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A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE LEGITIMATE PLAYHOUSES ON WEST FORTY-SECOND STREET BETWEEN SEVENTH AND EIGHTH AVENUES IN NEW YORK CITY

City University of New York PH.D. 1982

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A HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE LEGITIMATE PLAYHOUSES ON WEST FORTY-SECOND STREET BETWEEN SEVENTH AND EIGHTH AVENUES IN NEW YORK CITY

by

MARGARET MARY KNAPP

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

1982

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1982

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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 LEGITIMATE PLAYHOUSES ON WEST FORTY-SECOND STREET BETWEEN SEVENTH AND EIGHTH AVENUES IN NEW YORK CITY

by

Margaret Mary Knapp

Adviser: Professor Stanley A. Waren

The purpose of the study is to trace the development and decline of the "theatre block" on West Forty-second Street. The method followed is basically chronological, that is, the history of the block is traced from the street's beginning in the early nineteenth century through to the present, with major emphasis on the years 1893-1944, when the playhouses on Forty-second Street first appeared, grew in number, flourished, and declined. The study has been broken down into several chronological periods, with each chapter representing a new phase in the history of the block. Thus, the first chapter traces the early history of Forty-second Street through 1893, the second chapter details the construction of the first three theatres on the block (1893-1900), the third deals with the rash of theatre building that resulted from the conflict between members of the Theatrical Syndicate and Independent managers (1901-1904), the fourth presents the block during its years of greatest prestige (1905-1912), the fifth examines the first

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hints of decline (1913-1920), the sixth explores the playhouses in relation to the complex theatre economics of the 1920s, the seventh follows the conversion of the theatres to motion picture houses in the aftermath of the Depression in the decade of the 1930s, the eighth highlights the 1940s to the present, and the conclusion brings the history up to date and applies the insights gained through the study to the question of Forty-second Street's revitalization.

For each period, information is given on the development of the block as a whole, including the nature of the nontheatrical enterprises on the street. The overall economic picture of the New York stage is explored briefly in each chapter, and the effects of the changing theatre economy upon Forty-second Street are noted. Whenever the chronology reaches the point at which a new theatre was constructed on the block, details of ownership, design, style, construction, etc., are given for that house. Highlights of each theatre's season are given for the years 1893-1937, and where possible the major dramatic and musical productions presented on Forty-second Street are placed within the context of the evolving American stage.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In researching this history of the Forty-second Street theatres, I drew on the resources of a variety of libraries, museums, and city offices. In every case, I found the librarians and desk clerks to be most patient and helpful. Paul Myers, Dorothy Swerdlove, and the staff of the Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library were especially tireless in answering questions and requests for materials. Wendy Warnken, Assistant Curator of the Theatre Collection at the Museum of the City of New York, was also most helpful in locating materials. In addition, I must acknowledge the expertise and assistance of librarians and desk clerks at: the New York Public Library's Local History Division, Research Collections, Art and Architecture Division, Music Collection, Map Room, Microfilm Room, and Mid-Manhattan Branch; the New York Historical Society; the New York City Municipal Archives; the New York City Buildings Department; the Hofstra University Library; the Graduate School of CUNY Library; the Molloy College Library; and the Baldwin Public Library.

This study would never have been completed without the help of a number of teachers, colleagues, and friends. Foremost of these is Stanley A. Waren, who, as Executive Officer of the Ph.D. Program in Theatre at the Graduate

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School of the City University of New York, asked me to serve as research assistant on the "42nd Street: Theatre and the City" project in 1977, thus launching me into a fascinating field of inquiry which has ultimately led to this dissertation. Professor Waren's extensive knowledge of the New York theatre and his skill as an editor have been invaluable to the completion of this study, while his personal interest in my work and his encouragement and reassurance have made my entire course of doctoral studies a very pleasant and fruitful experience.

I have also been fortunate to have as members of my dissertation committee Professor Glenn M. Loney, whose enthusiasm for the preservation of New York's historic theatres has inspired me throughout the research and writing of this study; and Professor Vera Mowry Roberts, who has been most generous with her guidance and support ever since my first days as a graduate student.

In the area of moral support and practical advice, I owe a great deal to Professor Daniel C. Gerould, now Acting Executive Officer of the Ph.D. Program in Theatre at CUNY, and to my fellow graduate students, especially Dr. Alvin Goldfarb, Dr. Rita Plotnicki, Dr. Debra Gonsher, and Dr. Steven Hart. My colleagues in the Communication Arts Department at Molloy College have also been sympathetic and supportive of my work. I am also indebted to several colleagues, relatives, and friends who have passed on to me information about Forty-second Street: Walter Zvonchenko,

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Vicki Gold Levi, Grace O'Leary, Carlene Price, John Knapp, and Stanley Green.

Some of the financial burden of completing this dissertation was eased by a Sloan Foundation Urban Dissertation Fellowship, for which I am most grateful.

Last, I am happy to acknowledge a debt that no amount of thanks can repay. This dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father, Margaret Foley Knapp and Charles W. Knapp, Jr., in gratitude for their love, their support, and their patience.

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CHAPTER I

BEGINNINGS TO 1893

Give my regards to Broadway,
Remember me to Herald Square.
Tell all the boys at Forty-second Street
That I will soon be there.
--"Give My Regards to Broadway"

When George M. Cohan sang those lyrics on the stage of the Liberty Theatre on West Forty-second Street in 1904, he was acknowledging that Forty-second Street had joined Herald Square and Broadway as one of New York's primary theatrical centers. A year later the New York Dramatic Mirror ran a full-page picture of West Forty-second Street with the caption, "An approach to the New Rialto," thereby confirming that the block extending between Seventh and Eighth Avenues had become the "rialto" or main theatrical district of the city.[1] Indeed, by 1905 West Forty-second Street, with its seven major theatres, three roof gardens, and numerous offices of producers and agents, had entered upon a golden era which would culminate in 1920 with the opening of the Apollo, the twelfth playhouse to be built on this single block. Long after the street had fallen victim to the complex theatre economics and relentless northward march of the theatres in the 1920s, it still

[1] 23 December 1905, front cover.

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preserved its glamorous image. In the depths of the Depression, Warner Brothers produced what was to become the archetypal backstage film; it was called 42nd Street, a title which seemed to symbolize the excitement of legitimate theatre to spectators across the country. Today, almost half a century after the motion picture was released, the legend of the fabulous "theatre block" still casts a powerful spell over audiences who attend David Merrick's Broadway musical comedy based on the film and on the original novel by Bradford Ropes. Clearly, West Forty-second Street was something more than the temporary center of New York's theatrical activity. It became (and remains) the symbol of the brash, commercial, sometimes tawdry, occasionally elegant American stage during the first three decades of this century.

Despite Forty-second Street's central role in the development of the American theatre, there has been no full-length study of the block or its playhouses. Mary Henderson, in her book The City and the Theatre [(Clifton, N. J.: James T. White and Co., 1973)], gives basic data on the Times Square theatre district and its playhouses but does not examine any of the theatres or any parts of the theatre district in detail. In 1978 the Theatre Historical Society published an Annual devoted exclusively to pictures and articles about the New Amsterdam Theatre on Forty-second Street, but no attempt was made to link the theatre to its surroundings or to developments in the Broadway theatre as a whole.

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The purpose of this study is to trace the development and decline of the "theatre block" on West Forty-second Street. The method followed is basically chronological, that is, the history of the block is traced from the street's beginning in the early nineteenth century to the present, with major emphasis on the years 1893-1944, when playhouses on Forty-second Street first appeared, grew in number, flourished, and declined. The study has been broken down into several chronological periods, with each chapter representing a new phase in the history of the block. Thus, this chapter traces the early history of Forty-second Street through 1893, the second chapter details the construction of the first three theatres on the block (1893-1900), the third deals with the rash of theatre building that resulted from the conflict between members of the Theatrical Syndicate and Independent managers (1901-1904), the fourth presents the block during its years of greatest prestige (1905-1912), the fifth examines the first hints of decline (1913-1920), the sixth explores the playhouses in relation to the complex theatre economics during the 1920s, the seventh follows the conversion of the theatres to motion picture houses in the aftermath of the Depression in the decade of the 1930s, the eighth highlights the 1940s to the present, and the conclusion applies the insights gained through the study to the question of Forty-second Street's revitalization.

For each period, information is given on the development of the block as a whole, including the nature of the

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nontheatrical enterprises on the street. The overall economic picture of the New York stage is explored briefly in each chapter, and the effects of the changing theatre economy upon Forty-second Street are noted. Whenever the chronology reaches the point at which a new theatre was constructed on the block, details of ownership, design, style, construction, etc., are given for that house. Highlights of each theatre's season are given for the years 1893-1937, the period during which the houses were used for legitimate shows and, where possible, the major dramatic and musical productions presented on Forty-second Street are placed within the context of the evolving American stage.

The chronology of productions presented on Forty-second Street results from the collating of several sources. These works are listed in a separate section of the Bibliography but are not noted in the text itself because of the amount of space such listing would occupy. A major source, both for the production chronology and for other information about the theatres, was the New York Dramatic Mirror, whose editions between 1892 (the year before the first theatre was built on Forty-second Street) and 1922 (when the Dramatic Mirror ceased publication) provided a vast amount of otherwise unobtainable data.

Other principal sources of information on Forty-second Street and its theatres include the New York Times, whose Index lists over 1,200 articles related to Forty-second Street during the period 1892-1981; Variety, from its beginning in 1905 to the present; the clipping folders

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and scrapbooks at the New York Public Library's Performing Arts Research Center at Lincoln Center; the folders on Forty-second Street and environs in the Print Room of the New York Historical Society; maps and atlases in the Map Room of the New York Public Library; folders on individual Forty-second Street theatres in the Theatre Collection of the Museum of the City of New York; and the records of the New York City Office of the Register and the New York City Buildings Department. These and other sources are noted in the text and Bibliography. From them it has been possible to piece together a comprehensive picture of the rise and fall of the theatre block of West Forty-second Street.

The transformation of West Forty-second Street from sleepy farmland into the theatrical heart of America was a process that began slowly but gathered momentum at the turn of the century. For the first half of the nineteenth century, West Forty-second Street was considered too far north to share in the hustle and bustle of a city that was burgeoning in the lower part of Manhattan Island. Much of the area around what is now Times Square was originally settled by Dutch farmers and had remained in the hands of one or two families until 1807, when John Jacob Astor and William Cutting purchased seventy acres of the land for $25,000.[2] Because there was virtually no public transportation connecting Forty-second Street with the heart of the

[2]John Austin Stevens, "The Physical Evolution of New York City in a Hundred Years," American Historical Magazine 2 (1907): 177.

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city far to the south, the development of the area as a residential center was slow, as evidenced by this advertisement in an 1829 issue of the New York Times:

> To let--large and commodious house and garden spot situated on Forty-second and Forty-third Streets, and 100 feet from Eighth Avenue. Well calculated for boarding school, summer retreat or private family--being pleasantly situated on high ground with view of North River. House has 25 rooms, good well and pump in ceilar. Garden is laid out and at present planted for spring vegetables.[3]

It is clear from the suggestion that the house would make a good "summer retreat" that Forty-second Street was still too far north for a year-round city residence.

Three years after the "retreat" on Forty-second Street was advertised, the first horse railroad was introduced in New York, running along Fourth Avenue from Prince Street to Murray Hill. As the horsedrawn streetcar lines were extended farther north, dwellers to the south began enjoying excursions to what were then the outer boundaries of the city. In 1839 a newspaper reporter advised his readers to "jump into a railroad car at City Hall, get out at Forty-second Street. Two minutes' walk will find you in a shady grove on the banks of the East River; you have escaped the heat of the city, you snuff [sic] the pure air. And all this for the inconsiderable sum of 2 shillings."[4]

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[3]Reprinted in "Times Square a Rural Centre One Hundred Years Ago," New York Times, 27 January 1929, sec. 12, p. 11.

[4]New York Mirror, July 1839, quoted in "Romantic History in Forty-second Street with Wonderful Increase in Realty Values," New York Times, 8 December 1912, sec. 9, p. 2. The creation of Central Park beginning in 1857 was a further impetus to such sightseeing trips.

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By the middle of the nineteenth century, a few hardy souls were building houses on Forty-second Street, but the area to the north, particularly on the east side, had lost its pleasant rural character and was now occupied by "garbage dumps, shantytowns, and decrepit taverns, all punctuated by outcroppings of rock."[5] To add to the unpleasantness of the neighborhood, cattle which had been shipped from New Jersey to the piers on the west side of Manhattan were driven through the streets in the vicinity of Forty-second Street on their way to the slaughterhouses on the east side.[6]

The garbage dumps, shantytowns, etc., would be pushed farther and farther north as Manhattan's ever-increasing population and ever-improving transit systems claimed greater and greater chunks of the island for residential and business purposes. Once the horsecar had begun to replace the stagecoach as the major means of public transportation, New Yorkers discovered that they could live some distance away from the commercial center in downtown Manhattan and still reach their jobs quickly and in relative comfort. In 1866 there were five horsecar companies and rails had been laid along First, Second, Third, Fourth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Avenues; among the crosstown routes was one that connected the Weehawken Ferry

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[5]Charles Lockwood, Manhattan Moves Uptown (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), p. 236.

[6]Ibid., p. 238.

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that docked at the foot of West Forty-second Street with the downtown business district.[7]

Apart from the expansion of the horsecar lines, there were other indications that Forty-second Street was destined to become the axis for New York's transportation systems. In 1811 a commission charged with creating an orderly plan "for the laying out of streets and roads in the city of New York" laid out the gridiron system of avenues running north and south and streets running east and west. As part of the plan, the commission decreed that sixteen streets (Fourteenth, Twenty-third, Thirty-fourth, Forty-second, Fifty-seventh, Seventy-second, etc.) were to be main thoroughfares one hundred feet wide instead of the usual sixty feet.[8] A half-century after the commission's report, when mass transit had begun to draw Forty-second Street within the feasible limits of city life, its greater width made it a natural choice as an important crosstown route; with the opening of Grand Central Station on the corner of Madison Avenue and Forty-second Street in 1878, and the completion of the Third and Sixth Avenue Elevated Railways the same year, Forty-second Street's primacy as a hub of transportation was secured.

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[7] The 1866 Guide to New York City (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), pp. 99-100. Originally printed as Miller's New York as it is (New York: J. Miller, 1866).

[8] "The Physical Evolution of New York City," p. 25. The commission consisted of Gouverneur Morris, Simeon Dewitt (the State Engineer), and John Rutherford (a "gentleman").

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While these developments in transportation were taking place, the block of West Forty-second Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues was blossoming into a residential street lined with brownstone houses. Around mid-century, two churches had been built on the block, the Bloomingdale Baptist Church (opened in 1841 and renamed the Central Baptist Church in 1868) and the Forty-second Street Presbyterian Church (founded in 1854, it was converted to St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1875). Also erected on the block at this period was the Methodist-Episcopal Asylum for the Aged and Infirm, which opened in 1855 or 1856 and functioned until 1883, when the building became the Clinton Apartment House.[9]

In 1883, as if to put its seal of respectability on the street, the George Bruce Memorial Circulating Library

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[9]Information on the Central Baptist Church comes from "New Times Square Theatre/Old Church in Forty-second Street to be Supplanted by a Playhouse," New York Times, 18 October 1911, p. 1. The history of the Forty-second Street Presbyterian Church is given on the back of a photograph of the church in the "Forty-second Street, West" folder, Print Room, New York Historical Society. Details of the asylum for the aged and insane are from "Landmarks Pass in Times Square," New York Times, 5 May 1929, sec. 12, p. 2, and from an 1878 map, "New York City South of 93rd St." in the "Maps of the Theatre District" folder, Theatre Collection, Library and Museum of the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center, hereafter referred to as Lincoln Center. The 1878 map also shows a building marked "St. Louis College" on the south side of the block. Perhaps this is the same school "for Catholic boys of refined families" that is listed as occupying 224 W. Fifty-eighth Street in King's Handbook of New York City 1893 (Boston: Moses King, 1893; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1972), p. 286. The origin of the name Long Acre Square is found in Stephen Jenkins, The Greatest Street in the World (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911), p. 264.

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was opened at 226 W. Forty-second Street. The surrounding streets also showed signs of becoming, if not genteel, at least law-abiding in the 1880s and 1890s. A guide to New York published in 1893 lists boys' schools at 1473 and 1475 Broadway, churches on West Thirty-ninth and West Forty-fifth Streets, a synagogue on West Forty-seventh Street, and a "Midnight Mission" on West Forty-sixth Street.[10] The horse and harness trades had found a home in the sidestreets between Fiftieth and Sixtieth Streets, and the whole area soon gained the name "Long Acre Square," supposedly after the section of London that housed its carriage and harness businesses.

The period when West Forty-second Street existed mainly as a residential neighborhood was relatively short-lived. The northward march of the business and amusement districts of the city was inexorable. In the first part of the century, businesses, stores, hotels, and places of amusement had clustered together in the vicinity of lower Broadway. As New York's various businesses moved north, they began to isolate themselves in more or less separate areas: the financial institutions remained downtown; the major retail stores situated themselves on Broadway between Fourteenth and Twenty-third Streets, eventually moving to Herald Square and Fifth Avenue at the turn of the

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[10]King, pp. 301, 332, 346, 403, 439, 812-813. The purpose of the Midnight Mission was "the reclamation of fallen women, who are here given homes, and, if found worthy, aided in obtaining permanent homes or employment," (King, p. 439).

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century; the hotels, originally located near the stores and theatres, began to congregate around major transportation centers such as Grand Central Station or on the newly fashionable Fifth Avenue; the mansions of the plutocrats spread further north on Fifth Avenue, as did such objects of their beneficence as the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The theatre district, which had existed in the midst of the stores, hotels, and other businesses along Broadway for most of the nineteenth century, remained loyal to Broadway. Little by little, farsighted theatre-builders, perceiving the population's northward migration, began to extend the upper boundaries of New York's rialto. The Casino Theatre was opened on the southeast corner of Broadway and Thirty-ninth Street in 1882. A year later, it was joined by a most ambitious undertaking--the construction of the Metropolitan Opera House on Broadway between Thirty-ninth and Fortieth Streets. In 1888, the Broadway Theatre was erected by Elliott Zborowski, T. Henry French and Frank W. Sanger on the southwest corner of Broadway and Forty-first Street.[11] Just to the north lay the next logical stopping-off place for the theatre district: Long Acre Square. Here was an area, formed by the crossing of Seventh Avenue and Broadway, where land was still relatively cheap and undeveloped, yet easy to reach by horsecar or elevated railway. Here, too, was an area with enough space

[11]The discussion of the northward movement of Manhattan's businesses and theatres is based on Henderson, The City and the Theatre, pp. 130-131, 168-170.

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to accommodate the many theatres and satellite businesses that were sprouting up as the New York stage was being transformed from a local amusement to a national institution. By the time theatres were being built just below Forty-second Street in the 1880s and 1890s, New York was already well established as the nerve center for the vast network of American theatres known as "the road."

This expansion in theatre operations had its beginnings in the 1860s when the traditional method of running a theatre, the stock system, was challenged by the growing popularity of touring "combination" shows. As defined by one writer, "the stock system was a complex of fairly permanent companies, each a continuous producing unit, each independent, functionally, from all others, and each attached to a specific theatre which it controlled and at which it played for the major part of each season."[12] Such stock companies were located in towns and cities across America. In the first half of the century, star actors and actresses toured the country, performing with various resident companies along the way. As a result of these visits, local audiences became dissatisfied with the familiar faces of their stock performers, and a demand was created for the combination system by which whole shows were packaged and sent across the nation with the assurance that they were "direct from New York." In contrast to the

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[12]Alfred L. Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre (New York: Actors Equity Association, 1932; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1964), p. 26.

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stock system, "the combination system is composed of temporary producing units, each organized for one play only, none organically connected with any specific theatre, and the great majority without control over the theatre in which they happen to be playing."[13]

The combination system held enormous advantages for theatre managers across the country--they no longer had to worry about gauging their audiences' tastes, keeping together a company of competent actors, providing adequate scenery, lighting, and costumes, or making any other artistic decisions. Once the combination system took hold, theatre managers needed only concern themselves with booking the most successful productions available and then counting their box office receipts. The success of the combination system is indicated by the estimates that fifteen years after the first combinations were sent on the road, 100 different companies were touring America, and by December 1904 the number had grown to 420 companies.[14]

Of crucial importance to the operation of the combination system was a single location where combination shows could be cast, rehearsed, tried out and then booked for a cross-country tour. Since New York was already regarded as the most important theatre city in America, it is not surprising that it became the headquarters for the combination system. In addition to the many theatres

[13]Ibid., p. 26.

[14]Jack Poggi, Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 6.

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needed for an initial Broadway production for the combinations before they went on tour, New York's theatre district encompassed rehearsal halls, the headquarters of scenery, costume, lighting and makeup companies, offices of theatrical agents and producers, theatrical printers and newspapers and other auxiliary enterprises. Close to the theatre district were boarding houses catering to the hundreds of performers who came to New York in the hope of being hired for a touring show or a Broadway production. For a number of years, these various offices, boarding houses, costume companies, etc., clustered around Union Square because most of New York's major theatres were located there.[15] As theatres were built farther uptown, the auxiliary enterprises also began to move north. By the turn of the century, "the section of Broadway between 37th Street and 42nd Street was known as the Rialto. Theatre people gathered there or promenaded there. Producers could sometimes cast a play by looking over the actors loitering on the Rialto; and out-of-town managers, gazing out of office windows, could book tours by seeing who was available."[16] The theatre district that moved north to Long Acre Square in the 1890s was thus a vast array of business enterprises devoted to every facet of theatrical production. Like other businesses in the late nineteenth century, the American theatre was booming, and like some

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[15]Henderson, p. 134.

[16]Brooks Atkinson, Broadway, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1974), p. 11.

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other businesses it was soon to be strangled by the growth of a trust that would control nearly all commercial theatrical activity in the United States.

During the period when the theatre district made its first moves toward Long Acre Square, however, New York's playhouses were still largely in the hands of independent producers who took an active part both in the management of their theatres and in the creation of their dramatic offerings. The first theatre to be built on West Forty-second Street was the project of such a producer-manager, T. Henry French.

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CHAPTER II

PIONEERS (1893-1900)

In light of the fact that New York's theatre district was located on or near Broadway for most of the nineteenth century, it is ironic that the first theatre on West Forty-second Street should be built at the Eighth Avenue end of the block. The American Theatre was the brainchild of T. Henry French, the son of Samuel French, head of the play publishing business that still bears his name. In the 1880s T. Henry French had managed the Grand Opera House and the Garden Theatre, and had had a financial interest in the Broadway Theatre.[1] His tenure as manager of the Grand Opera House had been particularly frustrating for French because the theatre was owned at the time by Jay Gould, a self-made millionaire who had definite ideas about how the playhouse should be operated. An example of Gould's interference was his insistence that gas lighting should be retained in the theatre even after electricity was available; he also demanded that the lamps in the auditorium remain burning during performances, thereby ruining French's carefully

[1]George C. D. Odell says that French "had managed the Grand Opera House with profit and the Garden Theatre with less golden returns, . . ." Annals of the New York Stage, 15 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949; rept. New York: AMS Press, 1970), 15: 343.

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planned lighting effects.[2] When he could no longer tolerate Gould's meddling, French began plans to build a theatre where he would have both financial and artistic control. He turned to one of his co-owners of the Broadway Theatre, Elliott Zborowski,[3] for help in financing the construction of a new theatre, and then commissioned Hartie I. Phillips, a real estate agent who specialized in obtaining property for theatres, to negotiate the purchase of a large parcel of land. Phillips had to come to terms with seventeen different owners in order to obtain a total of twelve lots--seven on Forty-first Street, two on Eighth Avenue, and three on Forty-second Street.[4] The result of these purchases was an oddly-shaped plot of land. The lots on the Forty-first Street side of the block formed a parcel 150 feet wide and 100 feet deep, beginning 100 feet east of Eighth Avenue. The bulk of the theatre was to be constructed on this part of the property. The Eighth Avenue side, consisting of a strip of land fifty feet wide and 100 feet deep, would enable the builders to construct a foyer leading to the main part of the theatre. The plot facing Forty-second Street was thirty-four feet wide and was also

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[2] "Grand Opera House Doomed," New York Times, 5 March 1892, p. 8.

[3] Zborowski's name is spelled Zboroski and Zborouski in various sources, but appears as Zborowski in the records of the New York City Office of the Register (Conveyances, 1917-1937, Block 1013).

[4] Robert Grau, The Business Man in the Amusement World (New York: Broadway Publishing Company, 1910), p. 148; "Next Season's Programmes," New York Dramatic Mirror, 4 June 1892, p. 6. Hereafter referred to as NYDM.

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to be used for an entrance foyer.[5]

During the period when French was planning the construction of the American, Eighth Avenue was relatively undeveloped. The block across Eighth Avenue was bare, and only a faint gleam from a café near the theatre provided any light on the street.[6] The area was not a complete wilderness, however. In addition to the numerous brownstones and tenements in the neighborhood, there were several small businesses nearby. An examination of the opening night program for the American discloses advertisements for J. Wieland's Pharmacy on the northeast corner of Eighth Avenue and Forty-second Street and the Franklin Savings Bank on the southwest corner next to the Forty-second Street entrance to the American.[7] These and other businesses in the vicinity no doubt received their share of customers during the day, but there seems to have been little activity in the area at night, perhaps because in 1893 electric street lighting had not yet been extended

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[5]"Grand Opera House Doomed." In later years, when lots facing Forty-second Street were scarce and prohibitively expensive, other theatre builders would copy the idea of constructing a narrow entrance leading to Forty-second Street while erecting the main part of the theatre on Forty-first or Forty-third Street.

[6]Majorie Mears, "Thus Passes the Glory of Forty-second Street," New York Times, 7 August 1932, in the American Theatre Clippings Folder, Lincoln Center.

[7]"The Prodigal Daughter" program in the American Theatre Folder, Theatre Collection, Museum of the City of New York. Hereafter referred to as MCNY.

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as far north as Forty-second Street.[8]

Even at this early date, Eighth Avenue was not considered a particularly glamorous address for a theatre; in 1893, King's Handbook of New York City called it "the West-Side cheap thoroughfare," but conceded that "the upper part of the avenue toward 59th Street is respectable."[9] Although it may seem odd that French chose such an out-of-the-way location for his theatre, it is probable that his choice was governed by the necessity of finding a piece of land large enough to accommodate the kind of building he had in mind. When completed, the American would be the third largest theatre in New York--only the Grand Opera House and the Academy of Music had larger seating capacities.[10] The American occupied 23,000 square feet of space,[11] and was intended by French to house spectacular productions. It seems unlikely that a plot of land that large could have been found on or near Broadway.

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[8]According to Mears, Forty-second Street had very few electric streetlights at this time. King's Handbook states that as of 1893 the Edison Illuminating Company's operations covered the portion of the city from the Battery to Central Park and from Third to Eighth Avenues (p. 203), but does not actually state that electric street lighting had been installed throughout that area. Henderson (p. 185) says that electric street lighting reached Forty-second Street by 1895.

[9]King's Handbook, p. 155.

[10]"The Prodigal Daughter" program. Edward Walsh, the contractor who demolished the American in 1932, claimed that its space was large enough to hold two modern theatres (unidentified clipping, American Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center).

[11]"American Theatre Site for Taxpayer," New York Times, 24 July 1932, secs. 10 and 11, p. 1.

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Another reason for building the theatre on the Eighth Avenue end of the block might have been French's success (despite Gould's interference) as manager of the Grand Opera House, which was located on the northwest corner of Eighth Avenue and Twenty-third Street. For most of his tenure at the Grand, French had operated the theatre as a combination house, presenting Broadway attractions after they had ended their initial run. French's policy had been to book such shows for one week at reduced admission prices, a scheme that had evidently been successful in drawing a less affluent clientele. That he intended to run the American in the same manner is indicated by the announcement in the New York Dramatic Mirror that the American would be "the largest and the handsomest combination theatre in the United States."[12] Perhaps French felt that he would be more likely to attract his Grand Opera customers to another theatre on Eighth Avenue than to one in the more fashionable Broadway area.

Construction on the theatre got underway in the spring of 1892 and almost immediately hit a snag--in excavating for the building, the contractors struck more rock than they had anticipated and therefore had to prolong blasting operations.[13] As construction continued, French abandoned his intention to run the American as a combination house and announced that it would open with a spectacular

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[12] Untitled article, NYDM, 12 March 1892, p. 5.

[13] "Next Season's Programmes," NYDM, 4 June 1892, p. 6.

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production. On a trip to England, he had obtained rights to a show called The Land of Gold, and in June 1892 he announced that it would open the American. Jefferson De Angelis, a popular comedian of the day, would be the star.[14]

Meanwhile, construction on the American was nearing completion. The plans included a roof garden over the theatre, lodge rooms over the Eighth Avenue entranceway, and a bachelors' apartment house over the Forty-second Street entrance.[15] The theatre itself was conceived on a grand scale. It was designed by architect Charles C. Haight, who had created many churches and collegiate buildings in the New York area.[16] Haight made the best use of the irregularly-shaped plot of land by having the three entrance foyers lead into a large octagonal lobby. From there, spectators could pass through doors to the orchestra seats or take the elevators to the upper levels. The auditorium was seventy-four feet, six inches from the curtain line to the rear wall, and seventy-four feet, five inches wide. Above the auditorium, seventy feet over the stage level, was a huge panelled dome, fifty-seven feet

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[14]"Next Season's Programmes." As late as November 1892, French was still maintaining that the opening production would be The Land of Gold. See "T. Henry French Returns," NYDM, 12 November 1892, p. 3.

[15]"The Prodigal Daughter" program.

[16]Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased) (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, Inc., 1970; orig. pub. 1956), p. 225.

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in diameter, supported by coffered vaults. In addition to the large orchestra (called the parquette), there was a balcony and a two-section gallery. On either side of the auditorium were six boxes, two on each of the three levels. The total seating capacity of the theatre was 1,900 with room for 200 standees. The overall color scheme employed shades of red and yellow. The walls were decorated with panelled pilasters and the floors of the corridors and vestibules were paved in mosaic tile.[17]

Although the auditorium was quite large by the standards of the day, its sightlines and acoustics seem to have been well planned. The opening night reviewer for the New York Times reported that "the first impression one gets of it is not of great size; its lines are such that every spectator, even those in the upper gallery, is brought in close relation with the stage."[18] The stage was designed in the same massive proportions as the auditorium. The proscenium opening was thirty-nine feet high by thirty-nine feet wide, and led to a stage that was fifty-six feet deep, seventy-eight feet wide, and seventy-two feet high from stage to gridiron. In front of the stage hung a drop

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[17]This and subsequent descriptions of the American Theatre, except where otherwise noted, are based on "The Prodigal Daughter" program; on William H. Birkmire, The Planning and Construction of American Theatres (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1901), pp. 21-29; and on "French's New American Theatre," New York Herald, 2 April 1895, in the American Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center. Some of the dimensions given in Birkmire are inaccurate.

[18]"A Splendid New Playhouse," New York Times, 23 May 1893, p. 4.

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curtain painted by Henry E. Hoyt, an ornament that seems to have been considered old-fashioned even then.[19] The stage area also included a carpenter shop built over the scene dock.

Of particular concern to the builders of the American were the heating and ventilation systems, which were constructed according to the latest technology. The Times reviewer reported that "the ventilating appliances in the new theatre seem to be perfect. The house was not uncomfortably warm last night, and the air in the auditorium was always surprisingly fresh."[20] The electric lighting was also meticulously planned. The 2,000 electric lights in the theatre were carefully placed so that instead of a direct glare they gave out a soft, mellow light.[21] The exterior of the building, constructed of pressed brick with terra cotta decorations, was designed in the style of the Spanish Renaissance. While the most imposing facade of the building was on the Forty-first Street side, the carriage entrance (and hence the most fashionable entrance) was on the Forty-second Street side.[22]

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[19]"A Splendid New Playhouse." An undated photograph in the American Theatre Folder, MCNY, shows a drop curtain with a large female figure (evidently representing Liberty) in the center and an American flag in the background.

[20]"A Splendid New Playhouse."

[21]Ibid.

[22]Odell (15:343) says of the American, "Since I always entered through the 42nd Street doors, I thought of the theatre as in that street, rather than in democratic Eighth Avenue."

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In December 1892, French announced that the opening production for the new theatre would be, not The Land of Gold, but The Prodigal Daughter, a spectacular racing melodrama written by Henry Pettitt and Sir Augustus Harris. The show had previously had a successful run at the Drury Lane Theatre in London. French seems to have bought the English production lock, stock, and barrel, for in April 1893, he arrived in New York after a trip to London with a cargo of special scenery, costumes, and furniture. Following him on another ship were nine racehorses, including a winner of the National Steeplechase, ten hounds given to French by the Duke of Beaufort, and five jockeys.[23] The leading man for The Prodigal Daughter was also imported from England. Leonard Boyne, an expert rider, had starred in the Drury Lane production. After arriving in New York, Boyne rehearsed the show's horses at Tattersall's, a horse exchange located at Seventh Avenue and Fiftieth Street, where the Winter Garden Theatre now stands.[24]

The preparations completed, French opened the American Theatre on May 22, 1893. The Prodigal Daughter proved to be every bit as spectacular as its advance publicity had declared it to be. The audience was no doubt startled by the appearance of a pack of hounds during a scene laid at a hunt breakfast, but their

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[23]Untitled article, NYDM, 8 April 1893, p. 2.

[24]Mears.

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surprise must have been far greater during Act IV, listed in the program simply as "The Race." For this climactic moment in the play, an exact replica of the Grand National Steeplechase course at Aintree, Liverpool, was set up on the stage, complete with a hurdle and a water jump. Ten steeplechase horses raced diagonally across the stage on treadmills so that they seemed to be heading straight for the audience. During this scene the cast was augmented by 175 supers impersonating spectators at the race.[25]

The critical reaction to The Prodigal Daughter was mixed. The reviewer for the Times, while generally praising the production, felt it would have been more appropriate for the American Theatre to be opened with a play by a native author.[26] Despite critical reservations, the elaborate spectacle of the production, coupled with the attractions of the new theatre, drew large audiences. Wealthy racing aficionados were said to drop in at the American each evening just to see the horse race. French was quick to capitalize on this interest in his play by employing society men as supers, allowing them to stand on one of the coaches and cheer the horses during the steeplechase scene. He was immediately besieged with applications from members of the Knickerbocker and Racquet Clubs, two of New York's most exclusive associations.[27]

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[25]This account of the opening production is based on Mears and on the "Prodigal Daughter" program.

[26]"A Splendid New Playhouse."

[27]"Society Stars as Supes," New York Times, 4 June 1893, p. 16.

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Part of the appeal of The Prodigal Daughter lay in the audience's fear of danger during the steeplechase scene. Events proved this fear to be well founded, for as George Odell reported:

> In the race scene, on May 26th, . . . the horse, Columbus, fell, in jumping over the hurdles, and rolled upon his rider, Guttenberg Billy. The fiery steed, Rochefort, ridden by Leonard Boyne, attempted to climb over the iron balcony. The panic was completed when Julia Arthur employed the leading lady's privilege of fainting. Lady Windemere's Fan [Arthur's previous role] was far less dangerous than a runaway horse. Thenceforth, so far as I know, the horses behaved according to the script of the play.[28]

The possiblity of accident no doubt contributed to the popularity of The Prodigal Daughter, which despite opening at the beginning of the summer, ran for twenty-nine weeks to excellent business. The ticket prices for the American Theatre made it possible for people from all economic levels to attend: orchestra seats cost $1.50, balcony seats $1.00, gallery seats 50¢ and 25¢. Boxes were $8.00, $10.00, and $12.00.[29] The American became an even greater bargain for audiences when, on June 19, French opened the theatre's roof garden and charged a single admission of 50¢ for both The Prodigal Daughter and the vaudeville show on the roof.

Roof gardens had first become fashionable in 1890, when Rudolph Aronson built one on top of the Casino Theatre. Here customers sat at tables and chairs and could purchase refreshments while watching several acts of

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[28] Annals, 15: 344.

[29] "The Prodigal Daughter" program.

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vaudeville. The popularity of the Casino Roof led to the opening of a roof garden atop Madison Square Garden in 1892. The appeal of roof gardens lay, of course, in the opportunity they provided for New Yorkers to escape the heat of the city and to enjoy the breezes blowing off the rivers while being entertained. The American Theatre's roof was described in the New York Times in the following manner:

> The main garden is 90 feet square, and is brilliantly lighted by arches and trefoils of powerful electric lights. It will accommodate 650 persons, who, in case of rain, can take refuge in two large roofed apartments, where free air is a feature and shelter is perfect. The stage is large, and some say it is the largest among the roof garden stages.[30]

The opening of the roof attracted a large crowd, many in evening dress.[31] Heading the vaudeville was Maggie Cline, famous for her raucous rendition of "Throw Him Down, McCloskey." Also on the bill were a family of acrobats, a strongman, and the usual vaudeville assortment of singers, dancers, and comedians.[32]

As the summer of 1893 progressed, the continued success of both The Prodigal Daughter and the Roof Garden seemed to vindicate French's choice of location for the

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[30]"Will Be an Attractive Place," New York Times 19 June 1893, p. 4. Mears claimed that the roof garden seated 200.

[31]"Summer Night Amusements," New York Times, 20 June 1893, p. 5.

[32]Odell, 15: 355; "American Roof Garden," NYDM, 24 June 1893, p. 3. According to Mears, Cline's singing was so loud that it disturbed the actors appearing in The Prodigal Daughter in the theatre downstairs.

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theatre. In August, the New York Dramatic Mirror observed that

> no midsummer theatrical performances in this city have ever met with the phenomenal success of those at Mr. French's American Theatre. Whether the thermometer and old humidity are struggling to reach the top notches of the heated term or cooling breezes temper the atmosphere, it is all the same at the American--the audiences are limited only by the capacity of the house. This extraordinary success has demonstrated the fact that the new theatre is located in the right spot, and that Mr. French builded better than he knew, although he believed that his venture would prove successful, if not at once at least in a short period of time.[33]

Unfortunately, French was never able to duplicate the success he experienced at the American during the summer of 1893.

The Prodigal Daughter was popular enough to continue throughout the normally slack summer season and well into the fall. The roof garden closed on September 2, after a summer of good patronage.[34] As the run of The Prodigal Daughter began to draw to an end, French announced that his next spectacular production would be The Voyage of Suzette, starring Sadie Martinot. Just as The Prodigal Daughter was chosen in order to exploit the public's interest in racing dramas, The Voyage of Suzette seems to have been selected because of the recent popularity of plays about the circus. In its first incarnation, Suzette had premiered in Paris as a musical comedy written by the team of Chivot and Dubu. After its European success,

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[33]Untitled article, 5 August 1893, p. 2.

[34]Untitled article, NYDM, 2 September 1893, p. 6.

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it was adapted and "melodramatized" by Charles Alfred Byrne and Louis Harrison.[35]

The result of this tinkering was a show with the slenderest of books; its success or failure was to result entirely from the quality of its "spectacle." An indication of the importance of the visual elements of the production was an announcement in the Dramatic Mirror that Sadie Martinot, scheduled to begin rehearsals for Suzette on November 27, was actually spending her rehearsal time selecting and designing the eight costumes she was to wear.[36]

After The Prodigal Daughter ended its run on December 16, the American was dark for a week in order to prepare for the opening of Suzette on December 23, 1893. A longer rehearsal period seems to have been needed, for the opening night reviewer for the Times felt that the two elaborate ballets in the production would be improved when "the dancers are more familiar with their work and the limelight man with his."[37] Aside from this criticism, the reviewer's main objection seems to have been the play's lack of a coherent plot and entertaining dialogue. The critic for the Dramatic Mirror characterized the story as "a thread upon which are hung many stage ornaments."[38]

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[35]"At the Theatres," NYDM, 30 December 1893, p. 3.

[36]Untitled article, NYDM, 2 December 1893, p. 13.

[37]"The Voyage of Sadie Martinot," 24 December 1893, p. 5.

[38]"At the Theatres," 30 December 1893, p. 3.

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A week later, a column in the Dramatic Mirror called "The Usher" revealed that the comic actors in Suzette were complaining that the adaptors had "squeezed the humor out of the play." An attempt by the comedians to interpolate some humor into the production was quickly squashed by the adaptors. "The result," the Usher concluded, "is that Suzette makes her voyage amid funereal gravity, and the comedians are seriously debating whether they ought not to throw up their parts on the ground that, they were not engaged as chief mourners."[39]

Although deficient in its book, Suzette attracted audiences with the sheer magnificence of its spectacle, which was characterized as being "one of the most amazing ever put on the Metropolitan boards."[40] Spectators were shown ten scenes, each one more elaborate than the last. The final scene was a big circus parade with a band, chariots, and numerous animals, including an elephant. Opening just before Christmas, Suzette seemed to have been planned for a holiday audience (the Times called it a "Christmas pantomime"[41]), but its lack of story and humor was a deficiency too large to overcome. On January 13, 1894, the Dramatic Mirror announced that Suzette would be withdrawn shortly. The play closed after a run of four weeks.

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[39] 6 January 1894, p. 4.

[40] NYDM, 30 December 1893, p. 3.

[41] "The Week at the Theatres," 31 December 1893, p. 13.

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Undaunted by Suzette's failure, French immediately opened another production. Poor Girls, a "human drama," was supposedly adapted from a play by Guy de Maupassant.[42] Opening on January 22, the play starred Odette Tyler, Kitty Cheatham and Joseph Holland, with Edna Wallace Hopper and John Bunny in supporting roles. Although the opening night audience was described as being large and well dressed,[43] Poor Girls made its greatest appeal to spectators in the American's lower-priced gallery seats. The reviewer for the Dramatic Mirror reported that the "audience situated in the balcony [that is, gallery] on the first night at the American Theatre whistled itself hoarse in its approval of [the play's] heroics."[44] The approbation of the gallery audiences was shortly to become an important factor in the planning of productions at the American.

Poor Girls was not notable for the novelty of its plot--the Dramatic Mirror reviewer felt that "inveterate theatregoers should be able to tell the last act after seeing the first"[45]--but it was praised for its "natural and vigorous dialogue" and its "well-contrasted" characters.[46] Despite these advantages, Poor Girls lasted

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[42]The anonymous reviewer who contributed "A Play Called 'Poor Girls'" to the New York Times, 23 January 1894, p. 5, was certain that de Maupassant did not write the original play.

[43]"A Play Called 'Poor Girls'."

[44]"At the Theatres," 27 January 1894, p. 3.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid.

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a mere two weeks before it was replaced by French's last full-scale production for the season, A Woman's Revenge. Like The Prodigal Daughter, the new melodrama had been written by Henry Pettitt and had premiered in London.[47] A Woman's Revenge opened on February 5, and was described as a play that "tells of love running in rough channels, with scandal, forgery, and murder keeping it turbulent company."[48] While the plot seems to have been a rehash of other melodramas, one reviewer praised the trial scene in the last act as being depicted in a "realistic and graphic manner."[49]

By this time, it had become obvious that French had so far failed to find a successful policy for his new theatre. One of the chief difficulties was the configuration of the theatre itself. Situated on Eighth Avenue, and with hundreds of gallery seats available at low admission prices, the American could not help but attract the lower-class audiences that patronized theatres primarily devoted to cheap productions of action-packed melodramas. On the other hand, French had planned the theatre with a large and comfortable parquet and a stage capable of accommodating the type of elaborate productions that would interest more sophisticated spectators.

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[47]Odell, 15: 619.

[48]"'A Woman's Revenge'," New York Times, 6 February 1894, p. 2.

[49]"At the Theatres--a Woman's Revenge," NYDM, 10 February 1894, p. 3.

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At first, both audiences seemed to coexist happily because in The Prodigal Daughter there was something to please every taste. Unfortunately, French could find no worthy successor to The Prodigal Daughter. His subsequent productions either sacrificed the excitement and action of melodrama or the spectacle and glamor that could redeem a hackneyed book. Quite simply, French found it impossible to please all of the people all of the time. The Sunday reviewer for the Times was aware of the dichotomy in French's audiences, for he observed that while "to the people who sit in the orchestra and first balcony at the handsome American Theatre, 'A Woman's Revenge' is either dreadfully wearisome or mildly amusing, according to their dispositions, and their digestion, . . . its performance is a veritable feast to the gallery boys, . . . It is difficult to find plays suited to this spacious stage and auditorium . . . ."[50]

In the Dramatic Mirror, "The Usher" attributed French's failure to his bestowing "princely expenditure, superb scenery [and] accomplished actors . . . upon trashy plays."[51] Certainly, none of the productions thus far presented at the American were particularly notable for their plots, dialogue, and characterization, but it is doubtful whether French could have found many plays that would have pleased both of his audiences. Since he could

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[50]"The Week at the Theatres," 11 February 1894, p. 10.

[51]24 February 1894, p. 3.

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no longer afford to mount elaborate productions at the theatre, French abandoned his role as producer after A Woman's Revenge and converted the American to a combination house. The first visiting production to be booked into the American was J. K. Emmet in Fritz in a Madhouse. Thereafter, the American changed its bill weekly, presenting plays that had completed a run at another theatre and were beginning their tour, or shows that had returned to New York after a long period on the road. Occasionally, a big star would take the American for a few weeks of repertory, and even more occasionally, a new production would be mounted there.

In May 1894, the British actor Wilson Barrett made his first New York appearance of the season at the American, playing in The Silver King, with a single performance of Hamlet on a Friday night. Barrett returned to the American in December 1894 with a production of The Manxman, following it with Hamlet, Virginius, Claudian, Ben My Chree, Othello, and The Silver King in repertory. Other highlights of the 1894-95 season were performances by boxer James J. Corbett and Lillie Langtry in vehicles created especially for them, and a visit by "Sandow's Trocadero Variety Company," under the supervision of young Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., whom the Dramatic Mirror termed a "young manager in the front rank of amusement caterers of his kind."[52]

[52]"The Sandow Trocadero Vaudevilles," 23 March 1895, p. 13. Ziegfeld's association with Forty-second Street was to last for over thirty years.

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More typical of the productions at the American during this period were such melodramas as The Man Without a Country, which so stirred the "gallery boys" that the Dramatic Mirror recommended that ushers or police guards be stationed in the upper reaches of the theatre to keep order.[53]

While many of the productions during this period were aimed at the tastes of the gallery audiences, there were occasional attempts at more serious drama. In January 1895, the American presented the premiere of a play entitled The District Attorney, written by Harrison Grey Fiske (editor of the New York Dramatic Mirror) and Charles Klein (a writer whose greatest success lay in creating libretti for musical comedies). Minnie Maddern Fiske directed the rehearsals of the play, which starred Wilton Lackaye and Adele Ritchie. Needless to say, the Dramatic Mirror devoted a great deal of space to a review of the play, during which the following observations were made about the American's audiences:

> This house on important occasions has audiences that perhaps no other New York theatre can exactly parallel. It draws patronage from the critical, from those who, though possibly not particularly critical, are able to buy amusement wherever fancy may take them, and from the great mass who attend a theatre because they love to be moved--and are easily moved--by any plausible stage picture of life as it appeals to them from their more common experiences and through their matter-of-fact imaginations. In fact, the American Theatre audience, as a rule, is representative of all the elements

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[53]"American--The Man Without a Country," 27 October 1894, p. 10.

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> in metropolitan life; and the play that succeeds with such an audience may be ventured elsewhere with confidence.[54]

The District Attorney was able to attract this varied audience to the American for five weeks. It was followed by the usual assortment of farce-comedies, touring productions of musicals, and melodramas.

At the beginning of the 1895-96 season, an attempt was made to restore the American to its original position as a home for new productions. On September 4, the theatre opened for the season with The Great Diamond Robbery, a sensational melodrama starring Mme. Fanny Janauschek. It ran for several weeks, and was succeeded on November 5, by the premiere of Sutton Vane's In Sight of St. Paul's, advertised as "A Play for the Multitude." After four weeks, it was replaced by a touring show. At the end of December, the third new play of the season opened, a melodrama called Northern Lights. It, too, ran for several weeks before the American was forced to revert to its combination policy. Toward the close of the regular season, a single matinee of The Rivals was presented at the American with an all-star cast: Joseph Jefferson, Julia Marlowe Taber, Mrs. John Drew, Nat Goodwin, W. H. Crane, Joseph Holland, Robert Taber, E. M. Holland, and Francis Wilson. With ticket prices increased to a range of from $1.50 to $5.00, the performance netted $7,250 in

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54 J. A. Waldron, "American--The District Attorney," 20 January 1895, p. 3.

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receipts.[55] In May of 1896, a summer season of English comic opera was inaugurated under the management of Paul Steindorff and Thomas Ebert.

While comic opera reigned in the downstairs theatre, the Roof Garden was once again the home of vaudeville. The roof had been moderately successful under its previous management, but in 1896 it was turned over to a syndicate headed by John W. Hamilton. The syndicate also had charge of the Casino roof garden and had arranged for a London representative to send over European talent.[56] Faced with the prospect of a poor season, Hamilton tried several means to stir up interest in the two gardens. He offered the use of the American roof for political debates during intermissions of the show and experimented with having the Casino and the American share a vaudeville bill. The most notable of Hamilton's methods for creating interest in the roof shows was the presentation on the American Roof of a sketch called "Ten Minutes in the Latin Quartier [sic] ; or, a Study in the Nude." This act was considered, by the Police Inspector who viewed it, to be a violation of public decency. Hamilton was arrested, along with Hope Booth, the actress who appeared in it.[57]

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[55]"The Rivals," NYDM, 16 May 1896, p. 10.

[56]Untitled article, NYDM, 23 May 1896, p. 16.

[57]"Actress Hope Booth Arrested," New York Times, 23 July 1896, p. 1. This was the first, but far from the last, recorded arrest for public indecency in a West Forty-second Street theatre.

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During the summer of 1896, another syndicate, with ambitions encompassing far more than the management of two roof gardens, was being organized. On August 31, three theatrical partnerships (Hayman and Frohman, Nixon and Zimmerman, and Klaw and Erlanger) agreed to form a Theatrical Syndicate or Trust. The purpose of the organization was to control the booking of productions in theatres across America. Among them, the partnerships controlled enough theatres to be able to force touring companies to be booked by the Syndicate and to force theatre owners to take Syndicate shows. The existence of the Syndicate was to have a great influence on the economic organization of theatre in America, and would ultimately affect the theatrical life of Forty-second Street, especially in the first years of the new century.

Another event which would indirectly affect the future of Forty-second Street had occurred in November 1895 when Oscar Hammerstein I, a cigar maker, opera impresario, and theatre builder, opened his enormous Olympia Theatre on Broadway between Forty-fourth and Forty-fifth Streets. This was the first theatre to be built on Broadway above Forty-second Street, and thereby earned Hammerstein the title of "Father of Times Square." The original plan for the Olympia called for a "perfect palace of entertainment--which would have included three theatres, a roof garden, billiard rooms, a bowling alley, a turkish bath, cafés and restaurants."[58] Only part of this visionary plan ever

[58]Henderson, p. 263.

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became a reality. On November 25, 1895, Hammerstein opened the Lyric Theatre section of the Olympia building with a production of Excelsior, Jr., and a little over three weeks later inaugurated the Music Hall section with a performance by Yvette Guilbert. Hammerstein was never able to make the Olympia a financial success; he was forced to close it two years after it opened. After the debacle of the Olympia, Hammerstein concentrated his next theatre-building efforts in the Forty-second Street area, providing formidable opposition to the Theatrical Syndicate at the turn of the century.

