] "F. P. Presentations Produced in N. Y.; 20 Weeks of Travel--Acts in Them Also," Variety, December 16, 1925, p. 29.

[74] "House Reviews: Rivoli," Variety, December 30, 1925, p. 192.

[75] "New 49th St. House," Variety, September 23, 1925, p. 1.

[76] "Famous Players Will Produce Musical Shows," Variety, September 23, 1925, p. 1.

[77] "Fox Connects with Milton, Inc. for Legit Play Productions," Variety, October 14, 1925, p. 29.

[78] RED, pp. 143, 146.

[79] "Theatre Boom for Times Square within Next 12 Months," Variety, February 11, 1925, p. 16.

[80] "News of the Dailies," Variety, February 18, 1925, p. 14.

[81] "Inside Stuff on Vaudeville," Variety, April 1, 1925, p. 18.

[82] "New K.-A. House for Car Barn Site," Variety, May 13, 1925, p. 7.

[83] "$75,000 a Year, Capitol Profit," Variety, May 27, 1925, p. 29.

[84] "Rothafel's Theatre, Seating 6,000 on Site of Old Carbarn at 51st St.," Variety, June 3, 1925, p. 24.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, September 2, 1925, p. 33.

[89] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 116 (July 4, 1925): 6.

[90] "Roxy on Vacation," Variety, July 1, 1925, p. 24.

[91] Frederick J. Hunter, comp., Catalog of the Norman Bel Geddes Theatre Collection: Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1973), p. 25. The pertinent reference is as follows: "Roxy Movie Theatre - A movie theater designed for Samuel L. Rothapfel, New York. It was built in 1927. Items: Notes for autobiography." Bel Geddes does not appear to have been involved in the Roxy Theater as it was built in 1927.

[92] "Roxy Signs, Gets New Car," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 31.

[93] "News of the Dailies," Variety, July 22, 1925, p. 10.

[94] "Roxy's 6,210 Capacity," Variety, September 16, 1925, p. 29.

[95] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, November 11, 1925, p. 36.

[96] "News of the Dailies," Variety, November 11, 1925, p. 10.

[97] "Chanins Operating Own Houses."

[98] "Roxy House Is on Sign Only; Roxy on Air," Variety, October 7, 1925, p. 34.

[99] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 116 (November 14, 1925): 9.

[100] "News of the Dailies," Variety, October 21, 1925, p. 8.

[101] "Erno Rapee to Go with U. F. A. in Berlin," Variety, July 15, 1925, p. 23.

[102] "Presentations: Papillons," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 34; "Presentations: At the Seashore," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 34.

[103] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, July 8, 1925, p. 34.

[104] "House Reviews: Capitol," Variety, July 29, 1925, p. 18.

[105] "Warners Pay $800,000 for Och's Piccadilly on Broadway," Variety, August 12, 1925, p. 23.

[106] Ibid.

[107] "Piccadilly and Colony Barred to Out and Out Independents, Variety, July 8, 1925, p. 21.

[108] "Presentations: Radio Demonstration," Variety, August 5, 1925, p. 28.

[109] "Disappointments on Radio Program," Variety, August 5, 1925, p. 33.

[110] "Warners Pay $800,000."

[111] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, August 26, 1925, p. 21.

[112] "New York Has 29 Stations," Variety, September 30, 1925, p. 45.

[113] "News from the Dailies," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 16 [reference actually on continuation on p. 49]; Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 116 (December 19, 1925): 6.

[114] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 115 (January 17, 1925): 10.

[115] "Erlanger-Zieggy Split, Rumor Through Hearst Theatre Deal," Variety, January 7, 1925, p. 21.

[116] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 115 (June 20, 1925): 8.

[117] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 116 (July 4, 1925): 9.

[118] "News from the Dailies," Variety, September 2, 1925, p. 10. Variety's reference to Columbus Circle appears to be to the general Columbus Circle vicinity. See other references to this theater project below.

[119] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 25.

[120] Joseph Cunningham and Leonard O. DeHart, A History of the New York City Subway System, Part I: The Manhattan Els and the I.R.T. (United States: Joseph Cunningham and Leonard DeHart, 1976), p. 61.

[121] "Erlanger-Zieggy Split."

[122] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 116 (December 12, 1925): 10; and "$15,000,000 Bond Issue," Variety, December 16, 1925, p. 30.

[123] W. A. Swanberg, Citizen Hearst (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), pp. 305-6.

[124] "News of the Dailies," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 16.

[125] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, June 24, 1925, p. 27.

[126] "Ziegfeld Theatre Starts," Variety, September 30, 1925, p. 20.

[127] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, October 7, 1925, p. 19.

[128] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 115 (May 23, 1925): 11.

[129] Real Estate Record and Buyers Guide, 115 (April 4, 1925): 7.

[130] "News from the Dailies," Variety, December 9, 1925, p. 20.

[131] George Blumenthal, My Sixty Years in Show Business: a Chronicle of the American Theater, 1874--1934 (New York: F. C. Osberg, 1936), pp. 122-29.

[132] William Wheelock to Otto Kahn, October 15, 1925, Kahn Collection.

[133] RED, p. 171.

[134] Real Estate Directory of the Borough of Manhattan New York City Containing a Geographical Classification of Properties and an Alphabetical Classification of Owners together with a Listing of All Properties to Which Each Owner Holds Title 1925-26 (New York: Real Estate Directory Co., [1925]), p. 528.

[135] "Pan's Vaudeville in Hearst's New Building," Variety, September 30, 1925, p. 5.

[136] "News from the Dailies," Variety, September 2, 1925, p. 10.

[137] "Hearst's 3d for Zieggy," October 7, 1925, p. 25.

[138] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (September 10, 1927): 6.

[139] Otto Kahn to Edward Ziegler, February 26, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[140] "Cabaret Reviews: Ciro's," Variety, October 28, 1925, p. 40.

[141] "New Club for 56th St.," Variety, August 5, 1925, p. 35.

[142] "Class Residence Cabaret," Variety, September 30, 1925, p. 1.

[143] "Volterra's N. Y. Cabaret," Variety, August 19, 1925, p. 3.

[144] Evening Transcript, quoted by Norman Bel Geddes in his autobiography, Miracle in the Evening (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1960), pp. 265-66.

[145] "News from the Dailies," Variety, October 25, 1925, p. 10.

[146] "News from the Dailies," Variety, June 17, 1925, p. 49.

[147] Ibid., p. 22.

[148] E. G. Chadwick to Otto Kahn, July 31, 1925, Kahn Collection.

[149] Ibid.

[150] RED, pp. 175-77.

[151] William Wheelock to Otto Kahn, October 15, 1925, Kahn Collection.

[152] Martin F. Huberth to W. A. Swanberg, quoted by Swanberg in his Citizen Hearst, pp. 220, 223.

[153] "Erlanger-Zieggy Split."

[154] Ibid.

[155] "Rent Free as Hearst Boost," Variety, August 5, 1925, p. 1.

[156] "John Golden's Theatre," Variety, December 16, 1925, p. 9.

[157] RED, p. 174.

[158] RED, p. 732.

[159] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (February 12, 1927): 11.

[160] RED, pp. 181, 677.

[161] "Century Show by Unknown," Variety, July 17, 1925, p. 20.

[162] "Century's Night Club," Variety, September 2, 1925, p. 8.

[163] Lewis A. Erenberg, Steppin' Out, Contributions in American Studies, no. 50 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 121.

[164] "'A Night in Paris' for Century Roof," Variety, December 9, 1925, p. 23.

[165] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, August 12, 1925, p. 31.

[166] "San Carlo Co. At Century," Variety, September 2, 1925, p. 21.

[167] "News from the Dailies," Variety, October 14, 1925, p. 12.

[168] "News from the Dailies," Variety, August 12, 1925, p. 10.

[169] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, August 5, 1925, p. 16.

[170] Otto Kahn was well known for his support of theatrical organizations of merit which needed assistance. The Provincetown Playhouse was one of the organizations which he aided, and it is noteworthy, and perhaps merely coincidence, that the Provincetown productions found a home in a theater immediately next door to the Century with which Kahn was concerned, and near an area of town which was of interest to him.

CHAPTER IV

1926

In 1926 there continued an overall trend which saw the gradual diminution of importance in theatrical activity on the west side of Manhattan in the blocks immediately below 42nd Street, while the area above Times Square increasingly was the site for new theater and broadcasting company projects in various stages of planning and development. The importance of variety stage presentations in film theaters continued to grow while vaudeville went into decline, with the result that the locations of the larger first-run film theaters became more critical focal points for theatrical activity, just as major vaudeville theaters such as the Palace had been in earlier years.

34th Street

In 1926 Warner Brothers was using the Manhattan Opera House, built by Oscar Hammerstein in 1905 on the north side of West 34th Street at number 323 and between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, as a facility for producing

silent films and Vitaphone films. Warner Brothers had leased the theater from the Masonic organization, which had bought it at auction sale in October 1921.[1] Warners reportedly was considering converting the theater, which had a capacity of approximately 4,000 seats, into a motion picture theater. By 1926, work on the new Eighth Avenue Independent subway line was moving along, and a station for the line was planned for the vicinity of 34th Street and Eighth Avenue, a very short distance from the Manhattan Opera House. Warner Brothers may have considered taking advantage of the benefits which would accrue to the theater from the location of the subway station, but any such plans that might have been had were not realized.

There was a report later in 1926 which suggested that Warners had bought the Manhattan Opera House from the Masons, and that the transaction was going to make it possible for the Masons to build a new theater and meeting place on West 46th Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue.[2]

In 1926, because of the theater's size, large ensembles for Vitaphone productions were being filmed there including those for the films of the Metropolitan Opera personalities, Anna Case and Giovanni Martinelli.[3] Other parts of the building were being used for research activities, with the Masons retaining a portion of the space for their headquarters. The theater's proximity to

the Metropolitan Opera House may have been of assistance for production of films featuring singers on the roster of the Metropolitan.

At this point, the Warners facility well may have been the most southerly of the major film production buildings in Manhattan. Many of the other production and/or office buildings of the other major companies were located or in the process of locating in the west Forties and Fifties between Ninth and Eleventh Avenues, nearer the Times Square area.

The area of the Manhattan Opera House was growing rapidly in 1926 as an office and loft center for the garment industry, and as a location for hotels being built around Pennsylvania Station, located between Seventh and Eighth Avenues and between 31st and 33rd Streets. An indication of the direction in which the area around the Manhattan Opera House was moving in 1926 was the sale to Frederick Brown in that year of the west block front of Eighth Avenue between 34th and 35th Streets, comprising 481 to 497 Eighth Avenue, 301 to 307 West 34th Street, and 306 to 320 West 35th Street, adjoining the Manhattan Opera House. A $9,000,000 twenty-two story loft and office building originally was planned for the site,[4] which, however, soon after was used for the New Yorker Hotel.

The loft building probably was intended for use by the garment industry as it continued to expand vigorously in the west Thirties in 1926. Extending from the west

side of Broadway to the Hudson River and approximately from 30th to 40th Streets, the garment center had seen more than $250,000,000 in construction investments in the preceding five years, and had produced approximately a billion dollars worth of manufactured articles annually. The tenant demand for space in the area was said to be strong in 1926 despite the large number of new structures. Credit for the development of the Center generally was accorded to Saul Singer, who, in 1926, was Vice-President of the Bank of the United States.[5]

The impact on the area of development in the garment center was considerable. In early 1926, the Shuberts were reported to have sold the Casino Theater, near the garment center, and their first major house in New York. The Casino's site at the southeast corner of 39th Street and Broadway was expected to be used for an office building, although the Casino was not demolished until 1930.

The Edison Company owned the site adjoining Maxine Elliott's Theater which was at 107-15 West 39th Street between Sixth Avenue and the Casino Theater and was said to want to redevelop the theater site.[6] Maxine Elliott's Theater was not demolished until 1959, but of the major first-run theaters remaining below 42nd Street in 1926, including the Empire, Comedy, Knickerbocker, Garrick, Broadway, National, Princess, and the Metropolitan Opera House, only the Empire, National and the Opera House would

survive the 1930s as major presentation houses.

The Broadway was built in 1888 at the southwest corner of 41st Street and Broadway and had been a house for spectacular drama such as Ben-Hur before becoming a variety theater under the administration of B. S. Moss. It was booked by Keith-Albee and was a successful vaudeville house in the earlier 1920s. It was said to have shown a larger profit in 1925 than the Palace. But in late 1926, its box office gross was reported to have fallen off considerably after the Hippodrome at 43rd Street and Sixth Avenue was given the same popular vaudeville policy that the Broadway had employed with success in the immediately preceding years, and after the opening in November of the new Paramount Theater which featured inexpensive variety entertainment.[7] The opening of the Paramount meant not only the competition of another theater, but also the opening of a theater which helped to anchor the theatrical center in Times Square and above 42nd Street.

42nd Street

In 1926, a number of developments suggested that the role of 42nd Street in theatrical affairs in New York City was undergoing modification. Several theaters in addition to the Paramount opened in 1926 or were about to open in the area immediately on or just off Times Square, and these were shifting the theatrical center northward,

thereby reducing the importance of 42nd Street.

42nd Street was not one of those crosstown arteries which ran through Times Square, from which it was one block removed. The New York Times tower, fronting on 43rd Street, was a strong southern boundary for Times Square and tended also to act as a visual barrier between 42nd Street and Times Square. In the later 1920s, the streets which prospered as centers for theatrical activity were largely those which did cross Times Square and which included sites contiguous with those on which were built landmark theaters such as the Paramount.

In early 1926, the Shuberts withdrew from participation in the administration of A. H. Woods' Eltinge Theater at 236-40 West 42nd Street. Earlier the Shuberts had been thought to be interested in bringing additional theaters into their affairs, but in 1926 were reported to feel that there were more theaters available than called for by demand.[8]

Before reconsidering their position, the Shuberts had agreed to pay Woods $75,000 per year and 50 percent of the profits for a leasehold on the Eltinge. A similar offer by the Shuberts for the Selwyn and Times Square Theaters was said to have been rejected in 1925 by the Selwyns.

Later in the year, however, the Shuberts purchased the Sam H. Harris Theatre at 226 West 42nd Street, running through to 223-29 West 41st Street, from Sam Harris, who

had been sole owner of the theater since the dissolution of his partnership with George M. Cohan some years before. The lease on the theater, held by the Wilkes Corporation (owned by Thomas H. Wilkes of San Francisco), contained a clause requiring a notice of removal six months before it would take place.[9] Title to the property passed to the Shuberts on September 17, 1926.[10]

While the position of the Shuberts with regard to 42nd Street seemed amibigous in 1926, A. L. Erlanger seemed to be reducing his interests in the street. At the time of the report of the Shubert withdrawal from the Eltinge came another according to which the ground lease for the neighboring Liberty Theater at 234 West 42nd Street had been sold by A. L. Erlanger and the estate of Jack Mayer.[11] In view of Erlanger's long-standing association with 42nd Street in the form of his flagship theater, the New Amsterdam, such a report, coupled with the news of his intention to build a new headquaters office building and theater to be called the Erlanger on 44th Street, is especially noteworthy as an indication of the strength of the attraction of the Times Square theatrical center.

In 1926, Wallack's Theater at 254-256 West 42nd Street was sold again, title passing on October 22 to Irrose Realty Company, an arm of the Schulte group which had purchased the Longacre Building at the northeast corner of 42nd Street and Broadway the previous year. The

Schulte group was reported to be considering an office building for the Wallack's site, which was not far above the growing garment center.[12]

A momentary positive note for 42nd Street was the report in late 1926 of a plan for construction of a theater immediately to the west of the Selwyn Theater. Zimmer, Reznick and Locker, a group of developers, bought the property at 241 West 42nd Street on a lot measuring twenty by approximately 100 feet, and the abutting land at 250-262 on a plot which was approximately 105 feet by 100 feet, the latter adjoining the Selwyn Theatre on the west. The 42d Street parcel was purchased from the 251-257 West 42d Street Real Estate Corporation, and the West 43rd Street parcels from J. C. Mayer and Mitchell Lehman. Thomas Lamb, architect, was reported to be preparing plans for the theatre.[13]

The size of the lots suggests that the theater would have been similar to the Selwyn and Apollo in that a long entrance corridor would have run from 42nd Street to the main building which would have been on 43rd Street. However, as proved to be the case with other projects for theaters on 42nd Street in the 1920s after the opening of the Times Square and Selwyn Theaters in 1920, the theater was not built. All new activity actually realized in the way of theater construction in the theatrical center took place farther north.

During 1926, the theaters on 42nd Street continued

to be popular as first-run film houses. This development further lessened the importance of the street to legitimate production. Nor was it able to secure permanent status as a first-run film center in the face of the growth of importance of the Times Square area for first-run film presentations, especially after the opening of the Paramount and Roxy Theaters.

The New York premiere of the Douglas Fairbanks production, The Black Pirate, was held at the Selwyn in March,[14] and Producers Distributing Corporation sublet another Selwyn theater, the Times Square, from William Fox for an indefinite period to begin April 12, when Cecil B. DeMille's The Volga Boatman was to open there.[15]

Toward the end of the year it was reported that William Fox had acquired an option, apparently from Erlanger, on the New Amsterdam Theater giving him use of the theater when the new Erlanger Theater on West 44th Street was completed. Fox was said to want the New Amsterdam as a showcase for his Movietone talking films.[16] The report is credible in light of Erlanger's plans for his new theater and office building on West 44th Street and Fox's need for a major outlet in the primary theater district.

Furthermore, at approximately the same time as the date of the report of his interest in the New Amsterdam, Fox took space on the eighth floor of the Longacre Building nearby at the northeast corner of 42nd Street and

Broadway for his road show department. At the time, the Longacre Building, popular for some time with theatrical organizations as office space, also housed Individual Films, Inc., the road show department of Famous Players-Lasky.[17]

Development in the area around Grand Central Station continued to be intense during 1926, during which announcement was made that a syndicate headed by Irwin S. and Henry I. Chanin had purchased the 105-year leasehold on the property on the west side of Lexington Avenue between 41st and 42nd Streets from J. C. and M. G. Mayer and Shroder and Koppel who had acquired it the previous July; and would construct a forty-five story office building on the site.[18] The plans for this structure were an early version of the building that actually was constructed, which was taller, and which housed a performance space in the upper stories subsequently added to the plans.

At this time, the Chanins also were engaged in the construction and administration of several theaters, and had interests in property on 42nd Street. It is noteworthy that J. C. Mayer was one of the principals in the transaction for the property on Lexington Avenue, the name having been mentioned in at least one other transaction in the west Forties in 1926, as noted above.

43rd Street

During 1926, there was considerable activity in the new Publix Corporation offices as plans were made for the opening of the new Paramount Theater scheduled for late 1926, and for the production of the Publix stage presentation units. Herschel Stuart was in charge of the Publix Presentation and Producing Department which included John Murray Anderson. In early 1926, Stuart's offices were installed in the New York Theater office building diagonally across Times Square from the Paramount Theater and office building, still under construction at the time.[19] There had been an earlier suggestion that the Publix offices be housed temporarily at the headquarters office of Famous Players-Lasky at 485 Fifth Avenue, but that was at considerable remove from the theatrical center.

A decision was reached in the new Publix offices to effect a change in the emphasis in the Publix stage presentation units. John Murray Anderson's units for the Rivoli had relied on production values and had done well at the box office at first, but afterward had begun to attract smaller audiences. In 1926, a decision was made, apparently by Harold B. Franklin and Sam Katz, to introduce well-known, or "name," personalities into the units. Two of the first to be signed to contracts were Gilda Gray, who, with her six girls and orchestra group, The Royal Samoans, had done very well shortly before at

the Rialto; and George Beban, a film personality who also had done well as a variety attraction in California.[20]

Paul Whiteman, whose orchestra was enormously popular at the time, was reported to be on the verge of signing a contract which would give him a large salary to open the Paramount Theater for Publix.[21] It was reported that Joe Plunkett, then general manager of the Strand Theater three blocks above the site of the Paramount Theater, had planned to have Whiteman as an attraction competitive to the opening of the Paramount.[22]

But the precise date of the opening of the Paramount was not known, and apparently was being kept secret by Publix for the very reason that Publix did not want to allow the competing theaters sufficient time to engage an attraction strong enough to damage the desired concentration of publicity on the new theater. Publix executives were said to feel that the theater itself would be a sufficient draw against any competing attraction for at least its first few weeks.[23]

The planning for the new Paramount Theater and its stage policy suggests that a considerable effort was being made to create a sense of institution about the theater. A special pictorial map of New York City showing the location of the new Paramount building and listing interesting features around the city was issued by the Publix offices a few months before the opening of the Paramount. The tower at the top of the building was to be

illuminated in white save on the hour, when the light would change to red for a brief time to enable people for miles around to set their watches by the Paramount Building. There was a glass-enclosed observation room on the thirty-first floor which operated for some years before it was outmoded by the observation decks of taller buildings.[24]

In the theater were various lounge rooms where the emblems of colleges, fraternities and clubs were displayed, and a Hall of Nations where rocks presented to the theater by various nations were set in the walls.[25] There does not appear to have been a precedent for such an effort to create an institution in the form of a theater.

There still were reports early in the year that Ziegfeld would be signed to stage the initial presentation at the Paramount. At the time, Ziegfeld was involved with plans for the Ziegfeld Theater being built by the Hearst interests at 54th Street and Sixth Avenue, but even if the reports were innacurate, the publicity had value.[26]

A. H. Woods, on behalf of Publix, was said to be offering $600,000 to Al Jolson if he would sign for forty weeks on the Publix circuit with a first engagement at the opening of the Paramount.[27] In late summer, there was a report that Richard Strauss probably would be the conductor for the orchestra at the Paramount. As was true of the reports concerning Ziegfeld, this story at least had publicity value.[28] All of the publicity efforts were

designed to focus attention on the specific location on Times Square which was the site of the new Paramount, and certainly did no harm to the growing reputation of Times Square as, far and away, the most important theatrical center in the United States.

At noon, on May 19, 1926, with a large number of dignitaries in attendance, Mayor James J. Walker laid the cornerstone of the new building, after which the guests proceeded to the Rose Room of the Hotel Astor across the street.[29]

From a financial point of view, the building project was faring well. An advertisement appearing around the beginning of the year offering $10,000,000 in mortgage bonds for the building also listed a statement that subscriptions for the issue had been received in excess of the amount needed, the advertisement being merely a matter of record. Kuhn, Loeb; Hallgarten and Company; and Marshall Field, Glore, Ward and Company were listed as the banking houses for the issue.[30] The mortgage bond issue for the Paramount Building reportedly was the only such underwritten to that time by Kuhn, Loeb, but that is not surprising given the closeness of the connection between Kuhn, Loeb and Famous Players-Lasky.[31] Famous Players-Lasky leased the building as of January 1, 1926 from a holding company which itself was a subsidiary of Famous Players-Lasky.[32]

In an article written for a special issue of

Variety which recognized the achievements of Famous Players-Lasky and which was published less than two weeks after the opening of the Paramount Theater, Jesse Lasky discussed the role of Adolph Zukor, head of Famous Players-Lasky, in the development of the Paramount Theater and building. He gave entire credit for the building's realization to Zukor, saying it was Zukor's idea to purchase the Putnam Building property which became the site of the Paramount building, and that at one point, Zukor had insisted to the executive board of Famous Players-Lasky that the firm continue to hold the property even in the face of the board's marked preference that it be sold in order to secure revenues which were much needed at the time.[33]

Famous Players-Lasky may have considered selling the property in 1923 when the economic recession was still ongoing, and when an effort to float a much needed bond issue reportedly had failed. The bond issue was to be used, at least in part, to aid in the financing of a theater to be built on the site. Otto Kahn was said to favor holding the property, and it may have been at this juncture that a disagreement arose among the board members as to the best disposition of the site.

There is little doubt that the Paramount location was a very visible presence in the Times Square area, and, if it is true that Adolph Zukor fought to hold the site, the significant potential prestige value in the location

for Famous Players-Lasky might have given him reason to do so.

The Putnam Building had been built by the Astors, whose property holdings in the area were extensive, and had housed many important theatrical organizations over the years. Title to the property had passed to the Famous Players interests on October 7, 1919, but Famous Players-Lasky had not been able to begin development of its new structure for several years, apparently due to financial difficulties mentioned above.[34] Almost coincidentally, title to the property on the east block front of Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets at 1514-26 Broadway passed to a subsidiary of Famous Players-Lasky very shortly thereafter on January 19, 1920. This was the property on which were the New York and Criterion Theaters and the New York Roof Theater,[35] and the property which would be the location rumored for a second major Publix theater in the Times Square vicinity.

But in 1926, among its theaters, it was the new Paramount on which Famous Players-Lasky and the affiliated Publix concentrated attention. Strenuous efforts appear to have been made to establish the Paramount office building as a prestigious address for other than theatrical clients. No theatrical agents were to be given space.[36] Toward the end of the year it was announced that the Chemical National Bank, one of the largest banks in New York City, would open a branch on the second floor of

the Paramount Building the following spring. The decision was said to have been reached by Percy Johnston, the president of the bank, and was thought to be a favorable indication for the value of the Times Square area, bringing to the Square the presence of a prestigious business institution. There were other bank branch offices in the area also, the newest of which was an office of Times Square Trust at the corner of 40th Street and Seventh Avenue.[37]

A successful plan to induce prestige tenants to take space in the Paramount Building would render two benefits to Famous Players-Lasky: greater rental income from the prestige tenants and any tenants who might care to surround themselves with the aura of the prestige tenant; and a sense of prestige for the firm whose building it was and for the firm's product. And there is little question but that the structure became a midtown landmark very quickly.

The Paramount Building project marked a significant moment in theatrical real estate history: the first time that a theater organization was wholly responsible for a large scale office building project in New York City. The intense office building activity in the mid-1920s, both in the area directly south of Times Square in the west Thirties, and east along 42nd Street beyond Sixth Avenue toward Lexington Avenue could have been an inducement to Famous Players-Lasky to proceed with

an office structure and to try to attract well-positioned business clients capable of paying high rental fees, or capable of drawing other clients who could pay high rental fees, to their place of business. Famous Players-Lasky itself and its subsidiaries were to occupy the fifth to the eleventh floors. The most recent innovations in office construction were to be installed.[38]

The theater, designed by Rapp and Rapp, included a domed lobby, capable of accommodating 2,500 people at once, which measured 150 feet by 45 with a large marble staircase at one end leading to the mezzanine level. The orchestra pit, designed to hold seventy musicians, was mechanized, able to be raised and lowered and moved forward and back on the stage.[39]

Apart from the relatively meager thirty-foot stage depth, the theater seemed designed to be able to house spectacular presentations. The light bridges on either side of the stage were reported to be the most sophisticated in the city, each holding eighteen spotlights, capable of being adjusted to the desired height. There was an additional light bridge at the front of the stage, fifteen spotlights in the front of the mezzanine loges and additional lighting supplied from the projection booth above the back of the balcony.[40]

On Friday evening, November 19, 1926, an invited audience saw the first performance at the Paramount Theater. An intensive advertising campaign preceded the

opening, and, during the early part of the week there was fierce competition for tickets for the evening of November 19, prices for seats going as high as fifty dollars. The Publix offices received 12,000 applications for the approximately 3,700 seats available. The regular opening for the general public took place at 10:45 Saturday morning, November 20.[41]

In 1926, the press of commercial land development was being felt in a wide area of midtown Manhattan. There were reports in that year that consideration was being given to installing nontheatrical commercial space in an existing theater building, the Hippodrome, not far east of the Paramount. In early 1926, as part of an effort to reduce overall operating costs of the Hippodrome, Keith-Albee, which controlled it, considered building store space into its 43rd Street side and leasing space on the second floor of the 44th Street side for office use.

While it had been successful in its operations in the immediately preceding period as a two-a-day Keith-Albee vaudeville house, in early 1926 the Hippodrome was losing money, but the site was thought to be of value as a commercial property for other use given its proximity to the corner of 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue, an area around which there was a great deal of new development.[42]

At the time, portions of the elevated train track system were being demolished, including the portion on Sixth Avenue above 53rd Street, and the demolition of the

area below that point was thought by many to be inevitable and probably not far off in time. It was thought that this would have a significant and positive effect on property values farther down along the avenue.[43] There was room for speculation that, if this were to happen, Sixth Avenue could share in the prosperity that was changing radically the streets and avenues just to the east of Sixth Avenue.

There also was a report that the Hippodrome would not open the following autumn with Keith-Albee vaudeville, but might be converted into an office building. Keith-Albee was said to have been looking into the cost of rebuilding the interior of the theater without demolishing the structure. Nothing came of the rumors about office use for the Hippodrome, but, given the nature of other real estate transactions in the area and the losses being suffered by the theater, Keith-Albee well may have had such a plan.

Keith-Albee also was said to be concerned about the negative impact of the Hippodrome on the flagship Palace Theater. The same acts played both theaters, but with considerable difference in admission price. The higher-priced Palace was thought to have enough competition from the Times Square film houses with their increasingly elaborate stage presentations without being undercut in its own policy by a cheaper theater not very far away which was owned by the same organization.[44]

In August, as an economic measure, the Hippodrome policy was changed from the two-a-day vaudeville policy which had been in effect since Keith-Albee had taken control of the theater in December 1923 to a popular continuous, or "grind," policy of a combination of vaudeville stage presentation and films presented four times daily. Mark Luescher, the general manager who had been responsible for the so-called "Luescher" policy of "building up" standard vaudeville acts with elements from revue, left the theater, as did Alan Foster and his line of dancers who had been an important part of the modified vaudeville style.[45] E. Louis Bauer, who had been with the Hippodrome for seventeen years and who had built all the big scenic and stage properties for the theater, which had done so much for its renown, also left.[46]

This change in policy did nothing to alleviate Keith-Albee's concern that the Hippodrome might have a negative impact on the Palace, especially if the top price at the Hippodrome was fifty cents against the three dollar top at the Palace. The State, much nearer the Palace, was said to have cut into Palace patronage already with a policy similar to the one now being instituted at the Hippodrome.[47]

At this point, the future role of the Hippodrome appeared to be uncertain, but there seemed to be uncertainty also concerning the immediate future of the Keith-Albee theaters in New York. There were rumors of

talks with other companies concerning merger possibilities and other rumors of a major new theater planned by Keith-Albee for a site in the Times Square vicinity. There were several such reports, none of which mentioned the Hippodrome or its site as a possible location for a new Keith-Albee center in midtown for vaudeville and film.

Although the Hippodrome was approximately as large as the largest of the first-run film theaters in midtown, the fact that its location was not on or very near Times Square well may have worked against it. It certainly is true that no sites near it were being considered by other organizations for new theaters despite talk concerning a new Independent line Sixth Avenue subway system, although interests connected with William Fox did buy a parcel on Sixth Avenue above 48th Street in 1926, a parcel which never saw use as a theater site.

44th Street

In the course of the 1920s, the farther west side of midtown Manhattan became home to a number of facilities of theatrical organizations. Often, these were used for rehearsal space, storage, production of films, and executive offices. The convenience of the area to the primary theatrical center around Times Square well may have aided its growth as a home for theatrical facilities, some of which remained in operation for many years.

The location of these facilities extended the area

in midtown important to the theatrical industry, and added to the general impact had on land use in midtown by the industry.

During the middle and later 1920s, the William Fox interests were going through considerable expansion, an expansion which would continue into 1929 with the acquisition by Fox of controlling interest in the Loew organization. On March 22, 1926, the William Fox Exchange was opened at 331-345 West 44th Street housing the film sales offices for New York and New Jersey and shipping and accessory departments. This was one of a number of film production offices opening in the farther west Forties and Fifties, and only one of at least three facilities eventually to be used for Fox concerns.[48]

Meanwhile, theatrical development and plans for projects continued a short distance to the east. In early 1926, the Chanins were reported to be planning to build a "ballroom theater" in the hotel that they were constructing, to be called the Chanin, on the east side of Eighth Avenue between 44th and 45th Streets. The complex was across 44th Street from the most northerly subway entrance for the Eighth Avenue subway station planned for 42nd Street and Broadway. The hotel was to occupy the Eighth Avenue frontage and the theater was to be built behind it. It was to seat 1,825 and to be designed for musicals. On the 44th Street side, running to the Broadhurst, was to be a theater seating 1,250 for use for

musicals and straight plays, while on the 45th Street side was to be a smaller house seating 850 for straight plays.[49] Subsequently, the ballroom theater was eliminated and instead of the 1,250 seat theater planned for 44th Street, plans moved ahead for construction of the 1,650 seat Majestic on the site, while two theaters rather than one were built on 45th Street.

In 1926, the Chanins formed Chanin Productions, Inc. to handle productions intended for their several legitimate theaters then open or about to open in midtown Manhattan.[50] There was talk at the end of the year to the effect that the Chanins would form an alliance with Erlanger, Charles Dillingham and David Belasco against the Shuberts who then operated directly eighteen theaters and booked ten others. Erlanger, Dillingham and Belasco in total had fourteen theaters and worked closely with five other independent theaters, while the Chanins had five in addition.[51]

Furthermore, Erlanger, in association with Vincent Astor who owned the site, was planning to build his Erlanger Theater at 244 West 44th Street to include new office space for his staff.[52] The Erlanger staff occupied five floors of space in the New Amsterdam Theater office building. Variety reported that the space in the New Amsterdam was considered too valuable for use by the Erlanger staff, a curious comment which leaves open to question what might have been thought a proper use for the

space, especially in light of William Fox's interest in the New Amsterdam Theater and the growth of the garment center.

The Chanin houses were on 44th, 45th and 47th Streets, the Belasco was on 44th, and Dillingham's Globe was at the northwest corner of 46th and Broadway with the entrance on Broadway just above 46th. With a large new Erlanger Theater and Erlanger offices on 44th Street diagonally across the way from the Shubert offices in the Shubert Theater at 225-233 West 44th Street, the focus of legitimate theater activity certainly would continue to shift away from 42nd Street.[53]

45th Street

Late in 1926, Lee Shubert and A. E. Lefcourt, a prominent realtor, sold 227-237 West 45th Street to a syndicate which intended to build a thirty-story hotel on the site, eventually the Piccadilly Hotel, now demolished.[54] It was reported that the Shuberts previously had intended to improve the site themselves,[55] but whether the development intended by the Shuberts consisted of theaters is not clear. The sale is particularly noteworthy because it involved land on what had become a very important block for theater activity, the block of 45th Street between Times Square and Eighth Avenue, land which the Shuberts might have been thought to want for construction of a new theater or theaters. The

previous year, the Shuberts had been reported to be selling parcels in the Broadway area with the restriction that they not be used for theater construction.[56] In immediately subsequent years, the Shuberts restricted their activities with new theaters almost entirely to leasing or buying shares of the new houses, building only one new house in New York City, the Ethel Barrymore, during the later 1920s. According to report the Shuberts refrained from new building activities to such a degree in order to minimize reduction of value of existing theaters which they owned.

The corner of 45th Street and Broadway was the midpoint of Times Square, and an extremely valuable location in 1926. The Astor, Loew's State and Loew's New York were the three theaters on this central site. In 1926, the American Tobacco Company leased from the Longacre Square Theater Company, an operation of Walter Reade and Frank Storrs, the corner store in the Astor Theater building, paying a rental which was said to have set a record for Times Square; it was based on what were considered to be the exceptional advertising advantages of the site.[57]

The single most important chain in New York City of theaters with policies of presenting both stage productions and films was the Marcus Loew chain. Prior to the 1920s, Loew had pursued a policy which included presentation of lesser known stage acts with film

showings, a policy often called "Popular," "Family," or "Small Time" vaudeville, while Keith-Albee presented "Big Time" vaudeville, which meant, among other things, the major names in the world of vaudeville.

When Loew's State was opened in 1921 at the northeast corner of 45th Street and Broadway, Edward Albee, the head of Keith-Albee, said that he did not consider the State to be competition, or "opposition," to the Palace which was less than two full blocks north of the State near the southeast corner of 47th Street and Broadway, and there was said to be a so-called "gentlemen's agreement" between Albee and Loew that they would not "oppose" one another.

However, a few years later, Keith-Albee announced plans to build its 86th Street Theater at 86th Street and Lexington Avenue which would be very near Loew's Orpheum on 86th Street near Third Avenue. In response, Loew announced plans for two additional houses within "opposition" distance of the new Keith-Albee theater. Loew was said to be "going after" Keith-Albee. The situation was exacerbated when Keith-Albee, in 1926, declared the State to be "oppostion" to the Palace, placing acts that appeared at the State on a "blacklist," meaning that these acts then could not play the Palace.[58] Such an action was noteworthy among other reasons because it indicated that, since there were acts which both theaters were signing, the line between the presentation

policies of the theaters was blurring. Thus, the Palace was moving into a period of fierce competition on Times Square in the presentation of a policy very similar to its own in addition to being confronted ever more strongly with competition from the large film houses in the form of productions based on a revue format which, as the later 1920s progressed, made increasing use of major vaudeville names.

This kind of competition lent credibility to the recurring reports that Keith-Albee was considering construction of a major new film and vaudeville house in the Times Square area, a move which well may have been seen as necessary if the Keith-Albee chain was to maintain anything like its former dominion over the world of variety theater.

Since 1924, Loew also had been involved with the Capitol with its major presentation policy. In 1926, Loew combined the booking offices for his popular vaudeville with the booking office for the presentation theater. Louis K. Sidney, head of the Loew presentation department, and J. H. Lubin, overall head of the booking department, were said to feel that the popular vaudeville houses could carry major names as well as the presentation houses.

Loew began paying higher salaries for acts while Keith-Albee began to take economy measures including reduction of salaries. There was a report that when Paul Whiteman, then a major name, offered to play the Palace

for $5,500 for the week after having played the Hippodrome for $8,500, after much negotiation, Keith-Albee said their top offer would be $5,250, causing Whiteman to break off talks in disgust.[59]

With Loew's State entering the "Big Time" ranks, in practice if not in name, there was bound to be difficulty for the Palace which had a top ticket price of $3.50 against fifty cents at the State. The State also had more than twice the seating capacity of the Palace and presented twice as many performances daily as the Palace which had a reserved seat policy for its two shows daily.

Because it added so much audience traffic and brilliance to the theatrical scene, the intensity of the competition among the organizations which presented variety productions on Times Square only sharpened the value of a Times Square location for theatrical organizations. There was no parallel for the magnitude of strength of theatrical concentration in New York City, and the establishment of that concentration would make indispensable that the major organizations have adequate representation in or very near it.

46th Street

During the course of the later 1920s, there were recurring reports that Sid Grauman, who had achieved a considerable reputation for producing popular stage presentation for his film theaters in California, would

come to New York for one project or another. In 1926, Grauman and Marcus Loew were said to have reached an agreement whereby Grauman would direct a theater on Broadway for Loew, a theater which would have a film and stage presentation policy similar to the policy at Grauman's Egyptian Theater in Los Angeles where Grauman produced "prologues," stage presentations built around a theme or idea from the film then being shown.[60]

Grauman was said to be getting his New York theater within the "next year," and, while the site was not generally known, one report on the matter said that it was thought that the theater might be built on the combined sites of the Gaiety and Fulton Theaters which were said to be available for purchase, and that a tall office building would be erected on the Times Square frontage.[61] The properties were controlled in 1926 by the Erlanger interests who did not appear to be interested in developing the property themselves, and who, like the Shuberts, built only one theater in New York City, the Erlanger, in the second half of the 1920s.

Grauman did not bring his production style to New York, but the report that he might have done so appears credible in view of the likelihood at the time that the varied presentation style made popular through the Balaban and Katz theater organization in the midwest would be coming to New York to the new Paramount Theater. If there had been discussions between Loew and Grauman, they well

might have occurred if Loew was concerned with meeting what would be the heightened degree of competition from the Publix organization to the State and Capitol Theaters. Grauman's arrival in New York as a producer would have been but one more intensification of the central importance of the Times Square location to theatrical presentation.

47th Street

In 1926, the Shuberts entered into two land transactions on West 47th Street. In the early part of the year, the Romax building and property at 243-249 West 47th Street was sold to the Trebuhs Realty Company, a Shubert subsidiary. Although there was a report that the site would not be used for a theater, eventually, in December 1928, the Ethel Barrymore Theater, the last theater ever built by the Shuberts in New York City, opened there.[62] Apparently, the Shuberts did not purchase the land itself, title to which was listed, as late as 1931, as having passed to and having been held by the West 47th Street Realty Corporation as of May 23, 1916.[63]

Later in 1926, the Shuberts, through their Trebuhs Realty Company, bought the property at 228-240 West 47th Street.[64] They already owned the property at 242-248 West 47th Street which, in the early part of 1926, had been the reported site for a new Shubert theater seating 1,300 to replace the Casino with a comparable capacity at 39th

Street and Broadway.[65] No immediate plans were announced for the enlarged site, but soon after, the Edison Hotel was built there, joining a growing number of hotels going up in the area, including the Chanins' Lincoln Hotel on Eighth Avenue adjacent to the Chanin theaters on West 44th and West 45th Streets.

It has been said that real estate is to New York City what oil is to Texas. With the growth of the importance of theatrical real estate, especially the chains of motion picture theaters which were getting ever larger in major cities, banking interests began to play increasingly prominent roles in the affairs of many of the theatrical organizations which required larger and larger sums of money for expansion. For some years, Kuhn, Loeb, especially in the person of Otto Kahn, had been involved in the affairs of Famous Players-Lasky, but as the 1920s progressed and as the motion picture industry continued to expand and prosper, other theatrical companies became allied to other banking houses.

Goldman, Sachs and Company had a working relationship with Warner Brothers, and Blair and Company, affiliated with the J. P. Morgan interests, reportedly bought 50 percent of Pathe from Merrill Lynch and Company, after which there were negotiations toward amalgamation of Pathe with the Producers Distributing Corporation. P.D.C. provided film product for those theaters in the Keith-Albee group which featured films with vaudeville, all of

which led to suggestions that Blair and Company was moving toward the creation of a theater chain, with Keith-Albee as a base, to rival the Famous Players-Lasky chain.[66] At the time, the Producers Distributing Corporation was connected with Cecil B. DeMille.

During the same year, Joseph P. Kennedy, financed by his former employer, Hayden, Stone and Company, had gained control of the Film Booking Offices of America and the R-C Pictures Corporation. Over the course of the next two years, he would gain control also of Keith-Albee, P.D.C. and Pathe, and then oversee the takeover of Keith-Albee and P.D.C. by the Radio Corporation of America, itself controlled by General Electric and Westinghouse.[67]

The relationships among many of the major banking houses, theatrical organizations, real estate companies, and organizations connected with broadcasting or some aspect of communications became increasingly complex as the 1920s entered into their second half, but these relationships have a significant impact on the shape of the theatrical map in New York City over the course of this period.

Times Square locations became particularly valuable. A rumor circulated to the effect that the Columbia Amusement Company would sell its Columbia Theater, the flagship of the burlesque organization, located at the northeast corner of 47th Street and Seventh Avenue. The report was denied vigorously by the

company.[68] But not very long after, the theater was sold to Walter Reade who then investigated a series of possibilities for the site, including a theater project with Sid Grauman, and also a large theater and office building complex along the lines of the Paramount project to be built for Radio-Keith-Orpheum. The Columbia was extensively rebuilt a few years later for Radio-Keith-Orpheum and renamed the Mayfair.

48th Street

During the course of 1926, the area immediately north of Times Square and areas in both the east and west Fifties saw a significant amount of realty activity connected with the theater and communications. One of the several theaters opened in the vicinity during the later 1920s was the Edyth Totten Theatre which opened at 247-249 West 48th Street on October 26, 1926 with Secret Sands.

On May 10, 1926, real estate listings indicate that title to the land at 1226-1232 Sixth Avenue passed to the Dougmilt Realty Corporation, located at 850 Tenth Avenue. The property was on the east side of Sixth Avenue between 48th and 49th Streets adjoining the extensive Columbia University land holdings which later became the site of Rockefeller Center.[69]

The building at 850 Tenth Avenue housed an office of the William Fox organization, of which Dougmilt appears to have been a function. Fox held the property until late

1932 when he finally sold it to the Rockefeller interests after their repeated efforts to acquire the parcels which, at the time of purchase, adjoined their RKO Roxy Theater.[70]

The reason for Fox's purchase of the property is not clear, but when title to the parcels was conveyed to the Fox interests, Fox had no outlet of his own for his films in the Times Square area, and by May 1926, the general section where the Fox property was located was attracting investors' attention. The Hearst interests were moving ahead with their development five blocks north at the corner of 54th Street and Sixth Avenue, the portion of the elevated train track system above 53rd Street had been removed from Sixth Avenue and there was talk of the removal of portions of the train track to the south along Sixth Avenue. Furthermore, there is evidence, mentioned above, that Famous Players-Lasky had acquired land nearby on 49th and 50th Streets between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, and plans for the Roxy at Seventh Avenue and 50th Street were progressing, albeit with some difficulty in financing.

Columbia University had not gotten involved yet in discussing the possibility of using its extensive holdings adjoining the Fox parcels as a possible site for a new Metropolitan Opera House, as it was to do in early 1928, so that the mode of redevelopment of its land was an open question in 1926. Thus, although Fox's motives for

acquiring the parcels on Sixth Avenue are not clear, it seems highly probable that he was interested in taking advantage of what appeared to be the improved fortunes of an avenue that had been neglected, and may have considered a theater project for his site.[71]

That Columbia University had no major development plans for its holdings in 1926 would seem to be indicated by its sale of a leasehold late in the year for 49 West 48th Street which carried with it two twenty-one year renewals. That parcel did become part of the Rockefeller Center site a few years later.[72]

Furthermore, there also were reports at approximately the same time that Columbia had leased the block front on the west side of Fifth Avenue between 49th and 50th Streets for twenty-one years with two twenty-one year renewals to William Filene Sons Co. of Boston, owners of a major department store in Boston. The site was directly across the street from the site that became the location of Saks Fifth Avenue,[73] and eventually became the site of British and French buildings and the so-called "channel" in Rockefeller Center a few years later.

Eventually, the Rockefellers became the leaseholders and built a number of facilities devoted to theater and broadcasting, primarily for the Radio Corporation of America and its affiliates. Although the Rockefellers were not yet connected with the Columbia properties, over the course of the years, they had been

buying properties immediately above the Columbia land. Title to 11 and 13 West 53rd Street, for example, passed to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. on February 29, 1924,[74] and title to 23 West 54th Street passed to him on May 16, 1924.[75] Thus, it is clear that the Rockefellers were active in real estate activity in the vicinity before 1928, the year in which the initial contact between Columbia and the Rockefellers had been made concerning the Columbia property between 48th and 51st Streets and between Fifth Avenue and a short distance to the east of Sixth Avenue.

49th Street

During most of 1926, pending completion of the Paramount Theater, the Rivoli, on the east side of Broadway between 49th and 50th Streets, continued to be the primary outlet in New York City for Publix, and was the scene of the various efforts in stage presentation format for the Publix circuit. At the end of the year, the Rivoli policy was changed and the benefits of the experience in presentation redounded to the new Paramount.

The most prominent of the presentation producers at the Rivoli in 1926 was John Murray Anderson, but others were brought in as Publix continued to seek a profitable formula to guarantee the success of its new flagship as well as its other theaters. One of Anderson's efforts that was well received was Rhapsody in Jazz, described in

the theater program as "A Syncopated Manhattan Cocktail" based on George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," done in five scenes, three of which used the full stage. Scenery and costumes were designed by Herman Rosse.

Anderson's productions were admired for their visual effects, and this presentation seemed to exemplify his style. One scene was laid on the floor of the Stock Exchange with the six girls of the ensemble costumed as Oil, Copper, Coal, Real Estate, Steel and Gold. A specialty dance was performed by the "stock gambler" and the Spirit of the Ticker. In the final scene, the lighting design and specially treated scenery and costumes helped to effect the transformation of a cabaret into an everglades wilderness, with everyone on stage appearing to be in blackface.[76] Anderson had used a similar transformation effect in the 1924 edition of the Music Box Revue, and was bringing to the Rivoli a level of design sophistication which very likely was uncommon in the film theater stage presentations.[77]

Later in the year, Anderson devised a presentation entitled Milady's Shawl which suggested in its style the large production sequences from such revues as Ziegfeld's Follies. For the finish of the piece, Anderson revealed a flight of stairs in black velvet rising half the way into the visible stage space. Behind a girl standing on the staircase, there descended a drop in the form of a hugh Spanish shawl done in black with brocading in irridescent

design. The shawl was attached to the girl's shoulders, and as she descended the staircase, it fell into the form of a huge train to her dress.[78]

Frank Cambria also was prominent as a producer on the Rivoli stage. Cambria had gone to Chicago from New York where he worked with the Balaban and Katz organization, and came back to New York when Sam Katz came to the New York Publix office after the amalgamation of the Famous Players-Lasky and Balaban and Katz theaters into the Publix Corporation.

His second presentation at the Rivoli was A Garden Festival in which a huge copy of a Watteau painting was placed upstage in an enormous gold frame. Various figures in the painting came to life and were lighted sequentially as they contributed to the presentation which was a series of balletic and classical music offerings.[79]

Both Anderson's and Cambria's offerings bore similarities to S. L. Rothafel's style as seen at the several theaters at which he had worked including the Strand and Capitol. Rothafel's presentations often depended on a pictorial beauty with moments of balletic dance and excerpts from the classical music repertoire. Given Rothafel's great reputation and success at this point in the 1920s, it would not be surprising that Publix would want to emulate Rothafel's popular style for its theaters.