In the summer of 1896, T. Henry French returned from Europe and announced that he would present the American premiere of The Broken Melody at the American in the fall. This sentimental play had run for 1,000 performances in England, primarily because of the appeal of its star, an actor-musician named Auguste Van Biene, who had played violin-cello with the Bayreuth orchestra. French brought Van Biene to America, along with several of the English actors who had played supporting roles in the original production. The play opened on November 5, and was an immediate success; audiences seemed particularly enamored of Van Biene's cello solos, which he changed weekly for the sake of variety. Since French's agreement with Van Biene had called for a run of eight weeks, it seemed that the manager had finally produced a profitable show. However, the hapless French had previously contracted with Fanny Davenport to present a month of repertory at the American

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beginning on November 27, and there was no way the contract could be broken. The Broken Melody was forced to leave the American at the height of its popularity and was replaced by Fanny Davenport in productions of Sardou's Fedora, Cleopatra, and La Tosca.[59] The theatre then returned to its usual diet of action-packed plays. One such production was "a drama of local interest" called New York. This offering seems to have been the usual reworking of familiar melodramatic materials, but is notable because it was an early producing effort by William A. Brady, who was at the time accumulating enough money from such potboilers to launch himself as a producer of serious drama.[60] A few weeks later, Brady followed New York with another successful melodrama, At Piney Ridge.[61]

By the early spring of 1897, T. Henry French was experiencing serious financial difficulties: Al Hayman and Charles Frohman were demanding payment of $10,231, and another $10,357 in promissory notes was due; Elliott Zborowski was suing French to foreclose the mortgage given by the manager on his interest in the American property in order to secure the lease on the theatre; and, finally,

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[59]The accounts of the production of The Broken Melody are taken from, "T. Henry French's European Trip," NYDM, 29 August 1896, p. 14; "The Cast for the Broken Melody," NYDM, 3 October 1896, p. 16; "American--The Broken Melody," NYDM, 14 November 1896, p. 16; and "Auguste Van Biene's Season," NYDM, 5 December 1896, p. 12.

[60]"American--New York," NYDM, 6 February 1897, p. 16.

[61]"American--At Piney Ridge," NYDM, 27 February 1897, p. 14.

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French's father was suing him for payment of a debt of $59,320. The result of all these demands was bankruptcy for French. A receiver was appointed and plans were made to sell the American property, which by now also included apartment buildings on Eighth Avenue. On October 4, 1897, the auction was held; the only bid was made by Elliott Zborowski who paid $375,625 for the property. French, who died five years later, was thus deprived of the theatre which he had worked so hard to build and to operate.[62]

French's financial problems led Edward A. Dithmar to write an extended consideration of the American Theatre for the magazine section of the Sunday New York Times on May 16, 1897. Dithmar regretted that "this theatre should be open to any reasonably solvent traveling 'combination' without regard to merit." Instead, Dithmar argued the need for

> a permanently established playhouse for melodrama, as it is called, of the best sort, romantic plays, and tragedy, old and new, not necessarily with a permanent stock company, though a few actors engaged by the season

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[62]French's financial difficulties are covered in "Manager French's Troubles," New York Times, 11 May 1897, p. 7; "Manager French's Troubles," New York Times, 12 May 1897; p. 7; "Receiver for T. H. French," New York Times, 13 May 1897, p. 9; "Mr. French's Business Troubles," NYDM, 22 May 1897, p. 13; "Sale of the American Theatre," NYDM, 9 October 1897, p. 17; and Thomas Allston Brown, A History of the New York Stage from the First Performance in 1732 to 1901, 3 Vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1903), 3: 583. According to the Times (13 May 1897, p. 9), at the time of his business troubles, French was residing at 260 West Forty-second Street.

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> would ensure smoother performances, and with a stage equipment of the finest and most modern sort.

The repertory of such a theatre should consist of

> Shakespeare and the few other dramatic classics worth airing out of the library, mounted appropriately (not with dazzling spectacular effects) and acted intelligently, and coherent, vital new plays, put on to run as long as they naturally would, with no forcing for speculative purposes . . . .[63]

Dithmar's scheme, as intelligent as it may seem to us, was never carried out at the American. Instead, after negotiating with several producers interested in the theatre, Zborowski decided to team with Henry Savage in the presentation of a season of opera in English. Savage had begun his career in real estate in Boston, where he had acquired an interest in the Castle Square Theatre, considered by most managers to be a white elephant. Convinced that the Boston theatre-going public would be interested in opera presented in English, Savage had formed the English Grand Opera Company (which soon became known as the Castle Square Opera Company); the undertaking was an immediate hit. Hearing of Savage's success in Boston, Zborowski decided that opera in English was the very thing to attract customers to the American. He and Savage formed a partnership and confidently announced that their purpose was "to produce in a first-class manner, both as to cast and scenic embellishments, the prominent standard works of the most

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[63] "The Drama," p. 8.

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successful composers in English, and at prices ranging from 25 cents to 75 cents. Every opera will be produced with new scenery and costumes."[64] To further attract audiences, the theatre was being completely redecorated.[65]

On Christmas Day, 1897, the Castle Square Opera Company (the New York and Boston companies were both referred to by this name) began its season with a production of Johann Strauss's The Queen's Lace Handkerchief. The music reviewer for the Times criticized the opera's awkwardly translated libretto, and complained that the company was not as good as its Boston namesake, but was forced to admit that "every person in the cast sang with all his soul and all his strength without thought of the hereafter."[66] The reviewer for the Dramatic Mirror praised the principal singers and "the general excellence of the scenery and costumes."[67] The leading members of the company in its first season were Grace Golden, Joseph Sheehan, and Lizzie MacNichol.

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[64]"Mr. Henry W. Savage--The Yankee Impresario," New York Times, 4 December 1897, p. 7.

[65]An undated picture in the American Theatre Folder, MCNY, shows the theatre's proscenium arch surrounded by scrolls with the names of opera composers inscribed upon them. Perhaps this was part of the redecorating that occurred before the opening of the opera season.

[66]"In the World of Music," New York Times, 26 December 1897, p. 6. This appreciation of the work of the chorus was to be repeated by critics throughout the company's existence.

[67]"American--The Queen's Lace Handkerchief," 1 January 1898, p. 14.

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Raymond Hitchcock, later to be a star performer in, and producer of, musical comedies, played supporting roles with the Castle Square troupe.

For the remainder of the 1897-98 season, this remarkable company presented a different opera in English every week, with the principals singing at virtually every performance. Critics remarked on the company's versatility, while crowds flocked to the American to hear everything from H. M. S. Pinafore to Carmen. Matinees were particularly well attended. On one Wednesday afternoon, the box office was shut down at 1:45 P.M., having sold 2,136 tickets for that day's performance (the theatre's capacity, including standing room, was 2,100). One of the reasons for the success of the Wednesday matinee was its popularity with music students, many of whom subscribed for a full season and attended performances with a music score in hand. The Castle Square Company further encouraged young singers by holding open "voice trials" each Tuesday.[68]

So successful was the Castle Square Company that its season was extended to the last week in June. The roof garden had opened earlier in the month, but instead of a vaudeville bill, provided only an orchestra for the audience's enjoyment after the opera. Once the

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[68]"Success of the Castle Square Company," NYDM, 15 January 1898, pp. 11, 17; "English Opera a Success," New York Times, 12 March 1899, p. 6.

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opera season had ended, the roof returned to vaudeville, this time under the management of Hurtig and Seamon.[69]

The popularity of the Castle Square Company in the spring of 1898 had not been lost on Oscar Hammerstein. Although financial difficulties had forced him to close the Olympia in 1897, Hammerstein announced in March 1898 that he would reopen his theatre with a stock comic opera company. As his financial situation worsened, Hammerstein found it necessary to abandon this project, and in June 1898 he lost the Olympia when his mortgage was foreclosed. The theatre was sold at auction on June 29, 1898 for $967,400. Hammerstein was not a man to take defeat easily, however; he immediately began preparations to build a new theatre.[70]

As the season of 1898-99 opened, the Castle Square Company made plans for another year of opera in English at the American Theatre. They began with such lighter works as Boccaccio, Dorothy, and Patience, before undertaking, on October 10, the first New York production of Aida in English. Yvonne de Treville, the company's new prima donna, alternated the taxing role of Aida with Effie Stewart. For this production, there were a total of 150 persons in the cast, including a military band.

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[69]"American--The Bohemian Girl," NYDM, 11 June 1898, p. 14; "American Roof Opens," NYDM, 9 July 1898, p. 16.

[70]Untitled article, NYDM, 5 March 1898, p. 13; Vincent Sheean, Oscar Hammerstein I: The Life and Exploits of an Impressario (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), p. 97.

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While the Castle Square Company was beginning its second season at the American, Oscar Hammerstein's new theatrical venture was taking shape. The site he had in mind for his new playhouse was the northwest corner of Forty-second Street and Seventh Avenue, occupied at the time by run-down buildings and a stable. Less than three months after the Olympia was auctioned off, Hammerstein announced that he was going to build a music hall called Hammerstein's Victoria. For this purpose he formed the Hammerstein Amusement Company in conjunction with his sons William and Arthur. After extensive negotiations with the various property owners, Hammerstein secured a lease on a plot running one hundred feet, four inches on Seventh Avenue and one hundred thirty-one feet on Forty-second Street.[71] Construction began immediately.

Because of his precarious financial position, Hammerstein was forced to pinch pennies in erecting the Victoria. The building itself was designed by the architectural firm of J. B. McElfatrick and Co. to cover

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[71]Reports of the terms of Hammerstein's lease vary. The New York Times ("Hammerstein's New Venture," 18 September 1898, p. 7) announced that the property rental came to $10,000 for the first year and $7,000 for each year after that. The length of the lease, according to the Times, was for five years, followed by two twenty-one-year renewals. George Blumenthal, who worked for Oscar Hammerstein in various capacities, recalled that the lease required Hammerstein to pay $5,000 a year for the first three years, followed by the two twenty-one-year renewal periods. See My 60 Years in Show Business (New York: Frederick C. Osberg, 1936), p. 68. Some of the confusion may have been caused by Hammerstein's propensity for exaggeration in public announcements.

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practically every inch of the property. One major means of saving on the cost of construction was Hammerstein's insistence that he was building a concert hall rather than a theatre. In his application for erection of the building, filed on October 6, 1898, Hammerstein described it as a "concert hall." The Superintendent of Buildings was evidently skeptical, because on October 13 Hammerstein sent him a letter declaring

> that the premises to be erected are not intended for theatrical or operatic performances, that there will be no excavation, room or cellar underneath a stage platform, that there will be no fly galleries, scene rooms, carpenter shop, or paintframe, . . . that we shall not provide or keep what is known as theatrical scenery on the premises, nor erect or provide stationary appurtenances necessary for performances of theatrical or operatic character; also, that no application for theatrical license will be made and that the premises when completed are to be devoted to attractions only, permitted under the existing concert licenses.[72]

A month later, this declaration was supported by a letter from the architects to the Commissioner of Buildings stating that there would be a stage in the Victoria but no excavation under it.[73] Letters on the subject continued to pass back and forth through January 1899. The reason

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[72]Letter from Oscar Hammerstein, General Manager, Hammerstein Amusement Company, to Superintendent of Buildings, New York, dated October 13, 1898. This and subsequent letters quoted are in the Plans, Alterations to Victoria Theatre Folder, Lincoln Center.

[73]Letter from J. B. McElfatrick and Sons, Architects to T. J. Brady, Commissioner of Buildings, New York City, November 14, 1898. In 1906, Variety reported that the Victoria's lack of a trap door leading to space under the stage prevented vaudevillian Arthur Dunn from doing his usual trick with a piano stool ("Shows of the Week," 10 March 1906, p. 9).

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for Hammerstein's insistence that the Victoria was to be a concert hall may be found in a letter from J. B. McElfatrick and Sons to the Commissioner of Buildings in which the architects noted that there were two different licenses available, one for theatrical and operatic performances and one for concert halls. The architects then pointed out that "your department [the Department of Buildings] is not responsible for violations of such licenses, after the erection of a building in which performances of either character are being given."[74] Clearly, Hammerstein's intent was to construct the theatre under the less stringent building restrictions applicable to concert halls, and then to open it with a theatrical presentation. As late as 1902, an Application for Amendment (alteration) to the building stated that the Victoria had been used as a concert hall, despite the fact that numerous theatrical productions had been presented there in the three years since its opening.[75]

Another method of saving money on the construction of the Victoria was the use of second-hand building materials and interior fixtures. Hammerstein's biographer reported that every bit of brick and lumber from the buildings demolished on the site of the theatre was used in

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[74]Letter from J. B. McElfatrick and Sons to T. J. Brady, Commissioner of Buildings, November 30, 1898.

[75]Application for Amendment filed with the Department of Buildings by William E. Mobray, Architect, on May 2, 1902. No further questions about Hammerstein's operation of the Victoria seem to have been raised by any city agencies.

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construction. Rubbish was employed to fill the hollow spaces in the walls or between floors. The heating apparatus and fixtures were secondhand, as were the carpets, bought for 25¢ a yard from the owners of a trans-Atlantic liner that was being retired from service. Hammerstein's son Arthur chose the gold and white color scheme for the theatre because the plaster walls were naturally white and would not require painting. Arthur, who was handy with tools, made the cast cornices that covered the supporting beams. He modeled the cornices with a motif of a leaf encircling a hole. Inside the holes were positioned the electric light bulbs, thus eliminating the expense of lighting fixtures. The orchestra seats were secondhand and repeatedly broke down, after which they were propped up by wooden beer crates from the theatre's bar.[76] With all this cheese-paring, the total cost of the building exclusive of the property was approximately $50,000 (in contrast, the American had cost $500,000).[77]

Hammerstein's design for the theatre was unique. The auditorium consisted of a large orchestra or parquet seating 550. To the rear of the orchestra was a spacious promenade thirty feet wide and three hundred feet long, encircling the orchestra from one side of the proscenium arch

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[76]Sheean, pp. 102-104; Blumenthal, p. 69.

[77]The $50,000 figure is given on the Application for Erection. As in the case of other details about the Victoria, sources vary widely on the cost of the building, with figures ranging from $50,000 to $250,000. The latter figure probably includes the assessed valuation of the land.

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to the other. Admission to the promenade was only 50¢, and both smoking and drinking were permitted there (they were not allowed in the orchestra seats). Above the orchestra was a tier of boxes attached to the front of the balcony. Smoking and drinking were permitted in the upper parts of the house, where uniformed waiters were available to serve drinks. The capacity of the balcony was 450; estimates of the seating in the boxes ranged from 110 to 250. The theatre's total seating capacity of 1,250 was not very large for a theatre of its day, but the existence of the promenade made it possible to accommodate as many as 2,000 standees if the occasion warranted.[78] The existence of the promenade and the bars on every level seems to suggest that Hammerstein intended to run the theatre as an old-fashioned music hall, in keeping with his application to build a concert hall rather than a theatre. In public announcements, the building was referred to as a music hall or as a combined theatre and music hall. There can be no doubt, however, that Hammerstein intended from the first to build a playhouse that would accommodate legitimate theatrical productions. The stage, minimized in the descriptions sent to the Buildings Department, was quite large; the Times reported that the stage was one hundred feet wide and fifty feet deep.[79] While these figures may be another example of

[78]"Incidents in Stageland," New York Sun, 3 March 1899, in the Reign of Error Scrapbook, Lincoln Center; "Hammerstein's Opening Postponed," NYDM, 4 March 1899, p. 17; "The Revival of Hammerstein," New York Times, 23 February 1899, p. 7.

[79]"The Revival of Hammerstein."

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Hammersteinean exaggeration, other sources corroborate that the stage was of an ample size. The Dramatic Mirror described it as "the second largest in the city," and after viewing the opening production the reviewer for the Times related that "the stage is so built that no spectator need crane his neck to see anything that is done upon it, and is broad and deep enough for big scenic effects."[80]

In hiring McElfatrick and Sons to plan the building, Hammerstein chose a firm that had great experience in theatre architecture; nevertheless, it was Oscar Hammerstein himself who was the prime mover in the planning and construction of all his theatres. That Hammerstein intended to take a personal interest in the operation of the Victoria is indicated by the fact that he included in the design for the theatre three private rooms on the third level which would serve as his bedroom, office, and workshop. According to some accounts, he also ordered that the stable's hayloft be left standing in back of the stage as a refuge when the theatre itself became too oppressive.[81] Once the plans for the Victoria had been approved, Hammerstein was desperate to have the theatre finished. As work on the building progressed, the Dramatic Mirror commented that "it is worth going miles to see Mr. Hammerstein in his role of superintendent of construction. Not a detail escapes him, and

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[80]"Hammerstein's Opening Postponed;" "Hammerstein's Victoria," 3 March 1899, p. 6.

[81]Sheean, p. 103; Blumenthal, p. 69.

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every man around the place puts in a full day's work, simply because he cannot help being infected with the energy which is the chief characteristic of Mr. Hammerstein."[82]

Even with Hammerstein's personal supervision, there were delays. The original opening date was announced as February 27, which would have enabled Hammerstein to break all records by opening the theatre exactly four months after the groundbreaking. Delays in construction forced Hammerstein to move the opening back to March 2, and even then the theatre was not completely finished.

If any of Hammerstein's economies in constructing the Victoria were in evidence on opening night, they were not commented upon in the next day's reviews. Instead, the writers were enthusiastic in describing the new theatre. The Dramatic Mirror reported that "the decorations are in white and canary, with a little gold here and there. The effect is pretty and the house has a very bright, cheery look, which is emphasized by the warm, red colors in the chairs, carpets and hangings."[83] Other reviewers praised the "polished marble balustrades, painted pictures, [and] statuary," the "centre piece of the ceiling from which an electric chandelier depends," and "a large figure typifying genius above the proscenium arch."[84] There was an

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[82]"Hammerstein is Hustling," 12 November 1898, p. 18.

[83]"Hammerstein's Victoria Opened," 11 March 1899, p. 17.

[84]"Incidents in Stageland;" "The Revival of Hammerstein."

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outpouring of affection for Oscar Hammerstein from the opening-night audience, and a genuine pleasure in seeing his fortunes restored. The reviewer for the Dramatic Mirror summed up the experience in this way: "It was a big night for Hammerstein. Nobody cared for the performance, but everybody told everybody else what a fine old man Hammerstein was, and how glad they were that he was once more on his feet."[85]

On opening night, the standing-room-only audience of formally dressed men and women was treated to the following programme:

1. March: "A Reign of Error"
2. Newhouse and Guernsey - musical specialty
3. Victoria Festival March [composed by Oscar Hammerstein]
4. The Rogers Brothers in John J. McNally's vaudeville in 3 acts, "A Reign of Error"

This programme seems to have been deliberately chosen in order to add to the confusion as to whether the Victoria was a music hall featuring variety entertainment or a legitimate theatre. A Reign of Error, the first starring vehicle for the Rogers Brothers (Dutch comics who had made their name in vaudeville), seems to have been a musical hodgepodge created for the purpose of showing off the specialties of the young comics. The same reviewers who were enthusiastic about the new theatre were less charitable about the show. The Dramatic Mirror described it as "simply a string of incidents, divided into three parts, with the well-known specialty of the Rogers Brothers spread

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[85]"Hammerstein's Victoria Opened."

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out thinly over the whole affair."[86] The Times reviewer was somewhat more generous, characterizing the show as "full of honest if somewhat juvenile fun. . . . It is never unpleasantly coarse."[87] Because the Rogers Brothers were known primarily as a vaudeville act, and because A Reign of Error was described as a "vaudeville in three acts," no one seems to have noticed that the so-called "music hall" had opened with a legitimate production. The Rogers Brothers remained at the Victoria for 102 performances before the theatre closed for the summer.

At the same time that Hammerstein was experiencing his first success in his new theatre, the Castle Square Opera Company was bringing its season to a close at the American. This second year of opera in English had included such ambitious ventures as the first English-language production of La Bohème six months after Puccini's opera had made its American debut, and a production of Lohengrin with an enlarged orchestra and chorus. It is obvious from reviews of their work that the company's performances were uneven and that the costumes, scenery, and stage management were sloppy at times. Nevertheless, the overall quality of the company received critical praise while at the same time attracting new audiences to performances of both light and serious operas. In summing up the work of the company's second season, W. J. Henderson, the

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[86] "Victoria--A Reign of Error," 11 March 1899, p. 16.

[87] "Hammerstein's Victoria."

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music critic for the Times, made the following observations:

> . . . the success of this institution, for that is what is has become, demonstrates that it is not necessary that opera should be performed by the world's greatest artists at immense cost. At the American Theatre opera is given at very low prices by singers who are not above the grade of those heard in the ordinary "comic opera" performance. The employment of people of this grade is what makes the plan feasible. All of them work hard, rehearse often, and are generally out of voice. Not one of them is possessed of a singing organ of the first quality. . . .
>
> The orchestra of the Castle Square Company is radically, hopelessly bad. The chorus, which is much overpraised, is a good one, but it never has time to do more than learn the music of each opera, and sing it with all its might and main. . . .
>
> The operas have been neatly staged. There has been plenty of new and respectably painted scenery, and the costumes, without being elaborate, have generally been fairly correct and not bad to look at. The stage management has been above average.[88]

Henderson concludes that the Castle Square Company serves a real purpose by bringing opera to audiences who would never have attended the Met.

As the 1898-99 season drew to a close, the managements of both the American and the Victoria made plans for the summer roof garden season. The American Roof was to be under the direction of George A. Kingsbury, who promised to offer "high class musical features under Maurice Levy and polite variety."[89] The roof opened on July 1, but had difficulty attracting an audience and was forced to close after a few weeks. Kingsbury blamed the chilly nights and

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[88]"Music," 7 May 1899, p. 7.

[89]Untitled article, NYDM, 10 June 1899, p. 16.

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damp weather for the roof's failure.[90] A more plausible reason for the poor business at the American was the opening on June 26 of the "Venetian Terrace Garden" on the roof of the Victoria.

The Victoria roof garden seems to have received as much of Hammerstein's attention as the main theatre did. According to a newspaper account, the roof was designed to represent the grand promenade at Monte Carlo.[91] (In light of this, it seems odd that the name "Venetian Terrace" was chosen). The basic framework of the roof theatre, constructed of iron, rose in terraces to a height of thirty feet. In the center of the roof was a stage surrounded by audience seats on all four sides. By this arrangement, no audience member was more than fifty feet from the performers. A second stage was built to one side, making it possible to give two performances simultaneously.[92] The decorations seem to have consisted mainly of growing plants and bushes. Illumination was provided by 2,000 electric lights, some of which were immersed in globes of colored water to give an unusual lighting effect. Because of the size of the roof theatre and because it was not enclosed, acoustics were rather poor. For that reason, most of the

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[90] "American Roof Closed," NYDM, 29 July 1899, p. 18.

[91] "Opening of Hammerstein's Roof," NYDM, 1 July 1899, p. 18. The subsequent description of the roof is taken from this account.

[92] I have not uncovered any evidence that these two stages were ever actually employed at the same time.

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vaudeville acts booked for the roof were so-called "dumb acts," that is, performances that were primarily visual rather than oral. Exceptions were singing groups who could be expected to make enough noise to be heard by the audience.

Among the acts seen at the opening of the Venetian Terrace were the Johnson Brothers (bicycle act), Farnum and Nelson (acrobats), M. Gautier (horse trainer), and the "Auto-Humano Ladies' Orchestra," an act consisting of one Dr. Miller, who played the organ while mannikins of women were mysteriously manipulated by wires to give the illusion that they were playing in an orchestra.[93] With weekly changes in the bill, the Venetian Terrace did excellent business before closing on September 9.

As the two theatres on West Forty-second Street looked forward to the new season, there was a note of optimism in the theatrical world. The previous season had been the best in many years for New York theatres.[94] The city itself had been growing rapidly. On New Year's Day 1898, Greater New York had been officially formed out of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island. New York immediately became a city of first importance, and all New Yorkers took pride in their city's new status.[95]

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[93]"Victoria Roof Garden," NYDM, 8 July 1899, p. 16.

[94]"Theatres Made Money," New York Times, 14 May 1899, p. 25.

[95]Henderson, p. 177.

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Despite all this growth, West Forty-second Street was somewhat slow in becoming urbanized. In a booklet called Pictorial Forty-second Street, published in 1899, photographs of the theatre block revealed the following: moving west from Seventh Avenue along the north side of the block, there was the Victoria, followed by some low buildings and brownstones. Toward the middle of the block was located George W. Thedford's Coal and Wood Yards, with St. Luke's Church a little further west. Closer to the western end of the block were the offices of Richard S. Treacy, a real estate and insurance agent. On the northeast corner of Eighth Avenue and Forty-second Street were the offices of Dr. Walsh, a dentist. On the south side of the block, the Seventh Avenue corner was occupied by MacDermot's Cafe. Next door was the Garrick Chop House, followed by William D. Grant's tile business. At 210 West Forty-second Street there was the Royal Cleaning and Tailoring Company, with brownstones further to the west. At 216 West Forty-second Street there was a dental infirmary and oxygen company, next door to which was the Stancourt Laundry. In the middle of the block were the Central Baptist Church and the free circulating library. The buildings to the west of the library appear to be apartment houses and brownstones. Near the corner are a money exchange office and the Forty-second Street entrance to the American Theatre. The Eighth Avenue corner was not photographed, but from other records it is clear that the Franklin Savings Bank

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occupied that spot all through this period.[96] While the photographs in Pictorial Forty-second Street indicate that the number of residences on West Forty-second Street seems to have been diminishing during this period, the businesses that took their place were still mainly related to the day-to-day life of the neighborhood's inhabitants rather than to the world of the theatre that had begun to invade the Long Acre Square area.

During the summer of 1899, however, plans were being made to add to the theatrical character of the block. Having begun to repair his finances with the successful opening of the Victoria, Oscar Hammerstein cleared the way for further theatre-building ventures by declaring bankruptcy in April 1899. This maneuver rid him of his Olympia debts. His creditors were unable to attach any of the Victoria's profits because that theatre was owned by the Hammerstein Amusement Company. Hammerstein claimed to own no stock in the company, merely receiving a salary of $100 a week for managing the Victoria.[97] Having improved his financial situation, Hammerstein began to plan a new theatre to be built on the lot adjoining the Victoria on West Forty-second Street. He immediately ran into difficulties regarding his lease of the property. On May 22, Mrs. Anna F. Davidson, the owner of the land, sued Oscar

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[96] Pictorial Forty-second Street (New York: Pictorial Publishing Co., 1899), n.p.

[97] "Hammerstein in a New Role," NYDM, 22 April 1899, p. 17; "Hammerstein's Creditors Meet," NYDM, 13 May 1899, p. 17.

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Hammerstein, William Hammerstein, and Sol L. Lichtenstein (officers in the Hammerstein Amusement Company) for "ejectment" from the lot adjoining the Victoria. Co-plaintiff in the suit was George M. Jansen, who claimed to have made an agreement for a forty-six year lease on the property on May 1. Hammerstein countered that he had an oral agreement with Davidson predating the Jansen lease, and that he had paid $250 to bind the agreement. The court ruled against Hammerstein, ordering him to vacate the land.[98] Jansen promptly announced that he would build a music hall on the property. Toward the end of June, he made it known that the plans for the building were filed and the contracts were let. The theatre, to be known as the Orpheum, was to house vaudeville and burlesque at popular prices. In addition to the main theatre, there was to be a glass-covered roof garden and a billiard room and café in the basement. The overall style of architecture was to be Moorish, and the front of the building would be made of stained glass. The seating capacity was to be 800.[99]

For the rest of the summer and well into the fall of 1899 there was no further word of Jansen's theatre. Then, in November, the Dramatic Mirror carried a story

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[98]"The Hammerstein 'Squatter' Suit," New York Times, 23 May 1899, p. 14; "Proceedings for Ejectment," NYDM, 27 May 1899, p. 17; "Ruling Against Hammerstein," New York Times, 25 May 1899, p. 4.

[99]"Jansen's New Theatre," NYDM, 24 June 1899, p. 18. Despite Jansen's assurances that the building was on its way to becoming a reality, I found no further mention of Jansen or his Orpheum Theatre in any sources I consulted.

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called "Another Hammerstein Theatre" in which it reported of the property: "The ground has been in the hands of several would-be theatre builders for months past, but the indefatigable manager-architect-builder-inventor, etc., finally secured it."[100] Whether Jansen was unable to put together sufficient financing for his theatre, or whether Hammerstein simply out-maneuvered Jansen is not discernible from the Dramatic Mirror's report. What is clear is that Hammerstein had already done extensive planning for his new theatre, for in the same article it was announced that the new house would be constructed of Philadelphia brick with granite and terra cotta trimmings, would seat 1,200 and would cost $200,000. The completion date was announced as August 1, 1900. The roof of the new theatre was to be the same height as that of the Victoria so that the two roofs could be made into the largest roof garden in New York. A month later Hammerstein announced that his new playhouse would be called the Theatre Republic and that the theatrical producing firm of Liebler and Company would fill out the first season with their attractions, opening with James A. Herne in Sag Harbor.[101]

While plans for the new theatre were taking shape, Hammerstein was searching for the right kinds of shows for the Victoria. Having succeeded with a Rogers Brothers musical in the spring, Hammerstein decided to bring the

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[100] 11 November 1899, p. 15.

[101] "Hammerstein's New Theatre," NYDM, 9 December 1899, p. 2.

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brothers back in the fall. The new show was called The Rogers Brothers in Wall Street. On opening night, the stage boxes were occupied by Mayor Van Wyck and a number of Tammany Hall figures who seemed to enjoy the many political jokes included in the play.[102] Although Wall Street seems to have had little more in the way of a plot than A Reign of Error, it amused the Victoria's audiences for fifteen weeks.

The 1899-1900 season had a more auspicious beginning at the American Theatre, where the Castle Square Opera Company launched its third season with the first production in English of Die Meistersinger. For this third season of opera in English, Henry Savage announced that a new plan had been established whereby members of the New York and Chicago Castle Square companies would be interchanged during the course of the season, with the repertoire so arranged that the operas presented would always be suitable to the talents of those singers in the company at the time. The choruses would be expanded by the addition of ambitious students, and were to be further extended on special occasions by employing an auxiliary group made up of members of church choirs and singing societies. The orchestra would also be augmented, and the musicians would now be located in an orchestra pit that had been lowered by six feet. A new act drop was installed "so that singers may respond to curtain calls without delaying the change of scenes." The

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[102]"Rogers Brothers in Wall Street," New York Times, 19 September 1899, p. 5.

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depth of the stage was increased by twenty feet to provide added space for "scenic equipments."[103] Over the summer, Savage had also announced plans to establish an operatic school in conjunction with the American Theatre, but this part of his plan never came to fruition.[104]

The production of Die Meistersinger was perhaps the most ambitious undertaking of the Castle Square Company during its tenure at the American. Yvonne de Treville, the company's leading lady, had spent the summer in Europe studying the roles she was to sing at the American that fall. The twenty-four principals in the opera were supported by a chorus of 100 and dozens of supers. The orchestra was also enlarged for the occasion.[105] In reviewing the company's first performance of Die Meistersinger on October 2, the critic for the Times found their singing unequal to the burden of such a difficult work. Such adverse criticism did not seem to dampen the ambition of the Castle Square singers, however, for in succeeding weeks they appeared in Romeo and Juliet, Aida, Tannhauser, Il Trovatore, and Carmen. Even the Times was forced to admit that the Castle Square Opera Company had developed a whole new audience for opera. Of those who

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[103]"Castle Square Company," New York Times, 1 October 1899, p. 18.

[104]"Henry W. Savage Returns," NYDM, 29 July 1899, p. 2.

[105]"Yvonne de Treville Returns," NYDM, 30 September 1899, p. 15; "Preparations for Die Meistersinger," NYDM, 16 September 1899, p. 15.

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attended the performances at the American, the Times wrote:

> There is apparently not a theatre-worn, blasé theatregoer among them. Everyone applauds, and even the women take off their gloves and clap heartily. People go to be entertained and possibly to be instructed and educated as well, to know the great operas so that they will be recognized at sight--or hearing. The number of men to be seen there is a revelation to the people who believe that, except among a few thoroughly cultivated people or real musicians, men do not care for anything in the way of music except a little light opera or more generally music of the vaudeville class.[106]

As the Castle Square season progressed, Savage announced that in January the company would present the first American production of A Basso Porto (called in English At the Lower Harbor), by Niccolo Spinelli. The lead was to be sung by Selma Kronold, who had originated the role in Cologne two years before, and who was now with the Castle Square Company. To fill out the evening, the company would also present Offenbach's The Magic Melody.[107] This premiere production of an opera gave the Times' music critic a chance to compare the work of the Castle Square Company with that of the Metropolitan Opera Company. After criticizing the star system and the sloppy chorus work at the Met, the critic praised the "care and industry in the preparations" of At the Lower Harbor and concluded that "the manner in which 'A Basso Porto' was put on the stage at the American Theatre should have

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[106]"At a Castle Square Performance," 15 October 1899, p. 20.

[107]"A New Opera in Preparation," NYDM, 23 December 1899, p. 70.

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covered the Metropolitan Opera House with shame . . . ."[108]

By the spring of 1900, Henry Savage's Castle Square Opera Company was solidly established. In contrast, Oscar Hammerstein was having great difficulty in finding shows for the Victoria. When the Rogers Brothers concluded their engagement at the end of the year, they were succeeded by Chris and the Magic Lamp, a three-act extravaganza with music by John Philip Sousa. The show had the popular Edna Wallace Hopper in the title role, but even her talents could not overcome the trite book and commonplace music. Chris ran for eight weeks before being replaced by another musical, Mam'selle 'Awkins, which was also criticized for a dull book and mediocre music.[109] Five weeks later, the final show for the season was produced. A Hot Old Time was a variety farce starring a family of vaudevillians called the Rays. Having failed to find a show successful enough to run into the warm weather, Hammerstein closed the Victoria on April 28, and began to plan for the summer roof season.

The Castle Square season at the American lasted to the end of May. In March, Savage's lease on the American, which was due to expire in December, had been taken over by Henry Greenwall, a southern theatre owner.

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[108]W. J. Henderson, "Themes and Topics in the Music World," 4 February 1900, p. 18.

[109]"Victoria--Chris and the Magic Lamp," NYDM, 13 January 1900, p. 16; "Victoria--Mam'selle 'Awkins," NYDM, 3 March 1900, p. 16.

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Greenwall announced that he would install a stock company at the American beginning in the fall of 1900.[110] Henry Savage was willing to give up his lease on the American because he had just entered into an agreement to form the "Metropolitan English Opera Company" for the purpose of presenting opera in English at the Met. While it is obvious that the Met, under the leadership of Maurice Grau, was operating on the "if you can't lick 'em, join 'em" principle, Savage's motivation seems to have been slightly more aesthetic. In announcing the formation of his new company, Savage stated that "I fully appreciate the fact that my present company in this city is inefficient in the chorus and orchestra, principally due to the fact of the extraordinarily cheap prices which prevail and the lack of stage facilities, which will not permit enlargement in either instance. But through the new arrangement, all these deficiencies will be overcome."[111]

The realization that the 1899-1900 season was to be the last one for the Castle Square Company at the American added a certain poignancy to their final performances. On the last night (May 26), the American was packed to the rafters to hear the entire company appear in

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[110]"American Theatre Lease," New York Times, 29 March 1900, p. 7.

[111]"Grand Opera in English," New York Times, 22 March 1900, p. 7. The season of opera in English opened at the Met on October 1, 1900 to indifferent reviews; the company went on tour with the intention of returning to the Met in April, but after a loss of $30,000 the company was disbanded.

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segments of several of their most popular operas. In summing up their three seasons at the American, the Times calculated that the company had given eight performances a week for ninety-five weeks and had sung operas by thirty-three different composers, including 168 performances of Gilbert and Sullivan.[112] While the shortcomings of the company were often pointed out by reviewers, the general critical consensus was that the Castle Square Opera Company had introduced new audiences to opera and had demonstrated that their simple, unpretentious productions could be as effective as the elaborate spectacles at the Met.

The change in lessees at the American meant that the theatre's roof garden remained closed during the summer of 1900. In spite of Hammerstein's preoccupation with the construction of the Republic, the Victoria roof garden opened on June 4 with Wormwood's Circus as the principal attraction. During the fourteen weeks that the roof remained open, there were few changes or additions to the program on the roof, presumably because the construction of the new theatre was demanding Hammerstein's attention. One novelty that was presented on the roof during the course of the summer was a moving picture of the Fitzsimmons-Ruhlin prize fight. Such films were often used to "chase" or move an audience out at the end of a vaudeville show. During the next decades, films were to become a more and more important part of the vaudeville

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[112]"Farewell Performance of Opera at the American Theatre," 27 May 1900, p. 20.

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bill, eventually supplanting live entertainment as the drawing card to the theatres on West Forty-second Street.

While the Victoria roof passed a profitable summer, Hammerstein plunged into the construction of the Theatre Republic. The announced date for the Republic's opening was now September 1, but the usual delays caused the opening to be postponed until September 27. The greatest difficulty in constructing the Republic seems to have been the small size of the plot of land it was to occupy. The lot upon which the theatre was built was seventy feet wide on the Forty-second Street side by one hundred feet deep. Like the Victoria, the Republic was four stories high, although the latter theatre seems to have been a few feet higher than the former. The size of the property dictated the construction of a small theatre. Photographs taken during renovations in 1902 show that the backstage area was very shallow, and one of Hammerstein's associates recalls that the theatre barely seated 900, yet in typical Hammersteinean fashion it was announced that the theatre seated 1,100 and that the stage was seventy-five feet high from stage to gridiron. Hammerstein designed the theatre to hold a maximum number of seats. In order to save space, on the sidewalk in front of the theatre were constructed two open stairways leading to the balconies, thus obviating the need for large staircases inside the theatre. The box office was located underneath the top of the

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stairway.[113] Inside the theatre's front doors was a tiny lobby leading directly to the orchestra seats. Because the lobby was so small, it was an inadequate buffer against street noises, with the result that patrons in the rear orchestra seats often had difficulty in hearing the play. To further economize on space, the orchestra was located in a music gallery over the proscenium arch rather than in front of the stage. Making the most of the theatre's size, Hammerstein described it as "a drawing room of the drama" and declared that it would be "dedicated to all that is best in dramatic and lyric art."[114]

Although the outer facade of the building was characterized as being Venetian in style,[115] Hammerstein did not seem to have a particular period or style in mind when designing the Republic. Among the outstanding features of the interior was a large gold and green dome over the orchestra seats. Recessed into the dome were red electric lights that cast a soft glow over the house. Also admired were such decorations as the allegorical figures of Harmony and Melody over the proscenium arch.

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[113]Photograph in Republic Theatre Folder, MCNY; Blumenthal, p. 82; "The Theatre Republic," New York Times, 23 September 1900, p. 17. Although McElfatrick and Sons were the architects of record, it was generally acknowledged that Hammerstein had ultimate control over the design and construction of his theatres.

[114]"The Theatre Republic," New York Times, 23 September 1900, p. 17.

[115]"Dramatic and Musical," New York Times, 29 September 1900, p. 14.

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The overall color scheme of the theatre was green, ivory, and old gold.[116]

The house consisted of an orchestra, two balconies, and twelve boxes (six in the proscenium and six in the house). The stage was reportedly thirty-three feet wide and thirty-two feet deep, and was outfitted with electric motors for moving scenery. The heating system consisted of ducts running under the asphalt floors rather than steam pipes and radiators.

First nighters were enthusiastic about the new theatre. The reviewer for the Dramatic Mirror described the Republic as "a model of what a comfortable, well appointed theatre should be. It is a small, cozy house, with roomy aisles and foyer, and wide spaces between the rows of chairs." The Times reviewer reported that "the unique, beautiful and comfortable auditorium was greatly admired."[117] Also admired was the opening production, Sag Harbor, which starred its author, James A. Herne, and featured young Lionel Barrymore in an important role. It ran for seventy-six performances before beginning a lengthy tour.

While Hammerstein was concerning himself with opening the Republic, the Victoria's season was inaugurated with yet another Rogers Brothers farce, this one called

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[116]The Sag Harbor Pilot, 8 October 1900, p. 1. In the Sag Harbor Clippings Folder, Lincoln Center.

[117]"Republic--Sag Harbor," NYDM, 6 October 1900, p. 16; "Dramatic and Musical."

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The Rogers Brothers in Central Park. The show was not quite as successful as the brothers' other efforts, but it did manage a run of ten weeks. At the other end of the block, the American Theatre inaugurated its first stock season under the direction of Henry Greenwall with a production of The Great Ruby. The leading players were Ralph Stuart and Mary Hampton. Admission to the house was 25¢, 35¢, and 50¢.

At first, the reviewers found much to praise in the offerings of the stock company, particularly in the elaborate scenic effects of its opening production. It was not long before the critics began to find fault with the company's work, however. Of its production of The Charity Ball during the week of September 24, the Dramatic Mirror reviewer wrote: "The scenery was more gaudy than rich, and the acting was like unto it. The comedy scenes were played noisily, the serious scenes were presented with overemphasis, and the individual characters were nearly all exaggerated."[118] Among the early productions of the stock company was a revival of The Prodigal Daughter, the play that had opened the American Theatre in 1893. With a few exceptions, the Greenwall company's repertoire consisted of such melodramas as The Two Orphans, Cumberland '61, and The Power of the Press.

In the last days of 1900, the productions at the American, the Victoria, and the Republic gave some

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[118]"American--The Great Ruby," NYDM, 15 September 1900, p. 17; "American--the Charity Ball," NYDM, 29 September 1900, p. 16.

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indications of the future direction that each theatre would take. For Christmas Week the American featured a production of The Silver King. During one of the performances, the long wait between scenes was enlivened by a fight that broke out in the gallery. The police had to be called to take the combatants away.[119] In the next few years, melodrama would be the dominant form of theatre at the American, and the theatre's audiences would be noted for their lack of refinement.

At the Victoria, the Christmas show was Miss Prinnt, a farce comedy starring Marie Dressler. Like many other Victoria shows, Miss Prinnt was closer to an extended vaudeville sketch than a play: interpolated into the story were two "coon" songs and a burlesque of L'Aiglon.[120] During the next few years, the Victoria would experiment with many different types of productions from high tragedy to farce before the Hammersteins would decide that their "music hall" was most suited to vaudeville.

At the Republic, the last day of 1900 witnessed the production of In the Palace of the King. Based on the novel by F. Marion Crawford, the play was written expressly for the talents of its star, Viola Allen. It was given an elaborate mounting, with six interior scenes designed by

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[119]"American--the Silver King," NYDM, 29 December 1900, p. 16.

[120]"Victoria--Miss Prinnt," NYDM, 5 January 1901, p. 14.

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Ernest Albert.[121] In the next two years, the Republic would play host to other great actresses of the era such as Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Henrietta Crosman before the theatre would be leased by David Belasco as a permanent home for his protégé, Mrs. Leslie Carter. Thus, as the new century began, the three theatres constructed on West Forty-second Street had begun to take on distinctive characteristics, both in the type of dramatic fare they offered and in the kinds of audiences they attracted.

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[121]"Republic--In the Palace of the King," NYDM, 12 January 1901, p. 12.

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CHAPTER III

SYNDICATE VS. INDEPENDENTS (1901-1904)

When T. Henry French and Oscar Hammerstein decided to build theatres on West Forty-second Street, their choice of location was no doubt influenced by the opportunity of obtaining relatively inexpensive tracts of land in an area that seemed destined to become the next major theatrical district. It is unlikely, however, that either French or Hammerstein had any idea how quickly Forty-second Street would be transformed into the center of New York's theatrical activity. In the period from 1901 through 1904, four new theatres (one with a roof garden) were built on Forty-second Street; another playhouse underwent a change of name and a major renovation; and still another was converted from a legitimate stage to a vaudeville house.

To some extent, this rapid expansion on Forty-second Street can be explained by the growth of theatre throughout America. The years following the turn of the century were ones of unprecedented popularity for live theatre: virtually every city and town across the country had one or more legitimate playhouses which were regularly visited by the hundreds of combination companies then touring the land. Perhaps never before in the history of

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western civilization had live theatre been as widespread or as accessible to the average citizen. This growth of live theatre affected Forty-second Street for two reasons. The first, the development of New York as the starting point for the hundreds of touring combination companies, has been described in a previous chapter. Essential to the success of a combination tour was an initial run in New York, enabling the show to be billed as "direct from Broadway." As the number of combinations increased, the need for more theatre space in New York likewise increased. The second way that the growth of live theatre affected Forty-second Street concerns the popularity of theatre with New Yorkers themselves. During the nineteenth century, the inhabitants of New York had customarily attended a wide variety of entertainments, both in small neighborhood theatres and in the more fashionable playhouses on Broadway. By the turn of the century, the Broadway theatres were patronized, not only by the ever-expanding population of Manhattan, but by visitors from the other boroughs of Greater New York who were now able to reach the theatre district in a relatively short time, due to the improving system of mass transit. These native audiences were further swelled by a virtually endless stream of out-of-town businessmen who were drawn to the new metropolis because of its financial and manufacturing institutions, and by tourists who came to New York because of its growing reputation as an amusement center.

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This seemingly unlimited supply of New York audiences, added to the need for a producing base for combination productions, resulted in a demand for new playhouses that occurred at the precise time when the northward march of the theatre district had brought it to Long Acre Square. By themselves, the confluence of these trends would certainly have resulted in the construction of a number of theatres in the neighborhood of Forty-second Street. There was, however, an additional catalyst to the theatre-building boom that began at the turn of the century--the expanding conflict between the Theatrical Syndicate and a handful of independent producers and actors. In the years after its formation in 1896, the Syndicate had managed to gain control of 500 theatres across the country.[1] While those who sided with the Syndicate argued that it had brought order and stability to the chaotic theatre-booking process, opponents of the Theatrical Trust saw it as a monster that would kill off the freedom necessary to the creation of art. A particularly vocal opponent of the Syndicate was Harrison Grey Fiske, editor of the New York Dramatic Mirror. Week after week, the editorials in the Dramatic Mirror railed against the existence of the Theatrical Trust. Fiske and his wife, the celebrated actress Minnie Maddern Fiske, maintained a continuous opposition to the Syndicate throughout its existence. Other

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[1]Poggi, p. 13, quotes David Belasco as estimating that by 1904 the Syndicate controlled 500 theatres.

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producers and stars joined the "Independents" for a time, only to give in to the threats or bribes of the Syndicate.

During the period of 1901-1904, the Syndicate experienced its first serious competition from the Independents, with the rivalry manifesting itself primarily in the construction and leasing of theatre buildings in New York, particularly in the area of West Forty-second Street. Two events in the spring of 1901 gave the first indications that a full-scale battle was about to break out on the "theatre block." The first was an attempt by the Syndicate to gain control of the Victoria. In March, Klaw and Erlanger had lured the Rogers Brothers (Oscar Hammerstein's most profitable attraction) away from the Victoria. Undaunted, Hammerstein announced that he had signed another comedy team, the Russell Brothers, as his new drawing-card.[2] A month later, under the pressure of a thus far unprofitable season, Hammerstein made it known that he was considering an offer from the Syndicate to book their shows into the Victoria.[3] Somehow, the Syndicate managed to alienate Hammerstein permanently within the next few months, for in the fall of 1901 he publicly announced his opposition to the Trust.[4] Making an enemy of Hammerstein was a serious blunder on the part of the Syndicate, for he

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[2]"Mr. Hammerstein Playing Chess," NYDM, 2 March 1901, p. 17.

[3]"Victoria Theatre Plans," New York Times, 6 April 1901, p. 9.

[4]"Hammerstein Gets Control," New York Times, 25 October 1901, p. 2.

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proved to be an implacable opponent.

The second important event in the spring of 1901 was the production of The Brixton Burglary at the Herald Square Theatre. This show was the first New York theatrical production supervised by the Shubert Brothers, who had arrived in the city in the previous year.[5] The Brixton Burglary was quickly forgotten, but the phenomenal success of the Shuberts, both as producers and as theatre managers, considerably strengthened the opposition to the Syndicate and contributed to the development of the theatre block of Forty-second Street.

Apart from these portents of things to come, the spring of 1901 was not a particularly remarkable time for the theatres on Forty-second Street. At the American, the Greenwall Stock Company varied its diet of such old favorites as Camille, East Lynne, and Rip Van Winkle with an occasional new production. These premieres seem to have been selected for their potential appeal to the gallery audiences at the American; they were presented with elaborate scenic effects and plenty of chases, gunfights, and other melodramatic touches.[6] Perhaps the most unusual production at the American that spring was a dramatic version of Carmen, during the last act of which was introduced

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[5]Jerry Stagg, The Brothers Shubert (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), p. 36.

[6]An example was the melodrama Kit Carson, produced at the American on 27 May 1901. See NYDM, 1 June 1901, p. 16.

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an Edison biograph film of the bullfight at Cordova.[7] This mixing of live action and film (a technique which has been rediscovered in our own day) was another indication that the motion picture, while still regarded by many as a cheap novelty, was generating interest among theatre audiences.

The main attraction at the Victoria in the spring of 1901 was an extravaganza called My Lady. It opened on February 11, with Clifton Crawford, Lotta Faust, and Eva Tanguay in leading roles. Although it professed to be a travesty of The Three Musketeers, the musical also included a burlesque of Mrs. Dane's Defense, a current hit play. A few weeks after My Lady opened, the comedy team of Yorke and Adams took over the roles of two of the three musketeers, the plot of the show being adjusted to make room for the comics' specialties.[8] This hodgepodge remained at the Victoria until May 4, when the theatre closed for the summer.

At the Republic, Viola Allen continued her run in the dramatization of F. Marion Crawford's novel, In the Palace of the King until the end of April, when it was replaced by Lover's Lane, a play which had been transferred from the Manhattan Theatre. The Republic closed for the summer on May 25. Three days later, Oscar Hammerstein opened his new summer theatre, the Paradise Gardens, which spanned the Victoria and Republic roofs. Hammerstein

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[7] "American--Carmen," NYDM, 9 March 1901, p. 16.

[8] "Victoria--My Lady," NYDM, 23 February 1901, p. 16.

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had evidently been dreaming of an immense roof garden for quite a while, for in the summer of 1900 he had tried to hurry construction on the Republic in order to use its roof for part of the Venetian Terrace.[9] Since this was not possible, Hammerstein apparently shelved his plan until the summer of 1901. As the roof theatre was being prepared, two new elevators and seven fireproof stairways were added to the Victoria.[10]

Because the Republic was higher than the Victoria, the roof garden naturally divided itself into two separate sections linked by a broad flight of stairs. The theatre itself remained on the Victoria roof. Its large and comfortable auditorium was enclosed by a glass roof and glass walls on three sides. On warm nights windows in the walls could be opened to let the breezes blow through.[11] The proscenium of the theatre was bordered by flower-bedecked boxes. Four thousand incandescent bulbs in scrolls and ceiling arches, with fanciful designs, provided the light.[12]

On the Republic side of the roof was installed Hammerstein's most talked-about innovation--a reproduction of a Dutch farm. This novelty was described in detail in most of the reviews of the roof's opening. According to

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[9]"Changes in My Lady," NYDM, 9 March 1901, p. 13.

[10]"Oscar Hammerstein's New Roof," NYDM, 25 May 1901, p. 18.

[11]"Paradise Gardens," NYDM, 8 June 1901, p. 16.

[12]"'Paradise Gardens' Opened," New York Times, 29 May 1901, p. 9.