Gus Edwards, a well-known producer of miniature

revues for vaudeville, also was signed by Publix for the Rivoli, but his contributions did not succeed.[80]

Like Loew and unlike Keith-Albee, Publix seemed willing to spend considerable sums to make its stage presentations attractive. Anderson's Rhapsody in Jazz set a record for costs both for personnel and for stage design, and apparently he was running over budget for subsequent productions.[81]

During 1926, Publix made plans to convert the Rivoli into a "run house" on completion of the Paramount. A "run house" featured a policy of films which were allowed to remain as long as demand warranted as opposed to the policy in effect at stage presentation film houses which usually changed films and stage productions on a weekly basis. The weekly change often was demanded by contracts that a theater might have with the film exchange furnishing it with film product. Publix already had two run houses in the Times Square area, the Rialto, which had been converted to the policy in early 1926, and the Criterion.[82]

50th Street

In 1926, two projects for small theaters to be built on 50th Street were announced, but not realized. The theaters would have been on adjacent sites. One was to be built at 238-240 West 50th Street for the Covent Theatre Corporation which was located at 52 Vanderbilt

Avenue, Earl House, President. It would have been built on a lot measuring 50 x 100 feet.[83] The other theater also was to be built on a lot measuring 50 x 100 feet at 234-236 West 50th Street according to plans by the architect, Herbert J. Krapp, for the Shuberts. It would have seated 299.[84]

Variety carried a report concerning a theater to be built on 50th Street which appears to be the theater which was planned by the Covent Theatre Corporation, although the report in Variety placed the theater on a site adjoining the rear of the Capitol, a site across the street from 238-240 West 50th Street. According to the Variety item, that theater also would seat 299. It was to open in mid-November 1926 and was to be known as the Irving. Fred Proctor of the Proctor and Gamble company was said to have a financial interest in the project along with Earl House and Willy Pogany, the set designer, who was to be art director for the theater.[85]

The Waldorf Theater opened on October 20, 1926 at 116-122 West 50th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, a few doors east of the Earl Carroll Theater building and across the street and a little to the east of the Roxy Theater, then under construction. The Waldorf, a 1,200 seat theater, was built by the Oshrim-Grisman Theatrical Corporation which also was planning construction of a theater across West 52nd Street from the Guild Theater.[86]

The Waldorf's location made it, along with the Belmont Theater at 125 West 48th Street, the most easterly of the major legitimate playhouses then in use. The Ziegfeld Theater which was farther east and north did not open until the following February, but was well under way when the Waldorf opened. Title to the property on which the Waldorf was built did not pass to the owners of record until March 10, 1926. The owners were listed as the Mayson Corporation, care of Jules Mayer at 55 West 45th Street. The date on which title to the property passed was well after the public announcement of the plans of the Hearst interests for theaters or a theater to be built at the corner of 54th Street and Sixth Avenue and after demolition of the most northerly spur of the Sixth Avenue elevated.[87] The owners and operators of the theater may have been depending for the success of the theater on the improvement of Sixth Avenue. Another possibility, however, is that the site may have been cheaper than sites in the theater district proper but still not too far from it.

50th Street and Seventh Avenue

During part of early 1926, work on the Roxy Theater across 50th Street from the Waldorf Theater had been suspended because of financial difficulties. The New York brokerage firm, Henry D. Lindsley and Company, ran daily advertisements urging readers to "Invest with Roxy

in his new theatre." The investment vehicle was the Roxy Theatres Corporation, and potential investors were advised that Rothafel would outdo his previous successes, the advertisement thus taking advantage thereby of Rothafel's strong reputation as a film theater producer.[88]

As if in response to the stories of the theater's difficulties, early in 1926 Rothafel stated that he was satisfied with the manner in which the work on the theater was progressing and that he expected it to be ready for use in November. In a statement issued by the attorneys for the Roxy Theatres Corporation, he said that there was sufficient funding available for the theater's needs. The mortgage bond issue for the theater had been arranged through S. W. Straus and Company.[89] In the early part of the year, a story circulated to the effect that S. W. Straus had entered into an understanding with William Fox whereby Straus would agree to handle all of Fox's building projects.[90]

In April 1926, there was a report of an arrangement made between S. L. Rothafel and William Fox whereby the Roxy would be furnished with film product from the Fox studios. As of that date, there was yet no firm plan for film product for the theater, nor did Fox yet have his own major outlet in New York City, but there was an unconfirmed report that Fox had secured part ownership in the Roxy.

But the Roxy situation seemed very confused.

Immediately after the report of some agreement between the Fox and Roxy organizations appeared a story that the Stanley film theater organization was interested in the Roxy, but that difficulties had arisen as to whether the Stanley officials or Rothafel would be in control of direction of the theater.[92] But it seemed certain that large film organizations were giving serious consideration to trying to take advantage of the size of the Roxy, and, in all probability, of Rothafel's production abilities.

Toward the end of 1926, there were rumors that the Roxy organization would become affiliated with the Producers Distributing Corporation and the Pathe motion picture company to insure film product for the Roxy and for the other theaters being planned by the Roxy Theatres Corporation, sites for which included property at 58th Street and Lexington Avenue near Proctor's 58th Street Theater which was booked by Keith-Albee; and property in the vicinity of 96th Street and Broadway, near the Riverside Theater which was owned by the Fox interests and booked and managed by Keith-Albee. The intent of the Roxy Theatres Corporation was said to be the establishment of a chain of independent deluxe theaters in the New York metropolitan area.[93]

Rothafel and Herbert J. Lubin, who had been a critical factor in the conception of the Roxy, addressed a special meeting of the Theatre Owners Chamber of Commerce on December 21, 1926 in the Hotel Astor to present a plan

for the banding together of independent exhibitors in the New York metropolitan area to form a new theater chain. The plan would give theater owners payment half in cash and half in the form of stock in the Roxy Theaters Corporation in return for sale of the leaseholds on their theaters to the Roxy Theater Corporation. Rothafel and Lubin appear to have been depending on the attraction of Rothafel's reputation and popularity to insure the success of the big Roxy Theater, which, in turn, as the pivot house of any chain of theaters, would be attractive to potential investors and participants in the new chain. Some exhibitors disliked the idea, seeing it as a scheme to give the Roxy Theater leverage to force major films from major producers primarily for its use. And it was true at that date that the Roxy had no firm connection with a major producer for film product.

But rumors persisted that William Fox already was connected with the theater to some degree, although probably not yet in control.[94] Rothafel seems to have been resisting any efforts by Fox to take control of the Roxy, and subsequently, when Fox did acquire control of the theater, there were many reports of discord between Rothafel and him.

A note dated December 6, 1926 from Otto Kahn's private secretary to Kahn asked for a response to the conveyance of an offer from the Roxy Theater Corporation, apparently concerning participation in financing for the

Corporation. Kahn wrote on the note that he was interested and that Fox film had made an offer for the theater which was not accepted.[95] Although Kahn does not appear to have had any connection with the Roxy Theater project, it would be interesting to know the reasons for his expression of interest in it.

But the note also suggests that apparently Rothafel did need greater financial support, and Fox had begun a theater-building program. By late 1926, the Roxy was almost completed, and well may have been attractive as a prospective flagship house for Fox, despite its short remove from Times Square. A report current at year's end had it that Fox already had agreed to furnish the Roxy with at least ten films during 1927. Erno Rapee, who had been signed as musical director for the Roxy, was said to be under contract to Fox for the position.[96]

Clearly, the Roxy was going to be considerably larger than the Paramount, which just had opened with great fanfare and a surge of public attention even without so major a figure as a Ziegfeld or Rothafel involved in its stage productions. With Rothafel in charge of stage proceedings, the Roxy seemed to be on the verge of becoming a major landmark.

51st Street

A short distance from the Roxy site, the Capitol, at 51st Street and Broadway, continued successful

operation with the stage policy that Rothafel had established for it in 1920 and had carried through until his departure from the theater in 1925. An example of the Rothafel emphasis on excerpts from classical music and ballet and elaborate scenic and lighting effects was the presentation at the Capitol for the week of April 18, 1926 which featured a performance by the theater's symphony orchestra of Tchaichovskii's fourth symphony, albeit abbreviated, a ballet sequence and attractive lighting of the silver stage curtain.[97]

Marcus Loew, controlling presentations at the Capitol since 1924, seemed content to continue Rothafel's policy with or without Rothafel. In early 1926, Loew signed Louis K. Sidney to a five-year contract as supervisor of presentations in all of the Loew presentation houses. Sidney had attracted attention for his simultaneous work at the Aldine Theater in Pittsburgh and Loew's State in St. Louis. Sidney took offices in the Loew headquarters at 45th Street and Broadway and began a long and very successful association with the Capitol which, because of his efforts, remained strong competition for all of the other major presentation houses in the Times Square area until presentations were eliminated there in 1935.[98]

52nd Street

The circumstances which surround the planning and

building of what came to be the Alvin Theater at 244-254 West 52nd Street are a little complicated. Variety carried an item about the project in early 1926 according to which a young millionaire by the name of Cannon was building a combination theater and hotel building across West 52nd Street from the Guild Theater. The theater was to seat 1,000 and be used for legitimate productions, and the hotel was to have 250 rooms.[99] It is highly probable that the theater project, given its location across from the Guild Theater, was the one which eventually became the Alvin Theater.

At the same time appeared another report to the effect that Alfred E. Aarons had formed a corporation to finance the building of a Broadway theatre understood to have been underwritten by a Wall Street banker.[100] Alex Aarons, son of Alfred E. Aarons, and Vinton Freedley were the producers for whom the Alvin Theater was named when it opened in November 1927.

In February 1926, in the Variety column called "Theatres in Construction," a notice appeared according to which the Lebanon Building Corporation was to build a combination theater, hotel and studio building at 244-254 West 52nd Street. A. Caron was identified as president of the Lebanon Building Corporation and P. B. LaVelle was listed as the project's architect.[101]

Another report from later in the year had Provence Realty Co. buying from Samuel Hoffman the buildings on a

plot 120 by 100.5 feet at 244 to 254 West 52nd Street with the intention of building a theater seating 1,200 and an adjoining sixteen-story hotel. Negotiations were said to be in progress for the leasing of the theater to the Oshrim-Grisman Theatrical Holding Corporation which then was erecting the Waldorf Theater not far distant on West 50th Street.[102]

In late summer came a report that the Oshrim-Grisman Theatrical Corporation would open a theater then under construction opposite the Guild Theater in 1927. The house was to have the stadium-style auditorium used in Chanin's Forty-Sixth Street Theater, a seating capacity of about 1,700 and a "stage larger than any in New York, outside of the Century." It was to be used for large revues and musical comedies and would be booked independently.[103]

In the latter part of the year, the Lebanon Building Corporation was reported to have sold to Max N. Natanson and Irving Lewine, prominent real estate investors, a nineteen-story hotel and theater at 244-254 West 52nd Street,[104] this suggesting that the project already was underway. Perhaps the change in ownership had something to do with a major change in the plans, because the theater as realized seated about 1,300, had an auditorium in the more traditional style, and a stage of average size. The final architect was Herbert J. Krapp, not P. B. LaVelle, and the house was leased to Aarons and

Freedley, not to the Oshrim-Grisman Theatrical Corporation.

In 1926, despite the existence of the elevated tracks, the area around 50th Street and Broadway was beginning to be a fairly thick cluster of operating theaters and theaters under construction or in the planning stages. The Capitol, Rivoli and Winter Garden were somewhat older theaters, but the Piccadilly, renamed the Warner, and the Colony dating from 1924, the Guild from 1925, and the Waldorf from 1926, would see added to their number the Roxy, Alvin, Gallo, Ziegfeld and Hammerstein, all opening in 1927. Had it not been for the Chanins' activity nearer Times Square, the area above the square would have surpassed the side streets of the square in amount of theatrical construction in the mid-1920s.

It is not surprising, then, that a report appeared on the front page of an issue of Variety in later 1926 according to which Keith-Albee was said to be negotiating for purchase of the site then occupied by the Manhattan Storage Warehouse on the east side of Seventh Avenue between 52nd and 53rd Streets. On the site, which measured 300 feet east from Seventh Avenue, Keith-Albee was said to be considering building a 4,000-seat theater together with an office building with commercial store frontage,[105] a repeat of a theme which was appearing often now.

Keith-Albee never built a theater on the reported

site, but is not at all beyond the realm of possibility that Keith-Albee might have considered such a project. An arrangement had been made by Keith-Albee with the Producers Distributing Corporation for film product for the Keith-Albee film theaters, and the locational direction of theater construction was clearly in evidence. Keith-Albee well may have felt that it needed a large film theater in the theater district in Manhattan to compete with other chains. At this time, it was building or planning larger theaters in cities such as Boston and Cleveland and had opened the 3,000-seat Albee Theater in January 1925 in Brooklyn.

The location of the reported project is particularly interesting. The opening of the Roxy, which was separated by one block from the reported Keith-Albee site and on the same side of Seventh Avenue, was little more than five months off. The Roxy appears to have acted as a new focal point for theatrical activities in the Times Square area even in its early stages. A few years earlier, its location had seemed to be too far from the center of activities to be used for a theater site. But when the project began to be an architectural fact, its bulk and the Rothafel reputation did overcome a problematic site, and the Roxy developed into an enormously successful operation in the late 1920s.

Although there were reports that the 53rd Street elevated soon would be torn down, it still existed in

later 1926, and would have run along one side of the Keith-Albee site. It is doubtful, assuming there was some basis in fact to the speculation reported in Variety, that Keith-Albee would have considered such a site, not only so far north, but on the "wrong side" of hitherto unattractive Seventh Avenue, had there not been the dramatic increase in theatrical activity in the area above 50th Street.

There also must be kept in mind when considering the rapid expansion of interest in theaters for the lower Fifties the BMT subway line stations at 49th Street and Seventh Avenue and at 55th Street and Seventh Avenue, factors which added to the value of the locations in the area.

Rumors of Keith-Albee interest in the vicinity, rumors too persistent and logical to be dismissed entirely, continued until Joseph P. Kennedy gained control of the organization and started a chain of events that led to the opening of two theaters by the successor corporation to Keith-Albee, Radio-Keith-Orpheum, in Rockefeller Center.

In 1926, the area of Fifth Avenue near what was to become Rockefeller Center in a few years' time was in a state of flux, continuing to change rapidly from an affluent residential area to an affluent commercial area. Some of the larger land developers in New York City were involved in the process, and were making substantial

investments in property in the vicinity.

Well before the start of that chain of events that led to the creation of Rockefeller Center, the Rockefellers, as mentioned above, were accumulating property near the area that was to become Rockefeller Center. In 1925, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. had bought the residence of Mrs. Florence A. Twombly at 684 Fifth Avenue at the southwest corner of 54th Street and Fifth Avenue opposite the University Club and adjoining both the home of John D. Rockefeller, Sr., and 680 Fifth Avenue, a residence which lay between the Twombly home and St. Thomas' Church. Rockfeller had purchased 680 Fifth Avenue in 1913, subsequently converting it into a six-story business building.[106] By 1926, the Rockefeller interests held a large number of properties in the west Fifties, and had considerable experience in real estate matter prior to the discussions with Columbia concerning its land holdings along Fifth Avenue in midtown Manhattan.

By 1926, there was little of a residential character remaining on Fifth Avenue below Central Park in the Forties and Fifties. In that year, Benjamin Winter completed the Vantine Building on part of the site of the William K. Vanderbilt mansion on the northwest corner of 52nd Street and Fifth Avenue near the Rockefeller properties. A number of luxury goods retail stores were relocating in the 1920s from the section of Fifth Avenue in the Twenties and Thirties to the Fifties. The Vantine

Building was named for one of these, a dealer in Oriental objects who was relocating uptown from 1 West 39th Street. The Twenties and the Thirties had become a popular location for these kinds of stores and large department stores such as Altman's in the early years of the Twentieth Century at approximately the time when the first IRT subway line was planned and built on a route that included Fourth Avenue from lower Manhattan to Grand Central Station. Until 1918, there was no comparable route on the west side of Manhattan to counteract the attraction of the east side line, and it was not until 1918 that the Lexington Avenue line ran northward from Grand Central Station.

After the economic recession of the early 1920s, retail stores began to recognize the vastly increased attractiveness of the Fifth Avenue area in the Fifties as a commercial center, located near the homes of the wealthy and convenient also to a huge public transportation network. Many of the stores that had been located in the vicinity of the Thirties along Fifth Avenue relocated further uptown, although the large stores tended to remain in the Thirties, perhaps because of the proximity of the garment center. In addition, in the 1920s, the cost of land in the Fifties for the size parcel required for an operation such as a large department store would have been very high.

But, in 1926, there appeared to be a market in the

Fifties for space to be made available to commercial tenants. In 1926, Benjamin Winter also was building the Hickson building, to be used for luxury specialty stores, on the remaining Fifth Avenue frontage of the former Vanderbilt property, and was taking title to the Henry White mansion across 52nd Street at the southwest corner of 52nd Street and Fifth Avenue with the intention of demolishing the mansion and building another structure to house luxury retail stores.[107]

Despite the rapidity of commercial expansion in the area in the Fifties along Fifth Avenue, until 1926 there was no theater or night club on the Avenue itself. But on January 22, 1926, Billy Rose opened his Fifth Avenue Club at 683 Fifth Avenue between 53rd and 54th Streets, nearer 54th, across Fifth Avenue from the Twombly residence, and next door to the residence of Samuel Untermeyer at 685 Fifth Avenue.[108]

The Fifth Avenue Club was said to be the first night club on Fifth Avenue. The Embassy Club nearby had been operating successfully for some time, but with emphasis on dining rather than on entertainment. The production at the Fifth Avenue Club's opening was a full revue, with music by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Lorenz Hart, sketches by Harold Atteridge (whose material was seen in editions of the Shuberts' Passing Shows and Ziegfeld's Follies), and choreography and direction by Seymour Felix who had directed Al Jolson's Big Boy. It

was said that the night club revue was a tryout for material which Billy Rose wanted to use to begin an annual Fifth Avenue Follies on Broadway. Rodgers, Hart, Atteridge, and Felix were getting royalties for the show, a departure from night club practice, and Harms was publishing the score. The principal performers were Cecil Cunningham, Bert Hanlon and Doris Canfield, with liberal use made of the singing and dancing chorus which had a recurring theme "Do You Notice Anything?" each time it appeared, and each time wearing less and less. Rose apparently wanted to combine the reputation and "class" atmosphere of the location with a rather daring production to gain public attention. The final number, "Susie," introduced a sextet of Billy Watson's Beef Trust choristers, the 200-pounders doing an old-fashioned parade number, and taking the proceedings very seriously.

The outfitting of the club cost $50,000, the revue, $3,500 weekly to operate, and the weekly overhead was $5,000. A great deal of importance seems to have been attached by the club's promoters to the Fifth Avenue location. Certainly other locations would have been available if they had been wanted. Rose said, "We are working on the theory nothing is too much for the five dollar couvert," a high figure for the time and indicative of the address.[109]

Title to 683 Fifth Avenue, the site of the club, had passed to 683 Fifth Avenue Inc., care of John Ottinger

at 44 Pine Street, on August 19, 1925, only a few months before the opening of the Fifth Avenue Club, suggesting that a reason for the purchase might have been installation of Rose's club.[110]

The Fifth Avenue Club was the only club of its kind to open directly on Fifth Avenue, certainly above 42nd Street, and probably below. There were public dining rooms that featured entertainment in some of the luxury hotels on the avenue that but none of them featured full revues of the kind seen at the Fifth Avenue, or in clubs in other areas of town such as the Silver Slipper or Palais Royal. The fact that it happened to open at all seems due in part to the development of ever more sophisticated revue entertainments and the attraction they had for all economic classes, including the wealthy. And the fact that the Fifth Avenue Club opened in the heart of one of New York City's most affluent sections suggests that the level of entertainment able to be devised through the combined efforts of such men as Billy Rose, Richard Rodgers, Larry Hart, Seymour Felix, and Harold Atteridge, and the luxury hotels and shops which were becoming very prominent in the area were mutually reinforcing elements, attractive to real estate interests wanting to promote development projects.

West 53rd Street

In the Fifties along Broadway, Emil Seelig

transferred title on April 30, 1926 to 221-223 West 53rd Street to the Rose Marie Company, of which Arthur Hammerstein was President.[111] The Rose Marie was planning to have built a theater with a fifteen-story structure on a site 100 by 150 feet at 221-223 West 53rd Street and 1691-1697 Broadway, the northwest corner of 53rd Street and Broadway. In late 1926, Herbert J. Krapp was announced as architect for the theater[112] which would open in 1927 as the Hammerstein Theater. It would be located across 53rd Street from B. S. Moss' Colony Theater, and next to the tracks of the elevated train line which ran along 53rd Street between Sixth and Ninth Avenues. The Hammerstein would be the last theater in the general Times Square area to be built with Broadway frontage until the Marquis would be built in the 1980s.

54th Street

Among the participants in real estate activity in the lower Fifties in the later 1920s were the Shuberts who had property in the area. In mid-1926, plans were announced for a new theater, sixteen-story building, stores, and offices, to be located at 254-256 West 54th Street and extending to 225-237 West 53rd Street. The latter site was immediately adjacent to the Hammerstein Theater at 221-223 West 53rd Street, plans for which had been announced in the same year. The theater at 254-256 West 54th Street became Fortuno Gallo's Theater, opening on November 7, 1927 with a production of La Boheme.[113]

At approximately the same time as the announcement of the plans for this theater was made, the Trebuhs Realty Company, a function of the Shubert interests, transferred title to 254-256 West 54th Street and 233-237 West 53rd Street on June 30, 1926 to the 254 West 54th Street Corporation at 51 East 42nd Street.[114] Title to 233-237 West 53rd Street passed from St. Mark's Methodist Episcopal Church to Trebuhs Realty Company on April 15, 1926.[115]

The Gallo as built at 254-256 West 54th Street did not extend to West 53rd Street, but occupied only the parcel on 54th Street. It is noteworthy that the property at 225-227 West 53rd Street had been held since May 13, 1905 by the Interborough Rapid Transit Company as part of the 53rd Street elevated train system which was thought to be about to be demolished. Had it been demolished, 225-227 West 53rd Street might have been available for purchase on a block made more attractive and valuable through the disappearance of the elevated.[116]

On July 6, 1926, the 254 West 54th Street Corporation leased 229-237 West 53rd Street and 254-256 West 54th Street to 54th Street Theater, Inc. at 33 West 42nd Street (Fortuno Gallo) for a term of twenty-one years with option for two renewals.[117]

Gallo's San Carlo Opera Company was scheduled for a 1926 season at the Century Theater, but it was to be in the new Gallo Theater in the fall of 1927. The plans for

the new theater were reported to include a large stage furnished with the latest stage equipment, selected after a year's study; and a seating capacity of 1,400. Z. D. Berry and Robert Podgur were reported to be building the theater for Gallo.[118]

Farther east along 54th Street, construction of the Ziegfeld Theater at the northwest corner of 54th Street and Sixth Avenue proceeded during 1926, but there were reports of difficulties between Hearst and Brisbane on the one hand and Ziegfeld on the other. Early in January, a statement was circulated through the offices of the Hearst newspapers to the effect that publicity for Ziegfeld and his productions should be extremely limited because of concern that the generous attention given to Ziegfeld until that time may have alienated other theatrical advertisers. The Shuberts were reported to have withdrawn their advertising from the Hearst newspapers and Arthur Brisbane was said to have made a personal effort to regain their business.

But in addition, Ziegfeld had withdrawn his production of Louie the 14th from Hearst's Cosmopolitan Theater and a report had spread that Ziegfeld had said that he did not intend to produce another of his own shows for the Cosmopolitan.[119] Hearst was said to have been sufficiently annoyed to have considered cancelling the arrangements whereby Ziegfeld would have had control of the Ziegfeld Theater; and to have considered also turning

the theater over to Earl Carroll.[120] But a few weeks after the statement concerning Ziegfeld had appeared in the Hearst offices, and after an interruption of seven weeks of work on the Ziegfeld Theater, reportedly due to direct orders from Hearst himself, work on the theater was resumed. (Practically all the foundation work had been completed when, just before Christmas, Thomas Lamb, the architect, and James Stewart Company, the contractor, had received orders from Hearst's office to stop all work at the site, no explanation having been given.)

Hearst was said not to want to build the theater at all, feeling that the site was too valuable for that kind of use because the property values had risen sharply during 1925, very likely due in part to the demolition of the Sixth Avenue elevated above 53rd Street. The zoning regulation in New York City did not permit the construction of the main body of a theater within a larger building above it.

Brisbane was said to have gone to California to discuss the status of the Ziegfeld Theater with Hearst and to have convinced Hearst to allow work on the theater to continue. It is not clear whether Ziegfeld removed himself from the Cosmopolitan Theater because of upset at Hearst's attitude toward use of the site for the Ziegfeld Theater, or whether Hearst stopped the work on the theater at least partially in response to Ziegfeld's departure from the Cosmopolitan, if, in fact, there was basis for

speculation in either case. Variety reported that Ziegfeld, ordinarily sparing no time in responding to a report in Variety that troubled him, took three weeks to deny a newspaper report in January 1926 of difficulties between Hearst and him.[121]

Early in the following summer, work again stopped on the Ziegfeld Theater for about two months. This stoppage was attributed to delays in steel delivery, but there were reports of renewed difficulties, this time between Ziegfeld and Brisbane, who was said to be on the verge of abandoning the theater and having plans drawn for another apartment-hotel. Brisbane withdrew from the project and Hearst agreed to complete the theater for Ziegfeld.[122]

An air-conditioning unit, said to be the first in a legitimate theater in the United States, was installed at considerable cost in the Ziegfeld Theater during construction. There was a report that the unit had been installed without Hearst's authorization. If the report was based in fact, the incurrence of the extra cost cannot have helped any troubled relationship between Hearst and Ziegfeld.[123] During the second work stoppage, there were reports that the theater building, then scheduled to open in the fall, would include a roof theater similar to the Frolic above the New Amsterdam Theater. It was not built.[124]

Ziegfeld laid the cornerstone of the theater on

December 9, 1926, and it opened with Rio Rita on February 2, 1927.[125] Subsequently, there were reports that Ziegfeld was investigating the possibility of using B. S. Moss' Colony Theater, and in 1932, he made use of the reconstructed Earl Carroll Theater when Carroll lost control of it. But no aspect of either of these instances was connected with the Hearst interests, and Ziegfeld's relation with Hearst appears to have been limited after this time to their mutual interest in the Ziegfeld Theater.

Ziegfeld's move to the Ziegfeld Theater at 54th Street and Sixth Avenue was the first step in his relocation in entirety from 42nd Street, a move paralled in 1926 by the Aeolian Company when the new Aeolian Building was opened on the northeast corner of 54th Street and Fifth Avenue, bringing another major musical organization into the vicinity, and replacing the offices of the firm which had been in the Aeolian Building at 33 West 42nd Street. The new building was across 54th Street from the building which was adjacent to the site of Billy Rose's Fifth Avenue Club and one block below 711 Fifth Avenue, the building which, in 1927, would house the studios and offices of the National Broadcasting Company.[126]

55th Street

Gradually, a broad area of Manhattan's Fifties was

becoming a center for performance and broadcasting organizations. On January 23, 1926, WEAF, the radio station of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, staged its first concert of WEAF radio personalities, not in its own studios, the best of the time, at 195 Broadway at Fulton Streets near City Hall, but at the Mecca Auditorium at 131 West 55th Street, charging a three dollar admission. The previous year, it had staged an event in another midtown location, the Ritz-Carlton at 46th Street and Madison Avenue.[127] Its primary competition, station WJZ, the radio station of the so-called radio group, General Electric, Westinghouse and the Radio Corporation of America, had been located from inception at a midtown location, 33 West 42nd Street, in order to be near the theatrical and broadcasting center of New York City, a locational consideration that had not influenced the placement of the studios of WEAF which were in the headquarters building of AT&T. The main offices of each of the three components of the radio group also were downtown, all within a few blocks of the AT&T building, but still it was decided to house WJZ in midtown.

In July 1926, an agreement was reached whereby WEAF came under control of the radio group, which created the National Broadcasting Company to be responsible for the radio programming both of WEAF and of its own WJZ. WEAF became the red network, and WJZ was the blue. The two stations continued operating out of their existing

studios until new quarters were ready in a new building at the northeast corner of 55th Street and Fifth Avenue.

At the second board meeting of the newly created National Broadcasting Company, held at the headquarters building of the General Electric Company on October 15, 1926, a motion was carried authorizing NBC's President, Merlin H. Aylesworth, to negotiate and conclude a lease for the twelfth through the fifteenth floors of 711 Fifth Avenue for a term of fifteen years. The minutes of the meeting mention that the building was to be called the National Broadcasting Company Building and that it was then being constructed by the Bethlehem Steel Company.[128]

It does not appear that the building at 711 Fifth Avenue was built for the National Broadcasting Company or for any of its parent organizations, but that NBC negotiated for space only after construction of the building was well along. There had been a report in mid-1926 that a substantial lease of space in the building had been made by the Bethlehem Engineering Company, Floyd de L. Brown, President, to a group of importers of luxury millinery goods. The report made no reference to the "National Broadcasting Company Building" or to the company itself, suggesting that the building was becoming a successful realty operation before NBC was created and with no contact with NBC's parent organizations. This would indicate again that property in the area was attractive to potential tenants.[129]

That the space in the building was popular seems evident from the minutes of a subsequent NBC board meeting, according to which President Aylesworth reported to the board that he was not able to get the desired space in 711 Fifth Avenue on a fifteen-year lease, but had been obliged to accept a lease for eighteen years and eleven months. He asked the board to ratify the action, and it did so.[130]

The building was to contain an auditorium with seating accommodations for 150 musicians and for "distinguished guests and radio writers who will be invited on occasion," as it was phrased in an era predating the time of the studio audience. The ceilings of the eight studios were to be equipped with glass panels to permit those on the thirteenth floor to see the broadcasters at work in the studios on the floor below.[131]

Toward the end of 1926, another radio station, WPCH, was making plans to move into studios also in the Fifties, at the top of the new Park Central Hotel between 55th and 56th Streets and between Broadway and Seventh Avenue on the first of 1927, moving out of studios at 72nd Street and Central Park West in the Hotel Majestic. An Artist Bureau was organized to bring club entertainment to the station's audience, a bureau which predated the NBC and CBS Bureaus, both highly successful operations.[132]

56th Street

Although the development of facilities for broadcasting seemed to be well underway in the Fifties in 1926, whether the development of a new Metropolitan Opera House would proceed in the further west Fifties was very much an open question. In a letter dated January 12, 1926, R. Fulton Cutting, Chairman of the Board of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, informed Otto Kahn that the Company had decided against a new building.[133] Nevertheless, from January 15 to May 18, 1926, Wolab Realty Company, the instrument organized by Kahn to oversee acquisition and management of the property required for the proposed new Metropolitan Opera House, took title to a number of parcels ultimately forming a connected group in the block between 56th and 57th Streets and between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, and in the following year, Kahn continued to discuss possible use of the site for the Metropolitan Opera Company with the board of the Metropolitan Opera and Realty Company.[134]

Three plans, two of which were quite different from the third, were announced during 1926 for development of the Hearst properties at the east end of the block containing Kahn's parcels. One called for construction of a six-story theater and office building at 951-969 Eighth Avenue on a site measuring 200 feet by 188 feet, a site large enough to contain the 3,000-seat theater that had been reported the previous year to be about to be built

for Florenz Ziegfeld or for Alexander Pantages. The architect was listed as Thomas Lamb. It is not clear whether Joseph Urban was involved in the project as an associate architect much as he was in the project for the Ziegfeld Theater where he worked with Lamb.[135]

Another plan called for a two-story theater, store and offices to be built at 301-315 West 56th Street on a lot measuring 200 feet by 200 feet, M. Bernstein to be architect. The owner of the property was listed as the New York Evening Journal, Inc., a Hearst organization. A property of this size at this address very likely would have had to have included a considerable portion of the east end of the block between Eighth and Ninth Avenues and between 56th and 57th Streets. It is entirely possible, since these were only plan listings and not actually completed projects, that more than one plan of a given type, with different architects in authority, can have been drawn. The two listings may explain the two plans which the Hearst interests were reported to have had for the theater: the theater for Ziegfeld, and the theater for the "California" vaudeville of Alexander Pantages.[136]

The third plan for the general site and the one eventually carried out was for a five-story building with stores and offices at 951-969 Eighth Avenue and 301-313 West 56th Street on a lot measuring 200 feet by 182 feet, Joseph Urban, architect and George B. Post and Sons, associated architects. The owner of the property was

again listed as the New York Evening Journal, Inc.[137]

During the summer of 1926, the New York Evening Journal Company sold the property which was the west block front of Eleventh Avenue between 54th and 55th Streets to the Packard Motor Company of New York. Title to the property actually passed to the Packard Motor Car Company of New York on October 8, 1926.[138] The property was part of a larger parcel on that block which the Hearst interests had leased some years before with an option to purchase. The option had been exercised a few months prior to the sale of a portion of the larger property to Packard. Hearst was reported to have intended to construct a large publishing plant to house his various publications, but had abandoned the project.[139]

A few years later, in 1930, Warner Brothers purchased a large portion of the block behind the Packard site, continuing the tendency of many of the motion picture firms to house general offices for functions such as film distribution in the far west side of Manhattan in the Forties and Fifties.[140]

The structure actually built at 951-969 Eighth Avenue was used for offices for part of the Hearst publications organization. But of particular importance here is the evidence that there were serious plans for a theater to be built by the Hearst interests on the Eighth Avenue block near Kahn's Metropolitan Opera site. Given the plans for the new Independent subway system and its

interchange with the IRT at Columbus Circle, a large film and stage presentation theater near Columbus Circle might have found an audience. But something, whether it be Kahn's preference not to have a variety theater as neighbor to his opera house, or Hearst's disenchantment with Ziegfeld, caused the plans to be changed.

57th Street

The prospect of a major subway transfer point at Columbus Circle very likely played a role in stimulating other kinds of commercial development in the vicinity which became the location of a number of new office buildings, one of which was the General Motors Building at 57th Street and Broadway.

In later 1926, approximately at the time of the opening of the first major sound film, The Jazz Singer, at the Warner Theater, new offices for the marketing of Vitaphone were opened in the Fisk Building at 250 West 57th Street, with accommodations for Sam and Abe Warner, whose film company was very much concerned with the Vitaphone process, and Walter J. Rich, a major stockholder in Vitaphone. Vitaphone was a synchronized sound and film process owned by Western Electric which was the manufacturing and sales end of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company. Western Electric had leased use of the system to Warner Brothers.[141]

The location of the Vitaphone office is indicative

of the growing importance of the 57th Street corridor as a location both for communications and for other other kinds of industries. Farther east on 57th Street, on December 17, 1926, the Atlantic Broadcasting Corporation opened studios occupying all of the seventeenth floor of the new Steinway Building at 109 West 57th Street, making one further addition to the communications complex in the vicinity.[142] In later 1926, Douglas L. Elliman, brokers, leased offices in the Steinway Building to Haensel and Jones, managers of musical organizations, who had been located for the previous fifteen years in the old Aeolian Building at 33 West 42nd Street where they had been the first lessees when the building was erected.[143]

The earliest days of commercial radio seem to have been a time when musical entertainments were the most common kind of programming. A few of the early broadcasting companies organized artist bureaus fairly quickly, at least in part to insure adequate talent resources. Musical booking and talent agencies often settled around Carnegie Hall which had been on the southeast corner of 57th Street and Seventh Avenue since 1891. Given the need for a particular kind of talent, there was logic to the tendency of broadcasting organizations to locate near or not far from the center of Manhattan's musical industry which itself was not too distant from the theatrical center.

Among the transportation facilities serving the

Carnegie Hall vicinity in the 1920s was the BMT station at 55th Street and Seventh Avenue, which had a connection with the Lexington line at 59th Street. In addition, there was a BMT stop at 59th Street and Fifth Avenue. These transportation factors, coupled with the considerable prosperity of the period, helped the upper Fifties above and below 57th Street, especially near the critical juncture with Fifth Avenue, to continue development as a corridor attractive to luxury item merchants, professionals and the real estate industry.

Frederick Brown, a prominent real estate investor, who later would negotiate for part of the Columbia lands which became the site of Rockefeller Center,[144] bought the mansion of the late Cornelius Vanderbilt, situated on the west block front of Fifth Avenue between 57th and 58th Streets, from Mrs. Vanderbilt, the site eventually becoming the location of a new Bergdorf Goodman store.

The Hearst interests continued development activity in the Fifties. In mid-1926, John Friedrich and Brothers, Inc., one of the oldest firms in New York City specializing in rare violins, located for many years at 279 Fifth Avenue between 29th and 30th Streets, became another firm to move northward to the Fifties near Fifth Avenue, leasing the sixth floor of a building at 5 East 57th Street then under construction by one of the Hearst organizations, the W. A. R. Realty Company.[145] Later in the year, Douglas Elliman leased the tenth floor of the

same building for office space to Joseph Urban.[146]

58th Street

Despite the fact that the Columbus Circle area was served by the public transportation network, and would be better served with the completion of the new Eighth Avenue line, it was not faring as well as the sections of the Fifties farther east in the way of general commercial development. The closer a block was to Fifth Avenue, the better its economic picture seemed to be, suggesting that a decisive factor in land development in the broad area was location near the homes of the wealthy and the services attending them.

At least in the upper Fifties, and into the lower Sixties, where the Century, Colonial and Daly's Theaters were located, events in theatrical development and operation seemed to run parallel to general commercial development. In early 1926, the Shuberts leased the Cosmopolitan Theater at 58th Street and Broadway (Columbus Circle) from the Hearst interests after Ziegfeld had removed his production of Louie the 14th and had turned back his leasehold on the theater.[147] But the Shuberts fared no better with the Cosmopolitan than they did with their own Century.

On November 22, 1926, the Theatre Guild took possession under leasehold of the John Golden Theater at 202 West 58th Street, reported to have been reconstructed

from a stable at a cost of $300,000. The Guild was said to have an option to buy the theater for $400,000 after three years.[148] The John Golden was on property owned by the Durham Realty Corporation which was a real estate arm of the Benjamin Duke interests. Like its neighbors in the Columbus Circle area, the theater never was a successful operation. (The Theatre Guild had held a lease on the Klaw Theater at 251-257 West 45th Street, but that lease was to expire in January 1927. The Guild reportedly also was leaving the Garrick Theater at 65-69 West 35th Street after the 1926-1927 theatrical season.[149])

There were fewer theaters in the east Fifties than in the west Fifties, but these few were fairly prosperous operations, sufficiently so as to engender interest in development of at least one another in the middle and later 1920s very near the interchange between the Lexington and BMT subway lines at 59th Street and Lexington Avenue.

In late 1926, the Chanins obtained the contract to erect the Roxy Mansion Theater at 731-733 Lexington Avenue and 141-155 East 58th Street, the theater to cost $5,000,000, a considerable figure, especially for this period.[150] The Mansion, which never was built, was to have been one of the circuit of deluxe film and presentation theaters to be built by the Roxy Theater Corporation, with the Roxy Theater as flagship house. Title to 731-733 Lexington Avenue as well as to 142-158

East 59th Street passed on December 17, 1925 to the Lexington Avenue and 59th Street Corporation located at 565 Fifth Avenue and was still held by that corporation as of 1931. It is not clear whether the Lexington Avenue and 59th Street Corporation and the Roxy Theater Corporation were cooperating on the project. Frederick Brown, the realtor who purchased the Cornelius Vanderbilt mansion in 1926 and who, in 1928, would be negotiating for use of a portion of the Columbia University land which later became the basis of Rockefeller Center, was the president of the Lexington Avenue and 59th Street Corporation.[151]

The property at 142-158 East 59th Street probably was contiguous with at least a portion of the property at 141-155 East 58th Street, indicating that the Mansion Theater may have been intended to run the length north to south of that block and to be a larger theater. The Lexington Avenue and 59th Street Corporation also had held, as of December 14, 1926, the property at 735-741 Lexington Avenue and at 136-140 East 59th Streets which would have formed the southeast corner of Lexington Avenue and 59th Street and would have been adjacent to 731-733 Lexington Avenue and to 142-158 East 59th Street. But, on December 15, 1926, title to 735-741 Lexington Avenue and to 136-140 East 59th Street passed from the Lexington Avenue and 59th Street Corporation to the 741 Lexington Avenue Corporation located at 386 Broadway. It is not clear whether the two corporations were part of the same

larger group. If they were, and all of the property was intended for use for the Mansion Theater, the theater would have been of considerable size.[152]

The site of the Mansion Theater was across 58th Street from Proctor's 58th Street Theater, a large theater with its public entrance at 964 Third Avenue. It was soon to be rebuilt into an even larger house of close to 4,000 capacity. It was booked by Keith-Albee and was, with the exception of Loew's Lexington Theater at the southeast corner of Lexington Avenue and 51st Street, the only larger theater on the east side of mid-Manhattan. Hence, in a period when theaters were considered good investments, given the increasing degree of attention being paid to the entertainment industry by banking firms, the Roxy Theater Corporation well may have deemed it wise to build a competitive deluxe house.[153]

In early 1926, a school for performing arts opened at 128-130 East 58th Street one block east of Proctor's 58th Street Theater and the site of the projected Mansion Theater. John Murray Anderson and Robert Milton brought together a large number of prominent theater practitioners, including S. L. Rothafel (who was concerned with the prospects of the Mansion Theater nearby), Martha Graham, Robert Edmond Jones, and Joseph Urban, to lecture on occasion at their School of Theatre and Dance. The school was another addition to the increasingly animated cultural scene in and near the 57th Street corridor.[154]

62nd Street

In 1926, the Shuberts were active in real estate matters in the lower west Sixties, purchasing the property at 1884-1888 Broadway and 23-29 West 62nd Street, the northeast corner of 62nd Street and Broadway, adding this to their other holdings on the block, and thereby coming into possession of the whole of the north block front of 62nd Street from Broadway to Central Park West.[155] This block included on its east end the Century Theater which also was owned by the Shuberts. Title to the newly purchased property passed to Meyer Klein, an associate of the Shuberts, on July 13, 1926, and from Klein to the Trebuhs Realty Company on August 5, 1926.[156]

Later in the year, the Shuberts, through Trebuhs Realty Company, leased additional property in the immediate vicinity, 1876-1884 Broadway, at the southeast corner of 62nd Street covering a fairly large plot, together with an "L" to 9 West 61st Street, adjoining the northeast corner of Broadway. The term of the lease was twenty-one years with two renewals for the same period. The lease reportedly required the lessees to erect a hotel or business building costing not less than $500,000 on the property.[157]

Finding profitable fare for the Century continued to be a problem for the Shuberts. Their acquisition of property around the theater suggested that they might have had other plans for the Century site, but in the meantime,

the theater continued in use. In June 1926, there was a report that the Shuberts were planning a lengthy series of operetta revivals at the theater, with a permanent company to be installed along with a special scenic design and production plant. The report had it that when the series of revivals had run its course, there was a further plan to introduce operetta in repertoire in the manner of the Metropolitan Opera productions of grand opera, with unusually successful productions to be placed in theaters of their own for a run.[158]

In late summer, Fortuno Gallo's San Carlo Opera Company came into the Century,[159] and on October 3, 1926, the first night of Sunday vaudeville concerts, booked by Keith-Albee, was presented.[160]

But the theater continued to lose money, the blame for this usually being laid to the theater's location. In the fall, the successful operetta, The Vagabond King, was transferred to the Century after sixty-eight weeks at the Casino where popularly priced tickets were said to have sold very well. But even with reduced ticket prices and a heavy advertising campaign, the production did not earn half at the Century what it had at the Casino, the difference said to be "a further demonstration that the public will not take the long hike uptown to the Century."[161]

Furthermore, when his production of Castles in the Air had to leave the Selwyn Theater on 42nd Street, James

W. Elliott was said to have considered moving the production to the Century, and reportedly was trying to devise a campaign to overcome the theater's locational problems. There was the further difficulty of subway construction at the time on Central Park West on which the Century abutted. Elliott was said to have decided to take a theater farther downtown in order to continue the run of his production.[162]

Nor were the night clubs in the Century doing well. The Cafe de Paris on the roof of the theater closed December 5, 1926 after the failure of another attempt at formulating an attractive policy for the space.[163] While the size of the theater proper, considerably larger than the usual legitimate theater, probably did not help matters, the theater's location, just too far away from the theatrical center, played a significant role in its fortunes.

It is noteworthy that the proximity of the Century Theater to major public transportation lines was of no help to it either. Even with such an advantage, there was no withstanding the power of the attraction for audiences of the theaters in the immediate vicinity of Times Square.

There was no new theatrical development in 1926 below Times Square, while the well publicized opening of the new Paramount Theater on the Square announced the establishment of a new landmark which solidified the

already strong position of Times Square as theatrical center.

The Hippodrome had been a successful "Big Time" two-a-day vaudeville house in 1924 and 1925, but in 1926, its appeal to audiences appeared to be weakening, a weakening perhaps attributable to its distance from Times Square, and from a loss of popularity of the straight vaudeville format which had been the paramount form of popular entertainment before 1920. The Hippodrome's location on Sixth Avenue did not seem to have presented undue difficulties to the theater in the earlier 1920s, but, by 1926, the sheer number of popular theaters in one fairly narrow location seemed to have reached a point at which a major theater simply had to be on or near Times Square to find its share of the potential audience being brought into the Square through its proximity to an interchange of three major subway lines.

The vicinity just above Times Square continued to see growth of theatrical development, but theaters near or on Columbus Circle, for example, were too far away to benefit from audiences flowing through Times Square.

In 1926, the immediate vicinity of 50th Street and Broadway was developing as a fairly thick cluster of operating theaters and theaters under construction or in the planning stages. The Capitol, Rivoli and Winter Garden were built in the 1910s, and the Piccadilly, renamed the Warner, and the Colony dating from 1924, the

Guild from 1925, and the Waldorf from 1926, had added to their number. In the following year, 1927, the Roxy, Alvin, Gallo, Ziegfeld and Hammerstein were to open. Only the Chanins' activity nearer Times Square prevented the area above the square from surpassing the side streets of the square in amount of theatrical construction in the mid-1920s.

Concurrent with the growth of Times Square and the area just above it as a theatrical center was the development of the Fifties in midtown Manhattan as a center for music organizations, a development perhaps due to the long time location of the successful Carnegie Hall, and also to the establishment of the BMT subway line in 1918, a line which ran through and near the upper Fifties.

And the report in 1926 of the planned move of the newly formed National Broadcasting Company to 55th Street and Fifth Avenue was a portent of a new wave of development for the area, this time of facilities for broadcasting. The neighborhood which would be NBC's had been served by the Lexington Avenue subway line since 1918, a line which had an interchange with the BMT line at 59th Street and Lexington Avenue.

There was greater involvement of nontheatrical interests in the affairs of theatrical organizations in 1926, an involvement which had an increasing impact on the locational and land use decisions considered by some of the large theatrical organizations. The trend toward this

kind of interrelationship would continue beyond 1926, and would reach its climax, both in terms of complexity, and in terms of its influence on location and land use decisions of theatrical organizations, only after the onset of the Great Depression.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1] Blumenthal, pp. 224-25. According to Blumenthal, the "Scottish Rite" did not secure complete possession of the Manhattan Opera House until February 1, 1922.

[2] "Masons on 46th St.," Variety, December 29, 1926, p. 1.

[3] "Warners May Turn M. O. H. into Pictures," Variety, September 15, 1926, p. 5.

[4] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (December 18, 1926): 12.

[5] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (July 17, 1926): 6.

[6] "N. Y. Casino Sold; 47th St. Development," Variety, March 21, 1926, p. 22.

[7] "All Moss Contest Finals Will Be Held at B'way," Variety, December 15, 1926, p. 22.

[8] "Woods Retakes from Shuberts," Variety, January 27, 1926, p. 21.

[9] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (September 25, 1926): 11.

[10] RED, p. 118.

[11] "Liberty, N. Y., Sold?," Variety, January 27, 1926, p. 23.

[12] "Wallack's Sold Again; First House Razed," Variety, October 27, 1926, p. 88.

[13] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (December 11, 1926): 12.

[14] "'Pirate' at Selwyn March 9," Variety, February 24, 1926, p. 45.

[15] "P. D. C.'s 'Boatman' Puts 7 Specials on B'way," Variety, March 10, 1926, p. 30.

[16] "Fox's Amsterdam," Variety, December 22, 1926, p. 12.

[17] "3 Road Show Depts. in Same Building," Variety, December 22, 1926, p. 12.

[18] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (September 4, 1926): 7.

[19] "F. P. Booking Office in Times Square; Earl Saunders Named Tentative Head," Variety, February 3, 1926, p. 5.

[20] "Publix Using Big 'Names'; Gilda Gray Set; Beban Also with Own Company," Variety, June 23, 1926, p. 5.

[21] Ibid.

[22] "Film Circuits in Rivalry for Whiteman Appearances," Variety, June 30, 1926, p. 14.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] "Paramount's 3rd Run House--Rivoli May Be Chosen--2,200 Seats," Variety, June 23, 1926, p. 8.

[26] "Ziegfeld Puts on 1st Show," Variety, January 27, 1926, p. 29.

[27] "$600,000 Offer for Al Jolson--A. H. Woods Makes It for Famous Players," Variety, April 7, 1926, p. 1.

[28] "Strauss May Conduct Paramount's Orchestra," Variety, September 8, 1926, p. 4.

[29] "Corner Laid for New F. P. Building--Zukor's First Feature Film Placed in Copper Box," Variety, May 19, 1926, p. 3.

[30] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, January 13, 1926, p. 38.

[31] Harold B. Franklin, "A Reason for the Universe," Variety, December 1, 1926, p. 11.

[32] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, January 13, 1926, p. 38.

[33] Jesse L. Lasky, "Adolph Zukor--My Partner," Variety, December 1, 1926, p. 5.

[34] RED, p. 475.

[35] RED, p. 467.

[36] "14 Stories of Paramount Bldg. for F. P.," Variety, January 20, 1926, p. 27.

[37] "Chemical Nat'l Branch in Times Sq.," Variety, December 8, 1926, p. 1.

[38] "A Monument to Entire Film Industry; New Paramount Theatre in Times Sq.," Variety, July 14, 1926, p. 4.

[39] "Paramount's Gala Opening," Variety, November 24, 1926, p. 4.

[40] Ibid.

[41] "Broadway's Ter-Centenary," Variety, November 17, 1926, p. 5.

[42] "Hip, $24,000 Last Week," Variety, February 10, 1926, p. 7.

[43] "N. Y. Hip May Be Office Building," Variety, March 26, 1926, p. 7.

[44] Ibid.

[45] "Foster Girls Out of Hip; Big House Chops Expense," Variety, April 14, 1926, p. 5.

[46] "K.-A.'s Economical Hip; 17 Yrs.--Bauer Out," Variety, August 11, 1926, p. 21.

[47] "50c. Top for First 'Grind Show' at Keith-Albee's Hippodrome," Variety, July 28, 1926, p. 23.

[48] "Fox's New N. Y. Exchange Opening Mr. 22--Buffet," Variety, March 17, 1926, p. 31.

[49] "Chanin's Combination Theatre-Ballroom," Variety, February 17, 1926, p. 21.

[50] "Chanins Producing; Appoint General Staff," Variety, November 17, 1926, p. 40.

[51] "Chanins with Erlanger; Line Up against Shuberts," Variety, December 29, 1926, p. 1.

[52] "Erlanger's 44th St. House," Variety, February 10, 1926, p. 22.

[53] "Erlanger's 15 New Show and 9 New Theatres in Prospect," Variety, May 12, 1926, p. 39.

[54] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (December 18, 1926): 11.

[55] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (December 11, 1926): 11.

[56] "Shuberts Sell Plots with Restrictions."

[57] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (July 17, 1926): 16.

[58] "2 Circuit Heads Not Speaking to One Another," Variety, September 22, 1926, p. 1.

[59] "Combined Vaude Film Circuits Using Acts," Variety, November 24, 1926, p. 1.

[60] "Grauman's B'way House?," Variety, March 17, 1926, p. 25.

[61] Ibid.

[62] "News from the Dailies," Variety, February 17, 1926, p. 16.

[63] RED, p. 136.

[64] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (October 30, 1926): 10.

[65] "N. Y. Casino Sold."

[66] "Bankers May Battle to Gain Lead in Pictures--P. D. C.-Pathe Deal Blocked?," Variety, October 13, 1926, p. 4.

[67] "FBO Changes Heads; $2,000,000 the Price," Variety, February 10, 1926, p. 36.

[68] "Columbia Wheel May Sell Some theatres; Columbia, N. Y., One," Variety, January 6, 1926, p. 8.

[69] RED, p. 738.

[70] "Wm. Fox's Profit of $500,000," Variety, December 13, 1932, p. 7.

[71] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (December 18, 1926): 13.

[72] Shortly after title to the parcels on Sixth Avenue passed to the Dougmilt Realty Corporation, another parcel, this one at 24 East 55th Street passed, on July 6, 1926, to the 55 Street and 10th Avenue Holding Corporation, "[care of] Fox Film Co 850 10 Av." See RED, p. 162.

[73] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (December 4, 1926): 15.

[74] RED, p. 158.

[75] RED, p. 551.

[76] "Presentations: 'Rhapsody in Jazz'," Variety, March 10, 1926, p. 36.

[77] Robert Baral, Revue: a Nostalgic Reprise of the Great Broadway Period (New York: Fleet Publishing Corp., 1962), p. 275.

[78] "Presentations: 'Milady's Shawl'," Variety, August 25, 1926, p. 25.

[79] "Presentations: 'A Garden Festival'," Variety, March 10, 1926, p. 36.

[80] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, May 12, 1926, p. 18.

[81] "Presentation Costs," Variety, March 10, 1926, p. 35.

[82] "Paramount's 3rd Run House."

[83] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (July 17, 1926): 66.

[84] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (October 16, 1926): 56.

[85] "299-Seat Try-Out Legit House for B'way on 50th," Variety, August 11, 1926, p. 1.

[86] "Waldorf Opening," Variety, September 8, 1926, p. 42.

[87] RED, p. 146.

[88] "Ads on Radio Pages Plug Roxy Theatre," Variety, March 10, 1926, p. 30.

[89] "Roxy Sailing," Variety, March 17, 1926, p. 27.

[90] "Fox and Strauss [sic]," Variety, January 20, 1926, p. 29.

[91] "Roxy in with Fox on House?," Variety, April 21, 1926,. p. 25.

[92] "Stanley's and Roxy's Latest B'way Rumor," Variety, May 12, 1926, p. 5.

[93] "Big Pathe, P. D. C., K-A Deal," Variety, December 15, 1926, p. 5.

[94] "Roxy Stock for Houses," Variety, December 22, 1926, p. 5.

[95] Note dated December 12, 1926 to Otto Kahn, Kahn Collection.

[96] "Roxy Stock for Houses."

[97] "House Reviews: Capitol, New York," Variety, April 21, 1926, p. 42.

[98] "Louis K. Sidney with Loew for Long Term," Variety, March 10, 1926, p. 35.

[99] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, January 27, 1926, p. 20.

[100] "A. E. Aaron's New House and New Show," Variety, January 27, 1926, p. 21.

[101] "Theatres in Construction," Variety, February 24, 1926, p. 8.

[102] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (July 10, 1926): 10.

[103] "Waldorf Opening."

[104] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (October 9, 1926): 11.

[105] "K.A. May Get 7th Ave. Site for 4,000 Seater," Variety, September 29, 1926, p. 1.

[106] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (November 20, 1926): 10.

[107] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (September 25, 1926): 6.

[108] "$40,000 Invested in 5th Ave. Club," Variety, January 6, 1926, p. 45.

[109] "Cabaret Reviews: 5th Ave. Club," Variety, February 3, 1926, p. 46.

[110] RED, p. 545.

[111] The Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1926, 110 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corporation, c1927), 732.

[112] Real Estate Record and Buyers Guide, 118 (November 13, 1926): 64.

[113] Ibid., p. 854.

[114] Ibid., p. 74.

[115] Ibid., p. 73.

[116] RED, p. 158.

[117] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide 118 (July 17, 1926): 16; and Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1926, 110 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1927): 252.

[118] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (September 18, 1926): 8.

[119] "Hearst on Ziegfeld," Variety, January 13, 1926, p. 1.

[120] "Hearst May Add Carroll," Variety, January 27, 1926, p. 1.

[121] "Zieggy-Hearst All Apple Pie," Variety, February 17, 1926, p. 21.

[122] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, August 25, 1926, p. 44.

[123] "Zieggy's Only Ice Plant in Legit," Variety, November 24, 1926, p. 41.

[124] "Ziegfeld's Roof Theatre," Variety, July 7, 1926, p. 39.

[125] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, December 8, 1926, p. 39.

[126] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (December 18, 1926): 7.

[127] "Once Deadhead Always--for Radio Stars," Variety, January 27, 1926, p. 1.

[128] Minutes of the meeting of the board of the National Broadcasting Company, October 15, 1926, Owen Young Collection, Community Corporation of Van Hornesville, Van Hornesville, New York (hereafter cited as the Young Collection).

[129] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (July 3, 1926): 14.

[130] Minutes of the meeting of the board of the National Broadcasting Company, November 5, 1926, Young Collection.

[131] "Radio's 15-Story Bldg. on 5th Ave.," Variety, December 8, 1926, p. 52.

[132] "WPCH's Plans," Variety, November 24, 1926, p. 52.

[133] R. Fulton Cutting to Otto Kahn, January 12, 1926, Kahn Collection.

[134] RED, pp. 168, 171.

[135] The Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan arranged for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1926, 110 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1927): 860.

[136] Ibid., p. 854.

[137] Ibid., pp. 854, 860.

[138] RED, p. 540.

[139] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (August 14, 1926): 11.

[140] RED, pp. 162, 164.

[141] "Interweaving Interests Create Talking-Movie Merger Gossip," Variety, December 22, 1926, p. 4.

[142] "New Radio Station Placing Program Ads in N. Y. Dailies," Variety, December 8, 1926, p. 52.

[143] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (October 2, 1926): 16.

[144] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (December 18, 1926): 12.

[145] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (July 17, 1926): 16.

[146] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (December 4, 1926): 14.

[147] "Mitzi at Cosmo," Variety, March 10, 1926, p. 20.

[148] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, November 17, 1926, p. 35.

[149] "News from the Dailies," Variety, November 17, 1926, p. 27.

[150] Real Estate Record and Buyers Guide, 118 (December 18, 1926), p. 55; and "News from the Dailies," Variety, December 22, 1926, p. 34.

[151] RED, pp. 176, 621.

[152] The Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1926, 110 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1927): 79, 174.

[153]" $22,000,000 for New Theatres In Greater N. Y. Via Bankers," Variety, January 27, 1926, p. 1.

[154] Anderson, pp. 104-114.

[155] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (August 14, 1926): 10.

[156] The Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1926, 110 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1927): 81, 164.

[157] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (November 20, 1926): 12.

[158] "Century as Home For Light Operas," Variety, June 9, 1926, p. 37.

[159] "New Mascagni Work," Variety, September 8, 1926, p. 42.

[160] "Vaudeville Reviews: Century," Variety, October 6, 1926, p. 58.

[161] "Low Prices at Century Didn't Help 'King'," Variety, November 24, 1926, p. 41.

[162] Ibid.

[163] "Shubert Club on Roof Cost Susskind $10,000," Variety, December 8, 1926, p. 54.

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE RELATION OF THEATRE AND BROADCASTING TO LAND USE IN MIDTOWN MANHATTAN IN THE YEARS 1925 THROUGH 1928

by

WALTER ZVONCHENKO

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CHAPTER V

1927

In 1927, the center of gravity of New York's theatrical district continued to move northward with the opening of several new theaters in the west Fifties. The most important among these, from the point of view of impact on considerations of location, was the very large new Roxy film theater at 50th Street and Seventh Avenue just above Times Square which soon became a theatrical landmark and a new reckoning point for organizations with plans for new theatrical development in midtown Manhattan. The lower Fifties were no longer a theatrical frontier, but rather a full extension of the major theater center.

But there were limits to how far the primary theater district could be extended, and at year's end, any hope that might have been entertained by Otto Kahn and William Randolph Hearst for major theatrical development in the vicinity of Columbus Circle, some blocks above the area of new expansion for theater buildings, seemed to have been in vain. And the growth of the garment center in the Thirties exerted a push from the south which helped

to move the theater district even more definitively into the Times Square area.

Meanwhile, the opening of the new NBC headquarters building at the corner of 55th Street and Fifth Avenue was a step in the growth of the area as a broadcasting center, a growth certainly aided by the expansion in the area of the public transportation subway system.

During the course of 1927, plans for the development of the Independent Subway System in Manhattan and other parts of New York City were advanced. A temporary injunction against construction of the 53rd Street subway, which would run from Eighth Avenue in Manhattan to Queens, was set aside early in the year and $300,000,000 was authorized by voters in November to be spent for development of the Independent system including lines for Eighth and Sixth Avenues in addition to the 53rd Street section.[1]

Although the first section of the Independent system would not open for use until 1932, there was a considerable amount of real estate activity involving some of the properties along its routes, especially properties near planned stations. Some of this activity involved theater or broadcasting organizations.

Among the stations along the Eighth Avenue line would be one located at 34th Street and Eighth Avenue, in the vicinity of the Manhattan Opera House. In 1927, there was talk that the opera house would be torn down to be

replaced by a new building. A syndicate was said to have purchased an extensive parcel in the area, but no definite plans had been made for reuse for the site as of midyear, at which point, Vitaphone and the Joseph Teichner Studios were occupying the building. (Joseph Teichner was well known for set construction, one of his clients in 1927 being the new Roxy Theater where he worked with S. L. Rothafel and Clark Robinson, the set designer for the Roxy.)[2]

40th Street

In 1927, the garment center continued to grow in the west Thirties, but immediately above and to the east of it, there remained the southern end of the central theater district of the city, and at least two outlets of major broadcasting organizations.

Radio Station WOR has been a fixture for decades at the corner of 40th Street and Broadway, and was the scene on Sunday afternoon, September 18, 1927, of the inaugural program of the Columbia Broadcasting System. The studio was the remote unit in New York City for the main body of the station located in Newark, New Jersey. WOR was the key station in a network which then consisted of sixteen stations in locations in the east and in the midwest.[3] A performance of The King's Henchman, an opera by Deems Taylor with a libretto by Edna St. Vincent Millay, was heard on the premiere broadcasting day.[4]

WOR continued to have offices at 1440 Broadway long after the time when it was associated with CBS and maintains its primary studio at that address even today. But the major broadcasting centers did not remain in that vicinity. CBS moved elsewhere soon after, going to 485 Madison Avenue at the southeast corner of 52nd Street and Madison Avenue in 1929, while the Radio Corporation of America station, WJZ, which, in early 1927 still was located at 33 West 42nd Street as the "blue" network of the new National Broadcasting Company, moved to 711 Fifth Avenue later in the year, a location very near 485 Madison Avenue.

41st Street

One of the theaters very near the garment center was the Broadway, diagonally across Broadway from 1440 Broadway where the midtown facility of WOR was located. The Broadway occupied the property at the southeast corner of 41st and Broadway extending all the way west to Seventh Avenue and, by 1927, was a vaudeville and film house, presenting variety and motion pictures on a grind, or continuous, basis daily. The theater still was one of the more important of the theaters booked by Keith-Albee, but of late it had been faring more poorly at the box office than previously.

In the spring of 1927, Charles F. Noyes Company, Inc. and Mastbaum Brothers & Fleisher, located in

Philadelphia, after protracted negotiations, sold the leasehold of the Broadway Theatre property. The site was considered to be one of the most valuable in the Times Square area because of its location at the point where the most vital area of the city's theater district met the expanding office and loft center which was the garment district. The leasehold was owned by the Broadway and 41st Street Company, in which participated the estate of the late Jules Mastbaum who had died the previous year, and who, with his brother, Stanley, who had died a few years earlier, had established the Stanley chain of film theaters. The Stanley organization was one of the most dynamic theatrical organizations of the time, and, had not the brothers died at an early age, very likely would have become a much greater force than it was at Jules' death.

The purchaser of the leasehold was the New York Vaudeville Theatre Corporation, of which B. S. Moss was President. The Vaudeville Theatre Corporation had been operating the theater under the joint management of Moss and the Stanley Company of America for some time and was reported to be considering replacing the theater with a twenty-nine story office building and theater to cost $4,500,000. (The fee to the property was owned by a branch of the Astor family, which controlled considerable property in the vicinity.)[5]

Moss was said to have his architect at work on elaborate plans for the structure. Such a plan would have

been a logical development for the area, combining consideration of its growing office needs and its function as a theater center. There also was the precedent by the spring of 1927 of the Paramount Theater office building, then fully operational and successful as a real estate development and film theater.

During 1926 and 1927, there were frequent reports that the Stanley Company and Keith-Albee might be parties to a major new combine among theatrical organizations, reports which may have depended on Jules Mastbaum who pursued a very acquisitive course for his company during his lifetime. Prior to the sale of the Mastbaum interests in the property, the Broadway Theater, booked by Keith-Albee, was the only point in New York City where the Stanley and Keith-Albee interests actually came together. It would be interesting to know whether the theater and office building project that B. S. Moss took on alone in 1927 originally might have been a plan for a major new Keith-Albee-Stanley house, since both companies had been reported seeking sites for a major new theater in the Times Square area to house a film and stage presentation policy.[6]

42nd Street

Moss' project for a combination theater and office building for a site just below 42nd Street was one of a few such which were planned, but not realized, for the

West 42nd Street vicinity in the later 1920s and early 1930s. In 1927, the area still was attractive as an important theater center, but as the 1920s moved to a close, it became clear that the theatrical center was cohering around Times Square itself and the area just above the square, with the new Paramount and Roxy Theaters functioning as the two most critical nodal points between which was most of the major theatrical activity in the city.

Still, the vicinity around 42nd Street and Broadway attracted attention in 1927. The Shuberts who, the previous year, had purchased the Harris Theater, with an entrance on 42nd Street and a theater building which was mostly on the north side of West 41st Street, in 1927 bought the National Theater located at 208-216 West 41st Street across the street from the bulk of the Harris Theater. The National Theater had been built by the Shuberts and Walter C. Jordan and opened in 1921 under the control of the Sanjor Corporation, which, in 1927, sold the property to Meyer Klein, representing the Shubert interests, title passing to the 41st Street Theatre Company on August 4, 1927. The 41st Street Theatre Company was located at 233 West 44th Street, the address for the Shubert Theater.[7] With the garment center pressing on the area, it is conceivable that the Shuberts wanted full control of the site against nontheatrical reuse.

The Frazee, or Wallack's, Theatre at 254-258 West 42nd Street changed hands more than once during 1927. Located near a major stop for the new Eighth Avenue subway system, the site seemed also to be of interest to investors at least as much for its value for possible reuse as for its situation as a theater. First the Schulte interests who owned the Longacre Building at the northeast corner of 42nd Street and Broadway and who recently had acquired property at 253-257 West 42nd Street on the opposite side of 42nd Street from the Frazee; then Witman Realty Corporation; and finally the Fleisher Yarn Company of Philadelphia purchased the property. Samuel L. Fleisher was the principal person in the Fleisher Yarn Company transaction. (The name Fleisher was mentioned together with the Mastbaum Brothers in the transaction, also in 1927, having to do with the leasehold on the Broadway Theater to B. S. Moss' New York Vaudeville Theatre Corporation. I have not determined whether there was a connection between that Fleisher and the Fleisher involved in the Frazee transaction.[8]) Title to 254-258 West 42nd Street passed to Edwin A. Fleisher of Philadelphia on October 3, 1927.[9]

Another project for a large theater and office building combination in the vicinity was reported when the Lyric Theater at 213 West 42nd Street and at 214-216 West 43rd Street was bought in early 1927 by Jacob and Joseph Oppenheimer, controllers of the Lyric Operating Company,

from S. & S. Lyric Company for $2,000,000. A thirty-story office and theater building to cost $5,000,000 was said to be planned for the site. As with the project for the Broadway Theater site, nothing ever came of this plan, which was announced as postponed for at least a year a little later in 1927,[10] but would be a further instance of the effect of office building growth in the area and a new interest in theater and office building combinations.[11]

During 1927, 42nd Street theaters continued to be popular as film houses. Warner Brothers leased the Selwyn Theater for six months beginning January 31 for its Vitaphone productions. Warners was said to have been seeking a 42nd Street house for some time, having considered the Selwyn and Harris, as well as the 44th Street Theater. The Selwyn was chosen, it was reported, because of the possibility that William Fox might present his Movietone sound films at the New Amsterdam which was roughly across 42nd Street from the Selwyn.[12]

The lease of the Selwyn continued the practice of the Selwyn Brothers and their associates of allowing all three of their theaters, the Selwyn, Apollo and Times Square, which were adjacent on 42nd Street in that order, to be used for film, a practice which had the inevitable result of lessening the importance of 42nd Street to legitimate production, especially since the Selwyn houses were the newest on the block.

Farther east on 42nd Street, in later 1927,

Douglas Elliman leased a large portion of the ninth floor at 16 East 42nd Street to the International Broadcasting Corporation which operated radio station WGL, until that time located in the Hotel Majestic at 72nd Street and Central Park West. It was said that the new broadcasting studio would be the largest in the city, but this would seem to have been a dubious claim in light of the opening also in later 1927 of the new and large National Broadcasting Company facility at 711 Fifth Avenue.[13]

In mid-1927, the Chanin brothers, who developed a number of theaters in the Times Square area in the 1920s, announced a revised plan for their office building which was to open in 1928 at the southwest corner of 42nd Street and Lexington Avenue. The earlier plan called for a forty-five story building, while the new plan raised the number of floors to fifty-two. The forty-ninth and fiftieth floors were to be the private and executive offices for the Chanins, and would include a large board and conference room to be designed in the form of a theater with a seating capacity of approximately 150 which would be used when needed as an experimental theater for the theatrical division of the Chanin interests.

The fifty-first and fifty-second floors were to be designed as one unit, with a mezzanine and galleries intended to be the home of a permanent international art, architectural and textile arts exposition. Irwin S. Chanin was said to have wanted the building to have

artistic and civic distinction in addition to its commercial importance.[14]

This kind of building, with space for cultural exhibits, seemed to have been of particular interest to the Chanins. A few years later, the Chanins announced another project, this one for a sixty-five story building, to be built on the site of the Century Theater on Central Park West between 62nd and 63rd Streets for the use of the interests of the government of France. The building would have included public exhibition spaces, these to be devoted to French themes.[15] These kinds of projects, fostered by the Chanins, for an office building of large scale with space devoted to general cultural purposes appear to be precursors of the subsequent Rockefeller Center complex which, in fact, included a building devoted to French themes, and brought this manner of combination office, exhibition and cultural usage to a high point in the earlier 1930s.

43rd Street

The Chanin Building, although a project of a firm connected with the world of the theater, was not primarily a headquarters space for a large theatrical firm, or known as such. The new Paramount Building, on the other hand, was a symbol of the power of one of the country's leading organizations in a newly powerful industry. (In early 1927, Famous Players-Lasky was renamed Paramount-Famous-

Lasky to better identify the connection between Famous Players-Lasky, the production firm, with Paramount, the distributing arm of Famous Players-Lasky.[16]) Although a large building, the offices and needs of the Paramount organizations filled floors six through thirteen, but did not house all facilities of the organization which were located in New York.

Over the course of the 1920s, the space requirements for the growing film industry continued to expand, and there came to be an increasing number of facilities in the farther west Forties and Fifties built or used by the film organizations, one of which was Paramount. In 1927, Paramount built and opened a facility at 545 West 43nd Street to house the operations of the Paramount News unit which covered the eastern United States, transferring the staff from temporary space on the sixth floor of the new Paramount building at 43rd Street and Broadway.[17] 545 West 43rd Street, between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues, was one of several spaces that Paramount owned and/or occupied in the farther west side of midtown Manhattan during and after the 1920s. In 1927, it already owned 331-337 West 44th Street on the block between Eighth and Ninth Avenues, title to which passed on August 29, 1922 to Attica Film Corporation, an organization connected with Famous Players-Lasky, as it was known at the date of title transfer.

Other film companies owned facilities for offices

or production in the vicinity. Fox Film Realty Corporation owned 343-345 West 44th Street, just a few doors west of the Paramount facility, having acquired titles to the land also in 1922.[18] These locations in the farther west side of midtown Manhattan had the advantages of land cost very likely lower than would be incurred in the Times Square area, and of proximity to the major focus of attention for the industry in New York which was the Times Square area and its first-run film and stage presentation houses.

During 1927, with the opening of the new Roxy Theater in March following the opening of the new Paramount a few months earlier in November 1926, competition among the Times Square variety theaters became intense, a great deal of expense and effort going into the operation of the three largest presentation houses in the Times Square area: the Paramount, Roxy and Capitol. Their competition determined all the more definitively the locational focus on Times Square as the critical arena for theatrical presentations. These three theaters attracted great crowds with their elaborate stage and film shows, crowds usually accommodated with ease in the very large auditoriums where four full shows daily were seen.

The other major variety theaters on the Square, the State, Palace and Strand, also continued to do well in 1927, contributing to the sense of vast entertainment horizons that came to characterize Times Square.

Sam Katz, head of the Publix presentations office, made a series of adjustments to Publix presentation policy during this and subsequent years, calculated to enhance the attraction of the greater Publix circuit, but giving special attention to the fortunes of the flagship Paramount Theater which functioned as a symbol of the prestige of the Paramount-Famous-Lasky Corporation. Paramount had a major investment in its headquarters building and theater on Times Square which translated into more than the box office and rental income which accrued to it from the property. The building was an institution. Paramount did not have a Rothafel or a Ziegfeld around whom to build a legend, but it managed over the years to make certain that the theater was well publicized and furnished with a regular run of popular attractions, and its site on the west side of Broadway between 43rd and 44th Streets became established as a location of importance.

Katz wanted to vary the kinds of presentations that the Paramount's primary producer, John Murray Anderson, was staging and, in the spring, signed André Charlot, producer of Charlot's Revue, for the Paramount Theater.[19] Katz was said to want to introduce musical tabloid, or short revue, presentations. Frank Cambria, who had been the major stage presentation producer for Balaban and Katz in Chicago, was brought to New York to take charge of the Publix production department under

Katz, with Anderson at one point reported, wrongly, to be about to leave. Stage band presentations were said to be about to become a staple at the Paramount.[20]

Harold B. Franklin, who was primarily responsible for bringing John Murray Anderson to Publix, resigned from his position as vice-president of the Publix Theatres Corporation in February to become president and general manager of West Coast Theatres, Inc., with headquarters in Los Angeles.[21] Franklin was given much of the credit for having organized the very large chain of Famous Players-Lasky theaters, leading the way to the formation of the Publix Theaters Corporation which managed the chain. The investment banking house of Hayden, Stone and Company, which had an interest in West Coast Theatres, and was prominent in a number of transactions in the later 1920s affecting theatrical organizations, was reported to have convinced Franklin to leave Publix to join West Coast Theatres.[22]

Publix was involved in the fostering of the stage band policy which became a major vogue in film theaters in the 1920s and came to have a serious impact on variety stage presentations, both in the period under study here and for many years afterward. The policy often was called the "Paul Ash policy," named after the band leader who achieved extraordinary popularity in California and Chicago through presentation of programs in which the band was placed on the stage with a series of acts seen in

front of the band, the band leader acting as master of ceremonies.

Jack Partington was said to have conceived Ash's presentations, and to have been largely responsible for creating the vogue for bands, if he did not actually create the concept. Partington was brought to New York during 1927 by Katz to work at the Paramount with Paul Whiteman, who, with his band and group of entertainers, had achieved great success there.[23] In 1927, Whiteman continued to be popular at the Paramount with a form of stage presentation which differed markedly from Anderson's whose methods placed great stress on scenic beauty and dance, frequently balletic dance. The scenic aspects of the Whiteman presentations were more aggressive. In one of Whiteman's finales, a two-gun turret revolved, the guns lighted to simulate firing, and hundreds of miniature lights were strung above the set and across the proscenium while the band played various marches and a two-four rendition of "My Country Tis of Thee."[24]

Entirely different was the revue centered around Gertrude Lawrence who was making her film theater debut at the Paramount in July 1927. Variety saw the presentation as a bid for other than film patrons. Lawrence received $3,500 for the week, and Andre Charlot received program credit for devising and staging the production, apparently a series of moments from his Charlot's Revue. As a sophisticated presentation straight from the major

Broadway legitimate houses, it was a departure from the norm for film houses.[25]

Charlot's contract was not renewed by Publix. His first presentation, scheduled for seven weeks on the Publix circuit, was withdrawn after the fourth week, and his three subsequent productions were seen for one week each only at the Paramount in Times Square.[26]

Frank Cambria, who was replaced in mid-1927 as chief of presentation productions for Publix by James Cowan, devised presentations which often centered around excerpts from classical music and dance.[27] One presentation centered around Faust, and included an overture based on themes from the Gounod version, and a moment from the Berlioz Damnation of Faust with fairly elaborate production. During one of Mefistofeles' arias, the Paramount ballet ensemble was seen in frenetic dance in a scene depicting the underworld,[28] a style which seems to be suggestive of Rothafel's manner.

Clearly, a great deal of effort was being expended in the attempt to devise a stage policy which would satisfy the large audiences which the Paramount was capable of accommodating. Publix seemed determined to do what was needed to establish the Paramount as a house of especial importance for the stage presentations which accompanied its film screenings, while the realty arm of Paramount expended efforts to create a first-class office structure in the form of the Paramount Theater Building.

The staff of the Paramount group of organizations moved from the offices at 485 Fifth Avenue to floors six through thirteen of the new building on Times Square during the last week of March in 1927.[29] The Publix production offices were on the ninth floor and the executive offices, including Adolf Zukor's office, were on the twelfth floor.[30] The following week, Individual Pictures, the road show department of Paramount, moved to the new building from the Longacre Building, which was a popular location for film offices, at the northeast corner of 42nd Street and Broadway.[31]

In January, two months prior to the move of the Paramount staff to the Paramount Building, the building was reported eighty-five per cent rented, with street level stores renting for $35,000 to $50,000 annually, high figures for the area and the time, indicating the success being achieved by the building as a prestige realty venture.[32]

44th Street

In May, Publix received a loan of $21,000,000 to be used primarily for construction of new theaters in the greater New York area, with Sam Katz reported eager to get activity under way. Publix, of which Katz was head, was said not to be satisfied with the Paramount as flagship house for the chain because of its relatively limited seating capacity--approximately 3,400 seats against the

new Roxy's 6,200--and to want to build the largest theater in the world in New York in order to rank as the city's foremost exhibitor chain for the nationwide prestige which it was felt would accrue to Publix and Paramount thereby.[33] The $100,000 weekly grosses being earned by the new Roxy after its opening in March 1927 were said to have prompted Katz' plans for a huge new theater on Broadway, probably to be called the Publix.[34]

Shortly after the $21,000,000 was loaned to Publix, it was reported that the site of the large new theater might be the New York and Criterion Theater properties which were owned by Paramount and which were located on the east side of Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets, diagonally across Times Square from the new Paramount Theater and Building. It was said, however, that construction of the theater was not imminent and that additional property behind the New York and Criterion Theaters would be needed for a theater of the size contemplated.

Marcus Loew had the New York Theater and Roof, playing a continuous picture policy in both theaters, under a percentage agreement with Paramount, the same arrangement he had had with Klaw and Erlanger when they owned the theaters. Some said that Loew had no lease, the agreement terminating at the pleasure of either party, while others said there was a lease which shortly would expire. The theaters were said to be highly profitable

under Loew's management, there being a very large regular audience which came into the theaters regardless of the indications on the advertisements. The New York played nine different features during the course of a week, the only theater on Times Square with that kind of policy.[35]

A number of new theaters were opened in midtown Manhattan during 1927, two of which were on 44th Street. The Chanins opened their Majestic Theater on March 28, 1927 at 245 West 44th Street, adjacent to their new Hotel Lincoln, which they sold and leased back in 1927.[36] The Chanins' Theater Masque, now the John Golden, was adjacent to the Lincoln on 45th Street at 242 West 45th Street, and opened on February 24, 1927; and their Royale Theater was immediately next to the Theater Masque at 252 West 45th Street, opening on January 11, 1927.

A. L. Erlanger opened his Erlanger's Theater at 246-256 West 44th Street directly across the street from the Majestic on September 26, 1927. The Chanin theaters and the Erlanger were at the west end of their blocks between Broadway and Eighth Avenues very near a major subway stop for the new Eighth Avenue Independent line. In fact, Erlanger's was adjacent to one of the planned entrances to the subway system. The theaters were the largest concentration of theaters so far to the west, and may have been influenced in their development by the city's plans for the subway system.

Their construction also gave even greater emphasis

to the importance as the center for legitimate theater to the area just to the west of Times Square. The Majestic and Erlanger's were two of the largest legitimate theaters in the city, designed to accommodate the increasingly important variety and musical forms of theater. Erlanger was building Erlanger's Theater to replace his New Amsterdam as his flagship house and office center, even though, in 1927, the New Amsterdam still was considered to be the most important revue and musical comedy theater in the city.

Early in 1927, the Chanins were reported to prefer an open booking policy for their theaters, despite an earlier understanding with the Erlanger office which was said to have given preference to Erlanger productions. Irwin Chanin was reported to have said that there was no contract with Erlanger.[37]

The Chanins were said to have been impressed by the income earned by the Shuberts when they leased the Chanins' new Chanin's 46th Street Theater, and decided on that basis to operate their theaters themselves. They were retaining their Theater Masque as their own production house, intending to transfer successful presentations from it to other Chanin houses. They claimed that, as engineers and builders, they were able to build more cheaply than other managers through use of their own staff for all aspects of development, planning and construction.[38]

But later in the year, the Chanins sold half interest in the Majestic, Royale and Theater Masque to the Shuberts for a reported $1,800,000 cash, the Chanins retaining managerial control while the Shuberts took charge of bookings. When the Chanins began their theater building program, it was said to be no secret that the Shuberts sought to discourage them, sending word to the Chanins that the Shuberts would not care to book Chanin attractions for the Shubert road houses after their New York run in Chanin theaters. It was this Shubert position which was said to have prompted the protective agreement between Erlanger and the Chanins, an agreement laid aside with the entry of the Shuberts into the Chanins' affairs.[39]

45th Street

During 1927, real estate activity was brisk on West 45th Street including the area in the block above what would be the northernmost entrance to the station at 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue for the planned Eighth Avenue Independent subway line. The Klaw Theater, which opened in 1921 at 251-257 West 45th Street changed hands twice during 1927, being sold first by the builders, Marc and Joseph Klaw, to Irving Lewine, Inc. Marc Klaw had been associated with A. L. Erlanger in the firm of Klaw and Erlanger, but had become estranged from him. Later in 1927, Irving I. Lewine Inc. sold the Klaw to Bernard J.

Goldstein.[40]

Irving Lewine was one of the principals who bought and leased back to the Chanins the Hotel Lincoln during 1927. The Klaw was very nearly directly across the street from the Hotel Lincoln. In the same year, Lewine bought from the Chanins the new Mansfield Theater at 256 West 47th Street, a short distance away, and leased it back to them as he and his associates had the Hotel Lincoln.[41]

In 1927, Robert E. Dowling, one of New York's most prominent real estate figures, sold the adjoining Astor, Morosco and Bijou Theaters to Walter Reade, title to the properties passing to Reade's Astor-Bijou-Morosco Theatre Realty Corporation on April 29, 1927.[42] The Astor Theater was on the northwest corner of 45th Street and Broadway at 1531-1537 Broadway; the Bijou adjoined, occupying the property at 211-215 West 45th Street; and the Morosco adjoined the Bijou and occupied the property at 217-225 West 45th Street. Reade was said to be negotiating with the Shuberts who had the Morosco and Bijou on lease to be able to proceed with demolition of the two theaters in order to build a larger theater on the site for use as a two-a-day "class" vaudeville house.[43] The project was not realized.

Across Times Square from the Astor Theater, in the summer of 1927, a new studio facility for Loew's radio station WHN was opened on the top floor of Loew's State Theater Building.[44] Shortly thereafter, it was reported

that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which was controlled by Loew, was negotiating with the American Telephone and Telegraph Company for land wire service in order to establish a national M-G-M radio network with WHN as principal station.[45] This well may have been a response to Paramount's involvement with the new Columbia Broadcasting Company, an involvement which culminated in Paramount's purchase in 1929 of half interest in CBS.

But at just this point, in September 1927, Marcus Loew died. Loew had kept close control over his organization, and it is highly probable that his death had a profound impact on all aspects of Loew activities. William Randolph Hearst, who always had been on particularly good terms with Loew, was reported, at year's end, to be planning a network of sixty stations in conjunction with the Loew organization and its M-G-M subsidiary. The principal station of the new network, which would have been larger than the one connected with the then new National Broadcasting Company, would have been WHN, but nothing came of the plan.[46]

It happened also that the executive offices of CBS were located in the new Paramount Building until 485 Madison Avenue was opened as the CBS headquarters building in 1929. Had the Loew network become a reality, its Times Square headquarters, added to the Paramount-CBS offices, may have exerted a new pull on locational considerations for the communications industry, perhaps offsetting the

move of the National Broadcasting Company to 711 Fifth Avenue in 1927.

47th Street

In 1927, A. E. Lefcourt, a prominent land developer, bought from the Shuberts 228-248 West 47th Street extending through to 233 West 46th Street, intending to build a hotel in association with the Shuberts and Joseph Leblang, a well known theater ticket broker and owner of the Cohan Theater.[47] During the course of 1926, there had been a report that the Shuberts would use part of the 47th Street property to build a new 1,300 seat musical comedy theater to replace the Casino which then seemed on the verge of demolition. But the Shuberts were doing very little at this point in the way of theater planning. The Ethel Barrymore, opened on 47th Street in 1928, was their only new building project in the later 1920s.

During 1927, in the face of major new competition from the Roxy and the Paramount, the Strand, on the west side of Broadway between 47th and 48th Streets, adhered to its long established use of musical and balletic moments well set and lighted in the Rothafel manner for its presentations. Rothafel had been in charge of production at the Strand when it opened in 1914. As Times Square was evolving, the Strand had a particularly favorable location, approximately halfway between the two critical

nodal points which were the Paramount and the Roxy; a continuous flow of film product from First National, which at that time was one of the three largest film producing companies along with Paramount and M-G-M; and popular stage presentations, all of which allowed the Strand to do well despite the powerful new competition.

48th Street

In 1927, the William A. Brady Enterprises took complete control of the Playhouse Theater at 137-145 West 48th Street, buying it from the New Netherlands Theatre Company. Brady owned half interest in the Company which had built the theater in 1911. Title to the property passed to Brady Enterprises Inc. on April 19, 1927. [48] In 1912, Brady also had built the 48th Street Theater at 155-161 West 48th Street, a short distance from the Playhouse Theater, but had sold it. Joseph Leblang had purchased it in 1925.

On August 4, 1927, title to the Cort Theater, opened in 1912, and property at 138-146 West 48th Street, across 48th Street from the Playhouse Theater, passed to the 138 West 48th Street Company which was listed as being located at 223 West 44th Street.[49]

The Cort and Playhouse Theaters were not far from the Sixth Avenue corridor which was attracting real estate attention at the time, in large measure as a consequence of developments connected with the public transportation

network on or near the Avenue. The portion of the Sixth Avenue elevated above 53rd Street had been demolished, raising hope that the more southerly portion also soon would come down. In addition, there were serious plans to build the Independent system Sixth Avenue subway line, which would add greater strength to the already strong network of subway lines at various points along the vicinity of 50th Street.

Paramount, as mentioned above, was reported to have purchased land on 49th and 50th Streets between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, and the William Fox interests continued to hold property purchased in 1926 on Sixth Avenue between 48th and 49th Streets. Especially with the opening of the Roxy in March 1927, the vicinity of the corner of 50th Street and Seventh Avenue and 50th Street and Broadway was the center of considerable land planning and development.

50th Street

The Shuberts long had been represented in the area of 50th Street and Broadway by their Winter Garden, a pioneer theater in the area when it opened in 1911 on the east side of Broadway between 50th and 51st Streets above the 50th Street entrance to the IRT subway line. In 1927, the popular band leader, Vincent Lopez, opened his Casa Lopez, a night club, in the Winter Garden Theater building in the space formerly occupied by another night club, the

Plantation.[50] The Shuberts leased space for, or themselves ran, night clubs in at least three of their theater buildings including the Century, Winter Garden and 44th Street. Now, in the later 1920s, the Winter Garden was extremely well located as a theater and night club building, facing the Capitol on one side and the Roxy on the other, and in the area of the west Fifties where a number of night clubs were opening and operating successfully.

The Casa Lopez had a seating capacity of approximately 300 to 360, and featured a strong variety bill which used major names. Apart from Lopez himself, the bill for the week of November 11, 1927 included Benny Rubin, one of the foremost comedians on the variety stage of the time; Tamaris, a dancer; a skating couple; singers; and a caricaturist.[51] There were other night clubs with comparable bills, and they seemed to be clustered in the west Fifties in the area between the Times Square area and Fifth Avenue.

The opening of the Roxy Theater in March 1927 was one of the most significant locational events in New York's theater history in the modern period. It created a new focus for theater activity in the city and, both because of its size as well as location, caused other organizations to reevaluate their theater construction and placement programs. It made popular a scale of presentation production which persisted in modified form

on the stage of the theater which in many ways was successor to the Roxy, the Radio City Music Hall, into the present period. And, because of Rothafel's efforts, the Roxy productions gave exposure to modern dance and ballet in a period when these were not often seen.

During the period of planning and construction of the Roxy Theater, plans for the Gallo, Alvin, Hammerstein and Craig Theaters, all in the neighborhood of the Roxy, were being made and subsequently realized. There also were reports of plans for other large theaters for the area, plans which were not realized. And the only major theaters built between 1929 and 1962 in midtown Manhattan--the Hollywood (Mark Hellinger), Radio City Music Hall, RKO Roxy (Center) and the new Earl Carroll Theater--were built on or very near West 50th Street near the Roxy. The Roxy may not have been the primary cause for all theatrical activity in its area after it was announced, but the plans for the theater, the process of its realization, and Rothafel's reputation, in addition to the development of a massive subway network very nearby, certainly contributed to a cumulative effect which helped to foster the broad growth of the area immediately above Times Square and in the west Fifties. The Roxy's size and success also reportedly prompted executives such as Sam Katz of Publix to consider building theaters of comparable or greater size in midtown Manhattan, if for no other reason than to hold the city's largest theater for the

prestige and public relations value.

But the period just prior to the opening of the Roxy was a time of difficulties for the Roxy Theatres Corporation. At the beginning of 1927, Rothafel was reported seeking an additional $1,000,000 for his theater from the downtown banks. Also reported was that Rothafel had told offices which were potential sources of funds that certain economy measures were to be put into effect in the theater's operation. A major role in the Roxy project was played by Rothafel's prestige, a prestige that we in a subsequent period must have difficulty appreciating because his legend, unlike Ziegfeld's, did not live on, but was harmed severely by Rothafel's subsequent failures. Bankers were said to have inquired of theatrical sources about the likelihood of the Roxy's success and were told that if anyone could succeed in such an undertaking, it was Rothafel.[52]

Shortly thereafter, White Weld Company made a loan of $650,000 to the Roxy Theaters Corporation taking as collateral stock control of the corporation in the event of default. Reportedly, the Stanley Company also had been offered control for the loan.[53] Meanwhile, rumor that William Fox was or would be involved in a major way in the Roxy project persisted.[54]

As the time for the opening of the Roxy, scheduled for late winter, approached, Rothafel completed assembly of his staff, one of the most important in which was Clark

Robinson, Rothafel's art director,[55] who had attracted considerable attention with his sets for the series of Music Box Revues, and who stayed with Rothafel during his directorship of the Roxy, following him thereafter to the Radio City Music Hall where a disagreement parted them. Robinson's work at the Roxy further enhanced his reputation and helped in great measure to bring fame to the Roxy stage spectacles.

Erno Rapee was made chief of the music department (another area of deep concern to Rothafel), and chief conductor,[56] and Charles Previn (uncle to André) and Maurice Jacquet were conductors under him.[57] Rothafel intended to provide full orchestral accompaniment for all film exhibition through an orchestra of eighty-six which would be divided into two shift sections of forty-three and which would have four conductors.[58]

Rothafel had become something of an institution, in some measure, as a result of his radio broadcasts from the Capitol Theater through which Roxy and his gang reached a wider audience. In fact, the Capitol maintained the slogan, "A National Institution." During 1927, Major Edward Bowes was continuing those broadcasts on WEAF, the station on which Rothafel had been heard from 1922 through 1925. Since 1926, WEAF was the "red" network of the National Broadcasting Company, and now Rothafel was to return to radio through WJZ, the "blue" network of NBC, broadcasting from the Roxy Theater. Each of these

programs provided important publicity for the theater concerned, and reinforced the prominence of the theater's location.[59]

As February 1927 came to a close, there still was uncertainty about the opening date for the Roxy, said to be planned either for March 4 or 11. Rothafel was on the scene almost continuously supervising the details of the finishing touches for what was to be called in its publicity materials "The Cathedral of the Motion Picture." As time for the opening of the theater approached, many people who formerly had doubted that the theater could be successful were said now to be changing their opinions, looking for a gross return over the first ten weeks of operation of $1,000,000 based on a top price of two dollars, with six shows daily, three of which were to be full presentations.[60] Rothafel still had no firm supply of film product, but had said that he did not think that he would have trouble getting films because he had the capacity--6,250 seats--to get the attention of film producers.[61] The Roxy opened on Friday, March 11, and set a record gross in its first week of $110,000.[62]

The theater had a lobby capable of holding 3,000 people and an auditorium placed diagonally across the site so that the stage was actually in the northeast corner against 51st Street. As a result, the stage was unusual in shape, with an average depth of thirty feet and a maximum depth into the far corner where the north and east

walls of the structure joined of seventy feet; and stage right was more commodious than stage left and differently configured.[63]

The opening presentation consisted of the balletic and operatic excerpts and scenic spectacle which were hallmarks of Rothafel's style. After a concert performed by the three organs in the orchestra pit, the house darkened and a robed figure far upstage spoke what seemed to be a dedication of the house, immediately after which full house lights came on to reveal the ninety-piece orchestra in the pit.[64] In its review of the second presentation at the Roxy, Variety commented that it was a "revival" of Rothafel's work at the Capitol, but was "produced more elaborately."[65]

A sense of size and mass was a primary characteristic of presentations at the Roxy, and it was this giganticism, often handled with ease and grace by Clark Robinson through his stage designs, which did much to bring people to the theater and to make a landmark of the northeast corner of 50th Street and Seventh Avenue.

On March 25, two weeks after the Roxy opened, it was announced that William Fox had gained control of the theater and Roxy Theatres Corporation by purchasing, through Fox Theatres Corporation, the stock interest in Roxy Theatres Corporation which had been held by Herbert Lubin. Lubin, together with Arthur Sawyer, had been one of the original promoters of the plan for the Roxy Theater

and of the subsequent plan for a Roxy chain.[66] Rothafel was to continue as director of the Roxy, and of the two additions to the Roxy Theatres Corporation chain then being planned. At the time it opened, the Roxy was said to have cost $10,000,000, inclusive of land costs. Fox reportedly paid much more overall, but was said to have paid only an approximate $685,000 in cash for Lubin's stock. Lubin and Rothafel were said to have had strong words over Lubin's action.[67]

The acquisition provided Fox Film Corporation with its first theater in the Times Square area and a spectacular showcase for its films. Fox was said to have been negotiating for the purchase of the Roxy for six months prior to the sale with which he also acquired controlling interest in two other theater projects. Ground for one, the Roxy Mansion (although never built), was being broken at the time on Lexington Avenue between 58th and 59th Streets, while the other, the Roxy Midway (eventually the Beacon), was planned for a site on the east side of Broadway between 74th and 75th Streets.[68] Rothafel was a formidable personality, but so was William Fox. The location at 50th Street and Broadway might have been "Roxy" Rothafel's as far as the general public was concerned, but the real power behind the theater now was Fox.