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the Dramatic Mirror, the roof of the Republic had

> . . . a spacious platform that has tables and chairs set about, and a little pond of real water wherein disport sundry truly live ducks, not to mention a couple of property boats, one labeled "Shamrock III." Also there is a real water wheel that works, and a beautiful more or less arabesque arch with illuminated panels of stained glass that artistically disguises the customarily uninspiring institution known as a fire escape. Over the duck pond there is a pretty rustic bridge that takes one up to a still higher platform that boasts a Hollandish village with a little cottage, a practicable windmill, a cow-shed with property cow peering out at window, and a vegetable garden containing sprouting cabbages, potatoes, and all that sort of thing.[13]

Hammerstein must have reasoned that a roof garden should be more than a place to escape the oppressive heat of the city; it could be a delightful setting that gave the spectator the illusion of a trip to the country. To make sure that the roof was profitable as well as delightful, Hammerstein had tables and chairs scattered throughout the farm, with waiters close at hand to take orders for refreshments. The stage on the Victoria roof could be viewed from these tables.

The farm proved to be a master stroke. Realizing that its main appeal lay in its novelty, Hammerstein made constant changes in the farm so that there was always something new for his customers to see. Coupled with the excellent vaudeville show on the Victoria roof, the farm

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[13] "Paradise Gardens." Although the reviewer claims that the barn was inhabited by a "property cow," other evidence suggests that a live cow was installed on the roof, if not at the very beginning, shortly thereafter. On 27 July 1901, the Dramatic Mirror reported that the cow was depressed because it was unable to break away from its restraints to eat the vegetables in the garden ("Paradise Gardens," p. 16).

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became an irresistible attraction to summer theatregoers. The roof remained open for sixteen weeks and did tremendous business the whole time.

Against this kind of competition, the American Theatre's roof (this year called the "Rose Gardens") had little chance of success. The manager for this summer, George Blumenthal, announced that the first attraction was to be the American Roof Rose Gardens Opera Company in a production of The Mikado.[14] Perhaps the manager hoped that a season of light opera would bring back the many customers who had crowded the theatre when the Castle Square Opera Company had played there. Strong breezes prevented Blumenthal from opening the roof on schedule, however, and when the premiere finally occurred on June 27, the cool weather forced him to present The Mikado in the downstairs theatre. The season of light opera proved unsuccessful and was immediately terminated, to be replaced by vaudeville. Blumenthal was no more successful with his new policy, and when his musicians struck on July 3, his term as manager came to an abrupt end. Blumenthal's successors, after a quick survey of the situation, decided against continuing the vaudeville bill, and closed the American roof for the season on July 5.[15] In its report

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[14] "American Roof Garden," NYDM, 22 June 1901, p. 14; "American--The Mikado," NYDM, 29 June 1901, p. 14. Blumenthal's autobiography is understandably silent about his management of the American Roof.

[15] The description of the American roof's problems is based on "American Rose Garden," NYDM, 6 July 1901, p. 16; "Last Week's Bills--American," NYDM, 13 July 1901,

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of the American roof's troubles, the Dramatic Mirror suggested the following reasons for its failure:

> The American roof never has been, and probably never will be, a winner. Its location is such that it cannot possibly attract the crowds that patronize the similar resorts in Broadway or nearer to that great thoroughfare. It had practically no chance this time against its already thoroughly established competitors. Roof-garden audiences are seldom inspired by anything but the purpose of keeping cool. They do not care a jot about the bills. They simply yearn to get away from the superheated pavements and the probably still hotter hall bedrooms, and they are willing to pay for the chance to inhale pure air for a few hours. But they would much prefer to exercise their powers of inhalation on the roof spaces of Broadway. . . . It was not the fault of the performers that the entertainment drew almost no one. It was absurdly and inefficiently advertised. Only a clairvoyant would have known that there was a performance on the American Roof.[16]

The rivalry between the two roof theatres on Forty-second Street thus ended before it had really begun.

As the 1901-1902 season opened, the competition between the Syndicate and Oscar Hammerstein intensified. The season at the Victoria got underway with Sweet Marie, a production starring the Russell Brothers, the comedy team that Hammerstein had signed after the Syndicate had lured away the Rogers Brothers. The production of Sweet Marie offers evidence of Hammerstein's involvement in every facet of the operation of his theatre, for

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p. 16; "Theatrical Notes," New York Times, 21 June 1901, p. 7; "Theatrical Orchestra Struck," New York Times, 4 July 1901, p. 7; "Roof Garden Troubles," New York Times, 5 July 1901, p. 2.

[16]"Last Week's Bills--American." Besides providing an explanation for the failure of the American, this article also indirectly suggests some of the reasons for the success of the Paradise Gardens.

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according to the Dramatic Mirror's reviewer, "To anyone familiar with the previously exploited works of Oscar Hammerstein . . . there was scarcely a chance for a doubt that the managerial genius had himself written and composed the new offering just as the programme confessed that he had staged it."[17] Despite the fact that Sweet Marie was called a "masterpiece of inanity" by the Times, it managed to run for four weeks.[18] While it was on the boards, Hammerstein purchased all the remaining shares of the Hammerstein Amusement Company and thereby became the sole owner of the Victoria. He immediately announced that the house would be Independent and would book outside attractions in opposition to the Syndicate.[19]

Hammerstein's satisfaction was not to be of long duration. The next production at the Victoria was a new play by Clyde Fitch called The Way of the World. This offering was the first legitimate drama to be presented at the Victoria. Fitch, who had burst into theatrical prominence the previous season when he had four shows running simultaneously, created in The Way of the World a play that mixed two popular theatrical genres: society drama and melodrama. Hammerstein gave the play an elaborate production which included having the two principals (Elsie De Wolfe and Frank Mills) ride across the stage

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[17]"Victoria--Sweet Marie," 19 October 1901, p. 16.

[18]"Trouble at the Victoria," 11 October 1901, p. 9.

[19]"Hammerstein Gets Control," New York Times, 25 October 1901, p. 2.

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in an automobile. The reviews for The Way of the World were good, but the show's run was brought to an early end because of a dispute between Hammerstein and the Lederer Amusement Company, managers of Elsie De Wolfe. Lederer claimed that his agreement with Hammerstein for the use of De Wolfe in the show provided that Lederer would receive 60% of the show's profits, but that Hammerstein, finding the agreement unprofitable to him, was doing everything in his power to cause the show to fail so that he could bring in a more lucrative attraction.[20] Hammerstein denied the charges, but was forced to close the play. He replaced it with a production of Fitch's The Marriage Game starring Sadie Martinot. This "unpleasing and unnecessary play,"[21] an adaptation of Augier's Le Mariage d'Olympe, ran at the Victoria for three weeks before being succeeded on New Year's Eve by a highly-praised production of Boker's Francesca da Rimini starring Otis Skinner.

While Hammerstein was devoting the fall of 1901 to legitimate drama at the Victoria, the Republic was the home of two successful productions, an early effort by Augustus Thomas called The Bonnie Brier Bush (which the Dramatic Mirror characterized as a "delightfully sweet, homely [sic]

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[20]"Trouble at the Victoria," NYDM, 14 December 1901, p. 13. Hammerstein blamed the loss of De Wolfe on intriguing by the Syndicate. "Theatre Republic for Mr. Belasco," New York Herald, 15 January 1902, in the Mrs. Leslie Carter Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

[21]"Victoria--The Marriage Game," NYDM, 21 December 1901, p. 38.

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play, quaintly humorous, deeply pathetic and intensely dramatic by turns"[22]; and Under Southern Skies, a comedy-drama produced by William A. Brady as a starring vehicle for his wife, Grace George.[23]

At the American Theatre, the Greenwall Stock Company continued its usual policy of melodramas relieved here and there with a comedy or musical. The work of the stock company continued to be very uneven. Most of its productions were criticized for poor acting, inadequate rehearsals, poorly painted scenery or bad stage management, yet the critics found occasional opportunities to praise the strong acting of a principal player or the effectiveness of a particular stage setting. In the second half of the 1901-02 season, the management tried to dress up its standard repertoire by the introduction of new productions or novel effects. In February, the company presented what was supposedly a new dramatization of Vanity Fair by Charles Coghlan. The Dramatic Mirror claimed that most of the play was identical to a version by J. H. Nevins, while the last act bore a great resemblance to Langdon Mitchell's play, Becky Sharp.[24] Toward the end of the season, the Greenwall Company again exploited the

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[22]"Republic--The Bonnie Brier Bush," 28 September 1901, p. 16.

[23]"Republic--Under Southern Skies," NYDM, 23 November 1901, p. 16.

[24]"American--Vanity Fair," NYDM, 22 February 1902, p. 16. The Dramatic Mirror was no doubt especially protective of the Mitchell version because it had been written for Mrs. Fiske, the wife of the editor.

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popularity of a production that had already made a hit at another theatre when they presented Jean Du Barri, designed to compete with David Belasco's production of Du Barry, then playing at the Criterion Theatre.[25]

Besides presenting new plays that were intended to profit by the success of other theatres' productions, the Greenwall Company spiced up some of their tried-and-true offerings with novel effects. When Uncle Tom's Cabin was presented in April 1902, an "old-fashioned Negro Festival," complete with cotton-picking and cakewalk, was included. A few weeks later, the Greenwall Company's production of the dramatic version of Carmen was improved by what the Dramatic Mirror termed "a decidedly successful innovation," the addition of choral numbers from Bizet's opera.[26] That the Greenwall Company was able to attract large audiences with their work is implied by a lawsuit instigated at this time by the New York City Fire Commissioner in order to force the managers of the American to remove folding chairs from the aisles of the theatre. If a playhouse seating 1,900 needed extra folding chairs in order to accommodate all of its patrons, it seems safe to assume that the Greenwall Company had a large and faithful following.[27]

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[25]"American--Jean du Barri," NYDM, 14 June 1902, p. 14.

[26]"American--Uncle Tom's Cabin," NYDM, 5 April 1902, p. 16; "American--Carmen," 12 May 1902, p. 16.

[27]"In Favor of the American," NYDM, 1 March 1902, p. 15. The Fire Commissioner lost the suit; presumably the folding chairs remained.

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While the American seems to have found a successful policy with the offerings of its stock company, Hammerstein was still seeking the right kind of shows for the Victoria. In the spring of 1902, he presented Primrose and Dockstader's Minstrels. This elaborate production, which included a scene laid in the "Garden of the Gods" in Italy, was a far cry from the minstrel shows that had been so popular in New York a few years before. It ran for seven weeks at the Victoria. When the minstrels left, Hammerstein replaced them with the Roberval French Opera Company from New Orleans, which presented light opera in French for five weeks. The season at the Victoria ended with a three-week engagement by Kellar, a magician who had not appeared in New York for some years. If Hammerstein was hoping to build a steady clientele for the Victoria, it is difficult to see how such widely divergent presentations would be likely to attract such an audience.[28] Perhaps the pressure of the Syndicate had kept worthwhile attractions away from the theatre.

Hammerstein was more successful in filling the Republic with interesting productions. In January, Liebler and Company presented the New York debut of Mrs. Patrick Campbell. For her three-week engagement, the English actress chose to appear in Sudermann's Magda, Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray and The Notorious Mrs.

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[28] In reviewing the performance of Kellar, the Times reported that the audience was entirely different from that which visited the Victoria during the French opera season. "Kellar Easily Mystifies," 6 May 1902, p. 9.

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Ebbsmith, and Bjornson's Beyond Human Power. During Mrs. Patrick Campbell's performances in Magda, the lack of lobby space in the Republic proved to be a problem, since the back of the auditorium was so close to the Forty-second Street sidewalk that spectators in the last rows were unable to hear Mrs. Pat over the street noises, particularly the noises of the cable cars. George Tyler, who was then associated with Liebler and Company, jokingly suggested that tan bark ought to be put down in the street to absorb some of the noise. A. Toxen Worm, the press-agent for the show, jumped at the idea, had forty wagonloads of tan bark put down in the street, and claimed that Mrs. Pat had insisted upon it. It turned out to be a very successful publicity stunt.[29] During her engagement at the Republic, Mrs. Patrick Campbell also appeared in two matinee performances of Maeterlinck's Pelleas and Melisande at the Victoria.[30]

When Mrs. Patrick Campbell left the Republic to begin a tour of America, the next attraction was the premiere of Joan o' the Shoals, a play starring Henrietta Crosman. When this production proved unsuccessful, Crosman revived one of her former hits, Mistress Nell, and then finished her engagement with a revival of As You Like It. The Republic's season ended in April in order to allow

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[29]George C. Tyler, Whatever Goes Up (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1934), pp. 182-183.

[30]"Victoria--Pelleas and Melisande," NYDM, 8 February 1902, p. 16.

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sufficient time for the theatre to be completely renovated before it reopened in September 1902 under the management of David Belasco. In January 1902, Oscar Hammerstein, finding it difficult to fill his two theatres with Independent shows, and not wishing to capitulate to the Theatrical Syndicate, had made a deal with Belasco whereby Belasco would manage the Republic for five years with an option to renew the contract for another five years. In return, Belasco was to pay Hammerstein $30,000 a year rental plus 10% of the gross receipts of each performance. Belasco also agreed that his big stars would not play any other New York theatres except for one week each at the Harlem and Grand Opera Houses. The result of this agreement was that Belasco obtained a New York theatre in which to present his attractions, and Hammerstein obtained a yearly income of between $60,000 and $72,000 without the worry of finding shows for the Republic.[31]

Besides alleviating his financial difficulties, the agreement with Belasco provided Hammerstein with a chance to revenge himself upon the Syndicate, of whom he was quoted as saying, "They have been trying to take away my property. They took away the Rogers Brothers from me because I would not join them. They intrigued so that Miss De Wolfe suddenly left my theatre. They would not give me any good bookings. But I have made an arrangement that will take away some of their best attractions and make my

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[31]William Winter, The Life of David Belasco, 2 vols. (New York: Jefferson Winter, 1918), 2: 51-52.

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two theatres so important that they cannot harm them." According to the same newspaper report, Belasco was much less militant. He announced that "I am on the most friendly terms with the syndicate and will not oppose them further than to have my own theatre, where I may do as I wish with my own productions."[32] Belasco's main purpose in taking over the Republic was to provide a home for productions starring Mrs. Leslie Carter, his protégé at the time. When redesigning the theatre, Belasco included two suites of rooms on the top floor--one for Mrs. Carter and one for himself.[33] Belasco originally intended to spend $15,000-$20,000 on renovations in the Republic, but after viewing the theatre he found that a great deal of reconstruction had to be done, particularly in the stage area. As the spring and summer progressed, Belasco's plans for the Republic became more complex and more expensive. His renovations became nothing less than a complete rebuilding of the theatre. The entire interior of the house was gutted, and only the original four walls and the roof remained.[34]

At the same time that Hammerstein was announcing his agreement with Belasco, plans were going forward for the construction of other theatres on Forty-second Street.

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[32] "Theatre Republic for Mr. Belasco."

[33] "Belasco's Theatre is for Mrs. Carter," Morning Telegraph, 19 April 1902, in the Mrs. Leslie Carter Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

[34] Winter, p. 53.

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Because of the war between the Syndicate and the Independents, announcements of new theatres tended to be rather vague, omitting details such as the ownership of the building. In January 1902, the Dramatic Mirror revealed that two separate parcels of land had been purchased on Forty-second Street. The lot on the south side was announced as the site of the Majestic, which was to be a large house used for melodramas and spectacular productions. The second lot, on the north side of the block, was to be the location of an as-yet-unspecified playhouse. Both of these transactions were handled by real estate agents in order to keep the ownership of the theatres a secret until they were near completion. In June 1902, another new playhouse was announced for the south side of the block. The new theatre was described as the future home of the Rogers Brothers' shows, a strong indication that it was being built by the Syndicate.[35]

While construction was progressing on these new theatres in the summer of 1902, the shows at the Victoria and American roof gardens each played to the same kind of audiences as they had the summer before. The Paradise Gardens on the roof of the Victoria and Republic got a head start on the summer season by opening on May 26. Despite the chilly weather, the roof was crowded during the opening week. A few weeks later, the vaudeville bill was changed to include fewer acts and an intermission

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[35]"Theatre Plans and Leases," 11 January 1902, p. 13; "Notes of New Theatres," NYDM, 7 June 1902, p. 12.

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(presumably to give customers enough time to spend their money on refreshments). The reviewer for the Dramatic Mirror felt that the intermission was unnecessary, since "the patrons can find plenty of spare time during the acts that they do not care to see to view the kine, the chickens, the ducks, the vegetables, the real water and the new wax figures in Oscar Hammerstein's aerial farm."[36] Two weeks later, the Dramatic Mirror digressed from its review of the vaudeville bill on the roof to report that

> the simple minded citizens of the great metropolis are more than eager to expend their good money for the glimpse of pastoral life that the Paradise Gardens afford and to contemplate in almost childish glee the crops that are propagated on the roof. Mr. Hammerstein's agricultural exhibition is now bigger, brighter, and better than ever, the corn belt is particularly prolific, and the prospects are excellent for the potatoes and cabbages. The ducks are even more blasé than last year, but the chickens are most condescending and communicative. The cow's demeanor continues to be very "up-stage," and the windmill and the water wheel squeak on joyously. The attendance is enormous all the time.[37]

This description of the farm suggests some of the reasons for the popularity of the Paradise Gardens. No doubt many of the visitors to the roof had grown up on farms themselves, either in America or in their native European

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[36] "Vaudeville--Paradise Gardens," NYDM, 14 June 1902, p. 16.

[37] "Vaudeville--Paradise Gardens," NYDM, 28 June 1902, p. 16. Although the reviewer claims that only the "simple minded" enjoyed the farm, reports on the farm appear so frequently in the Dramatic Mirror that it seems likely that its appeal was universal enough to include writers for dramatic newspapers.

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countries. For them, the farm may have had a nostalgic appeal. For more sophisticated patrons, ostensibly there to see the vaudeville show, the farm seems to have become a continuous joke manifested by a mock concern for the state of the animals and vegetables. Whatever the reasons for their attendance, spectators came to the roof in large numbers for the rest of the summer.

The American Roof, meanwhile, had hired a new manager, Ted. D. Marks, who planned a season of vaudeville for the theatre. Like his predecessors, Marks could not make a success of the American Roof. It opened on June 23, and closed two weeks later, after a loss of $1,700. These continuing failures seem to have discouraged any managers from attempting to open the American Roof again until 1909.

As the 1902-03 season began, Oscar Hammerstein, whose contract with Liebler and Company was still in effect, moved their attractions from the Republic to the Victoria, thus providing the latter theatre with its most distinguished season of legitimate drama. After two less-than-successful productions in the early fall, the Lieblers brought Eleonora Duse to the Victoria for a two-week engagement in November. Reviewers praised Duse's powers as an actress, but criticized her decision to present only plays by D'Annunzio.[38] Duse was followed at the Victoria by a production of Hall Caine's melodrama,

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[38]"Victoria--Francesca da Rimini," NYDM, 22 November 1902, p. 18; "The Duse of To-Day a Mold of D'Annunzio," New York Times, 5 November 1902, p. 9.

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The Eternal City, starring Viola Allen. Despite critical reservations (the Times called the play "a melodrama of the most conventional sort"[39]), the drama ran at the Victoria for thirteen weeks.

At the American Theatre, the fall of 1902 saw the inauguration of the Greenwall Stock Company's third and final season. Their work may have improved, for the Dramatic Mirror's reviews were for the most part complimentary. To augment its usual repertoire of vintage melodramas, the Greenwall Company presented the New York debuts of several plays during the fall season. While these productions did not add any significant chapters to the history of the New York stage, their one week at the American did qualify them for the label "direct from New York" when they went out on tour. Whether they were presenting premieres or revivals, however, the Greenwall Company drew a large, steady clientele to the American Theatre.

The fall of 1902 also saw the reopening of the Republic, entirely renovated and renamed the Belasco Theatre. The cost of improving the theatre, originally estimated at $15,000-$20,000, had mushroomed to more than $150,000.[40] Of particular concern to Belasco was the

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[39] "The Eternal City," 18 November 1902, p. 9.

[40] The plans filed with the Buildings Department in April 1902 cited the $20,000 figure. See "Notes of New Theatres," NYDM, 12 April 1902, p. 17. The $150,000 amount is mentioned in several unidentified clippings in the Mrs. Leslie Carter Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

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necessity for a stage large enough to hold the elaborate scenic effects he was fond of creating for his productions. Belasco decided to install an enormous elevator in the stage so that scenery could be changed in the basement. He therefore ordered the area under the stage to be excavated to a depth of thirty feet, but in the process of digging, the contractors tapped an underground spring of water which had to be dammed and cemented in before work could continue. The roof over the stage was also torn out in order to accommodate a gridiron of greater height.[41] A counterweight system was installed, as well as a catwalk above the stage that would enable stagehands to provide moving sun, moon, and snow effects. The musicians, formerly located in a music loft above the proscenium, were now moved to an orchestra pit underneath the stage. Also under the stage were dressing rooms for the supers, the men's and women's rooms being separated by the stage elevator. Belasco insisted upon an improved lighting system for the theatre. Footlights were arranged so that they reflected upstage and had no "spill"; the individual lamps in the borderlights were set in separate compartments so that the colors would not blend unintentionally. All lights were connected to resistance dimmers, apparently something of an innovation in 1902.[42]

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[41]"Belasco and Mrs. Carter," New York Telegraph, 31 August 1902, in the Mrs. Leslie Carter Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center; Winter, p. 54.

[42]Winter, p. 57; "Belasco and Mrs. Carter."

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Belasco lavished a great deal of care on the construction of the stage, but he was just as careful in outfitting and ornamenting the rest of the house. The original decorations that had been chosen by Hammerstein seem to have been rather gaudy, particularly the statues and friezes. Belasco's design for the interior was much more subtle, relying on a unified style and a delicate use of color. The period chosen for the decorations was that of the First Empire, an apt choice, for as one newspaper account pointed out, "All about you are Napoleon's torches, garlands, and wreaths of victory. They stand out, in relief, from over the proscenium arch, hangings, and indeed wherever the possibilities of the scheme permit. The back of each chair bears, in silken design, the Napoleonic bee--equally appropriate for the Belasconian conquests."[43]

The basic color scheme of the theatre was "autumnal," that is, primarily composed of reds, golds, browns, and greens, supplemented by Mrs. Carter's favorite hue, rose du Barry. The walls of the orchestra level were covered with French tapestries depicting a forest in autumn. On the second level the tapestries were basically green, and on the walls above the second balcony a mock tapestry was painted in shades of rose. The color scheme was also carried out in the auditorium's illumination, which had been chosen by

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[43]Charles Emerson Cook, "The New Belasco Theatre," Daily America, 28 September 1902, in the Mrs. Leslie Carter Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center. Cook was the press representative for the Belasco Theatre.

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Belasco after much experimentation to give a rich, mellow effect.[44]

Belasco included in his plans for the theatre a number of amenities for his customers. A special telephone and messenger call board was available for free use by patrons of the theatre. Outside the theatre a new wrought iron marquee was installed, on the side of which was an electric carriage call system. A massive mahogany screen was erected inside the lobby to reduce the amount of street noise reaching the spectators. The gentlemen's smoking room was designed to resemble a library, complete with writing desk, stationery, and a supply of current magazines. The main ladies' room was said to be a copy of Marie Antoinette's boudoir. Belasco was also thoughtful of his actors, providing a greenroom for them as well as fifteen dressing rooms.

The overall effect that Belasco sought in his new theatre was the creation of what he called a "drawing-room theatre," a genteel but homey atmosphere where the customer would be lulled by the decor and the conveniences into a relaxed and receptive frame of mind.[45]

For his opening attraction Belasco chose to install his production of Du Barry, which had had a successful

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[44]"Belasco and Mrs. Carter."

[45]The description of the Belasco Theatre is based on "The New Belasco Theatre"; on "Belasco Theatre Opens," New York Times, 30 September 1902, p. 9; and on various clippings in the Mrs. Leslie Carter Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

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engagement at the Criterion Theatre in the spring. With Mrs. Leslie Carter in the title role, Du Barry stayed at the Belasco for nine weeks. Meanwhile, the director was planning a splendid new production, The Darling of the Gods, with Blanche Bates as the star. When his new show opened, the reviewer for the Times voiced some common criticisms of Belasco's work when he called The Darling of the Gods "a series of really splendid tableaus, with long waits between them, of gorgeous costumes and gayly diversified crowds, of acrobats and tumblers, of choruses of Geisha girls from Geisha Street, and all the rest; and in the interstices of these many engrossing things, there is a story of love and suffering, compounded of strenuous emotions and Sardoudling situations that are, alas! false not only to human nature but also to their not very lofty model."[46] Despite its shortcomings as drama, The Darling of the Gods pleased audiences through the sheer magnificence of its spectacle. Its initial run at the Belasco lasted throughout the spring of 1903.

While Belasco was enjoying his first success in his new theatre, Hammerstein continued to present legitimate attractions at the Victoria. In February 1903, he opened a well-publicized adaptation of Tolstoy's Resurrection on the same night that the play was premiered by Herbert Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty's Theatre in London. Although the Times

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[46]"Du Barry the Second," 4 December 1902, p. 9. According to Burns Mantle and Garrison P. Sherwood, The Darling of the Gods cost $78,000 to produce and ran for two years before showing a profit. The Best Plays of 1899-1909 (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1944), p. 109.

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dismissed the production as "a tinned-soupy Siberio-religious melodrama, with only a squint of Tolstoi,"[47] plans were made for three road companies to begin touring with the play as soon as it had opened in New York. Hammerstein, who produced Resurrection in conjunction with Wagenhals and Kemper, reportedly made a net profit of more than $100,000 from the play.[48] After a run of twelve weeks, Resurrection was replaced at the Victoria by David Warfield in a revival of The Auctioneer.

At the American Theatre the Greenwall Stock Company continued to diversify its standard repertoire with the addition of low-budget productions of such recent hit plays as The Christian, In the Palace of the King, and Barbara Frietchie. Three months after its opening at the Victoria, a version of Resurrection held the stage at the American for two weeks. The greatest novelty of the American's season occurred during the last week of May, when the great Yiddish actor Jacob Adler appeared for a week in a production of The Merchant of Venice. For this presentation Adler, who spoke his lines in Yiddish, was supported by an English-speaking cast. The scenery came from Augustin Daly's elaborate production of the play done twenty years before. Adler's portrayal of Shylock received a great deal of acclaim. The Dramatic Mirror called it "a broad, deep,

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[47] John Corbin, "Topics of the Drama," 22 February 1903, p. 21.

[48] Sheean, p. 107.

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dignified characterization," while the Times praised the naturalness of Adler's acting.[49] Although originally announced as an engagement of indefinite length, The Merchant of Venice closed five days after it opened. No reason was given for this hasty departure, but it may have been related to the recent sale of the American Theatre. Early in May, it had been announced that the Greenwall Company would return to the American in the fall of 1903 for another season of stock. Just two weeks later, however, the Dramatic Mirror reported that Greenwall had sold his interest in the American to his partner, Albert Weis. Whether Weis then decided to terminate the Adler engagement is not evident, but it is clear that the American's season suddenly ended on May 30, that the roof garden never opened for the summer, and that the American became a combination house in the fall.[50]

With one less roof theatre to offer competition, Hammerstein's Paradise Gardens was more prosperous than ever. As the featured event in its vaudeville bill the roof theatre offered Punch, Judy and Company, a "spectacular extravanganza in one act," written, composed, and staged by Oscar Hammerstein.[51] No expense was spared in presenting

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[49] "American--The Merchant of Venice," NYDM, 6 June 1903, p. 16; "The Yiddish Shylock," New York Times, 26 May 1903, p. 9.

[50] "American and Columbia Sold," NYDM, 23 May 1903, p. 15; "Jacob Adler at the American," NYDM, 9 May 1903, p. 16.

[51] "Vaudeville--Paradise Roof Gardens," NYDM, 6 June 1903, p. 18; "Punch, Judy and Company," NYDM, 13 June 1903, p. 16.

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this "extravaganza"--a cast of 100 performers swelled Hammerstein's weekly expenses for the roof theatre to $5,000.[52] Despite a spell of bad weather, the enclosed roof theatre did excellent business for the whole season.

During the summer of 1903, construction on the new Forty-second Street theatres continued. The playhouse originally announced as the Majestic, and now called the New Amsterdam, had been under construction since early in 1902. A neighboring new theatre on the south side of the block, intended to be a home for the Rogers Brothers, was to be called the Liberty. Both of these theatres were owned by Klaw and Erlanger, leading members of the Theatrical Syndicate. On the north (or Independent) side of the block, a new theatre named the Lyric was also reaching completion during the summer of 1903. Perhaps because of fear of the Syndicate, the ownership of the Lyric had not been made public until the theatre was nearly finished. In the fall of 1902 Reginald De Koven, the well-known composer of light operas, had announced that his American School of Opera was to move into a five-story building to be erected next to the Belasco Theatre on Forty-second Street. At the same time, he had revealed that in conjunction with "a firm of managers" he would soon begin to build a theatre in the Long Acre Square area.[53] While De Koven was making known

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[52] "Vaudeville--Paradise Roof Gardens"; "Hammerstein's Plans," NYDM, 23 May 1903, p. 21.

[53] "American School of Opera Moves," NYDM, 4 October 1902, p. 13; "De Koven Plans New Theatre," NYDM, 4 October 1902, pp. 13, 14.

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his plans to build a new playhouse, the Shubert Brothers first announced, and then abandoned, a plan to build a theatre on Thirty-ninth Street opposite the Casino.[54] It was not until July 1903 that the reason for this Shubert maneuvering was made public: De Koven had agreed to lease his new theatre to the Shuberts for twenty-one years. In return, the Shuberts agreed to produce one new opera by De Koven annually. Richard Mansfield, then under contract to the Shuberts, was to open each season at the Lyric for ten years.[55] The long-term lease of the Lyric by the Shuberts meant that three Independent theatres (the Victoria, the Belasco, and the Lyric) were lined up on the north side of the block. It is not surprising, therefore, that Forty-second Street became a major battleground in the theatrical war. The Syndicate hurried the construction of its own playhouses on the south side of the block while harassing the Independents as much as possible.

In September 1903, the Belasco reopened with a continuation of the run of The Darling of the Gods. Two months later, Belasco replaced it with revivals of Zaza and Du Barry starring Mrs. Leslie Carter. These revivals brought in a steady profit while Belasco prepared his new production for

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[54]"Shuberts May Have New Theatre," NYDM, 11 October 1902, p. 15; "De Koven's Theatre Site," NYDM, 18 October 1902, p. 2.

[55]Leander Richardson, "Twenty-One Operas in Twenty-One Years De Koven's Aim," Morning Telegraph, 27 July 1903, in the Reginald De Koven Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; "New York's Magnificent New Playhouses," The Theatre 3 (August 1903): 194.

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the season, Sweet Kitty Bellairs, starring Henrietta Crosman and written by Belasco himself. Making her first appearance on a New York stage in Kitty was Jane Cowl, who would later have some of her greatest successes in Forty-second Street theatres. Kitty proved popular enough to run at the Belasco for the remainder of the season.

At the Victoria, Hammerstein was once again seeking a production that would draw a large, steady clientele. He opened the theatre in September with The Jersey Lily, a "musical comique in two acts" with music by Reginald De Koven and others. George W. Lederer, Hammerstein's former enemy, produced the show, which starred Blanche Ring. The Dramatic Mirror described The Jersey Lily as "about as stupid a thing as has ever been offered at a first-class theatre in this city."[56] After three weeks, it was succeeded by The Fisher Maiden, a comic opera with music by the popular songwriter Harry Von Tilzer. After a run of four weeks, The Fisher Maiden went on tour and was replaced at the Victoria by Frank Daniels in The Office Boy, a musical comedy produced by Charles Dillingham. Also featured in the production was Eva Tanguay. The Office Boy attracted enough theatregoers to last for nine weeks.

The fall season at the American marked the theatre's return to a combination policy. Its opening production was The Evil Men Do, a melodrama by Theodore Kremer which caused the Dramatic Mirror to observe that "it would seem that in

[56]"Victoria--The Jersey Lily," 26 September 1903, p. 17.

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the up-town march of things the Bowery has overtaken Forty-second Street, since rarely before has the lurid drama of this particular type found refuge in playhouses as far north as Long Acre Square. That there are Forty-second Street theatre-goers with a taste for blood and brutality was evidenced, however, by the size of the audiences. The lookers-on applauded with enthusiasm."[57] For the rest of the fall, the American hosted combination productions of melodramas, English comedies, and plays about rural life. Most of these ran for two or three weeks before continuing their tours.

As the 1903 season progressed, the established theatres on Forty-second Street were joined by the two new playhouses, the Lyric and New Amsterdam. The former opened on October 12, with a production of Old Heidelberg, starring Richard Mansfield. The Lyric, designed by architect V. Hugo Koehler, proved to be a fine addition to the "theatre block," even though only a narrow entrance foyer actually touched Forty-second Street (the auditorium was built on the Forty-third Street side of the property). The theatre had two lobbies--one inside the main entrance on Forty-second Street, and one inside the carriage entrance on Forty-third Street. Particular care was taken in decorating the Forty-third Street facade of the building to resemble a Venetian palazzo, complete with gargoyles, busts,

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[57] "American--The Evil Men Do," 5 September 1903, p. 16.

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wreaths, columns, and, of course, lyres.[58]

The auditorium of the Lyric was built at right angles to Forty-second Street, so that after passing through the lobby doors the spectator faced a row of seats midway between the stage and the rear wall of the orchestra. Wide aisles around the seating area enabled the audience to enter and exit easily, but opening night reviewers found the theatre's layout somewhat confusing.[59] The space between the rows of seats was two inches larger, and the seats themselves were two inches wider, than in most playhouses. There were nine boxes on either side of the auditorium and two balconies, adding up to a total seating capacity of 1,543.[60] The auditorium was wide for its depth and the sightlines were reported to be quite good.[61] For a color scheme the designers chose pink and green (resembling "tomatoes and lettuce" according to one reviewer),[62] with accents of gold and old ivory. The style of the interior was said to be

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[58] Joel Lobenthal, "The Glory Beneath the Grit: A Study of Nine 42nd Street Theatres" (Lincoln Center).

[59] "Lyric--Old Heidelberg," NYDM, 24 October 1903, p. 18; Alan Dale, "'Old Heidelberg' at the New Lyric Makes You Feel Young," unidentified clipping in the Richard Mansfield Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

[60] "The Lyric Theatre," Architects' and Builders' Magazine 5 (February 1904): 217.

[61] "'Lyric' Opened by Mr. Mansfield," unidentified clipping, Richard Mansfield Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

[62] "'Old Heidelberg' at the New Lyric."

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"the pure classical revival in the late period of the Italian Renaissance, after the reign of the Baroque style."[63]

The stage of the Lyric was eighty feet wide, forty feet deep, had a proscenium opening of forty feet, and was "finely equipped with mechanical contrivances."[64] In order to keep extraneous light from leaking onto the stage, the architect separated the actors' dressing rooms from the stage by means of a long corridor.[65]

The Lyric's opening production of Old Heidelberg was highly praised by the reviewers and ran for four weeks before it was replaced by De Koven's first opera for his new theatre. The Red Feather starred Grace Van Studdiford and George L. Tallman. It was presented under the management of Florenz Ziegfeld, who gave it a gorgeous production, exercising the attention to detail for which he would later become famous. For example, the armor worn by the soldiers in the opera was reportedly made by the armorer to the Emperor of Germany. This care with the physical aspects of the production did not extend to the play itself, for of the twenty-one musical numbers, the Dramatic Mirror reported that "almost none has any bearing on the story."[66] In fact, the biggest hit song from the show was an interpolated

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[63] Architects' and Builders'.

[64] Architects' and Builders'; "Lyric--Old Heidelberg."

[65] Architects' and Builders'.

[66] "Lyric--The Red Feather," 21 November 1903, p. 16.

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number called "There's a Little Street in Heaven That They Call Broadway." Despite these inconsistencies, The Red Feather attracted audiences to the Lyric for eight weeks.

The opening of a third Independent theatre on the block must have been a thorn in the side of Klaw and Erlanger, who were rushing to complete their own Forty-second Street playhouse, the New Amsterdam. This new theatre, planned as the flagship of the Syndicate's empire, had been under construction for two years. The plot of land which had been purchased for the theatre consisted of a large parcel, 150 feet by 100 feet, on the Forty-first Street side of the block, and a lot twenty-five feet wide by 100 feet deep on the Forty-second Street side. This narrow piece of land was to be used for the main entrance to the theatre. Above the entrance was constructed an office building, the total height of this part of the complex reaching 190 feet.[67] On the main part of the property was planned a large theatre with a roof theatre above it. Most observers assumed that the roof theatre of the New Amsterdam would resemble the modest structures on top of the American, the Victoria, and other theatres. It was not until May 1903 that the public learned that the theatre on the roof of the New Amsterdam was not a summer garden but another complete playhouse, fully enclosed and completely equipped. Although

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[67]W. H. Bates, "The New Amsterdam," Press Release issued by the New Amsterdam Theatre, in the Nat Goodwin Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

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Klaw and Erlanger's original idea seems to have been to operate the roof theatre year-round as an old-fashioned music hall, the roof theatre did not open until the summer of 1904, and was used as a summer roof garden for the first years of its existence.[68]

The main theatre was one of the largest in New York; the auditorium was eighty-six feet wide and ninety feet deep from the edge of the stage to the back wall of the general reception room. The distance from the floor of the orchestra to the dome in the ceiling was eighty feet. In addition to the generous orchestra space, there were two balconies and twelve boxes, for a total seating capacity of approximately 1,800. The stage was one hundred feet wide and sixty feet deep, with a proscenium opening forty feet wide and thirty-six feet high.[69] The height of the gridiron was one hundred feet over the stage. A large part of the stage floor consisted of elevators that could be lowered into the basement for scene changes.

Several innovative techniques were employed in the construction of the building. Structural steel, which had previously been used only in office buildings, was employed in the skeleton of the New Amsterdam.[70] The building's main

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[68]"Klaw and Erlanger Plan a Surprise," New York Telegraph, 4 May 1903, in the A. L. Erlanger Collection Scrapbooks, Lincoln Center, hereafter referred to as the Erlanger Collection.

[69]W. H. Bates.

[70]Joel Lobenthal, "The New Amsterdam Theater," The Theatre Historical Society Annual 5 (1978): 3.

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girder, which supported the roof theatre, was the largest single piece of ironwork ever put into any building in the world up to that time. It was ninety feet long, fourteen feet high, and weighed seventy tons. Another innovation was the use of cantilevers to support the balconies, thereby eliminating the need for supporting posts. A final novelty in the construction was announced but never actually utilized: the orchestra section of the theatre was built in such a way that it could be converted to a ballroom in a matter of hours.[71]

The greatest innovation of all was the decision of Herts and Tallant, the architects of the New Amsterdam, to decorate the entire building in the art nouveau style. This choice was unusual for two reasons: first, although art nouveau had attained a certain popularity in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, it was rarely used in the United States; second, the architects had decided to employ a single style of decoration throughout the building rather than follow the more common practice of adopting different styles in different parts of the theatre.[72] Belasco had

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[71] Untitled article, Brooklyn Standard Union, 12 July 1903, in the Erlanger Collection; "A Few Notes About the Theatre and its Decorations," pamphlet in the Gertrude Robinson Smith Scrapbook, Lincoln Center; "Theatre Near Completion," New York Telegraph, 6 September 1903, in the Erlanger Collection.

[72] Announcement of Landmark Designation for the New Amsterdam Theater, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, October 23, 1979, p. 4. Subsequent description of the theatre comes from this source and from those previously cited.

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tried to impose an overall scheme of decoration on the Republic, but he was hampered by the general features of a structure that had already been built. Herts and Tallant, on the other hand, were able to see that their design concept was carried out in the basic lines of the building itself, as well as in the decorations. The result was a theatre that demonstrated the principles of the "new art" on a grander scale than had ever before been attempted.

The decor of the New Amsterdam united three main motifs: the art nouveau preoccupation with nature, the glories of the drama, and the development of the city of New Amsterdam. The theme of nature could be found throughout the theatre--in the animals carved into the staircase newels, in the trees that adorned the vestibule columns, in the tea roses that decorated the ladies' retiring room. The glorification of the drama could first be noticed in the lobby friezes depicting scenes from Shakespeare and Wagner. The theatre motif was also visible in the thirty-eight heads of famous "Loves of Historical Drama" set into the wainscoting of the reception room, and in the enormous mural typifying the Drama painted over the proscenium arch. The New Amsterdam motif was carried out in two bas-relief pieces in the foyer entitled "New Amsterdam" and "New York," as well as in the New Amsterdam Room (the men's smoking room) which was decorated with friezes depicting the principal historic events in the development of New York from Hendrik Hudson to 1903.

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The color scheme of the theatre was appropriate to the art nouveau style. The dominant hue throughout the theatre was green. The auditorium was done in shades of green and tones of yellow and mauve, with carpet and chairs in a light green color. Even the wainscoting on the walls of the lower floor and the two balconies was tinted a grayish green. No primary colors were used anywhere in the theatre.

In addition to the attention lavished on the decorative scheme, Herts and Tallant showed great concern for the comfort of the spectators who came to the theatre. The house was designed so that every seat gave a full view of the stage, and sightlines were further improved by the elimination of posts supporting the balcony. Acoustics were also carefully planned.

The lobby, vestibule, foyer, and promenades were as exquisitely decorated as the rest of the theatre. The women's retiring room and the men's smoking room in the basement of the building were lavishly decorated and appointed. The comfort of the actors was also considered in the design of the New Amsterdam. Backstage were dressing rooms large enough to accommodate 500 people, while a special elevator was included in the backstage area to carry performers from their dressing rooms to the roof theatre.

The theatre on the roof of the New Amsterdam was as carefully designed and as fully equipped as the main

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auditorium. Reached by means of two large elevators, the roof theatre covered an area one hundred feet by one hundred feet, with a stage sixty feet wide and forty feet deep. The auditorium was ninety feet wide and sixty feet from the rear wall to the stage. Promenades on either side of the stage led to an open-air garden one hundred feet by fifty feet built over the stage house of the main theatre. The roof theatre's auditorium, seating 1,200, consisted of an orchestra, a balcony fronted with boxes, and a large promenade behind the balcony seats.

The exterior of the building was executed in plain brick except for the Forty-second Street facade, which was elaborately decorated with friezes, sculpture, and other ornamental details. Klaw and Erlanger had poured enormous amounts of money into the construction of the New Amsterdam. The estimated cost of the building was $1,500,000; the statuary alone was reported to cost $100,000. A steady stream of publicity about the design, construction, and future use of the theatre was sent out by Klaw and Erlanger's publicists. The New Amsterdam was dubbed "The House Beautiful," a name it retained thorughout its existence as a legitimate playhouse.

Opening night audiences agreed with the theatre's nickname. Alan Dale wrote that the New Amsterdam represented "the very pinnacle of theatrical possibility," and the Times reviewer termed the theatre "a vision of gorgeousness." The Dramatic Mirror, while protesting that the

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"Oriental splendor of it all is confusing and unpleasing to Saxon eyes," was forced to admit that the "New Amsterdam Theatre is beyond question the most gorgeous playhouse in New York."[73]

The opening show at the New Amsterdam was a spectacular production of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, starring the popular comedian Nat C. Goodwin as Bottom. Mendelssohn's music, with additions by Victor Herbert, accompanied the action of the play. The same reviewers who praised the new theatre felt that this elaborate production overwhelmed Shakespeare's play. Audiences evidently agreed, for A Midsummer Night's Dream disappeared after three weeks, to be replaced by Her Own Way, a play starring Maxine Elliott that had been running at the Garrick Theatre.

At the beginning of December, Klaw and Erlanger presented at the New Amsterdam the American premiere of Mother Goose, an extravaganza first produced at London's Drury Lane Theatre. Mother Goose combined the spectacular elements of English Christmas pantomime with what the Dramatic Mirror characterized as a "Tenderloin type" of humor.[74] Audiences seemed to find this combination

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[73]"'Midsummer Night's Dream' Lost in the Setting," 23 October 1903, in the Nat Goodwin Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center; "New Amsterdam Opened," New York Times, 25 October 1903, p. 7; "New Amsterdam--A Midsummer Night's Dream," NYDM, 7 November 1903, p. 16.

[74]"New Amsterdam--Mother Goose," 12 December 1903, p. 16.

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enjoyable, for Mother Goose ran throughout the holiday season and into the middle of March 1904.

The year 1903, which had been a time of growth and prosperity for the theatre block of Forty-second Street, ended on a tragic note: on December 30, the Iroquois Theatre in Chicago burned to the ground in a matter of minutes, leaving 602 spectators dead. As 1904 began, theatre-owners throughout the United States, fearing a significant drop in theatre attendance, tried to reassure their customers that their playhouses were fireproof. Soon after the tragedy, the Dramatic Mirror underscored the problem of theatre safety by publishing the New York Fire Insurance Exchange Rates on forty-eight New York theatres. The rates were based on each theatre's fireproofing, fire resistance, and fire extinguishing appliances. The lowest (and best) rating went to the Knickerbocker Theatre. Of the theatres on Forty-second Street, the Lyric ranked lowest at third, the Belasco was nineteenth, the American twentieth, the New Amsterdam twenty-second, and the Victoria forty-seventh.[75] Shortly afterward, the Mayor of New York sent for the managers of the city's theatres to discuss possible means of making their buildings fireproof. Stringent new safety regulations were quickly adopted for theatres in New York, and these rules would have an important bearing on the design and construction of future playhouses.

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[75]"Insurance Rates of Theatres," 9 January 1904, p. 12.

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As 1904 began, it was "business as usual" at most of the Forty-second Street theatres. The American was still mixing a few new productions into its schedule of touring combination shows. At the Belasco, Henrietta Crosman was continuing to draw audiences with Sweet Kitty Bellairs. At the Lyric, The Red Feather was followed by a two-week engagement of Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall, a play that had opened two weeks earlier at the New York Theatre. By the middle of January, Ada Rehan and Otis Skinner had taken over the Lyric for three weeks in order to present productions of The Taming of the Shrew, The School for Scandal, and The Merchant of Venice. On February 10, William A. Brady produced and directed The Pit, Channing Pollack's adaptation of the Frank Norris novel. The play starred Wilton Lackaye and Jane Oakes, and had Douglas Fairbanks in a supporting role. The Pit stayed at the Lyric for ten weeks. During its run the company gave a special matinee performance of Ibsen's Pillars of Society for the benefit of the Professional Women's League. It was not well received.[76] The Lyric's final production for the season was a revival of Wang starring De Wolf Hopper in the title role, a part he had created in the original 1891 production. Wang lasted for eight weeks before the Lyric closed for the summer.

Over at the New Amsterdam, Klaw and Erlanger followed their successful production of Mother Goose with a

[76] "Lyric--Pillars of Society," NYDM, 23 April 1904, p. 16.

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three-week engagement by Richard Mansfield. After concluding his run at the Lyric in the fall of 1903, Mansfield had been lured away from the Independent fold by the Syndicate managers. Mansfield's engagement at the New Amsterdam began with Ivan the Terrible, a translation of a play by Tolstoy. After two weeks, the actor-manager changed to a repertory policy, alternating Ivan with Beau Brummel, A Parisian Romance, Old Heidelberg, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. When Mansfield's run was over, A. M. Palmer presented a revival of the D'Ennery-Cormon melodrama The Two Orphans at the New Amsterdam. The excellent cast included Kyrle Bellew, Grace George, Margaret Illington, and Clara Morris, who was celebrating the fortieth anniversary of her first stage appearance. This elaborate production of a long-popular play ran for seven weeks.

The season at the New Amsterdam ended with a two-week engagement of Weber and Fields in Whoop-Dee-Doo. In January, the stringent building codes put into effect after the Iroquois Theatre fire had forced the celebrated comedy team to close their popular music hall on Broadway and Twenty-ninth Street. For the next few months, the partners had toured the country with Whoop-Dee-Doo. They had decided to end their twenty-eight-year partnership, but kept the news secret until they arrived back in New York in April. By the time Weber and Fields opened at the New Amsterdam in May, everyone believed that it would be the last time the team would work together. On the final evening, the theatre was crowded with "representatives of

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society, clubdom, the world of the first-night, the theater and every walk of life," all of them begging the partners to remain together. After the performance, everyone in the company made speeches, "Auld Lang Syne" was sung, and Weber and Fields went alone to their dressing room to say their final farewells.[77] For the next few years, they pursued separate careers as star-managers of their own companies.

At the Victoria, another kind of ending occurred in 1904. Having failed to find a successful policy of legitimate shows for his theatre, Oscar Hammerstein announced in February 1904 that the playhouse would be renamed the "Victoria Theatre of Varieties" and would present high-quality vaudeville bills to the public. Hammerstein's reasons for the conversion were obvious: he had been successful as a vaudeville impressario, first at the Manhattan Theatre in conjunction with Koster and Bial, and later at the Victoria's Roof Theatre; and since the Victoria was originally built as a music hall, it was really more suited to vaudeville than to legitimate drama. Much of Hammerstein's previous success in vaudeville, particularly with the summer roof theatre, was due to the managerial abilities of his son Willie, who had been taught how to book vaudeville bills by William Morris, the biggest

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[77]Felix Isman, Weber and Fields (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924), pp. 304-307.

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independent vaudeville booking agent in America.[78] Willie's genius for discovering and promoting talent was to make the Victoria the foremost vaudeville theatre of its day, and at the same time freed Oscar to concentrate on his first love, opera.

In announcing his intention to devote the Victoria to vaudeville, Hammerstein revealed that ticket prices would be cut in half, and that smoking would be permitted throughout the theatre. This dispensation seems to have made the theatre especially attractive to men. One contemporary commented that women were "in the very small minority" in Victoria audiences.[79] Hammerstein also announced that "no attempt will be made to exploit any European notoriety-seekers or sensationalists" because he did not believe "that such a policy is conducive to lasting prosperity."[80] Actually, much of the Victoria's future prosperity would stem from Willie Hammerstein's flair for exploiting the notorious and the bizarre.

The opening night of the Victoria as a vaudeville house proved that Hammerstein was justified in making the change. The Times reported that "there was prolonged applause for most of the acts last night, the men apparently enjoying the privilege of smoking vouchsafed

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[78] Joe Laurie, Jr., Vaudeville: From the Honky-Tonks to the Palace (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1953), p. 371.

[79] Blumenthal, p. 111.

[80] "Victoria to Be a Music Hall," NYDM, 16 January 1904, p. 19.

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to them, and there seemed every indication that the new venture would prosper."[81] The impressive opening bill consisted of the Six Musical Cuttys, the English Pony Ballet, the Florenz Troupe, Al Shean and Charles Warren, Delmore and Lee, Yorke and Adams, the Schenk Brothers, Colby and Way, the Nichols Sisters, Sparrow, the New Aga, and Burke's Dogs.[82] The bills at the Victoria were changed weekly, but the quality remained high. In May, the Dramatic Mirror commented that "Mr. Hammerstein is providing bills of extraordinary merit, using more big headliners, than any other house in the country."[83] Among the stars of the day who appeared at the Victoria during the spring of 1904 were Eva Tanguay, James J. Corbett (the boxer-turned-actor and raconteur), Jack Norworth and Nora Bayes, McIntyre and Heath, the Russell Brothers, Blanche Ring, Ethel Levey (Mrs. George M. Cohan), and Rose Coghlan. In addition to all this talent, Hammerstein inaugurated the practice of ending each show with a newsreel.

Once the Victoria had been successfully launched as a vaudeville house, Oscar Hammerstein turned his attention to another project--the construction of a new theatre on the south side of Forty-second Street. In early February he announced that he had leased a piece of

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[81] "Theatre of Varieties," 2 February 1904, p. 5.