There were suggestions of discord between the two over the operation of the Roxy. Variety reported that

George Olsen and his band, which had done well recently at the Fox in Philadelphia, were a "possibility" for the Roxy. Rothafel had never used popular bands or name personalities in his theaters, always preferring a different level of dance, music and scenic attraction.[69]

Rothafel stated publicly that John Zanft, a chief lieutenant to William Fox, was coming into the Roxy because Rothafel wanted him there for his financial expertise. Zanft was to be the liaison between Rothafel and Fox. Rothafel said that his contract allowed no one to interfere with his directorship of the Roxy and that no attractions without Rothafel's wanting them.[70] By the fall of 1927, however, Rothafel was reported to be assembling an all-star orchestra for his permanent jazz unit at the Roxy.[71]

Fox apparently intended to integrate the Roxy theaters into the larger Fox chain and to model the presentations for the Fox theaters on the presentations at the Roxy. Rothafel was to supervise the style of the stage productions while Zanft was to be general theater and circuit manager. Thus, there would be three large film house presentation circuits in existence by later 1927, each built around one of the three most important film presentation theaters in the Times Square area: the Fox circuit using the Roxy as the flagship and model house; the Loew circuit to be fashioned around the Capitol; and the Publix circuit with the Paramount as

flagship. In addition, the Fox organization was making statements to the effect that the network carrying the Roxy radio program would be expanded considerably, which, together with the creation of the circuit centered around the Roxy, underlined the importance of the theater and its image to the Fox firm and its intention of making use of it in whatever way it could.[72]

Whatever the state of relations between Rothafel and Fox, the Roxy Theater became a popular institution. The audiences were said to applaud with the rising of the curtain, the settings designed by Clark Robinson and executed by Joseph Teichner being particularly much praised.[73]

In June, Rothafel was reported to be considering paying high salaries for name attractions such as Fritz Kreisler and Geraldine Farrar, Farrar to appear in an abbreviated Carmen in conjunction with a new film Carmen with Dolores Del Rio. Nothing came of these reports, but, although their signing would have been a departure from Rothafel's established policy, the use of this kind of name in his productions nevertheless would have been an extension of his usual presentation style.[74] Rothafel's reputation was built in part on efforts to extend the appeal of elements of the concert, operatic and dance stage through programs which might include, as one at the Roxy in June 1927 did, a Tchaikovskii overture and a twenty-five minute version of The Mikado, which "brought

all the production resources of the big institution to focus [on the] elaborate stage picture of vivid color, getting astonishing production values into so short a period."[75]

On October 16, 1927, Sunday morning concerts by the full Roxy orchestra were inaugurated. The orchestra performed for ninety minutes beginning at 11:00 A.M., audiences paying regular admission prices and being allowed to remain for the first regular presentation of the day.[76] Almost coincidentally, just one week earlier on October 9, the Capitol Theater began to present a series of concerts on Sunday mornings from 11:30 A.M. to 12:30 P.M. with full pit orchestra and soloists under David Mendoza, the regular conductor. On October 8, the Capitol had instituted its new policy of bands, scenic spectacle on a new mechanized stage and name attractions in response to Rothafel's competition a few hundred feet away.[77]

But it was the sheer size and mass of the stage picture at the Roxy that elicited the greatest comment, as a similar style at the Radio city Music Hall did in later years. In late summer of 1927, suggesting the importance of the night club scene in New York City, a Roxy presentation featured a full night club on stage, with a full revue, jazz band, waiters hurrying about, and audience. In contrast was the opening number, "Voices of the Chimes," the curtain rise revealing enormous candles

ranging from appoximately fifteen to forty-five feet in height set behind a chair in what appeared to be a nunnery setting. The sides of the theater then filled with white-robed nuns who descended slowly toward the stage while chanting. Enormous bronze bells were hung over the stage which featured a black background in stark contrast to the white robes of the nuns.[78]

Although the Hippodrome once had presented grand spectacles, in 1927 the Roxy was unique for the scale on which its stage attractions were produced, and the theater was doing well financially with the policy. During one week in the late summer of 1927, Fox stock was reported to be doing well on the showing of the Roxy's receipts.[79] But the production overhead for the Roxy was high, and there were reports that the Fox organization was making strenuous efforts to reduce costs by asking suppliers to make substantial reductions for their materials.[80]

Reportedly, in the fall, in the face of the strenuous efforts being made by Louis K. Sidney to improve the standing of the Capitol Theater, Roxy, for the first time, called a meeting of his staff to ask for ideas and to state that he was willing to spend an additional $10,000 to $15,000 for novel stage productions. Subsequent to the meeting, it was understood that an increase of 50 to 65 percent in certain aspects of Roxy production costs had taken place. Rothafel was said to have been determined to maintain his leadership among the

presentation houses even though he might suffer financially since his contract gave him 15 percent of the net profits in addition to his weekly salary of $2,000.[81]

In September 1927, the Fox Theater in Washington opened, and William Fox made arrangements for broadcasting from the theater on Sunday afternoons beginning November 6 in the time slot on station WRC which, prior to that date, had been the hour when Rothafel's Roxy's Gang program had been heard.[82] At approximately the same time, Irving Aaronson and his Commanders, a band, played a very successful five-week engagement at the Roxy, and there were reports that there would be further appearances of "jazz policy" attractions.[83] It is unclear whether Rothafel endorsed the Aaronson engagement or the elimination of WRC from the list of stations broadcasting his program, but it does not seem surprising, if there is substance to the reports of difficulties between Rothafel and Fox, that Rothafel left the Roxy, or tried to, as soon as the Radio City theater project became a real possibility.

The reports of problems between Rothafel and Fox are difficult if not impossible to verify. But it is true that the Roxy was both successful and expensive to operate,[84] and Rothafel apparently did make some moves in the direction of providing more widely popular attractions at the theater than his earlier policies would have allowed. Some presentations were more or less elaborate

than others, and the extent to which costs actually were lowered is not clear, but the orchestra does appear to have been reduced in size. One review in Variety in the fall of 1927 commented on the difference in apparent expenditure, noting that that week's presentation included "no big full stage flashes with a village's population on the stage."[85]

Apart from spectacle, perhaps the single most popular attraction at the Roxy, and then subsequently at the Radio City Music Hall, came to the Roxy in the fall of 1927 when Russell Markert's Sixteen American Rockets made their first appearance. They were a group of young women who performed precision dancing and had been enormously popular at one of the major presentation houses in St. Louis. The Rockets were an immediate success at the Roxy and became a regular attraction, later changing their name to the Roxyettes and helping to achieve a kind of institutionalization, first of the Roxy, and then (as the Rockettes) of the Music Hall.

They came to the Roxy shortly after the Chester Hale Girls were introduced at the Capitol as part of Sidney K. Louis' modified stage policy. The Hale Girls also became a regular feature, and a form of competition became established between the Rockets and them.[86] The Rockets were perhaps better thought of for their technique, while the Hale Girls were said to be more attractive and more attractively outfitted, suggesting

that they were closer in style to the girls in the Follies, Scandals or Vanities than were the Rockets.

The Paramount Theater had no comparably famous line of dancers in a time that seemed disposed to accept with enormous enthusiasm the kinds of efforts that the Rockets and Hale Girls put forward. And so, the two theaters farther north and, but for the Winter Garden's relatively small block, across the street from one another found a new element to emphasize their particular presence and, hence, location in the form of a variant of a common feature of revue and musical comedy.

During the holiday season at the end of 1927, Rothafel presented the first of the annual Roxy Theater holiday spectacles, a series which helped to reinforce the prestige and renown of the Roxy Rothafel name and to strengthen the degree to which the Roxy's location became a focal point for vast numbers of visitors. Excepting that the Rockets did not perform the March of the Wooden Soldiers, this first holiday presentation provided the general basis for succeeding editions both in the Roxy and in the Radio City Music Hall and seemed to have been mounted without regard to tight budgetary constraints.

The production included an elaborate telling of the Cinderella story, with a score especially written by Erno Rapee and Lew Pollock, and a setting of the Prince's ballroom done in dark red plush with gold chandeliers and the company grouped on terraced levels. At either side of

the proscenium arch were lighted Christmas trees, and above were holly wreaths.[87]

With its seventy-foot proscenium width and fair stage depth at least at stage center, the Roxy's stage picture probably presented an impressive sight. But in later 1927, Rothafel had to concern himself with the increasingly elaborate productions that his former stand, the Capitol, was presenting nearby.

51st Street

In the summer of 1927, the Trebuhs Realty Company, a Shubert organization, sold to Messmore Kendall the property at 248-250 West 51st Street on a plot forty-seven feet by one hundred feet. The property adjoined the southeast corner of Eighth Avenue, and was on the block which included the Capitol Theater, also owned by Kendall. With the purchase, Kendall controlled a site of 57,000 square feet in the block between Broadway and Eighth Avenue and between 50th and 51st Streets running from the Capitol theater to a Knights of Columbus building on Eighth Avenue. No new use for the site was announced at the time.[88] Title to the site passed on September 30, 1927 from Trebuhs Realty Company to Los Olmos Estates, Inc., apparently controlled by Kendall, at 17 East 42nd Street.[89] The Shubert interests had acquired 248-259 West 51st Street two years earlier in 1925 during which title to 246 West 51st Street was transferred from Los Olmos

Estates Inc. to Kendall.[90]

Kendall's land assemblage is not surprising in light of the considerable number of theaters that were being planned, constructed or opened in the west Fifties in 1927; the Roxy's successful operation after March 11; and the plans for a new Metropolitan Opera House on Otto Kahn's site on West 57th Street.

In 1927, the Capitol was occupying a choice piece of real estate, a location especially well suited to theatrical production as the number of theaters increased around it, and the subway system continued to improve in the vicinity. But in earlier 1927, the theater's management was concerned about the Capitol's position vis-a-vs its primary competition, the Paramount which opened in November 1926; and the Roxy, which opened in March 1927.

In the earlier part of the year, the presentations at the Capitol continued to be structured essentially along the lines of the Rothafel format. One week's production included Liszt's Second Hungarian Rhapsody, a male chorus with baritone solo and Joyce Coles and John Triesault together in a dance number. Coles, an Englishwoman who had been with the Pavlova company, was the prima ballerina at the Capitol.[91]

Also on this program was a screening of Lindbergh's speech in Washington in the new phonofilm sound-on-film talking picture process developed by General

Electric, this reportedly in response to the Movietone talking film process in use at the Roxy.[92]

In mid-summer, Major Edward Bowes, managing director of the Capitol and successor to Rothafel, issued orders for the enlargement and remodeling of the stage, stating that the trend seemed to be toward the "stage side of the picture theater," and that the Capitol would keep step with that trend.[93] According to report, the Capitol was scheduled to take on a jazz band policy, which seemed to be the trend, and which, it was suggested, was influencing policy in New York since its arrival into the New York Paramount under Jack Partington's direction. The Strand also was said to be thinking along similar lines, while early in September, the Roxy was featuring Louis Katzman and his Anglo-Persians. The Colony was to make a point of Hugo Riesenfeld's "Classical Jazz."[94]

The cost for installation of new pit elevators and modifications to the stage for the new band policy at the Capitol was said to be $200,000, with work going on day and night during the run of two features, first Ben-Hur and then The Big Parade, the lengths of which permitted elimination of stage presentations.[95] When completed, the new stage was said to be the most intricate in any film house in the country, having four platforms on rising elevators which could move to either side or upstage and downstage. The entire stage was said to be a series of tracks controlled by electricity.[96]

The Capitol's new stage and policy had their premiere on October 5, 1927 with a presentation which included Pat Rooney, the Chester Hale Girls, a pit orchestra numbering approximately fifty, a string orchestra of nine, Paul Specht's stage band of twenty, and seventy-six girls in the finale. Clearly, a massive stage picture was intended. The new stage mechanism seemed to work well. When a stairway was required for the movement of the girls, the audience saw the sectional steps slide into place, the stage mechansim becoming part of the production spectacle.[97]

The second presentation under the new policy featured Nora Bayes, Morton Downey and Ben Bernie, the last serving as the guest conductor and master of ceremonies for the week.[98] Sidney was said to be willing to pay high salaries for attractions, Bayes getting $5,000 for her week, and Bernie getting $1,500 for the first week and $2,000 for a holdover week. Al Jolson was offered $22,000 for the third week of the new policy, but did not accept.[99]

After the first few weeks of the new policy's operation, however, there was a period when there were no name attractions on stage at the Capitol. There was a rumor to the effect that the Capitol would become a popular vaudeville house similar to the State, and talk of serious curtailment of expenses.[100] But Sidney was said to be determined to succeed with name attractions.[101]

Apparently, Sidney was still in control of the theater, since, at approximately the same time as the theater seemed to be having financial difficulties, he was given the additional task of choosing films for the Capitol, a task formerly handled by Major Bowes.[102]

Variety suggested, in a review of a Capitol presentation of the late fall of 1927, that some of the personalities being featured on its stage might not be suited to a theater which depended, as did the Capitol, on its ability to attract a film audience, an audience which might not understand the routine of a comedian accustomed to a more knowing vaudeville audience.[103]

But there was also a difference in size which effected a strong contrast between theaters such as the Palace Theater, still the country's most important vaudeville house, on the east side of Broadway just below 47th Street, and the larger film and presentation houses. The Palace was not a small theater, but its approximately 1,600 seats made it much more intimate than the major film theaters in Times Square, most of which had at least 3,000 seats. Furthermore, the Palace still was an important part of a tradition which bred names such as Benny Rubin and Frank Fay who were understood in those vaudeville theaters where the audiences came primarily to see them and knew and appreciated their characteristics. In the smaller atmosphere of the vaudeville houses, there was a sense of direct contact between performer and audience

which was difficult to render in huge theaters such as the Capitol.

This lack of intimacy stood as a problem for the larger theaters for a time, but after 1930, and especially after 1931, as the Palace went into marked decline, apparently because its management was unwilling to pay the increasingly lofty salaries demanded by important personalities famed in films and radio, the Paramount and the Capitol were able to feature very successfully name attractions such as Burns and Allen and many other comic acts with the aid of well placed microphones.

But, although the Capitol lacked a sense of intimacy, it was able to afford a sense of spectacle. A presentation featuring Benny Rubin included a production called "Babyettes," the name apparently coming from the eighteen small pianos on the stage in the finale, said to be reminiscent of a moment in The Century Girl of 1916 at the Century Theater. In a green color scheme, fourteen pianos with girls at the keyboards came up from behind the band stand on a double bridge, while four others came out from the wings.[104] The Capitol continued to utilize its new stage equipment to create scenic attractions such as this one which suggests the later Busby Berkeley film productions and is indicative of the large presentation scale mounted in opposition to Rothafel's efforts nearby at the Roxy.

The similarity of aspects of "Babyettes" to a

number in The Century Girl also is a reminder that large-scale presentations earlier attracted audiences to such productions as The Century Girl and Miss 1917, mounted at the Century Theater in 1916 and 1917 respectively, and, at approximately the same period of time, to Charles Dillingham's large productions at the Hippodrome, and that these Hippodrome and Century productions, together with aspects of revues such as the Follies, Vanities and Music Box Revues were precursors of the large presentation house productions, accustoming audiences to a finish and grandeur in scenic production which grew ever more sophisticated under the hand of designers such as Clark Robinson who had the benefit of having worked in the earlier presentations as preparation for these later film theater spectacles.

At the end of 1927, it was reported that the Loew circuit would not continue to feature name attractions in its vaudeville and picture houses, not so much for economy, but rather because the name personalities were not drawing an audience. The trend, despite the difficulties said to be encountered by comedians such as Rubin and Fay, was toward comedy, the mainstay of theaters such as the Palace, and, as the years went along, comedy would increase in importance in the larger houses.[105]

The competition among the major first-run stage and film presentation houses continued to be vigorous over the course of the remainder of the 1920s, and tended to

sharpen the focus of public attention on the particular theater and on the particular location. The dynamism imparted by the spectacle both inside these theaters--especially the Capitol, Roxy and Paramount--and to their immediate neighborhood helped to engender an attractiveness for their location which was able to be translated into general new real estate development.

This certainly was true of the immediate vicinity of the Capitol and the Roxy which continued to develop in 1927. The Manger, later the Taft, Hotel opened on the site immediately adjacent to the Roxy and fronting on Seventh Avenue, while in the same year, plans for another hotel for the site immediately above, on the property on the northeast corner of 51st Street and Seventh Avenue, were announced.[106] These hotels, along with the large Park Central which had opened the previous year a few blocks north on the block between Broadway and Seventh Avenue and 55th and 56th Streets brought with them additional entertainment spaces which further strengthened the area as a new focal point for performing arts presentations of various kinds, and acted as extensions, although less grandiose, of the hotel room entertainments which were increasingly a part of activity on Fifth Avenue in the Fifties, forming, with the efforts of the Hearst/Brisbane interests on Sixth Avenue above 53rd Street, a fairly solid block of redeveloped property in a large sector of the Fifties.

Early in 1927, Variety carried another report of Keith-Albee interest in a site for a new theater in the west Fifties, this one extending 206 feet along Broadway and 150 feet on 51st and on 52nd Streets. The property was said to have been sold, according to the report, to interests representing Keith-Albee. Variety ventured the opinion that the Palace Theater, which, in 1927, still was the flagship house for the Keith-Albee organization, was not large enough to function as a weekly-change Broadway film house, and that the new theater would mean a Broadway house for Producers Distributing Corporation/DeMille films, with which groups Keith-Albee had a relation at the time.[107]

On April 5, 1927, the John J. Emery Company, Girard Trust Company, trustee, leased to the Broadway Block Corporation at 15 West 45th Street, a site on the west side of Broadway between 51st and 52nd Streets, 1651-1665 Broadway, running west for approximately 100 feet on 51st and 52nd Streets, for the period from August 1, 1926 to January 1, 1946 with two twenty-one year renewals. The location included on West 51st Street was 215 West 51st Street, and on 52nd Street, 222-226 West 52nd Street.[108]

A listing of buildings projected for some phase of development in 1927 included mention of a three-story building with stores and hall for the site; the Broadway Block Corporation at 215 West 51st Street as owner; Ward Melville at 191 Hudson Street as president of the

corporation; and Schultze and Weaver, a prominent architectural firm in New York, as architect.[109]

The coincidence of these items, along with the probability that Keith-Albee was interested in a new theater in the Times Square area, suggests that Keith-Albee may have been interested in this property, located across 51st Street from the Capitol, diagonally across Broadway from the Winter Garden, and one short block from the Roxy. This site probably would have been large enough to accommodate the style film and vaudeville theater of approximately 3,000 seats which Keith-Albee was building in the middle and later 1920s up to the time when Joseph P. Kennedy took control of the organization.

52nd Street

In early 1927, it was reported that Otto Kahn had withdrawn his support from the Provincetown Players and had started a new group, the New Playwrights Theater, headed by Jasper Deeter, which would make use of Bimberg's 52nd Street Theater. The theater was on the south side of 52nd Street a short distance west of Eighth Avenue, and four short blocks south of Kahn's projected site for the new Metropolitan Opera House, which happened also to lay between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. The new group included John Howard Lawson and was said to be concerned with production of work by new playwrights, the first production to be Fiesta by Michael Gold. Kahn reportedly

had guaranteed his support for one year, contributing $50,000.[110]

On November 20, 1927, the Alvin Theater was opened at 244-254 West 52nd Street, one block west of Bimberg's 52nd Street Theater, with Funny Face. The theater was operated by Vinton Freedley and Alex Aarons who had become estranged from his former employer, A. L. Erlanger. The property was owned by the Pingo Realty Company which had acquired title on January 20, 1927. Pingo Realty was controlled by Pincus and Goldman who also had built the Imperial Theater at 249 West 45th Street in 1923, and who were listed as having offices at 565 Fifth Avenue, also the address of Frederick Brown, one of the foremost land developers of the time in New York City.[111]

As mentioned above, Brown was active during the course of the 1920s in real estate concerns involving properties elsewhere in the Fifties, including the site which became the location for a new Bergdorf Goodman store, and the property which was to have been at least part of the site for the Roxy Mansion Theater, projected for the vicinity of Lexington Avenue and 58th Street. Brown also was to become involved in discussions concerning the Columbia property in the Forties and Fifties west of Fifth Avenue, an area which continued to become more commercial in 1927.

The prospects for successful development of large sections of the lower east and west Fifties improved in

the later 1920s, following the announcement that there would be an Independent subway line running underneath 53rd Street from Eighth Avenue to Queens.

In early 1927, it was reported that Pease & Elliman, Inc. had sold for Mrs. Virginia Fair Vanderbilt to an unidentified buyer the four-story limestone mansion on the west side of Fifth Avenue at number 666 between 52nd and 53rd Streets, a site which would be very near a subway station planned as part of the new 53rd Street line of the Independent system. The neighboring William K. Vanderbilt mansion had been torn down the previous year and replaced with commercial space occupied by dealers in luxury items. The buyer of the property at 666 Fifth Avenue intended to lease the property for business use, but placed emphasis on his further intention to retain and preserve the mansion's facade and the more important aspects of the interior decorations. The mansion had been built in 1906 from plans by McKim, Mead and White.[112]

There is no record of transfer of title to the property in 1927, but title did pass on February 28, 1928 from Mrs. Vanderbilt to the Empire Mortgage Company.[113]

The mansion was leased in its entirety to the C. G. Gunther's Sons, furriers who had been located at 391 Fifth Avenue on the east side of the avenue between 36th and 37th Streets, and who, like many other dealers in luxury goods, were moving north, nearer the homes of the wealthy and the bulk of the luxury hotels.[114]

Benjamin K. Winter, who had redeveloped the site of the William K. Vanderbilt mansion, was planning another structure (never actually built) nearby on the site of the Henry White mansion on the southwest corner of 52nd Street and Fifth Avenue which would extend 150 feet along 52nd Street, the most westerly fifty feet of which had been restricted to residential purposes "until the recent decision of the Board of Estimate which removed the restrictions and opened the street to business development, in view of the changed character of Fifth Avenue in the sweep of the retail trade northward."[115] If that modification to zoning could be made, then perhaps there might be other modifications which could have a marked effect on an area.

53rd Street

During the course of the 1920s, the Universal film company was reported to be interested in developing a major new theater in the Times Square area as a showcase for its product, but nothing ever came of the talk. In September 1927, Universal took on direction of Moss' Colony Theater at the southwest corner of 53rd Street and Broadway, appointing Dr. Hugo Riesenfeld, formerly with Famous Players-Lasky, as managing director. Riesenfeld conducted the house orchestra, including his Classical Jazz feature, and placed John Wenger, who also had worked for Famous Players-Lasky, in charge of stage settings.

The programs featured several variety acts, including, during the first week, one of Tony Sarg's marionettes as a novelty presentation. (Sarg, one of the most important names in American puppetry, later performed at the Roxy.)[116]

Universal might have been attracted to the vicinity by the increase in the number of theaters very near the Colony, including the Roxy, proving to be very successful a short distance away. But the Colony lost money almost from the opening of its new policy.[117] Although it was a large theater, having 1,900 seats, it could not compare in size to theaters such as the Roxy and Capitol, or even the Strand, the theaters which were, given its policy, the Colony's primary competition. And it was located under the elevated train tracks which still ran along 53rd Street.

On the northwest corner of 53rd Street and Broadway, directly across 53rd Street from the Colony, Arthur Hammerstein's Hammerstein Theater opened on November 30, 1927.

There were rumors in 1927 that another theater would be built on a site very near Hammerstein's theater, on the northeast corner of 53rd Street and Seventh Avenue, also under the 53rd Street elevated. Title to the properties at 159-167 West 53rd Street; 158 West 54th Street; and 821-827 Seventh Avenue passed to the Mishol Realty Company, care of Carl Sholtz and Alfred Schaeffer,

at 36 West 44th Street on dates ranging from January 6, 1926 to November 2, 1927. The parcel had extensive frontage on Seventh Avenue, and an outlet on West 54th Street, although the southeast corner of 54th Street and Seventh Avenue was not included in the assemblage.[118]

While no theater building ensued from this activity, the very fact of the property assemblage is suggestive of the interest at the time in real estate in the vicinity, an interest especially understandable in light of the persistence of the rumors to the effect that soon the 53rd Street and Sixth Avenue elevated train systems would be demolished.

Plans were reported, also in 1927, for yet another theater on West 53rd Street on a parcel adjacent to the West 53rd Street property held by Mishol Realty. The new theater was to be built by the estate of S. M. Lichtenauer on property owned by the estate at 145-157 West 53rd Street and 152 West 54th Street, and, as the Craig, opened the following year on December 24, 1928 as a legitimate playhouse.[119]

Both the Craig and the property held by the Mishol Realty Company included extensions to West 54th Street while the bulk of the property was adjacent to West 53rd Street where the 53d Street elevated yet ran. The Craig's main entrance when built was in the extension to 54th Street, thus permitting the arriving audience to avoid the elevated. The fact that the Mishol Realty assemblage also

had a narrower extension to 54th Street is further suggestion that a theater was considered for the site, and that the developers of that parcel might also have intended a primary public access point away from the elevated.

54th Street

On November 7, 1927, the Gallo Theater opened at 254 West 54th Street with a production of La Boheme. The Gallo was one of three theaters--the others being the Alvin and the Roxy--to open in the west Fifties in the same month.

Earlier in the year, the Ziegfeld Theater opened less than two blocks to the east of the Gallo. Across the street and a short distance to the east of what would be the main entrance to the Craig late in the following year, it was situated, like the north end of the Craig, at a point, the northwest corner of 54th Street and Sixth Avenue, which allowed it to be above and somehwat removed from the elevated track system. One of the most attractive and larger legitimate theaters in New York City, the Ziegfeld opened on February 2, 1927 with Ziegfeld's Rio Rita, adding another theater to the group in the west Fifties.

Shortly thereafter, Ziegfeld announced construction plans for four new theaters, one of which was to be in New York City, and all of which were to be

modeled after the new Ziegfeld Theater.[120] There seems to be no indication that the Hearst interests were involved in these plans, and no further theaters were built by or for Ziegfeld, who considered making use of the Colony at 53rd Street and Broadway a short while thereafter. During the course of 1927, the Ziegfeld Theater appeared to be the single link between the Hearst interests and Ziegfeld, suggesting that there might have been substance to earlier stories of serious problems between them.

During 1927, the Hearst interests continued acquiring property in the area of the Ziegfeld Theater, buying parcels in the block across Sixth Avenue from the theater and on 54th and 55th Streets.[121] The Hearst group already controlled the northeast corner of 54th Street and Sixth Avenue, which, at one time, was reported to have been the site for the larger of the two Ziegfeld theaters intended for the corner, and, with transfer of title to 1350-1358 Sixth Avenue on February 2, 1927 (the day the Ziegfeld Theater opened), it controlled the entire Sixth Avenue frontage of the block.[122]

No further plans for theater building for the area were announced by the Hearst group. Zoning regulations prohibited construction of larger structures over theater auditoriums and/or stage areas, and it well may have been deemed economically unsound to encumber the properties with structures the size of which would be limited radically. In subsequent years, organizations such as the

John Todd group, connected with the Rockefeller interests, continued to see theaters as important aspects of larger developments in midtown such as the complex which became Rockefeller Center, but, in 1927, the Hearst group, at least as far as the area around Sixth Avenue was concerned, no longer seemed inclined to build theaters.

55th Street

In 1927, as mentioned above, another major financial force purchased the St. Regis Hotel at the southeast corner of 55th Street and Fifth Avenue and announced plans to build a major addition to the hotel on East 55th Street which would include an enclosed roof garden for dining and dancing. Benjamin N. Duke purchased the hotel through the Durham Realty Corporation, holding company for the Duke properties, from Vincent Astor, title to the property passing to Durham Realty on March 2, 1927. The roof garden became the St. Regis Roof and was designed by Joseph Urban, opening in the summer of 1928 and taking its place as one of the prominent entertainment rooms on Fifth Avenue.[123]

Durham Realty Corporation also owned the property which included the site of the John Golden Theater at 202 West 58th Street and the northeast corner of 61st Street and Park Avenue, providing to the Duke interests a concentration of land holdings in or just above the Fifties.

Across 55th Street from the St. Regis was the new fifteen-story office building at 711 Fifth Avenue, into which the National Broadcasting Company moved in later 1927. The studios for the network included a room which, reportedly, was the largest broadcasting studio in existence, measuring forty by eighty feet, and, in addition, a small theater capable of seating 250.[124]

NBC was a successful operation. Apparently, almost immediately after the National Broadcasting System moved into 711 Fifth Avenue, it was found that additional space was required, and, on November 11, 1927, the board of directors approved a motion that negotiations toward leasing the eleventh floor of 711 Fifth Avenue be undertaken.[125] But soon, growth brought with it the need for much more space, and it would not be long before NBC would be seeking additional office and studio space beyond 711 Fifth Avenue, a search culminating in its move in 1933 to Rockefeller Center a few blocks south of 711 Fifth Avenue.

The NBC move placed on Fifth Avenue the headquarters and operating facility for the most advanced and largest broadcasting organization in the country. The building at 711 Fifth Avenue was very near the complex of offices for organizations in the music and concert field which had begun to develop along and near 57th Street, in addition to which were the various hotels, galleries and luxury retail stores which were giving a new tone to Fifth

Avenue, fast losing its residential flavor. The various night clubs, hotel entertainment spaces, radio studios, and its greater proximity to nearby major theaters such as the Ziegfeld began to make of the avenue a creative center of a kind different from Times Square, yet strongly related to it in its utilization of many of the same kinds of talents to which Times Square was home. And this relationship would grow markedly in strength as the communications and theater worlds became ever further interrelated through common use of talent and through the development of the power of the advertising agencies.

In the later 1920s, the larger advertising agencies tended to cluster in the east Forties and Fifties, not far removed from the theater, music, concert, and broadcasting offices. Broadcasting quickly became extremely important to the advertising agencies which began to develop radio production capability as part of their staffing, agencies such as Barton, Durstin and Osborne; the George Batten Company; and the J. Walter Thompson organization hiring staff away from NBC.[126]

A manifestation of the corporate interrelatedness of the two worlds of theater and broadcasting can be seen in the election to the board of directors of the National Broadcasting System on October 7, 1927 of Paul Drennan Cravath of the prominent Wall Street law firm of Cravath, Henderson and DeGorsdorff.[127] Cravath was general counsel for General Electric and Westinghouse, his firm worked

with Kuhn, Loeb in matters dealing with Paramount, among other companies. He also often acted in Otto Kahn's interests in affairs having to do with the Metropolitan Opera.

Over the course of his involvement with so many major organizations, Cravath, perhaps inevitably, was drawn into discussions of matters having to do with locational decisions. For example, he was said to have had a role in the 1927 decision by the board of the Radio Corporation of America, essentially controlled at the time by General Electric and, in its turn, being part of the mechanism controlling the National Broadcasting Company, not to locate in the large new Lincoln Building on East 42nd Street. Then too, when, in 1931, Cravath eventually succeeded Kahn as head of the Metropolitan Opera Company, he took part in negotiations for the possible move of the company to a new building in Rockefeller Center, and resigned from his board position at NBC in 1932 when the Metropolitan Opera began broadcasting on Saturday afternoons through NBC.

In 1927, in addition to his other activities, Cravath was working with Otto Kahn on the plans for the projected new theater for the Metropolitan Opera to be located on West 57th Street, and also the plans for a twenty-one story studio apartment building to be built adjacent to the new opera house to act as a source of additional revenue for the Opera. Kahn had been involved

in the financing of the Paramount Theater and office building, from which Paramount had been able to realize income from tenants of various kinds who located their operations in the building, either in the office tower, or in the shops on the street level. The extent to which Kahn, as a senior partner in Kuhn, Loeb, and Cravath, as legal adviser, advised Paramount as plans for the structure evolved is not clear, but had the project for the new Metropolitan Opera House on West 57th Street been realized as apparently Kahn envisioned it, it would have been the second major theater in New York City to be built with a tower capable of producing income for the organization administering the theater.

Kahn was very familiar with the Paramount operation. After Benjamin W. Morris and Joseph Urban had been named chief architect and associate architect respectively for the new opera house, Kahn wrote to Edward Ziegler, his general manager at the Metropolitan Opera Company, "that it might be well" if Morris and Urban were to look at a few other theaters in preparation for their work on his new theater. The first listed of the theaters mentioned in the letter was the Paramount, which, Kahn noted, seemed to him to have a particularly good seating arrangement.[128] The Paramount was a theater with which Kahn very likely was quite familiar.

A letter to Kahn from Edward Ziegler mentioned Ziegler's discussions of the proposed income-earning

structure to be built in conjunction with the projected opera house with a member of a realty management firm who felt that a studio apartment building might be best because it would be cheaper to maintain than an office building, but who advised planning the building so that it could be converted to office space in later years.[129] It might have been thought that farther West 57th Street might become more commercially viable after a few years' time.

Kahn's apparent agreement that studios should be built in conjunction with the new theater is reflected in an announcement on the new opera house prepared by Kahn for distribution to the press on February 9, 1927, an announcement of the unanimous approval of the Board of Trustees of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company of the project to build the opera house on West 57th Street. The statement mentioned that, in addition to the opera house, there would be an apartment house, "mainly for studios," and that there was to be an increase of 1,000 in seating capacity over the existing house capacity, an increase to be obtained through "modern methods of planning" rather than through construction of an auditorium larger than the one in the 39th Street theater.[130]

The announcement signalled an agreement more tentative than might have seemed to be the case to the casual reader. Kahn still had to convince the

Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Corporation, which would have to bear the costs of the project, of the soundness of the idea of bringing the Opera to an ungainly area of the farther west Fifties, and further, of the financial feasibility of the undertaking.

In early 1927, there seemed to be general accord on the project between Kahn, as head of the Metropolitan Opera Company which would lease the new theater, and the representatives of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company which actually would undertake the building of the opera house, and which, through Kahn, commissioned Benjamin Wistar Morris as chief architect for the theater, charged, in 1927, with devising preliminary plans. Morris wrote to Kahn outlining his understanding of the commission and acknowledging his obligation to consult with Joseph Urban on all matters having to do with operatic production and stage arrangements. He also put forward the names of two builders for the project: Marc Eidlitz and Son, and Todd, Robertson and Todd, the latter eventually building Rockefeller Center on a site considered in 1928 for the Metropolitan Opera House.[131]

Kahn's response to Morris' letter was essentially a clarification of Urban's role in the project, reiterating Morris' obligation to work with Urban, but noting that if Morris, as the "responsible Architect," should find Urban, the secondary or associate architect, unwilling to work with him, the Metropolitan Opera and

Real Estate Board would arrange for Morris to work with another expert or experts.[132]

Apparently, it was important to Kahn that Morris understand that Urban's name figure prominently in the project. During 1927 work was proceeding on an office building being built by the Hearst interests for Hearst's Evening Journal on the west side of Eighth Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets on a site adjacent to Kahn's projected site for the new opera house. Joseph Urban and George E. Post & Sons were listed as associate architects for the Hearst project which was on the site earlier intended for the larger variety theater with which Ziegfeld's and Alexander Pantages' names had been connected.[133]

The day after he sent his letter concerning Urban to Morris, Kahn sent a letter to Ziegler with an announcement concerning the selection of architects for the opera house to be given to the press. The letter also contained a suggestion that Kahn and Ziegler had had discussions concerning the need to have Urban suggest to the Hearst group the advantage that would accrue to them if an arcade were to be constructed from the opera house through the Hearst property to Eighth Avenue. The letter to Ziegler mentions the possibility that revenue might be obtained from such a device, continuing the theme of search for sources of income support for the opera.[134]

Because expense was a critical factor, the cost of

stage machinery was a matter of importance, the consideration of which brought indication of difficulties early on between Morris and Urban when Morris tried to get confirmation from Urban of a cost estimate for stage equipment which had been given to Morris by Ziegler.[135]

In a memorandum written a few weeks thereafter, Morris noted Urban's objections to elaborate stage mechanisms. They were prone to disorder, expensive and reduced the elasticity of stage use.[136] Later in the year, Morris wrote Urban, trying to conciliate Urban because of their disagreements on the opera house scheme,[137] but matters grew worse when Urban released his own set of plans for the opera house, causing serious discomfort for Kahn and Morris.

Still later in the year, Kahn wrote to Ziegler telling him that Mrs. Kahn and he had a decided preference for Morris' plans over Urban's,[138] but Kahn continued a relationship with Urban, whether because of Kahn's respect for Urban's scenic design and architectural work, for Urban's continuing connections with Hearst, or for Urban's familiarity with many of the European stage personalities whom Kahn supported in appearances in the United States. The following year, in fact, there was a communication from Urban to Kahn concerning a plan whereby Urban would design a theater to be built on property adjacent to the Capitol Theater for use by Max Reinhardt.[139]

As to the question of the income-earning studio

apartment building, in response to inquiry from Ziegler, Kahn advised, early in 1927, that the realty firm of Brown, Wheelock: Harris & Vought which had assembled the site for the projected opera house be consulted on any further real estate matters.[140]

The importance to the project of the studio apartment building was reflected in a lengthy letter sent in July 1927 by Kahn, Cravath and Henry R. Winthrop to R. Fulton Cutting, President of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company. In the letter, substantial upward revisions of projected costs for the new opera house were outlined, and it was stated that, while the costs of the project could be kept lower by eliminating the studio building, the Metropolitan Opera Company would find it very difficult to meet its operating costs if it could not assume, as earlier it had thought it could, revenue from the shops and studio apartments which were to have been included in the additional structure. It was pointed out that, while a portion of the property assembled for the larger project could be sold if the studio building was not built, part of the extra land still would be essential for use as a permanent right of way for a thoroughfare thirty feet wide at the westerly end of the opera house site to prevent the construction of a building which would interfere with the traffic facilities of the opera house or damage its architectural character.[141]

The letter discussed the need for harmony in the

relationship between the studio tower and the scenery tower over the theater, and mentioned that the physical separation of the two towers would allow the project to be in conformity with city zoning ordinances which did not permit the construction of another building above the auditorium or stage area of a theater, and also would placate those who felt it necessary to exclude utilitarian features from the Metropolitan Opera House. A plan was outlined whereby the studio building would be owned by the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company, but would be leased by the Metropolitan Opera Company which also would take on the costs of taxes and the interest on the mortgage on the building as it would do on the opera house building.[142]

Unfortunately, Cutting and the Board of the Real Estate Company never had exhibited great enthusiasm over any part of the project, so their negative response to the letter cannot have been surprising. The letter suggested that a way to raise additional revenue would be to sell boxes for an additional night. The matter of boxes had been a source of difficulty. Kahn, who did not own one, earlier suggested that their number be reduced and the rights to them be limited. In the existing opera house, they were costly and a source of great prestige to their owners who usually were members of older New York families of substantial means and who seemed to guard their privilege. Possession of a box also carried with it

stockholding privilege in the Real Estate Company.

The letter stressed the advantage to the property's commercial value which would accrue from the erection of a studio building adjoining, but separate from, the opera and which would be owned by the Real Estate Company. Kahn, Cravath and Winthrop sought to minimize the disadvantage of locating the opera on a side street, which they called one of the city's "great East-West thoroughfares," and claimed that any other available sites would be preferable mainly because of conspicuous locations, but that these, they said, would cost much more than the 57th Street site.[143]

The tone of the letter suggests that Kahn's group was doing its best to make the project and site as attractive as possible. But while 57th Street farther east was becoming a fashionable thoroughfare, its route in the vicinity of Eighth Avenue did not see comparable development.

Kahn's office issued a statement in June which purportedly was his response to being asked about the "alleged movement on the part of certain stockholders for a site other than the one in West 57th Street" for the new opera house in which Kahn said, among other things, that four points had to be kept in mind in determining the location of the new theater: the need to be near the theatrical district; accessibility to residents of both the east and west side; convenience to transportation

systems; and that it be on a broad street, but need not, and perhaps should not, be on an avenue because of the traffic congestion on all avenues.

In his statement of June, Kahn spoke about the combination of studio and theater in an interesting and realistic manner, stating that, in New York, a wholly low-rise project would act as an invitation to surrounding tower development. He pointed out that conditions in New York were different from those in Europe and that the existing Metropolitan Opera House contained a bank, shops and apartments, while Carnegie Hall contained studios. He implied a precedent thereby for the studio/theater project which he was fostering. He said that the new theater would depend for its dignity on its architecture, interior design and performance and not on the presence or absence of apartments or shops of appropriate character and quality. Moreover, Kahn put forth, was "there not something characteristically American in the democratic association between utility and beauty?"[144]

The association between utility and beauty can be said also to have characterized the plan for the Paramount Theater and office building in which Kahn had played a role, but in the course of planning that project, there were no counter-pressures at work arguing against the suitability of the location. In the case of Kahn's opera house project, the location was too far removed from a vital cultural nodal point such as Times Square. Like the

Martin Beck Theater, it was on the wrong side of Eighth Avenue, and all the publicity concerning the new Independent subway system did not help. But the locational trend in the period does suggest that, perhaps if the economy had not collapsed in 1929, the area near Kahn's property might have seen much more significant development. The only large theaters in midtown Manhattan built after 1929 were at 50th Street or above, with the exception of the RKO Roxy which was at 49th Street and Sixth Avenue.

The letter from Kahn, Cravath and Winthrop to Cutting seems to have met with a strongly negative reaction from the board of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company. In September, Cutting, choosing not to phone, sent a letter to Kahn requesting a brief conference,[145] and, on October 13, 1927, an editorial appeared in the New York Evening Post in which it was said that Cutting wanted an opera house nearer Fifth Avenue.[146] A few months later, a representative of the William White firm, a prominent real estate brokerage company, approached Cutting with the suggestion that the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company consider leasing a portion of the land owned by Columbia University between 48th and 51st Streets adjacent and to the west of Fifth Avenue, thereby effectively removing any serious possibility that the 57th Street project might be realized, and opening a new and very significant phase of

theatrical development above Times Square.

But earlier in 1927, the prospect of a new Metropolitan Opera House on West 57th Street continued to make the area of the project attractive to investors. One group, Bernmore Realty Company, assembled several large parcels in the vicinity of Kahn's projected opera house and was said to believe that the new Eighth Avenue subway and the new opera house on 57th Street would enhance property values; and that the increase would bring many business houses west into Ninth and Tenth Avenues.[147]

The amount of real estate activity in the area a little to the east was increasing. The large new General Motors Building between 57th and 58th Streets and Broadway and Eighth Avenue and diagonally across Eighth Avenue from Hearst's new building for his Evening Journal was opened in 1927 while another large project was begun on the northeast corner of 57th Street and Broadway, a site across Broadway from the General Motors Building.[148]

During 1927, space was taken on 57th Street east of Seventh Avenue for a variety of organizations from the worlds of the theater and communications. In late 1927, Lew Leslie, who, the following year, produced the highly successful revue, Lew Leslie's Blackbirds, became lessee of the property which had housed Roger Wolfe Kahn's night club, "Le Perroquet de Paris," at 146 West 57th Street running through to 153 West 56th Street to open another night club, "Les Ambassadeurs," a further addition to the

many night clubs already in the west Fifties.[149]

The tenth floor of the Steinway Building at 109 West 57th Street was leased to the Judson Radio Program Corporation which recently had been incorporated as a talent agency for broadcasting stations and which was the precursor of the Columbia Artists organization. Arthur Judson, the president, was prominent in musical activity in the city, being associated with the Philharmonic Orchestra and the Stadium concerts, the offices for which were included on the tenth floor of the Steinway Building. The Philharmonic's home was across the street and a short distance to the west at the Seventh Avenue corner in Carnegie Hall, a factor of considerable importance in fostering musical life in the area in 1927.[150]

By mid-1927, the Steinway Building housed the offices of the Steinway piano company, radio corporations, concert organizations, and various artists, publishers and architects.[151] In 1927, the comparatively new Steinway Building and two recently completed buildings controlled by Hearst, one at 5 East 57th Street, the other at 20-22 East 57th Street, were said to be approximately 90 percent occupied, while other new structures in the area were said also to be attracting tenants.[152]

In 1927, the Cornelius Vanderbilt mansion on the west side of Fifth Avenue between 57th and 58th Streets, one of the most prominent residential landmarks in the area, was demolished by a development company of which

Frederick Brown was president, and announcement was made that a new building to be leased to Bergdorf Goodman would be erected on the site. There had been earlier reports that Brown intended to build a fifty-six story luxury hotel on the site, but under either plan, Fifth Avenue in the Fifties was losing a major residential landmark, and moving closer to a markedly commercial character.[153]

East 58th Street

Frederick Brown also controlled the property at 731-733 Lexington Avenue between 58th and 59th Streets and 141-155 East 58th Street, not very far from the Vanderbilt mansion site; it had been reported earlier in several sources to be the projected site for the Mansion Theater planned by the Roxy Theatres Corporation. But William Fox now was involved in matters having to do with the Roxy Theater, and in July Variety included a report on the matter, according to which the site for the Mansion Theater was "not closed for," and, while he was connected with the Roxy theater itself, William Fox was "reported not being concerned in any way with the Roxy Theatre Circuit."[154]

However, on June 7, 1927, title to property at 729 Lexington Avenue adjacent to Frederick Brown's property at 731-733 Lexington Avenue passed to the Bushflat Operating Corporation located at 850 Tenth Avenue, the address for offices of the Fox film company.[155] There does not appear

to have been an announcement of purpose from the Fox group, but the transaction suggests that Fox was involved in property in the neighborhood, and that, if that were so, there yet might have been life in Mansion Theater project.

Whatever Fox's position or plans might have been, F. F. Proctor, according to report earlier in 1927, was going to raze his Proctor's 58th Street Theatre at 162 East 58th Street and erect on its site and on an adjoining site at 146-150 East 58th Street one of the city's largest theaters.[156] These parcels formed most of the south block of 58th Street between Lexington and Third Avenues. Proctor's property was almost directly across 58th Street from the site for the projected Mansion Theater, and, in 1927, was the site of the only large theater excepting Loew's theater at the southeast corner of 51st Street and Lexington Avenue on the east side of midtown Manhattan, circumstances which, in a period when theaters were considered attractive investments, was likely to invite competition.

While the Mansion Theater never was built, the new Proctor theater was, opening the following year and becoming the RKO 58th Street Theater when RKO took control of the Proctor interests. In the meantime, an article appeared in Variety in August which seemed to contradict something of what had been reported in the newspaper in July concerning the Roxy Theatres Corporation. Plans for

new financing of the corporation were said to have been approved at a meeting of the directors, the proceeds of the new issue of notes to be used to erase a deficit of $1,750,000 remaining on construction costs for the Roxy Theater. This may have had something to do with the attempt made by the Fox organization to reduce costs at the theater when once it gained control of the Roxy.[157]

East 59th Street

Dining and entertainment rooms in the luxury hotels and apartment hotels were increasing in number in this period, playing a role in moving the Fifth Avenue area closer to becoming a location for performing arts activities. The Sherry-Netherland Company, a subsidiary of the Boomer-Du Pont Properties Corporation, and of Louis Sherry, Inc., purchased from the 59th Street and Fifth Avenue Corporation the new thirty-eight story New Netherland Hotel then in course of construction on the northeast corner of 59th Street and Fifth Avenue. Louis Sherry was well known for his fine restaurants in midtown Manhattan and the new hotel was to have both Sherry restaurants and Sherry domestic service, a move which helped to fuse Fifth Avenue's older residential function with the increasing tendency to development of hotels, night clubs and supper clubs.[158]

East 63rd Street

Another of Manhattan's restaurateurs, Alfons

Baumgarten, was retained by Paterno Brothers to manage the restaurant to be opened in the new cooperative residential hotel which they completed in 1927 on the east side of Fifth Avenue between 63rd and 64th Streets at 825 Fifth Avenue. Baumgarten had worked with his brother in the development of the Voisin, Elysee and Crillon restaurants, all luxury establishments in midtown Manhattan.[159]

The trend to construction of luxury residential hotels in the area continued in later years with the erection and opening in 1931 of the Pierre Hotel on the southeast corner of 61st Street and Fifth Avenue, built by a syndicate which included Otto Kahn, among other notable names. The operating manager of the hotel was yet another well known restaurateur, Charles Pierre, whose Pierre restaurant was an attractive meeting place.[160]

West 62nd Street

In 1927, Kahn's concerns included matters having to do with the Century Theater. Like the site for the Pierre almost directly across Central Park, the Century attracted the interest of developers and realtors in part because of its park frontage, a locational advantage which also seemed to be of interest in 1927 to the board of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company.

With the support of Kahn, Max Reinhardt had presented The Miracle at the Century in 1924, and now in

1927, Kahn was guaranteeing the deficit for Reinhardt's visit to the United States including a fall season at the Century. Reinhardt was to tour with his entire company, including Alexander Moissi, under the auspices of Gilbert Miller as head of the Charles Frohman company. Part of the expenses guaranteed by Kahn were the carrying charges that would accrue from the closing of six German theaters during Reinhardt's United States tour to enable Reinhardt to bring his full company.[161]

Also in the fall of 1927, the Shuberts allowed Texas Guinan to open Guinan's Century Club in the basement of the Century Theater in the oddly shaped and elongated room that had until recently been the location for the Chez Fysher which had failed. The Shuberts had other night clubs located in Shubert houses in town: the Casa Lopes and Montmartre in the Winter Garden Theater building and the Little Club underneath the 44th Street Theater, and took 10 percent of the gross receipts in lieu of rent.[162] Texas Guinan had run other night clubs in New York and her usual style of decoration, characterized by an abundance of banners and a souvenir display, was in marked contrast to the elegant primary structure of the Century. The entertainment was of a kind typical of such well-known night clubs as the Silver Slipper which had full floor shows. The club's name suggests an effort to publicize the Century name. Guinan had brought in John and Christo who had a fine reputation for restaurant

administration. It was thought that this would be a help to Guinan's efforts to establish the new club in the public eye "if she can make 'em come up to the wide open spaces of 8th avenue and 62d street."[163]

Locational considerations also weighed very heavily in the matter of the choice for a site for the projected new Metropolitan Opera House, considerations into which the Century property entered in a major way in 1927. Very shortly before Kahn, Cravath and Winthrop had sent to R. Fulton Cutting the lengthy letter dated July 15, 1927 in which was set forth an apparently realistic view of the situation regarding the plans for the projected 57th Street opera house, Cravath received a letter from Lee Shubert concerning the Century Theater property, a letter which appeared to be a response to a communication from Cravath. Shubert enclosed a diagram of Shubert property in the Century Theater block, and wrote that he would take up with his associates the question of price of any part of the property which interested Cravath.[164] Cravath immediately forwarded the letter to Kahn.[165]

The circumstances suggest that Kahn's group may have been exploring alternative avenues of approach to a new opera house against the chance that Cutting and his board reacted negatively, as apparently they did, to the July letter concerning the 57th Street project. But apparently other groups were looking at the Century

Theater property, as is indicated in a letter from Kahn to Cutting dated October 22, 1927, a week following the appearance in the New York Evening Post of the editorial in which is mentioned Cutting's preference for an opera house site nearer Fifth Avenue.

Kahn wrote Cutting that he had been telephoned the previous day by Lee Shubert who told him that a real estate broker had inquired about the price of the Century Theater, and that Shubert had said that the broker first had declined to reveal whom he was representing, but then said that he had been sent by DeLancey Kountze and Thomas Hastings.[166] Kountze was associated with Cutting and his board, and Hastings was an architect who had worked on the design of the Century Theater many years earlier. The circumstances suggest that a site on the west side in the area of Columbus Circle was not objectionable to the board of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company if the site was attractive, as the Century's location facing Central Park certainly was.

Kahn's letter suggests strongly that, by the fall of 1927, the plans for a location on West 57th Street for the new opera house had been abandoned. Very likely the problematic location on an ungainly street removed from more vital areas had much to do with its fate. The letter also makes clear that Kahn's group had been at work on alternative plans.

Kahn reminded Cutting that Shubert had offered the

Century site to him, Kahn, a few weeks before, and that Morris had since been at work on plans to support a presentation of ideas to be made by Kahn's group to Cutting's committee on the opera project as to the availability of the Century site for the opera house. Cutting apparently had been aware of Morris' work on those plans, and Kahn suggested that he was certain that the broker's statement to Shubert concerning Kountze, who was a member of the opera project committee, could not have been authorized. Kahn seemed concerned that another architect, Thomas Hastings, was involved in the matter, and pointed out to Cutting that he felt it inadvisable to create the impression that his and Cutting's groups were working at cross purposes; and that his group would abide by Cutting's wishes if Cutting and his colleagues chose to undertake the entire matter.[167]

On October 22, Morris wrote to Kahn, enclosing a copy of a letter from Morris to Thomas Hastings in which he told Hastings, apparently in response to Hastings' inquiry of Morris whether thought had been given to retaining in modified form the Century Theater for use as the new opera house, that Morris had indeed considered such a possibility, but that a practical solution made necessary complete removal of the theater.[168] The retention of the Century Theater in modified form may have been the idea which prompted Kountze and Hastings to send their broker to talk to Shubert.

On October 25, Kahn responded to Morris, telling him that his letter to Hastings was excellent, and, in answer to Morris' inquiry about the matter, that he, Kahn, would speak to Brown, Wheelock: Harris, Vought & Company to ask them to talk with Morris with a view to formulating an estimate of the rental values of the two ends of the Century Theater site, by which he apparently meant, not just the site of the theater proper, but the greater portion, although not the whole, of the block running from Broadway to Central Park West. The Shuberts had been acquiring other properties on the Century Theater block and their offer of the site to Kahn included all of their holdings on the block.[169]

Lee Shubert wrote to Kahn in late October telling him that he had received a substantially higher offer for the site from another bidder, but felt committed to Kahn for a reasonable length of time provided that Kahn or the Metropolitan Opera join with him in the improvement of the Broadway frontage.[170] A few weeks after this communication between Kahn and Shubert, the Trebuhs Realty Company acquired the leasehold of the property on the southeast corner of 63rd Street and Broadway, the most westerly portion of the Century Theater block, at 1890-1896 Broadway, giving the Shuberts possession of the entire block excepting two parcels on West 63rd Street.[171]

In the late summer of 1927, the Shuberts also purchased leasehold on the property at 1890-1896 Broadway,

the northeast corner of 63rd Street and Broadway which was across Broadway from the most westerly portion of the Century Theater block. They secured purchase on condition that they would improve the site before 1937 at the expiration of leases then in effect at a cost of no less than $500,000. Had the opera house been built on the Century Theater block, this property immediately to the north very likely would have improved in value and would have rewarded a high redevelopment cost.[172]

On October 28, a meeting of the directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company was held with Kahn, Cutting, Cravath and Morris, among others, in attendance. Among the matters discussed was a problem that had arisen with regard to Joseph Urban's work as associate architect. Apparently, Urban had not been getting on at all well with Morris, and, according to Morris' memorandum on the meeting, had succumbed "to a stress of artistic temperament, had acted most unwisely, unethically and in an unfortunate manner," and had published his plans for the opera house without consulting anyone, subsequently tendering his resignation verbally.[173] Kahn accepted Urban's verbal resignation and was said to intend to ask Urban for a formal statement of resignation without publicity, but was not certain that that could be done. However, Urban would continue to be a factor in Kahn's activities even after this sequence of events had run its course. Kahn said that Morris would continue as architect

without an associate and said further, in response to an inquiry at the meeting, that Morris' recent visit to European opera houses qualified him to work alone, indicating that Urban's function was to advise on architectural concerns that were peculiar to theater buildings. Kahn said, that if the need arose, European experts were available to advise Morris.

Kahn reported that Lee Shubert had offered the Century Theater block at a lesser price than "he has since found he would be able to obtain from other sources," but that the site is more costly than the 57th Street site, and that the difference, as far as he could see at the time, would have to be absorbed by the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company Board if it chose to move ahead with plans for the Century site. Kahn reported Morris' suggestion that the Broadway and Central Park frontages which were the most valuable portions of the property be developed as income-producing structures, with the Opera itself to be placed between them; and that there be a monumental approach to the opera house leading from the center of the easterly front on Central Park West through the lower portion of the east building and meeting the main lobby of the opera house, the stage being at the west end of the opera house adjacent to the west building. Realty experts had advised Morris that, any subsequent investigation not indicating need for a different procedure, the east building be developed for either

residential or institutional use, and the west structure be devoted to commercial occupancy on the lower levels and studios in the upper floors.

Morris developed a plan for the site for an impressive and handsome structure which might have appealed to those who favored a grandiose scheme with elements of the kinds of grand approaches often found in European opera houses, and which incorporated in an attractive setting the planned income-producing building, a form of integration which suggested, not so much the Paramount Theater, as the later Rockefeller Center theater buildings' relationship to surrounding office towers.

Thomas Hastings was said to have put forward the suggestion that great cost would be saved and the need for larger seating capacity for increased revenue could be obviated if the existing Century Theater could be modified to suit the conditions of the Metropolitan Opera Company, to which Kahn replied at the meeting of October 28 that the saving thus realized would in no sense compensate for the loss of increased revenue which would accrue from a house of larger seating capacity, and that a Metropolitan Opera House with a seating capacity of 2,500 immediately would invite the construction and launching of a new opera house. Kahn said that he was thoroughly familiar with the Century Theater and "would not care to renew his experiences in any modification or reconstruction of the same, and that the remodelling of this building would

produce a result entirely out of keeping with the dignity and requirements of the Metropolitan Opera House."

Kahn said that he hoped that Morris could have his studies and report on the possibilities of the Century Theater site adequately developed in the next month or so in order to permit the presentation of an analysis to the board of the Real Estate Company for its consideration.

On November 28, Mr. G. Ross of Brown, Wheelock: Harris, Vought and Company sent a letter to Morris in which, after setting forth some cost figures on possible structures for either end of the Century Theater site, recommended against erection of an apartment hotel on the west end of the site because it "will hardly be possible to get any considerable group of nice people to live on Central Park West" even with the improvements which were scheduled to be built on the avenue on completion of the new subway line; and because the market was far overbuilt. Ross pointed out that a building had been erected just a year before on the block immediately south (the Mayflower) and that it was only half rented, and then to a "very poor class of tenants." Two hotel people whom Ross had consulted about the prospects for a plan for a commercial hotel for the Broadway frontage reported overbuilding of hotels in the city at the time, one suggesting construction of a hotel with small rooms and lower rates which might appeal to students and people related to the opera and to music.[174]

Morris sent a copy of Ross' letter to Kahn on December 15, subsequent to his submission to Kahn of a report which apparently was based at least in part on the supposition that the plans for the east and west frontages of the Century Theater site, which Ross had found lacking, were sound in concept; and advised in his accompanying letter that Ross' letter "in no way changes the color of the report already submitted."[175] Kahn's response on the next day was brief, thanking Morris for the copy of Ross' letter "which I have read with interest."[176]

Kahn asked Morris to accompany Edward Ziegler and him to a meeting of representatives of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company on December 21 at the home of George F. Baker, a member of the board, at which Kahn reported on matters concerning the studies of the possibilities of the Century Theater site and also placed before the board the possibilities of a site at 96th Street and Park Avenue to which Ziegler objected, stating that the site would result in very substantial losses for the Metropolitan Opera Company which it could not undertake.

Kahn said that the Century site seemed infeasible because of the expenditure involved and because of the rather negative report from Brown, Wheelock: Harris, Vought and Company on the plan for the income producing structures. He stressed the continuing problems of operating the existing opera house, stating that

"complications were frequent with the City authorities."

In response to inquiries at the meeting, Morris said that, in his opinion, it was impractical to consider using the Century Theater interior, but that he had not considered whether any part of the exterior could be preserved for use in conjunction with a new building, the matter being a reiteration of Hasting's question to Morris, suggesting a perseverance of interest among board members in the possibility of escaping extended expenditure outlays. And Cutting did ask Morris immediately thereafter his idea of an ideal seating capacity for a new opera house, to which Morris responded somewhat ambiguously to the effect that, while European practice has favored smaller theaters, and while certain operatic productions "comparatively small in number" are better housed in smaller houses, he, Morris, was advised that a smaller house would not allow financially successful opera without government subisdy.

Morris noted in his memorandum on the meeting that he "sensed the feeling on the part of several persons in favor of the Century Site," and so suggested consideration of two plans for the use of only the easterly portion of the Century block as a site for a new theater: one which would incorporate such portion of the existing theater as might be usable; and one for construction of an entirely new building and removal of the Century Theater.[177]

On December 28, Morris sent a letter to Kahn to

confirm their telephone conversation of the previous day in which Kahn had told Morris that circumstances had arisen which caused Kahn to direct that Morris not undertake work requested by Kahn after the meeting at George Baker's home, "the status being that you expect no further services from me . . . ."[178]

While the nature of the circumstances referred to in the letter is not clear, it appears to have been approximately at this time that John Tonnele of the William A. White realty firm approached R. Fulton Cutting with the idea that the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company might build a new opera house on the lands owned by Columbia University west of Fifth Avenue between 48th and 49th Streets. And while no opera house ever was built on the site, this appears to have been the beginning of the chain of events that led finally to the building of Rockefeller Center, the largest land and theater and communications building development of the time.

In 1927, a large sum of money was authorized by the City of New York for expenditure for lines for the new Independent subway system. These lines in midtown Manhattan would add density to an already sophisticated system of IRT and BMT lines crossing midtown. This would be especially true in the vicinity of the lower Fifties where a new Independent subway line under 53rd Street would connect with other new lines under Sixth and Eighth

Avenues at subway stations which would also be near one or another of older IRT or BMT stations near 50th Street.

These public transit developments continued to favor land development of both a theatrical and nontheatrical nature near 50th Street and near 53rd Street. During the course of 1927, several theaters either were opened in, or were being planned for, the lower Fifties, while, in the 42nd Street area, a few theatrical projects were being considered, but none were realized.

There also was considerable theatrical development activity in 1927 on or near Times Square, both in the way of theaters opened and of theaters planned. Of all the theaters opened in 1927, only one, the Erlanger on 44th Street, was built by a theatrical firm of long standing, and it was an especially significant development because it signalled the move of the headquarters offices of the Erlanger firm from its former flagship house on 42nd Street, the New Amsterdam, to the Erlanger, located near other newer theatrical development.

The other new theaters were built by smaller theatrical organizations or, as in the case of the new Ziegfeld, by firms which had little or no previous experience in building theaters. But at least one of these new theaters, the Roxy, ultimately came under the control of one of the growing organizations operating theaters which featured both stage and film presentations.

These theaters often were called "presentation houses" if the form of stage entertainment was more along the lines of revue entertainment, as opposed to vaudeville format.

The entry of the Roxy into the ranks of the very large combination film and stage presentation theaters lent new intensity to the competition among these kinds of theaters. All of the first-run theaters of this kind were located in or near Times Square, and the competition among the theaters added a vibrancy to the area which had the effect of increasing considerably the importance of finding a location for any such theater in or near the Square.

This intensification of the importance of a Times Square area location seemed to work to the detriment of theaters, whether featuring legitimate, variety or combination film and stage presentations, which were located at a remove from the Square. The management of the very large film and stage presentation theaters which were on or near Times Square seemed to expend considerable effort in maintaining the position of their theaters, largely through development of new stage production formats which, it was hoped, would appeal to the very large audience which the public transportion network was able to bring into midtown.

The big presentation houses were becoming vigorous competition for theaters featuring the older straight vaudeville format. These theaters, theaters such as the

Palace, generally were smaller, and not capable of producing the kind of financial return which accrued to the very large houses. Keith-Albee, the foremost chain of straight vaudeville theaters, was reported in the course of the middle and later 1920s to be seeking or considering sites for a new and larger theater in the vicinity of Times Square.

In later 1927, the National Broadcasting Company moved to a headquarters building at 55th Street and Fifth Avenue, and helped thereby to bring that area to prominence as a broadcasting center.

But farther west, while there was new development just below Columbus Circle, the prospect of an enlarged subway complex beneath the Circle did not seem to aid Otto Kahn in his effort to establish a new Metropolitan Opera House on West 57th Street on a site between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. By the end of 1927, these plans appear to have been abandoned, and once again, theatrical activities in the Columbus Circle area, including those at the Century Theater, seemed to suffer from their distance from a theatrical center farther south which continued to grow, establishing a mass and density of theaters of a magnitude far beyond anything the city had known in prior years. But just how far from that center a new theater project might dare to be and under what kinds of circumstances continued to be locational questions extremely difficult to answer.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

[1] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (March 11, 1927): 5.

[2] "Razing Manhattan O. H.?," Variety, June 15, 1927, p. 31.

[3] "National Advertisers Behind Theatre of the Air," Variety, August 3, 1927, p. 33.

[4] Abel, "Around New York," Variety, September 21, 1927, p. 57.

[5] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (May 21, 1927): 11.

[6] "News from the Dailies," Variety, May 4, 1927, p. 4.

[7] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (February 12, 1927): 11; and RED, p. 118.

[8] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (July 2, 1927): 11; and Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (October 8, 1927): 55.

[9] RED, p. 120.

[10] "News from the Dailies," Variety, May 4, 1927, p. 56.

[11] "News from the Dailies," Variety, April 13, 1927, p. 58.

[12] "Selwyn for Vita; Warners' 3d on B'way," Variety, January 19, 1927, p. 8.

[13] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (October 8, 1927): 13.

[14] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (July 2, 1927): 7.

[15] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 124 (August 17, 1929): 10.

[16] "P.-F. L. Coming," Variety, March 16, 1927, p. 10.

[17] "Special Building for F. P.'s New News Staff--Paramount's First News," Variety, August 3, 1927, P. 10.

[18] RED, p. 126.

[19] "Katz Going After Variation in Stage Presentations," Variety, May 4, 1927, p. 5.

[20] "Publix Appears Altering Presentation Policy," Variety, May 18, 1927, p. 5.

[21] "Franklin Ratified by West Coast Directors," Variety, March 9, 1927, p. 4.

[22] "Franklin Leaves F. P. to Become President of West Coast, Inc.," Variety, February 23, 1927, p. 1.

[23] "That Paul Ash Policy," Variety, June 22, 1927, P. 8.

[24] "Film House Reviews: Paramount," Variety, June 22, 1927, P. 37.

[25] "Film House Reviews: Paramount," Variety, July 20, 1927, P. 22; and "Presentations: Gertrude Lawrence and 'Bits from Charlot's Revues'," Variety, July 20, 1927, p. 23.

[26] "Publix Allows Option on Charlot to Lapse," Variety, August 24, 1927, p. 5.

[27] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, August 31, 1927, p. 20.

[28] "Film House Reviews: Paramount," Variety, September 28, 1927, p. 27.

[29] "Moving to Paramount Bldg.," Variety, March 23, 1927, p. 10.

[30] "F. P.-L., Paramount and Publix Now in New Paramount Building," Variety, March 30, 1927, p. 9.

[31] "Famous Rd. Show Dept. Goes to Headquarters," Variety, April 6, 1927, p. 4.

[32] "$35,000 to $50,000 Rent for Paramount Stores," Variety, January 19, 1927, p. 13.

[33] "New York Alleged Fertile for More Theatre Building," Variety, May 25, 1927, p. 5.

[34] "B'way's Biggest and Newest House--Publix," Variety, June 8, 1927, p. 1.

[35] "New Big Publix on New York's Site," Variety, June 15, 1927, p. 4.

[36] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (June 11, 1927): 11.

[37] "Theatres Most Profitable; Says Chanin, Theatre Builder," Variety, January 26, 1927, p. 41.

[38] Ibid.

[39] "Shuberts Pay Cash for Chanins' Piece," Variety, December 7, 1927, p. 47.

[40] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (January 15, 1927): 18; and Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (June 25, 1927): 11.

[41] "News from the Dailies," Variety, May 4, 1927, p. 56.

[42] RED, pp. 129, 475.

[43] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (April 16, 1927): 102.

[44] "News from the Dailies," Variety, August 17, 1927, p. 40.

[45] "M-G-M Radio Network on Money Making Basis before Start," Variety, September 14, 1927, p. 29.

[46] "3rd Big Radio Chain Forming," Variety, December 28, 1927, p. 1.

[47] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (December 31, 1927): 12.

[48] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (April 23, 1927): 10; and RED, p. 139.

[49] RED, p. 138.

[50] "Night Club Reviews: Casa Lopez," Variety, November 16, 1927, p. 54.

[51] Ibid.

[52] "Rothafel After Million; Bankers Make Inquiries," Variety, January 5, 1927, p. 9.

[53] "Roxy Borrows $650,000 for New Roxy House," Variety, January 26, 1927, p. 6.

[54] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, February 2, 1927, p. 34.

[55] "Roxy's House Staff," Variety, February 9, 1927, p. 12.

[56] "Rapee Roxy Music Chief," Variety, March 23, 1927, p. 9.

[57] "Stahlberg Walks on Roxy," Variety, March 16, 1927, p. 9.

[58] "Continuous 'De Luxe'," Variety, February 16, 1927, p. 11.

[59] "Capitol and Roxy Sew Up WEAF and WJZ," Variety, March 2, 1927, p. 4.

[60] "New Roxy Is a Marvel; Holds 6,250; Can Do $185,000 W'k.," Variety, February 23, 1927, p. 5.

[61] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, March 8, 1927, p. 13.

[62] "Roxy's $110,000--Record," Variety, March 16, 1927, p. 1.

[63] "New Roxy Is a Marvel."

[64] "Reviews: Roxy," Variety, March 16, 1927, p. 22.

[65] "Film House Reviews: Roxy," Variety, March 30, 1927, p. 25.

[66] "Roxy 2d Wk., $95,000--B'way Back; Param't, $73,200--Capitol, $52,600," Variety, April 6, 1927, p. 22.

[67] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, April 6, 1927, p. 22.

[68] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (April 9, 1927): 10.

[69] "Roxy Determined to Hold Leadership," Variety, November 9, 1927, p. 5.

[70] "Roxy Speaking," Variety, April 13, 1927, p. 1.

[71] "Roxy's All-Star Jazzers," Variety, November 9, 1927, p. 5.

[72] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, April 20, 1927, p. 19.

[73] "Film House Reviews: Roxy," Variety, June 8, 1927, p. 21.

[74] "Roxy Engaging Star 'Names' at Big Money," Variety, June 29, 1927, p. 1.

[75] "Film House Reviews: Roxy," Variety, June 15, 1927, p. 28.

[76] "Roxy's Sunday A. M.," Variety, September 28, 1927, p. 11.

[77] "Elaborate Stage Show Starts New Policy at Capitol, N. Y.," Variety, October 5, 1927, p. 31.

[78] "Film House Reviews: Roxy," Variety, September 7, 1927, p. 29.

[79] "Selling of Loew on Death of Founder Checked Promptly," Variety, September 7, 1927, p. 6.

[80] "Efficiency at Roxy?," Variety, September 14, 1927, p. 7.

[81] "Roxy Determined to Hold Leadership."

[82] "Fox Takes Roxy Hour," Variety, November 2, 1927, p. 5.

[83] "Roxy Retaining Jazz," Variety, October 26, 1927, p. 7.

[84] "Roxy's $104,000, Ovrhd., $84,000 Each Week," Variety, October 12, 1927, p. 5.

[85] "Film House Reviews: Roxy," Variety, November 30, 1927, p. 36.

[86] Ibid.

[87] "Film House Reviews: Roxy," Variety, December 28, 1927, p. 28.

[88] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (July 16, 1927): 12.

[89] Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1927, 114 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1928): 65.

[90] Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1925, 114 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1926): 83.

[91] "Film House Reviews: Capitol," Variety, June 15, 1927, p. 28.

[92] Ibid.

[93] "Capitol's New Stage Show Policy," Variety, August 17, 1927, p. 13.

[94] "B'way Houses' Band Policy Convinces Capitol It's Thing," Variety, September 7, 1927, p. 31.

[95] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, September 7, 1927, p. 16.

[96] "Elaborate Stage Show Starts New Policy at Capitol, N. Y."

[97] "Film House Reviews: Capitol," Variety, October 12, 1927, p. 28.

[98] "Film House Reviews: Capitol," Variety, October 19, 1927, p. 36.

[99] "Capitol's Salaries," Variety, October 19, 1927, p. 25.

[100] "Loew's Expanding on Stage B'ds and M. C.'s," Variety, November 9, 1927, p. 4.

[101] "Capitol Is Up against It for 'Names'," Variety, November 9, 1927, p. 4.

[102] "Inside Stuff on Pictures," Variety, November 16, 1927, p. 47.

[103] "Film House Reviews: Capitol," Variety, November 30, 1927, p. 37.

[104] Ibid.

[105] "Loew's Fail to Find Big Draw for Big cost of Headliners," Variety, December 28, 1927, p. 5.

[106] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (August 27, 1927): 7.

[107] "K-A B'way House Report for P. D. C.," Variety, April 20, 1927, p. 9.

[108] Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1927, 114 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1928): 228.

[109] Ibid.

[110] "Kahn Shifts Support to New Art Group," Variety, January 26, 1927, p. 41; and "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, March 9, 1927, p. 40.

[111] Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1927, 114 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1928): 66.

[112] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (April 9, 1927): 10.

[113] Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1928, 114 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1929): 160.

[114] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (April 9, 1927): 16.

[115] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (March 12, 1927): 7.

[116] "Film House Reviews: Colony," Variety, September 14, 1927, p. 26.

[117] "Fox May Take U's Losing Colony at $3,000," Variety, December 28, 1927, p. 10.

[118] "7th Ave. Theatre Site," Variety, July 27, 1927, p. 10; and RED, pp. 168, 170, 728.

[119] "Theatres Proposed," Variety, August 3, 1927, p. 26; and Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (October 29, 1927): 49.

[120] "News from the Dailies," Variety, May 15, 1927, p. 47.

[121] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (February 5, 1927): 11; and Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (May 28, 1927): 13.

[122] RED, pp. 738-39.

[123] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (February 12, 1927): 11; Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (July 16, 1927): 7; and RED, pp. 162, 545.

[124] "New N. B. C. Home Ready," Variety, September 21, 1927, p. 57.

[125] Minutes of the meeting of November 11, 1927 of the board of directors of the National Broadcasting Company, Young Collection.

[126] "Enormous Radio Outlook; Biggest Business Going on Air," Variety, November 23, 1927, p. 3.

[127] Minutes of the meeting of October 7, 1927 of the board of directors of the National Broadcasting Company, Young Collection.

[128] Otto Kahn to Edward Ziegler, February 26, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[129] Edward Ziegler to Otto Kahn, January 28, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[130] Newspaper announcement attached to letter dated February 9, 1927 from Otto Kahn to Edward Ziegler, Kahn Collection.

[131] Benjamin W. Morris to Otto Kahn, February 21, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[132] Otto Kahn to Benjamin W. Morris, February 25, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[133] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (September 10, 1927): 6.

[134] Otto Kahn to Edward Ziegler, February 26, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[135] Memorandum dated February 26, 1927 written by Benjamin W. Morris with copies to Otto Kahn, Edward Ziegler and Joseph Urban, Kahn Collection.

[136] Memorandum dated March 23, 1927 written by Benjamin W. Morris, Kahn Collection.

[137] Benjamin W. Morris to Joseph Urban, July 1, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[138] Otto Kahn to Edward Ziegler, August 1, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[139] Joseph Urban to Otto Kahn, July 20, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[140] Memorandum dated February 26, 1927 written by Benjamin W. Morris with copies to Otto Kahn, Edward Ziegler and Joseph Urban, Kahn Collection.

[141] Otto Kahn, Paul D. Cravath and Henry R. Winthrop to R. Fulton Cutting, July 15, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Ibid.

[144] "Statement by Otto H. Kahn on his return from Europe June 21, 1927 concerning proposed new Metropolitan Opera House," Kahn Collection.

[145] R. Fulton Cutting to Otto Kahn, Kahn Collection.

[146] New York Evening Post, October 13, 1927, p. 10.

[147] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (July 2, 1927): 11.

[148] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (May 7, 1927): 8; and Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (June 11, 1927): 7.

[149] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (December 31, 1927): 13.

[150] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (September 24, 1927): 53.

[151] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (July 2, 1927): 9.

[152] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (May 7, 1927): 5.

[153] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (March 19, 1927): 13.

[154] "Shows Rescue Roxy, Short on Film Supply," Variety, July 20, 1927, p. 10. Variety appears to be referring here to the Roxy Theatres Corporation.

[155] RED, p. 621.

[156] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (April 16, 1927): 10.

[157] "News from the Dailies," Variety, August 3, 1927, p. 38.

[158] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 119 (March 12, 1927): 11.

[159] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (October 1, 1927): 9.

[160] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 123 (February 16, 1929): 8.

[161] "Reinhardt's U. S. Visit for 8 Weeks under Kahn's Guarantee," Variety, September 21, 1927, p. 49.

[162] "Shuberts' Nite Clubs," Variety, October 19, 1927, p. 51.

[163] "Night Club Reviews: Guinan's Century Club," Variety, October 19, 1927, p. 58.

[164] Lee Shubert to Paul D. Cravath, July 7, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[165] Paul D. Cravath to Otto Kahn, July 8, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[166] Otto Kahn to F. Fulton Cutting, October 22, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[167] Ibid.

[168] Benjamin W. Morris to Thomas Hastings, October 22, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[169] Otto Kahn to Benjamin W. Morris, October 27, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[170] Ibid.

[171] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (December 17, 1927): 11.

[172] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 120 (September 17, 1927): 15.

[173] Memorandum dated October 28, 1928 on meeting of the directors of the Metropolitan Opera Company, Otto Kahn Collection. This memorandum is the source for all of the information on this meeting in this study.

[174] G. Ross to Benjamin W. Morris, November 28, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[175] Benjamin W. Morris to Otto Kahn, December 15, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[176] Otto Kahn to Benjamin W. Morris, December 16, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[177] Memorandum dated December 21st, 1927 written by Benjamin W. Morris on meeting at George F. Baker's residence, Kahn Collection.

[178] Benjamin W. Morris to Otto Kahn, December 28, 1927, Kahn Collection.

CHAPTER VI

1928

The year 1928 was climactic for land development in midtown Manhattan in the number of announcements which were made of plans for projects of unusual size, projects which included the Chrysler and Lincoln Buildings, and the projects which ultimately became the Empire State Building and Rockefeller Center. While there were significant realty developments in other parts of the city, especially in the financial district in lower Manhattan, those in midtown Manhattan were, considered as a group, the largest, and played an important part in creating in midtown a business center which was at least the rival of the downtown area, but having a base in a mix of activities considerably different from the foundation of the downtown complex. Both areas were the result of the general locational demand of industries wanting to be near activities which were relevant to their interests. In 1928, financial institutions continued to want to be based near one another, and downtown was the preeminent focal point for those interests. In midtown, there was

developing an increasing degree of interrelationship among organizations concerned with theater, music and communications, including advertising and publishing, all of which had increasing space demands as they matured and/or advanced technologically and often located near like institutions.

34th Street

But midtown's business area covered a considerably larger space than did the compact concentration downtown, and there was locational movement within the confines of midtown. In late 1928, plans were announced for a very large office building to contain 2,000,000 square feet of space, to be fifty stories in height and intended to occupy the site of the Waldorf-Astoria hotel on the west side of Fifth Avenue between 33rd and 34th Streets. The development became the Empire State Building and revised plans for the structure raised the number of stories to 102. The Du Pont interests sold the Waldorf-Astoria property in 1928 to the Bethlehem Engineering Corporation which built 711 Fifth Avenue and held other properties in the west and east Fifties during the 1920s.[1]

The passing of the Waldorf-Astoria on Fifth Avenue removed from that area of the avenue the only major hotel with dining and entertainment rooms. In 1928, every other prominent luxury hotel in the city was farther north. Other large hotels in the Grand Central Station area were

being demolished or superseded in importance, the increase in land values in the area taking its toll. The Hotel Manhattan at the corner of 42nd Street and Madison Avenue was modified to function as an office building and plans had been announced for a similar undertaking involving the Hotel Belmont at the southwest corner of 42nd Street and Park Avenue, while the Grand Union Hotel at the southeast corner of 42nd Street and Park Avenue had been replaced by the Pershing Square Building.[2]

In 1928, Fifth Avenue in the upper Thirties was home to a newer unit of the growing Radio Corporation of America. After it acquired the photophone talking picture process for sound on film from its parent company, General Electric, RCA maintained an office for the newly created subsidiary, RCA Photophone Inc.,[3] at 411 Fifth Avenue on the northeast corner of 37th Street and Fifth Avenue, a location a short distance above the Waldorf-Astoria where, a few years before, RCA's radio station WJZ had maintained a portion of its operation. But subsequent office building developments with which RCA was connected farther north caused the Photophone office to be moved.

The general vicinity once had been home to at least two film organizations. Photophone's 37th Street office was four blocks south of 485 Fifth Avenue, which, as mentioned above, had housed the headquarters offices of Famous Players-Lasky from 1916 until 1927 when it was moved into the new Paramount Building on Times Square.

And Samuel Goldfish, later Goldwyn, had opened an office at 469 Fifth Avenue in 1916 when he separated from Famous Players-Lasky.

In the west Thirties, expansion of the garment center area continued in 1928. A new forty-three story tower was announced for the site of the Hotel Navarre at the southwest corner of 38th Street and Seventh Avenue. The new building was to be developed by the Garment Centre Capitol, Inc., the president of which was Paul Singer, also president of the City Finance Company and Executive Vice-President of the Bank of the United States, and, as was mentioned earlier, the man often given credit for establishing the garment center in the west Thirties.[4]

39th Street

In early 1928, the Tishman interests were reported to be planning to demolish the 299-seat Princess Theater near the southwest corner of 39th Street and Sixth Avenue in preparation for construction of a large office building on that and adjoining sites. The Princess had been the office for Ray Comstock and Morris Gest who had moved out, taking space in the new office building at 57th Street and Broadway, 1776 Broadway, just below Columbus Circle. The Columbus Circle vicinity was one in which Gest frequently worked when bringing attractions deemed not sufficiently popular to warrant tenancy in Times Square area theaters into less frequented theaters such as the Century,

Cosmopolitan and Jolson.[5]

41st Street

The largest of the legitimate theaters along Broadway below 42nd Street was the Broadway. The leasehold on the theater, extending for a term of more than eighty years, had been acquired in 1927 by Keith-Albee from B. S. Moss as part of a larger transaction giving control of most of the Moss theaters to Keith-Albee, which had booked the theater prior to 1927 when Moss operated it as a vaudeville house. But in May 1928, Keith-Albee came under the control of Joseph P. Kennedy and John J. Murdock who sold the leasehold in the later part of the year as part of a transaction in which the property was leased to the Bricken Construction firm which intended to build a large office tower on the site. Earlier there had been reports that an office tower and large theater would be built on the site, but there was no further talk of a theater in connection with the newly announced project.[6]

The Broadway had done well as a vaudeville and picture theater earlier in the 1920s, but it began to lose trade after 1925, a loss attributed by some to the competition from the Keith-Albee Hippodrome which, in 1926, changed its policy from two-a-day to continuous vaudeville with film features. In 1928, the Broadway was reported to be earning a profit not sufficiently

substantial in the view of the Keith-Albee management under Kennedy and Murdock to warrant continued operation.[7] The theater operated on a week-to-week basis after the sale of the leasehold and closed after the New Year's Eve performance on January 1, 1929, marking the first closing of a major theater in the theater district just below 42nd Street.[8]

West 42nd Street

Another project for a combined theater and office building previously planned in the area, but abandoned, was the project for the Lyric Theater site at 213 West 42nd Street and 214-226 West 43rd Street. Jacob and Joseph Oppenheimer of the Lyric Operating Company, whose plan it had been, sold the Lyric Theater to Cavabel Realty Corporation (Philip Meyrowitz, President) which announced no plans for the site, but at year's end, Variety reported an impending major realty transaction which would take into consideration the Lyric and the neighboring Republic Theater.[9] Nothing came of this report, but there were a number of rumors over the course of the next few years concerning realty transactions on the 42nd Street block between Seventh and Eighth Avenues which suggest that, at some level, there still was serious interest in the land value of the street, reported plans including projects for large theaters for RKO and Loew, and a major broadcasting facility for NBC.

William Fox, on the other hand, was reported to intend putting another of his major films into a theater on 42nd Street for its initial run. Fox was making use in 1928 of the Times Square Theater on 42nd Street, and, in addition, the Gaiety and Globe on Times Square, while negotiating for the Central. He had had plans earlier for use of the major Klaw and Erlanger theater, the New Amsterdam, plans which were not realized, and had used at various times the Harris and Liberty on 42nd Street.

But Fox left the Times Square Theater on May 6, 1928 and leased it on July 1 for the duration of his lease, reportedly feeling that, whatever the block could do for legitimate production, it did not help film trade; and that the attraction to Broadway for those looking for film entertainment or for those merely walking through Times Square who might decide spontaneously to see an advertised attraction was so great that the half block remove of the 42nd Street theaters meant a big loss in revenue.[10]

In the fall of 1928, Fox was said to be planning to have six to eight sound films on Broadway and reportedly expected to have three or four legitimate theaters under lease by February 1, these to have Broadway frontage or to be on the side streets if necessary. The side streets referenced probably were the side streets to Times Square.[11] Fox had been one of the film people most involved in 42nd Street in the earlier 1920s, and his

departure was further evidence of the growing importance and power of Times Square itself, a crossroads which did not include 42nd Street.

In later 1928, Florenz Ziegfeld, whose name was so much connected with 42nd Street, gave evidence of continued faith in its attractiveness as a theater street, making plans at that time to return to production of the Midnight Frolic in the Frolic Theater above the New Amsterdam. The roof was converted from a cabaret into a standard theater at considerable cost in 1919, but had failed as a house for regular production. Now Ziegfeld had retained Christo and John Steinberg (who had run the restaurant operation at Texas Guinan's night club in the Century Theater the year before), and the dance floor and dining tables were to be reinstalled. The first production was to feature Eddie Cantor.[12]

When the Ziegfeld Theater was being built for Ziegfeld by Hearst and Brisbane at 54th Street and Sixth Avenue, there had been talk to the effect that the new structure would feature a roof theater. But the roof theater never was realized.

The night clubs with elaborate floor shows which were located mostly just above Times Square and in the west Fifties were continuing to do well and may have been part of the impetus which brought Ziegfeld back to cabaret-style performance. Ziegfeld, Cantor and George Olsen whose band was to be featured in the first new

Frolic production were to incorporate as Olsen's Club to administer the new operation jointly, but Olsen was replaced subsequently by Paul Whiteman. Cantor was to open in Whoopee downstairs in the New Amsterdam approximately when the new roof presentation was to begin, a situation which would make it easier for Cantor to appear in both shows. Joseph Urban was to redecorate the roof.[13]

The roof reopened on December 29, 1928, but it was not successful and closed again not long afterward. Variety's review of the reopening suggested that, while the time may have been right for the reestablishment of the Midnight Frolic on its former scale, the less elaborate new version was not particularly interesting.[14] Whoopee and this last Midnight Frolic were Ziegfeld's last presentations on 42nd Street. Afterward, Ziegfeld confined his activities to theaters above Times Square: the Ziegfeld and the second Earl Carroll Theater at the southeast corner of 50th Street and Seventh Avenue which Ziegfeld renamed the Casino on leasing it when Carroll lost possession.

East 42nd Street

While the west end of 42nd Street may have been going through a period of uncertainty of direction in 1928, East 42nd Street in the Grand Central Station vicinity was expanding at a significant rate under the

auspices of some of the most affluent individuals and organizations in the United States, its growth testifying to the power of the attraction of land investment in the area.

The largest of the structures built in the 42nd Street area prior to the period after World War II were completed in the period from the middle 1920s to the early 1930s. In 1927, work was begun on the project for construction of the fifty-two story Lincoln Building on the south side of East 42nd Street between Park and Madison Avenues; and announcement was made of plans for a sixty-seven story building to be built between 42nd and 43rd Streets and between Lexington and Third Avenues, the project which became the Chrysler Building. The Lincoln Building was being erected by a syndicate which was reported headed by John H. Carpenter who financed and developed several buildings in midtown during the 1920s including the headquarters building for the Columbia Broadcasting Company at 485 Madison Avenue, opened in 1929 on land owned by Arthur Brisbane, close associate of William Randolph Hearst. The Lincoln Building syndicate also included the names of some of New York's most prominent financiers.

The Chrysler Building was being erected by the W. P. Chrysler Building Corporation which was said to be a personal investment vehicle of Walter P. Chrysler and not connected with the Chrysler motor car company.[15] And just

to the south of East 42nd Street, another tall office structure was being planned for 10 East 40th Street by the Houston Properties Corporation, of which Jesse Jones was president. Jones was a very prominent Texan financier and land developer who later was the head of Roosevelt's Reconstruction Finance Corporation.[16]

While the core of larger scale midtown development continued to be East 42nd Street during the course of the second half of the 1920s, there also was the beginning of activity of a similar kind during this period farther north along Fifth and Madison Avenues, activity which would reach its prewar climax in the Rockefeller Center project in terms both of general office construction and theater and broadcasting building construction.

43rd Street

As a Keith-Albee house, the Hippodrome, at the corner of 43rd Street and Sixth Avenue, was one of the theaters owned by a corporation affected in 1928 through consummation of major mergers and acquisitions among theatrical concerns. One of the major corporate events in 1928 which had to do with theatrical affairs was the acquisition of control of Keith-Albee in the spring of 1928 by Joseph P. Kennedy and John J. Murdock, the latter long connected with Keith-Albee, and the subsequent sale of the Keith-Albee control the following fall to RCA. Prior to Kennedy's advent, there had been signs that

Keith-Albee was moving toward construction of a new theater in the Times Square area and no indication that it was considering selling its properties. In fact, only the year before Keith-Albee had taken on most of the B. S. Moss theaters. But shortly after Kennedy came in, Keith-Albee disposed of the Broadway Theater leasehold, and there were reports concurrent with those concerning the Broadway that Keith-Albee was interested in selling the Hippodrome.

Immediately after Kennedy assumed his position at Keith-Albee, there were reports that the Hippodrome would be the first Keith-Albee house to be wired for sound, and that the RCA Photophone system would be installed, the last an indication of things to come.[17] But in August, negotiations for sale of the theater were said to be underway, with only a relatively small difference in price keeping the transaction from being completed. It was said that Kennedy and Murdock were more interested in the profit on a sale of the theater than in return on continued operation of the theater, and that any price, presumably any reasonable price, would bring an attractive return over the Keith-Albee purchase price of some years before because the Hippodrome's Sixth Avenue site had increased markedly in value. The prospective purchasers were reported not to be involved in theatrical affairs.[18]

Another major corporate move in 1928 was the acquisition of the control of Stanley and First National

by the Warner Brothers interests. In September, there had been recurring reports that Warner might be negotiating for control of Stanley, as in fact it appeared to have been doing.[19] Warner also acquired effective control in 1928 of First National, which had been considered, with Paramount and MGM, to be one of the three largest film concerns. But so great was the rate of expansion at Warner, and so much outside money used, that the Warners were said to have had to decide whether to allow stockholders to take control of the company, or to sign a contract with Goldman-Sachs, one of the major investment banking houses in New York, allowing them control, assuming the stockholders approved the move.[20] Goldman-Sachs had had a working relationship with both Stanley and Warner Brothers.[21]

In the case of the Warner acquisitions, expansion of corporate size also meant expansion in space. At the end of the year arrangements were reported being made to move the Stanley staffs in Philadelphia and New York to the Warner general office building on West 43rd Street west of Eighth Avenue, part of a developing concentration, both in the far west Forties and in the Fifties, of various kinds of facilities used by film concerns which included large structures belonging to Fox and Paramount. Warner purchased three lots adjacent to the 43rd Street building for construction of an annex of size comparable to the existing building; the new structure was

to house the staffs of the recently acquired companies.[22] Ground for the annex was broken late in the year. First National was to retain its headquarters offices at 46th Street and Madison Avenue until the annex was completed. An earlier decision following the First National acquisition had been that First National would move immediately out of the Madison Avenue office into the West 43rd Street building, the vacated office to be sublet for the duration of First National's five-year lease.[23] But it was then decided that First National would remain on Madison Avenue for the six months necessary to complete the annex.

In the meantime, in related moves affecting streets other than 43rd Street, the First National film exchanges moved from 729 Seventh Avenue, the building on the east side of the avenue between 48th and 49th Streets and once the home of Famous Players-Lasky, to the Madison Avenue offices, while Columbia Pictures took the film exchange space at 729 Seventh Avenue, vacating its offices across the street at 1600 Broadway which was on the east side of Broadway between 48th and 49th Streets.[25]

At the end of the year, with the Stanley theaters now part of the Warner operation, the Warners prepared to open a booking office which was to be located, beginning approximately January 1, in the Warner Building at 321 West 44th Street.[26] Apparently, this location between Eighth and Ninth Avenues was not thought too removed from

Times Square to allow its use for a booking office. The Martin Beck Theater was on the same block, but around the corner on 45th Street.

At the other end of the block, on the property on the east side of Ninth Avenue between 44th and 45th Streets, work was begun in early 1928 on clearance for a thirteen-story office and storage structure to be known as the Film Center Building, reportedly the result of the committee appointed by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America to find a location outside the theatrical district, yet easily accessible, presumably to the same theatrical district. The committee was composed of Charles M. Steele of First National, chairman; J. S. McLeod of MGM; E. Leishman of Universal Pictures; and A. S. Dickinson, representing Will Hays. The three film companies represented did not have a major exchange facility in New York comparable to those owned by Fox, Paramount and Warner Brothers, all three of which had offices in the very block on which the Film Center was to be built, and had other space elsewhere in the general vicinity. The building was designed primarily for storage and other exchange concerns, but was to include private and public exhibition rooms.[27] MGM, First National and Universal had signed leases for space in the Film Center building by May 1928, but First National came under the control of the Warner interests shortly thereafter.[28]

To return to 43rd Street, in the Times Square

area, the Gnalbel Realty Corporation, of which Joseph Leblang was president, acquired the property on the southeast corner of 43rd Street and Broadway incuding the George M. Cohan Theater and the twelve-story Fitzgerald Building. Leblang had acquired the leasehold on the property some years before. No announcement of plans for redevelopment of the property was made.[29]

During the year, there were reports of various plans for very large new theaters in the Times Square area, including projects for a new Publix theater for the Criterion and New York Theaters site one block north of the Cohan; a new theater on the Strand site; and a new house for Rothafel "on Broadway."[30] The very existence of such reports suggests the degree to which new theatrical development in the Times Square area could excite rumor and discussion. And throughout 1928, the primary presentation houses in the area continued to do their part to maintain a high level of public interest in the vicinity of their locations with their combination stage production and film programs.

During 1928, Publix and Loew, two of the largest theatrical organizations on Times Square, made an effort to combine a portion of the operations of their two chains of theaters, primarily under the direction of Publix. But the attempt did not prove successful, leading to its termination in 1928 in several cities including New York, where the Capitol, which had been part of the combined

operation, reverted to the direction of Loew.[31] Prior to the reversion, Charles Niggemeyer, who had been with Balaban and Katz in Chicago, had been brought to New York to produce Publix units which were designed exclusively for the Capitol, an arrangement which suggests that Publix had made a special effort to recognize the importance of the leading Loew presentation house.[32]

The Publix production office was itself quite large by 1928. At the outset of the period of cooperation with Loew, the advertising and publicity staffs for Publix were moved to the eighth floor of the Paramount Building and the ninth floor space which they vacated was given over to the Publix stage production executives, the music department and the Loew representatives who were to work on the presentation units for the combined Loew-Publix operation,[33] and eventually, space demands for the Publix production staff were accommodated in a new building erected by Paramount on West 43rd Street west of Tenth Avenue. In earlier 1928, Publix was reported to be spending approximately $2,000,000 a year to produce two stage units a week, the average cost per unit being $22,000. Publix claimed to be the employer of a larger number of production personnel than any other theatrical organization, citing as an example its 1,500 chorus girls.[34]

While the band policy with the band leader as master of ceremonies seemed to be the preferred

presentation policy at the Publix Paramount Theater during 1928, the Publix production staff was in a state of flux, with suggestions made during the year that alternative policies were being considered to maintain the strong position of the theater. Paul Ash, whose name personified the band policy, came to the Paramount in May for an indefinite run after having become something of an institution in Chicago.[35] But the band policy was not new to Paramount audiences who had seen Paul Whiteman and his band, another extremely popular group, earlier on the Paramount stage and Ash was unable to duplicate his Chicago success in New York. In a review of one of the Ash units at the Paramount, Variety suggested that "New York might be less unlike Chicago and other points west if New York ever got a taste of the real, undiluted stuff."[36] But, whatever the problem, Ash did not remain at the Paramount after 1928.[37]

In late May, after Ash had been in the Paramount for a time, Publix was reported to be planning revisions for late summer for its unit policy through production of "book" or "story" presentations, engaging Joseph Santley to stage two such units as a trial. Santley was to join the Publix production department on July 1. Whether the bands were to stay in the pit for these productions was said not to have been determined.[38]

In August, in comments reported in Variety, A. J. Balaban, of Balaban and Katz which now was affiliated

with the Publix operation, said in Chicago that the probable Publix presentation policy for the following year would include several different types of units intended to provide a greater degree of variety to the fare. One week a unit would center around a master of ceremonies and would be adaptable to various stage personalities; a musical comedy unit with story continuity might follow; then a light opera unit; and after that, a novelty unit built around a major performer or special attraction. Balaban's comments included criticisms of masters of ceremonies who try to dominate the production or who depend on others to establish their contact with audiences. Balaban seemed to feel that the band policy, already of some age, could no longer be depended upon to guarantee audiences for the Publix theaters.

By the end of the year, only Paul Oscard, C. A. Niggemeyer and Boris Petroff were working as Publix producers in New York. John Murray Anderson returned to revue, Frank Cambria returned to Chicago, and Joseph Santley was working with James A. Cowan on talking short subject films in the Paramount facility in Astoria, Long Island.[40]

44th Street

The year for Publix seemed to be one of flux and uncertainty of direction in matters of theater policy. During the year, there was recurrence of reports

concerning Publix' plans for the New York and Criterion Theaters property, which was owned by Paramount, on the east side of Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets, diagonally across Times Square from the Paramount Theater and office building. In May, Variety reported that Paramount-Publix had decided to proceed with development of the theater which was to have a seating capacity of 8,500 and was to feature talking films only. It was said further that Loew's, which operated the New York Theater, might acquire a financial interest in the new theater.[41] In the fall, Paramount was reported to have completed plans for the theater, now said to be planned for a capacity of "over 6,000," and requiring a year's time for construction.[42]

The large Publix theater was not built, but the recurrence of reports concerning the project signify both the popularity at the time of the idea of the very large capacity film theater, and also the attraction of a site so centrally located as the site of Loew's New York.

With two large theaters, Loew's State and Loew's New York, facing one another across a small side street at the 45th Street corner midpoint along Times Square, Loew had a formidable presence in the heart of the theatrical center. The two Loew theaters were positioned to take advantage of the casual passer-by and the person actively seeking film entertainment, but with no preconceived thought for a particular title, advantages which William

Fox was reported to be seeking in abandoning 42nd Street for Times Square.[43]

Loew's New York was said to be one of the most profitable of the Loew's chain, with a policy of daily change of film, continuous screenings from nine in the morning to one the following morning, and a top ticket price of forty cents. It had a small orchestra and permitted smoking, and often screened older films. The roof theater above the New York had the same policy, a policy which made the New York and the roof theater unique among theaters in the vicinity.[44]

Talk of further Loew-Publix cooperation came to an end at the close of the year as rumors, eventually substantiated, began to circulate that William Fox was negotiating for purchase of a block of Loew stock which would give him effective control of the Loew organization. Earlier in the year, Fox had been reported to be about to take control of Walter Reade's chain of theaters, most of which were in New Jersey, but four of which were on or just off Times Square--the Astor, Bijou, Morosco, and Columbia--and probably capable of satisfying Fox's reported interest in acquiring control of several theaters in the area to function as two dollar primary run houses for his film product. The Astor was a theater particularly much sought after by exhibitors because of its location which, like the location of the two Loew theaters across Times Square, was midway along the

square. The transaction was not realized, but Fox continued to be interested in locations on Times Square.[45]

47th Street

Later in the year, in November, shortly before there began to be talk of Fox's interest in Loew, Fox was said to have been negotiating for some time with J. J. Shubert for purchase of the Central Theater, which Shubert owned in entirety, at the southwest corner of 47th Street and Broadway. The Central, like the Astor, faced directly onto Times Square. Fox also was said to have secured options on the property adjoining the Central to the west on 47th Street, and to intend to gain control of the automat which adjoined the Central to the south, fronting on Broadway, all of which, according to report, was to be used for a forty-story office building and a theater with a seating capacity of 4,000. Most of the office space would be used for Fox' general offices.[46] Although nothing came of this report, the magnitude of the transaction whereby Fox later acquired control of Loew suggests that Fox well may have been capable of the undertakings mentioned in the two earlier reports. These earlier reports are all the more credible in light of the many stories over time of Fox' interest in property in the Times Square vicinity, which, by 1928, was the unquestioned center of theatrical activities.