[82] "Vaudeville--Hammerstein's Victoria," NYDM, 6 February 1904, p. 18.

[83] "Vaudeville--Hammerstein's Victoria," 7 May 1904, p. 16.

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property near the Forty-second Street entrance to the American Theatre with a frontage of sixty-six feet, eight inches on Forty-second Street and depth of ninety-eight feet, nine inches. In March, Hammerstein made it known that he intended to build a theatre on the land. The plans that had been filed with the city called for a four-story building occupying the entire lot. In order to save space, the balcony staircases were to be built out onto the sidewalk as they had been at the Republic. The seating capacity was to be 400 in the orchestra, 200 in the first balcony, and 200 in the second balcony. The total cost of the building was expected to be $175,000.[84]

In June, after the break-up of Weber and Fields, Hammerstein announced that his new theatre would be called the "Lew M. Fields" and that he had formed a partnership with the firm of Hamlin, Mitchell and Fields for the purpose of producing shows at the new theatre. The productions, which would star Lew Fields, were to be similar to those presented by Weber and Fields in the past, but were to be "more consistent and less on the happy-go-lucky order."[85] Hammerstein saw this agreement as a further means of revenge on the Theatrical Syndicate, since Klaw and Erlanger had been trying to book the Hamlin, Mitchell and

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[84] Application for Erection of Field's Theatre filed with the New York City Department of Buildings, February 24, 1904; "Hammerstein to Build Another," NYDM, 5 March 1904, p. 13.

[85] "Theatre for Lew Fields," New York Times, 1 June 1904, p. 9; "Lew Fields' Theatre," NYDM, 11 June 1904, p. 18.

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Fields shows in their own theatres.[86] The new theatre would also extend the influence of the Independents to the south side of Forty-second Street which, since the opening of the New Amsterdam and the about-to-be opened Liberty, had become Syndicate territory.

The war between the Syndicate and the Independents did not abate with the arrival of summer, for the Victoria roof was to experience its first stiff competition when Klaw and Erlanger opened the Aerial Gardens on top of the New Amsterdam. This newest of New York's roof theatres was described in detail in the Dramatic Mirror:

> It is roofed in and closed on the sides and back by windows, and resembles an ordinary Winter theatre, except perhaps that there is a little more ventilation than usual. The decorations are in shrimp pink and white, and the effect is not at all restful on a hot night. Back of the stage is a promenade, consisting of a few paths, with growing plants here and there, and tables at which refreshments are served. No sitting room is provided for those who do not buy drinks. . . . From an architectural point of view the auditorium is badly constructed, as there are many seats in the upper tier from which the stage cannot be seen to any advantage.[87]

The production featured at the Aerial Gardens during the summer of 1904 was a "musical vaudeville" called A Little Bit of Everything. According to the Dramatic Mirror, it consisted of twenty-one musical numbers with a little dialogue in between. The production, which starred Fay Templeton and Peter F. Dailey, featured a sketch called "The Evolution of Rag-Time," with music and lyrics by Cole

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[86] "Theatre for Lew Fields."

[87] "Aerial Gardens," 18 June 1904, p. 16.

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and Johnson. A Little Bit of Everything did not impress the reviewer for the Dramatic Mirror, and a month after it opened an "Offenbach review" or series of musical selections from Offenbach was added in an attempt to bolster the show.

Soon after this "musical vaudeville" began its run at the New Amsterdam, the Victoria Roof was opened with Parsifalia, a musical extravaganza written and composed by Oscar Hammerstein. Parsifalia was not a burlesque of Parsifal but rather a travesty on the producing methods of Heinrich Conreid at the Metropolitan Opera House. Included in the sketch were five songs and two ballets. The comedian Willie Zimmerman did impressions of the great composers and reportedly brought the house down with an imitation of Oscar Hammerstein.[88] In addition to Parsifalia, several acts of vaudeville were presented at the Paradise Gardens. As the season progressed, the Hammersteins sought unusual acts that would make their vaudeville bill unique. One such oddity was "Enigmarelle," an automaton that could smoke cigarettes, ride a wheel, write on a blackboard, and do a few dance steps.[89] The farm on the roof featured a cow that was milked every night by an electric milking machine.

Both A Little Bit of Everything and Parsifalia ran throughout the summer, but Hammerstein's show seems to have

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[88] "Paradise Gardens," NYDM, 18 June 1904, p. 16.

[89] "A New Automaton," NYDM, 20 August 1904, p. 16.

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had a decisive edge in popularity. The explanation may lie in the physical layout of his theatre and in the nature of the entertainment presented there. The Paradise Gardens was an open-air theatre (thanks to the windows in the walls and the one open side) which made the most of the breezes blowing off the Hudson and East Rivers. In addition to its comfortable auditorium, there was the farm, which made a stroll along the Belasco roof both cool and entertaining. In contrast, the New Amsterdam's roof consisted of an enclosed theatre that must have been uncomfortable on hot nights and a promenade that lacked visual interest or novelty.[90] Because the Aerial Gardens was a "regulation theatre," the entertainment chosen for it was a quasi-legitimate musical with an awkward book that detracted from the various acts employed in the show. On Hammerstein's roof, the show, with the exception of the Parsifalia sketch, was composed of a vaudeville bill that was constantly changed and therefore could tempt audiences to return to the roof several times during the summer. Whatever the reasons, the Paradise Gardens would remain the supreme roof theatre in New York for the next few years.

The 1904-05 season began for Forty-second Street on August 27, when the American opened with a new melodrama called The White Tigress of Japan. This second season of combination shows was diversified by a month-long visit from

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[90] A photograph of the outside promenade reveals a great deal of shrubbery surrounding small wooden tables and chairs. See "Plays and Players," The Theatre 4 (July 1904): 160.

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a company of French actors presenting the works of Hugo, Dumas, Labiche, etc., in their native tongue. The reviewer for the Dramatic Mirror praised the expressive acting of the French performers and urged American actors to observe their work.[91] After the French company left, the American returned to its usual melodramatic fare.

David Belasco opened his theatre with a three-week engagement of Sweet Kitty Bellairs before presenting his first major production of the season, The Music Master starring David Warfield. Audiences were enthusiastic about this comedy-drama, while critics particularly praised Belasco's direction of the production.[92] The Music Master ran at the Belasco for fifteen weeks.

At the Lyric the season started with a musical comedy imported from Chicago, The Royal Chef. The featured performer was Ida Renee, an English music hall star making her American debut. After seventeen performances, The Royal Chef was followed at the Lyric by Taps, a drama that had been played in German at the Irving Place Theatre the previous year and was now translated into English. The stars were Effie Shannon and Herbert Kelcey. A few weeks later, Taps was succeeded by The Harvester, an adaptation of a French drama which starred Otis Skinner. This series of mediocre productions was interrupted on November 7, when

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[91]"American--French Repertoire," 22 October 1904, p. 16.

[92]"Belasco--The Music Master," NYDM, 8 October 1904, p. 16.

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the celebrated French actress Gabrielle Rejane opened a month's engagement at the Lyric. For her first visit to America since 1895, Rejane brought a repertoire of modern French plays. The reviewer for the Dramatic Mirror admired Rejane's acting, especially in comedies, but criticized the shabby productions that her plays were given.[93] The final production of 1904 at the Lyric was The Fortunes of a King starring James K. Hackett. It ran for thirty-eight performances.

At the New Amsterdam, the season began with The Rogers Brothers in Paris, the usual kind of vehicle for the comedy team. Co-starring in this production were Josephine Cohan (recently split from the Four Cohans) and her husband Fred Niblo. The show ran four weeks at the New Amsterdam before it was transferred to the new Liberty Theatre down the block. Following the Rogers Brothers into the New Amsterdam was Mrs. Patrick Campbell in Charles Frohman's production of The Sorceress, a play by Victorien Sardou originally written for Sarah Bernhardt. After thirty-six performances The Sorceress was succeeded by Humpty Dumpty, another Drury Lane extravaganza. The original English production had cost $100,000; Klaw and Erlanger expended an additional $50,000 on it. The managers claimed that the running expenses for Humpty Dumpty would be $12,000 a week exclusive of the cost of the theatre. Eight hundred people

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[93] "Lyric--Rejane in Repertory," 19 November 1904, p. 16; "Rejane in Repertoire," 26 November 1904, p. 2.

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were supposedly employed on the production, with 500 actually appearing on the stage. In order to rehearse these vast armies of performers, the company was divided into detachments which rehearsed at five separate theatres and two rehearsal halls. The result of all this expenditure, according to the Dramatic Mirror, was a production in which the character of Humpty (a traditional pantomime favorite) "never emerged from the confused mass of glitter and glare and tinsel."[94] Although the critics lamented the loss of the traditional Humpty Dumpty, the spectacular effects seem to have pleased audiences, for the show ran for sixteen weeks.

While the legitimate playhouses on Forty-second Street were going about the precarious business of finding dramatic and musical productions to fill their theatres, the Hammersteins had launched another profitable season of vaudeville at the Victoria. Among the headliners in the fall of 1904 were Della Fox, Nora Bayes, Maggie Cline (who had opened the American Theatre's roof garden in 1893), and Fred Niblo. At the end of the year, the Victoria featured Rose Stahl and Company in an abbreviated version of her hit play, The Chorus Lady.

The fall of 1904 saw the opening of two new theatres on West Forty-second Street. The first was the Liberty, built by Klaw and Erlanger a few doors to the

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[94] "'Humpty Dumpty' Will Revive Old Time Clown," New York Times, 30 October 1904, sec. 3, p. 5; "New Amsterdam--Humpty Dumpty," NYDM, 26 November 1904, p. 16.

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west of the New Amsterdam. The Application for Erection of the Liberty had been filed in 1902, but labor disputes and other delays caused the owners to postpone the opening of the theatre until October 10, 1904.[95] Like the American and the New Amsterdam, the bulk of the Liberty was built on Forty-first Street. The portion of the property that faced Forty-second Street was twenty feet wide and eighty feet deep. This land, used for an entranceway, led to the main plot, which was one hundred feet wide on Forty-first Street and ninety-nine feet deep. The theatre itself was ninety feet wide by sixty feet deep.[96] Herts and Tallant, the same architectural firm that had designed the New Amsterdam, planned the Liberty as a miniature version of their masterpiece.[97]

The interior dimensions of the Liberty were in keeping with the avowed purpose of the house, which was to be a home for burlesque and musical comedies, particularly for shows starring the Rogers Brothers, who had a financial interest in the theatre.[98] The auditorium of the Liberty was seventy-two feet wide and sixty feet from the footlights to the back wall of the lobby. There were only

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[95]Application for Erection of Liberty Theatre filed with the New York City Department of Buildings, October 7, 1902. In January 1904, the Application was amended to improve the fireproofing of the building, no doubt as a result of the Iroquois Theatre fire in December 1903. These changes may also have delayed completion of the theatre.

[96]Application for Erection of Liberty Theatre.

[97]"New York's Magnificent New Playhouses."

[98]"Liberty Theatre Opened," NYDM, 15 October 1904, p. 13.

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fifteen rows of orchestra seats, the last row being forty-two feet from the stage. Besides the orchestra, there was a balcony, a gallery, and eight boxes. The cantilever system was once more employed in order to eliminate supporting poles in the theatre. The total seating capacity was 1,202 seats. The stage of the Liberty was seventy-two feet wide by thirty-six feet deep, with a proscenium opening thirty-six feet wide and thirty-two feet high.[99] Of particular importance to the builders was adequate fireproofing for the theatre. The Liberty was constructed with twenty-one separate fireproof exits, and the owners asserted that the theatre could be emptied in two minutes. The tanks on the roof held 15,000 gallons of water for the sprinkler system.[100] The fact that these details were included in announcements about the theatre suggests that the general public was anxious about the safety of New York's playhouses.

Those who expected the decor of the Liberty to be as startling as that of the New Amsterdam were surprised at the modesty of the new theatre's interior. The overall

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[99]The dimensions of the Liberty are taken from "Rogers Bros. in the Liberty," Morning Telegraph, 11 October 1904, in The Rogers Brothers in Paris Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; "The New Liberty Theatre," Evening Post, 11 October 1904, in The Rogers Brothers in Paris Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; "Liberty Theatre Opened"; and Clarence Stratton, Theatron (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1928), pp. 62, 65.

[100]"Fine Theatre, the Liberty," The Sun, 11 October 1904, in The Rogers Brothers in Paris Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; "The Liberty Theatre," NYDM, 1 October 1904, p. 17.

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style of the decorations was said to be that of the Early French Renaissance. The color scheme, which employed shades of old gold, amber, and ivory, was described as "restful" by one reviewer, who was relieved that "no garishness is evident anywhere,"[101] while another reviewer commented that there was nothing ostentatious about the theatre except the ushers, who were dressed in fancy grayish-green uniforms.[102]

Since Klaw and Erlanger had built the Liberty as a home for the Rogers Brothers, it is not surprising that the opening attraction at the new theatre was The Rogers Brothers in Paris, moved from the New Amsterdam where it had premiered on September 5. Despite Klaw and Erlanger's obvious enthusiasm for the Rogers Brothers, there is some evidence that the comedians' popularity was on the wane. When The Rogers Brothers in Paris opened at the New Amsterdam, the critic for the Dramatic Mirror complained that

> every one of the pieces is cut on exactly the same pattern. There are a certain number of choruses, marches, drills and dances; a certain amount of time allowed for the Rogers Brothers to mangle the English language and sing inane parodies; there is a semi-sentimental song with light effects, and the members of the company are allowed to occupy the stage just long enough to permit the Rogers Brothers to change their clothes.[103]

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[101] "The New Liberty Theatre."

[102] "Rogers Brothers in the Liberty."

[103] "The Rogers Brothers in Paris," 17 September 1904, p. 16.

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Although the Rogers Brothers continued to present a new show each year at the Liberty, the days of their greatest popularity seem to have been over by the time they got their own theatre.

The Rogers Brothers left the Liberty after four weeks and were succeeded by an event of great significance in the history of American musical theatre: the production of George M. Cohan's second full-length musical, and his first show to play a major uptown theatre, Little Johnny Jones. The cast included Cohan's mother and father, his wife Ethel Levey, and Donald Brian (later to achieve Forty-second Street immortality as Prince Danilo in the American premiere of The Merry Widow), but the undisputed star of the production was Cohan himself, who had written, composed, and directed the show in addition to playing the title role.[104] Despite Cohan's herculean efforts, critical reception of the show was cool. Reviewers were especially disturbed by the intrusion of serious elements into a musical comedy plot. The writer for the Dramatic Mirror described Little Johnny Jones as "a melodrama with musical trimmings, as it were," while the Times critic was confused by the fact that Cohan and Levey recited their songs rather than singing them in the usual operetta style.[105]

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[104] Gerald Bordman, American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 205. Bordman notes that Little Johnny Jones was the first show that Cohan produced in conjunction with Sam H. Harris.

[105] "Liberty--Little Johnny Jones," 19 November 1904, p. 16; "Complicated 'Johnny Jones,'" 8 November 1904, p. 9.

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In the face of this lack of critical enthusiasm, Little Johnny Jones lasted for seven weeks at the Liberty before beginning a very successful tour.

The next show at the new theatre was In Newport, starring Peter F. Dailey, Joseph Coyne, and Fay Templeton, who were supposedly the nucleus of a comedy company that was to appear regularly at the Liberty. In Newport turned out to be so dreary, however, that it was unable to attract an audience even in the normally busy holiday season.[106] The show closed after three weeks, and the Liberty's comedy company seems to have disappeared as well.

Earlier in December, a show opened that had no trouble at all in attracting a holiday audience. It Happened in Nordland was the first attraction at the new Lew M. Fields Theatre. Built by Oscar Hammerstein, the Fields was the first Independent house to be constructed on the south or "Syndicate" side of Forty-second Street. For this theatre, which was to be in many respects a duplicate of the Republic, Hammerstein leased a plot of land that was sixty-six feet wide on Forty-second Street, and ninety-nine feet deep. The four-story building occupied the entire property. Like the Republic, the Fields had a relatively small seating capacity: the orchestra held 400, the first balcony 200, and the second

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[106]"Liberty--In Newport," NYDM, 7 January 1905, p. 14.

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balcony 200. There were also nine boxes in three rows of three on each side wall of the theatre and two boxes built into the mezzanine.[107] The interior dimensions reflected the small size of the property. The auditorium was sixty-five feet wide and forty-two feet from the footlights to the back wall.[108] The stage area was described as "not very large."[109] As in the case of the Republic, practically every square inch of space in the auditorium of the Fields was utilized for audience seating, with the result that there was only the smallest of lobbies in the theatre. The reviewer for the Dramatic Mirror reported that the entrance to the Fields was "even more abrupt" than that of the Republic, and that the last row of orchestra seats was directly inside the door.[110] Several critics complained about the small entranceway and the difficulties it caused as the opening night crowds tried to enter and leave the theatre.[111] Although this inadequate entrance seems to have constituted a major fire hazard, Hammerstein seems to have been more concerned with providing for the safety of his

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[107] Application for Erection of Fields' Theatre; "Premiere To-Night for Lew Fields," unidentified clipping in the Lew Fields Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

[108] These dimensions are taken from an unidentified sheet of paper in the Anco Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

[109] "Fields' Theatre is Unique," NYDM, 17 December 1904, p. 13.

[110] Ibid.

[111] "Fields' Theatre Opens With Dainty Comedy," New York Times, 6 December 1904, p. 6.

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audiences in other ways. Just before the theatre opened, he invited members of the Buildings and Fire Departments to the Fields to see his latest invention. Hammerstein had ordered the gridiron over the stage to be constructed of flood pipes so that by pulling a chain on the stage level, the pipes could be opened and the stage deluged with water.[112]

The decorative scheme for the interior of the playhouse employed shades of green, white, and gold, and featured "a great deal of the plaster relief work of which Mr. Hammerstein is so fond."[113] In describing the interior, the words most often used by the reviewers were "cozy" and "comfortable." This intimate theatre seems to have been ideally suited to the type of shows favored by Lew Fields. According to an announcement made in June 1904, Fields intended to present a "bright, lively musical play with a plausible story for the first half of the entertainment, that to be followed by a burlesque of some current successful attraction."[114] In order to present such shows, Fields announced the formation of the "Lew Fields Stock Company," a group of players who would appear regularly in the shows at the theatre, just as

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[112] "Oscar Hammerstein's Invention," NYDM, 3 December 1904, p. 2.

[113] "Fields' Theatre Opens With Dainty Comedy"; "Fields' Theatre is Unique."

[114] "House in 42d St. for Lew Fields," New York Telegraph, 1 June 1904, in the Lew Fields Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

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Lillian Russell, David Warfield, and others had done at the old Weber and Fields Music Hall.

The opening attraction at the Fields certainly lived up to the requirements of a "bright, lively musical play." It Happened in Nordland, with a book and lyrics by Glen MacDonough and music by Victor Herbert, starred Fields, Marie Cahill, Joseph Herbert, and Bessie Clayton.[115] The show was a great success with both critics and audiences, running at the Fields for the rest of the season before going on tour for the summer.

The opening of this seventh playhouse on the single block of West Forty-second Street emphasizes the block's importance as a theatrical center and as a focal point for the opposition between the Syndicate and the Independents. It is important to remember that in addition to the theatres themselves, Forty-second Street contained the offices of the major figures on both sides of the rivalry: from their rooms in the New Amsterdam, Klaw and Erlanger could look out their front window at the Independent theatres across the street. Perhaps they could see David Belasco standing at the window of his office in the playhouse which now bore his name, or their newest and ultimately their strongest adversaries, Sam and Lee Shubert in their offices over the entrance to the Lyric. Klaw and Erlanger must also have known that Oscar Hammerstein spent

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[115] "Lew Fields--It Happened in Nordland," NYDM, 17 December 1904, p. 16.

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a good deal of his time in his workshop and office over the Victoria; they would also be aware that the headquarters of Harrison Grey Fiske's New York Dramatic Mirror was just a block away at 121 West Forty-second Street.[116] This close proximity of the leading contenders in the theatrical wars, which no doubt intensified their enmity, served to concentrate the attention of the theatrical world on the "theatre block" of West Forty-second Street.

Events were also occurring outside the world of the theatre which were to contribute to the growing importance of the theatre block. In April 1904, the New York City Council passed a resolution changing the name of Long Acre Square to Times Square in honor of the New York Times Building, recently completed in the southern part of the square between Forty-second and Forty-third Streets. The official designation by the Mayor came one week later.[117] The Times Building brought prestige and a certain glamor to the neighborhood, while serving as a visible symbol of the rapid development of the area.

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[116]Klaw and Erlanger moved into offices in the New Amsterdam Building before the theatre was completed. "Managers Busy Moving," New York Telegraph, 1 May 1903, in the Erlanger Collection. In a photograph taken while the Lyric was being built, there is a sign posted on one of the entranceway pillars reading: "Lyric Theatre Offices/Shubert Enterprises Up Stairs." See Republic Theatre Folder, MCNY. It is interesting that both Klaw and Erlanger and the Shuberts were so anxious to have offices on Forty-second Street that they moved in while their respective theatres were still being constructed.

[117]Paneth, p. 14.

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Six months later, on October 27, 1904, the West Side Subway was opened to the public for the first time. The Manhattan-Bronx route laid out for the new system ran north on Fourth Avenue as far as Forty-second Street, then across Forty-second Street to Broadway, and then up Broadway to 125th Street.[118] Because the Times Square stop linked the crosstown route to the line running north on Broadway, it quickly became the busiest station in the entire subway system. By the end of its first year of operation, it was estimated that 5,000,000 people had used the Times Square station.[119] As the subway system expanded, additional lines fed into the Times Square station, so that for many years it remained the most-used stop in the system.

The opening of the subway had a great impact on Times Square. Since the area was now at the heart of Manhattan's mass transit system, it speedily became the most desirable location for restaurants, theatres, and other places of amusement. As theatre builders and owners realized the advantages of building in an area that received such great pedestrian traffic, the relentless northward march of the theatre district slowed down considerably once it had reached Times Square. Rather than locate their playhouses too far north of the subway stop, theatre builders

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[118]Howard B. Furer, New York: A Chronological and Documentary History, 1524-1970 (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, 1974), p. 38; The New York Subway (Interborough Rapid Transit Co., 1904; rpt. New York: Arno Press, n. d.), p. 26.

[119]"Times Square and the Subway," New York Times 28 October 1905, p. 8.

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spread out into the square's side streets, mostly in the blocks between Seventh and Eighth Avenues in the middle Forties. It was not until the 1920s, when land in the Times Square area became scarce, that the theatre district was again ready to move north.

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CHAPTER IV

THE NEW RIALTO (1905-1912)

In the years following the completion of the Times Building and the opening of the subway, the Times Square area consolidated its reputation as New York's chief amusement center. In addition to a steadily increasing number of theatres, the district boasted several important hotels, such as the Metropole (home of George M. Cohan and Enrico Caruso) and the Astor, as well as such glamorous restaurants as Shanley's, Rector's, Churchill's, and Murray's. Thousands of people were brought to Times Square each evening by the subway and trolley lines that intersected the district. In 1907, metered taxicabs were introduced in New York; two years earlier the last horse-drawn stagecoaches had been replaced by gas-powered buses.[1] These new forms of surface transportation quickly clogged the streets in Times Square, their noise providing suitable aural accompaniment to the bustling crowds that invaded the area each evening. As one contemporary described this nightly invasion of Times Square, "At eight in the evening there is the incessant come and go of trolleys, the rattle of cabs, the shuffle and push of many feet along the street,

[1]Edward Robb Ellis, The Epic of New York City (New York: Coward-McCann, 1966), p. 462.

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the insistent voice of ticket speculators, and the unintelligible shout of men and boys hawking night editions of newspapers."[2] Times Square was fast becoming a symbol of the fast-paced tempo of life in the "new metropolis."

While Times Square as a whole was viewed as New York's primary entertainment district, West Forty-second Street maintained its reputation as the city's theatre center. In 1905, the Dramatic Mirror proclaimed the block of Forty-second Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues "The New Rialto," or main theatre district of the city.[3] That Forty-second Street deserved this title is attested to by the existence of the seven theatres on the block and by the concentration of theatrical offices and concerns in or near those theatres. Most of the era's important producers and managers rented office space on Forty-second Street. Those already mentioned in the previous chapter were joined by Cohan and Harris (who moved into the New Amsterdam in 1905), and by William Morris (who took over the American and converted it to a vaudeville house in 1908). As films became a more popular and more respected medium, motion picture companies began to rent office space on the "theatre block." During this period Belasco and the Shuberts moved their headquarters out of the Republic and the Lyric Theatres respectively, but they continued to lease playhouses and produce shows on Forty-second Street.

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[2]John C. Van Dyke, The New New York (New York: Macmillan, 1909), p. 213.

[3]23 December 1905, front cover.

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Only one new legitimate theatre was constructed on the block between 1905 and 1913, although at least four other theatre projects were announced but never completed. A small movie and vaudeville house appeared on the block towards the end of the period. The growing reputation of Forty-second Street and the development of its image as the most glamorous block in New York was paralleled by a rapid increase in property values. In 1900, the assessed valuation of the Victoria property had been $200,000. By 1905, it had jumped to $650,000; by 1910, it was worth $980,000, and by 1915 it would be valued at $1,175,000, almost six times what it was worth fifteen years before.[4] As property values on the block increased, real estate speculators became interested in acquiring the property rights to the plots of land on which the theatres were built. This influx of nontheatrical investors would in turn have a bearing on the already-complicated finances of the theatres, as we shall see.

Besides theatres and theatrical offices, Forty-second Street began to attract other kinds of businesses during the period of 1905-1912, including one of Bernarr McFadden's Physical Culture Restaurants and the Hermitage Hotel. A billiard parlor and a Swedish massage establishment had appeared on the south side of the block by 1909; a piano company and a music store were in evidence by 1910; and a pawn shop was located on the north side of the block by 1911.

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[4] "Rialto Value Rose 15-Fold Since 1900," New York Times, 4 February 1933, p. 10.

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A school (Public School #80) was located on the Forty-first Street side of the block between 1905 and 1912, when it was demolished to make way for the Candler Theatre.[5] The most famous nontheatre building on the block, Murray's Restaurant, opened in 1909 and quickly became one of New York's most popular eating places. By the end of this period the most imposing structure on the block, the twenty-five story Candler Building, was being constructed. In addition to these new edifices, several of the original businesses, like the dental infirmary and the cleaning and tailoring establishment, remained on the block during the period.

The theatres themselves were still the battleground for the war between the Syndicate and the Independents in 1905. Although both sides continued to build theatres at a frenzied pace in New York and other cities, neither side built another playhouse on Forty-second Street, although the Shuberts kept the Syndicate on its toes by negotiating for control of existing theatres on the block and by revealing plans to build other theatres in the vicinity. In 1905, for example, a new theatre was announced for the north side

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[5] The existence of these buildings was traced through the following sources: Advertisements in programs for the Victoria Theatre in the Victoria Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; photo circa 1910-1911 in the Forty-second Street, West Folder, Print Room, New York Historical Society; Atlas of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan (Philadelphia: G. W. Bromley and Co., 1905), Blocks 1013 and 1014; Atlas of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan (Philadelphia: G. W. Bromley and Co., 1910 [corrected to 1912], Blocks 1013 and 1014.

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of the block, to be built by a syndicate headed by J. M. Flagg and to be managed by the Shuberts. This playhouse was never built; neither was the large theatre and office building planned by the Shuberts for Forty-second Street between Broadway and Sixth Avenue, a project announced by the brothers in 1907.[6]

The continuing opposition to the Trust on the part of the Shuberts, the Fiskes, and Belasco reached a climax in 1907, when Klaw and Erlanger were indicted for restraint of trade. Despite the fact that the indictment was quickly dismissed, the legal action seems to have bothered Klaw and Erlanger sufficiently to cause them to agree to a truce with the Shuberts, who were by now the Syndicate's most formidable opposition. The peace lasted for two years, after which the rivalry was renewed, but with much less vehemence. By the end of the period, Syndicate and Independent producers were freely booking shows in each other's theatres. During the years 1905 through 1912, the theatrical rivalry on Forty-second Street manifested itself more in the rush to sign the top attractions, and less in the construction of new theatres.

At first, theatregoers seemed to benefit as each side tried to present the top stars and the most elaborate productions. Ultimately, the spectator paid a high price for these shows, for the expense involved in producing

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[6] "New Forty-second Street Theatre," NYDM, 9 December 1905, p. 13; "The Shuberts May Build," New York Times, 27 October 1907, sec. 2, p. 1.

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them made a long run a financial necessity. To increase a show's chances for a long run, producers tended at first to stick closely to the tried-and-true formulas of the past: famous international stars in revivals of the classics, melodramas with plenty of action and special effects, musicals with exotic settings, imported comedies of manners, and romantic dramas. At the beginning of the period, there was little room for experimentation or for works by unknown playwrights.[7] However, as producers found it harder and harder to keep up with the demand for new productions caused by the ever-growing number of theatres in New York and on the road, works by unknown writers were produced, but only if they adhered to the accepted formulas. The pressure for a long run made experimentation on Broadway almost impossible. It was not until the noncommercial, little theatres began to appear around 1915 that widespread experimentation in dramatic form and content took place.

At the beginning of 1905, most of the theatres on Forty-second Street were pursuing the same policies that had guided them in previous years. As the period progressed, the theatres with successful policies and stable ownership had a fairly prosperous existence, while the houses that could not find an appealing policy or which changed hands frequently would struggle to keep their doors open.

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[7]My analysis of the state of the American drama is based on John Corbin, "The Lights and Stars of Broadway," Scribner's Magazine 37 (February 1905): 129-142.

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For the first few years of the period the American remained a combination house, presenting melodramas with strong appeal to the theatre's gallery audiences. At the end of the 1904-05 season, the American management, perhaps recalling the success of the Greenwall Stock Company a few years before, brought in the Fawcett Stock Company to present Shakespeare's plays at popular prices. On May 1 the company offered a production of Romeo and Juliet that was praised by the critics. Two weeks later, Jacob Adler returned to the American to portray Shylock in The Merchant of Venice. Once again he impressed the reviewers with his characterization. On May 27 the Fawcett company presented Fedora with Bertha Kalich, another star of the Yiddish stage, in the title role. Kalich played in English with "remarkably little accent." Her fine acting in this production led to other roles in English-language dramas.[8] Despite the success of Adler, Kalich, and the Fawcett Stock Company, the American never again presented such distinguished performers.

At the Belasco Theatre, the attraction during the spring of 1905 was Adrea, a drama written by Belasco and John Luther Long which starred Mrs. Leslie Carter. Critics praised her tempestuous acting and the elaborate Roman settings; audiences were also pleased with the production which ran at the Belasco throughout the spring.[9]

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[8] "American--Romeo and Juliet," NYDM, 13 May 1905, p. 4; "American--The Merchant of Venice," NYDM, 27 May 1905, p. 4; "American--Fedora," NYDM, 5 June 1905, p. 4.

[9] "Belasco--Adrea," NYDM, 21 January 1905, p. 16.

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Shortly after Adrea opened, the Shuberts presented one of their most successful productions at the Lyric. Fantana, a musical with book by Sam S. Shubert and Robert B. Smith, lyrics by Smith, and music by Raymond Hubbell, starred Jefferson De Angelis and Adele Ritchie, with Douglas Fairbanks and Julia Sanderson in supporting roles. So popular was Fantana that it ran throughout the summer and into the next season before the Shuberts were obliged to send it on tour because of prior commitments.

Across the street from the Lyric, the New Amsterdam continued to feature its elaborate production of Humpty Dumpty until March, when it was replaced by The Prince Consort, a comedy staged by Arnold Daly. The New Amsterdam's season ended with two interesting revivals: She Stoops to Conquer, presented by the Lieblers with an all-star cast including Kyrle Bellew, Sidney Drew, and Eleanor Robson; and Trilby, produced by William A. Brady, with Wilton Lackaye and Virginia Harned recreating the roles they had played in the original production.

The Liberty began 1905 with a farce called The Money Makers, which was the first play starring Ida Conquest at the head of her own company. It lasted for only two weeks before it was replaced by Mme. Rejane repeating the repertoire of plays she had presented at the Lyric in November (the Syndicate had apparently coaxed her away from the Shuberts). On February 6, Ada Rehan and her company came to the Liberty for a brief engagement in The Taming of the Shrew and The School for Scandal. After two

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weeks, she was followed into the Liberty by The Education of Mr. Pipp, a comedy by Augustus Thomas based on the pictures of Charles Dana Gibson. The Dramatic Mirror called Mr. Pipp the Liberty's "first resemblance of a success";[10] with Digby Bell in the title role it ran for eleven weeks.

The Lew M. Fields Theatre continued to present its initial attraction, It Happened in Nordland, throughout the spring. Oscar Hammerstein's satisfaction at the successful opening of his new theatre must have been of short duration, however, for in March 1905, New York's District Attorney sent a letter to the Superintendent of Buildings in which he called the latter's attention to twenty-two violations of the Building Code alleged to exist in the Fields Theatre. Among the violations were specified the following:

> Doors intended to serve as exits open directly on stairways; doors of the gallery open inward; the proscenium wall has no fire doors; dressing-rooms under the auditorium are not built in accordance with filed and approved plans; an excessive number of seats between aisles; stairway serving as exit from gallery having nine turns at right angles; box-office obstructing main exit; heat registers placed in floor of auditorium; electroliers too low in stairways, and aisles are not of required width.[11]

A week later, the theatre was inspected and the District Attorney received a report stating that seven changes, each

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[10] "Liberty--The Education of Mr. Pipp," NYDM, 4 March 1905, p. 16.

[11] "Condition of Theatres," NYDM, 1 April 1905, p. 16.

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of which violated the Building Code, had been made in the theatre after it opened. The report also revealed that the theatre had been permitted to open even though it had several violations of the Building Code.

Hammerstein, in a letter to Mayor McClellan, denied the charges and claimed that he did not deviate from the plans and specifications filed with the Buildings Department. He asked the Mayor to make a personal investigation. When the Buildings Superintendent charged that the Victoria was also in violation of the Building Code and ordered the vaudeville house closed down, Hammerstein responded by suing the Superintendent for $500, the cost of fixing the violation. Finally, in August 1905, Hammerstein announced that plans were filed with the Buildings Department for certain improvements to the Fields, including additions to the fire escape and a new staircase leading to it. These changes were clearly made in order to satisfy the Buildings Department, and seemed to have brought the matter to an end.[12]

Oscar Hammerstein's troubles at the Fields provided a contrast to the unbroken popularity of the vaudeville bills at the Victoria. In the spring of 1905, such well-known variety performers as Victor Moore, Eddie Foy, Elsie Janis, and Cecilia Loftus appeared there; Hammerstein was also able to present such stars of the legitimate stage as

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[12] "Theatre Conditions Reported On," NYDM, 8 April 1905, p. 13; "Ban Off the Victoria," NYDM, 13 May 1905, p. 15; "Hammerstein Sues," NYDM, 20 May 1905, p. 11; "Changes at Lew Fields Theatre," NYDM, 26 August 1905, p. 2.

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May Robson and Adele Ritchie in their vaudeville debuts. As the summer approached, the Hammersteins arranged for another season of vaudeville on the Victoria and Republic roofs. The result of their preparations was reported by the Times reviewer on the morning after the roof opened: "Everything had been dressed up for the occasion in a new garb; the auditorium was dazzling with white paint and countless incandescents, the old mill and the little cluster of buildings were gay in festive colors, and there were new ducks, a new monkey, a new goat, and a new cow."[13] Among the usual assortment of performers to be found on the roof that summer was Will R. Rogers, who "won great favor with a remarkable lasso-throwing act."[14] Rogers was such a hit that he remained on the bill for several weeks, a rare occurrence at the Victoria.

Also of interest at the Paradise Gardens was "Captain Bloom's Demonstration of Marconi's Wireless Telegraphy" (the first time that radio had been exhibited in vaudeville), and "Abdul Kader and His Three Wives in an Exhibition of Rapid Painting," one of Willie Hammerstein's earliest, and best, publicity stunts. Since Turkey was in the news at the time, Hammerstein decided to capitalize on its topicality. He sent Morris Gest (then a Hammerstein employee, later a distinguished producer) to Europe to find a Turk with three wives, or the nearest equivalent.

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[13]"Hammerstein Roof Open," 6 June 1905, p. 9.

[14]"Vaudeville--Last Week," NYDM, 1 July 1905, p. 16.

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In Lucerne, Gest discovered a Swiss artist who was appearing in a small vaudeville house with his wife, daughter, and sister-in-law. Gest hired the artist and his "wives," took them to Turkey to be outfitted, tried the act out in Paris, where it caused a sensation, and then headed for New York. Meanwhile, Willie Hammerstein complained to Immigration officials under an assumed name, so that the entourage was detained on board their ship until the officials were satisfied about the relationship of the artist and the three women. Next, the artist and his "wives" were taken to the Waldorf-Astoria, where Hammerstein had made sure that they would be refused accommodations. Reporters followed as the group and their forty pieces of luggage went from hotel to hotel; each time the artist's request for rooms was turned down. Finally, the act was taken to the apartment which had been waiting for them the whole time.[15] All of this (except the existence of the apartment) was duly noted in the newspapers. Needless to say, by the time the act finally opened at the Victoria, it drew standing-room-only crowds, even though it was basically a mediocre offering in which the artist executed a painting in less than fifteen minutes while the three women assisted him.[16] The success of this outrageous stunt encouraged Willie Hammerstein to create other exploitation

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[15] Abel Green and Joe Laurie, Jr., Show Biz from Vaude to Video (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951), pp. 21-22.

[16] "Vaudeville--Last Week," NYDM, 19 August 1905, p. 16.

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acts, particularly during the summer roof seasons.

At the New Amsterdam's Aerial Gardens, the attraction for the summer of 1905 was Lifting the Lid, a "musical travesty in two acts" with book by John J. McNally and music and lyrics by Jean Schwartz and William Jerome. Among its stars were Corinne, Eddie Leonard, and Julius Tannen. Described by the Dramatic Mirror as "a summer trifle," Lifting the Lid included a "Gilbert and Sullivan review," the purpose of which seems to have been to present a thinly-disguised encomium of the Theatrical Trust. There were also satires on events that had occurred the previous winter, such as Oscar Hammerstein's conflict with the District Attorney over the Fields Theatre.[17] Throughout the summer, efforts were made to improve this rather weak entertainment. Near the end of June, a new skit called "The Whole Damm [sic] Family" was substituted for the Gilbert and Sullivan review, and by August, Fay Templeton and Julian Eltinge had been added to the cast. With these improvements, Lifting the Lid ran until August 26, when the New Amsterdam's roof was closed for the winter.

The 1905-06 season got an early start on Forty-second Street when the American opened on August 14 with The Millionaire Detective. The theatre, now under the management of William T. Keogh, had been extensively renovated before the season began. In succeeding weeks,

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[17] "Aerial Gardens--Lifting the Lid," NYDM, 17 June 1905, p. 16.

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the American hosted its customary selection of combination productions, varying the diet of melodrama with an occasional comedy, or a musical starring a knockabout comedy team such as the Russell Brothers or Yorke and Adams.

David Belasco began the season at his theatre by bringing back Mrs. Leslie Carter in Adrea, their success of the previous spring. After three weeks of Adrea, Belasco revived Carter's earlier hits, Zaza and Du Barry, before presenting on November 14 his major production of the season, The Girl of the Golden West, starring Blanche Bates. This melodrama, written by Belasco and produced with his usual obsession for detail, had the longest run of any Belasco production at the Republic, remaining at the theatre for the rest of the season, and then returning for another sixteen weeks in the fall of 1906 and for three weeks in the fall of 1907, for a total of 444 performances.

At the Lyric, the fall of 1905 saw the end of Fantana's run after thirty-seven weeks. It was replaced on October 2, by Reginald De Koven's annual production. This year the musical was an elaborate comic opera called Happyland which starred De Wolf Hopper. The Dramatic Mirror praised Happyland's set and costumes, and was pleased that the show was more refined than the usual "slap-stick comic opera."[18] Audiences seemed to agree with this assessment, for Happyland stayed at the Lyric for ten

[18]"Lyric--Happyland," 14 October 1905, p. 2.

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weeks before going on tour. In December, the Shuberts exhibited their prize possession when Sarah Bernhardt appeared there in a repertoire of her famous roles. The Bernhardt engagement had resulted in an unprecedented advance ticket sale. The mail requests alone amounted to $30,000, while other ticket-buyers waited in line all night for the box office to open. By the time ticket sales started at 10:00 a.m., over 500 people were waiting. More than $20,000 was taken in at the box office that day, with Camille and La Tosca the most sought-after tickets.[19] Bernhardt remained at the Lyric for three weeks before embarking on the famous cross-country tour during which she was forced to play in a circus tent because the Syndicate refused to book her into their theatres.[20] On Christmas Day 1905, a musical extravaganza called The Babes and the Baron was presented at the Lyric. Based on an English musical, it had been "Americanized" with topical humor and interpolated songs. The show garnered enough audience attention to last through the holiday season.

At the New Amsterdam, the first show of the fall was The Prodigal Son, an elaborately produced Hall Caine drama which lasted for six weeks. It was followed by Miss Dolly Dollars, a musical originally produced at the

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[19] "Sarah Bernhardt's Tour," NYDM, 16 December 1905, p. 14.

[20] The details of Bernhardt's tour are given in Stagg, pp. 83-85.

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Knickerbocker by Charles Dillingham. After two weeks, Dolly moved on and was replaced by The White Cat, another "musical spectacle" imported from London's Drury Lane Theatre. The Dramatic Mirror criticized its garish scenery and dull book, but The White Cat managed to draw audiences for six weeks.[21] During the final weeks of 1905, the New Amsterdam was occupied by E. S. Willard in repertoire.

The Liberty began its fall season with the inevitable Rogers Brothers vehicle, this time called The Rogers Brothers in Ireland. Although the material written by John McNally for the brothers' shows was by now distressingly repetitive, the new effort pleased audiences with its elaborate scenery and the fine staging of Ned Wayburn, who was about to become a major choreographer-director. After eight weeks, the Rogers Brothers left the Liberty and were succeeded by a musical called Moonshine starring the popular Marie Cahill. Despite praise from the Dramatic Mirror, Moonshine ran for only five weeks.[22] Its replacement was A Fair Exchange, a comedy starring Thomas W. Ross that ran for three weeks before making way on Christmas Day for The Gingerbread Man, a musical obviously aimed at holiday audiences.

When the Lew Fields Theatre reopened at the end of August, its attraction was once again It Happened in

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[21] "New Amsterdam--The White Cat," 11 November 1905, p. 3.

[22] "Liberty--Moonshine," 11 November 1905, p. 3.

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Nordland, which had been on tour during the summer. During its run at the Fields, the show was changed in order to attract new audiences. New songs and humorous business were constantly being added; in September a burlesque of The Music Master was included. Written by Joseph Herbert, a veteran creator of Weber and Fields parodies, the burlesque was rather long and necessitated the shortening of Nordland. With these changes, the show attracted audiences for another twelve weeks. While Nordland was still running, the Dramatic Mirror reported that the Shuberts had acquired a five-year lease to the Fields, effective on November 27, 1905. The theatre was to retain its name, and Lew Fields was to appear there in one show a year, but otherwise the theatre was to be a Shubert house, their seventh in New York.[23] The Shuberts' first show at the Fields was The Press Agent, an undistinguished musical comedy that ran for thirty-nine performances.

At the Victoria, where vaudeville was still the attraction, the Hammersteins presented established variety stars such as Josephine Cohan and Williams and Walker; distinguished stars of the legitimate stage such as Robert Hilliard, James T. Powers, and Henry W. Dixey; and novelties such as Roy Knabenshue, at that time the only airman to make a successful trip over New York City. Two unusual groups to play the Victoria during the fall were "The Military Octette and Girl With the Baton," an elaborate act which consisted

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[23] "Another Theatre for the Shuberts," 11 November 1905, p. 3.

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of a girl leading the Victoria orchestra while the rest of the performers presented songs in different military settings; and Fred Karno's London Comedy Company, a slapstick English comedy group making its American debut in a sketch called "The Mumming Birds."

The spring of 1906 saw the continuation of the American's combination policy. In addition to the usual melodramas (many written by Owen Davis and produced by A. H. Woods), the season included a visit by Houdini and his vaudeville company, and a nostalgic revival of Old Lavender with Edward Harrigan and Annie Yeamans, the show's original stars. During this period the American management instituted Sunday night vaudeville. Their shows tended to be "small time"--using lesser-known acts rather than big stars. One of the novelties presented at the American on one of its vaudeville bills in the spring of 1906 was "Madeline Diston, The Girl With a Special." The act began with the announcement that Diston was late and had hired a special train in order to rush to the theatre. Following the announcement, a motion picture of a train was shown. When it pulled into the station, Diston was seen alighting from one of the cars. Just as she was walking away from the train in the film, Diston herself slipped through a slit in the screen and began her singing act. Aside from the novel opening, the act was described as mediocre.[24]

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[24]"New Acts of the Week," Variety, 20 January 1906, p. 5.

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The Victoria continued to present vaudeville bills that were definitely "big-time," including such headliners as Jack Norworth, Blanche Ring, Gus Edwards, and Eddie Foy. In February, Hammerstein renewed his lease on the Victoria land for twenty-one years at $35,000 a year. This action gave him a secure hold on what was rapidly becoming the most valuable piece of property in Times Square. The most sensational act at the Victoria in the spring was "The Marvelous Fays," a husband-and-wife mindreading act that was given the full Hammerstein publicity build-up. Although Variety was unimpressed with the act, audiences were mystified by the Fays' seeming ability to read minds, and the couple frequently appeared at the Victoria in the ensuing months.[25]

At the Belasco, The Girl of the Golden West continued its long and profitable run in the spring of 1906. Next door, the Lyric hosted a number of attractions, some of which gave an air of distinction to the theatre. On April 16, Arnold Daly presented a highly-praised revival of Shaw's Arms and the Man.[26] During the run, Daly added Shaw's one-act play, How He Lied to Her Husband, as a curtain-raiser. In June, Sarah Bernhardt returned to New York after her cross-country tour and appeared at the Lyric for two days before sailing for Paris. Encouraged by their

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[25]"New Acts of the Week," Variety, 28 April 1906, p. 6.

[26]"Lyric--Arms and the Man," NYDM, 28 April 1906, p. 13.

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excursions into "culture," the Shuberts signed Sothern and Marlowe for an engagement at the Lyric during the fall of 1906.[27]

Across the street, the New Amsterdam presented a show by the new producing firm of George M. Cohan and Sam H. Harris. Forty-five Minutes from Broadway, with book and music by Cohan, opened on New Year's Day 1906. Described as an "operatic comedy in three acts," the musical starred Fay Templeton, Donald Brian, and Victor Moore. As in the case of the earlier Little Johnny Jones, the melodramatic elements in Cohan's plot disturbed the critics, while audiences supported the show for ninety performances.[28] At the conclusion of the run, Klaw and Erlanger presented four weeks of Richard Mansfield in repertory.

The Liberty housed a season of mediocre plays in the spring of 1906. The longest run at the theatre (seven weeks) was achieved by The Clansman, a drama adapted by Thomas Dixon, Jr., from his own novel. The Dramatic Mirror complained that "it is difficult to do justice to so bad a play as The Clansman."[29] Nine years later, this sordid story of the Ku Klux Klan was transformed into one of the greatest, and most controversial, of early silent films, D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation. Coincidentally, the movie

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[27] "Sothern and Marlowe Independent," NYDM, 3 February 1906, p. 2.

[28] "New Amsterdam--Forty-five Minutes from Broadway," NYDM, 13 January 1906, p. 6; "Fay Templeton Afield in Sight of Broadway," New York Times, 2 January 1906, p. 9.

[29] "Liberty--The Clansman," 20 January 1906, p. 3.

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also premiered at the Liberty Theatre.

In March 1906, the lease of the Fields Theatre was obtained from the Shuberts by the popular romantic actor, James K. Hackett, who announced that his possession of the house would begin in April when his production of Mr. Hopkinson would be moved there from the Savoy. Hackett's policy was to present light opera, musical comedies, and farces at the theatre in conjunction with his partner, Frank Curzon.[30] Lew Fields, who had been sought after by the Shuberts since the fall of 1905, subleased the Shuberts' Herald Square Theatre in April, and a month later entered into a partnership with the brothers for the purpose of producing "dramatic and operatic performances."[31] Thus, a little over a year after the Fields had opened, the original plan to turn it into a music hall in the Weber and Fields tradition was abandoned; for the rest of its history as a legitimate playhouse, the Fields would change its ownership and its name more frequently than any other Forty-second Street theatre.

As the summer of 1906 drew near, the managements of the Victoria and the New Amsterdam announced plans to open their roof gardens on the same evening, June 4. On the New Amsterdam roof the attraction was to be a revised version of The Governor's Son, a show by George M. Cohan that had

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[30] "Hackett Gets Fields' Theatre," NYDM, 24 March 1906, p. 3.

[31] "Lew Fields Gets Herald Square," NYDM, 28 April 1906, p. 15; "Fields-Shubert Partnership," NYDM, 2 June 1906, p. 10.

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begun as a vaudeville sketch and then had been expanded into a three-act musical. For the new version, Cohan had written nine new songs and had reworked the dialogue.[32] With Cohan and his family in leading roles, The Governor's Son occupied the Aerial Gardens until August 25.

The Paradise Gardens atop the Victoria and Republic Theatres underwent the usual improvements before opening for the summer. According to the Times, "the roof garden had been repainted, and chickens, turkeys, kids, rabbits, and more monkeys had been added to the stock."[33] As usual, Willie Hammerstein had dreamed up some publicity stunts that were aimed at garnering a great deal of attention from press and public alike. During its opening week, the roof featured Lalla Selbini, "La Belle Baigneuse." Selbini did a rather routine juggling and bicycling act, but the Hammerstein touch was to have her appear in a bathing suit. As a result, Variety called the act "frankly indecent," thereby guaranteeing a large and curious audience.[34] A week later, Hammerstein presented Lu Tung Foo, billed as "The Only Chinese Baritone in the World." Appearing in traditional Chinese costume, the singer brought the house down with his rendition of "My Irish Molly O," complete with Irish brogue.

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[32] "Cohan's Summer Show in Aerial Gardens," New York Times, 5 June 1906, p. 9.

[33] "Paradise Gardens Opens," 5 June 1906, p. 9. The Dramatic Mirror also mentions the addition of a chicken incubator to the farm. "Hammerstein's Roof Garden," 9 June 1906, p. 10.

[34] "New Acts of the Week," 9 June 1906, p. 6.

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The following week Hammerstein introduced Machnow, a Russian giant reputed to be nine feet, two and a half inches tall. Machnow's entire act consisted of walking through the theatre and shaking hands with the audience, but Hammerstein sustained the public's interest in his giant by a series of clever publicity stunts, such as announcing that Machnow would walk through Central Park one Sunday so that poor children could see him for free. Hammerstein arranged for a commotion to take place when Machnow walked through the park, with the result that both the giant and the manager were arrested. Hammerstein then made sure that the court proceedings got a maximum of press coverage.[35] This clever exploitation resulted in another successful season on the Victoria roof.

The fall 1906 season had a very early beginning when the American Theatre reopened on July 28 with The Gambler of the West, one of three melodramas by the prolific Owen Davis to be produced at the American that autumn. Another premiere at the American that season was Theodore Kremer's Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl, the first of a series of melodramas concerned with young working women facing the dangers of life in the big city. In subsequent years, the American would play host to Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model and Edna, the Pretty Typewriter. Such melodramas were to make the fortune of A. H. Woods, who would later become a

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[35] "Machnow Arrested," NYDM, 21 July 1906, p. 14; "Stubborn Machnow," Variety, 21 July 1906, p. 8.