The Keith-Albee flagship theater, the Palace, also

occupied a site facing directly onto Times Square, having its main entrance just below 47th Street on the east side of Times Square. In 1928 the Palace was doing well financially, but the elaborate stage presentations, combined with the attraction of new film product, in nearby theaters such as the new Roxy and Paramount and the older Strand diagonally across the street, were providing its straight vaudeville policy with extremely heavy competition. The big presentation theaters were beginning to use some of the major name attractions which also were staples at the Palace. The larger theaters' experience with these names thus far had not been particularly happy, but the trend toward more elaborate productions in variety policies was becoming clear, even to a man as conservative as Edward F. Albee was said to be. It was the large theaters, because of their size and the popularity of their policies, which now were getting the big share of the audiences, and there were frequent reports of plans for newer large theaters such as Fox' project for the Central Theater site directly across Times Square from the Palace.

In early March, prior to Albee's sale of control of Keith-Albee to Kennedy and Murdock, there was a report that Clark Robinson and Joseph R. Teichner had been retained by Keith-Albee-Orpheum to remodel the stages and equipment of eighty-five K-A-O theaters including the Palace over a period of more than three years in order to

permit the use of lighting effects and presentation possibilities comparable to those in the newer film presentation houses in the event that Keith-Albee decided to modify its vaudeville policies. Keith-Albee was said to be planning a policy of stage productions similar in style to the Publix units then current. Clark Robinson was the stage and lighting designer at the Roxy who earlier established a reputation with his work for the series of Music Box Revues, and Teichner was the craftsman who built Robinson's sets for the Roxy.[47]

But, on May 15, 1928, Albee sold control of the Keith-Albee-Orpheum circuit for $4,500,000 in cash to Joseph P. Kennedy who reportedly made the purchase on behalf of himself, John J. Murdock, long associated with Albee in operation of the chain, and the financial interests behind him, including Kennedy's former employer, Hayden, Stone, a large investment banking house in lower Manhattan. For the duration of Kennedy's tenure, there was no more talk of new Keith-Albee theaters or modifications to its stages for revised presentation policies.

John J. Murdock also was the president of the Pathe film company and it was into the Pathe offices on the seventh floor and into additional space on the eighth floor of the Bond Building very near the Palace Theater Building that the executive offices of the Keith-Albee organization were to be moved in early fall of 1928, only

the booking offices for Keith-Albee being scheduled to remain in the Palace Theater Building.

The sequence of events surrounding RCA's role in the affairs of Keith-Albee is one of the most conspicuous examples of the interrelationship in the later 1920s of the worlds of theater and commerce, and of the effect had on the nature of theatrical development in midtown Manhattan by such interrelationships. The connection between RCA and Keith-Albee also involved aspects of the film, broadcasting and general electric industries. And the weaving of complexities around the relationship between RCA and Keith-Albee was to continue beyond 1928 to the involvement of the radio group and the Rockefeller interests in the matter of Rockefeller Center.

At the time of Kennedy's Keith-Albee transaction, connections were being made between the transaction and Kennedy's relationship to General Electric and the Radio Corporation of America through the interest held by the two latter companies in Kennedy's Film Booking Office, a film producing and distributing organization.[49] Then, in late October, it was announced that David Sarnoff and Kennedy would be the active heads of a new holding company to be called Radio-Keith-Orpheum which would direct a combination consisting of the Keith-Albee chain, Kennedy's FBO, and RCA Photophone.[50] On November 12, it was announced that Radio-Keith-Orpheum had secured the necessary 51 percent of K-A-O and FBO through exchange of

stock, enabling RKO to meet its deadline of November 15 for acquisition of effective control. Reportedly, the transaction had had to be completed by that date under terms of the agreement in force. David Sarnoff was to be chairman of the board of the new organization.[51]

RKO issued 1,800,000 shares of stock, of which 500,000 went to the Radio Corporation of America in consideration of the granting of non-exclusive license for use of RCA Photophone equipment; agreement to deliver sound recording apparatus to FBO on a priority basis; and an agreement between RKO and the National Broadcasting Company, which was controlled by GE and RCA, providing for cooperative bookings of acts used by both; for an agreement on periods for broadcasting for jointly administered programming, and for cooperating in developing electrical entertainment.[52] The enormous bloc of stock given to RCA gave it considerable influence in the affairs of the new company which was the most comprehensive amalgam of aspects of the theatrical and communications industries in existence. RCA, together with affiliated companies, was becoming a complex capable of producing, distributing and exhibiting different kinds of entertainments, including at least one, television, still in an early stage of development. The idea of providing television programming on large screens in theaters became a recurrent theme at the end of the 1920s. And it was the Keith-Albee real estate which was to

provide the facilities for these exhibitions and exhibitions of talking films using RCA Photophone which placed the sound electronically directly onto the film. In contrast, the Vitaphone system, owned by American Telephone and Telegraph through its Western Electric subsidiary, was a synchronization of sound with film.

The investment banking houses which were involved in the RKO transaction were Blair and Company and Lehman Brothers which also had been involved in the merger some years before of Keith-Albee and the Orpheum circuit.[53] A member of the Lehman firm, Arthur Lehman, was elected to the RKO board. Paul D. Cravath also was elected to the board, as were, among others, Merlin H. Aylesworth, President of the National Broadcasting Company, John. J. Murdock, Joseph P. Kennedy, and Louis E. Kerstein of William Filene and Sons[54] who was said to have brought Sarnoff and Kennedy together for discussions which culminated in the creation of RKO. Very few of the twenty-five board members had theatrical experience.

Although a board member, Kennedy did not take an executive post with RKO, Hiram S. Brown being elected president toward the end of the year. Brown had been president of the United States Leather Company located in lower Manhattan and had become known to Owen Young, Chairman of the Board of the General Electric Corporation which maintained effective control of the Radio Corporation of America. Brown was considered to be a very

able administrator, but he had virtually no experience in running a theatrical concern.[55]

At the time of the creation of RKO, the various components of RCA and affiliated organizations were housed in several locations both in lower Manhattan and in midtown. Eventually there was movement toward preparation of quarters adequate to meet the needs of at least part of the overall organization, but it could not be foreseen in 1928 that there would be a connection between the meeting of these needs and the agreement between John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Columbia University signed on September 6, 1928, less than two months prior to the announcement of the creation of RKO. The Rockefeller/Columbia agreement gave Rockefeller a leasehold on Columbia's property extending from Fifth Avenue to a short distance east of Sixth Avenue and between 48th and 51st Streets for the purpose, at the time, of developing a combined opera and commercial center.

The Shuberts were said to have held a substantial amount of stock in Keith-Albee, stock which Lee Shubert was said to have purchased primarily because, at the time of purchase, he was planning to enter into competition with Keith-Albee's vaudeville operation and wanted to be able to have access to information on Keith-Albee's affairs through the statements received by stockholders.[56]

In 1928, the Shuberts constructed their last

theater in New York City, opening the Ethel Barrymore Theater at 243-249 West 47th Street on December 20, 1928, a move which was a departure from the Shuberts' practice of years immediately precedent of acquiring interests in theaters built by other groups such as the Chanin organization through which they gained operational control of the Majestic, Masque and Royale in 1927.

In early 1928, apparently in response to the success being achieved as of that time by the Publix units featuring a band and musical revue policy, Irving D. Rossheim, President of the Stanley organization, approved the creation of a similar unit production policy for use in eight of the Stanley houses later in the year. The units would begin a circuit tour from the Strand on Times Square, which would eliminate units composed of balletic and classical music excerpts based on Rothafel's style. Joseph Plunkett, who had been managing director of the Strand, became head of the Stanley unit production department,[57] moving across the street into the Stanley offices in the Bond Building, producing the initial unit which went into the Strand on April 28.[58]

The units were not well received at the Strand.

> These Stanley units apparently are built to convulse the new Stanley, Jersey City . . . .
> Three of the turns [in the unit, Graduation days] are so small timey or worse that the names will be held confidential, although billed. . . . Acts like this smashed vaudeville in the Middle West . . . .[59]

This Variety review included some kind words for

contributions made by Ned Wayburn to this presentation, but even before this particular production was seen, there were reports that stage shows might be withdrawn from the Strand because of the lack of audience approval,[60] and, on June 2, Vitaphone short subjects supplanted the greater part of the Strand stage presentations.[61]

But, whatever the degree of success of a given policy at the Strand Theater, the Strand site continued to be a desirable location, and in the fall of 1928, during the period when the Stanley company, which was affiliated with Moe Mark who controlled the Strand, was moving into Warner control, there appeared one of the recurrent reports to the effect that the Strand might be replaced with a larger theater. Mark was said to be considering building a theater with a seating capacity of 5,800, or approximately twice the capacity of the Strand, but the Strand was making a regular and comfortable profit and Mark was reported to be undecided whether to make the large investment for the new house, the period of construction for which, with the old theater demolished, would give him no return. Mark was said to have secured space behind the Strand sometime before against possible future need,[62] and, especially since the opening of the Paramount and Roxy, there had been reports that the Stanley company might be the next film concern to erect an especially large theater, possibly on the site of the Strand. But, early in 1928, Stanley also had been said to

be considering a site farther north in the Fifties for a theater to be built in conjunction with Keith-Albee.[63]

By year's end both Keith-Albee and Stanley had passed into control of other organizations, and Mark might have been considering his site as a possible home for the enlarged Warner company. Warner Brothers now began to use the Strand. But, although now one of the powers in the film industry, Warner's did not have a theater in the Times Square area which could stand comparison with the Capitol of Loew-MGM, Fox's Roxy and the Paramount.

During the later 1920s, there were reports of projects for new theaters for most of the blocks having frontage on Times Square, and the intensity of activity increased toward the end of the decade as the economy began to expand and, with it, interest in the growing theatrical industry and its realty aspects in the area where the industry had its core. The reported theatrical projects for the Times Square area included the very large new Publix Theater project reported for the south half of the square; a new variety theater on the Astor site at 45th Street; a new Fox on the block above; and another new house on the block above that which was the Strand site. And across the street from the Strand, there was activity affecting the Columbia Theater on the northeast corner of 47th Street and Seventh Avenue.

The Columbia Theater had been built in 1910 as the main office and primary theater for the Columbia Amusement

Company, the most significant burlesque organization of the time, which, with the competing Empire circuit, dominated the field. When the Columbia opened, Times Square was just beginning to be a theatrical center, with only the Gaiety, Astor, New York and Criterion Theaters fronting on the square, along with Charles B. Dillingham's Globe which opened in the same month, January of 1910, as did the Columbia.[64]

Burlesque was a popular institution at the time, still distinguished by the broad humor from which its name derived, and the use of a chorus and women whose entertainments often were more suggestive than those seen in the developing, and ultimately competing, musical revue. Not long after its opening, the Columbia was occupying a critical location in the emerging theatrical center and fared well for a time, but, as variety genres evolved and revue and the productions at the major film presentation houses became popular, burlesque, continually beset by the problem of separating "spice from smut," and increasingly uncertain in definition, suffered setbacks.[65]

By the 1920s, burlesque was losing popularity, and the Columbia's location at the heart of the world of competing forms may not have helped its box office. The day of the kind of burlesque which tried to appeal to family trade through limitations on the extent of the suggestive in its content was coming to an end, and a more blatantly erotic form which had been developing for some

time was replacing it, even as new developments were being fostered which would result in the passing of the Columbia flagship theater.

But the Columbia's location was an excellent one, and attracted the attention of Walter Reade, who, in 1928, owned the Astor, Morosco and Bijou Theaters. Reade took control of the leasehold on the Columbia Theater and office building on April 28, 1928 through purchase of stock held by Sam Scribner and J. Herbert Mack of the Columbia Amusement Company. According to report, the burlesque productions of the newer Mutual circuit, which were being presented at the Columbia in addition to the Columbia circuit's own shows through agreement with Scribner and Mack, were to continue at the Columbia for a time. Reade announced that, after two years' time, he would convert the Columbia into a legitimate theater which also would be available for musical productions, the Mutual shows meanwhile continuing until Reade made other plans.

The Columbia property was owned by the Stephen C. Millett estate, Reade's leasehold extending for a term of forty-four years. The development of the Roxy and the Manger hotel three blocks above on Seventh Avenue was thought to have given a special value to the Columbia site, which stood at the point where Seventh Avenue, newly attractive since the opening of the Roxy, diverged from Times Square.[66] But, in addition, the Columbia was

located a short distance from two subway stations: the IRT station at 50th Street and Broadway, and the BMT station at 49th Street and Seventh Avenue.

Reade was said to be considering eventual sale of the theater or its site for use for a new film theater, or leasing the theater for special film attractions. Paramount executives looked at the theater in May,[67] and in the fall, General Electric was said to be installing wiring for talking films.[68] Subsequently, in 1929, announcement was made that the newly created RKO would lease the Columbia from Reade, and intended to enlarge the seating capacity through elimination of the stage behind the curtain line to create a theater, eventually named the Mayfair, suitable only for film presentations.

Prior to the opening of the Mayfair in 1930, there were reports of discussions between RCA and Reade concerning major redevelopment of the site, discussions which appear to have been initiated by Reade, but RCA's subsequent involvement with the Rockefeller Center project largely eliminated consideration of serious RCA development outside Rockefeller Center. In the meantime, at the end of 1928, Reade approved plans for construction of a ten-story building on a strip of land which was used as an entrance alley just north of the theater; and costs for refurbishing the house. Apparently, he was intent on making the most of his leasehold on a valuable location.

48th Street

Reade was not a major figure among theater operators in the 1920s, but he managed to gain control of important theatrical properties. Another of the lesser, but still important, figures in the field in the 1920s was Al Pincus. In 1928, Pincus, who was part of an organization which built the Imperial and Alvin Theaters, and who owned the Longacre Theater at 220-228 West 48th Street, bid unsuccessfully for the Edyth Totten Theater at 247-249 West 48th Street which was sold at auction to Gerome Real Estate Corporation at 239 West 48th Street and leased to Lucille LaVerne.[70] Pincus' name would be mentioned in connection with other reports of theatrical projects in 1928.

Farther east on 48th Street was the southern property line of the property owned by Columbia University, which ran north to 51st Street and between Fifth Avenue and a short distance east of Sixth Avenue. In 1928, this property became the subject of extensive real estate negotiations which brought into play the Metropolitan Opera and, later, RCA and Radio-Keith-Orpheum. Apparently, there had been contact either late in 1927 or very early in 1928 between John Tonnele of the William A. White realty firm which managed the property owned by Columbia University in the area that eventually became Rockefeller Center, and R. Fulton Cutting, President of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate

Company. In writing to Cutting on January 13, 1928, Benjamin W. Morris made reference to a conversation of January 7, 1928 between Cutting and him in which Cutting mentioned the possibility of locating the proposed new opera house on the Columbia property.[71]

The dates suggest that it might have been the entry of the matter of the Columbia property into discussions concerning a site for a new Metropolitan Opera House which constituted the unspecified circumstances mentioned by Kahn in his letter dated December 28, 1927 to Morris, circumstances which prompted Kahn to direct that Morris not undertake the further work on plans for the project that had been requested by Kahn only some days before.[72]

With the entry of the Columbia land into consideration for the opera house site, Morris seemed to be more frequently in contact with Cutting, and to be attempting to satisfy the concerns both of Cutting and of Kahn, concerns which were not always in harmony. The Columbia location also made possible consideration of expanded nontheatrical land use as part of the project. The opera began to be seen as the centerpiece of a commercial development of considerable size, much grander than the studio apartment building proposed for the 57th Street site. Hence, there began to be talk of potential lessees who might be capable of creating a major new commercial center on the portion of the Columbia property

between 48th Street and 51st Street which was not going to be used by the Metropolitan Opera group.

Morris evidenced familiarity with general realty concerns in his correspondence with Cutting. Apparently, Cutting's conversations with Tonnele had been very much of a preliminary nature, since, based on Morris' letter to Cutting, there seems to have been no definite site in the large Columbia parcel identified for the opera.

Cutting first suggested to Morris the creation of a street of sixty-foot width to run between 48th and 49th Streets on a line nearly halfway between Fifth and Sixth Avenues with the opera house occupying most of the western portion of the overall site. Morris found merit in the scheme, but suggested that the width of the street be increased to 100 feet in order to gain increased height privileges for buildings which might be erected on the eastern end of the block, an early suggestion of the high-rise direction taken ultimately by the final project. He wrote that he felt it would be to the interest both of Columbia and of any lessee syndicate to place the new street in the middle of the three blocks to run from 49th to 50th Streets in order to gain additional height privileges for buildings erected on the south side of 50th Street and on the north side of 49th Street, "privileges extending 150 feet East and West from the center line of the new street."[73]

This is the effective scheme which allowed the

Columbia property to become the basis for the wholly commercial Rockefeller Center. This scheme functioned also as the basis for a series of transitional plans which moved the project by degrees from the smaller plan devoted primarily to the opera, through a midway point which balanced the opera against equally large, if not larger, commercial properties, and finally to a point at which the project went over entirely to commercial use after the opera removed itself from the scheme.

In his letter to Cutting, Morris recognized those concerns, mentioning that he realized that use of the block between 49th and 50th Streets for the opera rather than the block between 48th and 49th Streets would be a complicated matter because existing leases in the former were to expire later than in the more southerly. But then he went on to say that the use of the more central block for the opera and the wider street would lead to significant improvement of the surrounding property, providing income which would far outweight any return from proposed shops under the opera house itself. Morris wrote that the plan which Cutting brought to his attention was practicable, and "would be sufficiently near the theatrical district and the centre of hotel life to meet the requirements of Mr. Kahn's advisers," but would have a result "correspondingly less interesting and beautiful."[74] The intent of the reference to "hotel life" in Morris' letter is not entirely clear, but it does point to the

increasingly vital hotel center which was growing in the vicinity very near the Columbia land.

Morris moved quickly to further study of a plan to use the Columbia property. In mid-January, he attended a meeting with William Wheelock of Brown, Wheelock: Harris, Vought and Company and others at which there was a general discussion of the aspects of the plan for the Columbia property, a discussion which had to do primarily with real estate matters. The group felt that Columbia, as owner of an unusually large piece of property, might favor a plan which developed the property in a unified rather than piecemeal fashion on the assumption that a unified approach would result in longer term revenue from rental. Implicit in such a plan seemed to be the idea that a larger project with a comprehensive plan behind it might result in a grander, more attractive development which would more quickly gain prestige tenants on a long-term basis, whereas a plan which divided the property into many parcels for individual development would merely put the parcels into the same category as any other neighboring parcel. This would mean that the portions of the Columbia land which lay well west of Fifth Avenue might not gain tenants willing or able to pay higher rentals any more quickly than could a parcel with a comparable location outside the Columbia area.

The group, including Morris, seemed quite concerned with fostering the idea of a very large-scale

development. Wheelock suggested that a group consisting of persons such as Kahn, Cutting, Tonnele, and himself meet with representatives of Columbia as soon as possible.

Morris found it necessary to advise Cutting that the large project envisioned by his group might not be able to gain the desired quality of tenant immediately without reduction of terms, but that eventually, when the project had become established, higher rentals would be had. But Cutting seemed not yet convinced that the Columbia land was the best alternative. Morris wrote to him some weeks later to tell him that he did not feel that he, Morris, had laid sufficient stress in an earlier letter to Cutting on the lack of success of the Century Theater, some of which "undoubtedly is attributable to its location and is not entirely chargeable to the defects with which the building at times has been accredited." He also laid emphasis on his "understanding" that Ziegler and the manager of the box office for the Metropolitan Opera Company strongly preferred the Columbia to the Century site. The letter suggests that Cutting had shown indication of wanting to consider further the possibilities of the Century site and that Morris, now interested in the Columbia possibility, felt the need to discourage such inclination. Cutting had objected to the idea of building the opera house on a leasehold, in response to which Morris advised him that he would take part in an effort to determine whether the site for the

opera house itself might not be able to be purchased from Columbia.[76]

But a week later, John Tonnele of William A. White sent a letter to Morris in which he advised him that Mr. Goetze, treasurer of Columbia, had telephoned Tonnele on February 29 to tell him that the Columbia officers were reluctant to sell the property for use for the opera house itself and were uncertain whether they wanted the opera on any of their holdings, and certainly did not at the price being offered. Goetze said that Columbia might reconsider for an adequate sum. Goetze also told Tonnele that Columbia had a substantial offer from unidentified bidders for rental for the block between 49th and 50th Streets and from Fifth Avenue to within one hundred feet west of Sixth Avenue; that Columbia was asking a price higher than was being offered; but that the bidders were inclined to meet the higher price.[77] Morris distributed copies of the letter which Tonnele had written to him to Cutting, Kahn, Cornelius Bliss, and De Lancey Kountze, all of whom, excepting Kahn, were members of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company.[78]

On March 9, 1928, Morris spoke with Cutting and with Frederick Brown, a prominent figure in New York real estate development who, at the time, was developing the Bergdorf Goodman site on Fifth Avenue below Central Park and was the owner of at least part of the property intended as the site for the Roxy Theater Corporation's

Mansion Theater project on Lexington Avenue between 58th and 59th Streets. Brown's entry into the matter seems to be the first indication of the presence in the considerations of a potential developer and of a developer, moreover, with considerable experience and capable of molding the opera house project.

In a memorandum with the heading, "Considerations of Sites and a Suggested Method of Procedures," written after conversations with Cutting and Brown, Morris noted that the Century site still was a possibility, giving it one-sentence consideration, and then going on in the memorandum to an outline of almost eight pages concerning his plans for the Columbia site. These saw the placement of a grand square in the middle of the overall property which extended from 48th to 51st Streets and from Fifth Avenue to approximately 100 feet east of Sixth Avenue. To the west of this square would be the opera house, facing east and visible from Fifth Avenue through a monumental arcade over which would be built an office structure. Morris stressed the advantage of the attraction of the grandeur of the proposed setting for the value of the larger neighborhood, a consideration which, he felt, would outweigh loss of income from space which might have been built in the planned open areas. Morris proposed involving the City of New York in the plan through vestment in the City of title to the grand square area in order to assist in securing zoning variations for the area

to permit greater height allowance for surrounding structures.

In general, Morris' plan envisioned a project which could be built properly only as a unit, a plan which was a true precursor of the Rockefeller Center project which, although not centered around the opera, was, nevertheless, centered around an equally important theatrical and communications organization, RCA and its related groups, the RCA Building taking the place of the opera house behind the grand square which became the sunken plaza in place today.

Morris' plan included pedestrian bridges above ground and expansive parking facilities, and may, in sum, have been the most innovative and comprehensive plan for integration of several different kinds of land use in a single large project presented to that date. His plans for Kahn's site on 57th Street and for one of the plans devised for the Century site included revenue-producing structures to be built adjacent to the opera house, in general conformity with the zoning regulations of the City of New York. The Columbia site plan was a considerable amplification of those, integrating Kahn's concept of a project which recognized that New York City's economic base differed from the base on which were built the isolated European opera houses, with strong elements of more traditional and symmetrical planning schemes.[79]

But Cutting and Bliss did not respond favorably to

Morris' proposal. At a meeting on March 12 in Cutting's office in lower Manhattan attended by Morris and Cornelius N. Bliss of the Real Estate Company, Cutting said that he felt that, although interesting and desirable, it would be too difficult to realize, while Bliss thought the area too congested and mentioned to Morris his conversation with Brown in the course of which Brown expressed interest in selling to the opera the property immediately east of the new New York Athletic Club which was on the east side of Sixth Avenue between 58th Street and Central Park South. The Real Estate Company seemed to continue to find attractive sites which had frontage on Central Park.

Morris told Bliss that the Central Park South site was defective because there were buildings on either side of it (as was true of the 57th Street site), and because a large new apartment house was on the southeasterly portion of the parcel. Brown had said to Bliss that he hoped the apartment house could be incorporated structurally into the opera house, an idea which Morris said was "utterly impossible." Morris said that, with no further obligation to the Real Estate Company or to Kahn, Tonnele and he and perhaps another interested party would pursue development of financial details on various aspects of the Columbia scheme for presentation to Cutting and Kahn in April.[80]

At the time of the March 12 meeting, Kahn was on an extended trip, but it is noteworthy that he seemed to be taking a considerably lesser role in the discussions

concerning the Columbia site than in those discussions in which the 57th Street property, assembled by him, was the matter at hand. It would seem that, had his primary concern been the construction of a new opera house, an opera house modern and convenient in every way, he would have been fully supportive of the Columbia project.

But Kahn had expended the effort to acquire control of a considerable amount of land elsewhere for the opera house and seemed somewhat reserved about the matter of the Columbia project. In a letter to Morris dated April 20, 1928, he thanked Morris for his "highly interesting" letter dated April 19, in which Morris set forth his presentation for a solution to the various concerns expressed about the Columbia site. Kahn wrote that he hoped that "it may be found possible to persuade men of the type of John D. Rockefeller, J. P. Morgan, George F. Baker, and Ed Harkness, to become donors of the proposed square."[81]

On the other hand, Kahn's reserve may have had base in a feeling that there was sufficient promise in the Columbia plan and a sufficient number of men potentially capable of carrying the project forward to insure its success and to enable him to undertake a quieter, but still active, role. In fact, Kahn apparently had decided to take at least one steo in the matter of the new scheme, perhaps reflecting more serious purpose than, at first glance, might have seemed to be the case in his mention of

Rockefeller's name in his letter to Morris dated April 20, 1928. In a postscript to that letter, Kahn asked Morris whether he would send "two or three copies" of his letter of April 19 to Kahn, who then, in light of subsequent events, appears to have sent one of the copies to Ivy Lee, public relations adviser to John D. Rockefeller, Jr.[82]

Cutting, on the basis of Morris' scheme, was sufficiently interested to suggest that a larger presentation be prepared, Morris assenting with enthusiasm. Cutting apparently intended to invite a large group to see the presentation, which seemed to have for its object the fostering of support for the project. Morris asked Kahn whether the Metropolitan Opera Company would care to cover any of the costs of the presentation,[83] receiving a negative, although very polite, response from Kahn in which Kahn expressed his feeling that it was important, "from the psychological point of view," to make "the Real Estate Company responsible for the new scheme from the very beginning."[84]

By April's end, matters were beginning to move more rapidly. Morris wrote to Kahn to advise him that the last leasehold on the Columbia site would expire November 1931; that wholesale purchase of the leases would be excessive; and that the new opera house, under favorable conditions, could be ready for rehearsals in October 1, 1932 and for opening November 1, 1932, if certain houses on the property could be taken somewhat earlier for

demolition and site preparation. Rapid progress would involve also minimal elaboration of decorative plaster work, effects to be had instead through use of plane surfaces and color, "[which] would seem to me in any event to be desirable and consistent with modern ideas of design."[85]

Morris wrote that Tonnele had suggested that the contract for taking title and possession of the opera house site from Columbia be effective as of November 1, 1931, contingent provision allowing possible earlier possession and taking of title if certain other conditions could be met. Morris advised Kahn that an opera house on the Century site could not be opened earlier than November 1, 1930, which meant, nevertheless, that pursuit of plans for the Columbia site would result in a further two-year delay, a factor which Morris wrote Kahn he had mentioned to Cutting, "who gave me the impression of feeling that it would be well worth waiting for." In a postscript to the letter to Kahn, Morris noted that Cutting had called on him, Morris, twice, not finding him in, and that, when Morris called on him in return, Cutting told him that he wanted Morris to see George Baker to explain the scheme to him. Morris seemed thereby to be stressing to Kahn the degree of interest being taken in the Columbia scheme by the critical members of the Real Estate Company.[86]

On April 27, Tonnele sent a letter to Morris in which he said that Frederick Brown had told him that he

was prepared to make a definite offer for the property between the proposed square and Fifth Avenue, provided the opera company took its portion of the general site. Brown said he would be willing to pay in the neighborhood of $1,000,000 for the site, apparently an annual rental figure, and an offer which Tonnele said he would communicate to Goetze, the Columbia treasurer. The parcel that interested Brown was the site in Morris' scheme for the monumental arcade surmounted by an office building.[87]

On May 4, Kahn wrote to Cutting suggesting that it would be advisable to invite to the dinner which was to be the forum for Morris' presentation of his Columbia scheme Ivy Lee and Raymond Fosdick who worked with the Rockefeller interests.[88] On May 5, Ivy Lee wrote to Kahn telling him that he liked Morris' plan as delineated in Morris' letter dated April 19 to Kahn, and that Rockefeller had to have his representatives study the plan thoroughly.[89] Kahn sent an extract from Lee's letter to Morris,[90] in response to which Morris wrote to Kahn three days later thanking him for the extract and telling Kahn that Cutting had called him to tell Morris that he had received a copy of the same extract from Kahn and was going ahead with plans for the dinner for the presentation to be held on May 21. Making no further reference to the extract or to anything having to do with Rockefeller, Morris described the extensive presentation which he had devised for the dinner, and then put forward, "for the

confidential information of yourself and Mr. Cutting," that he had had indirect indication from a source at Columbia that the Columbia administration was inclined, after seeing Morris' plans for the opera project, to sell rather than lease an unspecified portion of the property.

He also said in the letter to Kahn that he had learned from a source who had spent some time with representatives of a "powerful syndicate" that the syndicate was interested in leasing the land between the proposed opera square and Fifth Avenue for construction of a large building to be built in conformity, if at all possible, with the opera scheme. The syndicate interest was predicated "absolutely" on the realization of the opera scheme, apparently as planned by Morris, but the syndicate was not then willing to agree to the implementation of the arcade aspect of the scheme, but would give further study to the matter. In the face of this syndicate's position, Morris did not care to insist on the arcade connection between Fifth Avenue and the Opera Square, preferring that the idea not stand in the way of the larger development of the overall plan.[91]

The syndicate mentioned by Morris seems almost certainly to have been an organization with which Frederick Brown was concerned, given the similarity of the description of the syndicate's proposition to the one discussed in Tonnele's letter of April 27 to Morris, copies of which Morris sent to Kahn and to Cutting. If the

two were the same, it would render rather curious Morris' hesitating to identify the syndicate mentioned in his letter to Kahn.[92]

Kahn replied to Morris' letter of May 10 with a reserved one-sentence letter acknowledging receipt, but which, apart from mentioning that Kahn had read Morris' letter "with great interest," made no comment on the matters discussed therein.[93]

Whatever might have been Morris' opinion concerning the Rockefeller involvement in the Columbia project, that involvement now was an accomplished fact. On May 24, Ivy Lee sent a letter to Kahn in which he told Kahn that he, Lee, had prepared a memorandum, apparently concerning the Columbia project, to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. for Rockefeller's reading over the weekend, and suggested that Kahn write Rockefeller a note suggesting a meeting between Kahn and Rockefeller the following week, the sending of the note to be timed so that it would reach Rockefeller at the same time as Lee's memorandum. Lee's letter also made reference to his plans for meeting with Kahn over the course of the weekend and to a possible round of golf on Sunday, during which, if it took place, there well might have been further discussion of the project.[94]

Lee is said to have advised Rockefeller that the thought behind the opera scheme was to make of the opera square and its vicinity the most valuable shopping

district in the world, bringing into question thereby whether the project was to be essentially an opera scheme supported by commercial development, or vice versa. Or perhaps the two were to be, or were becoming, in project state, so intermingled that there truly was a new level of development of multiple nature being achieved. Since Rockefeller already controlled properties a very short distance above the Columbia land, his advisers, including his realty adviser, Charles Heydt, well might have been interested in a new nearby project of potential benefit in itself and to the surrounding area.

As if acting in accord with the spirit of his own comment to Morris in his letter of April 20 in which he suggested that it might be found possible to persuade men such as Rockefeller to become donors of the proposed square for the opera development on the Columbia land, Kahn asked Rockefeller whether he might care to contribute, or participate in contribution, toward purchase of the property for the square, or build a concert hall on one side of the square as a replacement for Carnegie Hall.[95] But the Rockefeller contribution to development of the site, irrespective of considertations of the opera, was to be much more pervasive.

On May 25, Morris wrote in a memorandum that Tonnele had called him advising him that Morris' original drawings for the project were to be sent to a representative of one of two people who were not

identified, but appear to have been the syndicate headed by Frederick Brown. And so, at this point in the matter, there were at least two large factions seriously considering advancing the project. Morris' memorandum also noted that Morris had been told that George F. Baker, Jr. had seen the plans for the project, and that he thoroughly approved of them.[96]

As spring progressed and planning became more detailed, the project began to seem ever more certain to be achieved, even though no developer had yet come to agreement with Columbia and with the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company. In June, Cutting was concerned that one of the allowed line items in the development budget was too small and advised Morris that plans were being made to increase it.[97]

In the same month, Edward Ziegler, general manager for the Metropolitan Opera Company, sent information concerning the company's storage needs to Morris, advising him that it was safe to assume that approximately eight operas at minimum would be in active repertoire and that that meant a minimum of 2,500 drops. Ziegler wrote that, at the present, the opera had 116 racks for storage strewn over the opera house itself and storehouses on 40th, 41st 50th, and 54th Streets.[98] Morris wrote Kahn that, under Urban's recommendation, 670,000 cubic feet had been provided in the 57th Street plan for storage, and that the amount had been increased in the Century and in the

Columbia plans to 1,000,000 cubic feet, while Ziegler's figures gave rise to a rough calculation of a need for 1,280,000 cubic feet. The increase would cost no less, in Morris' estimation, than an additional $200,000, and would be a matter to which "no doubt you and Mr. Cutting would want to give . . . consideration . . . ."[99]

The mention of Urban's name was a reminder of the events which accrued from his collaboration with Morris, a collaboration upon which Kahn had insisted. And now Kahn's own general manager was magnifying the results of an apparent error in calculations made by the man whom Kahn had retained to insure adequate planning for the more purely theatrical aspects of the project.

Shortly after Ivy Lee advised Rockefeller about the plans for the opera project on the Columbia property, Rockefeller's assistant on real estate matters, Charles Heydt, told Columbia's real estate agent that Rockefeller might care to take part in a syndicate which would buy the Columbia property and then donate the square for public use; or which would take a ninety-nine year lease with one or two renewals on the property on condition that Columbia allow the square to be dedicated.[100] By late August, the Rockefeller interests were about to take possession of the Columbia leasehold. On August 30, Morris wrote a memorandum for distribution to the members of the special committee from the Real Estate Company which was concerned with the new opera house project and to Otto Kahn in which

he reported confirmation through Louis Horowitz from Charles Heydt (Morris referred to him as Mr. Hite) in Rockefeller's office that, excepting independent appraisal of the property, all matters between Rockefeller and Columbia concerning the property had been settled, and that papers were being prepared for purchase of the opera house site and leasing of the rest of the Columbia land by Rockefeller, the syndicate having been removed from consideration. Tonnele told Morris that the Columbia lease to Rockefeller would run for four twenty-one year terms, and that Columbia required the option to repurchase the opera house site, in the event the opera ceased to exist or cared to sell, at an appraised value to be established at such time. Morris wrote that it was his impression that Rockefeller would deed the surface rights to the opera square to the city; would retain the subsurface rights for garage construction and income, its use to be a matter of negotiation; and would resell the opera site to the Real Estate company for $3,500,000.[101]

An initial agreement between the Rockefeller interests and Columbia was signed on September 6, 1928, and, on October 1, the Trustees of Columbia University authorized the lease of the university's real estate holdings between 48th and 51st Streets, extending from Fifth Avenue to within approximately 100 feet of Sixth Avenue and comprising approximately eleven acres and 203 separate leaseholds, for a period of eighty-seven years to

the Metropolitan Square Corporation, which had been organized by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The lease was to run for twenty-four years from October 1, 1928, and included the privilege of three renewals of twenty-one years each. As of October 1, the proposed arrangements for use of a part of the site for the new opera house had yet to be worked out, but the papers now were signed and the transaction consummated. Rockefeller agreed to pay an annual rental of approximately $2,000,000 to Columbia.[102]

In a letter to Kahn dated December 14, Ivy Lee made reference to developments concerning the opera house scheme in a manner which left unsaid whether negotiations with the Real Estate Company actually were progressing, and noted that "we" had been able to forestall serious publicity of the project, a suggestion that any such publicity would have to await a final agreement with the Real Estate Company.[103] But at least two problematic points caused the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company to withdraw from the Columbia project in 1929: the reluctance of the Real Estate Company to undertake the whole cost of purchase of the leaseholds on the opera house site in addition to the cost of purchase of the land itself;[104] and the advice of the Real Estate Company's legal counsel against acceptance by the Company of the clause in the purchase agreement which would allow Columbia to recapture the land if the opera either went out of existence or wished to sell, this clause, according

to the Company's legal counsel, impairing title to the property to such extent that it could not be readily mortgaged.[105]

But, near the end of 1928, when Lee wrote Kahn, the inclusion of the opera in the project was a very real possibility, although the Rockefeller group seemed prepared, even at this early stage, to forego the opera's participation. When, in January 1929, there was public announcement of the consummation of the agreement between Columbia and Rockefeller, Ivy Lee, speaking for Rockefeller, said that negotiations between the Real Estate company and Rockefeller's representatives were under way and that it was expected that these negotiations would result ultimately in an agreement whereby the opera would be located within the Columbia tract; but he said also that, if the opera house were not included, a different plan would be worked out for "a real estate development of the highest character." Rockefeller was said to have sought the lease as a sound business undertaking while at the same time wanting to do something for the beauty of the city.[106]

On January 22, 1929, Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, announced the agreement between Rockefeller and Columbia, and, in responding to an inquiry posed at the time, mentioned that Columbia always had had in mind the idea of a large, unified development for the land, and for that reason had not entered into

leases in recent years allowing construction of buildings which would interfere with such a development. Butler mentioned that aspects of the opera house site agreement still had to be worked out.[107]

The sequence of events which culminated in the authorization on October 1, 1928 by the Columbia Trustees of the agreement with Rockefeller's group coincided approximately with the climactic events during the same month which saw the organization of Radio-Keith-Orpheum under the control of the Radio Corporation of America, and, in December of the following year, 1929, immediately subsequent to the announcement of withdrawal by the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company from the Columbia project, discussions were begun between Rockefeller's representatives and General Electric, which controlled the Radio Corporation of America, and the Radio Corporation of America itself concerning RCA's possible tenancy in the planned Rockefeller project, discussions which led to the planning of the largest theatrical and communications complex in New York City on a site which functioned as a bridge between the theatrical center proper and the communications center growing in the Forties and Fifties on either side of Fifth Avenue.[108]

50th Street

The development of theaters such as the Roxy and Ziegfeld in the later 1920s brought the primary focal

point of the theater center closer to the Columbia properties, and made more feasible the inclusion in the later Rockefeller Center plan of projects for at least two large theaters to be built for RKO, theaters which would feature popular entertainment similar to the kind found in the leading theaters in the Times Square area. The move of theaters northward over the course of the 1920s was slow, but by 1928, there was at least as much new theatrical activity ongoing or being planned in the vicinity beginning just above Times Square as there was below 47th Street, with the area on and very near 50th Street seeming to be particularly attractive to theatrical organizations.

While the Ziegfeld Theater was perhaps a little too far from the theatrical center to create by itself a major shift in locational attraction, the opening of the Roxy, just beyond the earlier perimeter of theatrical activity, was sufficiently successful to counteract any negative factor which might have accrued from the theater's location on Seventh Avenue. Located as it was near, among other theaters, the Capitol, which it superseded as the largest film and presentation theater in New York City, and near the Shubert's popular Winter Garden, the Roxy was able to act as a new point around which theatrical activity could grow as it continued, into 1928, to be a very successful operation.

By 1928, Russell Markert's Rockets had become the

Roxyettes, and were an important part of Rothafel's presentations to the extent that they became a regular feature at the Roxy as of April 8. (Because Rothafel wanted two of the sixteen girl troupes to appear together in his presentations, a tour of a second Markert group which had just begun at the competing Strand was terminated.)[109] But it was the great size and special effects of productions distinguished by frequently innovative music and dance presentations which established the Roxy as a theatrical landmark in the area in the short time of its existence. One presentation featured the expressionistic dancer, Von Grona, who was seen against a city horizon in red with a steel building frame, a steam crane and various large machinery pieces in sharp black silhouette against the glowing red background. Von Grona was dressed in tight black silk and performed a modern piece of choreography against a sound accompaniment comprised only of shattering noises such as shrieking escapes of steam.[110]

In another presentation, Jacques Cartier, covered with black paint and wearing a tall, multi-colored feather headdress, performed a piece called "Congo," dancing alone atop a huge drum to the ever-accelerating rhythm from an offstage drum, while three lights--green, blue and orange-red--cast gigantic shadows against the back wall ever faster.[111] The Roxy continued to present expensive scenic displays such as a depiction of a ballroom in the palace

of Louis XIII created on a grand scale,[112] and costs for scenery and costumes for the first year of the theater's operation were reported to be approximately $250,000. In early 1928, it was said that budget reductions were being made, and that the weekly budget for scenery and costumes had gone from $3,000 to $1,500 per week.[113] These reductions were not likely to appeal to Rothafel for whom the scenic element was a very important part of his large-scale presentations.

There was further evidence of discord between Rothafel and Fox in prepared remarks which Rothafel delivered to over 700 guests at a midnight dinner at the Plaza Hotel on March 15, 1928. The dinner was a celebration of the first anniversary of the opening of the Roxy Theater. In his remarks, Rothafel said that his theater had not been able to get quality films from Fox. He said, however, that he had been assured that the producing interests in the Roxy were doing their best to get good films for the theater. Variety reported to the effect that this qualification was understood to have been inserted in Rothafel's remarks following a discussion between Fox and Rothafel after Fox had heard about Rothafel's complaints.[114]

In May 1928, Rothafel stated that reports of his planned withdrawal from the Roxy were not true, and that he intended to continue at the Roxy for the four years yet remaining in his contract.[115] But rumors persisted that

Rothafel had a plan and site for a new theater on Broadway to seat 6,500, and that the policy for the new theater would not necessarily include films. The stories about Rothafel's ideas for the new theater were said to have originated mostly from casual comments Rothafel himself had made about his future plans.[116]

Reports in the following year seemed to substantiate suggestions that Rothafel was thinking about new projects. In April 1929, it was reported that the Fox organization had purchased at least part of the large site behind the Roxy Theater running to Sixth Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets.[117] Title to the property on West 50th Street from Sixth Avenue to number 131 passed on July 2, 1929 to Consolidated Biological Products, Inc., located at 850 Tenth Avenue, one of the Fox office buildings; and title to the property on the west side of Sixth Avenue between 50th and 51st Streets and to the property on West 51st Street from Sixth Avenue to number 130 passed on May 1, 1929 to the Startling Realty Corporation.[118] (Whether Startling Realty Corporation was connected with the Fox organization is not clear).

According to another report in April 1929, a Roxy music hall was expected to rise on the site extending to Sixth Avenue behind the Roxy Theater. It was said that, in this hall, Rothafel would produce only stage entertainment at a popular price scale. The presentations, or certain features in them, would remain

for runs of four weeks and would include American and foreign performers. Rothafel was said to have had the idea for the theater for months, and to have convinced Fox of the efficacy of the concept. This story tends to substantiate the earlier reports on the matter. No films, apart from possible use of Movietone News or an occasional talking short, were to be featured.[119] This Roxy music hall was not realized, but the policy reported to have been intended for it was very similar in overall design to the policy that Rothafel first put into effect at the Radio City Music Hall when it opened in December 1932 on a site directly across Sixth Avenue from the property extending east from the Roxy Theater.

The period of time during which Rothafel was involved with RCA, RKO and Rockefeller Center is beyond the time limits of this study, but it ought at least to be mentioned that Rothafel's impact on the theatrical development of the area of West 50th Street was considerable, both during his tenure at the Roxy Theater and also during his relationship with the two large theaters built under his supervision in Rockefeller Center. Like any concern which presents the results of its practice in a specific location, theatrical organizations and producers are interested in the value of specific sites, and the matter of choice of site is a critical consideration. It is unlikely that Rothafel was concerned with the power of attraction of 50th Street for

any reason other than that his major theaters happened to be located on or very near to it, but that does not mitigate the degree of impact which he nevertheless had on the vicinity.

Although the large-scale presentation policy in film theaters was not uniquely his, Rothafel had a greater influence on its development than anyone else, fostering it from his period at the Strand and the Famous Players-Lasky theaters and at the Capitol before going to the Roxy. He is deserving of recognition for the efforts which he made to bring a degree of so-called higher culture to a large mass audience through his format of presentations on a large scale. His policies fostered also the growth in popularity of the very large film theater which, in turn, helped in leading to the involvement of some of the largest theatrical organizations with land use concerns and with major developers. The conjunction of developer and the world of the theater brought about a period in which theater found itself exerting a kind and degree of influence which was new to it, certainly in New York City where zoning regulations kept the greater part of theater buildings separate from overhead, larger structures of the kind common in the city.

51st Street

For several months in 1928, the Capitol Theater

competed with the nearby Roxy through use of stage presentation units devised by Publix. The practice was the result of a decision by Publix and Loew to cooperate in unit production.

The first Publix-Loew unit, produced by Frank Cambria of Publix, went into the Capitol Theater on February 11, 1928 and essentially was a continuation of the stage band policy. During the period lasting into late summer of the joint Publix-Loew productions, Dave Gould and Boris Petroff, in addition to Cambria, were brought in. Publix purchased the former Erlanger production facility on 49th Street west of Ninth Avenue in early 1928 for use for production of units for the Publix and Loew theaters. The facility, relatively convenient both to the Capitol and to the Paramount, was especially designed to accommodate scenery construction and painting, and was equipped with a complete stage and fly loft. The entire production unit, including costumes, was to be made there.[120]

The purchase of the production facility and the apparent need for it suggests the importance attached by Publix to its stage presentations. It is unlikely that a large space for use for preparation of these productions would have been purchased had Publix not seen a future for its stage features. And the additional work that would accrue from cooperation with Loew in preparation of the stage units could only expand its need for production

space.

Mort Harris, who had worked in California on stage productions for film houses, had come to the Capitol when the new stage facilities were installed in 1927, prior to the appearance in the Capitol of the first Publix-Loew unit. Harris had worked with Jack Partington in California where Partington had acquired a reputation for use of highly mechanized stages of the kind that was installed in the Capitol in 1927 by its management in an effort to counteract the competition from the new Paramount and Roxy. With the Publix producers in the Capitol, Harris' workload was modified, but, when the Publix-Loew agreement as it affected the Capitol was cancelled, Harris returned to New York in late summer to resume work.[121]

Early in the Publix-Loew period, Harris produced the unit entitled "Gems," a presentation which was noteworthy because of its reliance on a visual style which appeared to be in contrast to Rothafel's grandeur. Harris' production leaned instead more toward sharp elegant lines and brilliance. In the finale, the girls, elegantly costumed, formed a backdrop in frames of diamond boxes. [122]

The difference between Rothafel's productions and the productions at the Capitol could be seen in the difference in style of the Russell Markert's Rockets and the Chester Hale Girls. As mentioned above, the routines

of the Chester Hale Girls when performing at the Capitol were reminiscent of the kind of elegant production values for which some of the revue series such as the Vanities and Follies were famous. No trace of influence from these seems to have appeared on Rothafel's stages. Even the Russell Markert troupe, which was as close as Rothafel ever came to a chorus line, stressed its technical ability in ensemble performance, and not the glamour and sensuality which helped to make an attraction of the Capitol's Hale Girls.

The competition which arose between the two dance groups added to the excitement which had come to characterize the small area which enclosed both houses, as well as the Winter Garden between them and the Earl Carroll immediately across 50th Street from the Roxy, the last two known as homes to well-known revue productions.

Several theaters had opened in the vicinity in 1927, and in the summer of 1928, there was discussion about another theater proposed for a site not far from the corner of 50th Street and Broadway. On August 17, Messmore Kendall, who owned the Capitol Theater and a large amount of property immediately west of and adjoining the Capitol, said that plans for construction of a theater behind the Capitol on 50th Street for use by Max Reinhardt were still in the formative stage. Joseph Urban was designing a theater which would have a facade of black glass and would seat approximately 1,200 in the orchestra,

no balcony to be built. The stage would be shallow, but would feature the largest proscenium arch in the world and an elaborate forestage designed especially for Reinhardt's productions.[123]

Earlier in the year, Variety had reported that Otto Kahn would be interested in the project. Kahn had sponsored Reinhardt's 1927 tour when his company appeared at the Century and was arranging a return in the fall of 1928. It was said that there had been an earlier plan to build theaters on the Kendall property west of the Capitol, one of which was to have been occupied by the director Robert Milton, some of whose productions had been financed by Kendall, who, in the spring of 1928, was said to be on his way to Europe for discussions with Reinhardt.[124]

While it is not clear what role Kahn had in the matter, Urban felt it necessary to discuss apparent problems connected with it. He wrote to Kahn on July 20, 1928 about the proposed Reinhardt Theater, telling him that, if Kendall was not able to wait with his ground, he, Urban, was not worried about finding ground elsewhere. He wrote that he had received many offers from people in real estate, and felt that, if Famous Players-Lasky was willing to rent the theater, financing the matter would not be a problem. Apparently Kahn was familiar with the matter since Urban does not bother with preliminary explanations, but begins his letter to Kahn by informing him that he had

seen Sam Katz, head of Publix, that morning and that Katz, having "thought the whole situation over very carefully," found that he could not give Urban an answer until January 1 when he felt "the situation in sound pictures will be cleared up . . . ."[125]

Walter Wanger, who was one of the chief executives at Paramount in New York at this time, advised Urban to ask Kahn to speak to Zukor about the matter. Urban knew that Kahn, as chief partner in Paramount's banking house, Kuhn, Loeb, would certainly be able to get Zukor's ear. Paramount was closely connected with Publix, and although Publix and Loew still were working together in 1928, it is not known whether the reference to Paramount personnel in Urban's letter might have been a reflection of awareness that Paramount was considering, or was being asked to consider, a plan to build a theater on Kendall's property for Reinhardt and also for use by Paramount-Publix for film screenings, a use which the shallow stage would permit. It happens, however, that the plan for the theater is similar in overall concept, even to elimination of the balcony, to one designed by Urban and built for Paramount in Palm Beach. But I have not been able to determine the precise meaning of Urban's reference in the letter to Paramount.

The project for the Reinhardt theater never was realized, but there continued to be reports of projects for new combination film and stage theaters in the

vicinity of 50th Street and Broadway in 1928. In April, there were reports that Stanley and Keith-Albee were giving serious consideration to working together to build a 6,000-seat theater on the west side of Broadway in the Fifties and that financial interests already indicated willingness to sponsor the project. Stanley had not yet become fully involved with Warner, nor Keith-Albee with RCA, at this point. According to report, Stanley and Keith-Albee each had found that the other was working on plans for a very large theater and then decided to combine the operation.[126] Although no specific site was mentioned for the theater, it may have been the west side of Broadway between 51st and 52nd Streets, a property earlier reported to have been acquired by interests representing Keith-Albee,[127] and located directly across 51st Street from the Capitol. Realization of the project would have placed the three largest film and presentation theaters in the city in close proximity to one another, and would only have added to the strength of the area as a theatrical focal point.

If Keith-Albee had been considering such a project, it would have given a finer point to a somewhat earlier report that Keith-Albee had retained Clark Robinson, scenic director for the Roxy, and Joseph R. Teichner, in charge of scenic construction at the Roxy, to oversee remodeling of the stages of a large number of Keith-Albee-Orpheum theaters. Given Robinson's success at

the Roxy, which had opened only a year earlier, his counsel on a new house being built as competition to the Roxy well might have been sought, whatever Rothafel's opinion of such an arrangement might have been.[128]

During 1928, there were many reports of possible mergers and acquisition activities involving major theatrical and broadcasting organizations. Keith-Albee was said to be talking with Stanley; Stanley was moving toward Warner; and the Shuberts also were said to be involved seriously with Warner. Toward year's end, when Warner had become seriously involved with Stanley and First National, the Shuberts were reported to have signed a contract with Western Electric for installation of wiring for talking films in the Shubert and Booth Theaters. Because of the working relationship between Western Electric and Warner in Vitaphone, the wiring of the Shubert houses gave rise to renewed speculation concerning Warner and Shubert, speculation dismissed by the Warner offices.[129] But activity on West 51st Street suggests a relationship between Warner and Shubert, if not between Stanley or Keith-Albee and Shubert, based in real estate concerns.

The property which was rumored to be the projected site for the Keith-Albee-Stanley 6,000-seat theater included the land from the northwest corner of 51st Street and Broadway to 215 West 51st Street, and the Broadway frontage covering street numbers 1651-1665, in addition to

the property from the southwest corner of 52nd Street to 226 West 52nd Street.

In 1928, the Shuberts were involved in a realty transaction having to do with a nearby site. In March, they acquired title to 239 West 51st Street which joined on the east 235-237 West 51st Street, purchased by the Shuberts in 1922. The following year, in August 1929, Warner Brothers Pictures, Inc. acquired title to 227-233 West 51st Street,[130] in the same block, and began construction on its site and on a portion of the property fronting on Broadway, of its Hollywood Theater which opened in April 1930, and which, excepting the rebuilt Earl Carroll and the Rockefeller Center theaters, was the last theater to be opened in midtown for many years to come. (The Hollywood now is called the Mark Hellinger Theater.)

53rd Street

Florenz Ziegfeld opened no more productions on 42nd Street after 1927, preferring to restrict himself to theaters which were north of Times Square. In the spring of 1928, after the Universal organization, which had had the B. S. Moss Colony Theater at the southwest corner of 53rd Street and Broadway on lease, decided to withdraw from the theater,[131] Ziegfeld was reported to be near settlement of an agreement whereby he would use the Colony for productions. More than four years yet remained on

Universal's lease and it was this lease which Ziegfeld reportedly would assume.[132] Ziegfeld was reported to have bought property to the rear of the Colony to permit enlargement of the stage to a depth of at least forty feet, which was a little less than he had at the New Amsterdam and Ziegfeld Theaters;[133] and to have decided to rename the theater after Billie Burke,[134] who was Mrs. Ziegfeld and, reportedly, the person for whom the theater called the Ziegfeld originally was to have been named. But Ziegfeld was reported unable to complete negotiations for the property adjacent to the Broadway, and the matter was brought to a close.[135]

There was no further support for Ziegfeld's theatrical ventures from the Hearst interests, apart from publicity favoring attractions in the Ziegfeld Theater which they owned, but Ziegfeld, once having been brought to the area by them, seemed to have come to favor the west Fifties for his efforts. A few months prior to the appearance of reports of his interest in the Colony, there was a report that Pincus and Goldstone, whose Alvin Theater had opened in November 1927 under the directorship of Alex Aarons and Vinton Freedley, were said to be considering building a new theater for Ziegfeld, the theater to have a horseshoe auditorium and a mezzanine circle of boxes.[136]

Shortly thereafter, in April, Pincus and Goldman, in the name of the 107 East 34th Street Corporation,

purchased a leasehold on 320-328 West 55th Street which had thirty-five years yet remaining; and the lease on the property across 55th Street at 329-333 West 55th Street. The land at 320-328 West 55th Street measured 100 feet by 100 feet, and could have accommodated a theater, but no plans for either site were announced.[137]

The fact that they had opened their Alvin Theater nearby, and the general trend toward theater construction in the area, suggests that Pincus and Goldman may have considered building a theater for Ziegfeld on one of the two West 55th Street sites. Both sites were located between Eighth and Ninth Avenues one block south of the site between 56th and 57th Streets assembled by Kahn for his projected opera house. But, by the time Pincus and Goldman had purchased their leaseholds, the prospects for Kahn's project were not good. However, had the Reinhardt theater been realized, and had a theater been built for Ziegfeld on one of the West 55th Street sites, there might have been effected a distinct northwesterly turn of theatrical movement which would have been of benefit to real estate development in the Columbus circle vicinity.

54th Street

Although there continued to be reports of new theatrical projects for the Time Square area and for the west Fifties, there was relatively little construction

actually going on in 1928. There may have been an oversupply of legitimate theaters at the time, but this does not seem to have been true of large combination film and stage houses.

However, while the Shuberts' Ethel Barrymore Theater was the only major theater to open below 50th Street in 1928, the Craig Theater was the only one to open that year above 50th Street. The Craig began operation at 152 West 54th Street on December 24, 1928 with the production, Potiphar's Wife. The theater had approximately 1,500 seats and had an entrance on 54th Street, although the bulk of the theater fronted on 53rd Street where an elevated train still ran. These circumstances tended to isolate the Craig from the nearby concentration of theaters in the vicinity of 50th Street and Broadway, the Craig having only the Ziegfeld as a near neighbor. In addition, the theater was independently owned and booked, and never was a very popular house.

There might have been greater vitality injected into the immediate vicinity of the Craig had there been realized the plans, listed as filed for new construction in New York City, for construction of a theater at the northeast corner of 53rd Street and Seventh Avenue. The site for the project immediately joined the 53rd Street frontage of the Craig, and covered a rather large parcel, but nothing came of it, nor is it clear what the nature of the theater was to have been or what the affiliation of

the developers might have been. The owner was listed as Mishol Realty Company at 36 West 44th Street, and the lessee of the site was Vardmont Realty Corporation, Christopher Steinkaur, President, at 342 Madison Avenue.[138]

Farther east, the Ziegfeld Theater was housing one of the major successes of the 1927-1928 theatrical season. Show Boat was bringing considerable excitement to the vicinity of the theater, although the theater soon would begin to suffer from its distance from Times Square, and on April 22, 1933, within a year of Ziegfeld's death in 1932, it became Loew's Ziegfeld, and housed double feature film shows before being reopened as a legitimate theater in 1944.

But in 1928, with Show Boat as tenant, the Ziegfeld was prospering as a musical comedy house. Although the Hearst group showed no further interest in building additional theaters for him, Ziegfeld did, as mentioned earlier, continue to get considerable support from the Hearst press. Copies of Hearst's Wednesday morning American and Daily Mirror containing reviews of Show Boat, which opened at the Hearst group's Ziegfeld Theater, were said to have been in the hands of members of the first night audience the Tuesday evening before, the explanation having been given that the notices were written from Monday rehearsals. All three of Hearst's New York dailies gave Show Boat extensive coverage in

anticipation of the opening.[139] The Daily Mirror was said to have given so much space to Ziegfeld attractions as to precipitate withdrawal of advertisements of some other productions from the paper.[140]

The attention given by the Hearst papers to Ziegfeld was not limited to his productions at the Ziegfeld Theater. There was value to the Hearst interests to publicizing anything which mentioned Ziegfeld's name because their theater carried the name. Reportedly, a primary consideration in building the Ziegfeld in the first place was the benefit that a successful and prestigious theater might lend to a neighborhood in which the Hearst's held property. It is likely that this continued to be the basis for Hearst support over the years for the theater and for its director, whatever the personal relations between Hearst and Ziegfeld might have been.

Hearst and Brisbane had built the Warwick Hotel on the northeast corner of 54th Street and Sixth Avenue on the site which, at one time, was reported intended for a Ziegfeld theater which would have been larger than the one actually built. The realized Ziegfeld Theater was directly across Sixth Avenue from the Warwick, plans for an addition to which were filed with the Bureau of Buildings of the City of New York in March 1928 by the W. & R. Realty Corporation, an organization which was controlled by the Hearst interests.

The Ziegfeld was an attractive house and there is little doubt that it was seen as an advantage to the neighborhood by the Hearst interests. It brought a sense of activity and vitality to its site in the evening and would complement any addition to the environs which was oriented toward entertainment and social life. The new addition to the Warwick was to be fifty-one stories in height, making it an unusually tall residential structure. It would have been contiguous with the existing hotel, extending from it northward to the 55th Street corner. The first two floors were to be given over to public dining, dancing and lounging rooms and seem to have been intended to compete with the luxury hotels of the Fifth Avenue area which were including more entertainment areas during a time in which there was general growth in night and supper club activities in the west and east Fifties. The architect was to have been George B. Post and Sons, a firm which worked with Joseph Urban on the plans for the office building for the Hearst Evening Journal, built on the west side of Eighth Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets on the site that the Hearst interests had earlier planned for use for a large variety theater.[141]

Farther east along 55th Street, the addition to the St. Regis Hotel was opened in 1928, and with it, the roof garden for dining and dancing designed by Joseph Urban. The addition was immediately east of the older

building which was on the southeast corner of 55th Street and Fifth Avenue. The opening attraction was Vincent Lopez and his orchestra, one of the most popular orchestras of the time, and the dance team of Ramon and Rosita, one of a number of such teams seen in hotel dining rooms and night clubs in the period. The St. Regis Roof was the first hotel dining room on Fifth Avenue, with the possible exception of the old Waldorf-Astoria, to feature major theatrical and musical attractions. The room remained popular for many years, and is still in use today.[142]

In a move which was a further departure for hotel policy of the time, the St. Regis management gave Lopez responsibility for all music in the hotel including the roof, grill and dining rooms, with tea and concert ensembles also to be handled by him. The new roof garden, designed by Urban to convey a tone of the smart night club, was to be kept open year-round as an exclusive membership club with an annual fee to members of $1,000, and was said to be intended to be the rival of the Embassy Club on East 57th Street, a club especially popular with New York society for dining and dancing.[143]

The opening of the St. Regis Roof was part of the evolution of Fifth Avenue in the Fifties from residential to commercial usage. During the 1920s, many of the mansions which had lined the Avenue were replaced by commercial structures. The interests controlled by John

D. Rockefeller, Jr. had accumulated property in the area over a period of some years including a number of former residences. In 1926, he had purchased the residence of Mrs. Florence A. Twombly at 684 Fifth Avenue at the southwest corner of 54th Street and Fifth Avenue.[144] Fifteen months later, in February 1928, there appeared a report that the six-story building to be erected by Rockefeller on the southwest corner of 54th Street and Fifth Avenue would be occupied under lease by Revillon Frères, furrier, who would, in their new quarters, have twice the space that they had had in the building they were leaving at 668-670 Fifth Avenue on the southwest corner of 53rd Street and Fifth Avenue.[145]

In the cases of both the Rockefeller and the Hearst groups, theatrical developments were only one aspect of their realty concerns. Both the Rockefeller and the Hearst groups were involved with projects which included at one time or another a theater or theaters as part of a larger scheme. While both groups appear to have considered theaters desirable components of a large land assemblage, the theaters did not seem to be thought of as indispensable elements of the projects.

The Hearst group was reported to have considered building theaters other than the Ziegfeld, one on Sixth Avenue, the other on Eighth Avenue. But these projects were not realized and the land reportedly intended for these theaters was used for other purposes.

The Columbia property which became the location of Rockefeller Center was to have included a new opera house for use of the Metropolitan Opera Company. But when that project ran into difficulties, a revised development plan excluding the opera house as a primary focal point was the plan actually realized. As mentioned above, when Ivy Lee announced Rockefeller participation in the development of the Columbia property in 1929, he said that, if the opera project itself were not feasible,, a plan would be devised for a "real estate development of the highest character."[146]

In the 1920s, commercial developments of various kinds might be expected to be able to benefit from location on or near Fifth Avenue in the Forties and Fifties. The Rockefeller holdings at 680-684 Fifth Avenue were near one of the future entrances to the Fifth and Madison Avenues station of the new Independent subway line which ran under 53rd Street and which, by the end of 1928 was approximately 75 percent complete. The Rockefeller group also controlled property on 53rd Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues.

In 1928, coincident with the building of the new subway line came a number of developments on Madison Avenue in the vicinity of the subway entrance at 53rd Street and Madison Avenue. One of these was a fourteen story structure being built on the southwest corner of 52nd Street and Madison Avenue by Hearst's associate,

Arthur Brisbane. Across the street, on the southeast corner of 52nd Street and Madison Avenue on land leased for development from Brisbane by John H. Carpenter, there was rising a twenty-two story building which, in May 1929, would become the headquarters of the Columbia Broadcasting System. The opening of this building, 485 Madison Avenue was a major event in the development of the immediate vicinity as the broadcasting center of the country.[147]

By the beginning of 1928, the National Broadcasting Company had been in its new headquarters building at 711 Fifth Avenue on the northeast corner of 55th Street and Fifth Avenue only a short time, but already its operations were growing to the point at which additional room was needed. At the meeting of the board of directors of the National Broadcasting Company held January 6, 1928, the president, Merlin H. Aylesworth, asked and was given approval of the lease which he had concluded with the owners of the building, the Bethlehem Engineering Corporation, for the eleventh floor of 711 Fifth Avenue, and the agreement into which he had entered with Hyland Brothers Inc. for cancellation of a lease which that organization had had for the same space.[148]

And at the meeting of the NBC board on December 21, 1928, Aylesworth reported the need for additional space for offices and rehearsal studios at 711 Fifth Avenue and the board voted to permit negotiation for additional space on the third and fourth floors.[149] The

growth of the broadcasting industry and of NBC in particular was pushing NBC rapidly toward the time when a larger facility would be needed for its operation, but it would not be until November 1933 that NBC would be able to move into much larger quarters in the RCA Building in Rockefeller Center.

In the meantime, General Electric and the Radio Corporation were expanding their technological capabilities in a way that ultimately would have a profound effect on NBC. They were conducting successful tests of simultaneous electronic transmission of sound and moving images in January 1928.[150] Considerations of development of a theater chain to accommodate television broadcasts onto large screens eventually was a factor motivating RCA's expansion into theater acquisition and operation.

In 1928, 711 Fifth Avenue housed the National Broadcasting and Concert Bureau, a new booking agency which superseded the earlier NBC Artists' Bureau. The new agency had as its managing director a concert manager and former manager of the New York Symphony, George Engles who, at the time, handled the affairs of Damrosch, Heifetz, Paderewski, and Schumann-Heink.[151] The Bureau became an important factor in artist management in the city in broadcasting, concert stage and theater.

One of the chief competitors of the National Broadcasting and Concert Bureau was headed by Arthur

Judson from his offices in the Steinway Building located not far from 711 Fifth Avenue at 109 West 57th Street, a short distance west of Sixth Avenue. Judson's organization became part of the Columbia Broadcasting System. It happened also that Judson was the manager of the New York Philharmonic, one of the two most prominent orchestral organizations in New York, the other being the New York Symphony, managed by Engles.

The location of both organizations was influenced in part by the growth of the 57th Street corridor and its immediate neighborhood as a center for music affairs, and the proximity in the same vicinity of two organizations which became two of the largest talent agencies in the city helped, in it turn, to insure the stability of the area as music center.

As the business of the National Broadcasting and Concert Bureau expanded, so did its space needs, and, with the growth also of the firm of which Arthur Judson was part, so then did the importance of the general area for this additional aspect of theater and broadcasting life. In mid-1928, Judson leased four floors in the Steinway Building for his Judson Radio Corporation for a radio broadcasting studio. [152]

57th Street

While 57th Street east of Carnegie Hall was continuing to prosper and grow as a important address for

the broadcasting industry, its development west of Seventh Avenue received a setback in early 1928 as it began to appear that Otto Kahn's project for a new Metropolitan Opera House with frontage on 57th Street and 56th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues probably would not be realized. In February 1928, well before there was a public report about the possibility of use for the opera of the Columbia property on Fifth Avenue, there were reports that Kahn had placed the large 57th Street parcel on the market and that the opera was continuing its search elsewhere for a site.[153]

Kahn's Metropolitan Opera Company prepared a lengthy statement for the press (marked "Draft not used") dated February 1928 which announced that negotiations between it and the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company had been suspended for the time being for reasons which had nothing to do with disagreement between the parties about the viability of the site. The announcement noted that the Board of Directors of the Real Estate Company and "a preponderance of its stockholders" had agreed the previous February to the plan for the 57th Street site submitted by the Opera Company, but that the plan had to be abandoned because subsequent and more definitive studies had indicated costs considerably in excess of preliminary estimates, and because a considerable number of the stockholders of the Real Estate Company "could not see their way to acquiesce in the

proposition of devoting, individually, their share of the proceeds of the disposal of the present Opera House, as and when sold, to the erection of a new one, under the responsibility and ownership of the Real Estate Company."

The announcement listed reasons for Kahn's purchase of the 57th Street site and the offer he made of it to the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company. He was said to have bought it because he believed the location to be desirable, especially in view of subway construction in the area; because parking facilities were ample; because of the lack of traffic congestion; and because he found the cost of the land to be much less than what it would have been for a plot of similar, or even considerably smaller, size in other acceptable locations.[154]

But the 57th Street site seemed all but eliminated as a possible site for a new Metropolitan Opera House. On February 16, 1928, Kahn sent a telegram to Cutting telling him that he, Kahn, had been approached by people who wanted to take part of the 57th Street site for use as a replacement for Carnegie Hall and asked for a response from Cutting who answered with a telegram to Kahn on the same day telling him to make whatever plans for the site he cared to.[155] In early April, there appeared a report that Kahn had advised the controllers of the Philharmonic Orchestra that it would have as a new home the 57th Street site,[156] but nothing came of the matter. Shortly after the appearance of the report, the matter of the Columbia

project began to move in what seemed to be a very positive direction for the opera, and the likelihood that the 57th Street site finally would be home to the opera became small indeed.

Nor was there to be a new variety or musical comedy theater on the property immediately east of Kahn's property on West 57th Street. In 1928, the office building erected by the Hearst interests occupying the west block front of Eighth Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets was completed. Designed by Joseph Urban and George B. Post and Sons, it was called the International Magazine Building and had a facade which featured motifs related to art and music and an auditorium. The architectural treatment of the facade of the building, which suggests something of the facade of the Ziegfeld Theater (in the design of which Urban also was involved) is removed from the usual style used for office structures, and may at the least have been carried over from an earlier plan for the vaudeville theater reported to have been intended for the site.[157]

In 1928, Otto Kahn was involved in a real estate transaction having to do with another property on West 57th Street. In earlier 1928, Lew Leslie ran the night club, Les Ambassadeurs, in the space a short distance east of Carnegie Hall at 140 West 57th Street which had been Le Perroquet de Paris, administered by Roger Wolfe Kahn, band leader and son of Otto Kahn. By midsummer, Leslie also

had withdrawn from the location, and Mike Mindlin was reported to be negotiating with Otto Kahn to convert the room to a 500-seat film theater.[158] An agreement was reached whereby Mindlin paid an annual rental fee of $21,000 and twenty-five per cent of net profit on the operation to Kahn and was to remodel the space into a theater at his, Mindlin's, own expense.[159]

The Hearst interests were active in real estate matters in the period in the block immediately east of the one which included the location of the former Kahn night club. In 1928, they bought 54 West 57th Street and 50 West 56th Street, adding these properties to their holdings in the east block front of Sixth Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets, and the following year bought other properties in the immediate vicinity, all of which, by early 1929, gave them ownership of the largest part of the west end of the block bounded by Fifth and Sixth Avenues and by 56th and 57th Streets.[160]

Arthur Brisbane sold the Ritz Tower which he had developed to William Randolph Hearst, a sale actually made in November 1927, but not recorded until the following February. The Ritz Tower, still standing, is a forty-one story apartment-hotel at the northeast corner of 57th Street and Park Avenue, and was adjacent to another property owned by Hearst which extended from the Ritz Tower northward to 58th Street.[161]

58th Street

During 1928, there still seemed an intention to build the theater which had been planned originally by the Roxy Theatres Corporation for a site very near the Ritz Tower and the growing 57th Street corridor. The Roxy Mansion was planned for construction at the northeast corner of 58th Street and Lexington Avenue, and was now called simply the Mansion after the project was assumed by the Fox group. It was to be one of several so-called de luxe category houses being built by Fox and was reported to be up in steel on its site.[162]

The plans for the overall project appear to have undergone modification during the course of 1928. As late as September 1928, a commercial listing of building contracts awarded in New York City listed the project as one for a two-story theater to measure 310 feet by 120 feet, and thirty-seven feet by 215 feet;[163] whereas, in November, the same listing identified the project as one for "2 and 10-sty brick and stone mansion theatre" to measure 310 feet by 210 feet, and thirty-seven feet by 215 feet.[164]

During 1928, the new Proctor's Theater was being constructed on a site which included the site of the earlier Proctor's Theater on 58th Street west of Third Avenue with an entrance on Third Avenue, and across the street from, and a short distance east of, the projected Mansion Theater. While the new Proctor's was realized,

the Mansion was not. As a result, midtown Manhattan from Fifth Avenue eastward continued to be served in 1928 by two major theaters only: Proctor's 58th Street (excepting during the time of construction of the newer theater); and Loew's Lexington at the corner of 50th Street and Lexington, built by Oscar Hammerstein as his last effort to establish a successful opera house. (The theater had two rows of boxes on either side of the auditorium.) Loew provided it with a smoking gallery and achieved a successful operation in administering it.[165]

During the course of the 1920s, there were indications that various other film organizations were interested in building in the area, but no plan was being actively considered until the Roxy Theatres Corporation began making plans for its Roxy Mansion Theater eight blocks north at 58th Street and Lexington Avenues. Had not the economic difficulties of the following year modified expansion plans, the east midtown area might well have been able to support a theatrical center of some size based on the developing and affluent neighborhood. William Fox in particular suffered problems in late 1929, having extended his financial commitments quite far through purchase in 1929 of controlling interest in the large Loew organization. His difficulties in 1929 may be the reason for the failure of the Mansion project. But there seemed to be the potential at the least for a successful neighborhood theater operation, given the

health of Proctor's and the Loew Lexington farther south.

On the other hand, as the 1920s began to come to a close, there did not seem to be much hope for a brilliant theatrical future for the Columbus Circle neighborhood.' On April 1, 1928, the lease held by the Shuberts on Hearst's Cosmopolitan Theater expired,[166] and they did not request renewal. They were said to have had a number of dark houses among their holdings at the time, and the fact that the area around the Cosmopolitan was in disarray because of subway excavations for the new Eighth Avenue line did not help matters.[167] Their occupancy of the theater began shortly after Ziegfeld left it at the closing of Louie the 14th, but, despite earlier plans to bring a greater degree of theatrical activity of major importance to the area, the Cosmopolitan continued to have difficulty in operation.

In the spring of 1928, the Hearst interests acquired a long-term leasehold on the property at 300-308 West 59th Street. The property included the southwest corner of 59th Street and Broadway, on the same block with and just above the Cosmopolitan. The leasehold gave control to the Hearst group of the largest part by far of the block between 58th and 59th Streets and between Broadway and Columbus Avenue which probably was especially attractive as an assemblage since the Columbus Circle subway access was being enlarged through construction of the major interchange between the I.R.T. and Independent

systems.[168] Whatever plans there might have been for development of the site, after the construction of a single new theater, the Ziegfeld, and the abeyance of rumors concerning otherearst-connected theatrical projects in the period 1925 to 1927, there was no new talk of theater building coming out of the Hearst organization.

62nd Street

In 1928, the Century, located a block above Columbus Circle between 62nd and 63rd Streets and fronting on Central Park West, was not faring well either. It was housing transfers from better located theaters of plays which were doing less well financially than they had been when fresh,[169] but the Shuberts, who owned it, were having difficulty booking it in any case.[170]

Early in 1928, there seemed to be continued interest on the part of the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company in the Century site, or a modified Century building, as the home for the opera. But then, consideration of the site was largely set aside during the period in later 1928 when there seemed strong likelihood that the Columbia land would be the chosen site.

In early May, Lee Shubert sent a letter to Kahn telling him that he had received what he apparently thought a generous offer for a portion of his holdings in the block which included the Century and, while assuring Kahn that he preferred to sell to the opera, asked for a

definitive decision from the Metropolitan. Shubert enclosed a copy of the letter in which the offer was made. Kahn immediately sent a letter to Cutting enclosing a copy of Shubert's letter to him, and telling Cutting that he, Kahn, could only tell Shubert that a decision on the opera site could not be reached for another month or two, even though that very likely would mean the loss of the Century site. He asked Cutting to speak to him, Kahn, about the matter.[171]

The offer made to the Shuberts was for the Century Theater property only,[172] which they sold in May to Leo S. Bing of Bing and Bing who in turn sold it to Bricken Construction, reportedly for use for a large apartment house.[173] The Century was demolished in 1930.

The interrelationship of theatrical and nontheatrical interests as it affected land development and locational decisions in midtown Manhattan reached a climactic point on September 6, 1928. On that date John D. Rockfeller, Jr. signed a document which formally initiated the sequence events which led eventually to the development of Rockefeller Center with its large theaters, broadcasting studios and other spaces utilized by the theatrical industry. This sequence of events reflected the interest being evidenced by land developers in locations other than the immediate Times Square area for theatrical developments.

But Rockefeller Center was still a few years away in 1928, and, during the course of the year, the property on which it came to be built was being consideredfor use for a new Metropolitan Opera House, together with surrounding commercial development. The opera project was not realized, but the idea of a commercial office development for the general site was modified, and became Rockefeller Center.

The year 1928 was not as active as 1927 had been in the number of theatrical and broadcasting facilities opened in midtown Manhattan. But there continued to be reports in 1928 of formulation by some of the largest theatrical organizations of plans for construction of very sizable new theaters for combination film and stage presentations. The sites for these projected theaters were to be on, very near, or just above, Times Square, and, had they been built, the theaters would have continued a pattern seen in the immediately preceding years of intensification of the theatrical density of the Times Square area.

At least one of these reported plans included a sizable office tower larger than the Paramount Building, and, if built, would have continued a trend of construction of large theaters which were joined, as far as zoning regulations in New York City would permit, with a large tower. The culminating point for this kind of project prior to World War II would be Rockefeller Center.

In the area just below 42nd Street, the expansion of the garment center continued in 1928, and with the expansion, there was further talk of demolition of theaters in the vicinity. And, in fact, one large theater, the Broadway, closed on January 1, 1929 after the New Year's Eve presentation, and was demolished shortly thereafter. The Casino at 39th Street and Broadway came down in 1930.

Overall, the theatrical projects being planned were more and more frequently of very great size. The growing theatrical companies which were building, or planning to build, these theaters required larger sums of money, and continued to use the assistance of some of the major banking houses in lower Manhattan.

Some of the banks also were involved in corporate amalgamations affecting theatrical organizations. One of the most significant of these was the development of the relationship in 1928 between the Radio Corporation of America with the Keith-Albee vaudeville firm. This relationship brought film and theater concerns together with broadcasting and nontheatrical organizations of great size, and out of this meeting came the creation of Radio-Keith-Orpheum in October 1928.

RCA held a significant number of stock shares of RKO, and Keith-Albee-Orpheum became one of the firms placed under the control of the new holding company which was RKO. With connections with almost all aspects of the

worlds of theater and broadcasting, RCA had to be concerned with finding space for all needed facilities.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. had begun the formal sequence of events which eventually had issue in the development of Rockefeller Center shortly before RKO was organized, and, little more than a year later, when it appeared that the opera project for the Columbia property was not going to be feasible in the form that had been discussed, the Rockefeller group began talks with representatives of the radio group of which RCA still was part. These talks culminated in an agreement whereby RCA and affiliated companies were to be the largest single tenant in Rockefeller Center, which became the most significant complex to its time, at least in the United States, of theater and broadcasting facilities.

It also became a major new landmark, but its immediate influence on locational trends in midtown was limited by the economic conditions caused by the Great Depression. There was no resumption of commercial building activity on a major scale in New York City until the 1950s, but until that time, and for many years following, the Rockefeller Center complex was the home of a large number of firms with interests in theater and broadcasting. At least one major broadcasting corporation, the National Broadcasting Company, continues to maintain its main office in the RCA Building.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

[1] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (December 29, 1928): 7.

[2] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (September 8, 1928): 8.

[3] Paul D. Cravath was a member of the board of directors of RCA Photophone, Inc.

[4] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (May 5, 1928): 7.

[5] "Princess Coming Down, Loser for 18 Years," Variety, May 30, 1928, p. 50. The project for the Princess Theater site was not realized at the time, and the theater was not demolished until 1955.

[6] "Keith's B'way Sold; Commercial Bldg. Site," Variety, November 14, 1928, p. 1; and Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (November 17, 1928): 10.

[7] "Keith's May Sell B'way," Variety, August 28, 1928, p. 42.

[8] "Keith's Broadway Ended," Variety, January 2, 1929, p. 9.

[9] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (August 4, 1928): 9; and "42nd and 7th Ave. Deal Takes in Two Theatres," Variety, December 26, 1928, p. 47.

[10] "42d St. Not for $2 Films, Fox Discovers," Variety, May 2, 1928, p. 23.

[11] "Fox After 4 Broadway Houses for Talkers," Variety, October 10, 1928, p. 1.

[12] "Zieggy Reviving 'Frolic' Floor Shows with Cantor," Variety, September 5, 1928, p. 49.

[13] "$10,000 Weekly Profit Is Figured from Roof Cabaret," Variety, November 7, 1928, p. 1.

[14] "Night Club Reviews: Ziegfeld Roof," Variety, January 9, 1929, p. 64.

[15] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (June 2, 1928): 7; Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (August 25, 1928): 7; and Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (October 20, 1928): 13.

[16] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (January 4, 1928): 7.

[17] "Wiring Hip for Talker," Variety, May 23, 1928, p. 7.

[18] "N. Y. Hip May Be Sold," Variety, August 15, 1928, p. 1.

[19] "Rossheim Denies, But Warner Mum on Deal," Variety, September 5, 1928, p. 5.

[20] "Harry Warner Says Six-Year Contract with Bankers for Warners Retention-Business," Variety, November 21, 1928, p. 3.

[21] "Stanley's New Bankers," Variety, May 16, 1928, p. 3.

[22] "Warners After 100% of Stanley for Full Operation--May Buy Partners," Variety, December 5, 1928, p. 15.

[23] "Harry Warners Says Six-Year Contract."

[24] "Warners After 100%."

[25] "F. N.'s N. Y. Exch. Moving," Variety, December 19, 1928, p. 7.

[26] "Lew Golder Heading Warners' Booking Office, with Kemp on Books--Darling on Shorts," Variety, December 19, 1928, p. 24.

[27] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (April 28, 1928): 7.

[28] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (April 28, 1928): 7.

[29] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (August 11, 1928): 11.

[30] "Inside Stuff--Pictures," Variety, October 3, 1928, p. 49.

[31] "Loew and Publix Disassociate Joint Operation Policy of Theatres--Found Unfeasible," Variety, August 22, 1928, p. 7.

[32] "Niggemeyer at Capitol," Variety, April 18, 1928, p. 12.

[33] "Prod. Depts'. Offices," Variety January 25, 1928, p. 21

[34] "Publix-Loew's 113 Weeks: Stage Unit Shows Country's Trend," Variety, May 23, 1928, p. 41.

[35] "The Paul Ash Record," Variety, May 9, 1928, p. 4.

[36] "Film House Reviews: Paramount," Variety, May 30, 1928, p. 40.

[37] In its review of the Ash unit for the week of August 4, 1928, Variety mentioned that "Carmile Vittoo's settings and Charles Le Maire's costumes couldn't have been improved upon." "Film House Reviews: Paramount," Variety, August 8, 1928, p. 37.

[38] "Publix 'Book' Units As Dressed-Up Tab Santley-Staged," Variety, May 30, 1928, p. 35.

[39] "A. J. Balaban Takes On Special Attractions, Acts and M. C.'s in Film Houses for Next Season," Variety, August 15, 1928, p. 22.

[40] "But 3 Producers on Publix Units," Variety, December 19, 1928, p. 26.

[41] "'Talking' House of 8,500 on N. Y. Site," Variety, May 16, 1928, p. 5.

[42] "Inside Stuff--Pictures," Variety, October 3, 1928, p. 49.

[43] "42d St. Not for $2 Films."

[44] "Film House Reviews: Loew's New York," Variety, February 15, 1928, p. 37.

[45] "Fox After Reade Theatres; Ask $24,500,000 for 27 Houses," Variety, September 5, 1928, p. 5.

[46] "Wm. Fox Buying Central Site," Variety, November 28, 1928, p. 4.

[47] "K-A-O Stages to Be Remodeled for Film House Presentations," Variety, March 21, 1928, p. 1.

[48] "Keith Office Move," Variety, October 3, 1928, p. 34.

[49] "Albee Sells K-A-O Stock--Kennedy Bankers Pay $4,500,000," Variety, May 16, 1928, p. 1.

[50] "Radio and Keith Tie-Up; New Holding Co. As Operator," Variety, October 24, 1928, p. 5.

[51] "R-K-O Over," Variety, November 14, 1928, p. 12.

[52] "KAO Turns Dull and Lower on Publication of RCA Deal Terms; Loew Spurts; Warners at 116," Variety, October 24, 1928, p. 11.

[53] "Keith's Leadership? Selection Soon by Sarnoff," Variety, October 31, 1928, p. 1.

[54] "R-K-O's Board," Variety, December 12, 1928, p. 34.

[55] "R-K-O's President Named, But Entire Keith Staff Is Awaiting Reorganization," Variety, December 5, 1928, p. 25.

[56] "Albee Sells K-A-O Stock."

[57] "Stanley Units Rotating in 8 Cities," Variety, March 14, 1928, p. 13.

[58] "Joe Plunkett in New Office," Variety, April 18, 1928, p. 10.

[59] "Film House Reviews: Strand," Variety, May 30, 1928, p. 40.

[60] "Units Out of Strand," Variety, May 16, 1928, p. 22.

[61] "Vitaphone at Strand, N. Y., Replaces Presentation; Orchestra Cut to 20 Men," Variety, May 23, 1928, p. 27; and "Strand's Talking Start," Variety, May 30, 1928, P. 21.

[62] "Inside Stuff--Pictures," Variety, October 3, 1928, p. 49.

[63] "B'way's New 6,000-Seater Will Be, If So, Joint Holding by Stanley Company and K-A-O," Variety, April 18, 1928, p. 4.

[64] Irving Zeidman, The American Burlesque Show (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967), pp. 64-67.

[65] Ibid., p. 63.

[66] "Reade's Lease on Columbia," Variety, May 2, 1928, p. 52.

[67] "Films in Columbia?," Variety, May 30, 1928, p. 45.

[68] "3-a-Day Burlesque and Talkers for Columbia's N. Y., New Policy," Variety, October 3, 1928, p. 38.

[9] "10-Story Bldg. on Strip," Variety, December 19, 1928, p. 36.

[70] "News from the Dailies," Variety, October 17, 1928, p. 75; and Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged for the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1928, 118 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1929): 56. In 1928, 239 West 48th Street was the address also of Louisa Leone. The theater building was converted to use in 1956 as part of Leone's Restaurant. RED, p. 140.

[71] Benjamin W. Morris to R. Fulton Cutting, January 13, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[72] Otto Kahn to Benjamin W. Morris, December 28, 1927, Kahn Collection.

[73] Benjamin W. Morris to R. Fulton Cutting, January 13, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Benjamin W. Morris to F. Fulton Cutting, January 15, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[76] Benjamin W. Morris to R. Fulton Cutting, February 21, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[77] John L. Tonnele to Benjamin W. Morris, February 29, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[78] Memorandum from Benjamin W. Morris to R. Fulton Cutting, Cornelius Bliss, Otto Kahn, and De Lancey Kountze, March 1, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[79] Memorandum dated March 10, 1928, revised March 12, 1928, written by Benjamin W. Morris and entitled Considerations of Sites and a Suggested Method of Procedure, Kahn Collection.

[80] Memorandum concerning a meeting of R. Fulton Cutting, Cornelius Bliss and Benjamin W. Morris, written by Morris, March 12, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[81] Otto Kahn to Benjamin W. Morris, April 28, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Benjamin W. Morris to R. Fulton Cutting, April 25, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[84] Otto Kahn to Benjamin W. Morris, April 26, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[85] Benjamin W. Morris to Otto Kahn, April 27, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[86] Ibid.

[87] John L. Tonnele to benjamin W. Morris, April 27, 1928, Kahn Collection; and Benjamin W. Morris with copies to R. Fulton Cutting, Otto Kahn and John L. Tonnele, April 30, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[88] Otto Kahn to R. Fulton Cutting, May 4, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[89] Ivy Lee to Otto Kahn, May 5, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[90] Otto Kahn to Benjamin W. Morris, May 7, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[91] Benjamin W. Morris to Otto Kahn, May 10, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Otto Kahn to Benjamin W. Morris, May 11, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[94] Ivy Lee to Otto Kahn, May 24, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[95] Alan Balfour, Rockefeller Center (New York: McGraw-Hill, c1928), P. 9.

[96] Memorandum written by Benjamin W. Morris, May 25, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[97] Memorandum written by BenjaminW. Morris, June 15, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[98] Edward Ziegler to Benjamin W. Morris, June 28, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[99] Memorandum from Benjamin W. Morris to Otto Kahn, June 22, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[100] Balfour, p. 9.

[101] Memorandum "Re: Metropolitan Opera House," Benjamin W. Morris to R. Fulton Cutting, Otto Kahn, Cornelius N. Bliss, Robert S. Brewster, DeLancey Kountze and J. Pierpont Morgan, August 30, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[102] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 123 (January 26, 1929): 7.

[103] Ivy Lee to Otto Kahn, December 14, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[104] Balfour, pp. 9-12.

[105] R. Fulton Cutting, June 28, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[106] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 123 (January 26, 1929): 7.

[107] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 123 (January 26, 1929): 7.

[108] Balfour, pp. 11-12.

[109] "Rockets at Roxy's Indef.," Variety, March 21, 1928, p. 15.

[110] "Film House Reviews: Roxy," Variety, May 16, 1928, p. 39.

[111] "Film House Reviews: Roxy," Variety, May 30, 1928, p. 40.

[112] "Film House Reviews: Roxy," Variety, February 29, 1928, p. 36.

[113] "Roxy's Production Costs," Variety, March 7, 1928, p. 7.

[114] "Roxy Anniversary with Roxy Medal," Variety, March 21, 1928, p. 11.

[115] "Roxy Will Stick," Variety, May 30, 1928, p. 7.

[116] "Inside Stuff--Pictures," Variety, October 3, 1928, p. 49.

[117] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 123 (April 30, 1928): 9.

[118] RED, pp. 147, 149, 742.

[119] "Roxy Music Hall Show; No films," Variety, April 17, 1929, p. 2.

[120] "Publix Buys Plant For Productions," Variety, February 22, 1928, p. 9. The facility reportedly bought by Publix may have been a building located at 447-449 West 49th Street. However, as late as 1931, the land at that address still was listed in one source as belonging to A. L. Erlanger Realty Corporation, located at 214 West 42nd Street, the address of the New Amsterdam Building. See RED, p. 144. It is not clear whether it might have been the building as opposed to the land at 447-449 West 49th Street which might have been purchased by Publix.

[121] "Harris Back at Capitol," Variety, August 22, 1928, p. 26.

[122] "Film House Reviews," Variety, February 22, 1928, p. 34. Dolly Tree was given credit for designing the costumes.

[123] "Plans for a Theatre Await Max Reinhardt; Producer's Arrival Here Uncertain, Says Messmore Kendall, Interested in Project," New York Times, August 18, 1928, p. 7.

[124] "Kendall Building House In N. Y. for Reinhardt," Variety, May 2, 1928, p. 1.

[125] Joseph Urban to Otto Kahn, July 20, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[126] "B'way's New 6000-Seater."

[127] "K-A B'way House Report for P. D. C.," Variety, April 20, 1927, p. 9.

[128] "K-A-O Stages to Be Remodeled."

[129] "Shuberts Wiring Booth and Shubert in N. Y.," Variety, December 26, 1928, p. 47.

[130] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121, (March 10, 1928): 13; and RED, p. 150.

[131] "U Closing Colony and Retains Central," Variety, April 18, 1928, p. 23.

[132] "New Ziegfeld in Loop," Variety, June 13, 1928, p. 54; and "Ziegfeld's Colony Closed," Variety, August 8, 1928, p. 44.

[133] "New Ziegfeld in Loop."

[134] "Ziegfeld's Colony Closed."

[135] "Colony Deal Cold," Variety, October 10, 1928, p. 46.

[136] "2 New Houses in Sight; One May Go to Ziegfeld," Variety, January 25, 1928, p. 57.

[137] Record and Guide Quarterly Containing the Real Estate Records of Manhattan Arranged For the Period of January--December (Inclusive), 1928, 118 (New York: F. W. Dodge Corp., 1929): 198; and Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (April 28, 1928): 11.

[138] Real Estate Record and Buyers Guide, 121 (January 14, 1928): 58.

[139] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, January 11, 1928, p. 46.

[140] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, February 1, 1928, p. 47.

[141] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (March 31, 1928): 7.

[142] "Night Club Reviews," Variety, July 18, 1928, p. 57.

[143] "Lopez' 3 St. Regis Rooms," Variety, September 26, 1928, p. 53.

[144] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 118 (November 20, 1926): 10.

[145] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (February 25, 1928): 13.

[146] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 123 (January 26, 1929): 7.

[147] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (May 26, 1928): 6; and Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (December 15, 1928): 6. Carpenter was the head of the syndicate developing the Lincoln Building on East 42nd Street.

[148] Minutes of the meeting of January 6, 1928 of the board of directors of the National Broadcasting Company, Young Collection; and Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (January 28, 1928): 13.

[149] Minutes of the meeting of December 21, 1928 of the Board of Directors of the National Broadcasting Company, Young Collection.

[150] "Sight and Sound Perfection Looked for within 2 to 5 Years," Variety, January 18, 1928, p. 9.

[151] "N. B. C.'s Concert Booking Bureau with Engles Head," Variety, May 9, 1928, p. 76.

[152] "Judson's Uptown Studio," Variety, June 20, 1928, p. 56.

[153] "News from the Dailies," Variety, February 22, 1928, p. 44.

[154] STATEMENT FOR THE PRESS from the Metropolitan Opera Company marked Draft not used, dated February 1928, Kahn Collection.

[155] Telegram from Otto Kahn to R. Fulton Cutting, February 16, 1928, Otto Kahn Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey; and telegram from R. Fulton Cutting to Otto Kahn, February 16, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[156] "Philharmonic's New Home," Variety, April 4, 1928, p. 51.

[157] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (February 11, 1928): 9.

[158] "Kahn's Nite Club May Become Sure Seater," Variety, August 1, 1928, p. 1.

[159] "Mindlin's Kahn Deal," Variety, August 15, 1928, p. 5.

[160] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (August 11, 1928); and RED, p. 168.

[161] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (February 11, 1928): 13.

[162] "Fox's New Line-Up of 8 Big De Luxes," Variety, March 7, 1928, p. 7.

[163] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (September 22, 1928): 40.

[164] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 122 (November 3, 1928): 40.

[165] "Film House Reviews: Lexington," Variety, February 22, 1928, p. 34.

[166] "Dowling's Cosmopolitan?," Variety, April 11, 1928, p. 47.

[167] "Shuberts Turn Theatre Back to W. R. Hearst," Variety, March 21, 1928, p. 59.

[168] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (June 16, 1928): 11.

[169] "Inside Stuff on Legit," Variety, February 22, 1928, p. 49.

[170] "Shuberts Turn Theatre."

[171] Lee Shubert to Otto Kahn, May 1, 1928, Kahn Collection; and Otto Kahn to R. Fulton Cutting, May 2, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[172] F. A. Wyckoff to Lee Shubert, April 27, 1928, Kahn Collection.

[173] Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 121 (May 26, 1928): 10.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: 1929 AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

In an article of early 1929, the Wall Street Journal called 1928 the most momentous year, in many respects, in the history of the motion picture industry. It stated that the year probably marked the final stages of the "transformation of amusements into the realm of big business", and that even bigger developments were on their way.[1] The article mentioned both film production and exhibition as being largely the province of the five major organizations in the industry: Paramount, Loew, Warner, Fox, and RKO. But it laid stress on control of the circumstances of film exhibition, and this, inevitably, involved the matter of theatrical real estate. By 1929, theatrical real estate both in and beyond midtown Manhattan had become a vital consideration in the affairs of the industry leaders. In 1928, the large companies had acquired chains of independent theaters to the point that, in early 1929, only a few small independent theater operators were left. Expansion in the new year 1929 was likely to take the form of new affiliations among the

large companies.[2]

The scope of corporate maneuvers in the industry had come to embrace organizations of great size and power. The Wall Street Journal saw the entry of the Radio Corporation of America into talking films as important, RCA "representing as it does the most powerful banking and business interests in the country."[3] RKO, the theater affiliate of RCA, was seen as one of the likely candidates to purchase control of Loew, itself a vast organization. Loew was thought possibly to be open to takeover in part due to the death in 1927 of its founder, Marcus Loew, who had exercised careful management of his firm.

The article in the Wall Street Journal provided some detail on the Loew real estate holdings, which were seen to be particularly attractive. Most of these holdings had been acquired as long ago as 1910, and many of the properties had been depreciated to a degree at which they were substantially undervalued. This undervaluation had the result also of undervaluing the whole of the Loew holdings, and was all the greater incentive for takeover by another firm. The Loew State Theater on Times Square was singled out as an outstanding example of unrealistic valuation. It had cost $2,500,000 to build, opening in November 1921, and, by early 1929, had been written down to a value of about $1,500,000 through depreciation. Yet the property was appraised at between $6,000,000 and $7,000,000.[4]

This concern with particular pieces of property and their worth was a manifestation of a general concern among many major theatrical firms with land holdings and with the use of these holdings.

This Wall Street Journal article appeared shortly after the announcement in January 1929 that the William Fox interests had completed acquisition of a number of independent theaters through merger or purchase. These theaters had a combined seating capacity of over 280,000 and a combined average annual net profit of $5,000,000. They were in the greater New York and surrounding metropolitan area, and were scheduled to become part of Fox Metropolitan Playhouses, the stock of which would be wholly owned by Fox Theatres Corporation. The new acquisition was said to have given Fox the largest number of theater seats in the metropolitan New York area, the area reported to be the most profitable center for theaters in the world.[5]

The Wall Street Journal article referred to the Loew real estate as a thing of value as real estate, not mentioning the particular theatrical function of the building. The value of the Loew State Theater was due in large measure, if not wholly, to its location on Times Square. But the location had been made important through the function of the Square as theater center, as a center for theatrical structures which were important to their operators also for their ability to attract and house

admission-paying audiences. And it was the animation and force which these audiences brought to the Square which gave it its newly commanding position as both theater center and as one of the most costly stretches of real estate in New York City.[6]

And it was this desire to house the largest number of customers which resulted in theater acquisitions such as those made in 1929 and earlier by the Fox interests. With the acquisitions announced in early 1929, Fox Theatres Corporation expected to earn a gross profit of approximately $100,000,000 a year, and, together with the income of the west coast circuit, approximately $135,000,000.[7] Especially in terms of dollar value in 1929, these were large sums of money, reflecting something of the standing of the theater industry in the national economy.

With this new acquisition and including the west coast theaters, Fox held about 700,000 theater seats, and reportedly expected this to rise in 1929 to 1,000,000.[8] And a little later in 1929, it was the Fox organization which gained effective control of Loew, creating an enormous new giant in the theater industry.