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serious producer and Forty-second Street theatre owner. These shows were shrewdly created to appeal to the tastes of the American's audiences. Later in the fall season the Dramatic Mirror, while reviewing a typical melodramatic offering at the theatre, described the tastes of the American spectators:

> L'Action, encore de l'action, toujours de l'action--this paraphrase of Danton gives the quintessence of melodrama of the sort typified in The Four Corners of the Earth. The man who goes to the American looking for sequence, for probability, for characterization, might as well go to Labrador for pineapples, but if he goes to smell powder, to see the flashes of guns, to hear the gallery yell at the discomfiture of the villain--he will find it all.[36]

Although the American persisted with its policy of blood and thunder melodrama for another year and a half, it was fighting a losing battle against the nickelodeons that were then springing up all over New York, and which could offer a far more realistic brand of melodrama at a much lower price.

At the Victoria, William Hammerstein offered star-studded bills featuring such contemporary favorites as Della Fox, Norah Bayes, Josephine Cohan and Fred Niblo, and Bessie Wynn. The most sensational "freak act" in the fall of 1906 was A. Z. Marino, billed as an "Auto Defier." The act consisted of having Marino lie down on the stage while a three-ton touring car carrying four men rode over him. Remaining at the Victoria for three weeks, Marino caused a sensation with his unusual feat.[37] The success of such phony acts as

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[36] "American--The Four Corners of the Earth," 1 December 1906, p. 13.

[37] "New Acts of the Week," Variety, 17 November 1906, p. 9; "Last Week's Bills," NYDM, 24 November 1906, p. 18.

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the mind-reading Fays, the Turkish Artist and his three "wives," and Marino the "auto defier" points up an interesting contradiction in the nature of the Victoria's audiences. On the one hand, the Victoria's spectators were frequently described as sophisticated and blasé. In his autobiography, Buster Keaton recalled that the Victoria "attracted the most show-wise crowd in the country, for other performers attended in droves."[38] Certainly, these sophisticated viewers would be attracted by the first-class acts and vaudeville debuts of famous legitimate stars that were a part of the Victoria's bills. On the other hand, Willie Hammerstein's "freak acts" always drew large audiences to the theatre. While it seems likely that the freaks were put on the bill mainly to attract new customers to the theatre, they were also appreciated by the regular customers. In the fall of 1906, the Dramatic Mirror reported the audience's reaction to an act that was so unusual for the Victoria that it might almost be considered a "freak"--Bransby Williams appearing in a series of Dickens characters: "Nothing finer in this line has ever been seen here, and even the blasé, devil-may-care frequenters of Hammerstein's matinees, with their cigar and cigarette smoke half-obscuring the stage, gave vent to their approval in no uncertain way."[39] This description suggests that the Victoria audiences appreciated quality, whether in the impersonation of a Dickens character or in the

[38]My Wonderful World of Slapstick (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1960), p. 69.

[39]"Last Week's Bills," 27 October 1906, p. 18.

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perpetration of a colossal fraud. Sensitive to the nature of his audience, Hammerstein made sure that every act headlining the Victoria was the best of its kind.

David Belasco was also concerned with pleasing the audiences that came to his theatre. The Girl of the Golden West, which had opened the previous fall, had continued its prosperous run after a month's vacation in the summer of 1906. It remained at the Belasco until the end of November, when the manager presented his new attraction for the season, The Rose of the Rancho, starring Frances Starr. In the new show, Belasco gave his audiences his accustomed mixture of melodramatic story and naturalistic mise en scene, and his audiences responded with enthusiasm. The Rose of the Rancho remained at the Belasco for the rest of the season and returned in the fall of 1907 for another ten weeks.

Despite his string of successful productions, Belasco had never been satisfied with the theatre he had spent so much time and money on renovating in 1902. Instead, he wished to have a playhouse that would be built from the ground up according to his specifications. In June 1906, the Stuyvesant Theatre Company had been incorporated in Albany in order to operate a new theatre which would be built for Belasco on West Forty-fourth Street. By the fall of 1906, the plans for the Stuyvesant had been filed with the Buildings Department and construction was under

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way.[40] Even after the new theatre was completed, Belasco, whose lease on the Republic had several years to run, continued to produce shows in the latter theatre as well as in his new house.

At the Lyric next door to the Belasco, the alliance between the Fiskes, the Shuberts, and Belasco, all of whom had agreed to book shows in one another's theatres, resulted in two of the Fiskes' productions being housed in the Shubert-run theatre. The first was The Kreutzer Sonata, adapted from the Yiddish by Langdon Mitchell and starring Bertha Kalich. The quality of the production seemed to guarantee a long run, but three weeks after its opening, Kalich contracted appendicitis, and the play was forced to close down. Other shows were hastily brought into the theatre until the Fiskes' second production of the season was ready. The New York Idea, written by Langdon Mitchell and with a distinguished cast that included Mrs. Fiske, John Mason, Emily Stevens, George Arliss, and Dudley Digges, opened at the Lyric on November 19 and ran for nine weeks before the Shuberts required the theatre for the Sothern-Marlowe engagement. One of the few original American plays of the period that is still revived today, The New York Idea added further luster to the Lyric's reputation as a house of quality drama.

At the New Amsterdam, Klaw and Erlanger were also

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[40] "To Run New Theatre," New York Times, 30 June 1906, p. 7; "Stuyvesant Theatre Plans," NYDM, 29 September 1906, p. 2.

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trying to present quality drama. On October 1, they sponsored H. B. Irving and his wife Dorothea Baird in a month of repertory. Irving suffered by the inevitable comparisons to his famous father, Sir Henry Irving, especially when he presented The Lyons Mail and Charles I, two of his father's best-known productions.[41] At the end of the Irving run, Klaw and Erlanger presented the New York premiere of Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra starring Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson and his wife Gertrude Elliot. Although not enthusiastic about the play, the Dramatic Mirror praised the scenery and the acting.[42] Caesar and Cleopatra remained at the New Amsterdam for six weeks.

For the 1906-1907 season, Klaw and Erlanger had leased the Liberty to Liebler and Company, who booked several of their more popular attractions into the theatre. After opening with The Dear Unfair Sex, a comedy starring Ellis Jeffries, the Lieblers presented one of their biggest stars, Eleanor Robson (soon to be Mrs. August Belmont), in an Israel Zangwill comedy, Nurse Marjorie. When the play began to falter after seven weeks, the Lieblers changed to a double bill of Susan in Search of a Husband and A Tenement Tragedy. This combination was no more successful than Nurse Marjorie, and after two weeks Eleanor Robson appeared in her third play of the season, The Girl Who Has

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[41] "New Amsterdam--Irving and Baird," NYDM, 27 October 1906, p. 3.

[42] "New Amsterdam--Caesar and Cleopatra," 11 November 1906, p. 3.

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Everything, written by Clyde Fitch.

When the Lew Fields opened its doors for the season it had been renamed the Hackett Theatre in honor of its new lessee, James K. Hackett. At the end of August, Hackett announced an ambitious series of premieres for his new theatre.[43] The failure of his early productions and the illness of his wife (the actress Mary Mannering, scheduled to appear in a Rida Johnson Young play at the Hackett that fall), forced Hackett to abandon his plans.[44] In early October, he brought back Mr. Hopkinson, a play that he had opened at the Savoy in the spring. A week later, The Chorus Lady, starring Rose Stahl, was moved from the Savoy and ran at the Hackett for the rest of the season. Meanwhile, Oscar Hammerstein, who still owned the Hackett but was more interested in his Manhattan Opera House venture, made it known that he was interested in selling the theatre.[45]

During the spring of 1907, the patterns set in the previous fall were followed by the Forty-second Street theatres. The American continued its policy of melodrama alleviated by an occasional musical farce or the appearance of Primrose's Minstrels. At the Victoria the headliners included Pat Rooney, Marie Dressler (singing "Oh, Mr. Belasco"), Vesta Victoria, Gus Edwards, Eva Tanguay, and

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[43]"Hackett Returns from England," NYDM, 1 September 1906, p. 13.

[44]"Mrs. Hackett Undergoes Operation," NYDM, 22 September 1906, p. 16.

[45]"Hammerstein Willing to Sell," Variety, 3 November 1906, p. 7.

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Julia Sanderson. During the spring, the Hammersteins decided to test the validity of a city law forbidding vaudeville on Sundays by offering a series of Sunday night "concerts." The case was to drag through the courts for a year before a decision was reached against Hammerstein. However, by that time the license in question had already expired, and the new one was not affected by the decision. Meanwhile, Hammerstein announced that the Victoria would be completely renovated and an additional 1,000 seats would be placed in the promenade. This decision to improve the Victoria may be a reflection of the theatre's remarkable success, or merely an act of Hammersteinean bravado in the face of legal difficulties. In any case, the plans to renovate were abandoned three months later.[46]

At the Belasco, The Rose of the Rancho continued its successful run until the theatre was closed for a vacation on June 29. Next door at the Lyric, the Shuberts were again presenting distinguished actors and actresses in competition with the Syndicate. The Shuberts had signed the team of E. H. Sothern and Julia Marlowe to appear at the Lyric for eight weeks beginning on January 21, with a production of Sudermann's John the Baptist. During their engagement, Sothern and Marlowe also appeared in Percy Mackaye's Jeanne D'Arc, Hauptmann's The Sunken Bell, and Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Twelfth Night, and Hamlet.

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[46] "Hammerstein Losses Suit," NYDM, 15 February 1908, p. 14; "Hammerstein's to be Rebuilt," NYDM, 23 February 1907, p. 18; "Paradise Gardens Opening," NYDM, 18 May 1907, p. 17.

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When they left the Lyric in mid-March, they were succeeded by the distinguished Italian actor Ermete Novelli in repertoire. During his three weeks at the Lyric, Novelli appeared in seventeen different plays and presented three different monologues after the curtain of his performances.

Not to be outdone by this stellar season at an Independent theatre, Klaw and Erlanger presented two famous American actors in repertoire at the New Amsterdam during the spring of 1907. The first was the annual appearance of Richard Mansfield, begun with a production of Ibsen's Peer Gynt. After three weeks of Ibsen, Mansfield switched to a repertory of his most famous roles. On his last night, March 23, Mansfield appeared as Baron Chevrial in A Parisian Romance, the role that had first brought him to notice. It was to be Mansfield's last performance on any stage; he died on August 30, 1907. At the conclusion of Mansfield's engagement, Klaw and Erlanger presented a musical called The Grand Mogul, which ran for five weeks. The season then ended with a two-week engagement of Robert Mantell in an impressive repertoire which included Richelieu, Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice, Richard III, King Lear, Macbeth, and Othello.

At the Liberty, the Liebler season continued. On January 19, the producers presented Eleanor Robson in one of her biggest hits, Salomy Jane, a play by Paul Armstrong based on a story by Bret Harte. It ran for seventeen weeks. Starting in March, the Wednesday matinees at the Liberty

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were given over to Merely Mary Ann, one of Robson's earlier successes.

At the Hackett Theatre, The Chorus Lady continued its run throughout the spring. In February, Oscar Hammerstein found a buyer for the theatre. Henry B. Harris, the son of a well-known theatrical manager, and himself a theatre owner and producer, paid Hammerstein $400,000 for the Hackett and announced that he would honor the remainder of Hackett's lease.[47] Hammerstein was now free to concentrate on his operatic venture which was then providing the Metropolitan Opera with stiff competition.

When the summer roof garden season opened, the New Amsterdam management decided to follow their successful formula of the previous summer by presenting George M. Cohan's The Honeymooners, a revised version of an earlier Cohan effort called Running for Office. Once again Cohan and his parents were featured in the cast. Gertrude Hoffman, a dancer who was to cause a sensation on the Victoria roof in the following summer, was a featured performer in The Honeymooners. The Cohan show ran until August 24.

Across the street at the Paradise Gardens, Willie Hammerstein was putting together his usual mixture of freak acts and outstanding performers. Among the novelties were "Cremation," an act in which a young woman appeared to be reduced to ashes, and "Cameraphone," a combination of

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[47] "Harris Buys the Hackett," NYDM, 9 February 1907, p. 16.

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motion picture machine and phonograph that presaged sound films. The summer's biggest publicity stunt involved "Sober Sue," a Black woman who was paid $15 a week to stand on a platform in the roof garden while the audience and performers tried to make her laugh. Willie Hammerstein promised a reward of $500 to anyone who succeeded in making her laugh, but even the best comedians could not get her to crack a smile. Hammerstein never revealed the fact that "Sober Sue" was constitutionally incapable of laughing.[48] Another Hammerstein gimmick was a "dog matinee" during the engagement of an act called "Barnold's Dogs and Monkeys." For that performance owners could bring a dog of any size to sit on their laps while the show took place. This special matinee was scheduled for 11:00 a.m. on the Fourth of July, a time when business at the theatre would otherwise be very poor.[49]

The 1907-1908 season was one of contrasts. The American, the Victoria, and the Belasco followed their successful formulas and prospered; the Lyric, the Liberty, and the Hackett had difficulty in finding popular productions, especially in the fall when a general business depression hurt theatre attendance; the New Amsterdam's policy began to change to one of long-run productions.

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[48] Will Rogers claimed that Sue was deaf and short-sighted, but Oscar Hammerstein's biographer maintained that her facial muscles were paralyzed. See Donald Day, ed., The Autobiography of Will Rogers (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1949), p. 32; Sheean, p. 116.

[49] "A Dog Matinee," NYDM, 29 June 1907, p. 8.

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As usual, the season began with a new Owen Davis-Al Woods melodrama at the American, this time called The King and Queen of Gamblers. The trite formulas of melodrama seem to have been wearing a bit thin by this time, for producers were adding such crowd-pleasing gimmicks as live horses and dogs and a motorcycle rescue to their shows at the American.

The Victoria was offering its usual mixed bag of talent and notoriety. A rather interesting departure was the presentation of Arnold Daly in Shaw's one-act play, How He Lied to Her Husband. The Dramatic Mirror reported that the Victoria audience enjoyed the play.[50] Hammerstein's legal problems over the Sunday vaudeville concert continued to drag on, with the constant threat that the Victoria's license could be revoked at any time.

At the Belasco, The Rose of the Rancho resumed its run after a brief vacation, adding another eighty performances to its record before beginning a cross-country tour. It was replaced by The Girl of the Golden West, which ran for three weeks while Belasco prepared his new production for the season. The Warrens of Virginia, a play by William C. DeMille, opened on December 3. The stars of the show were Charlotte Walker and Frank Keenan, while in the supporting cast were Cecil B. DeMille and Mary Pickford. In a rare burst of prophecy, the Dramatic Mirror predicted that "Little Mary Pickford's acting is especially good and

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[50] "Last Week--Hammerstein's Victoria," 19 October 1907, p. 15.

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shows much promise for the future."[51] The Warrens remained at the Belasco for the rest of the season.

The Lyric Theatre housed ten different productions in the fall of 1907, none lasting for more than four weeks. Among the highlights were James O'Neill in Virginius and the inevitable Monte Cristo, with James O'Neill, Jr. in supporting roles; Percy Mackaye's verse tragedy Sappho and Phaon; a week of Mrs. Patrick Campbell in repertoire; two weeks of Ermete Novelli in repertoire, and Rosmersholm with Mrs. Fiske as Rebecca West.

The New Amsterdam abandoned its competition with the Lyric in the field of serious drama and distinguished acting. Instead, Klaw and Erlanger began their season with a "crude melodrama"[52] called The Round Up, before the theatre was given up to the biggest hit and most influential show of the season, The Merry Widow. Under the management of Henry Savage, erstwhile director of the Castle Square Opera Company, The Merry Widow had received an extensive publicity build-up which included a full page of stories and pictures in the Sunday New York Times the day before it opened.[53] The operetta lived up to its advance publicity and settled into the New Amsterdam for a long run.

The Liberty was less fortunate in finding a

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[51]"Belasco--The Warrens of Virginia," 14 December 1907, p. 3.

[52]"New Amsterdam--The Round Up," NYDM, 7 September 1907, p. 4.

[53]"'The Merry Widow' Due in New York Tomorrow," 20 October 1907, sec. 6, p. 2.

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tenant for the fall of 1907. The season began with The Follies of 1907, moved from the New York Theatre's roof garden at the end of the summer. This production was Ziegfeld's first Follies, and its success encouraged him to produce an annual edition. It was not until 1913, however, when Ziegfeld brought his revue to the New Amsterdam, that the shows really caught on. From that time through 1927, when the theatre bearing his name was completed, Ziegfeld continued to present the Follies at the New Amsterdam, contributing in no small way to the glamorous image of Forty-second street.

The fall of 1907 at the Liberty also saw the production of the last Rogers Brothers show, The Rogers Brothers in Panama. Opening at the Broadway Theatre, Panama played for three weeks at the Liberty before embarking on a national tour, during which Gus Rogers died. Three years after receiving the supreme tribute of having a theatre built especially to house their shows, the Rogers Brothers passed from the theatrical scene. Toward the end of the fall, the Liberty housed its first success of the season, Polly of the Circus. This play, written by Margaret Mayo (later married to Edgar Selwyn, builder of three Forty-second Street theatres), starred Mabel Taliaferro. Although criticized by the Dramatic Mirror for "not enough story," Polly's circus setting and circus acts amused audiences for twenty weeks.[54]

[54]"Liberty--Polly of the Circus," 4 January 1908, p. 2.

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Like the Lyric and the Liberty, the Hackett had difficulty in finding a popular production for the fall of 1907. It began the season with a drama by Martha Morton called The Movers, which lasted for three weeks before being replaced by The Struggle Everlasting, a modern morality play by Edwin Milton Royle. On October 14, Francis Wilson began a five-week engagement in When Knights Were Bold, which had premiered at the Garrick Theatre in August. The Hackett finally housed a hit show on November 18, when the Augustus Thomas' drama The Witching Hour opened. The Dramatic Mirror was very impressed with the play, which it felt established Thomas as America's foremost dramatist.[55] Audiences evidently agreed, for the play remained at the Hackett for the rest of the season.

Thus, after a shaky beginning, most of the theatres on Forty-second Street had managed to find a profitable attraction by the end of the fall. As 1908 began, four of the theatres were housing shows that would run until the summer: The Warrens of Virginia at the Belasco, The Merry Widow at the New Amsterdam, Polly of the Circus at the Liberty, and The Witching Hour at the Hackett. At the other legitimate playhouse on the street, the Lyric, Rosmersholm was followed by a thirteen-week engagement of E. H. Sothern and his company. Sothern recreated his father's famous role of Lord Dundreary in Our American Cousin and his own successful impersonation of François

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[55] "Hackett-The Witching Hour," 30 November 1907, p. 3.

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Villon in If I Were King. Also included in the engagement were an adaptation of Crime and Punishment entitled The Fool Hath Said: There is No God, and a dramatic version of Don Quixote by Paul Kester. The season at the Lyric was rounded out by a ten-week run of The Wolf, a play by Eugene Walter which had opened at the Bijou.

While long runs were bringing prosperity to most of the houses on Forty-second Street, the American was facing stiff competition from the increasingly realistic motion picture. Beginning in April 1908, the Dramatic Mirror published a series of articles on the causes for melodrama's decline. Among the reasons cited for a general falling-off in patronage at theatres such as the American were the business depression, the popularity of movies, and the low quality of the melodramas being produced.[56] In April, Felix Isman, a real estate man from Philadelphia, reached an agreement with the owner of the American to take over the lease of the theatre by making a deal with the present lessee, William T. Keogh. Isman's intention was to restore the American to a first-class theatre housing vaudeville or productions requiring a large stage. To enhance its respectability, Isman planned to close off the theatre's Eighth Avenue entrance and "thus try to cut off the Eighth Avenue atmosphere."[57] A few weeks later, it was

[56]Articles with various titles appeared in the Dramatic Mirror on 18 April 1908, p. 5; 25 April 1908, p. 3; 2 May 1908, p. 6; 9 May 1908, p. 26; 16 May 1908, p. 3; 20 June 1908, p. 3.

[57]"American Theatre for Felix Isman," New York Times, 5 April 1908, sec. 2, p. 11.

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announced that on May 1, Keogh's lease would be turned over to William Morris, who would convert the theatre to vaudeville in the early fall.[58] Morris had gone into partnership with Isman, and although it was announced in July that Isman and Morris had severed their relationship, both men continued to hold an interest in the theatre.[59] When Morris took over the American in May he had it cleaned and repainted, and then reopened it on May 4 with Ivan Abramson's Italian Grand Opera Company in a one-month engagement of grand opera at popular prices. The Dramatic Mirror reported that the opera company did good business for its run at the American.[60] The house closed on May 30.

At the Victoria the vaudeville bills included everything from the genteel comedy of Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew to an exhibition of Sumo wrestling. Sporting acts appeared frequently at the Victoria; a boxing sketch called "The Star Bout" caused the Dramatic Mirror to observe that the "patrons of Hammerstein's are fond of this type of act."[61] Other popular acts were W. C. Fields with his comic juggling, and a trumped-up contest between Eva Tanguay and Vesta Victoria for the title of "Champion Comedienne of the English Speaking World." The latter stunt drew packed houses but left the question of supremacy

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[58] "Morris Secures Theatres," NYDM, 25 April 1908, p. 17.

[59] "Isman is Out," NYDM, 25 July 1908, p. 14.

[60] "At Other Playhouses," 30 May 1908, p. 3.

[61] "The Vaudeville Stage," 7 March 1908, p. 13.

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undecided.[62] Another novelty that season was a film showing the start of the New York to Paris motor race. The movies had been shot right in front of the Victoria Theatre.

As the summer season approached, the Hammersteins began to line up freak acts and publicity stunts for the roof theatre. The name of the roof was changed from the Paradise Gardens to Hammerstein's Roof-Garden (the Victoria by this time was generally referred to as Hammerstein's, or simply as "the Corner").[63] The farm on the roof was to be enhanced by a cow being milked by a milkmaid. To get the maximum publicity out of this novelty, Willie Hammerstein had advertised for a first-class milkmaid, with the result that a "small army of women" appeared at the door of the Victoria. After several were "auditioned," a young woman from Haverstraw, New York was chosen. During intermissions in the performances on the roof, the milkmaid would milk the cow and pass the result around to anyone who wished to drink it.[64]

It was not until the middle of July that Willie Hammerstein introduced the greatest sensation of the summer and the longest-running act ever to appear at Hammerstein's--Gertrude Hoffman in "A Vision of Salomé."

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[62] "Hammerstein's Victoria--Eva Tanguay and Vesta Victoria," NYDM, 21 March 1908, p. 13.

[63] "Paradise Gardens No More," NYDM, 25 April 1908, p. 18.

[64] "Plenty of Milkmaids," NYDM, 6 June 1908, p. 16; "Hammerstein's Roof Garden," NYDM, 13 June 1908, p. 16.

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The ultimate source of this act was, of course, the Richard Strauss opera based on Oscar Wilde's one-act play. When Hammerstein learned that a dancer named Maud Allan had created a sensation in London vaudeville by presenting dances based on the Salomé story, he sent Gertrude Hoffman to London to study the act and learn to imitate it in every detail. For her performance at the Victoria, Hammerstein had the orchestra increased to thirty pieces and lavished a great deal of attention on the scenery and lighting. The result was a triumph. Hoffman, whose dance with the head of John the Baptist was described as "abandoned," drew $20,000 in patronage during her first week at the Victoria. The act remained at the theatre for twenty-two weeks and launched a nationwide Salomé craze that lasted for five years.[65] In typical Hammersteinean fashion, Salomé shared the bill at the Victoria with films of William Jennings Bryan and William Howard Taft.

At the New Amsterdam, the Aerial Gardens was occupied by the other craze of 1908, The Merry Widow. Just before moving the operetta to the roof for the summer season, Savage decided to commemorate the show's 275th performance by giving away "Merry Widow" hats to any woman who attended the Saturday matinee on June 13. Savage had sent to Paris for 1,200 hats, not expecting that 1,300

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[65] "Miss Hoffman to Do Allan Dances," NYDM, 11 July 1908, p. 14; "New Vaudeville Acts," NYDM, 25 July 1908, p. 14; "Last Week--Hammerstein's Victoria," NYDM, 1 August 1908, p. 14; Joe Laurie, Jr., p. 392; Green and Laurie, Jr., pp. 9, 20.

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women would show up. At the end of the performance, the spectators stampeded the tables at the back of the auditorium where four women were distributing the hats. There followed what the Times called a "hot skirmish" lasting half an hour before the spectators had each received either a hat or a promise that more would be ordered.[66] This incident, while demonstrating that Henry Savage was not as adept at generating publicity as the Hammersteins, also illustrates the popularity of The Merry Widow and its influence on women's fashions.

At the new season approached, William Morris was busy renovating the American Theatre to prepare it for vaudeville. A total of $50,000 was spent on the theatre. The seats were all reupholstered, the color scheme changed to old ivory and green, hundreds of new electroliers were installed, a new heating and ventilating system was put in, a row of loges was built onto the front of the first balcony, and a wide promenade added to the rear. The entire building was recarpeted.[67] The American opened on September 5 with a month-long engagement of the Abramson Italian Opera Company. On October 5, the theatre, now called the American Music Hall, attracted a large crowd to its opening as a variety house. Morris, who had taught Willie Hammerstein how to book vaudeville acts, presented the same type of performers that pleased audiences at the

[66]"Merry Widow Hats Galore," New York Times, 22 May 1908, p. 7; "Hot Skirmish Over 'Merry Widow' Hats," New York Times, 14 June 1906, sec. 2, p. 11.

[67]"William Morris' Plans," NYDM, 15 August 1908, p. 14.

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Victoria. On the American's opening bill, for example, was the boxer Robert Fitzsimmons, who had fashioned a respectable vaudeville act in conjunction with his wife. Morris was also quick to follow Hammerstein's lead in hiring stars of the legitimate stage. In October, he presented Amelia Bingham in scenes from four well-known plays. The biggest attraction at the American in the fall of 1908 was a four-week engagement by the Scottish singer-songwriter-comedian Harry Lauder, who appeared a total of fifty-six times to crowded houses.

Faced with such stiff competition on the same street, Willie Hammerstein beefed up his theatre's bills with the kind of acts most popular with his regular customers. In addition to stars of the legitimate stage such as Virginia Harned and Arnold Daly, Hammerstein presented a number of sports-related acts, like Frank A. Gotch, the champion wrestler of the world, who impersonated a Yale football player in a sketch; and "Mike" Donlin, captain of the New York Giants baseball team in a sketch called "Stealing Home." Besides the competition from the American, Hammerstein's was threatened by a deal through which Felix Isman claimed to have obtained options on the Belasco and Victoria Theatre sites. The Dramatic Mirror reported hearing rumors that Isman would have the Hammersteins ousted from the theatres on the grounds that they kept wild animals on the roof in violation of the terms of their lease. Oscar Hammerstein responded in characteristic fashion by asking "Now, what will happen to

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my poor cow?" and by enumerating the "wild" animals kept on the roof as:

> (1) Modern cow, attached during the intermission to a dairy maid, swindling her (the cow) out of a supply of milk by force and coercion.
> (1) Jackass, grown gray in the service of his country, frightening the mosquitos off the roof by his wonderful vocal abilities.
> (1) Dirigible turkey.
> (1) Male rooster; shadowing,
> (4) Female hens with a stormy past and peaceful future in boiling water.
> (1) Large but near-sighted monkey.
> (3) Peanut monkeys with complicated tails--Salomé dancers.
> (4) Ducklings, associated in business with,
> (1) Duck, Esq.

Hammerstein's final word on the subject was to offer to dispossess the monkeys from their cage and to allow Isman to occupy it at once.[68] Hammerstein could afford to ridicule Isman's threats of dispossession because he stood on firm ground--his leases on the Victoria and Belasco property were still valid. No further word of Isman's claims was reported.

Another interesting theatrical rivalry occurred in the fall of 1908 when two productions of Molnar's drama The Devil opened on the same night. The production at the Belasco, managed by Harrison Grey Fiske, starred George Arliss and Emily Stevens. The version presented by Henry W. Savage at the Garden Theatre at Madison Avenue and Twenty-seventh Street included Theda Bara in its cast. The Fiske production took the honors, running for 175 performances as compared to eighty-seven for the Savage version.

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[68] "Isman Wars on Hammerstein," New York Times, 22 August 1908, p. 1; "Isman Claims Theatre Sites," NYDM, 29 August 1908, p. 4.

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The Lyric opened its season with Mary Mannering in Glorious Betsy, which was supposed to have been produced at the Hackett the previous fall. It was followed in three weeks by Mlle. Mischief, a Viennese operetta presented by the Shuberts. After a run of nine weeks, Mischief was replaced by The Blue Mouse, a German farce translated, adapted, and staged by Clyde Fitch. It ran at the Lyric for twenty-two weeks.

At the New Amsterdam, The Merry Widow moved back downstairs after its summer on the roof and continued to run until the middle of October, when it ended with a total of 419 performances. It was followed by Little Nemo, a musical extravaganza with music by Victor Herbert and a book by Harry B. Smith based on the comic strip by Winsor McKay. The production's spectacular scenic effects and fine cast (it included popular comedians Harry Kelly, Joseph Cawthorn, and Billy B. Van) helped to give Little Nemo a run of fourteen weeks.

In the fall of 1908, the Liberty once again had difficulty in finding a successful production. After opening with The Traveling Salesman, a comedy by the author of The Chorus Lady, the Liberty presented on September 7 a comedy called Wildfire, starring Lillian Russell, with Ernest Truex in a supporting role. Primarily because of Russell's still-potent appeal, the show lasted for eight weeks before being replaced by Via Wireless, a melodrama most notable for having the captain of the producer's yacht appear in the play as a yacht captain. This novelty

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helped Via Wireless sustain a run of twelve weeks.

At the Hackett, the successful run of The Witching Hour was continued for an additional five weeks in the fall before James K. Hackett returned to the theatre with a revival of The Prisoner of Zenda. During the run of Zenda it was announced that the Fiskes had reached an agreement whereby they would sublease the theatre from Hackett for the rest of the season. This action was made necessary by the success of The Devil, which prevented the Fiskes from opening their next production at the Belasco.[69] The first Fiske production at the Hackett under the new arrangement was Salvation Nell, which premiered on November 17. Written by Edward Sheldon and starring Mrs. Fiske and Holbrook Blinn, the play won high critical praise for its realism and ran for eight weeks.

As the 1908-09 season progressed, the American began to establish itself as a first-class vaudeville house. In March 1909, the Dramatic Mirror observed that "the business at the American continues phenomenal and even with the addition of the new tier of boxes on the orchestra floor a capacity house was noted on Thursday afternoon."[70] Morris was not above employing freak acts such as Harry P. Speedy, who dove from a platform suspended from the dome of the theatre into a tank of water on stage. He also presented popular favorites such as Shean and Warren and Eddie

[69]"Mr. Fiske to Book at Hackett," NYDM, 17 October 1908, p. 9.

[70]"American Music Hall," 13 March 1909, p. 14.

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Foy, and newcomers like Ina Claire, who was just beginning her long career in vaudeville, the legitimate stage, and film.

At the Victoria, the bills were headlined by such stars as the Avon Comedy Four (including Smith and Dale, who were just developing their famous "Dr. Kronkhite" routine), Jefferson De Angelis and Company, Eva Tanguay, and Bert Williams in his debut as a single act after his years with partner George Walker. When Hammerstein's presented the boxer Jack Johnson in an exhibition of sparring, the American quickly countered by offering boxer James J. Jeffries. This competition among the vaudeville theatres was heightened by the announcement that for the first time in several years every roof garden in New York was scheduled to open in the summer of 1909.[71]

The spring season in the legitimate theatres of Forty-second Street was largely indifferent. When the run of The Devil concluded at the Belasco in January it was succeeded by The Fighting Hope, a Belasco production that had played at the Stuyvesant Theatre during the fall. After twelve weeks, the Shuberts occupied the Belasco with Going Some, a farce by Paul Armstrong and Rex Beach which ran out the season.

Most of the spring at the Lyric was devoted to the run of Fitch's The Blue Mouse, but at the beginning of May the Shuberts used the theatre to present The Great John

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[71] "Summer Roof Garden Plans," NYDM, 3 March 1909, p. 11.

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Ganton, a drama by J. Hartley Manners which starred his wife, Laurette Taylor. Also in the cast was George Fawcett, who had headed the stock company that presented Shakespeare at popular prices at the American in 1905. The Great John Ganton ran for seven weeks.

At the New Amsterdam, Charles Frohman tried to keep alive the theatre's string of successful musicals by offering Kitty Grey, a show adapted from the French. The title role was played by Julia Sanderson, well on her way to an important career in musical comedy. After fifty performances, Kitty Grey was replaced by a five-week engagement of Robert Mantell that included a week of King John, followed by a month of his usual repertoire. Mantell was under the management of William A. Brady, who had started out producing melodramas at the American and other theatres during the 1890s and was now an important legitimate producer. When Mantell left the New Amsterdam in April, he was succeeded by Klaw and Erlanger's revival of the Audran opera, The Mascot, which starred Raymond Hitchcock. This was the final offering of the season.

In January 1909, Mrs. Leslie Carter, who had broken off her association with Belasco in 1905, produced John Luther Long's play Kassa at the Liberty as a starring vehicle for herself. Without the Belasco touch, Mrs. Carter could manage a run of only eight weeks. In March, the Liberty was occupied by a drama called A Fool There Was, which gave a new meaning to the term "vamp." The play remained at the theatre for eleven weeks.

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The Hackett had a disappointing spring; its only successful production was A Woman's Way, a comedy produced by William A. Brady starring his wife, Grace George. At the end of the season a play called The Narrow Path was presented at the Hackett, but lasted for only one performance. It was produced by A. H. Woods, who, like Brady, had begun to abandon popular-priced melodrama for more serious dramatic offerings.

Early in 1909, Murray's Restaurant opened in a building at 228 to 232 West Forty-second Street. The main room, called the "Roman Gardens," was elaborately decorated in Romanesque style, with a great deal of pseudo-classical statuary and a touch of art nouveau decoration. A huge fountain, surrounded by vines and trees, was situated in the middle of the dining room. On the walls of the balcony was painted a panorama of Ancient Rome. A terrace garden divided the Roman room from another dining apartment, which was decorated with Egyptian motifs. There was reportedly a total of three acres of floor space in Murray's devoted to dining.[72]

Murray's quickly became one of the most popular restaurants in the Times Square area, and also served as a temporary home for two future celebrities. Somewhere around 1910, Vincent Sardi, newly arrived in America, worked as a waiter at Murray's while he gained the money and the

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[72]"Roman Gardens of Murray's," New York Plaisance, 1 (1980), n.p.

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experience to open his own restaurant eventually. At roughly the same time, John Barrymore, just beginning his stage career, lived in an apartment above Murray's.[73]

The summer of 1909 was unprecedented in the amount of theatrical activity that took place on Forty-second Street. In an unusual move, the Lyric was kept open throughout the summer with a production of The Motor Girl, a musical with Georgia Caine and Elizabeth Brice. At the New Amsterdam, the Aerial Gardens opened on May 31 with The Boy and the Girl, a musical comedy that brought Marie Dressler back to the New York stage after an absence of two years. Despite the presence of the popular Dressler, The Boy and the Girl could not withstand the competition from the other roofs. It closed on June 19. Making the best of the situtation, Klaw and Erlanger announced that as an "innovation" they would present straight drama on the roof. They booked the Brady and Grismer production of The Gentleman from Mississippi, which had already played at other theatres, and added a seasonal touch by stationing a band of troubadours behind the shrubbery to serenade the audience from 8:00 to curtain time. Smoking was permitted at the tables in the outdoor promenade.[74] This combination of legitimate drama and roof garden escapism

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[73] Vincent Sardi, Sr. and Richard Gehman, Sardi's (New York: Henry Holt, 1953), p. 86; Gene Fowler, Good Night, Sweet Prince (Philadelphia: Blakiston Co., 1944), p. 139.

[74] "Theatricals on the Roof Pay Very Well," Commercial Tribune, 11 July 1909, in the Erlanger Collection, Lincoln Center.

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lasted for six weeks before the Aerial Gardens closed on August 7.

The novelty on the Victoria Roof for the summer of 1909 was announced as a "small reproduction of the beach and boardwalk at Atlantic City. A miniature ocean with a real surf on a small scale will be part of the scene, while side shows and sales booths of varying descriptions will give an added attraction to the scene." The feature attraction at the "beach" was to be a diving exhibition by Annette Kellerman, the reigning swimming star of the day.[75] When the roof opened on May 31 there was no further mention of the beach. Instead, Willie Hammerstein turned his attention to securing such attractions as "A Night in a Monkey Music Hall," a simian version of the Karno Company's popular sketch, "A Night in an English Music Hall." There were no outrageous publicity stunts during the summer of 1909; Willie Hammerstein rather turned his attention to presenting solid vaudeville bills.

The big news in the summer of 1909 was the reopening of the American Roof for the first time in seven years. As early as September 1908, William Morris had announced his plans for the roof. He had hired noted theatre architect Thomas A. Lamb to design a whole new roof garden and theatre. In June, Morris and Isman secured a twenty-year lease on the American property and on that of the two entranceway buildings on Eighth Avenue and Forty-second

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[75] "Beach on Victoria Roof," NYDM, 22 May 1909, p. 12.

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Street. Once these leases were secured, the old roof theatre was torn down and replaced with a slab of reinforced concrete. Over the center portion of the auditorium was erected a high clerestory with windows in the sides. The balcony had a structural steel frame encased in concrete, and was suspended from the trusses by narrow rods. The capacity of the orchestra and single balcony was reported to be 1,400. The decor of the roof theatre was supposed to be a reproduction of an Adirondack lodge. The supporting columns were encased in plaster and made to look like trees with branches stretching up and across the trusses, which were hidden by a screen of leafy foliage. The upper parts of the trusses were painted blue; suspended about two feet below them were tiny lightbulbs giving the impression of stars twinkling in a night sky. The promenades, which led to the roof gardens atop the adjoining buildings, were decorated in birchbark and covered with awnings. All of the furniture was rustic in style.[76] Opening night audiences found the American roof pleasing. The Dramatic Mirror commented that "as a cool, comfortable, picturesque and delightful roof-garden it equals any the city has ever had heretofore, and surpasses most."[77] After several weeks of vaudeville, the American roof housed The Only Law, a play

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[76]"American Theatre Roof Garden," Architects' and Builders' Magazine 41 [n.s. 10] (September 1909): 494-497; "American Roof Garden Opens," NYDM, 31 July 1909, p. 21; "Morris Roof Garden a Sylvan Bower," New York Times, 20 July 1909, p. 7.

[77]"American Roof Garden Opens."

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that had opened at the Hackett in early August. This legitimate drama lasted on the roof for two weeks. The American Roof closed on September 11.

The 1909-10 season was launched at an early date on the theatre block of Forty-second Street. By the end of August, while the roof garden season was still underway, all five of the block's legitimate playhouses were already open. At the Belasco, the attraction was Is Matrimony a Failure?, adapted from a German comedy by Leo Ditrichstein, with Jane Cowl as its star. This "merry farce" pleased audiences for 185 performances.[78]

The Lyric remained open throughout the summer with The Motor Girl, which had proven to be the right kind of show for hot-weather audiences. In mid-September it was replaced by the American premiere of Oscar Strauss' operetta The Chocolate Soldier, based on George Bernard Shaw's comedy Arms and the Man. Despite some critical objections (the Dramatic Mirror found the male portion of the cast "barely adequate"[79]), the operetta had a great appeal for audiences. After six weeks at the Lyric, it was transferred to the Herald Square in order to make room for William Faversham in Herod, a play by Stephen Phillips that lasted for a month. The Chocolate Soldier was then brought back to the Lyric for another month's run. The final

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[78] "Belasco--Is Matrimony a Failure?," NYDM, 4 September 1909, p. 5.

[79] "Lyric--The Chocolate Soldier," 25 September 1909, p. 7.

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production at the Lyric for 1909 was The City, the last, and arguably the best, play by Clyde Fitch, who had died on September 4, 1909 at the age of forty-four. Billed as "a modern play of American life," The City dealt with corruption in public life.[80] It ran for 161 performances at the Lyric before being moved to the Hackett in May.

The New Amsterdam reopened on September 1 with The Love Cure, a Viennese operetta imported by Henry Savage in the hope of duplicating the success of The Merry Widow. Although the Dramatic Mirror praised it highly, calling it "an application to the eyes and ears and heart of all that is best in musical comedy,"[81] The Love Cure was unable to sustain a long run. After two months it was replaced by The Silver Star, a musical comedy starring the Danish dancer Adeline Genee. The popularity of Genee kept this otherwise mediocre musical afloat for ten weeks.

At their other theatre, the Liberty, Klaw and Erlanger had similar difficulty in finding a long-run attraction. The season opened in early August with The Florist Shop, which flopped. A month later, the Liberty saw the premiere of The Widow's Might, a vehicle for Lillian Russell which lasted for five weeks before being replaced by Springtime, a Booth Tarkington drama described

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[80] "Lyric--The City," NYDM, 1 January 1910, p. 5.

[81] "New Amsterdam--The Love Cure," 11 September 1909, p. 5.

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by the Dramatic Mirror as "a glorification of calf love."[82] The final production of 1909 at the Liberty was Arthur Conan Doyle's The Fires of Fate, produced by Charles Frohman.

The Hackett Theatre experienced another unsatisfactory season in the fall of 1909. Its production of The Only Law lasted for just three weeks before being moved to the American Roof. At the end of August the Hackett had its biggest hit of the season in Such a Little Queen, "a pleasant little preposterous romance" starring Elsie Ferguson.[83] It ran for 103 performances before the theatre was taken over by Harrison Grey Fiske for his production of Septimus starring George Arliss and Emily Stevens. A month later, Dustin Farnum appeared at the Hackett in Cameo Kirby under the auspices of Liebler and Company.

At the vaudeville houses, the intense competition kept the quality of the bills high. The highlight of the season at the American was the reappearance of Harry Lauder, who was so popular that on Thanksgiving he played three shows--two in the main theatre and one on the roof.[84] To maintain the momentum begun by the Lauder engagement, Morris in the following week offered an enormous bill with

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[82] "Liberty--Springtime," NYDM, 30 October 1909, p. 5.

[83] "Hackett-Such a Little Queen," NYDM, 11 September 1909, p. 5.

[84] "Lauder Plays 'Three'," Variety, 27 November 1909, p. 3.

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a salary list reported to be $5,500.[85] Among Morris' other headliners in the fall of 1909 was Sophie Tucker. The success of vaudeville at the American is indicated by the fact that Morris had the orchestra level of the theatre renovated to hold an additional ninety chairs.[86]

At the Victoria, the successful Hammerstein formula of freak acts and talented performers continued. Among the headliners were cartoonist Rube Goldberg; the Three Keatons, featuring sixteen-year-old Buster (of whom the Dramatic Mirror wrote: "That he has a future upon the stage goes without saying."[87]); and W. C. Fields, who was so popular that he was given five curtain calls and an encore at one performance.[88] An interesting development at the Victoria during this period was the growing importance of the motion picture on the theatre's bills. First used as a "chaser," or means of clearing the auditorium at the end of the show, films had become an important part of the bill by 1909. In November, the Victoria drew big crowds by showing a fifty-minute film of the Jack Johnson-Stanley Ketchell fight. The movie remained at the Victoria for three weeks, after which it was replaced by a revival of The Great Train Robbery. In the next few years,

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[85] "Big Show at American," Variety, 4 December 1909, p. 8.

[86] "Reseating the American," Variety, 25 December 1909, p. 11.

[87] "Last Week's Bills--Victoria," 25 October 1909, p. 21.

[88] "Hammerstein's," Variety, 1 January 1910, p. 17.

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films were to become a very important and highly competitive part of the vaudeville bills at both the Victoria and the American. Ultimately, the new medium of entertainment was to win out on Forty-second Street. The American would be transformed from a first-class variety house to a theatre featuring motion pictures and small-time vaudeville, while the Victoria, the most renowned vaudeville theatre of its day, would be demolished to make room for one of the early picture palaces.

As the spring season of 1910 began, the American was still flourishing with its policy of big-time vaudeville. Among the artists to appear there during the spring were Harry Lauder, Bessie McCoy, Sophie Tucker, William S. Hart, and Julian Eltinge. In April, Variety reported that the American was doing big business, grossing $20,000 during a week with bad weather and $15,000 during Holy Week, a traditionally slow time for theatres of all kinds.[89] This success seems to have occurred in spite of William Morris' habit of repeating acts several times during the season, a practice criticized by the Dramatic Mirror.[90]

The Victoria continued to present top headliners on its bills. In the spring of 1910, Lionel Barrymore appeared there in a one-act play. His performance was described in Variety as being "lost in a hopeless morass

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[89] "Big Business at American," 9 April 1910, p. 5.

[90] "Vaudeville--American," 16 April 1910, p. 22.

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of stagey talk and utterly false theatricals."[91] Several weeks later Barrymore returned to the Victoria in a better sketch and was praised by the Variety reviewer.[92] Will Rogers and Gertrude Hoffman both returned to Hammerstein's during the spring and received their share of applause. The biggest success of the season at Hammerstein's was made by Al Jolson. Variety described his act as a "classy black-face specialty," and noted that with his successful engagement at the Victoria, "Jolson has jumped in one bound into the front rank of single entertainers."[93] Jolson had been in vaudeville for several years, but his initial engagement at the Victoria was the beginning of his long reign as a star.

Next door at the Belasco, the first new production of the season was Just a Wife, a drama by Eugene Walter which starred his wife, Charlotte Walker. Described by the Dramatic Mirror as an answer to Is Matrimony a Failure? (the Belasco production of the previous season), Just a Wife lasted for ten weeks, less than half the run of its predecessor.[94] In April it was replaced by The Call of the Cricket, a comedy produced by Frederick Thompson as a vehicle for his wife, Mabel Taliaferro. After three weeks, Taliaferro collapsed and the theatre was closed for the

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[91] "At Hammerstein's," 5 February 1910, p. 14.

[92] "At Hammerstein's," 19 March 1910, p. 18.

[93] "At Hammerstein's," 22 January 1910, p. 21; "At Hammerstein's," 29 January 1910, p. 21.

[94] "Belasco--Just a Wife," 12 February 1910, p. 6.

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summer. In early May, Belasco announced that in the fall the theatre would revert to its original name, the Republic, while his other theatre, then called the "Belasco-Stuyvesant," would become the Belasco.[95] The change of names reflects Belasco's growing disinterest in his original theatre; in two years he would give up the lease of the Republic.

At the beginning of January, the Lyric was still housing its production of The City, which had broken all metropolitan records for a serious drama without a well-known star.[96] The City remained for four months before being moved to the Hackett. William A. Brady then rented the Lyric for an all-star revival of Jim the Penman, a play that had first been seen in America in 1856. After four weeks, Jim was succeeded by The Matinee Idol, which was moved there after its premiere at Daly's Theatre.

The New Amsterdam housed two melodramas in the spring of 1910. The first, called The Barrier, proved to be a trite depiction of life in the frozen north. It lasted for only three weeks before being replaced by a much more popular, if equally corny, melodrama, Madame X. This adaptation of a French play, with its plot device of a young lawyer unknowingly prosecuting his own mother, ran for sixteen weeks at the New Amsterdam and for years on the road. It has also been filmed several times.

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[95] "Belasco Theatre Changes Name," NYDM, 7 May 1910, p. 12.

[96] "The City Breaks Records," NYDM, 1 January 1910, p. 10.

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The Liberty, after a shaky fall season, had a prosperous spring, thanks to the popularity of The Arcadians, a musical produced by Charles Frohman. With Frank Moulan and Julia Sanderson heading the cast, it ran until the middle of May.

At the Hackett, the spring was another disastrous season. The theatre housed seven different shows presented by seven different producers. None of the productions lasted for more than a month. An unusual feature of the spring season was the rental of the Hackett by various groups for matinee performances of plays by unknown or unpopular playwrights. Olive Latimer's Husband, produced at the Hackett on January 7, was an early effort by Rudolf Besier. In February, the Hackett was taken over by Julius Hopp and the "Socialistic Dramatic Movement and Educational Stage Society" for a matinee of The Snow Storm, a psychological drama by the Polish playwright Stanislaus Bzybishewski. The Socialist Dramatic Movement returned to the Hackett in April with a Sunday evening performance of Hauptmann's Lonely Lives, and also rented the Hackett in May for a performance of Hebbel's Mary Magdalene.

During the spring, the configuration of the theatre block was changed by two occurrences. The first event was the construction of a small (less than 300 seats) movie theatre on the site of George W. Thedford's Coal and

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Wood Yard at 223 West Forty-second Street.[97] The second event was the widening of Forty-second Street by the removal of seven and a half feet of sidewalk space on either side of the street. Because the sidewalks would be much narrower, the city decreed that nothing would be allowed to project more than two and a half feet from the building line. This meant that the porticos on the Republic, the Hackett, the New Amsterdam, the Liberty, the Lyric, and the American would have to be severely reduced. Theatreowners were forced to comply with this order at their own expense. The upshot was the elimination of the elaborate porticos which stretched to the curb, and the introduction of more modest marquees on the fronts of the theatres.[98]

The summer of 1910 was another busy season for Forty-second Street. At the end of May, the Victoria and American Roofs opened. As usual, there were novelties to be seen at Hammerstein's farm. In addition to the cow, now milked by electricity, there was a flea circus and a pond of water where customers could win prizes by throwing a cork ring around the neck of a live duck. Once the A.S.P.C.A. got word of this amusement, it was promptly closed down.[99]

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[97] Untitled article, Variety, 5 March 1910, p. 7.

[98] "To Begin Widening 42nd Street at Once," New York Times, 4 June 1910, p. 1; "Changing Theatre Entrances," NYDM, 3 May 1911, p. 13.

[99] "$5,000 Roof Bill," Variety, 28 May 1910, p. 9; "Saving the Ducks," Variety, 18 June 1910, p. 6.

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At the American, the roof was improved by the addition of two new elevators on the Forty-first Street side of the building and by fresh trees and wisteria in the roof gardens.[100] Although the roof was opened on May 29, Morris did not present his major attraction for the season until "Chantecler" opened on June 6. This forty-five-minute burlesque of Rostand's play introduced Mizzi (later Mitzi) Hajos to American audiences. The Victoria roof responded by presenting a burlesque of Madame X. Competition between the two theatres remained keen during the summer of 1910. The major sporting event of the season was the Jack Johnson-James J. Jeffries heavyweight championship fight held in Reno, Nevada in July, which Johnson won by scoring a knockout in the fifteenth round. Willie Hammerstein lost no time in signing Johnson up for an engagement at the Victoria. Mobs greeted the champion, and Willie, anticipating that large numbers of Blacks would be anxious to see Johnson, raised the price of front row seats in the gallery to $1.00. The best that William Morris could do to capitalize on the fight was to present former champion James J. Corbett to explain to audiences why Jeffries lost the bout. The American even showed a fake film of the fight to its customers.[101]

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[100] "First Roof Opening," Variety, 28 May 1910, p. 4.

[101] "Echoes of the Fight," Variety, 16 July 1910, p. 9; "No Fight Film for Victoria and Morris," NYDM, 16 July 1910, p. 18.