By 1928, it had become commonplace to refer to the industry in terms suggestive of great size. There were vast sums of money involved, and reports of new developments of major importance concerning the large industry organizations, reports which often had to do with

real estate. The announcement in early 1929 of the Fox acquisitions had followed closely reports of plans for a greater RKO theater for Broadway, and for a Fox house for Broadway with a larger seating capacity than Fox' own Roxy.[9] The stress on large theater size was not new, but the degree of its importance to the industry as 1929 began was no less than it had been. During the Christmas holiday season of late 1928 and early 1929, while the legitimate theaters had seen mediocre returns, the large Times Square theaters had earned a gross income of over $1,000,000 in admission prices. The Roxy took in $143,900; the Strand, $75,000; the Capitol, $97.900; and the Paramount, $82,000. The Hippodrome, not very near Times Square, and with no first-run film, nevertheless had a large capacity and a stage show with its film, as did the major Times Square theaters, and it earned $107,000, a figure exceeded only by the larger Roxy's income.[10] The Roxy, the largest of the film theaters in the Times Square area, presented five full stage and film presentations on Sunday and attracted an average of 35,000 people. In the immediate theatrical district, there were more than 40,000 seats sold two to five times every Sunday.[11]

Thus, during the course of the later 1920s, the theatrical industry came to be characterized by great size. The audiences for their productions were becoming immense; corporate structures of organizations in the fields were growing enormously; and the quantity of land

used by the corporations to build various kinds of facilities had become very substantial.

The main offices for most of the major corporations in theater and broadcasting were located in New York City, and it was in midtown Manhattan where the growth of these industries made their greatest impact on land use in New York City.

New York City, the commercial and financial center of the country, had been the primary theatrical center for many years, and on this base, an enormous complex of organizations in the fields of theater, music, motion pictures, and broadcasting arose. The greatest number of the primary offices, studios, theaters, and other facilities for these organizations were located in midtown Manhattan and the locations for these were not randomly chosen. Selection of site, especially for theater buildings, was a matter of the greatest importance.

In general the operative factors influencing the relation between theater and broadcasting and their locational concerns were:

1. most fundamentally, the overall strength of the nation's economy.

2. the concomitant expansion of the real estate market.

3. the growth of the worlds of performing arts, especially the areas of film and radio.

4. the need for various kinds of space for the expanding theater and broadcasting industries.

5. the need for this space to be located so as to be convenient to clients, audiences and like organizations.

6. the development of new public transportation lines.

7. the increasing competition among large film theaters for audiences.

8. the entry of nontheatrical land developers and realtors into theatrical and broadcasting locational concerns.

9. the entry of the major financial institutions into the concerns of theater and broadcasting.

During the later 1920s, the interplay of these factors helped to determine where theater and broadcasting facilities would be located in midtown Manahttan, and which locations would be considered for land development projects. These factors played a role in the 1920s in moving the center of gravity of the theatrical center northward, and in fostering the establishment of major facilities for the broadcasting industry on sites not far from the theatrical center.

By 1925, many of the sites on Times Square already contained theater buildings, and developers of theaters began selecting sites for new buildings either on a side street, sometimes closer to Eighth Avenue than to

Broadway, or in the west Fifties just above Times Square where, by that time, there already existed a few major theaters such as the Capitol and Winter Garden, the new B. S. Moss' Colony Theater just having opened at 53rd Street and Broadway in December 1924.

The development of Rockefeller Center was a climactic point of land development, both theatrical and nontheatrical. Its site extended both above and below 50th Street, and its evolution and development helped to extend major theatrical activity north of Times Square.

But the possibilities for growth of the theatrical center were finite. The New Theater, later named the Century, was opened in 1909 above Columbus Circle and the Columbus Circle IRT subway station, and demolished in 1930. Its history was the story largely of the inability of its management to devise a presentation policy which would bring audiences so far from Times Square, and a reminder that there were limits to the benefit which could accrue to a theater merely from proximity to a subway station.

While theatrical development in the years 1925 through 1928 expanded in the vicinity of Times Square and in the area immediately above it, it came to a halt in the blocks just to the south of the Square. In fact, as 1929 began, one of the major theaters below 42nd Street was closing. The Broadway, one of the larger theaters in New York, was to be razed, and others--the Casino,

Knickerbocker and American Theaters--in the immediate vicinity of the Broadway came down not long thereafter, markedly diminishing the importance to theatrical activity of the area on and just off Broadway between Herald Square and 42nd Street. This change was influenced in large part by the dynamic growth in the 1920s of the garment center in the west Thirties, a growth which claimed more and more space in the area, pushing new theater development northward.

In sum, during the period 1925 through 1928, there were no new theaters opened below 43rd Street, although projects for 42nd Street were reported; two opened on Times Square; eight opened on the side streets off Times Square; and ten opened between 48th Street and 58th Street. In addition, there were at least as many projects which were reported, planned or rumored, but not realized, for the area above 48th Street as for the area below.

The expansion of theater-related activities in the Fifties during the late 1920s extended into the area of night clubs. During the later 1920s, a number of night clubs opened in the west Fifties, night clubs which often featured presentations similar in many respects to those seen in the same period in major Broadway theaters featuring revue and musical comedy. They were an extension into a large sector of the Fifties of the performance vitality which characterized both the Times Square vicinity to the south and the 57th Street corridor,

which, more and more in the later 1920s, was the center of concert music life in the city.

The dependence of broadcasting on the talents from theater and music, and the rapid growth of the industry led to the creation of its center in midtown Manhattan in the later 1920s. Prior to 1926, only one major facility, RCA's station WJZ at 33 West 42nd Street, was located in midtown, although other smaller stations were also in the area. But, as network broadcasting became big business, the headquarters for the major broadcasting organizations left lower Manhattan. The new National Broadcasting Company moved into a large new facility in 1927 at 55th Street and Fifth Avenue, and the Columbia Broadcasting System moved into 485 Madison Avenue, at the 52nd Street corner, in 1929.

Among the most significant of the factors which made midtown Manhattan preeminent as a theatrical center was the growth of the subway system in New York City from the first years of the twentieth century. Furthermore, when the subway system began to be capable of bringing large numbers of people into midtown Manhattan, the centers of theatrical and music activity already were there to serve, with their talent pools, the enormous expansion of their own proper activities, as well as the expansion of related activities such as motion pictures and broadcasting. These various fields were interdependent, and organizations in them tended to locate

near one another.

The growth pattern of the subway system affected both the general location in midtown of theatrical organizations; and also influenced their more precise locational patterns within midtown. The introduction of the Lexington Avenue subway line above Grand Central Station was followed, after the end of the recession of the early 1920s, by an expansion of building which included main offices for the Radio Corporation of American, as well as for the National Broadcasting Company, its affiliate, and the Columbia Broadcasting System. The expansion of the Fifties was facilitated also by the construction of the BMT subway line and the promise in the middle 1920s of a new Independent subway system with several subway stations in the vicinity.

But, as was shown to be the case by the experiences of some of the major theaters in the upper Fifties and beyond, proximity to a subway line was no guarantee in itself of successful operation.

During the period 1925 through 1928, organizations which were not essentially concerned with the theater played a greater role than previously in theatrical development. Three of the ten theaters built in the Times Square area--the Paramount, Erlanger and Ethel Barrymore--were built by and/or for organizations with a relatively long history of involvement in the theater, while five were built by the Chanin brothers who had only just begun

to erect theater buildings in Manhattan. Never before had an organization come upon the theater scene in New York to build so many new legitimate playhouses in so short a space of time.

Nor were any of the theaters built above 48th Street in this period built by large theatrical organizations, although some of the projects which were reported considered but which were not realized were said to have been planned by some of the biggest theatrical organizations. The degree to which theater development came to be a matter of concern for nontheatrical organizations strongly suggests that these organizations perceived value in investment in theatrical activity in a time when the income from general theater attendance was growing markedly.

Land development groups also saw value to development in the number of people which a successful theater could draw to an area; and in the prestige value which could accrue to a development through inclusion of a theater with the right kind of policy and production management.

The tendency toward movement of the theatrical center northward into the Fifties was intensified by the real estate interests of nontheatrical groups such as the organizations connected with William Randolph Hearst and his associates, notably Arthur Brisbane, who together held significant amounts of property in the west and east

Fifties. The Hearst group built a large theater for Florenz Ziegfeld, called the Ziegfeld, in the Fifties at a considerable remove from the primary theatrical center, and reports persisted during 1925 that Hearst would build at least one other theater for him in the Columbus Circle area. Hearst also had leased his Cosmopolitan Theater on Columbus Circle to Ziegfeld, but the relation was short lived and the theater, called the Ziegfeld-Cosmopolitan during Ziegfeld's occupancy, was leased to the Shuberts. Nor was the Ziegfeld, on 54th Street at Sixth Avenue, particularly successful, demonstrating again that there seemed to be a limit to how far removed from the central theater district a first-run theater could be without risk of failure as a result of poor choice of location.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr. was adding to his property holdings in the west Fifties during the 1920s and became interested in the plan for a new development to include a new Metropolitan Opera House on the site just above and below 50th Street which became Rockefeller Center, a project which also had a significant connection with the theatrical industry.

The nature of the role played by the Metropolitan Opera in the history of land development in midtown Manhattan in the 1920s suggests the force of a form of institutionalization of certain performance organizations, individuals and/or performance concepts. By institutionalization, a subjective consideration

certainly, is meant here the development of a reputation, however substantial the basis, around an organization, individual or concept which renders, in terms of real estate, particular value to the location of operation of the organization, individual or concept.

The Metropolitan Opera, assuming precedence in the later nineteenth century over the older opera company at the Academy of Music near Union Square, became increasingly popular to a constantly growing audience. It was attractive both for its operatic presentations and for its social parade, and, in terms of real estate considerations, the Metropolitan name became connected with a land development project which included within its scope structures which were not connected in any way with the function of the Metropolitan Opera Company.

Especially after World War I, a moment appears to have come in the cultural life in New York City when a performance institution which had about it a certain prestige and/or commercial appeal might be considered for incorporation within, or for a role as a cornerstone for, development projects not wholly for use by that institution alone.

Particular personalities might be said to have become theatrical institutions. In the period after World War I, Florenz Ziegfeld and Samuel L. Rothafel developed such formidable reputations that powerful groups with real estate and/or theatrical concerns sought their

participation in projects of significant size which would the names of one or the other of the producers.

Institutionalization of performance entities which was not connected immediately with large realty development, but which further exemplifies the nature of the idea of institutionalization, is reflected in the growth of the reputation of certain major theaters established by the Shubert and Klaw and Erlanger organizations, which were the most important operators of legitimate theaters in New York City in the early decades of the twentieth century. Klaw and Erlanger built the New Amsterdam Theater in 1903 which, with Ziegfeld in residence beginning in 1913, was the most prestigious musical comedy/revue theater in the city, while Ziegfeld's Follies series itself became an institution of far-reaching fame. The same was true to an extent of the Shuberts' Winter Garden Theater which was the home of many successful musical productions including the annual Passing Show series.

Theaters and production concepts such as these made of their locations critical focal points and achieved identities far more singular than those of most other legitimate theaters in New York City which simply housed available tenant productions without regard to any concern of continuity of concept or personality.

Other theaters which gained distinct identities were the Empire, flagship theater for Charles Frohman and

Charles Frohman, Inc., and the Music Box Theater, an unusually attractive playhouse which was home to the unusually attractive Music Box Revue series.

The New Amsterdam, Winter Garden and Empire tended to house the more important productions of certain genres of their controlling organizations, a policy which fostered their reputation as homes to some of the most important presentations of the time, and attracted the attention of other theatrical entrepreneurs to their vicinities. The New Amsterdam and Empire were built prior to the time of the large theater/non-theater use complexes such as began to develop in New York City in the 1920s, but the opening of the Winter Garden, although built only eight years after the New Amsterdam at the northernmost periphery of the theater center of the time, well may be said to have been the beginning of activity which, by the time of the period covered in this study, had made of the immediate vicinity of the Winter Garden a major theatrical center which came to include, in 1927, the two largest first-run film/stage presentation theaters in the city.

And it was these major film theaters, especially Rothafel's Roxy, which, well financed and providing lavish presentations, brought great quantities of people into their vicinity over the course of many hours of the day. Building on the locational emphasis provided by earlier important theaters such as the Winter Garden, the Roxy helped to create new boundaries for the theatrical

district.

The legitimate theaters were of much smaller capacity and instigated traffic over a much more restricted period of hours during a given week since they usually only gave eight performances a week, but the capacity and traffic volume of the continuous-run large film houses served to make of the largest of them in the Times Square area landmarks of unprecedented commercial power, and, as such, institutions of a kind of great interest to land developers who were eager to provide magnets for public attention for their realty projects.

Both Florenz Ziegfeld and Samuel L. Rothafel brought significant new theatrical activity to the Fifties in the later 1920s. Perhaps equally as well known for his productions in variety theater in the 1920s as Ziegfeld, Rothafel attached his popular name, "Roxy," and his efforts to the largest theatrical development to come out of the years 1925 through 1928, the Roxy Theater. Rothafel had achieved considerable fame through his activities at the Capitol Theater and through his radio program, "Roxy and his Gang."

At the time of its opening, the Roxy theater had the largest seating capacity of any in the city. The site of the Roxy, the old carbarn for the Seventh Avenue Railway Company, had been bought by another of the city's most prominent realty firms, Bing and Bing, and was reported to be the intended site of several new

playhouses to be built along the lines of the plan pursued by the Chanins at about the same time in the Forties west of Times Square. Edward Albee, head of the Keith-Albee vaudeville chain, had been said to be interested in the site for a large new theater for Keith-Albee, and then came the announcement of Rothafel's involvement in what became a very successful theatrical operation.

The Roxy project was one of the most signficant theatrical real estate projects in the late 1920s. There were few others of such large dimension actually built until the rise of Rockefeller Center in the early 1930s.

Nor were all major projects for theater facilities in the later 1920s realized. William Randolph Hearst was not able to make a performance center of Columbus Circle. Otto Kahn's project for a new Metropolitan Opera House on West 57th Street came to nothing. Nor did the scheme for another Metropolitan Opera House project on the site of what became Rockefeller Center fare any better. But two of these efforts--Kahn's and Hearst's--failed at least in part because the locations involved were just too removed from the center of the activities of which they were to be part, while the third did evolve into a development largely given over to facilities for theater and broadcasting. But the scope of these projects, whether or not realized, is indicative of the growth in New York City in importance of the theatrical industry as it was maturing as a major component of American business.

By 1925, the industry had increasing need for the assistance of some of the great banking institutions of lower Manhattan in order to be able to finance further expansion. Part of this expansion consisted of new land development for theaters, studios and office facilities, many of which were projected for midtown. By 1925, midtown Manahttan had become an extremely valuable stretch of land. High acquisition costs in the area meant greater reliance on the expertise of the banking institutions, and some of these institutions came to be connected in an important way with some of the largest of the theatrical organizations.

The investment banking house of Kuhn, Loeb was instrumental in the development on Times Square of the Paramount Theater, a theater which was extremely well situated to benefit from proximity to subway lines and a prominent position on Times Square as the Square came into maturity as the city's--and the nation's--theatrical center. The location and size of the Paramount structure was such that it was very apparent to a large street traffic along Times Square and a reminder of the Paramount name and product. Great care was taken with the theater's design; prestige tenants took office space in the adjoining Paramount Building skyscraper; and considerable effort was expended in devising the stage variety presentations to accompany the screening of the Famous Players-Lasky films.

Famous Players-Lasky was a very dynamic and acquisitive firm, and frequently was the subject of rumors and reports concerning new corporate combines. But during the later 1920s, virtually every major theatrical and/or broadcasting organization in New York was the subject of such talk.

In the later 1920s, the connection between Kuhn, Loeb and Famous Players-Lasky was by no means the only instance in New York City of a relationship between a major banking firm and a major theatrical organization. In 1928, Radio-Keith-Orpheum had been created as a holding company controlling, among other firms, the Keith-Albee-Orpheum chain of theaters. The Radio Corporation of America, with the assistance of the Lehman Brothers banking firm, had been instrumental in creating RKO, and held a very substantial portion of stock shares in the company. RCA was controlled by the even larger General Electric and Westinghouse companies, and, shortly after the creation of RKO in October 1928, there were reports of plans to effect some form of combination of certain activities of RKO and Paramount (formerly Famous Players-Lasky) and/or Publix, which was affiliated with Paramount.[12]

While this combination was not realized--Paramount was said not to want to be combined with the holding company, RKO, but to be a more equal partner with the larger RCA--RCA did enter into discussions about

another large undertaking a year later. These discussions resulted in an agreement in 1931 that RCA and its related companies would become the primary tenants in Rockefeller Center. This tenancy would result in creation in the Center of a huge complex of theatrical and broadcasting facilities.

Especially in 1928 and in 1929, as mentioned above, there were many rumors concerning merger and acquisition activity among the major theatrical corporations. Among those companies which did participate in mergers and/or acquisition activities were RCA, Keith-Albee, Warner Brothers, First National, Stanley, Fox, and Loew.

There is a sketch dated January 10, 1929 among David Sarnoff's papers which appears to be a chart of a modified organization plan for RKO, which had been created only in the previous October. The sketch includes a component which appears to be labeled "Famous."[13] Famous Players-Lasky had been the formal name until 1927 for the company which eventually became known as Paramount. Any combination of Paramount and RKO would have affected control of a considerable amount of theatrical real estate both in and out of Manhattan.

In late January, Variety reported that two major "deals" were underway: one to combine Paramount Publix with the Loew group and United Artists; and the other for Publix to operate the RKO theaters for five years under

contract.[14] The RKO theaters were the Keith-Albee chain, now administered by RKO, the holding company. Whether the latter "deal" had anything to do with the mention of "Famous" in Sarnoff's reorganization sketch is not clear. The Variety report said that "it is stated" that the Paramount-RKO matter is 90 percent closed. An advantage of the arrangment for RKO was said to have been the choice of film product it would gain.[15]

In mid-February, 1929, Variety reported that Sam Katz, head of Publix, the company which managed and operated the Paramount theater chain, was said virtually to have completed plans for the operation of the Keith theaters.[16] According to the report, there was to be no merger of Publix and RKO operations. Katz was to operate the RKO theaters as a separate entity, and Katz' personnel were to work from the Keith offices.

At this point, there was reported to be a plan for a major new RKO theater on Broadway,[17] and Publix had a major theater in its Paramount on Times Square. In addition there still was talk of a huge new Publix house, possibly for the site then occupied by the New York and Criterion Theaters and owned by Paramount.[18] Paramount officials also were said to have investigated the Columbia Theater at 47th Street and Seventh Avenue in 1928 for possible use, a theater which soon was remodeled for RKO's use and opened as the Mayfair in September 1930.

Publix participation in the operation of the Keith

theaters was said to have involved a plan whereby Publix would acquire a substantial number of RKO shares, but on February 26, 1929, Sam Katz reportedly stated that negotiations between Publix and RKO had been terminated.[19] Variety reported that it was understood that a problem had arisen with regard to the division of certain RKO shares held by RCA.

While there came to be no integration of any of the activities of RCA/RKO and Paramount/Publix, reportedly on February 28, 1929, the already vast Fox organization consummated a major transaction in early 1929 when it gained effective control of Loew. At the time, there had been talk that Warner Brothers was itself very close to acquiring Loew. Warner-Loew discussions were said to have progressed to the point at which attorneys were working at final papers. But, according to report, A. C. Blumenthal, in charge of Fox' realty concerns, who was said to have engineered the transaction, came in when the "Warner's bankers were in the center of their dickering."[20] The transaction gave Fox control of 750 theaters across the country. The gross assets of Loew and Fox were said to have value of approximately $200,000,000.[21] The Fox-Loew transaction added four theaters in the Times Square area to the Fox group. These were the Capitol, Astor, New York, and State. The Capitol and State were large theaters, and with the Roxy, Fox controlled more than 14,000 seats in the lucrative New York market in these

three houses alone.

Paramount and Loew had had an arrangement in 1928 whereby Publix operated the Capitol for Loew, and there were agreements in force between Paramount and Loew which were designed, among other reasons, to prevent the two companies from erecting theaters in specified areas where one or the other already operated theaters.[22] Adolph Zukor, chief officer of Paramount, was said to have seemed indifferent to the Fox-Loew plan when Nicholas Schenck of Loew had advised him of it[23] But in March, there followed a report that Paramount was preparing aggressive action against the new Fox-Loew combine. The first move, according to Variety, was expected to be announcement of new Paramount theaters. The number of Fox-Loew theaters in New York was much greater than the number of Paramount houses there. Some years before, Paramount had been planning to build a number of theaters in New York, but after agreement had been reached with Loew, Loew built the planned theaters.[24] Now those theaters had passed to Fox through its control of Loew.

Despite earlier denials, rumors continued to circulate about an alliance between Paramount and RKO. There was speculation about a union of Paramount with RCA, and about the Publix arrangement with RKO. Lehman Brothers was said to have had qualms about Publix operation of RKO. Lehman, which frequently worked with RCA, reportedly felt that RKO ought to have an opportunity

to handle the Keith theater matter.[25] RKO was only several months old in early 1929. (Lehman Brothers and Blair, another financial firm, underwrote securites issues for RKO in 1929 and 1930.[26])

On March 27, Variety reported that a cable from David Sarnoff in Berlin authorized a statement over his signature stating, in Variety's words, that "any thought of a merging of RCA, RKO and Paramount-Publix is off." Variety stated that this referred to the reported plan for Publix to operate RKO, by which probably was meant the RKO chain of theaters.[27]

However, in April 1929, according to Variety, a plan had been devised primarily by banking houses to bring about a merger of Paramount, RKO, Warner Brothers, and United Artists. The banking houses said to have been involved were Lehman Brothers; Kuhn, Loeb; Goldman, Sachs and Company; and Seligman and Company.[28] Lehman had been connected with RCA/RKO; Kuhn, Loeb, with Paramount/Publix; and Goldman, Sachs and Company with Warner Brothers, while Seligman had worked with the Shubert Theatre Corporation. (Goldman, Sachs had been involved in the failed negotiations between Warner Brothers and Loew before Fox stepped in.) According to report, in the arrangement designed by the banks, David Sarnoff would remain head of RCA, Adolph Zukor of Paramount would assume charge of the producing companies, and Sam Katz would head the theater chains.

Any such plan would have created a new monolith to compete with the also vast Fox-Loew organization. Variety reported that a meeting of the banking house representatives and heads of the several film concerns was scheduled for April 18, 1929.[29]

Then, in early May, Variety reported that a merger agreement between Paramount and Warner Brothers was imminent, and that, if Paramount and Warners did combine, RCA might follow into a new organization in some unspecified way. There were sufficient numbers of reports to suggest that something was happening in the way of efforts to achieve a regrouping of the theatrical interests, possibly in the face of the Fox threat. Since Fox held the largest theater in the New York area, the Roxy, and several others besides, his competition hardly could be expected to watch him hold so much profitable theatrical real estate without making moves of its own.

Paramount was reported to have closed transactions for property on West 45th Street east of its New York Theater, and was said to have plans for a theater with 7,000 seats, or more than the Roxy's 6,200. The theater and an office building would occupy the sites of the New York and Criterion Theaters and the additional property to the east.[30] A large new Publix theater had been rumored for the site for some time. In the face of the Roxy's competition, Paramount/Publix had the 3,600-seat Paramount, less than three years old, but no match for the

Roxy's earning power.

But the economic picture was very different not long afterward following the onset of the Great Depression which had a profound effect on the history of theatrical land use. Paramount, Fox and RKO went into receivership in the early 1930s, but the difficulties encountered by the Fox organization began earlier.

In November 1929, the Attorney General of the United States filed an antitrust suit against Fox, attacking not just its acquisition of Loew, but the whole of the Fox structure, including Fox Theatres Corporation and Fox Film Corporation.[31]

At approximately the same time, late in 1929, the reported refusal of the Fox Theatres Corporation, Roxy Theatres Corporation and William Fox to proceed with contracts to build the Mansion Theater planned for 148 East 58th Street resulted in the filing of a suit against them in the Supreme Court on December 9, 1929. The suit was filed by the Taylor-Fichter Steel Construction Company, Inc. which was said to have gotten the contract for the work in January 1928.[32]

Within a few weeks of the filing of the Attorney General's suit, Fox agreed to vest control of Fox Theatres Corporation and Fox Film Corporation in Harry L. Stuart of Halsey, Stuart,and Company, a banking firm, which had sold many of the Fox securities; John E. Otterson, president of Electrical Research Products, Inc., the sound motion

picture subsidiary of American Telephone and Telegraph; and himself. Fox retained Samuel Untermyer, and in January 1930, they requested the Bankers Bankamerica-Blair and Lehman Brothers, with whom Dillon, Read and Company later joined, to draft a refinancing plan.[33] A modified procedure resulted from resolution of difficulties with Halsey Stuart, and Company, and General Theatre Equipment, a large Fox creditor, acquired control of Fox.

The Fox affair was long and complicated, and is a of the most significant instances of the involvement of financial institutions with a theatrical organization.

Paramount also was in difficulty in the early 1930s. There was no more talk of large new theaters, and toward the end of 1932, it was said to be thought doubtful whether Paramount could avoid receivership.[34] In November 1931, Otto Kahn, because of what were said to be Kuhn, Loeb's feelings of responsibility toward the Paramount securities it had sponsored, persuaded John Hertz to join Paramount as chairman of its finance committee. At the time, two Kuhn, Loeb partners were Paramount directors. But reportedly, Hertz and Adolph Zukor had a serious disagreement, and Kahn ill at home, sought in vain to reconcile them.[35] Kahn's actions suggest the closeness of the tie between his firm and the client firm, Paramount.

Kuhn, Loeb continued its relationship with Paramount into the early 1930s. On January 26, 1933,

Paramount consented to the appointment of receivers in equity, and on March 14, 1933, filed a voluntary petition for bankruptcy. Shortly thereafter, a group bought heavily into Paramount stock and carried on a campaign against Kuhn, Loeb as result of which Kuhn, Loeb removed itself from dealings with Paramount.[36]

The Shubert Theatre Corporation also had a relationship with one of the banking houses. In 1924, J. W. Seligman and Company had provided financing for the new corporation, Shubert Theatre Corporation, which took over the theater interests of Lee and J. J. Shubert. These interests were said to involve eighty-six first-class theaters with a combined seating capacity of more than 130,000, and 60 percent of the nation's legitimate theater business of the time.[37] Seligman was further involved with the Shubert Theatre Corporation in financing a security issue in 1927.[38]

After the onset of the Great Depression, Lee Shubert and Irving Trust were receivers in an equity proceeding involving the Shubert Theatre Corporation. The proceeding began on October 22, 1931 and continued until 1933 when all of the Shubert Theatre properties were sold to Select Theatres Corporation.[39]

Among other persons or organizations connected in the 1920s with major theatrical real estate concerns, Abraham L. Erlanger of the Klaw and Erlanger firm died in 1930, and the Chanins built no more theaters after 1927.

Nor did the Hearst group.

But in the period immediately subsequent to 1928, the Rockefeller interests were involved in the construction of two of the largest theaters in the city, the Radio City Music Hall and the RKO Roxy Theater; and this involved the relationship between the Rockefeller group and RCA/RKO/NBC.

After it was clear that the Metropolitan Opera House would not be built as the centerpiece of development of the Columbia University property which the Rockefeller group had leased in 1928, plans for the project were modified and RCA and its affiliates were signed as tenants for the modified development. But the depression affected the ability of RCA and affiliates to meet their real estate commitments, commitments which extended beyond those to Rockefeller Center.

Furthermore, on May 13, 1930, the United States Department of Justice filed suit which sought, among other things, to compel divestment from General Electric and Westinghouse of their RCA stock.[40] GE, Westinghouse and RCA constituted the "radio group." The suit also sought to enjoin enactment of a plan to "unify" RCA, whereby, among other considerations, the radio patents, radio manufacturing assets of GE and Westinghouse, and "all the stock held by then in NBC, GMRC [General Motors Radio Corporation], RCA Victor and RCA Radiotron were to be vested in RCA or its subsidiaries in exchange for an

aggregate amount of RCA common stock, divided 60% to GE and 40% to Westinghouse, equal to the 6,580,375.1 shares at the time outstanding."[41]

In early 1929, prior to the filing of the government suit, RCA acquired 97 percent of the Victor Talking Machine Company and, in April 1929, the Radio-Victor Corporation of America was organized.[42] RCA had been planning to build a new main office on a parcel acquired at the intersection of Broad and Beaver Streets in lower Manhattan, but, after the acquistion of Victor, it was thought that the new building should be uptown. By the end of October 1929, an agreement was reached whereby RCA and Stone and Webster jointly would construct a building to be known as the RCA-Victor Building at 51st Street and Lexington Avenue. (The site was adjacent to an entrance to the 50th Street station for the Lexington Avenue subway line.)

A few months later, in January 1930, after the agreement for "unification" of RCA had been reached, the Rockefeller group suggested to Owen D. Young, Chairman of the Board of General Electric, which at that time still was a major stockholder in RCA, and to DavidSarnoff, that RCA, RKO and NBC become tenants in the Rockefeller development on Fifth Avenue.[43]

At this point, NBC still was housed at 711 Fifth Avenue at the corner of 55th Street and Fifth Avenue, but reportedly, was in need of additional space. On June 5,

1930, an agreement was reached according to which RCA and NBC were to take approximately 1,000,000 square feet of space in the Rockefeller development, and RKO was to take two large and two small theaters to be included in the buildings. The smaller theaters later were eliminated, and the larger theaters became the Radio City Music Hall and the RKO Roxy, later Center, Theater.[44]

The rental figure for the space in Radio City was said to have seemed reasonable at the time. However, RCA's participation in the project reportedly led to controversy with Stone and Webster over the use of the RCA-Victor Building on Lexington Avenue. RCA bought them out and became sole owner. But, as business conditions continued to deteriorate under the continuing economic depression after the RCA-Victor Building was completed in May 1931, the building suffered severe operating losses. In addition, RCA had contracted to sell the property at Broad and Beaver Streets at a profit of $4,000,000, but the purchaser defaulted.[45]

Early in 1932, RCA, NBC and RKO asked the Rockefeller group for relief from their commitments, but the Rockefeller group was said to be unyielding. RCA put forth its intention to sublet the space. The Rockefeller group was said not to care to consider modification of the realty arrangements unless RCA were in a position to fulfill them. At that point, the antitrust suit still was outstanding, and RCA was indebted to GE and to

Westinghouse for large sums of money.[46]

A settlement of the government action was effected in early September 1932 on the basis of complete separation of RCA from GE and Westinghouse, and embodied in consent decrees dated November 21, 1932. As part of the discharge of its indebtedness, RCA transferred the RCA-Victor Building at 570 Lexington Avenue to GE.

GE and Westinghouse made settlement contingent on adjustment of the lease arrangements made by RCA and its affiliates in the Radio City project. Simultaneously with the consent decrees, arrangements were made with Rockefeller Center, Inc. to reduce by approximately half the space to be taken by RCA, NBC and RKO, and the rental figure was modified. The saving to RCA and affiliates over the period of the twenty-one years of the lease was said to be about $28,500,000. RKO's lease arrangements for the two large theaters were modified also. In consideration, the Rockefeller interests received 100,000 shares of RCA "A" preferred stock, and 100,000 shares of RKO common stock.[47]

The Rockefeller Center project served as a climactic point to activities in theatrical real estate in New York in the period under discussion in a number of ways, one of which was in the matter of the immensity of the dimensions both of the physical plant, another in the scope of the corporate maneuvering and corporate interrelatedness entailed.

There had been other theatrical real estate projects during the course of the 1920s, some of which were not realized. And many of these involved participation of significant names in the worlds of theater, commerce and finance. But these had not been on a scale comparable with the scale of the Rockefeller project. The extent especially of the earlier commitments made by RCA and its affiliates for space in the Radio City development was evidence of the degree of growth which the theatrical industry had experienced, and evidence also that the corporations in command of the industry had reached a new level of importance in the commercial world.

The Rockefeller project, as home to RCA and its affiliates, also bespoke the interrelatedness of the various aspects of the theatrical industry. The group included significant representatives of most of the components of the industry, including live theater, motion pictures and broadcasting, and, through the NBC Artists' Bureau, was connected with the management of prominent figures in the field of music. The project included vast office space for the group, a substantial set of studios for NBC and two large theaters for RKO. Since performers and other production personnel often worked in more than one field within the broad industry, some of these might be involved in activities in more than one corner of the huge complex that became Radio City.

The very site of the Rockefeller project might be seen as a manifestation of intra-industrial connections. During the course of the first decades of the twentieth century, the area just below, around and on Times Square developed as the city's primary theatrical center. In the later 1920s, the chief organizations in broadcasting began to locate in the area on and to the east of Fifth Avenue in the Forties and Fifties as it underwent development. Rockefeller Center occupied a site which lay between Times Square and Fifth Avenue, and so may be said to have functioned as a meeting point or bridge between both the physical neighborhoods and also between the kinds of theatrical concerns of the neighborhoods.

The earlier plan for the Rockefeller development, had it been realized, might not have brought various components of the theatrical industry into one location as it did as a result of the involvement in the project of RCA and its affiliates, but, had a new Metropolitan Opera House been built on the Columbia land, it still would have been a bridge between the developing world of Fifth Avenue and the still growing theater center in and around Times Square.

By the time of the announcement of the Rockefeller lease arrangements with Columbia University, a time when the opera house project seemed likely to be realized on a part of the Columbia property, a number of theaters had been opened in the area above Times Square. The opening

of the huge Roxy Theater at 50th Street and Seventh Avenue in the previous year, 1927, had helped to bring considerable attention to the general area, and there were reports, even before the Roxy opened, of interest among theatrical organizations in sites for large new theaters both above the Roxy and to the east of the Roxy not far from the Rockefeller project.

The subway system also was growing in the number of lines and stations in the area of 50th Street, one of the streets which crossed the Rockefeller project site as well as the Roxy and Capitol, the largest major first-run film and stage presentation house in New York City after the Roxy. Hence, the Rockefeller development seemed to be well positioned, both with regard to transportation, and also with regard to proximity to two vital and growing sections of town.

The earlier plan for the Columbia property, like the later modified scheme devised for Rockefeller Center, also would have involved construction of large amounts of commercial space, and, although to a lesser extent than came to be the case, would have furnished a climactic point to the concept of developing theatrical and nontheatrical space either in contiguous, or in neighboring structures. The New Amsterdam in 1903, and the Strand in 1914, were early, smaller examples of the concept at work, while the Paramount Theater and office building provided the first completed large-scale project

in New York to be based on the concept. Shortly after the Paramount Theater was opened, the Roxy was opened as a building contiguous with a large new hotel structure. Had Otto Kahn's plan for a Metropolitan Opera House project on West 57th Street been realized, it might have included a large studio building which was considered for placement immediately adjacent to the opera house building.

There had been various rumors and reports of other theater and office building for midtown in the later 1920s, and more well might have been built, given the continuing growth of the theatrical industry in the period, had there not been the onset of the Great Depression. There was a report of a broadcasting center project in 1932 for 42nd Street. An office building was said to be intended for construction on the south side of the street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues on the site of the former Murray's Restaurant and the sites of the Liberty and Eltinge Theaters. The building was to include office and studio space for NBC.[48] The report seems curious in light of NBC's earlier commitment to the Rockefeller project. But NBC had provided a new facet to theatrical life on 42nd Street in 1930 when it began operating the New Amsterdam Roof as a broadcasting studio with a large audience, the first instance of the regular use of a theater for broadcasting in New York City. None of NBC's studios at 711 Fifth Avenue had the seating capacity of the New Amsterdam Roof, and demand for seats

for popular broadcasting events had become heavy.

But there was no new broadcasting center and no new theatrical development of any substance anywhere outside the vicinity of 50th Street during the years of the Great Depression. However, the economic difficulties may have saved some major theaters from demolition for a time. The site Hippodrome had been reported to be the location intended for a building project of eighty or more stories, but the theater remained intact until 1939. And, while the Broadway was demolished in 1929, and the American, Casino and Knickerbocker Theaters came down not long thereafter, many other theaters near the garment center remained standing in the 1930s as the demand for new construction fell away.

It is noteworthy that the only new theaters to be opened after October 1929 were located above Times Square. There already had been a marked decrease in 1928 from 1927 in the number of theaters opened in midtown, although there were a number of new projects reportedly being prepared in 1928 for execution. In 1929, no new theater was opened in midtown, while one, the Broadway, was demolished. In 1930, only the Hollywood, now the Mark Hellinger, on West 51st Street was opened, and in 1931, the rebuilt Earl Carroll was opened at 50th Street and Seventh Avenue. At the end of 1932, the Radio City Music Hall and the RKO Roxy Theater, later called the Center Theater, were opened in Rockefeller Center.

Other major theatrical facilities were built after 1929 as part of Rockefeller Center. NBC moved into its new studios in the RCA Building in 1933, and the RCA offices moved into the building in the same year. RKO offices went into the RKO Building in 1932. The facilities opened in Rockefeller Center were the last major new theaters and broadcasting studios to be built in Manhattan until Philharmonic Hall opened in Lincoln Center in September 1962.

In March 1933, Variety ran a headline article on the future of Broadway as theatrical center. The article discussed various forces said to be behind a move to make a new rialto of Sixth Avenue, while Broadway, with prohibition at an end, would become lined with vast beer halls. The Pabst beer interests were said to be assembling the site of the New York Theater on the east side of Times Square between 44th and 45th Streets for a beer garden, while Anheuser-Busch was said to be prepared to build a beer hall on the west side of Times Square between 46th and 47th Streets,[49] This was part of the site sometimes rumored, in the course of the later 1920s, to be the location intended for a huge new Publix Theater.

The Rockefeller and Hearst interests were said to be involved in the redevelopment of Sixth Avenue--the Rockefeller project and the Hearst/Brisbane land holdings in the area were mentioned--while various major film and financial organizations were said to be aligned in the

effort.

But Sixth Avenue did not become a primary theater street. Nor did the vast beer halls materialize, although, in the 1930s, a number of large cabarets opened in the Broadway area, sometimes in existing theaters. Earl Carroll's rebuilt Earl Carroll Theater became, at one point, the French Casino, while the Casino de Paree was opened in Gallo's Theater.

But the Variety headline article was a manifestation of the vastness of the interest in midtown Manhattan real estate, and of the theatrical industry's stake in the land. It was evidence that the theatrical industry, as much, if not more than most industries, must be concerned with the aptness of specific locations, and therefore must be much concerned with the question of real estate. Theatrical audiences will or will not go to certain locations, and the determinants of what is or is not a good location are extremely variable. Furthermore, related industries and organizations, including those in the theater, need to be near one another to facilitate various kinds of communication.

The Variety article was evidence of the extent to which the business of the theatrical industry had become big business, and evidence that the new great scope of its business and its realty needs helped to bring it into contact, often very close contact, with major nontheatrical institutions and groups. Frequently these

were large financial firms and large interests with substantial real estate concerns and connections.

In short, the article was evidence that there is a relationship of great signficance between theater and location, a relationship which has had, and certainly will continue to have, a profound effect on cultural history in New York City.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VII

[1] "New Mergers Likely in Theatre Firms," Wall Street Journal, January 15, 1929, p. 1.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] "New N. Y. C. Houses for Fox Theatres," Wall Street Journal, January 10, 1929, p. 17.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

[9] H. Z. T., "The Theatre--the Movie Box Office," Wall Street Journal, January 14, 1929, p. 4.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] "Par-Loew-U.A.-RKO Deals," Variety, January 30, 1929, p. 1.

[13] Sketch by David Sarnoff, David Sarnoff Collection, David Sarnoff Research Center, Princeton, New Jersey.

[14] "Par-Loew-U.A.-RKO Deals."

[15] Ibid.

[16] "Par's $15,000,000 RKO Goal; Rumor Deal Only for Operation," Variety, February 13, 1929, p. 7.

[17] H. Z. T., "The Theatre--the Movie Box Office."

[18] "Paramount Assembling Enlarged New York Site," Variety, April 24, 1929, p. 5.

[19] "Pub-R-K-O Deal Off Just Now, Says Katz," Variety, February 27, 1929, p. 71.

[20] "Fox's Loew Buy a Talk Riot; No Changes, Says Sale's Both Ends," Variety, March 6, 1929, p. 5.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] "See Fox-Paramount Clash; Zukor Building Wave First Gun?," Variety, March 13, 1929, p. 5.

[25] Variety, March 20, 1929, p. 5.

[26] Swaine, 2: 396.

[27] "Par-RCA Denial," Variety, March 27, 1929, p. 5.

[28] "R.C.A.'s Big Merger Plans; May Buy and Take In Several Cos.," Variety, April 17, 1929, p. 3.

[29] Ibid.

[30] "Paramount Assembling Enlarged New York Site."

[31] Swaine, 2: 534.

[32] "Contractor Sues Fox," Variety, December 11, 1929, p. 32.

[33] Swaine, 2: 534. Paul D. Cravath's law firm was principal counsel to the bankers (Swaine, 2: 534).

[34] Ibid., 2: 536-37.

[35] Ibid., 2: 537-38.

[36] Ibid., 2: 538-39.

[37] New York Herald Tribune, June 24, 1924, quoted in Swaine, 2: 439.

[38] Swaine, 2: 439.

[39] Ibid., 2: 541.

[40] Swaine, 2: 403.

[41] Ibid., 2: 402-3.

[42] Ibid., 2: 398.

[43] Ibid., 2; 404.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 2: 404-5.

[46] Ibid., 2: 405.

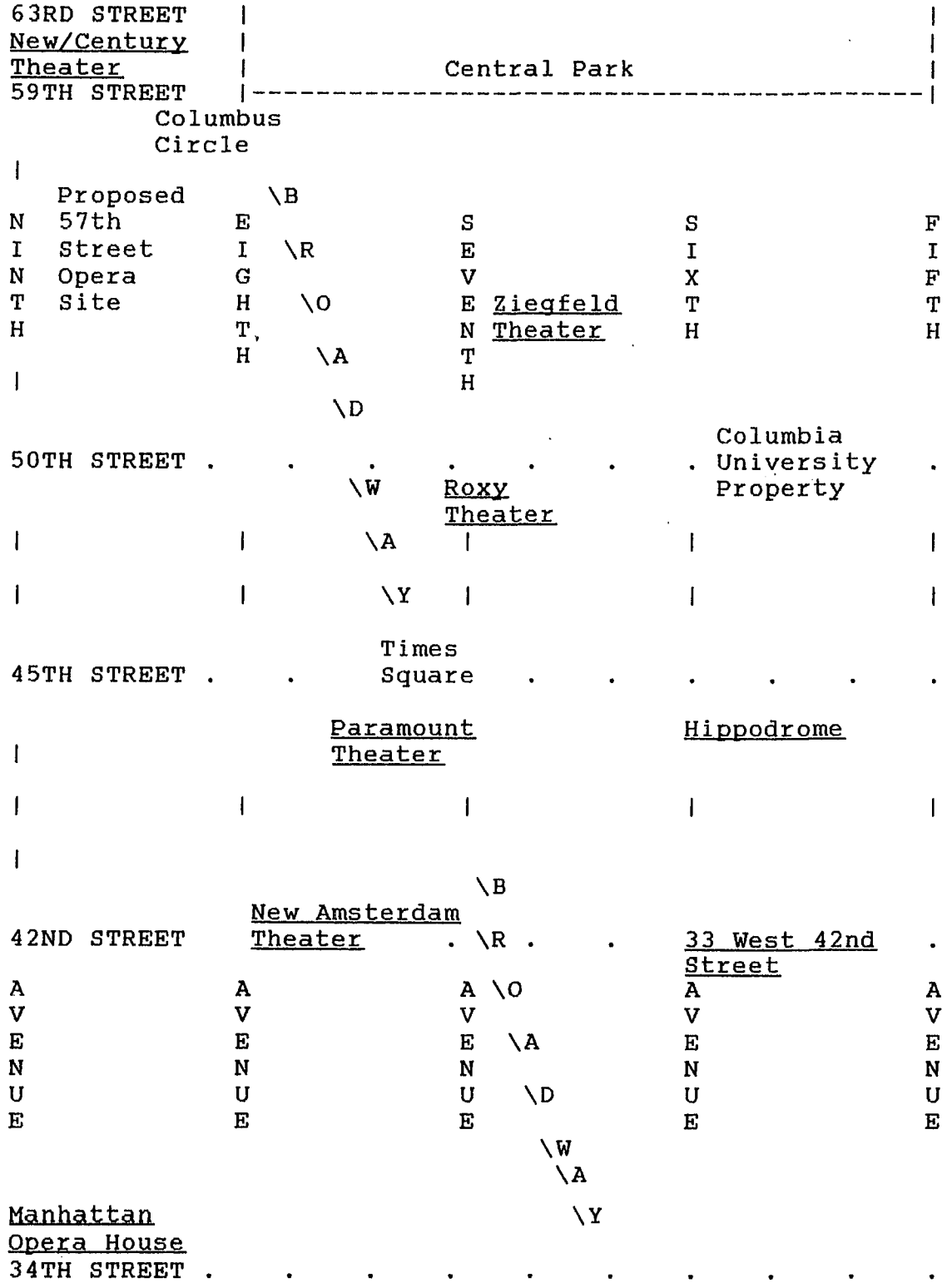
[47] Ibid., 2: 407.

[48] "42d St. Development Will Blot Out Center of Mid-Town 'Coney Island'," Variety, August 30, 1932, p. 41.

[49] "New Broadway of Future; Beer for Stem, 6th Ave. Rialto," Variety, March 21, 1933, p. 1.

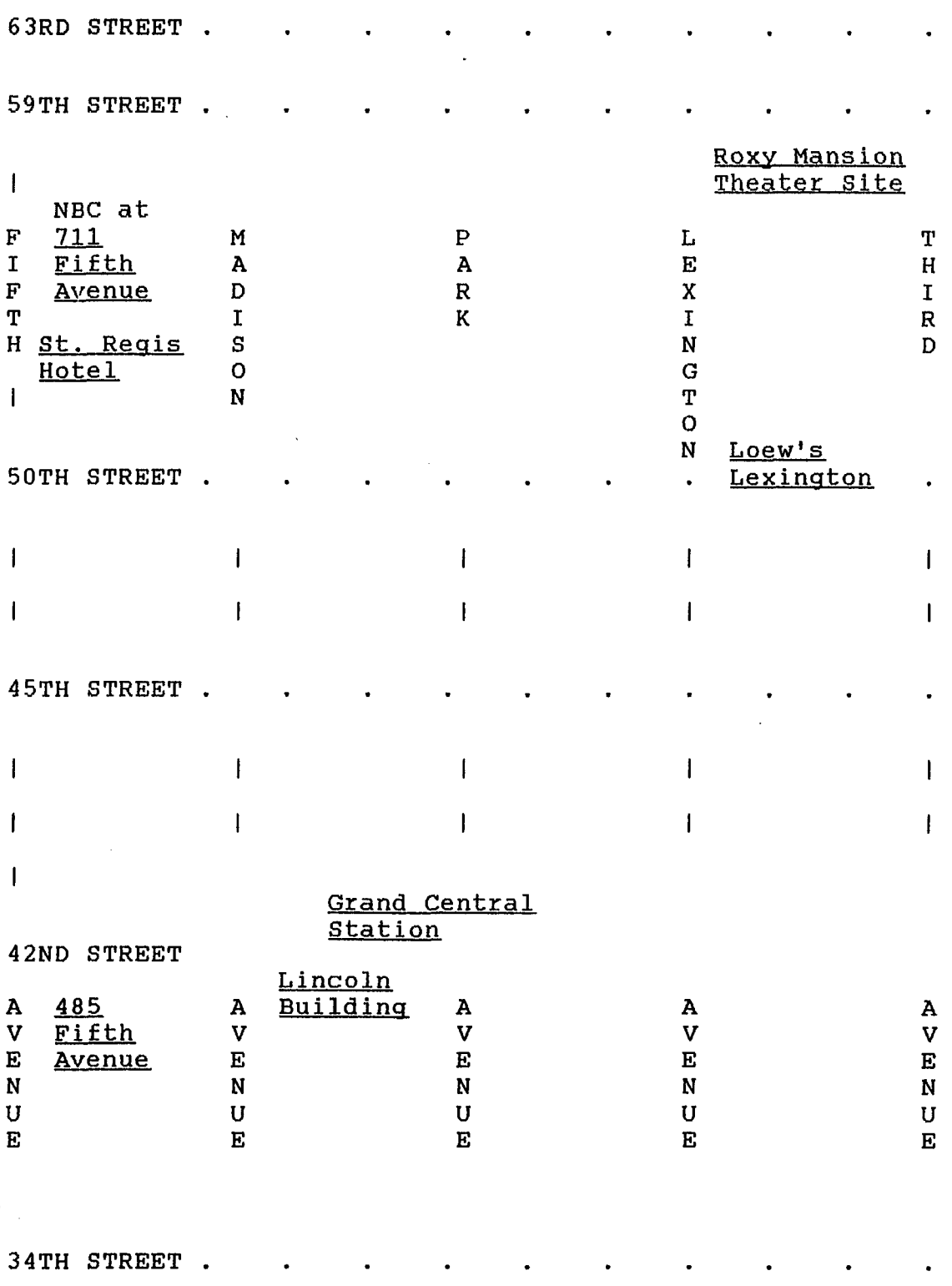
APPENDIX 1

SELECTIVE OVERVIEW OF MIDTOWN MANHATTAN BETWEEN FIFTH AND NINTH AVENUES, CIRCA 1925-1928 (Locations Approximate)



APPENDIX 2

SELECTIVE OVERVIEW OF MIDTOWN MANNHATTAN BETWEEN THIRD AND FIFTH AVENUES, CIRCA 1925-1928 (Locations Approximate)



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