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The two vaudeville houses received additional competition from two productions which opened on Forty-second Street during the summer. On June 13, the New Amsterdam Roof presented Girlies, a musical comedy with book by George V. Hobart and music by Williams and Van Alstyne. With a cast headed by Joseph Cawthorn and Ernest Truex, Girlies pleased audiences for eighty-nine performances. Ironically, Frederick Thompson, the producer of Girlies, quickly discovered that despite the show's success, there was no way that it could make a profit without raising ticket prices. Its initial cost was $30,000, and its weekly operating expenses were $6,000. The maximum receipts for the roof theatre were $1,400 a night, which were to be split on a 60%-40% arrangement between the theatre and the show. As a result, Thompson could receive a maximum of only $5,040 as his share of the show's weekly receipts.[102] The situation faced by the producer of Girlies demonstrates a principle of theatre economics that was to become increasingly widespread in the next two decades: the producer took all the financial risks while the theatre owner had a more or less guaranteed income.

The other legitimate production of the summer was The Cheater, a farce translated from the German by its star, Louis Mann. Presented at the Lyric by William A. Brady, The Cheater lasted for seventy performances.

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[102]"Capacity Not Enough," Variety, 18 June 1910, p. 4.

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Two other developments during the summer of 1910 are worth noting. In July, A. H. Woods, veteran producer of melodramas and bedroom farces, announced that he was looking for land on which to build a new theatre. It took Woods another year to choose a plot on the south side of the theatre block for his playhouse. The second development was the announcement in early August that the Eaves Costume Company, an old business located at 226 West Forty-first Street (across the street from the back of the Liberty), had been reorganized and brought up to date. Eaves is, of course, still a major costume company. Its revitalization in 1910 was another indication of the growth of the theatre business in New York.

As the fall season began, the theatres on Forty-second Street prepared themselves for another year of productions which adhered to the policies they had already adopted. At the American, the pattern of vaudeville was now firmly established. Many of the acts presented there were familiar to audiences from previous performances at the American, the Victoria, and the other first-class variety houses. One act that had often played in New York vaudeville was Fred Karno's English Comedy Troupe, a group of knockabout comedians appearing in rowdy sketches such as "A Night in an English Music Hall." When the Karno troupe (actually one of several that were touring England and America at the time) appeared at the American at the end of December, Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel were members of the company. It

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was during this engagement at the American that Mack Sennett reportedly saw Chaplin for the first time. Impressed with the comedian's abilities, Sennett kept Chaplin in mind, and sent for him when he needed a new face for his Keystone comedies.[103]

Willie Hammerstein was still presenting strong vaudeville bills at the Victoria, but Oscar Hammerstein had lost interest in the theatre and made no secret of the fact that he was willing to sell it. In order to increase the theatre's profits, Willie reopened the roof in October with a combination of films and family-time vaudeville at a price range of 10¢-15¢-25¢. Having the roof open at the same time as the main theatre necessitated the construction of a separate entrance leading upstairs. In the process of building the new entrance, a corner of the Victoria lobby was eliminated. This area, known as the "amen corner," had been a favorite meeting place of managers, agents, and vaudeville stars, and was also the headquarters of the "Ten O'Clock Club" of newspaper reporters covering the theatrical beat.[104] The new

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[103]Sennett insists that he first saw Chaplin at the American in 1912. See: Mack Sennett, King of Comedy (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1954), pp. 148, 155. Chaplin rightly recalls that he played the American in early 1911. See Lillian Ross, "Moments from Chaplin," New Yorker 54 (May 22, 1978): 100. Chaplin also claims in the same interview that while rehearsing at the Victoria with the Karno company Willie Hammerstein suggested that Chaplin throw a pie at another member of the troupe, and that this launched pie-throwing as a piece of comic business (p. 102).

[104]"Passing of Amen Corner," Variety, 29 October 1910, p. 12; Anna Marble Pollack, "Notes on the

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vaudeville-motion picture bill on the roof was enough of a success for Willie Hammerstein to increase the weekly payroll from $250 to $500-$600.[105]

The fall season at the Republic (now using its original name) began with a Winchell Smith comedy called Bobby Burnit, produced by Henry B. Harris. After a month, Belasco replaced it with a two-week engagement of his previous year's hit, Is Matrimony a Failure?. The theatre was then turned over to a long run of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, a comedy produced by Klaw and Erlanger, once the arch-enemies of David Belasco. With Edith Taliaferro in the title role, Rebecca ran for six months.

The Lyric had an uncharacteristically mediocre season in the fall of 1910. After playing host to Madame X for five weeks, the Lyric housed Madame Troubadour, a French operetta produced by the Shuberts. At the end of November, Mrs. Leslie Carter played two roles in Two Women, a drama by Rupert Hughes which occupied the Lyric for six weeks.

The New Amsterdam, which had hosted straight dramas in the spring, returned to the ranks of musical houses in the fall with Madame Sherry, an operetta with music by Karl Hoschna. Produced by the partnership of Woods, Frazee, and Lederer, Madame Sherry proved to be a big hit, remaining at the New Amsterdam for over six months.

Amusement Market's First Corner," New York Times, 2 December 1934, sec. 10, p. 3.

[105]"Hammerstein's Corner Opens," Variety, 29 October 1910, p. 11.

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The Liberty housed two successes during the fall. The first was The Country Boy, written by Edgar Selwyn and produced by Henry B. Harris, both of whom would one day control theatres on Forty-second Street. After 136 performances, The Country Boy was replaced by The Spring Maid, an operetta starring Christie MacDonald which represented the first producing venture by Werba and Luescher. Opening on December 26, The Spring Maid remained at the Liberty throughout the spring season.

The fall of 1910 saw the Hackett embark on another erratic year. It opened with The Marriage of a Star, a quick failure, and then was taken over by William A. Brady for Jules Eckert Goodman's "homely sort of drama," Mother, starring Emma Dunn.[106] Mother tugged at audiences' heartstrings for 107 performances, the longest run by a show at the Hackett in almost two years.

While the vaudeville houses and the legitimate theatres continued to function according to more or less predictable patterns, the new movie house on the block opened in September under the name of the Bryant. Although its electric sign advertised "Pictures and Vaudeville," the Bryant at first featured only films. A few weeks after its opening, the managers added a "split-week" bill of four acts arranged through the Lee office, of

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[106]"Hackett--Mother," NYDM, 14 September 1910, p. 11.

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small-time vaudeville.[107] Because it housed small-time vaudeville and the still somewhat disreputable motion picture, the Bryant was not important enough to be regularly covered by the theatrical newspapers. An examination of Manhattan telephone directories during the period from 1909 through 1920 reveals that the Bryant did not even have a listed telephone, a further indication of its insignificance.[108]

As the spring of 1911 began, the American and the Victoria both continued to present first-class vaudeville attractions. By the end of the spring, profound changes occurred that would affect the future course of both houses. In February, rumors were circulating that William Morris was going to sell his interest in the American to Marcus Loew, the "small-time king." On March 3, the rumors became fact. Loew obtained a controlling interest in William Morris, Inc., while Morris agreed to remain as an associate of Loew. The Loew and Morris Consolidated Booking Office was established with offices in the American Music Hall building.[109] The American then became a motion picture and small-time vaudeville house, which it remained

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[107] "2D 'Corner' Picture Place," Variety, 3 September 1910, p. 8; "42nd Street 'Splitting'," Variety, 24 September 1910, p. 9.

[108] New York City Telephone Directory, October 1909-November 1920. Other movie-vaudeville houses, e.g., those in the Loew's chain, do have telephone listings during this period.

[109] "Lowe [sic] Absorbs Morris?," NYDM, 1 March 1911, p. 7; "Significant Vaudeville Events," NYDM, 8 March 1911, p. 13; "New Amusement Enterprises," NYDM, 22 March 1911, p. 14.

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for eighteen years. Henceforth, very little of theatrical interest or importance was to occur at the American.

In May, after a spring season that included engagements by Will Rogers, the Avon Comedy Four, Nat Goodwin, and Maggie Cline, Oscar Hammerstein announced that he had given a $100,000 mortgage on the Victoria to Edward F. Albee, general manager of the Keith and Proctor vaudeville interests. Albee was also given an option to buy the lease of the Victoria for $1-1/4 million. The purpose of this transaction was to prevent other vaudeville managers, notably Martin Beck, from obtaining control of the Victoria.[110] That Hammerstein was willing to mortgage his most valuable theatrical property is a symptom of his contempt for the vaudeville house and his need for money to finance his operatic ventures.

At the Republic, the spring of 1911 saw a continuation of the run of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, followed in April by a three-week engagement of The Easiest Way, a drama by Eugene Walter that had premiered elsewhere.

The Lyric housed four shows during the spring, a premiere, a revival, and two productions that had been moved from other theatres. The biggest success was the premiere, The Deep Purple, a play by Paul Armstrong and Wilson Mizner starring Richard Bennett. In the estimation of the Dramatic Mirror's reviewer, "The Deep Purple rattles

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[110]"Hammerstein Gives $100,000 Mortgage," New York Times, 3 May 1911, p. 13; "Some Hammerstein News," NYDM, 10 May 1911, p. 10.

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as wildly as any melodrama that ever leaped from crag to crag."[111] The Deep Purple ran for 121 performances; by its 100th performance it had grossed $96,525 in receipts.[112] In May, William A. Brady produced another of his all-star revivals at the Lyric. Lights o' London, a vintage melodrama, was presented with a cast that included William Courtenay, Doris Keane, Holbrook Blinn, and Douglas Fairbanks. The engagement lasted for four weeks.

Across the street at the New Amsterdam, the spring saw the end of one long-run musical and the beginning of another. When Madame Sherry ended its run in March after 229 performances, it was immediately followed by The Pink Lady, an adaptation of a French musical with a score by Ivan Caryll. This Klaw and Erlanger production, which brought stardom to Hazel Dawn, remained at the New Amsterdam through the summer and into the fall.

The Spring Maid continued at the Liberty until the theatre closed for the summer on June 10. Down the block, the Hackett was enjoying a rare success with Overnight, a farcical comedy by Philip H. Bartholomae produced by William A. Brady. Its run of 122 performances made it one of the few successes at the theatre while it was under the Hackett management. By the spring of 1911, the Hackett's lease had been taken over by its owner, Henry B. Harris,

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[111] "Lyric--The Deep Purple," 11 January 1911, p. 7.

[112] "At Other Houses--Lyric," NYDM, 12 April 1911, p. 7.

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who invested $15,000 in extensive renovations. According to the plans filed with the Buildings Department, a new vestibule and lobby were installed, the boxes were removed and replaced, the orchestra seats were rearranged, the balcony was redecorated, and a new plaster proscenium arch and ceiling were installed.[113] On April 15, Overnight concluded its engagement and the renovations were begun.

During the summer of 1911, the American opened its roof theatre to vaudeville. One feature was a tabloid version of Lew Fields' play, The Girl Behind the Counter.[114] At the Victoria, the roof again featured Will Rogers, and also presented Ruth St. Denis in "Radha, the Hindu Temple Dance." The Pink Lady remained at the New Amsterdam throughout the summer. In June, Al Woods announced that he would build "The Julian Eltinge Theatre," named in honor of Woods' most profitable attraction, the female impersonator Julian Eltinge. Woods expected his theatre to be finished within the next twelve months.[115] In August, Woods revealed that he had leased a plot of land eighty feet by one hundred feet on the south side of Forty-second Street for twenty-one years. The theatre was to be

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[113] Application to Alter Hackett Theatre filed with New York City Department of Buildings, November 19, 1910.

[114] "American Roof Garden," NYDM, 5 July 1911, p. 7.

[115] "A. H. Wood's New Theatre," NYDM, 21 June 1911, p. 3.

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devoted to Woods' biggest stars, Julian Eltinge and Marguerite Sylva.[116]

During the fall of 1911, the American Theatre continued its policy of small-time vaudeville, while the Victoria had a particularly star-studded season. Among the headliners that fall were the Three Keatons, Victor Moore, Will Rogers, Eddie Leonard, Harry Von Tilzer, Elizabeth Brice and Charles King, and Gallagher and Shean.

At the Republic, which had been partially reconstructed because of the widening of Forty-second Street, the attraction for the fall was The Woman, a drama by William C. De Mille produced by David Belasco. It remained at the theatre for the rest of the season. The early fall at the Lyric was not very impressive. After a one-month run of Everywoman, which had opened at another theatre, the Lyric hosted two quick failures before presenting a three-week engagement of the Chicago Drama Players in Ibsen's The Lady from the Sea, Molière's The Learned Ladies, and Pinero's The Thunderbolt. Of the Ibsen performance, the Dramatic Mirror wrote, "The work was on such a high level of competence that a failure to find the audiences who enjoy Ibsen would be lamentable for the audiences, for the actors and for dramatic art in general."[117] Although the Drama Players did not find much of an audience, the Lyric's

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[116] "Julian Eltinge's Theatre," NYDM, 23 August 1911, p. 5. As far as I am able to tell, Eltinge never appeared at the Eltinge Theatre, and Sylva did not appear there until March 1925.

[117] "Lyric--The Lady from the Sea," 15 November 1911, p. 7.

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next show did. Little Boy Blue was a romantic operetta imported from Europe by Henry W. Savage. It remained at the Lyric for twenty-two weeks.

The Pink Lady continued its long run in the fall of 1911, causing the Dramatic Mirror to comment that the New Amsterdam was gaining a reputation for long run shows.[118] After a total of 316 performances, The Pink Lady left the New Amsterdam, and was followed by an all-star revival of Klaw and Erlanger's bread-and-butter piece, Ben-Hur, which remained at the theatre throughout the holiday season.

At the Liberty, the season opened on September 11 with The Fascinating Widow, a comedy with music produced by Al Woods and starring Julian Eltinge. It opened to lukewarm reviews and left for the road after seven weeks. It may have been this relatively unkind reception of Eltinge in New York that convinced Woods that his new theatre should not be opened with his star attraction. The Liberty's next show, Uncle Sam, was a quick failure and is only notable for being one of John Barrymore's early starring vehicles. At the beginning of November, Woods presented The Littlest Rebel at the Liberty. This civil war drama, with Dustin and William Farnum in leading roles, ran until the first of the year.

In late August the Hackett, now redecorated and called the Harris, opened with Maggie Pepper, starring Rose Stahl, who had played the title role in The Chorus

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[118] "At Other Playhouses--New Amsterdam," 27 July 1911, p. 8.

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Lady at the same theatre five years before. Maggie Pepper ran for nineteen weeks, getting the Harris tenure off to a good start. The Bryant Theatre also underwent a change of lease and a renovation before opening in the fall of 1911. Its seating capacity was enlarged to 700.[119]

The spring of 1912 followed, with a few exceptions, the patterns set by the Forty-second Street theatres in previous years. The Victoria's bills included the usual old favorites plus three important newcomers: Mae West, Fanny Brice, and Irving Berlin. At the Republic, The Woman ran until the theatre closed in April. The Lyric continued to present Little Boy Blue until April, when it was followed by a one-week engagement of Jules Layolle's French Grand Opera Company in repertoire. After the house was dark for two weeks, it reopened on May 6 with a Shubert-Brady revival of Patience starring Marie Doro and De Wolf Hopper. The Gilbert and Sullivan operetta ran for one month.

During the spring, the New Amsterdam temporarily abandoned its policy as a musical theatre to present a season of straight drama, including The Trail of the Lonesome Pine, Oliver Twist, and The Man from Cook's. Late in the year it returned to the musical fold with a revival of Reginald De Koven's Robin Hood. While running

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[119] "New Theatres," NYDM, 20 September 1911, p. 33.

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at the New Amsterdam, Robin Hood celebrated its 6,000th performance.[120]

The early part of the spring season found the Liberty looking for a successful production. After three failures, the theatre housed The Rainbow, a comedy by A. E. Thomas produced by, and starring, Henry Miller, with Laura Hope Crews and Ruth Chatterton in supporting roles. It amused audiences for three months.

At the Harris, the successful production of Maggie Pepper was followed in January by another hit, The Talker, a play by Marion Fairfax that was produced by Henry B. Harris. The Talker ran for four months, and just as it seemed that the theatre had finally rid itself of its jinx, Henry B. Harris was lost at sea when the Titanic sank in April 1912. The producer's estate, administered by William Harris (Henry's father and a veteran theatrical manager), continued to run Harris' theatres, but was unable to produce as many shows.[121] The result, first felt in the fall of 1912, was that the Harris Theatre once more hosted a string of mediocre productions. The brief flowering of the playhouse had come to an end after only one season.

In the summer of 1912, the Victoria Roof once again opened for vaudeville. The chief novelty was a pond of ice, illuminated by soft lighting, which was used for exhibitions of figure skating during the intermission of

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[120] "Here and There," NYDM, 26 June 1912, p. 30.

[121] "Henry B. Harris Lost at Sea," NYDM, 24 April 1912, p. 12; "Policy of Harris Interests," NYDM, 22 May 1912, p. 9.

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the vaudeville show.[122] The highlight of the Victoria's summer season was the appearance of Houdini, who stirred up interest in his engagement by having himself manacled and shackled and then nailed into a big box which was bound in steel bands. The box was lowered into the river in the presence of numerous reporters. Houdini emerged from the water one minute later. When the box was brought up, it did not appear to have been opened at all. A publicity stunt such as this could not fail to please Willie Hammerstein, who announced a short time later that Houdini had signed a contract to play the Victoria Roof each summer for the next five years.[123]

The fall of 1912 was a period of change for many of the theatres on Forty-second Street. William Morris, who had brought big-time vaudeville to the American in 1908, sold his interest in the theatre's lease to his partners, Marcus Loew and Felix Isman, thereby insuring the American's continuance as a small-time house. William Hammerstein split with his father over the latter's insistence that the Victoria's profits be poured into his grand opera ventures. It had become public knowledge that both the Shuberts and Martin Beck had made offers to purchase the Victoria, and Willie was afraid that his father would sell the theatre and then lose all the

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[122] "Hammerstein's Roof Opens," NYDM, 12 June 1912, p. 13.

[123] "Vaudeville Notes," NYDM, 10 July 1912, p. 15; "Vaudeville Notes," NYDM, 24 July 1912, p. 14.

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proceeds in opera. Oscar seems to have been unperturbed by his son's desertion. He appointed a new manager for the Victoria and continued to offer vaudeville there. Two weeks after the new manager had been hired, Willie was reconciled with his father and returned to his position at the Victoria.[124] Although disaster was averted for the moment, it was clear that Oscar was serious about getting rid of the Victoria. From this time on, he was on the lookout for a potential buyer.

The Republic opened with one of Belasco's most characteristic productions. The Governor's Lady was a mediocre drama by Alice Bradley (who credited Belasco with most of the work on the script). It was no doubt Belasco's idea to set the play's epilogue in a Child's Restaurant, one of a chain of inexpensive eating places that still exists in New York. Belasco was familiar with Child's because he used to frequent the Child's on Broadway, right around the corner from the Republic.[125] For The Governor's Lady, Belasco bought the interior fixtures of a Child's and exactly reproduced the restaurant on the stage of the Republic, right down to the perking coffee. While

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[124] "No Deal for the Victoria," New York Times, 28 September 1912, p. 13; "Hammerstein Wants a Guardian," NYDM, 2 October 1912, p. 11; "Vaudeville Notes," NYDM, 6 November 1912, p. 14; "The Hammersteins Reunited," NYDM, 20 November 1912, p. 21.

[125] Will A. Page, Behind the Curtains of the Broadway Beauty Trust (New York: Edward C. Miller Publishing Co., 1927), p. 43. Page says that Belasco took his friends to Child's after every premiere at the Republic because he liked the restaurant's butter cakes.

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The Governor's Lady was continuing its successful run of 138 performances, Felix Isman finally managed to obtain control of the Republic's property. Since Oscar Hammerstein's lease of the property had thirty-seven years to go, Isman could make no immediate changes. He seem to have been satisfied just to own such a valuable piece of land.[126]

The fall season at the Lyric was not particularly profitable. The highlight was William Faversham's production of Julius Caesar in November, concerning which the Dramatic Mirror's reviewer stated, "Frankly, I regard this as the best Shakespearean production of two decades."[127] It was followed four weeks later by The Firefly, an operetta with music by Rudolf Friml, produced by Arthur Hammerstein. The Firefly was moved from the Lyric to the Casino after four weeks, to be replaced by a Shubert-produced comedy, All for the Ladies, starring the popular Sam Bernard and Adele Ritchie.

The New Amsterdam again played host to The Pink Lady in the early fall of 1912. It was followed in September by The Count of Luxembourg, another European operetta, this one with music by Franz Lehar, the composer of The Merry Widow. It remained at the New Amsterdam for fifteen weeks.

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[126] "Isman Buys the Republic," New York Times, 16 November 1912, p. 15.

[127] "Julius Caesar," 13 November 1912, p. 6.

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The Liberty made one of its rare excursions into serious drama during the fall of 1912. Milestones, a play by Arnold Bennett and Edward Knobloch, proved to be both a critical and a popular success. It lasted at the Liberty for 217 performances.

Without Henry B. Harris to provide successful productions for the theatre bearing his name, the Harris once again faced a season of failures. Seven different shows appeared there in the fall of 1912, none remaining for more than twenty-five performances. In October, the Dramatic Mirror reported a rumor that the Harris Theatre was for sale. The estate denied the rumor, but it was becoming obvious that William Harris, Sr. was too old and tired to run it profitably.[128]

The biggest event on the block in the fall of 1912 was the opening of the Eltinge, the ninth theatre on the block and the first legitimate playhouse to be built on the street in almost eight years. In June, Al Woods had announced that the initial attraction in the new theatre would be Jane Cowl in Within the Law. Over the summer, the play was being readied and the theatre being completed. As designed by Thomas A. Lamb, the building was four stories high, sixty feet wide, and ninety-three feet deep. Although the building itself was relatively small for a playhouse, the fact that the entire plot of land fronted on Forty-second Street enabled Lamb to design an imposing

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[128] "Harris Theatres for Sale?," 23 October 1912, p. 10.

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limestone and terra cotta facade for the theatre. Built into the second story of the facade were the windows of Al Woods' new offices.

In keeping with the modest dimensions of the building, the theatre itself was an intimate house seating 889 in an orchestra, balcony, gallery, and eight boxes. The proscenium arch was thirty-six feet high, and the height to the rigging was sixty feet. The interior decoration of the house was a mixture of styles. Although the most striking features of the decor were the two large sphinxes painted over the proscenium arch and the Egyptian motif in the house curtain, there were also classical Greek figures carved into the boxes and balconies and painted in a mural above the sphinxes. This melange of styles caused the Times reviewer to comment, "What the designer intended when he decorated the boxes with bacchantic figures, wearing Egyptian headdresses and playing pipes, cannot be imagined."[129] The color scheme of the Eltinge was lighter than that of most theatres, the dominant shades being gold, light blue, and mauve. The walls were a gold-brown, the curtains a gold plush, and the seats a light blue.[130]

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[129] "'Within the Law' A Vivid Melodrama," New York Times, 12 September 1912, p. 11.

[130] The description of the Eltinge is based on the following sources: Application for Erection, filed with the New York City Department of Buildings, September 26, 1911; Joel Lobenthal, "The Glory Beneath the Grit," pp. 41-42; Eltinge Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; Eltinge Theatre Folder, MCNY; "'Within the Law' A Vivid Melodrama."

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The opening attraction at the Eltinge, Within the Law, proved to be a rather lurid drama of a woman wrongly accused of a crime. With Jane Cowl in the leading role, Within the Law turned out to be a far bigger hit than anyone expected, running for over 500 performances at the Eltinge before it left for London. Interestingly, Within the Law was produced not by Al Woods, but by the American Play Company, an organization consisting of Edgar Selwyn, Archie Selwyn, and Margaret Mayo (Edgar Selwyn's wife). The Selwyns had obtained the rights to the play from William Brady for $25,000, an action that Brady was to regret deeply when he saw the profits that Within the Law amassed.[131]

Two other items of theatrical interest occurred on Forty-second Street during the fall of 1912. In December, Le Cercle Dramatique de L'Alliance Francaise de New York presented a French-language production of Le Secret de Polichinelle for two evenings in the Aerial Gardens of the New Amsterdam. This was the first time that the roof theatre, which had been intended for year-round use when it was built, was occupied by a show during the winter. The second item of interest was the construction during the fall of 1912 of the twenty-five story Candler Building on the site of the old Central Baptist Church, which had been torn down earlier in the year.

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[131]"Who Wrote 'Within the Law'?" NYDM, 16 October 1912, p. 11.

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The new office building was the project of Asa G. Candler, who had purchased the formula for Coca-Cola in 1887, improved it, and made a fortune.[132] The Candler Building was the only major nontheatrical edifice on the theatre block of Forty-second Street, and is still the most imposing structure on the block. As the building was nearing completion, plans were being made to build a theatre on the property next door.

The period from 1905 through 1912, which had begun with Forty-second Street being proclaimed the "New Rialto," ended on a less optimistic note. The frenzied theatre-building and accompanying overproduction of plays occasioned by the theatrical wars had left New York with too many playhouses and not enough first-class attractions with which to fill them. According to Al Woods, by the fall of 1912, there were thirty-six theatres between Thirty-eighth and Forty-eighth Streets and Sixth and Eighth Avenues, or four more theatres than all of New York had held a dozen years earlier.[133] Lee Shubert felt that the number of theatres in New York stemmed from "the excessive number of playhouses built in other cities as a result of the rivalry of the theatrical factions in the past." Shubert reasoned that as long as the out-of-town theatres had to be supplied with attractions labeled

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[132] Clarence L. Barnhart, ed,, The New Century Cyclopedia of Names, 1 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1954), 794.

[133] "Figures About the Theatre Center," NYDM, 3 July 1912, p. 12.

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"direct from New York," there would have to be enough theatres in the city to house the initial productions of those shows.[134] Thus, the number of playhouses built in the Times Square vicinity during the period bore little relation to the actual numbers of New York theatregoers, but rather resulted from an artificial demand for productions created by the pressure of the ever-increasing number of theatres in other parts of the country.

The relationship between supply and demand in New York theatres was further weakened by the influx of real estate men and other wealthy "civilians" into the world of theatre building. At the beginning of the period, most of the theatres on Forty-second Street were owned and/or leased by theatrical producers who used the houses as a showcase for their own productions. If one of their shows was successful it meant that they would profit in two ways: by receiving a regular rental payment as lessee of the theatre and by collecting the profits that the show paid to the producer. Each theatre could have as many as five different parties interested in it: the owner of the property, the lessee of the property, the owner of the theatre, the lessee of the theatre, and the sublessee who rented the theatre for a specific production or for a season. Real estate men quickly discovered that owning a theatre or having a long-term lease on it was the safest and most profitable part of theatre finance, for the

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[134] "The Reason Why," NYDM, 11 September 1912, p. 3.

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theatre's rental had to be paid before the producer could claim his profits. Meanwhile, the property on which the theatres were built kept increasing in value as land in the Times Square area became scarce. Soon investors with no interest in the theatre were buying playhouses and the land they were situated on strictly for their financial value.

The result of the out-of-town demand for more and more shows and the separation of the functions of theatre-owner and producer was an increase of both long-run shows and quick failures. The long runs provided a regular rental payment to the owner/lessee and a steady profit to the producer, while the failures were closed down quickly and either sent on tour or to theatrical oblivion so that room could be made for a new and more profitable production. It was now becoming less possible for a production to run long enough to find its audience if its initial impression on critics and spectators was not overwhelming.

During the period of 1905-1912, the theatres on Forty-second Street began to feel the pinch of the "new" theatre economics. In many cases, the owner/lessees of the theatres had become less involved in the shows produced in their houses as the period progressed. After an unprecedented string of successes at the Republic, David Belasco began to concentrate more on his new theatre and frequently rented the Republic to other producers. The Lyric, which had been the first New York theatre in which the Shuberts had a financial interest when it opened in 1903, was by

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1912 only one of their many playhouses. As the brothers turned their attention to the Winter Garden, the Casino, and their other holdings, the Lyric was less and less often the home of a Shubert-produced show. Even Klaw and Erlanger produced fewer shows in their "flagship" the New Amsterdam, while the Liberty only rarely housed one of their productions. The melancholy history of the Fields/Hackett/Harris has already been related. Most characteristic of the change in the pattern of theatre ownership was Al Woods' Eltinge Theatre, which opened with a non-Woods production and never housed a Julian Eltinge show. The tradition of the producer-manager running his own theatre according to a set policy was practically dead by 1912, killed off by changing theatre economics.

At the end of 1912, the theatres on Forty-second Street were also being affected by the growing popularity of motion pictures. We have already seen how films were able to outdo the theatres specializing in old-fashioned melodrama, and we have observed how movies became a more and more essential part of the vaudeville bill, working their way up from the last, or "chaser" position to a featured spot on the bill. In small-time theatres such as the Bryant, the film was the major part of the evening's entertainment, while the four acts of vaudeville were included merely to fill out the evening. In 1910, the Victoria's roof theatre had been converted to a motion picture and vaudeville house for the winter months, another indication of the drawing power of films. As the number of film

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companies increased, the Times Square area, already the precinct of live entertainment, became the headquarters of the motion picture business as well. By the end of 1912, two motion picture companies had their offices on Forty-second Street: the Eclair Company was located at 225 West Forty-second Street, and the New York Motion Picture Company was in the Longacre Building at Broadway and Forty-second.

The theatre block was not greatly disturbed by the location of motion picture companies in its midst, but it was about to be affected, along with the rest of the New York legitimate stage, by the wholesale defection of theatrical talent to the movies. We have only to review the stars and productions which appeared on Forty-second Street from 1905-1912 to realize how extensive the exodus was. At one time or another during the period three-fourths of what would later be United Artists (Charles Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks) appeared in shows on the block, as did future motion picture comedians Stan Laurel and Buster Keaton, western stars Dustin Farnum and William S. Hart, the celebrated "vamp" Theda Bara, and the greatest silent film actress, Lillian Gish. Forty-second Street also joined the other theatres in contributing dramatic material to the new medium. Besides The Clansman, films were made of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, The Merry Widow, Madame X (filmed three different times by 1930), and many other plays.

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Theatrical producers were soon rushing to make deals to have their properties filmed, not realizing that once a show had been made into a movie, legitimate audiences might be less interested in seeing the show revived on the stage.

Not only did this movement of legitimate stars and shows from stage to screen impoverish the legitimate stage, but it also raised the prestige of the motion picture, so that it soon began to seriously compete with the live theatre for middle and upper-class audiences. Nothing symbolized the new respectability of films better than the opening in 1914 of the Strand, Times Square's first "picture palace." From that point on, the motion picture would be a formidable rival to the legitimate stage and would play a more important role in the future of the theatre block.

As the period closes, then, it is possible to see the growth of certain forces (the possibly excessive number of New York legitimate theatres, the division of the functions of theatre ownership and theatrical producing, the increasing importance of the motion picture) that would, in large part, determine the future direction that Forty-second Street's theatre block would take. Some of the forces would affect the theatres almost immediately, while others would not make themselves felt until the 1920s.

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CHAPTER V

STRAWS IN THE WIND (1913-1920)

Two of the major forces that had begun to exert their influence on the theatre block during the previous period--the increasing complexity of theatrical finances and the growing popularity and prestige of the motion picture--continued to shape events on West Forty-second Street during the years 1913-1920. As the period began, theatre owners and managers were faced with the fact that they were over-expanded, both in New York and in cities throughout the country. The earlier rivalry between the Syndicate and the Independents (which had by now become a war between Klaw and Erlanger and the Shuberts) had resulted in much theatre-building in cities and towns across the United States at precisely the time when live theatre was beginning its decline. Jack Poggi, in his book Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967, claims that the number of legitimate theatres in the United States decreased from 1,549 in 1910 to 674 in 1925, while the number of touring companies shrank from 236 in 1910 to 39 in 1920.[1] In New York, where one of the reasons for the erection of playhouses had been to provide combination shows with a Broadway debut before

[1] (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 29-30.

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they headed out on tour, managers began to realize that the declining road meant that many of the city's theatres would now be superfluous. Little by little, playhouses situated at a distance from the Times Square theatre district began to close down or convert to movies or vaudeville, while some of the legitimate theatres in the Times Square area began to fill in the increasing number of gaps between legitimate productions with motion pictures. For example, in January 1913 it was announced that Wallack's, one of the most venerable of New York theatres, would house motion pictures for a few weeks.[2] During the next eight years this practice, which was severely criticized at first, would become a standard procedure for many theatres.

A significant barometer of the seriousness of the overexpansion was the fact that Klaw and Erlanger negotiated a truce with the Shuberts in 1913. According to the terms of the agreement, the rival producers would continue to compete with one another in signing the top stars and attractions, but would allow touring companies to play in houses belonging to either side. In addition, theatreowners could book both Syndicate and Shubert productions into their houses. While this agreement brought the rate of theatre construction and acquisition under control, it did not entirely solve the problem of overexpansion, especially in New York. Now that there were more theatres than the city itself could support, competition for audiences became

[2] "Wallack's Goes to Films," NYDM, 29 January 1913, p. 15.

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fierce. The most prominent producers quickly contracted for the few well-known performers and playwrights who had not already defected to motion pictures. Less fortunate managers relied on plays written according to "tried-and-true" formulas to draw spectators, so that during the period there were many white slavery dramas, bedroom farces, ersatz Ziegfeld revues, woman-with-a-past plays, and, in 1917 and 1918, patriotic war melodramas. Whether by means of top stars or familiar plots, the goal of every producer was to create a show that would settle in for a long run, thereby insuring a steady profit.

Another method by which a producer could gain financially from a successful show was to sell his rights quickly in the play to a motion picture company. During this period, several prominent producers signed exclusive contracts with film companies. Although the procedure resulted in short-term profits, in the long run it was detrimental to the live theatre, for it seemed to reduce a show's life expectancy on the road, where audiences were often able to see the motion picture version at a reduced admission price before the live touring production had reached their town.

All of these developments in the commercial theatre's economic structure resulted in a kind of "inflationary spiral": the decline of the road led to a surplus of theatres; the surplus of theatres generated increased competition among producers to lure audiences into their houses; the increased competition forced producers to "play it safe" by employing top stars and well-known playwrights, by using

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established formulas, by encouraging long runs, and by selling their properties quickly to motion pictures. The eventual outcome of "playing it safe" was that established actors and playwrights were in a position to demand higher salaries and royalties, and owners of playhouses in the prime theatre district could command higher rental prices. Such additional expenses, in turn, gave even greater impetus to the producers' desire to play it safe in order to cover the higher cost of the production. In addition, control of more and more theatres was passing to real estate operators and other nontheatrical people who were more concerned about sure profits than about artistic achievement. These investors demanded a steady income from their properties, and therefore were not interested in nursing along unprofitable works. Increasingly during the period, shows that had failed to garner good reviews and big box office advances were quickly closed down instead of being given a chance to develop an audience.

One further contributor to the pressure on producers was the growing prestige of the motion picture. During this period the first of the great Broadway movie palaces were constructed: the Strand, which opened on Broadway and Forty-seventh Street in 1914, and the Rialto, which replaced the Victoria at Seventh Avenue and Forty-second Street in 1916. Because of their immense size, these movie houses could charge a relatively low admission price and still afford to show a first-run motion picture with a live orchestra providing background music. This stiff competition

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occurring right in the heart of the theatre district, forced the legitimate producers to present more elaborate, and even "safer," shows.

As this inflationary spiral continued unabated, an inevitable reaction set in, particularly among those artists, writers, and intellectuals who believed that the American theatre should become less concerned with profit margins and more interested in artistic expression. It is probably no coincidence that in an era when the Broadway stage reached the height (or depth) of commercialism, of playing it safe and counting the profits, the noncommercial "little theatre" movement was born and quickly burgeoned in cities across the United States. In 1917, there were fifty such little theatre groups throughout the country; by 1922, the number had grown to between three and four hundred.[3] In New York, the three most important of these art theatres were the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Provincetown Playhouse, and the Washington Square Players, all founded in 1915. Although the purpose of the art theatres was to offer plays that were too esoteric or experimental for Broadway, and although they were organized along very different economic lines, the noncommercial theatres eventually proved to be a boon to the Broadway stage, for they discovered and helped to develop young playwrights, actors, designers, and directors who would later contribute important work to the commercial theatre.

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[3]Poggi, p. 107.

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During the spring of 1913, the American Theatre persisted in its policy of small-time vaudeville, while Hammerstein's Victoria continued to present the day's biggest variety headliners. That Willie Hammerstein was well aware of the growing popularity of movies was evidenced by his signing John Bunny, who had abandoned vaudeville a few years earlier to become the first great silent movie comedian, to return to the Victoria in January at a reported weekly salary of $1,000. A week later, the bill included a satirical sketch called "Movies" which was described as a travesty on motion picture theatres and photo plays. In early February, it was reported that negotiations were underway to convert the Victoria to a motion picture house, and to assign the Victoria's exclusive vaudeville franchise for the Times Square area to a new theatre to be built at Forty-seventh Street and Broadway. The location of the new theatre would place it in direct competition with the Palace, the elaborate vaudeville house scheduled to open at the end of March 1913.[4] Although the Victoria was not converted to a movie theatre for two more years, the fact that motion picture companies could enter serious negotiations for the property in 1913 gives an indication of the new medium's growing affluence.

At the Republic, David Belasco started off the spring season with A Good Little Devil, the last of his productions

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[4] "Bunny in Vaudeville," NYDM, 15 January 1913, p. 51; "Vaudeville Notes," NYDM, 22 January 1913, p. 17; "Pictures at Victoria," NYDM, 5 February 1913, p. 27.

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to have its premiere at the theatre. The star of A Good Little Devil was Mary Pickford, who had already launched her motion picture career. Audiences who had seen her in silent films were thrilled to hear "Little Mary" speak on the stage, and also enjoyed the performances of featured players Lillian Gish, Ernest Truex, and Norman Taurog. With this strong cast, the otherwise unmemorable fairy play was able to run for 152 performances.

Next door at the Lyric, the Shuberts' comedy All for the Ladies continued its run until April 1913. As summer approached, the Shuberts presented a revival of Augustus Thomas' play Arizona which ran for five weeks. Across the street at the New Amsterdam the first attraction of 1913 was the return of The Spring Maid, the musical that had played so successfully at the Liberty in 1911. In February, Klaw and Erlanger moved their hit musical Oh! Oh! Delphine from the Knickerbocker to the New Amsterdam, where it remained for three months. The New Amsterdam's roof theatre was again the scene of French drama when the Cercle Dramatique presented La Petite Chocolatiere for three evenings at the end of January.

During the spring of 1913, the Liberty continued to house the long run of Milestones that had begun the previous September. The British play closed in April after 217 performances. It was succeeded by The Purple Road, an operatic romance that ran at the Liberty for two months before being moved to the Casino. Clifton Webb appeared in two small roles in the production.

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The British actor John E. Kellerd brought his revival of Hamlet to the Harris Theatre in January 1913. Kellerd played the title role for 102 performances, breaking Edwin Booth's record of 100 performances. Kellerd also portrayed Shylock in The Merchant of Venice during his engagement at the Harris. In February, the theatre housed a moderately successful play called The Master Mind, whose run of 128 performances did not accumulate enough profits to keep its producers, Werba and Luescher, from going bankrupt several months later. At the Eltinge the long run of Within the Law persisted during the spring of 1913, encouraged by such publicity gimmicks as holding a special matinee for the blind.[5]

The summer of 1913 was the last outstanding season for the Victoria roof. The big headliner was once again Houdini, and among the other popular favorites were Ina Claire and Sophie Tucker. Toward the end of the summer, Willie Hammerstein pulled the last of his great publicity stunts. In 1906, millionaire Harry K. Thaw had murdered architect Stanford White in a fit of jealousy over White's affair with Thaw's wife, former chorus girl Evelyn Nesbit. At the subsequent trial, Thaw had been found insane and sent to an asylum in upstate Mattewan. For a while, the notoriety had made Nesbit a big hit in vaudeville, but by 1913 the public had tired of her and had turned its attention to other sensations. Willie, sensing the possibility

[5]Photograph from the New York Times, 18 May 1913, in the Within the Law Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

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of another box office bonanza if he could rekindle the public's interest in Nesbit, sent her to England where she found a partner and put together a dancing act. Willie concocted rave notices for her appearances and had his agents in England cable these fictional reviews to the theatrical newspapers in New York. By the time Nesbit returned to New York, there was a great deal of renewed interest in her, enough to warrant a two-week engagement at the Victoria. During Nesbit's second week on the bill, Thaw, who had vowed to kill her as soon as he was free, escaped from Mattewan and was reported to be in New York. Thaw's escape was just the publicity angle Willie Hammerstein needed. He hired a small army of guards to follow Nesbit everywhere, and when Thaw was discovered to be in Canada, Willie had a friend up there send a wire signed "H. K. T." which threatened Nesbit with death. As a result of Willie's machinations, Nesbit remained at the Victoria for eight weeks, during which the box office took in $175,000. Willie raised Nesbit's salary to $3,500 a week, and then sent her on an extended tour.[6]

While the summer season was still underway at the Victoria, Willie began to make plans to utilize the roof in the fall and winter. In July, he announced that the roof would henceforth be known as the "Bal Champetre." According to the account in the New York Times, Willie revealed that "the portion of the roof garden now used for the 'old farm'

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[6]The account of Nesbit's appearance at the Victoria is taken from Charles and Louise Samuels, Once Upon a Stage (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1974), pp. 243-245.

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will be covered with a glass dome, under which an orchestra will be located, and a dancing floor will be laid over the space now occupied by the stage and orchestra floor of the roof garden." The roof would have a special feature act each week and would open at 11:00 each evening.[7] This conversion of the roof was no doubt Willie's response to the ballroom dance mania then sweeping the country.

The other major event on the theatre block that summer was the first appearance of a Ziegfeld Follies at the New Amsterdam. Ziegfeld had begun his series of annual revues at the New York Theatre in 1907, but it was only after they were moved to the New Amsterdam in 1913 that the Follies began to develop the aura of glamor and sophistication that made them legendary. The 1913 edition, which opened on June 16, starred Leon Errol, Ann Pennington, and Frank Tinney. The Follies proved popular enough to attract audiences to the New Amsterdam for the rest of the summer.[8]

The 1913-14 season was the last year in which Willie Hammerstein booked the vaudeville bills at the Victoria. Among the headliners that season were Joe Cook, Eddie Foy, Mae West, the Three Keatons, Vernon and Irene Castle, John L. Sullivan, Grace Fields, Sophie Tucker, Fannie Brice, Mae Murray, and Blossom Seeley. As the year progressed, the Victoria received heavy competition from the Palace, which

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[7] "Bal Champetre on Roof," 21 July 1913, p. 7.

[8] Robert Baral, Revue: The Great Broadway Period (New York: Fleet Press, 1962), p. 51. Subsequent descriptions of the Follies are based on this source.

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was offering bills made up almost entirely of headliners. As a means of combatting this threat, the Hammersteins announced in December that the Victoria would change to a policy combining six reels of film with the vaudeville, and in May offered a bill of twenty-four acts, some of which were shown at the same time on different parts of the stage, like a three-ring circus.[9] By late spring, it was becoming more and more apparent that the Victoria could not hope to rival the Palace's elaborate setting and star-studded bills. Willie Hammerstein, who was busily seeking out new sensations for the summer roof season, fell ill at the end of May and was sent to a sanitarium for rest. He died on June 10, 1914, at the age of forty-two.[10] Broadway was stunned and the Victoria received a blow from which it would never recover.

The 1913-14 season was also the end of an era at the Republic. In late September, David Belasco moved his production of the comedy The Temperamental Journey from his new theatre to the Republic. It was the last Belasco production to play at the Forty-second Street theatre. In January, Belasco rented the Republic to the Universal Film Manufacturing Company for what was reportedly a brief period of motion pictures.[11] Oscar Hammerstein, who still owned the theatre,

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[9]"Pictures in Victoria," NYDM, 10 December 1913, p. 26; "Three-Ring Variety at Victoria," NYDM, 6 May 1914, p. 26.

[10]"Willie Hammerstein Rests," Variety, 5 June 1914, p. 7; "Willie Hammerstein Dies," Variety, 12 June 1914, p. 5.

[11]"Republic for Pictures," NYDM, 17 December 1913, p. 26.

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was unhappy with the arrangement, and immediately applied for an injunction restraining Belasco from renting the theatre to any film company. Hammerstein claimed that he had rented the theatre to Belasco at $25,000 a year, which was half of its real value. To make up for the low rent, Hammerstein received a commission on the theatre's gross receipts. However, since motion picture admission charges were so much lower than those of the legitimate stage, Hammerstein would receive little or nothing in the way of commission if the theatre were used for films. Hammerstein also argued that using the Republic for movies would have "a deteriorating effect on the theatre's reputation and value."[12] Belasco countered that Daniel Frohman had introduced films in his first-class houses without lowering the character of those theatres. The case dragged on through the courts until March, when the Appellate Division granted Hammerstein the injunction, not on the grounds of lower commissions or damage to the theatre's reputation, but because motion pictures posed an additional fire hazard to the theatre.[13] Movies remained at the Republic until the middle of April, but Belasco decided to surrender the theatre's lease to Hammerstein in March. Two weeks later, it was announced that A. H. Woods, owner of the Eltinge, had

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[12]"Hammerstein Sues to Oust Movies," New York Times, 15 January 1914, p. 9.

[13]"Argue Theatre Injunction," New York Times, 17 January 1914, p. 10; "Hammerstein Wins Injunction," New York Times, 7 March 1914, p. 13.

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leased the Republic and would reopen it as a legitimate theatre in early August.[14] Thus, David Belasco's twelve year tenure at the Republic, during which he had presented some of his most memorable and most characteristic productions, ended on a note of bitterness.

The Lyric Theatre housed no fewer than ten shows during the 1913-14 season. Among the more interesting productions were The Girl and the Pennant, a comedy co-authored by baseball star Christy Mathewson; Ourselves, an early effort of Rachel Crothers; High Jinks, a Rudolf Friml musical that starred Oscar Hammerstein's daughter Elaine; and a revival of Othello with William Faversham as Iago. None of the shows had a particularly long run at the Lyric (High Jinks, the only real success of the season, was moved to another theatre a month after it opened at the Lyric).

The New Amsterdam also looked in vain for a long run show. The season opened with the Victor Herbert operetta Sweethearts, which remained for two months before being moved to the Liberty. It was followed into the New Amsterdam by The Little Café, a musical that reunited the star and composer of The Pink Lady, Hazel Dawn and Ivan Caryll. The Little Café managed a modest run of four months. The spring season at the New Amsterdam featured an unsuccessful production of a Franz Lehar operetta called The Maid of Athens, and a continuation of the long run of Sari, an operetta that had opened at the

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[14] "Belasco Gives Up Republic," New York Times, 13 March 1914, p. 2; "Woods Leases Republic," New York Times, 29 March 1914, sec. 4, p. 5.

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Liberty in January. The 1913-14 season at the New Amsterdam thus provided two examples of the increasingly common practice of slavishly imitating a previous hit show: The Little Café was clearly designed to capitalize on the success of The Pink Lady, while The Maid of Athens was an attempt to duplicate the popularity of an earlier Lehar work, The Merry Widow.

At the Liberty, Klaw and Erlanger pursued the same policy that they had put into effect at the New Amsterdam. The 1913-14 season at the smaller theatre began with a revival of De Koven's Rob Roy, followed in October by a new De Koven operetta, Her Little Highness. The new show could muster only a two-week run, an embarrassment that seems to have motivated De Koven's decision to retire as a composer for the Broadway stage.[15] After the De Koven failure, Klaw and Erlanger quickly filled the Liberty with the production of Sweethearts that had opened at the New Amsterdam, and then followed it in January with Sari, an operetta that remained at the Liberty for three months before being transferred to the New Amsterdam. The Liberty's final production of the season was a revival of Lady Windemere's Fan starring Margaret Anglin that had opened at the Hudson at the end of March.

The Harris Theatre opened for the 1913-14 season under the management of the New Era Producing Company, an organization backed by millionaire William Ziegler and

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[15] Bordman, p. 290.

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directed by Joseph P. Bickerton, Jr.[16] The company's first production at the Harris was a comedy called The Love Leash that lasted for only two weeks. The failure of his first show forced Bickerton to rent the theatre to other firms while he planned a new production. In February, he presented The Rule of Three, a farce by Guy Bolton that managed a run of eighty-two performances, rounding out the Harris' season.

At the Eltinge, the fall season was taken up with the phenomenal run of Within the Law, which finally closed in January 1914 after 578 performances. The second show to be offered at the theatre was The Yellow Ticket, a white slavery melodrama starring Florence Reed and John Barrymore that ran for five months.

The season of 1913-14 ended with the opening of still another Forty-second Street theatre. In October 1913, it had been reported in the Dramatic Mirror that theatre architect Thomas Lamb had filed plans for a new motion picture house to be built on the sites of the old public school and circulating library on the south side of the block. According to the report, the theatre was to cost $75,000, would seat 999, and was to be leased by the Shuberts.[17] In December, the Dramatic Mirror reported that the theatre would belong to motion picture distributor George Kleine, would have a capacity of

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[16]"Ziegler Takes Harris Theatre," NYDM, 1 October 1913, p. 10.

[17]"New Theaters," 18 October 1913, p. 12.

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1,200, and would be a "photoplay theatre de luxe."[18] A February opening was planned, but delays postponed the date until May. In April it was announced that the theatre would be called the Candler, that the owners and lessees were theatrical producer Sam H. Harris, real estate man Sol Bloom, and George Kleine. Reports of the theatre's policy were contradictory: the New York Times announced that the house would be given over largely to motion pictures, while Variety reported that Cohan and Harris would book legitimate shows into the theatre beginning in the fall.[19]

The issue seemed to be settled when the theatre opened on May 7 with the motion picture Antony and Cleopatra, produced by the Societa Italiana and imported by George Kleine, who seems to have specialized in the distribution of European spectacle films.[20] Opening night spectators saw a movie that boasted a cast of close to 7,500 in a theatre that seemed to be ideally designed for motion pictures. The auditorium of the Candler was eighty-five feet wide and one hundred feet deep, seating 625 on the orchestra level and 575 in the single balcony. Like those of the New Amsterdam and the Liberty, the balcony of the Candler was constructed on the cantilever principle so that no obstructing poles were

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[18] "Kleine Theater Ready Soon," 17 December 1913, p. 29.

[19] "New Candler on 42nd St. Booked by Cohan and Harris," Variety, 24 April 1914, p. 11; "The Candler To Be Open Soon," New York Times, 22 April 1914, p. 15.

[20] Arthur Knight, The Liveliest Art (New York: Mentor, 1957), p. 34.

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necessary. The stage of the Candler was thirty-five feet deep and eighty-eight feet wide. There were two boxes on each side of the auditorium at the balcony level. A counterweight system for flying scenery was installed, a sure indication that one purpose of the theatre was to house legitimate productions. A projection booth designed and installed in the house provided an equally strong indication that motion pictures would be shown there.

The architectural period of the house was that of the Italian Renaissance, and Thomas Lamb made great use of that style's elegant lines and curves in its design. The two boxes on either side of the house were an extension of the curve of the balcony, while the lines of the shallow circular dome over the auditorium melted into the curve of the proscenium arch. The interior decorations were described in detail by the New York Times:

> The prevailing tone is mouse color [gray] and orange. Carpets and seats are in keeping with the general scheme, the latter with tapestry backs of twelve different designs, giving an unusual effect to the lower floor. An altogether new idea in lighting has been introduced. Instead of glass, a metalized material cut out in artistic design sheds a mellow light.
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> This feature is made noteworthy by the illuminated rosettes and clusters that shed their subdued effects from the ceiling, and further by brackets and sidelights of corresponding design. No glass bulbs are visible. Covering the arch which sweeps over the boxes are tapestried lunettes which are illuminated from the back. Generous promenades are provided on the lower floor as well as on the balcony.[21]

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[21]"The Candler Opens With a Fine Film," 8 May 1914, p. 13. The description of the Candler is based on this article and on "The Candler To Open Soon"; on photographs in Architecture and Building 46 (July 1914): 280-282; on

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Other elements of the Candler's decor suggest that Lamb might have been influenced by Herts and Tallant's design for the New Amsterdam. The wall of the lower promenade was covered by a mural eight feet high and thirty-five feet wide entitled "Fête Champêtre." The marble-covered vestibule had gold stencilling in its ceiling. After passing through a foyer, the spectator entered a tapestry hall in which were hung six tapestries depicting scenes from Shakespeare's plays (reminiscent of the Shakespeare and Wagner friezes in the New Amsterdam lobby). The lobby was ornamented with flower panels, carried out in the same Caen stone that was a feature of the New Amsterdam's decor.

Opening night audiences may have been impressed with the beautiful new theatre, but the opening feature did not prove to be a powerful draw. A week later, Variety reported that Antony and Cleopatra was doing poor business, and in its review of the movie commented that it was difficult to believe the film's claim that its cast numbered 7,500.[22] Kleine continued to operate the Candler as a motion picture theatre until July, when he was forced to admit that the film policy had not been successful. The Candler then closed for the rest of the summer while preparations were made for its debut as a legitimate house.

The 1913-14 season had witnessed an extension of the motion picture industry's relationship with Forty-second

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photographs in the Sam H. Harris Theatre Folder, MCNY; and on "Candler Theater Opens," NYDM, 13 May 1914, p. 33.

[22] "Candler Starting Slowly," "Film Reviews," 15 May 1914, pp. 21, 22.

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Street. In addition to the opening of the Candler as a motion picture theatre, the short-lived lease of the Republic by a film company, and the announcement that the Victoria would offer more films during its vaudeville bills, movie companies were making their presence felt on the theatre block as more and more of them located their offices there. For several years, the movie business had been dominated by a few large companies, the so-called Patents Trust, a monopoly that had operated in a manner similar to that of the Theatrical Syndicate. By 1912, however, independent filmmakers such as William Fox, Carl Laemmle, and Adolph Zukor had successfully challenged the power of the Trust.[23] Once the Trust's stranglehold on the industry had been loosened, dozens of small independent film companies sprouted up virtually overnight. The Candler Building became the home of several such firms, including the All Star Feature Corporation, the Canadian Bioscope Company, the Itala Film Company of America, and the Photo-play Productions Company. Next door to the Candler Building was located the headquarters of Atsco, Inc., an organization dealing in theatre curtains, screens, and motion picture equipment. Besides locating their offices on Forty-second Street, motion picture firms were anxious to acquire control of theatres in the Times Square area so that their films could have a prestigious opening before being released

[23] Thomas V. Bohn and Richard L. Stromgven, Lights and Shadows: A History of Motion Pictures (Port Washington, N.Y.: Alfred Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 25-30.

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across the country. This demand for first-class theatres resulted in the opening of the Strand Theatre, the first Times Square motion picture "palace," in April 1914.

As movie companies continued to offer high prices for dramatic properties, more and more theatrical producers signed contracts turning over their rights to hit plays and musicals. In February 1914, Henry Savage reached an agreement with Famous Players; the same article that announced his contract reported that William A. Brady and Klaw and Erlanger had already sold the rights to their productions to motion picture companies.[24] The All Star Feature Corporation went so far as to make playwright Augustus Thomas its Director General in order to gain the film rights to his lucrative plays. In March, Famous Players released the film version of The Good Little Devil, less than a year after the Belasco production had ended its run at the Republic. Motion pictures were beginning to devour legitimate productions almost as quickly as legitimate producers were able to create them, but blinded by the short-term profits to be made from the movies, few producers objected.

In the summer of 1914, Al Woods began his tenure at the Republic by again renting the theatre out to a film company. Apparently, Oscar Hammerstein had no further objections to the use of the theatre for movies after the new lease with Woods had been signed. One of the films to

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[24] "To Film Savage Plays," NYDM, 18 February 1914, p. 30.

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play the Republic in late May was Protect Us, described by the Dramatic Mirror as a "vice film," perhaps the earliest example of an objection to the content of a movie playing on Forty-second Street.[25] By June, when there was little chance of renting the theatre to a more prestigious client, the Republic was taken over by the Playgoers Film Company at a mere $750 weekly.[26] In a further attempt to squeeze a maximum profit out of the theatre, it was announced in July that during the fall movies would be shown at the Republic on Sundays, when the theatre would otherwise be dark.[27]

The Shuberts also allowed films to be shown at the Lyric during the summer of 1914. To camouflage the fact that they were risking the reputation of the theatre in order to increase their profits, the brothers announced that the first week's profits from the film Little Lord Fauntleroy would be donated to the Newsboys' Home Club.[28]

As the summer approached, the roof theatres on Forty-second Street once more became the center of attention. By early May, the first act had been booked for the Victoria Roof--a forty-five minute version of Darktown Follies, the Black musical that had earlier premiered at the Lafayette

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[25] "Vice Film Injunction," 29 May 1914, p. 18.

[26] "Republic Rented Cheap," NYDM, 19 June 1914, p. 18.

[27] "Republic's 'Sundays'," NYDM, 3 July 1914, p. 19.

[28] "Republic Rented Cheap."

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Theatre. Once Willie Hammerstein's health had deteriorated, the management of the roof fell to Loney Haskell, a long-time Hammerstein employee. One of the acts signed by Haskell for the roof was "Delita Del Oro and Her Six Cows."[29] The choice of an act featuring farm animals was ironic, since the roof's permanent farm had been demolished in order to make room for the large cement dance floor that Willie had announced the previous summer. When the Victoria Roof opened on June 1, the feature attractions were "The Temptation of Adam and Eve," starring Emile Agoust and Simone de Beryl, and The Darktown Follies of 1914. There were fourteen additional acts, including Fannie Brice.[30] The roof season had barely begun when Willie Hammerstein died. It was immediately announced that the Victoria and the roof would henceforth be run by Arthur Hammerstein with assistance from Loney Haskell.[31] Almost from the start the new managers ran into difficulties. The dancing on the roof was discontinued just a few weeks after it had begun, with no explanation given. By early July, the difference between Willie Hammerstein's flamboyant style of management and the quieter approach of his brother was noted by Variety. Arthur did not believe in the "freak" act that had been the theatre's trademark during Willie's reign. Instead, he opted for "a

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[29] "Roof's Summer Season," NYDM, 6 May 1914, p. 20; "Bovine Stars at Victoria," NYDM, 13 May 1914, p. 9.

[30] "Victoria Roof Opens," New York Times, 2 June 1914, p. 4.

[31] "To Manage Victoria," NYDM, 24 June 1914, p. 20.

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long, well-balanced, swift-running program that will stamp Hammerstein's as always the place for a good show . . . ."[32] Arthur put his philosophy into practice by turning down acts featuring Mrs. Lefty Louie and Mrs. Gyp the Blood, the wives of two of the more notorious gangsters of the era.

Despite Arthur's noble sentiments (or perhaps because of them) the roof did not thrive during the summer of 1914. On August 16, it was closed in order to begin renovations that would prepare it for a new use: dance-skating. Oscar Hammerstein apparently believed that New Yorkers were tiring of the ballroom dance craze and would be ripe for a new fad. His plan was to enclose the Republic roof with glass and steel and to provide an artificial ice pond on which couples could skate to music. On the Victoria roof there would be a conventional dance floor and floor vaudeville acts.[33]

While the Victoria roof was experiencing difficulties during the summer of 1914, the New Amsterdam was prospering, thanks to the imagination and flair of Florenz Ziegfeld. The 1914 edition of the Follies opened on June 1 with a cast that included Ed Wynn, Ann Pennington, and Bert Williams. Not content with offering a first-class attraction in the main theatre, Ziegfeld announced that the New Amsterdam's roof would be open for the summer as the "Danse

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[32]"Hammerstein's Reversal of Form Most Noticeable," Variety, 3 July 1914, p. 5.

[33]"Skating on Republic Roof," New York Times, 6 August 1914, p. 8.

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de Follies," The roof would feature a 22,000 square foot dance floor, a ladies' bar, an East Indian lounge, and a French bar.[34] For the next several years, Ziegfeld would operate the New Amsterdam's roof as well as the downstairs theatre.

The competition from the New Amsterdam was just one of several problems that faced Oscar Hammerstein in the summer and fall. During 1914, three of Oscar's sons died, and he became estranged from his daughters over his failure to make support payments to them as provided in the divorce agreement with his second wife. Oscar spent a great deal of time in the courts straightening out the tangled claims of ownership in the Victoria, and was even forced to sue his son Arthur as a director of the Hammerstein Amusement Company. When the dust had settled, Oscar was once again in possession of the Victoria's lease, but it is impossible to say what damage this extensive litigation did to his family relationships.[35] Undaunted by his personal difficulties, Oscar immediately announced that the Victoria would close on April 1, 1915, after which it would be extensively altered with an office building and stores to be erected on part of the site.[36]

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[34] "Cabarets," Variety, 29 May 1914, p. 16.

[35] "Hammerstein Wins Suit," New York Times, 23 October 1914, p. 13; "Victoria's Sale Fought," New York Times, 22 November 1914, sec. 3, p. 3; "Victoria Theatre Lease," New York Times, 29 November 1914, sec 3, p. 4.

[36] "Plan New Theatres Near Times Square," New York Times, 3 December 1914, p. 16.

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In the spring of 1915, Oscar Hammerstein fell ill and his affairs were put in the hands of a receiver for a time. Plans to renovate the Victoria and lease it to an outside firm were formalized, and there was much speculation along Broadway about the identity of the future owners. It was reported that the Shuberts were among the bidders for the lease. The price asked by Hammerstein was reported to be $125,000 a year for the entire building or $75,000 for the theatre alone. While negotiations were still taking place, the Victoria's last season came to an end. The week of April 26 had been proclaimed "Willie Hammerstein Week," and the Victoria's entire bill was made up of acts that had been Willie's personal favorites. The last performance took place on Sunday, May 2; on the following day, workmen began the alterations by ripping out the seats.[37]

The colorful history of Hammerstein's Victoria, considered by many to have been the greatest of all vaudeville houses, thus drew to a close. Under the leadership of Willie Hammerstein, the Victoria had become the most profitable variety house in America. According to Joe Laurie, Jr. and Abel Green, the Victoria grossed over $20 million in its seventeen-year existence, resulting in a clear profit of $5 million for the Hammersteins.[38] In

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[37] "Receiver Named for Hammerstein," New York Times, 31 March 1915, p. 11; "$120,000 for Hammerstein's," Variety, 30 April 1915, p. 5; "Bills Next Week," Variety, 23 April 1915, p. 14; "Hammerstein's Finish," Variety, 7 May 1915, p. 5.

[38] Show Biz, p. 17.

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addition to the profits, the Victoria left behind a legacy of fond memories for the performers who appeared there. Buster Keaton remembered the Victoria as "America's greatest vaudeville theatre. That grand old showcase . . . was in its day everything--and perhaps a little more--than the Palace became later. Any old-timer will tell you, Hammerstein's Victoria was vaudeville at its all-time best." George Jessel termed the Victoria "the most glamorous vaudeville theatre in all the world," while Will Rogers recalled it as "the greatest vaudeville theatre of that and all time."[39]

Other theatres on West Forty-second Street experienced changes during the 1914-15 season. The Republic began its first year under the management of Al Woods with The High Cost of Loving, a comedy starring Lew Fields. It ran until November, when it was replaced by Kick In, a melodrama starring John Barrymore that had premiered at the Longacre. Kick In remained at the Republic until April, after which John Cort presented a play called The Natural Law to complete the theatre's season.

The early fall of 1914 was not a profitable time for the Lyric, where three plays quickly failed before The Only Girl was moved to the theatre in mid-November. Produced by Joe Weber, with music by Victor Herbert, The Only Girl ran at the Lyric until June 1915. Since the Shuberts had no

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[39]Keaton, p. 68; George Jessel, So Help Me (New York: Random House, 1943), p. 17; Autobiography of Will Rogers, p. 31.

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shows lined up to succeed The Only Girl, they announced in March that they were offering the Lyric for rent, and had asked some managers of popular-priced vaudeville to submit propositions.[40] Although the Lyric remained in their possession, in succeeding years the Shuberts became less interested in running the house themselves, preferring to rent it out either to legitimate producers or to motion picture firms.

The autumn of 1914 was a troublesome time for the New Amsterdam, which had great difficulty in following up the success of the Ziegfeld Follies with its winter productions. Its first two shows were failures, and it was not until December that the theatre housed a hit. Watch Your Step, a revue produced by Charles Dillingham, featured Irving Berlin's first full score for Broadway and the dancing of Vernon and Irene Castle, then at the height of their popularity. The show remained at the New Amsterdam for the rest of the season.

On January 5, 1915, Florenz Ziegfeld opened a new show on the New Amsterdam roof. The Midnight Frolic, as its name implied, was presented after the show in the main theatre had finished its evening performance. In a cabaret setting, patrons were able to enjoy liquid refreshments while watching a more modest version of the Ziegfeld Follies. Ziegfeld made frequent changes in the Frolics bills, often using the show as a try-out for new performers. Will Rogers

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[40] "Lyric for Rent?," Variety, 15 March 1915, p. 3.

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and Eddie Cantor were two of the many future Follies stars whom Ziegfeld introduced in the Frolics. In order to pay for the expense of producing the roof show, Ziegfeld introduced a $3 cover charge, a high price for the period. In spite of the cover, the roof did excellent business, and the Frolics ran more or less continuously until 1922, when Prohibition succeeded in killing off the cabarets in New York.[41]

At the Liberty, the fall also got off to a slow start with He Comes Up Smiling, a comedy produced by Al Woods. In November, Mrs. Patrick Campbell's production of Pygmalion was moved by Liebler and Company to the Liberty, where it played for two weeks. The Lieblers then presented the first American appearance of Phyllis Neilson-Terry in a revival of Twelfth Night. At the end of 1914, Charles Frohman brought Otis Skinner and his wife to the Liberty in The Silent Voice, a drama that attracted audiences for three months.

In March, the Liberty was rented by D. W. Griffith for the New York premiere of his most elaborate film to date, The Birth of a Nation. Griffith rented the theatre at $1,250 a week and spent $12,000 for advertising in the first week. With admissions ranging from 25¢ to $2.00, and with two performances daily, the movie brought in $14,000 during its first week. In contrast, roughly the same

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[41] Baral, pp. 53-55; "'Midnight Frolics' a Draw," Variety, 9 January 1915, p. 7.

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amount in total receipts was collected at the larger New Amsterdam Theatre for Watch Your Step, a legitimate show. The Birth of a Nation received generous praise from the reviewers and remained at the Liberty for ten months.[42]

Like the Lyric, the New Amsterdam, and the Liberty, the Harris began the 1914-15 season with a succession of flops before offering The Lie, a Henry Arthur Jones play starring Margaret Illington. The Lie opened in November and stayed at the Harris for 176 performances. In September 1914, the Harris Theatre was leased by Selwyn and Company, a producing firm that was beginning to have an impact on the theatre block.[43] The firm had begun as a company of play-brokers under the leadership of actor/playwright Edgar Selwyn and his brother Archie. Crosby Gaige was a vice-president of the concern. Selwyn and Company had its first great success as theatrical producers when they bought out William A. Brady's interest in Within the Law for $25,000 before the play came to New York. Under the name of The American Play Company, the Selwyns and their associates, who included playwrights Margaret Mayo (married to Edgar Selwyn), Avery Hopwood, James Forbes, Bayard Veiller, and

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[42]Advertisement for The Birth of a Nation, Variety, 5 March 1915, p. 27; "Griffith's $2 Feature Film Sensation of Picture Trade," Variety, 12 March 1915, p. 31; "'The Birth of a Nation' Summit of Picture Art," NYDM, 10 March 1915, p. 28; "Box Office Returns for N.Y. Shows are Affected by Lent," Variety, 12 March 1915, p. 11.

[43]"Selwyns Get the Harris," NYDM, 30 September 1914, p. 9.

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Eugene Walter, prepared the play for its Broadway debut at the Eltinge Theatre in 1914.[44] The success of Within the Law was the beginning of the Selwyns' rapid rise to the top rank of Broadway producers. It is therefore not surprising that by 1914 the Selwyns were ready to become important theatre owners as well as producers.

At the Eltinge, the 1914-15 season saw the production of two moderately successful plays. Innocent, which opened in September, was a play by George Broadhurst that starred Pauline Frederick. In December it was succeeded by The Song of Songs, a drama which Edward Sheldon had based on a novel by Sudermann. It remained at the Eltinge for the rest of the season.

The Candler housed its first legitimate production during the 1914-15 season. On Trial, an early effort by Elmer Reizenstein (later shortened to Elmer Rice), made effective use of the flash-back technique first developed in films. The melodrama proved a popular success, lasting for 365 performances.

The 1914-15 season had proven to be a terrible year for Broadway. The Dramatic Mirror described it as "The most disastrous in the history of the theatre in this country,"[45] and blamed it on the business depression and the war. Liebler and Company failed, Charles Frohman died on

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[44]Crosby Gaige, Footlights and Highlights (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1948), p. 99.

[45]"Season's Record of Productions," 16 June 1915, p. 9.

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the Lusitania, and the only producers who had made a profit were Selwyn and Company, Cohan and Harris, and Charles Dillingham, all of whom, coincidentally, had presented hit shows in Forty-second Street theatres. Paradoxically, the same season that was so disastrous for commercial producers saw the beginnings of the most important noncommercial theatres in New York. In February 1915, the Washington Square Players rented the Bandbox Theatre for a series of one-act plays. In the same month, the Neighborhood Playhouse opened on Grand Street with a dance-drama called Jephthah's Daughter. A total of six productions were presented at the Neighborhood Playhouse during the spring of 1915. That summer, the third noncommercial company got started when a group of artists and intellectuals who were summering in Provincetown, Massachusetts joined together to present some one-act plays. The Provincetown company did not actually begin producing plays in New York until the fall of 1916.

The formulas were very much in evidence on Forty-second Street during the summer of 1915. At the New Amsterdam, the annual edition of the Ziegfeld Follies got underway on June 21 with W. C. Fields, Ed Wynn, Bert Williams, Ann Pennington, and Ina Claire the featured performers. This was the first Follies to have sets designed by Joseph Urban, who had begun his association with the producer by designing scenery for Ziegfeld's Midnight Frolic.

At the Harris, the vogue for bedroom farces continued during the summer of 1915 with the production of Twin Beds, a

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comedy co-authored and staged by Margaret Mayo. Spectators with a taste for more stirring fare could still see the film, The Birth of a Nation, at the Liberty. For the first time in many summers, there was no vaudeville on the roof of the Victoria. During the late spring and early summer, the plans for Hammerstein's new theatre had been gradually made public. In May it was announced that a group of Wall Street men headed by Felix Kahn and Crawford Livingston would lease the Victoria for films. A week later it was revealed that S. F. Rothapfel (later spelled Rothafel, or shortened to Roxy), then manager of the Strand, would run the new theatre. By the following week, the terms of the lease were made known: the new house, to be known as the Rialto, would be leased for $85,000 a year. The stores to be added to the building during the remodeling would be leased for an additional $45,000 a year. After paying the ground rent of $60,000, the Hammersteins would collect an annual net profit of $70,000. In addition, the new owners agreed to build a new vaudeville theatre in the Times Square area so that the Hammersteins could use the exclusive vaudeville franchise that they had been awarded by the United Booking Office.[46] With all of the financial details settled, the renovation of the Victoria began in earnest. It was soon discovered that instead of renovating the existing theatre, a

[46]"New Hammerstein House Possible in Times Square," Variety, 14 May 1915, p. 5; "Speculating on Hammerstein Site," Variety, 21 May 1915, p. 3; "Hammerstein's Net Profit," Variety, 28 May 1915, p. 6. As far as I have been able to discover, the new vaudeville theatre was never built.

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completely new building had to be constructed. Because of changes in the building and fire laws (and no doubt because of Oscar Hammerstein's short cuts in erecting the original theatre), the Building Department had condemned the Victoria's walls.[47] Thus, the Rialto Theatre, often referred to as a renovation of the Victoria, was actually a completely new building.

The 1915-16 season was a mixed one for the Forty-second Street theatres. Some houses found profitable attractions while others were unable to produce a hit. At the Republic the season began at the end of August with Common Clay, a Harvard Prize Play by Cleves Kinkead that starred Jane Cowl. Produced by Al Woods, Common Clay remained at the Republic for 316 performances.

At the Lyric the first production of the season was The Girl Who Smiles, a French musical comedy that remained at the theatre for only three weeks before being moved to the Longacre. In late September, another French musical was presented at the Lyric, but it lasted for only four weeks. On October 21, the theatre housed Abe and Mawruss, a comedy starring Sam Bernard and Julius Tannen that proved to be a popular favorite. In January, the title of the show was changed to Potash and Perlmutter in Society. When its run ended in April, the season at the Lyric was rounded out with Katinka, a Rudolf Friml operetta that had opened at the Forty-fourth Street Theatre in December.

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[47]Unidentified clipping dated 14 August 1915, Victoria Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

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The New Amsterdam again had difficulty in matching the success of its summer offering during the 1915-16 season. In the fall it was occupied by Moloch, an unsuccessful drama starring Holbrook Blinn and Around the Map, a moderately successful musical revue. On January 31, Elsie Ferguson appeared there in a Hall Caine drama entitled Margaret Schiller, which was moved on March 13 in order to make room for a two-month engagement by the distinguished British actor-manager Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Sir Herbert appeared as Cardinal Wolsey in King Henry VIII, as Shylock in The Merchant of Venice, and as Falstaff in The Merry Wives of Windsor.

At the Liberty the run of The Birth of a Nation lasted through the fall. In January, the theatre housed Sybil, a musical importation that starred Julia Sanderson, Donald Brian, and Joseph Cawthorn. It ran for 168 performances. The 1915-16 season had a promising beginning at the Harris with the production of Rolling Stones, a "melodramatic comedy" written and staged by Edgar Selwyn. After 115 performances Rolling Stones departed, to be replaced by an Arthur Hopkins production called The Devil's Garden, which ran for four weeks. For the rest of the season, the Harris housed productions that had premiered at other theatres: an Avery Hopwood farce called Sadie Love and a George M. Cohan farce entitled Hit-the-Trail-Holiday.

The Eltinge experienced the first failure of its three-year existence with See My Lawyer, which opened on September 2 and closed after twelve performances. In

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November, the Eltinge once more became a house of hits when it presented Fair and Warmer, an Avery Hopwood farce produced by the Selwyns. Described in the program as "a play of Temperature and Temperament," Fair and Warmer stayed at the Eltinge for the rest of the season, then moved to the Harris in July, where it ended its run after 377 performances.[48] According to Crosby Gaige, Al Woods paid for the Eltinge out of his share of the profits from Within the Law, and could have paid for it a second time with his share of the Fair and Warmer receipts.[49]

The Candler began its second season as a legitimate theatre in September 1915 with The House of Glass, a play produced by Cohan and Harris that ran for seven months. The House of Glass had a crook as its protagonist, a device that had been frequently used after it had proved to be successful in Within the Law. Buoyed by their success as producers, Cohan and Harris completed negotiations to buy out the interests of George Kleine and Sol Bloom in the Candler, and then arranged to have their offices moved to the top floor of the theatre.[50] In April, the Candler housed John Galsworthy's play Justice, which gave John Barrymore his first major dramatic role. No doubt due to Barrymore's fine performance, Justice ran for three months at the Candler and

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[48] "Fair and Warmer," NYDM, 13 November 1915, p. 8.

[49] Gaige, p. 99.

[50] "Harris to Buy Interests in Candler," New York Times, 25 March 1916, p. 11.

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provided a higher standard for serious drama than was normally seen on Broadway.

In the spring of 1916, the Rialto was nearing completion. In April, Oscar Hammerstein tried to gain access to the third floor offices in the Rialto that he claimed were promised to him by Rothapfel. Rothapfel had Hammerstein kept out of the building, ostensibly because he was afraid that the old man would make a speech to the workmen and thereby delay construction. Hammerstein went to court and obtained summonses against Rothapfel and the building's superintendent, and then took matters into his own hands by climbing the building's fire escape. An argument ensued, and Hammerstein was dragged off to a police station by a patrolman. Rothapfel continued to bar Hammerstein from the building even after the theatre opened. When Hammerstein took the theatre manager to court, the magistrate ruled that since the original memorandum about Hammerstein's offices had not been signed by either party, it was not binding. This humiliating episode ended with Oscar Hammerstein being banned from the property he had so courageously leased and developed seventeen years before. He died in 1919.[51]

The Rialto opened on April 21, 1916, and was hailed as the most up-to-date movie theatre yet seen.

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[51] "Hammerstein Fears Harm," New York Times, 4 April 1916, p. 24; "Oscar in Three Reels," New York Times, 5 April 1916, p. 24; "Hammerstein Arming," New York Times, 6 April 1916, p. 21; "Court Aids Hammerstein," New York Times, 3 May 1916, p. 11; "Hammerstein Still Exiled," New York Times, 5 May 1916, p. 9.

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Rothapfel dubbed his new house a "Temple of the Motion Picture" and decorated it with the same care and taste as Belasco, Klaw and Erlanger, and others had used in their legitimate theatres. The Rialto's most striking feature was the complete absence of a stage, which emphasized that it was to be used exclusively for films. At the front of the auditorium was a colonnade with three outdoor murals set in between the columns. The murals could be hidden by red curtains when necessary. This area was designed to serve as a background for the soloists who would appear as part of each program. A screen could be lowered in front of the colonnade area when the film was to be shown. The auditorium, which consisted of an orchestra, a balcony, and some loges at the lower edge of the balcony, seated 2,000. The ceiling and walls were done in shades of cream and ivory that deepened as they descended toward the floor. The carpets and upholstery were red. On the mezzanine level there were writing desks, a lounge, a cloak room, and a ladies' retiring room. The lighting system in the auditorium, hidden behind cornices, consisted of cycles of red, blue, green, and amber lamps that could be changed to suit the mood of the film. According to the publicity at the opening, the Rialto's orchestra, the largest in New York outside of the Metropolitan Opera, would alternate with a $60,000 organ and a men's choir in providing accompaniment to the film. The Rialto's staff of 100 was dressed in military uniforms complete with swagger sticks. The ushers were reportedly trained in first aid techniques (the swagger sticks were to be used in making

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tourniquets).[52]

The opening film at the Rialto was The Good Bad Man starring Douglas Fairbanks. It was fitting that Forty-second Street's first major motion picture theatre should feature at its opening a film starring an actor who had appeared several times in legitimate productions on the theatre block.

As the summer of 1916 began, the theatres on Forty-second Street shared in the general prosperity of the Broadway stage. Three of the most prosperous Broadway producing firms controlled playhouses on the block: Klaw and Erlanger, Cohan and Harris, and Selwyn and Company. In addition, such successful independent producers as Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr. and A. H. Woods were active on Forty-second Street. The economic impact of the legitimate theatre on New York had become formidable, and in 1916 the city passed zoning laws that kept the garment trades out of the theatre district and that granted the Times Square area a special dispensation in the size and brilliance of its outdoor lighting displays.[53] If the denizens of the theatre block

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[52] The description of the Rialto is based on: "Rothapfel's Rialto Ready," NYDM, 22 April 1916, p. 34; "Rialto Theatre Opens Its Doors," New York Times, 22 April 1916, p. 4; "The Rialto--A Theatre Without a Stage," The Theatre 23 (May 1916): 282; "The Rialto Theatre a Gorgeous Playhouse," New York Dramatic News, 28 April 1916, in the Victoria Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; and "The Rialto--Temple of the Motion Picture," pamphlet in the Rialto Theatre Folder, MCNY.

[53] Henderson, p. 184; W. G. Rogers and Mildred Weston, Carnival Crossroads: The Story of Times Square (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 93.

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were conscious of the inroads made by motion pictures over the past few years, they did not seem unduly disturbed. In the summer of 1916, the superiority of the legitimate theatre over the motion picture was an unassailable doctrine, at least to those connected with the theatre.

As the summer progressed, the New Amsterdam housed another edition of the Follies, this time featuring Fannie Brice, Will Rogers, Bert Williams, W. C. Fields, Ann Pennington, and Ina Claire. Marion Davies was one of the "Ziegfeld Girls" in this edition. The Follies' backstage team included Joseph Urban (sets), Lucille, Lady Duff Gordon (costumes), Jerome Kern (music), and Ned Wayburn (staging). The New Amsterdam itself, now almost thirteen years old, was reappraised by a columnist for The Theatre who declared that "it still deserves the distinctive title conferred upon it at the opening--the House Beautiful . . . . The house is as fresh and beautiful to-day as when it was first thrown open to the public."[54] The exquisite New Amsterdam seems to have been the ideal environment for the Ziegfeld Follies. Other than the Follies, there was little legitimate theatre activity on the theatre block during the summer of 1916 (The Birth of a Nation had returned to the Liberty for an extension of its long run).

The 1916-17 season got underway at the Republic with the production of His Bridal Night, a farce by Lawrence Rising that had been revised and elaborated by

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[54]"The House Beautiful," 23 (March 1916): 122.

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Margaret Mayo as a vehicle for the Dolly Sisters. At the end of October, the Republic housed Good Gracious Annabelle, a comedy by Clare Kummer that was later chosen by Burns Mantle as the best play of that season.[55] Annabelle remained at the Republic for 111 performances. In February, it was succeeded by Lilac Time, "a play of love and springtime" written by Jane Cowl (who starred in it) and Jane Murfin.[56] Produced by the Selwyns, this war play ran for three months. The final production of the season at the Republic was Peter Ibbetson, a dramatization of Gerald Du Maurier's novel that starred John and Lionel Barrymore and Constance Collier. It ran from April 17 through mid-June.

The Lyric began its season in August with a two-week return engagement of Katinka. It was followed on September 4 by The Flame, a play by Richard Walton Tully that remained at the theatre until October 9 when it moved to the Forty-fourth Street Theatre. Thereafter, the Lyric was devoted to films until April 30 when Her Soldier Boy, a Sigmund Romberg musical, was moved to the theatre. It remained at the Lyric until May 14.

The New Amsterdam broke its habit of following the Ziegfeld Follies with a failure when Klaw and Erlanger presented Miss Springtime on September 25. A musical comedy by Emmerich Kalman, with lyrics by P. G. Wodehouse

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[55] The Best Plays of 1909-1919, p. 281.

[56] "Lilac Time," NYDM, 17 February 1917, p. 7.

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(working on his first American show), Miss Springtime chalked up a run of 224 performances. In April, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree returned to the New Amsterdam, this time in Colonel Newcome, a play based on a Thackeray novel. After four weeks the Tree production gave way to a "military opera" called When Johnny Comes Marching Home which remained at the New Amsterdam until the new edition of the Follies was ready.

On September 5, the Liberty presented a second D. W. Griffith film that was destined to become a classic. Intolerance, Griffith's answer to criticisms that The Birth of a Nation was racist, remained at the Liberty for the rest of the autumn. In January, the theatre housed a legitimate production, Have a Heart, a Bolton-Wodehouse-Kern musical produced by Henry W. Savage. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Coburn rented the Liberty in mid-March to present a revival of Molière's The Imaginary Invalid for one week before resuming their performances in The Yellow Jacket, a production that had opened at the Cort Theatre in November. The last play of the season at the Liberty was Bosom Friends, a comedy starring Lew Fields.

At the Harris, the season began with Under Sentence, a play by Roi Cooper Megrue and Irvin S. Cobb. Featured in the cast were future movie actors Edward G. Robinson, Thomas Mitchell, and Frank Morgan. It was succeeded in November by Our Little Wife, an Avery Hopwood play starring Margaret Illington. The Harris then housed the Coburns' revival of The Yellow Jacket for three months beginning at

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Christmas. In early March, Oliver Morosco presented a comedy called The Brat at the Harris. Written by, and starring Maud Fulton, The Brat lasted for 136 performances.

The Eltinge's season got an early start on August 9 with Al Woods' production of Cheating Cheaters, a comic melodrama about two gangs of thieves planning to rob one another that remained at the theatre for the entire season. Curiously, an Application to Alter the Eltinge had been filed with the Buildings Department just five days after Cheating Cheaters opened. The change described in the application was the removal of the back wall of the theatre so that the depth of the stage could be increased by six feet. It would seem unlikely that the alterations would have taken place during the run of the play, and there is no further evidence to show whether the change was ever actually carried out.[57]

As the 1916-17 season began, the New York Times reported that the Candler Theatre, renamed the Cohan and Harris, would be the only house under the full direction of the producing partners.[58] The new name did not herald a prosperous season, however. The theatre's first two productions lasted barely a month each. The third show, Captain Kidd, Jr., had a moderately successful run of 128 performances. During the Christmas season two special

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[57] Application to Alter Eltinge Theatre, filed with the New York City Department of Buildings, August 14, 1916.

[58] "Candler Theatre is Renamed," 4 August 1916, p. 18.

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matinees were scheduled during which Editha's Burglar, a dramatization of a Frances Hodgson Burnett story, was presented together with two other one-act plays. In early March, Cohan and Harris produced The Willow Tree at their theatre. This fantasy of Japan written by H. J. Benrimo and Harrison Rhodes, and starring Fay Bainter, managed a run of 103 performances.

During the spring of 1917, the Selwyns announced plans to build a theatre on West Forty-third Street that would have its main entrance on Forty-second Street. The plot of land that they had obtained was then occupied by several old rooming houses that had once catered to a theatrical clientele. On this plot was to be built, at a cost of $500,000, a theatre seating 1,000. One of the novelties to be introduced in the theatre was a rehearsal room with a small stage where young actors could be auditioned and trained.[59] The theatre was begun almost immediately and was projected to open in the fall of 1917. Once the United States entered the war, however, construction delays postponed the opening until 1918.

Over the summer of 1917, as construction on the new theatre proceeded, Sol Bloom, a real estate agent who specialized in theatrical properties, obtained control of several plots of land on the same block and came to Crosby Gaige with a proposition for Selwyn and Company. Sperry

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[59] "New Theatre for 43d St.," New York Times, 13 January 1917, p. 9.

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and Hutchinson, the owners of the property, had agreed to build two theatres on the land and then lease them to the Selwyns at $75,000 a year if the Selwyns would pay one year's rent in advance and in cash. Bloom brought in Aaron Naumberg to pay the rent in return for a 25% interest in the enterprise. This proposition was agreed to by the Selwyns.[60]

While these new theatres were in the planning stages, the summer season on Forty-second Street meant that another edition of the Ziegfeld Follies would appear at the New Amsterdam. Besides the return of Will Rogers, W. C. Fields, Bert Williams, and Fannie Brice, the 1917 edition boasted Eddie Cantor in its cast, and some of its music was by Victor Herbert. As usual, it ran through the summer. This year, the Follies had competition on Forty-second Street. Hitchy-Koo, a revue produced by, and starring Raymond Hitchcock, opened at the Cohan and Harris on June 7 and ran for 220 performances, doubling the record of the 1917 Follies. In addition to Hitchcock, the cast featured Irene Bordoni and Leon Errol. At the end of August, Hitchy-Koo was moved to the Liberty Theatre.

Before the summer revue season had ended, several of the Forty-second Street theatres has already opened for the fall. The Republic opened in early September with a continuation of the run of Peter Ibbetson, which left at the end of October when On With the Dance, a play by Michael Morton,

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[60] Gaige, pp. 121-122.

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opened for a seven-week run. It was followed by Blind Youth, a play produced, directed, co-authored by, and starring Lou Tellegen, once Sarah Bernhardt's leading man. After three weeks, it was moved to make room for Parlor, Bedroom and Bath, a typical Al Woods-produced farce that ran for the rest of the season.

The Lyric's season was launched with The Inner Man, a play starring Wilton Lackaye. After three weeks, it was moved to another theatre and replaced by The Masquerader, a play based on a popular novel. Between October and mid-March the Lyric was a film house featuring such movies as Cleopatra, Les Miserables, and Over the Top. On March 18, the Lyric returned to the legitimate fold with Getting Together, a play by Ian Hay, J. Hartley Manners, and Percival Knight. Despite a distinguished cast headed by Blanche Bates and Holbrook Blinn, Getting Together ran for only one week, after which the Lyric returned to films for the rest of the season.

At the conclusion of the Follies run, the New Amsterdam began the 1917-18 season with The Riviera Girl, an Emmerich Kalman operetta with interpolated songs by Jerome Kern and a setting by Joseph Urban. When it ended its run in late December, it was succeeded by The Cohan Revue of 1918, "a hit and run play batted out by George M. Cohan."[61] Cohan's topical humor and lively musical numbers amused audiences for ninety-six performances. The last

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[61]The subtitle is quoted in The Best Plays of 1909-1919, p. 619.

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production of the season at the New Amsterdam was The Rainbow Girl (not to be confused with The Riviera Girl of the previous season), an innocuous musical that kept audiences entertained until the Follies returned to the New Amsterdam in June.

The Liberty briefly hosted Hitchy-Koo after it left the Cohan and Harris, and then in September housed the production of Out There starring Laurette Taylor and Lynn Fontanne that had opened at the Globe Theatre in the spring. Written by J. Hartley Manners, Out There proved to be a durable vehicle. After its New York engagements, it was sent on the road with an all-star cast that included Mrs. Fiske, George Arliss, Laurette Taylor, George M. Cohan, Chauncey Olcott, Julia Arthur, James K. Hackett, and De Wolf Hopper. The tour raised $683,632 for the Red Cross.[62] In November, the Liberty was the home of another J. Hartley Manners play, The Wooing of Eve, starring Laurette Taylor, with Lynn Fontanne in a supporting role. In early December, Eve was replaced by The Grass Widow, a musical that managed a total run of six weeks, three of them at the Liberty. On Christmas Day, a much more successful musical was produced at the Liberty by Cohan and Harris. Going Up, with music by Louis Hirsch and book and lyrics by Otto Hauerbach, ran for 351 performances. Its cast included Frank Craven, Ruth Donnelly, and Donald Meek.

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[62]Atkinson, p. 38.

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The 1917-18 season was a year of mediocre productions at the Harris. Jane Cowl co-authored and staged Daybreak, but without her presence in the cast, the play could muster a run of only 71 performances. It was followed in October by Romance and Arabella, a Laura Hope Crews vehicle that featured Alfred Lunt in his Broadway debut. (This meant that for about a week during the fall of 1917, Lunt and Fontanne were playing in theatres just a few yards away from one another on the south side of Forty-second Street, but they were not destined to meet one another for two more years). A mediocre farce called Losing Eloise opened at the Harris in mid-November. After four weeks, its name was changed to The Naughty Wife but even the racier title could extend its run only until the end of January. Two other forgettable plays--Success and Her Country--rounded out the Harris' season.

The Eltinge continued its string of hit shows with Business Before Pleasure, another "Potash and Perlmutter" comedy which ran for 357 performances. This time around, the plot had the two friends making a motion picture, with the film itself playing an important part in the action. One line from the play reflected the current attitude toward the multitude of film companies that had cropped up: "Nowadays everybody has got two businesses, his regular business and the moving picture business."[63] The Cohan and Harris also prospered during the 1917-18 season with A

[63]"Business Before Pleasure," NYDM, 25 August 1917, p. 7.

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Tailor Made Man, a comedy that had an impressive run of 398 performances.

The fall of 1917 saw the Selwyns proceeding with their planned theatres. In September, an Application for a Permit to Demolish the Buildings at 215-223 West Forty-second Street and 228-234 West Forty-third Street was filed with the Buildings Department.[64] The buildings to be wrecked were characterized in the Application as stores and dwellings. It is important to note that the land was cleared before construction on the two theatres was begun because some theatre historians have mistakenly claimed that the Apollo, one of the two theatres built on the land, was a renovation of the Bryant, the little movie-vaudeville house that had opened on the block in 1910.[65] The Selwyns announced in September that in addition to their first theatre under construction, the Selwyn, there were two new theatres being built for them by Sol Bloom. The first, to be called the Margaret Illington, would seat 1,100, and the second, to be named the Margaret Mayo, would seat 800. These three houses, along with the Harris, would give the Selwyns four

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[64] Filed with the New York City Department of Buildings on September 8, 1917.

[65] This mistake first shows up in George Freedley's series of columns on New York theatres published in the New York Sun between 1941 and 1943. The manuscript of these articles is available at Lincoln Center under the title "Broadway Playhouses." Mary Henderson, no doubt following Freedley, also claims that the Apollo was a renovation of the Bryant in The City and the Theatre. An examination of the insurance map for the block shows that the Apollo could not have been the Bryant. The Bryant was built on the site of George W. Thedford's Coal and Wood Yard at 223 West Forty-second Street (see unheadlined article, Variety, 5 March 1910,

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theatres on Forty-second Street.[66]

Just as construction was about to get underway on the two new theatres, a financial depression hit the country. Sperry and Hutchinson decided to lease the property for the two theatres to the Selwyns at the same price they had paid for it. Aaron Naumberg then advanced the Selwyns $1 million in cash so that they could build the playhouses. On November 4, the New York Times reported details of the new theatres. The Selwyn was to be six stories high and would include the executive offices of Selwyn and Company above the lobby. It would be decorated in "old Italian" style and would seat 1,100. The Margaret Illington would be done in French Renaissance style and would also seat 1,100. The Margaret Mayo's decor was to be in the Adam style, and it would seat 800.[67]

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p. 7). The Apollo, on the other hand, was built on the Forty-third Street side of the lot obtained by the Selwyns, with only a narrow entranceway leading to Forty-second Street. Therefore, the only part of the Apollo that covered the same land as the Bryant was its entrance foyer. Moreover, in his autobiography (pp. 121-122) Crosby Gaige, who was a partner of Selwyn and Company at the time and active in the planning and construction of the Apollo, describes the site of the Apollo and Times Square as "still occupied by the old private houses and tenements which had infested it for eighty years or more." Gaige makes no mention of a renovation; rather he speaks of completely new construction. In addition, none of the newspaper articles describing the planning and construction of the Apollo mention the Bryant or a renovation. It therefore seems clear that the Apollo was a completely new building.

[66] "Selwyn & Co. To Build," New York Times, 17 September 1917, p. 13.

[67] Gaige, p. 122; "Big Increase in Theatre Building," 4 November 1917, sec. 3, p. 11.

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While the Selwyns pressed ahead with their plans, the Broadway theatre as a whole was suffering the effects of the depression. Of the seventy-five productions that had opened in New York by the end of the fall, thirty-six had closed, ten were touring, and twenty-nine were still on Broadway. Of those twenty-nine, less than a dozen were hits.[68] Meanwhile, the legitimate stage was contributing to the war effort by raising $50,000,000 in Liberty Bond sales through benefits and other activities.[69] The Times Square area also sacrificed its elaborate displays of neon lights to the wartime need to conserve fuel.[70] The amusement industry was rewarded for its efforts by a boom in business occasioned partly by the extra profits from war production and partly by the thousands of soldiers who crowded into New York for a few days' fling before being shipped to Europe.

Over the summer of 1918, Ziegfeld presented another edition of his Follies at the New Amsterdam. Besides regulars Will Rogers, Eddie Cantor, Ann Pennington, and W. C. Fields, the cast boasted Marilyn Miller in her Ziegfeld debut. The rehearsal pianist for the show was George Gershwin. Helped along by the general prosperity as well as by its own attractions, the Follies ran for 151 performances.

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[68] Show Biz, p. 176.

[69] The Best Plays of 1909-1919, p. 352.

[70] "Great White Way Lights Out," NYDM, 15 June 1918, p. 838.

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Sensing the money to be made from the war-inflated theatre economy, several of the Forty-second Street theatres began the 1918-19 season with war plays or escapist comedies. Al Woods opened the Republic in late August with Where Poppies Bloom, a war melodrama adapted from a French play. It ran for three months, after which it was replaced by Roads of Destiny, a play by Channing Pollack based on an O. Henry short story. In February, Arthur Hopkins presented The Fortune Teller at the Republic. With Marjorie Rambeau in a leading role, it lasted until the end of April.

The Lyric's season began in early August with a one-month engagement of Maytime, the immensely successful Sigmund Romberg musical that had opened at the Shubert Theatre the previous August. In September, the Lyric housed one of the season's biggest hits, The Unknown Purple, starring Richard Bennett. It remained at the theatre until May, when it was succeeded by The Lady in Red, an undistinguished musical that lasted for five weeks.

At the New Amsterdam, the team of Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse, the authors of the previous season's The Riviera Girl, contributed to the war effort with The Girl Behind the Gun, for which Ivan Caryll wrote the music. It managed a run of 160 performances. In December, Ziegfeld decided to produce a new show on the New Amsterdam roof to be called the 9 O'Clock Revue. In the cast were Bessie McCoy Davis, Lillian Lorraine, and Fannie Brice. In February, a new Victor Herbert musical was presented at the downstairs theatre. The Velvet Lady was not one of Herbert's

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masterpieces, but it did run for 136 performances. The New Amsterdam's 1918-19 season thus consisted entirely of musical offerings. In May, Marc Klaw commented on the preponderance of musicals at the theatre when he told a reporter that the New Amsterdam had originally been built to house serious drama, but the public seemed to prefer to see elaborate musicals there.[71] Aside from the visits of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree in 1916 and 1917, the New Amsterdam had not housed a successful straight play since Madame X in 1910.

The Liberty had remained open over the summer of 1918 with its hit show, Going Up, which ran until October. It was followed by Glorianna, a Rudolf Friml musical that ran for ninety-six performances. In January, the Liberty presented The Marquis de Priola, a mediocre play starring Leo Ditrichstein. Two months later it was gone, to be replaced by Philip Moeller's biographical drama Molière with Henry Miller in the title role. Despite a supporting cast that included Estelle Winwood, Holbrook Blinn, and Blanche Bates, Molière could eke out only an eight-week run.

At the Harris the opening production was Why Worry?, an Al Woods-produced farce by the same authors who created the Potash and Perlmutter plays. The presence of Fannie Brice and Smith and Dale in the cast of Why Worry? could not keep the show running for more than four weeks. The next

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[71] "What the Stage Has Gained by Thirty Years of 'K & E'," New York Sun, 4 May 1919, in the Klaw and Erlanger Scrapbook, ser. 2, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

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production at the Harris, a comedy with music called Some Night, had an even shorter run--twenty-four performances. The third production of the season, a drama entitled The Riddle: Woman, proved to be a big hit and settled in for a long run. In November, Thomas Dixon, the author of The Clansman and a budding theatrical producer, leased the Harris from the Selwyns for the rest of their long-term lease and announced that he would take possession at the first of the year. Apparently the Selwyns, having just opened their own theatre, and with two more playhouses under construction, had decided to give up their lease on the Harris. Dixon's first production, The Invisible Foe, opened on December 30 and ran for three months. In April, Dixon rented the theatre to producer H. H. Frazee for A Good Bad Woman, a play starring Robert Edeson, Wilton Lackaye, and Margaret Illington. The Harris then offered motion pictures until June, when a farce called Who Did It? opened for a one-week run.

The Eltinge had a busy season during 1918-19. At the beginning of July, The Kiss Burglar, a musical starring Fay Bainter that had opened at the Cohan Theatre in May, was moved to the Eltinge for a seven-week run. On August 20, A. H. Woods produced a "dramatic novelty" called Under Orders, in which Shelly Hull and Effie Shannon appeared in dual roles as an American and a German couple. Under Orders remained at the Eltinge until mid-January, when it was replaced by Al Woods' most famous bedroom farce, Up in Mabel's Room. With Hazel Dawn, the erstwhile Pink Lady, in a

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prominent role, Up in Mabel's Room ran for 299 performances.

The Cohan and Harris was also successful in its 1918-19 productions. The season opened with Three Faces East, a Paul Kelly spy drama that chalked up a total of 335 performances. In February, Cohan and Harris moved Three Faces East to the Longacre in order to make room for The Royal Vagabond, a comic opera that had been "Cohanized" so that its schmaltz was replaced by the usual Cohan snappy patter and inside jokes. Audiences enjoyed the new approach to operetta, giving The Royal Vagabond a run of 208 performances.

On October 2, the theatre block witnessed the opening of its tenth legitimate playhouse when the Selwyn Theatre offered its first production--Jane Cowl in Information Please. Oddly enough, the opening night reviewers hailed the new theatre as "large and commodious" and also "more intimate" than older playhouses. The Selwyn's capacity of 1,180, distributed over an orchestra, a single balcony, and eight boxes, did not place it among the larger theatres in New York. The impression of spaciousness stemmed from the fact that the auditorium was built in a broad, fan-shaped configuration rather than in the long, narrow shape of the older houses. The Selwyn was built on the Forty-third Street side of the plot of land. The auditorium ran parallel to Forty-third Street and the stage was parallel to Eighth Avenue. On the Forty-second Street side of the plot was erected a five-story office building which was to be the headquarters of Selwyn and Company. The first story of the office building

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consisted of the Forty-second Street entrance to the theatre. There was no Forty-third Street entrance.

The stage of the Selwyn was twenty-nine feet deep, and fifty-six feet high from the stage floor to the grid-iron. The proscenium opening was twenty-five feet high and forty feet wide. The decorative scheme was executed in the style of the Italian Renaissance. The predominant color was Italian blue, highlighted with gold. A wainscoting of Italian marble set off the walls and enclosed the lower proscenium boxes. The indirect system of lighting was similar to that of the Rialto Theatre in the way that its color could be changed from white to pink, rose, or purple. The stage of the Selwyn was lower than those in most Broadway houses, making it easier for the audience to see. An innovation in the design of the theatre was the inclusion of such amenities as showers and telephones in each dressing room. The generously-proportioned Selwyn lounge was not only a comfortable and attractive place to spend the intermission, but also served the practical function of insulating the auditorium from the noises of Forty-second Street. A novel feature of the Selwyn, and a sign of the times, was the inclusion of separate smoking rooms for men and women.[72]

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[72]The description of the Selwyn is based upon "Jane Cowl in Quest of Information," New York Times, 3 October 1918, p. 11; "Selwyn Theatre Opened," NYDM, 12 October 1918, p. 541; "A New Theatre Beautiful," International Studio 67 (March 1919): xvi, xvii; Lobenthal, "The Glory," pp. 20-25; Plan of the Stage of the Selwyn Theatre, 1936, Lincoln Center.

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Information Please was a comedy co-authored by, and starring the ubiquitous Jane Cowl. Despite the novelty of the new theatre and Jane Cowl's loyal following of fans, Information Please lasted for only six weeks. When its run ended, Edgar Selwyn directed Jane Cowl in The Crowded Hour, a play that he had also written. This drama succeeded in running for 139 performances. The last show for the season at the Selwyn was Tumble In, a Rudolf Friml musical produced by Arthur Hammerstein, with Charles Ruggles in the cast. Not one of Friml's finest works, Tumble In was nevertheless able to last for 128 performances.

The summer of 1919 got its start on the theatre block, not with the opening of the Follies, but with the premiere of Scandals of 1919 at the Liberty on June 2. This first edition of what was to become an annual series rivalling that of Ziegfeld, was the creation of dancer George White, who had been able to observe the Ziegfeld mystique at close hand as a performer in the 1915 Follies. For his first show, White hired Ann Pennington away from Ziegfeld and appeared on stage himself. The new revue attracted audiences throughout the summer, ending with a respectable run of 128 performances. Two weeks after the Scandals opening, Ziegfeld unveiled his latest, and perhaps greatest, edition of the Follies with a cast headed by Marilyn Miller, Eddie Cantor, and Bert Williams. It was for this edition that Irving Berlin composed what came to be regarded as the anthem of the Follies, "A Pretty Girl is

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Like a Melody." The run of this Follies outdid that of its predecessors, lasting for 171 performances.

The revues were not the only shows to open on Forty-second Street during the summer of 1919. At the Lyric another Guy Bolton comedy, The Five Million, made its appearance and remained for ninety-one performances. Next door, the Republic reopened on July 28 with A Voice in the Dark, an Al Woods melodrama that remained at the theatre well into the fall. Also contributing to the liveliness of the summer season on the theatre block were the continuing runs of Up in Mabel's Room at the Eltinge and The Royal Vagabond at the Cohan and Harris.

This activity was brought to a temporary halt in early August when Actors Equity called a strike. At first, producers felt that they could continue their shows with understudies and non-Equity performers, but when the stagehands and musicians walked out in support of the actors, the theatres had to be closed down. After a month, Equity won its demands and the strike was over. A Voice in the Dark continued to scare the Republic's audiences until December, when Al Woods followed it with another melodrama, The Sign on the Door. Written by Channing Pollack, the new melodrama ran even longer than its predecessor, remaining at the Republic for the rest of the season. Woods had evidently uncovered another profitable formula for his shows: the car-breaking-down-in-front-of-a-deserted-mansion thriller.

The Lyric's first offering for the 1919-20 season was Nothing But Love, a musical that lasted a little over a

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month. In November, it was followed by The Rose of China, a musical that managed to squeeze out forty-seven performances. In early January, the producers of The Rose of China, F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest, tried again with a straight drama called The Light of the World; it, too, closed after a month. On March 1, Walter Hampden produced Percy Mackaye's ballad play George Washington as a vehicle for himself. This unusual production closed after two weeks. In March the Lyric Theatre was purchased by sportsman E. E. Smathers from the estate of Reginald De Koven, who had died in January. Since the Shuberts' lease on the theatre still had five years to run, Smathers made no immediate plans for the theatre.[73]

Because of the extended run of the 1919 Follies, the New Amsterdam did not house a new production for the 1919-20 season until December 11 when Gilbert Miller presented the light opera Monsieur Beaucaire with music by Andre Messager. It pleased audiences for five months, after which it was replaced by a musical of a very different nature. The Ed Wynn Carnival was created by its star to feature his own zany brand of humor. Wynn kept the New Amsterdam buzzing until the next Follies was ready to open in June.

In the fall of 1919, the Liberty followed the long run of the Scandals with another revue. Hitchy-Koo, 1919 opened in October but could only manage a seven-week run. Its distinguishing features were the dances of Florence

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[73]"E. E. Smathers Buys the Lyric Theatre," New York Times, 6 March 1902, p. 11.

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O'Denishawn and "Old Fashioned Garden," a Cole Porter song that turned out to be the composer's first hit. In late November, the Liberty housed a Somerset Maugham drama, Caesar's Wife, produced by Ziegfeld for his wife Billie Burke. It ran for ten weeks before making way for The Night Boat, a Jerome Kern musical produced by Charles Dillingham. Two of The Night Boat's supporting performers, Louise Groody and Hal Skelly, stole the show and launched themselves on successful stage careers. The Night Boat stayed at the Liberty until the summer.

Down the block, the Harris was having another mediocre season. In September, the Shuberts produced a drama called The Dancer which featured Renee Adoree in its cast. Two months later, the Selwyns used the Harris for their production of the comedy Wedding Bells. With Edgar Selwyn's experienced hand to direct it, Wedding Bells was able to achieve a run of 168 performances. In April, the Harris housed a comedy with music called Three Showers that lasted for six weeks. The season ended with Respect for Riches, a comedy that closed after two weeks. In March, an article in the Times reported that the theatre had been purchased from Mrs. Henry B. Harris by H. H. Frazee, who would take possession when the Selwyns' lease expired in July. Frazee, who controlled several theatres in the West, was also the owner of the Boston American League baseball team.[74]

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[74]"Frazee Buys the Harris," 27 March 1920, p. 18.

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Al Woods began the 1919-20 season at the Eltinge in October with the production of another Avery Hopwood farce, The Girl in the Limousine. The cast included the rising young comic actor Charles Ruggles. After four months, Woods replaced it with another farce, Breakfast in Bed, adapted from a play by Feydeau. In April, Woods turned his theatre over to producer Walter Hast for Martinique, a romance that managed a five-week run.

At the Cohan and Harris, the Royal Vagabond resumed its run during the early fall of 1919. The first new production of the season was a drama called The Acquittal which opened in January and managed a four-month run. The second, and last, new production of the season at the Cohan and Harris was Honey Girl, a musical version of Henry Blossom's Checkers, a novel that had been dramatized at the American Theatre in September 1903. As a musical it was able to attract audiences for only four weeks. The credits for Honey Girl list Sam H. Harris, rather than Cohan and Harris, as the show's producer. This listing was an indication that the long partnership between Sam H. Harris and George M. Cohan was drawing to a close. In July, the split was officially announced.[75] The theatre remained in the control of Sam H. Harris.

The Selwyn, whose first year had not been spectacular, began the 1919-20 season with The Challenge, a Eugene

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[75]"Cohan and Harris's Parting Ends Long Stage Alliance," New York Sun and Herald, 4 July 1920, in the Sam H. Harris Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, Lincoln Center.

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Walter drama that starred Holbrook Blinn. After nine weeks, The Challenge gave way to Buddies, a musical comedy that starred Peggy Wood and Roland Young. Buddies proved to be a big hit and remained at the theatre for the rest of the season.

The only new production on Forty-second Street during the summer of 1920 was the by now inevitable edition of the Follies. Added to the cast that summer was Charles Winninger, later to star as Cap'n Andy in Ziegfeld's production of Show Boat. Despite the growing reputation of the Follies, this edition was not able to achieve a run as long as that of its predecessor. It did last through the summer, and like the previous editions, it did very well on tour.

During the summer of 1920, the owners and lessees of the Forty-second Street theatres seemed to concentrate on solidifying and protecting their holdings. In June, the Selwyns announced that they had formed an alliance with Sam H. Harris and Arthur Hopkins for protection against Klaw and Erlanger and the Shuberts and in order to book their own shows to the best advantage.[76] Meanwhile, construction on the Selwyns' two new theatres neared completion. In early June, they revealed that the two theatres would have a single facade on Forty-second Street. Although one of the theatres was to be named the Times Square, the other was still nameless (the idea of calling the two theatres the Illington and the Mayo had long since been abandoned). At the end of July,

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[76]"Selwyns' Alliance Is Just for Protection," New York Times, 7 June 1920, p. 9.

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it was made known that the second theatre would be called the Apollo, and would house only musicals, with a revue to be presented there each summer.[77]

In July, H. H. Frazee announced that his newly-acquired theatre would henceforth be called the Frazee rather than the Harris. The playhouse was to be completely renovated and redecorated before it reopened in August.[78]

With these realignments and plans made, the fall 1920 season began on Forty-second Street. It proved to be a time of great prosperity for many of the theatres on the block. The Republic opened in mid-August with The Lady of the Lamp, a comedy-drama by Earl Carroll, who produced it in association with Al Woods. It mustered enough interest to remain at the theatre for three months. Encouraged by its success, Carroll produced another comedy-drama, Daddy Dumplins, which had a run of eight weeks at the Republic.

Next door at the Lyric, the fall season began in October with an Ivan Caryll musical called Kissing Time. After a run of eight weeks, the Lyric was briefly used for films before Nora Bayes took the theatre over in order to produce the musical Her Family Tree as a vehicle for herself. Her talents attracted customers to the Lyric well into the spring season.

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[77]"Eighteen Prospective New Theatres," New York Times, 6 June 1920, sec. 6, p. 1; "Name Theatre the Apollo," New York Times, 31 July 1920, p. 5.

[78]"Frazee Gets the Harris," New York Times, 14 July 1920, p. 10.

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At the New Amsterdam the fun of the Follies was succeeded by the production of Hitchy-Koo, 1920 with music by Jerome Kern. The cast included Raymond Hitchcock, Julia Sanderson, Florence O'Denishawn, and Grace Moore. At the end of December, Ziegfeld produced one of the biggest hits ever to play Forty-second Street. Sally, with music by Jerome Kern and Victor Herbert, and starring Marilyn Miller, was hailed by the critics and settled in for a run that would eventually total 570 performances.

The season began at the Liberty in November with a ponderous musical called The Half Moon, a rare failure for producer Charles Dillingham. After six weeks it was succeeded by Lady Billy, a musical that achieved a long run primarily through the popularity of its star, Mitzi.

Down the block, the erstwhile Harris, now called the Frazee, offered as its first production The Woman of Bronze, a play by Paul Kester that starred Margaret Anglin. It ran for 252 performances, a rare success for the theatre.

For his opening production of 1920-21 at the Eltinge, Al Woods returned to the bedroom farce formula for Ladies Night in a Turkish Bath, with Charles Ruggles once again providing the comedy. This Avery Hopwood play remained at the theatre for a year. At the Cohan and Harris (still so-called in spite of the breakup of the partnership), the season opened with the comedy Welcome Stranger, which proved popular enough to last out the season.

For its third year, the Selwyn opened with Tickle Me, a musical produced by Arthur Hammerstein, with music by

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Herbert Stothart and book and lyrics by Otto Harbach, Oscar Hammerstein II (Willie's son), and Frank Mandel. With the popular comedian Frank Tinney in a leading role, Tickle Me ran for six months.

During the fall of 1920, the last two major legitimate theatres opened on the theatre block of Forty-second Street. Although the two new houses were begun at the same time, the Times Square was the first to be completed. Built on the Forty-second Street side of the large plot of land that the Selwyns had obtained from Sperry and Hutchinson, the Times Square was constructed along the same lines as the Selwyn. A broad, shallow auditorium with one balcony and four boxes again caused opening night reviewers to comment on the spaciousness and comfort of the new playhouse. The stage of the Times Square was similar in area to that of the Selwyn: the proscenium opening was forty feet, four and one-half inches wide and twenty-four feet, six inches high; the depth of the stage was twenty-eight feet, and the height was fifty-four feet from stage to gridiron. The seating capacity of the house was 1,200.

Eugene De Rosa, the architect of the Times Square and the Apollo, chose an unusual decorative scheme for the former theatre. The style chosen was variously described as Adam or Empire. The color scheme consisted of shades of silver, green, and black. The walls were silver gray with touches of green so delicate that they melted into the gray. The carpet was black and the main curtain was black velvet. From the orchestra level a grand staircase stretched to the

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mezzanine. On this upper level was located the women's smoking and retiring room. The men's smoking room, located in the basement, was finished in a Tudor style accented by oak wainscoting.[79]

The Times Square opened on September 30, 1920, with The Mirage, a melodrama by Edgar Selwyn that starred Florence Reed and Alan Dinehart. Although it received mixed reviews, The Mirage was popular enough with audiences to run for 192 performances.

Next door to the Times Square on Forty-second Street an entrance was constructed to the Apollo Theatre, the auditorium of which was actually built on Forty-third Street. A single facade covered both the Times Square lobby and the Apollo entrance foyer on Forty-second Street. Each theatre had a separate marquee extending from the facade. The Apollo was completed and opened in mid-November, just seven weeks after the inauguration of the Times Square.

Like those of the Selwyn and the Times Square, the auditorium of the Apollo was broad and shallow, bringing the audience into closer proximity with the stage. The seating capacity of 1,200 was distributed over an orchestra, one balcony, and four boxes. The stage

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[79]Description of the Times Square is taken from "Times Square and Apollo Theatres," Architecture and Building 52 (December 1920): 101, 104; Alexander Woollcott, "The Play," New York Times, 1 October 1920, p. 14; Unidentified Clippings in the Florence Reed Scrapbook, Lincoln Center; Plan of the Stage of the Times Square Theatre, 1936, Lincoln Center.

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dimensions were similar to those in the other Selwyn theatres: the proscenium opening was forty-one feet wide by twenty-five feet high; the stage was twenty-eight feet, four inches deep, and sixty feet, six inches high from stage to gridiron.

Like the Times Square, the Apollo was decorated in the Adam style, but there the resemblance ended. The color scheme of the Apollo employed shades of tan, rose, and blue. The curtain was done in peacock blue brocaded velvet. On the back wall of the auditorium was a mural by William Cotton. An eighty-foot-long lounging room was provided for use by both men and women.

The Apollo boasted several unique features. On the balcony level there was a crossover aisle behind the seats which made it possible for patrons to reach their seats without walking the whole length of the balcony. On the Forty-third Street side of the auditorium double doors and air cushions prevented street noises from filtering into the theatre. On the Forty-second Street side, the long lobby which extended back to the auditorium also served the function of blocking out noise. This lobby was described by the New York Tribune as "the most beautiful theatre foyer in this city. The outer section of this lobby is a combination of Rosato and Levanto marbles, while the inner part carries a color scheme of black and white in Belgian marble."[80]

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[80]Description of the Apollo is based on "Times Square and Apollo Theatres," 104-5; "New Apollo Theatre Rivals Its Twin, the Times Square, in Beauty and

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Spectators at the Apollo's opening night on November 17 saw a production of Jimmie, a pleasant musical comedy with score by Herbert Stothart, book and lyrics by Otto Harbach, Oscar Hammerstein II, and Frank Mandel. The star was Frances White. A lightweight show with an undistinguished plot and music, Jimmie managed a run of only seventy-one performances.

As 1920 drew to an end, the theatre block of Forty-second Street had reached its zenith of theatrical activity. The ten legitimate theatres on the block were filled with a variety of dramatic and musical productions, the Rialto was prospering as a first-run motion picture house, and the venerable American Theatre, now the Loew's American, was still operating as a popular-priced movie and vaudeville theatre. The Candler Building had become a landmark on the block and was the focal point for much of the independent motion picture business. Murray's Restaurant, which had installed a dance floor during the ballroom dance mania, was still a popular resort, although the onset of Prohibition was about to bring its lively existence to an untimely end.

As 1921 dawned, the New York theatre was entering a period of increasing activity and profit. By 1919, the

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Convenience," New York Tribune, 14 November 1920, sec. 3, p. 2.; Jimmie Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; Collection of Newspaper Clippings of Dramatic Criticism, 1920-21, Lincoln Center; Harry Delf Scrapbook, Lincoln Center; Plan of the Stage of the Apollo Theatre, 1936, Lincoln Center.

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professional theatre was the fourth largest industry in the nation.[81] After holding steady for a number of years, the number of theatrical productions presented in New York rose from 144 in the 1919-20 season to 152 in 1920-21. By the mid-Twenties, the figure would top 200.[82] In order to house these additional productions, new theatres were once more being planned and erected at a startling pace. In the 1912-13 season there were forty-five legitimate theatres in New York; by 1920-21, the number had increased to fifty-six, with more yet to come.[83] Forty-second Street shared in the general prosperity. At the end of 1920, eight of the ten legitimate theatres on the block housed shows that were destined to run for more than one hundred performances, long enough to return a profit to their investors. Three of the shows were to last for over 300 performances.

It appeared that the theatre block was about to enter an era of even greater achievement than it had ever experienced, but there were straws in the wind: the fact that the theatre district was moving farther and farther uptown leaving Forty-second Street as its southernmost border; the rate at which the motion picture companies were gobbling up property on Broadway for their enormous

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[81] John McCabe, George M. Cohan: The Man Who Owned Broadway (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973), p. 149.

[82] Poggi, p. 47.

[83] Ibid., p. 48.

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movie palaces, thereby increasing the assessed valuation of land in the Times Square area to ridiculously inflated levels; and the growing conviction on the part of potential theatre owners, lessees, and producers that the older Forty-second Street theatres with their two balconies and long, narrow configurations were now hopelessly old-fashioned. Although all of these warning signals were clearly discernible by 1920, the owners and lessees of the theatres on Forty-second Street seemed to ignore them, perhaps because they were blinded by a dazzling prospect of unlimited success and wealth awaiting them in the era of "normalcy."

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CHAPTER VI

THE BEGINNING OF THE END (1921-1929)

During the years 1921 through 1929, West Forty-second Street gradually lost its standing as the most important theatre block in the city. Two reasons for the decline had begun to be evident in earlier years: first, the theatres on Forty-second Street, some of which were now twenty years old, were perceived as old-fashioned as the decade of the 1920s progressed. Their narrow construction and second balconies were less appealing than the broad, single-balconied theatres that were built in later years. A second reason was that the theatre district was moving northward, transforming Forty-second Street, which had once been its heart, into the district's southernmost boundary. If the 1920s had not been a decade of increasing theatrical activity, Forty-second Street's theatres might have faded out of existence, to become movie or vaudeville houses, or to be demolished to make room for office buildings. In the 1920s, however, the unparalleled prosperity of the American economy as a whole filtered down to the commercial theatre, so that in the middle years of the period, newly wealthy stock market speculators joined veteran producers in presenting the over 200 new productions that appeared in New York each season. This large number of

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productions during the mid-twenties led to a shortage of theatres, so that the natural process of attrition was interrupted and playhouses that otherwise might have gone out of existence were pressed into service to house the overflow of productions.

Despite the fact that the theatres on Forty-second Street continued to function as legitimate playhouses throughout the 1920s, there were strong indications that the glorious heyday of the theatre block was reaching an end. Increasingly during the decade the theatres were used for films. At first, movies had been employed as a stopgap for a few weeks when no legitimate attraction was immediately available. Then, the theatres occasionally housed the premiere of a blockbuster film like The Birth of a Nation. Finally, by the 1920s, an entire season, such as the 1927-28 season at the Times Square, was devoted to a succession of films of varying quality. Even during the 1925-26 season, when the theatre shortage was most acute, two of the theatres on Forty-second Street housed films for part of the season.

A second indication of the theatre block's declining prestige was the changing character of the street itself. Although many new theatres were constructed in other parts of the theatre district during the 1920s, no additional playhouses were built on Forty-second Street. During the decade, several buildings on the block were demolished, including the Clinton Apartment Houses and St. Luke's Church, but they were replaced by stores and offices, not by theatres. The only

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well-known, nontheatrical enterprise on the block, Murray's Restaurant, was forced to close in 1924 when the effects of Prohibition had severely reduced its business. Murray's was replaced by Hubert's Museum and Flea Circus, an attraction that could hardly be said to have added glamour to the neighborhood. The other buildings on the block continued to house such nontheatrical tenants as an army and navy store, a chop suey restaurant, and a dentist's office. In the latter part of the decade investors began to view the theatre block as a site for a new commercial center, a use that they expected would be facilitated by the opening of the Eighth Avenue Subway and the subsequent development of the Eighth Avenue area. Plans were made to replace the American and Lyric theatres with offices, and speculators gained control of other available plots of land on the block in the belief that it was about to become a major business center.[1] Although the stock market crash in 1929 prevented such plans from being realized, their existence suggests that West Forty-second Street's days as New York's major theatre block had come to an end by the late Twenties.

Even though no longer considered the most important block in the theatre district, Forty-second Street did make some imporrant contributions to the American stage during the years 1921-1929. The period started off rather slowly

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[1] "Review of the Day in Realty Market," New York Times, 26 July 1928, p. 27; "Skyscraper to Replace American Theatre; 42d Street Lease Involves $12,000,000 Rent," New York Times, 2 May 1929, p. 1; "Says Times Square Has Many Advantages," New York Times, 21 July 1929, sec. 11, p. 1.

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as Broadway was feeling the effects of a general business depression in 1921 and 1922. Several of the theatres on Forty-second Street were fortunate to have long-running hits to tide them over the business slump. At the Republic, the first production of 1921 was Dear Me, a comedy produced by John Golden that lasted for four months. In May it was replaced by a brief run of Enter Madam. Next door, the Lyric continued to house the run of Her Family Tree. At the conclusion of the run in March, the Lyric was devoted to films for almost a year while several parties contended with one another for the lease to the theatre. E. E. Smathers, who had bought the Lyric from the De Koven estate in 1920, leased the theatre to H. H. Frazee in April 1921 for a period of sixty-seven years. Once the lease was made public, Lee Shubert was quick to point out that his lease to the Lyric still had five years left to run, and that the Shuberts intended to continue operating the theatre.[2] This announcement left Frazee with a lease to a theatre that he could not take possession of. By the time the Shubert lease expired, Frazee had given up and transferred his rights to another party.

Across the street at the New Amsterdam, Ziegfeld's production of Sally was in the early months of what promised to be a very long run, while at the Liberty Lady

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[2] "Frazee Leases Lyric Theatre," New York Times, 11 April 1921, p. 11; "Two Theatre Deals Near Times Square," New York Times, 12 April 1921, p. 29; "Shubert Lease of Lyric Until 1925," New York Times, 14 April 1921, p. 11.

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Billy proved popular enough to draw spectators for the rest of the season. At the Frazee, The Woman of Bronze continued its run until April, after which the theatre housed two productions that had been moved from other theatres: Smooth as Silk and Mixed Marriage. The final play of the season at the Frazee was Gold, an early Eugene O'Neill drama that opened on June 1 and ran for two weeks.

Down the block at the Eltinge, Ladies Night in a Turkish Bath proved to be a successful drawing-card, running for the rest of the season. In February and March, the Eltinge housed special matinees of The White Villa, a drama produced by the Players Fellowship in conjunction with Al Woods, and The Tyranny of Love.

The Sam H. Harris continued to be occupied by Welcome Stranger during the spring of 1921. Across the street, the Selwyn housed Tickle Me until the middle of February. On January 31, the theatre was given over to a matinee of Eugene O'Neill's play Diff'rent. When Tickle Me left in mid-February, it was replaced by William Faversham's production of The Prince and the Pauper that had opened at another theatre. The Selwyn housed motion pictures from March until June.

The Times Square continued to host the run of The Mirage until March, and also housed matinees of Mixed Marriage, Diff'rent, and Cradle Song during the early spring. Beginning in March, the Times Square housed a musical called The Right Girl. A modest endeavor with songs by Tin Pan Alley composer Percy Wenrich, The Right Girl lasted for

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almost three months. Next door at the Apollo, Jimmie ended its run in mid-January, to be followed by the Faversham production of The Prince and the Pauper. In February, the Apollo housed the most memorable dramatic offering to play that theatre. Macbeth, produced by Arthur Hopkins, with Lionel Barrymore and Julia Arthur in the leading roles, and with scenery designed by Robert Edmond Jones, was perhaps too far ahead of its time. The modernistic approach to Shakespeare's play seems to have baffled audiences, and the production closed after four weeks. On April 15, the Apollo presented the premiere of Love Birds, a Sigmund Romberg musical that remained at the theatre for three months.

During the summer of 1921, four of the theatres on Forty-second Street housed musical productions. After a year at another theatre, George White's Scandals returned to the Liberty for its 1921 edition, which opened on July 7 and ran until early October. The Selwyn housed two musical revues during the summer: Snapshots of 1921, starring Nora Bayes, Lew Fields, and DeWolf Hopper, followed by The Broadway Whirl with Richard Carle, Blanche Ring, and Charles Winninger. The Broadway Whirl had originated at the Times Square in June and had played there before moving to the Selwyn in August. At the Harris, the summer offering was Sunkist, a revue that had opened at the Globe in May and was transferred to the Harris on June 20. Adding to the theatre block's activity during the summer of 1921 was the continuation of the run of Sally at the New Amsterdam.

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As the 1921-22 season began, the Broadway theatres began to break out of the slump that had been caused by the business depression and to increase the number of productions. On Forty-second Street a few of the theatres managed to produce long-running attractions while others housed several shows during the course of the season. At the Republic, Al Woods tried to continue his string of successful bedroom farces with Getting Gertie's Garter. Although it boasted a script by Avery Hopwood, the author of Fair and Warmer, and although Hazel Dawn, the star of Up in Mabel's Room, headed the cast, Getting Gertie's Garter was unable to duplicate the long runs of its predecessors. It did manage a modestly profitable tenure of 120 performances. In the middle of November it was succeeded at the Republic by The Man's Name, a drama co-authored by Marjorie Chase and Eugene Walter, which was in turn replaced after three weeks by The Fair Circassian, a romantic comedy written by Gladys Unger and produced by one "Miss Newell." It lasted for seven performances before making way for Ain't It the Truth, which had premiered at another theatre. In January 1922, Al Woods produced at the Republic a "melodramatic comedy" called Lawful Larceny which proved to be popular enough to last the season.

At the Lyric, the fall season began with films, and then in January the theatre housed the production of Above the Clouds, a musical that starred Grace Moore. The show proved to be a mild success, but was moved in mid-February to make room for Fred and Adele Astaire in For Goodness

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Sake, an unremarkable musical that managed a fourteen-week run on the strength of the Astaires' popularity.

Marilyn Miller continued to draw audiences to Sally at the New Amsterdam for most of the 1921-22 season. On May 8, the theatre was turned over to the Russian Grand Opera Company for three weeks while preparations were being made for a new edition of the Ziegfeld Follies. The annual revue, whose existence had been interrupted by the success of Sally, reappeared on June 5 and commenced what turned out to be a year-long run. The financial success of the Follies may be guessed at from the fact that the new edition had barely gotten underway when Marc Klaw (who had quarreled with A. L. Erlanger in 1918) sued his former partner and Florenz Ziegfeld, alleging that the two producers had wasted much of the assets of the Follies and the Midnight Frolics. Since the assets to both shows were payable to a corporation of which Klaw was a partner, he demanded that less of the money earned by the shows find its way into the pockets of Erlanger and Ziegfeld.[3] The result of this suit is unknown.

The 1921-22 season at the Liberty was taken up by two productions. The O'Brien Girl, a musical produced by George M. Cohan with music by Louis Hirsch and book and lyrics by Otto Harbach and Frank Mandel, had a rags-to-riches plot reminiscent of those of Irene and Sally. Despite the familiarity of its materials, the show lasted for 164

[3] "Klaw Again Sues Former Partners," New York Times, 20 June 1922, p. 10.

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performances. The second show of the season at the Liberty was To the Ladies, a comedy by George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly that was aided by an outstanding performance by Helen Hayes. It ran for the rest of the spring.

Another great actress made a favorable impression in a Kaufman and Connelly play during the 1921-22 season. On August 13, 1921, Dulcy opened at the Frazee and brought Lynn Fontanne stardom after several years of apprenticeship in the theatre. Dulcy ran for 246 performances. In March, it was succeeded at the Frazee by a seven-week engagement of The Pigeon, which had opened earlier at another theatre. The season was rounded out at the Frazee with two mediocre shows and then a three-week run of From Morn to Midnight, the Theatre Guild production which had premiered at the Garrick in March.

The Eltinge housed two productions during the 1921-22 season. Back Pay, a drama by Fannie Hurst, lasted for ten weeks, after which it was replaced by The Demi-Virgin, a comedy that had premiered at the Times Square but had most of its run at the Eltinge, remaining at the theatre for the rest of the season.

The Sam H. Harris managed to find a comedy popular enough to draw audiences for an entire season. Six-Cylinder Love had a script by William Anthony McGuire and starred Ernest Truex. Early in the run of the play, the automobile that gave the show its title rolled off the stage and into the audience, frightening one woman into hysterics. The management then announced that a cable would "probably" be

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attached to the car for future performances.[4] In April 1922, the Harris was used for three matinees of Taboo, a drama by Mary Hoyt Wiborg that featured Margaret Wycherly and Paul Robeson in its cast.

At the Selwyn, the first show of the season was Somerset Maugham's comedy The Circle, which boasted a distinguished cast headed by John Drew and Mrs. Leslie Carter. The production lasted for four months before giving way in January to The Blue Kitten, a musical with a score by Rudolf Friml that managed to run for 175 performances. In May, it was succeeded by Partners Again, another entry in the series of "Potash and Perlmutter" comedies. Partners Again drew audiences through the summer and into the fall. In March 1922, the Selwyns purchased the land under the Selwyn Theatre, which they had leased with an option to buy in 1917. Selwyn and Company thus became one of the few New York theatre owners to actually own the land under its playhouse. In order to pay for the land, the Selwyns took out a loan of $500,000 from the New York Title and Mortgage Company, using the Selwyn Theatres as collateral.[5] Although it was not made public at the time, city records show that Lee Shubert also held a mortgage on the Selwyn from 1918 to 1926.[6]

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[4] "Stage Auto Rolls Off Into Audience," New York Times, 25 September 1921, p. 5.

[5] "Latest Dealings in Realty Field," New York Times, 9 March 1922, p. 31.

[6] Abstract Index-Block Register, Block 1014, New York City Office of the Register.

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Up the block at the Times Square the first show of the season was Honors Are Even, a Roi Cooper Megrue comedy starring Lola Fisher. It lasted for seventy performances, after which it was followed in October by Love Dreams, a "melody drama" by Ann Nichols, whose greatest success lay just ahead. After five weeks, Love Dreams was followed by The Demi-Virgin, another Avery Hopwood farce with Hazel Dawn in a prominent role. The formula proved successful, for The Demi-Virgin achieved a run of 268 performances, most of them at the Eltinge. The next production at the Times Square featured the third great actress of the American stage to achieve an early success during the 1921-22 season. A Bill of Divorcement brought Katharine Cornell great acclaim and launched her on her long and distinguished career. In April, it was followed into the Times Square by The Charlatan, a mystery melodrama that ran for almost two months.

Next door at the Apollo, the 1921-22 season began with films. The first legitimate production of the year was Love Dreams, which moved to the Apollo one week after it had premiered at the Times Square. In mid-November, the Apollo offered Nature's Nobleman, a comedy by Samuel Shipman and Clara Lipman that starred Miss Lipman's husband, Louis Mann. At the beginning of January, the Apollo reverted to films for three months. On April 17, a farce called Lady Bug was produced at the Apollo, but after a run of only five performances, it was withdrawn and the theatre returned to movies for the rest of the season.

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During the summer of 1922, both the Lyric and the Apollo housed films, while the New Amsterdam featured the Follies. The Times Square was occupied by a Black musical called Strut Miss Lizzie that was produced by the Minsky Brothers, and Sue Dear, a musical that borrowed the now familiar rags-to-riches formula of Irene and Sally. It remained at the theatre through the early fall. By far the biggest theatrical event of the summer of 1922 on Forty-second Street was the removal of Abie's Irish Rose from the Fulton, where it had premiered on May 23, to the Republic, where it opened on July 17. A classic example of a critical failure that became a popular hit, Abie's Irish Rose was written by Ann Nichols, the author of Love Dreams, the "melody drama" that had played at the Times Square and the Apollo in the fall of 1921. Abie's Irish Rose was destined to remain at the Republic for over five years.

During the 1922-23 season, the theatres on Forty-second Street offered a mixture of the usual melodramas and farces interspersed with more serious works, several of which were products of the art theatre movement that had begun in the previous decade. At the Republic, Abie's Irish Rose settled in for an indefinite stay. In April, the lease of the Republic passed from A. H. Woods to Oliver D. Bailey. Woods had actually assigned the remainder of his unexpired lease to Bailey the previous summer, but in April 1923, Bailey negotiated a twenty-one year lease of his own. The

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terms of the new lease provided that Bailey pay $75,000 in rent each year.[7]

Just a month before the Bailey lease was negotiated, the courts had awarded the ownership of the Republic Theatre to Arthur Hammerstein, upholding Hammerstein's contention that the theatre had been given to him by his father in lieu of his commission in settling the elder Hammerstein's affairs with the Metropolitan Opera. The Republic is thus a good example of the growing complexity of the theatre business. The land upon which the theatre was built was owned by the Davidson family. The ground rights belonged to the Geisha Realty Company. The theatre building itself was owned by Arthur Hammerstein. The long-term lease of the theatre now belonged to Oliver Bailey, who would in turn lease the house to other producers for a single show or for a season. This multiplication of interests made it even more imperative that the theatre attempt to present profitable attractions such as Abie's Irish Rose.

Next door at the Lyric most of the season was devoted to films. On April 16, the American Commedia Dell'Arte Company, headed by Romney Brent and Edna St. Vincent Millay, offered a repertory of The Show Booth and The Song of Songs for one week, before being replaced by Mister Malatesta, a comedy that had premiered at the Princess Theatre in February. By June, the Lyric had returned to films.

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[7] "Bailey's Republic," Variety, 19 April 1923, p. 14.

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Across the street at the New Amsterdam, the Ziegfeld Follies of 1922 continued to run throughout the winter season. Will Rogers and Gilda Gray headed the cast for this edition, but the biggest success was made by the comedy team of Gallagher and Shean singing the many comic verses of "Mister Gallagher and Mister Shean."

At the Liberty, the 1922-23 season consisted of two musicals. The first was Molly Darling, a show with book by Otto Harbach and William Cary Duncan and music by Tom Johnstone. Some of the action of Molly Darling was set at a radio station, still something of a novelty in 1922. Molly Darling ran for ninety-nine performances, after which it was succeeded by Little Nellie Kelly, a musical with book, score, and lyrics by George M. Cohan. With Elizabeth Hines and Charles King in leading roles, the show was able to please audiences for the rest of the season.

Down the block at the Frazee the first offering in the fall was Her Temporary Husband, a farce that ran for ten weeks before being replaced by the Theatre Guild's production of Karel Čapek's play R.U.R. that had opened at the Garrick Theatre in October. R.U.R. proved to be popular enough with a general audience to remain at the Frazee for sixteen weeks. In mid-March, the Frazee turned from this futuristic drama about a world populated by robots to its more usual fare--in this case a farce called Barnum Was Right, in which the great showman's adage that "there's a sucker born every minute" is tested out by an impecunious young man wishing to make enough money to impress his future

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father-in-law. It is interesting to note that after a little more than a month, Barnum Was Right was moved from the Frazee to the Cohan. The reason given for the transfer was that there was not enough balcony patronage at the Frazee, a condition blamed on the theatre's "poor location."[8] No explanation was given of why the Frazee's location was considered to be poor, but since it was located on the western end of the theatre block near Eighth Avenue, and since the Cohan Theatre (to which the show was transferred) was situated on Broadway, the latter playhouse may have had better luck in selling its cheaper balcony seats to the people who flocked to Broadway with the original intention of seeing a movie, since most of the major motion picture houses were located on the main thoroughfare.

The last offering of the year at the Frazee was an engagement of the Ethiopian Art Theatre, which presented what Variety termed "the first colored dramatic presentation on Broadway"--a production of Oscar Wilde's Salomé, preceded by a folk play called The Chip Woman's Fortune. During their second week at the theatre, the group presented Fortune and The Comedy of Errors a la Jazz, the latter a forerunner of the 1938 musical The Boys from Syracuse and the 1939 jazz version of A Midsummer Night's Dream called Swingin' the Dream.

The Ethiopian Art Theatre was a venture headed by a white manager named Raymond O'Neil and financed by Julius

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[8]"'Barnum' Moving," Variety, 26 April 1923, p. 13.

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Rosenwald, the head of Sears Roebuck, and Joseph Schaffner of Hart, Schaffner and Marx. The manager of the Frazee convinced the sponsors of the Ethiopian Art Theatre to confine Black spectators to the theatre's balcony and gallery, reserving the orchestra for white patronage. The manager claimed that white patrons would not come to the show unless they were assured separate seating. As it turned out, the offerings of the Ethiopian Art Theatre did not attract enough spectators of either race to sustain a lengthy run. In its two weeks at the Frazee, the group attracted only $3,500 in ticket sales.[9] The Frazee closed for the summer at the end of this engagement.

The 1922-23 season at the Eltinge began with East of Suez, a Somerset Maugham drama that lasted for one hundred performances. In late December it was replaced by The Masked Woman, an adaptation of a French melodrama that remained at the Eltinge until early March. During the last week or two of its run, Al Woods announced that he would offer late night performances of a new drama called Morphia at the Eltinge after the conclusion of The Masked Woman's performance.[10] Once the late night performances had

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[9]"Colored Factor in Theatres Sharply Brought Out in Broadway," Variety, 10 May 1923, p. 3; "Classics in Color for Week on Broadway," Variety, 3 May 1923, p. 11; "High Finance Backs Negro Art Theatre," Variety, 17 May 1923, p. 1; "No Colored Shows For This Summer," Variety, 24 May 1923, p. 11.

[10]"Midnight Shows Plan for Woods' 'Morphia'," Variety, 22 February 1923, p. 1.

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generated audience interest in Morphia, the run of The Masked Woman was terminated and Morphia became the sole attraction at the Eltinge. As far as I can tell, Woods never repeated this novel approach to previewing a show. Morphia, described by Variety as "the first of the anti-drug terror plays to reach New York,"[11] remained at the Eltinge for sixty-four performances.

At the Sam H. Harris the season began with a seven-week run of It's a Boy!, a comedy by William Anthony McGuire. It was succeeded on November 16 by the Arthur Hopkins production of Hamlet that starred John Barrymore. Like Hopkins' production of Macbeth at the Apollo in 1921, the revival of Hamlet had abstract settings designed by Robert Edmond Jones. While the earlier production had been able to sustain only a four-week run, the revival of Hamlet remained at the Harris for 101 performances, reportedly because Barrymore wished to break Edwin Booth's record of one hundred performances in the title role. Barrymore was apparently unaware that British actor John Kellerd had played Hamlet for 102 consecutive performances on Broadway during the 1912-13 season. At the conclusion of the Barrymore engagement in February, the Harris offered Icebound, a play by Owen Davis, who had learned the craft of playwriting by creating the blood-and-thunder melodramas that had been so popular at the American Theatre twenty years before. Icebound, a study of life in rural New England, won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for the 1922-23 season. It ran at the Harris through the middle of June.

[11] "'Morphia'," 8 March 1923, p. 18.

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Across the street at the Selwyn the fall season was devoted to the continuation of the run of Partners Again. In October, the theatre was occupied on Sunday nights by performances of Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and the Denishawn dancers. At the conclusion of the run of Partners Again in early December, the Selwyn hosted a revival of the film The Birth of a Nation that lasted for five weeks. For the rest of the spring the Selwyn was given over to a series of undistinguished dramas: Dagmar, starring Nazimova, lasted seven weeks; The Guilty One, with Pauline Frederick in a leading role, survived for only four weeks; Within Four Walls, a drama with flashbacks to the days of Peter Minuit, remained at the theatre for two weeks; and The Wasp, which had opened at the Morosco, concluded the Selwyn's season with a run of six weeks. On May 29, the Selwyn hosted a single matinee of The Silvernail Players in Officer 666, played in French. Eva Le Gallienne was a member of the company.

At the Times Square, the 1922-23 season began with The Exciters, a comedy starring Tallulah Bankhead. After five weeks, The Exciters ended its run to be succeeded by The Fool, Channing Pollock's modern morality play that surprised the more cynical observers by becoming a big hit. It remained at the Times Square for the rest of the season and ran into the summer.

The 1922-23 season was a difficult one for the Apollo. It began with Daffy Dill, a "musigirl" comedy with book and lyrics by Guy Bolton and Oscar Hammerstein II and music by Herbert Stothart. After seventy-one performances, Daffy Dill

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closed and the Apollo became a film house for several weeks. In late December, it returned to the legitimate fold with Johannes Kreisler, a melodramatic version of the composer's life that ran for eight weeks. The next attraction at the Apollo was The God of Vengeance, a play that had opened at the Provincetown Playhouse and had been characterized by Variety as "Broadway's Most Disgusting Play" because it dealt with lesbianism.[12] After eight weeks, the production moved to a theatre in the Bronx. On April 16, the Apollo offered How Come?, a musical comedy featuring Black performers. During the four-week run of How Come? the management of the Apollo reserved a section of their orchestra seating for Black spectators.[13] At the end of May, How Come? was succeeded by For Value Received, a melodrama that had premiered at the Longacre three weeks before.

One other event of note during the 1922-23 season was the renovation and reopening of the New Amsterdam roof. Prohibition had brought the annual editions of Ziegfeld's Midnight Frolic to an end and so Erlanger, Ziegfeld, and Charles Dillingham announced plans to convert the cabaret-type roof garden into a regular legitimate theatre with a seating capacity of 800.[14] The roof, now called the Dresden Theatre, reopened on April 3 with Cinders, a musical version of the

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[12]"B'way's Most Disgusting Play Never Reached 'General Jury'," 8 March 1923, p. 12.

[13]"Colored Factor in Theatres."

[14]"Roof To Be Made Theatre," New York Times, 2 December 1922, p. 17.

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Cinderella story with a score by Rudolf Friml. Opening night reviewers reported that the Dresden looked very much like the old Frolic Theatre with the dance floor converted to orchestra seating.[15] Cinders remained at the Dresden for a month.

During the 1922-23 season, the best of the old and the new had co-existed on Forty-second Street. The shows that year had featured the work of such veterans as Flo Ziegfeld, George M. Cohan, and Owen Davis, as well as the efforts of individuals and groups that had begun their careers in the noncommercial theatre: The Theatre Guild, the Ethiopian Art Theatre, and the Commedia Dell'Arte Company. While this infusion of new talent seemed to point to a healthier future for the theatres on Forty-second Street, it must be noted that during the same season three of the playhouses on the theatre block devoted part of their seasons to films.

In the summer of 1923, the Lyric stayed open with a season of movies, while the New Amsterdam housed the long-running 1922 edition of the Ziegfeld Follies. Beginning on June 19, the Selwyn offered a musical called Helen of Troy, New York, with a book by Kaufman and Connelly and a score by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby. The show, which was more notable for its literate book than for its music, proved popular enough to remain at the Selwyn into October and then continued its run at other theatres. During the summer of 1923, the Apollo first housed a musical called Go-Go which

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[15] "Cinders," Variety, 5 April 1923, p. 17; Percy Hammond, "The Theaters," New York Tribune, 4 April 1923, p. 10.

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had originally played at Daly's, and then featured motion pictures for the rest of the summer.

As the 1923-24 season began, Abie's Irish Rose was still the attraction at the Republic, and gave every indication of remaining at the theatre for a long time to come. Next door at the Lyric the season was mainly devoted to films, but in February it returned to legitimate use with a musical called The Chiffon Girl. Although the show had been put together by collaborators who had had little or no previous experience with musical theatre, The Chiffon Girl managed a modestly successful run of 103 performances. At the end of March, it was moved to another theatre in order to make room at the Lyric for a play called For All of Us that had premiered at another theatre. Three weeks later, the Lyric housed a revival of Leah Kleschna, once a popular vehicle for Mrs. Fiske. The new version starred Helen Gahagan, Arnold Daly, and William Faversham. After a run of four weeks, Leah Kleschna closed, and was replaced by Flossie, a light musical that ran for only a few weeks.

In December it was reported that Harry Frazee had transferred his long-term lease on the Lyric to Meister Builders, Inc. beginning on June 1, 1924. According to the report, Meister Builders would pay a rental of $80,000 a year, or an aggregate of $6,000,000 over the period of the lease. The new lessees announced that their plans were to renovate the theatre and then sublease it to a theatrical operator.[16]

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[16]"Theatre in Long Lease," New York Times, 29 December 1923, p. 24.

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At the New Amsterdam the 1923-24 season began with a return engagement of Sally, which had been running continuously in New York and on the road since its opening in December 1920. Sally remained at the New Amsterdam for just over a month, or long enough for Ziegfeld to prepare a new edition of the Follies. The new revue featured a cast headed by Fannie Brice and Ann Pennington, with Paul Whiteman's Orchestra providing the musical accompaniment. The Ziegfeld Follies of 1923 opened on October 20 and stayed at the New Amsterdam until the middle of May. In the late spring, while the Follies team worked on a new edition of the annual revue, the New Amsterdam was occupied by Plain Jane, another musical built around the Cinderella formula. Plain Jane ran at the New Amsterdam for six weeks before moving. Meanwhile, the roof theatre, whose name had been changed back from the Dresden to the Frolic, housed a Grand Guignol troupe from Paris during December of 1923.

The 1923-24 season at the Liberty began with Magnolia, a comedy by Booth Tarkington that starred Leo Carrillo. After five weeks, it was succeeded by The Magic Ring, a musical by Zelda Sears (book and lyrics) and Harold Levy (music) that served as a vehicle for the talents of Mitzi. Also in the cast were two future motion picture personalities--Jeanette MacDonald and Sydney Greenstreet. The Magic Ring lasted ninety-six performances. On Christmas Day it was followed into the Liberty by The Rise of Rosie O'Reilly, a musical comedy by George M. Cohan. Like far too many of its contemporary musicals, Rosie O'Reilly's plot was a variation of the

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Cinderella theme. After its run of eighty-seven performances, the Liberty housed the motion picture The Thief of Bagdad starring Douglas Fairbanks, which stayed at the theatre through the summer.

At the Frazee, the 1923-24 season was marked by a series of ten productions, most of which were failures. The more interesting shows were: Tweedles, a Booth Tarkington comedy that had Ruth Gordon, Gregory Kelly, Cornelia Otis Skinner, and Donald Meek in its cast; The Deep Tangled Wildwood, a rare failure for the writing team of Kaufman and Connelly; The Wild Westcotts, a comedy with Elliott Nugent, Cornelia Otis Skinner, Claudette Colbert, and Helen Broderick in its cast; Mme. Tilla Durieux in productions of Fedora and The Shadow; and a revival of The Kreutzer Sonata starring Bertha Kalich.

The season got underway at the Eltinge with The Woman on the Jury, an Al Woods-produced drama that lasted for ten weeks. It was succeeded by a two-week continuation of the run of Red Light Annie, and then in November by the run of Spring Cleaning, a Frederick Lonsdale comedy that stayed at the theatre through the summer. Down the street at the Harris the season began with motion pictures. In mid-September, the Harris housed a drama called Peter Weston whose only remarkable feature was the appearance of Judith Anderson in a supporting role. After three weeks, it was replaced by The Nervous Wreck, a comedy that Owen Davis based on a story by E. J. Rath. With Otto Kruger and June Walker in featured roles, The Nervous Wreck amused audiences until

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June. The final show of the season at the Harris was one performance of One Helluva Night, a revue presented by members of the "Cheese Club."

The 1923-24 season was a successful one for the Selwyn. The theatre's summer offering, Helen of Troy, New York, proved popular enough to stay until October, when it was moved in order to make room for Mr. Battling Buttler, an American version of an English musical with a prizefighting theme. With Charles Ruggles in the title role, Buttler became a great audience favorite, running at the Selwyn until April. During the latter part of the run of Buttler, the Selwyn was occupied on Sunday nights by Ruth Draper giving a programme of dramatic monologues. In April, the Selwyn and the Times Square exchanged productions. Buttler went to the latter theatre and the Selwyn received the production of Charlot's Revue that had premiered at the Times Square.

At the Times Square, most of the productions for the 1923-24 season were shows that had originated at other theatres. The year began with a few weeks of films before the theatre received Helen of Troy, New York which had opened at the Selwyn. In December, the Times Square housed revivals of Pelleas and Melisande and Romeo and Juliet starring Jane Cowl and Rollo Peters. On January 9, Andre Charlot's Revue of 1924 opened at the Times Square. This English import gave American audiences their first glimpses of Gertrude Lawrence, Beatrice Lillie, and Jack Buchanan. Charlot's Revue remained at the Times Square until April, when it was replaced by Mr. Battling Buttler, the musical that moved from the Selwyn.

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Next door at the Apollo, the entire season was taken up by the run of Poppy, a circus musical starring W. C. Fields and Madge Kennedy.

In November 1923, the New York Times reported that the property of the Eltinge and Liberty theatres, which had been purchased a week earlier by Max N. Natanson and Mandelbaum and Lewine, Inc. from the Goodrich estate, had been resold to Maximilian Zipkes.[17] This transaction is an example of the interest that real estate investors had begun to take in the land on West Forty-second Street.

There was a great deal of activity during the summer of 1924. Abie's Irish Rose continued at the Republic, and Flossie remained at the Lyric for the first part of the summer. Across the street at the New Amsterdam the 1924 edition of the Ziegfeld Follies opened on June 24. This year the stars were Will Rogers, Ann Pennington, and George Olsen's Band. This edition ran through the fall and into the spring of 1925. The Liberty continued to feature the film The Thief of Bagdad during the summer of 1924, while down the street the Harris offered Plain Jane, which had premiered at the New Amsterdam in May. At the Frazee a group of English actors presented Sweeney Todd and Bombastes, Furioso during the summer. The run of Charlot's Revue at the Selwyn also continued throughout the hot weather, while a new edition of George White's Scandals appeared at the Apollo. For this year's show George Gershwin wrote one of his most popular songs, "Somebody Loves Me."

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[17] "Two Theatres Resold," 29 November 1923, p. 36.

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This increase in activity over the summer of 1924 was probably due at least in part to the overall increase in theatrical production during this period. In the 1922-23 season there were 174 new productions on Broadway; in 1923-24 there were 186, and the number would continue to grow for the next four seasons.[18]

As the 1924-25 season began, the Republic was still housing Abie's Irish Rose, which would continue there through the year. The season at the Lyric began with John Ford's film The Iron Horse. During the run of the movie, it was reported that the Lyric had been taken over by the Mutual Burlesque Association in conjunction with Joseph Oppenheimer. Their plan was to convert the theatre to a burlesque house. Shortly after this announcement was made, it was reported that the Lyric's contract with the Fox Film Company had four months left to run and that the burlesque interests could not take over the theatre until the expiration of the Fox contract.[19] The Lyric continued to present The Iron Horse until March, when the movie contract expired. Instead of leasing the Lyric to the burlesque company as originally planned, however, Oppenheimer, who controlled the theatre's lease, continued to sublet it to legitimate theatrical producers. The first production was Bringing Up Father, a musical based on a popular comic strip. After three weeks,

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[18] Poggi, p. 47.

[19] "Lyric Goes to Burlesque," New York Times, 4 October 1924, p. 16; "Delay in Burlesque at Lyric," New York Times, 8 October 1924, p. 22.

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Bringing Up Father moved and was succeeded at the Lyric by Aloma of the South Seas, an exotic drama that ran through the summer.

At the New Amsterdam, the 1924 Follies was the sole show of the season. In March 1925, it was revised and its humor updated, after which it continued to run as the Follies of 1925. W. C. Fields and Ray Dooley were among the additions to the 1925 show. In light of the unabating popularity of the Follies it is not surprising that, in October 1924, Flo Ziegfeld announced that the show would become a permanent fixture at the New Amsterdam, with new editions offered every three months.[20] Although the plan was carried out during the 1924-25 season, it did not prove feasible after that time. Meanwhile, the Frolic Theatre on the New Amsterdam roof was reopened in January 1925 with Senniaya Ptitza (The Blue Bird), a Russian revue.

The Liberty began the 1924-25 season with The Thief of Bagdad, the film that had been playing there for the past several months. On October 13, the theatre returned to the roster of legitimate houses with Cock o' the Roost, a comedy by Rida Johnson Young that ran for three weeks. In December, the Liberty offered Lady, Be Good, a musical with book by Guy Bolton and Fred Thompson, music by George Gershwin, and lyrics by Ira Gershwin. With Fred and Adele Astaire in the leading roles, Lady Be Good generated enough audience interest to run for the rest of the season.

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[20] "'Follies' to be Permanent," New York Times, 17 October 1924, p. 18.

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The Frazee began the year with The Little Angel, a comedy adapted from a Hungarian original. It ran for eight weeks. During its tenure, the New York Times reported that Meister Builders, Inc. and the Chanin Construction Co. had purchased a ten-year lease on the Frazee from Samuel Breuer. The rent for the theatre was reported to be $60,000 a year. A week later, the Times reported that the theatre's new lessees had subleased the Frazee to theatrical producer John Cort for ten years at $75,000 a year.[21] On November 21, the name of the theatre was changed from the Frazee to Wallack's, no doubt to capitalize on the rich theatrical heritage associated with the latter name, but for the rest of the season the theatre was occupied by a series of mediocre productions. The only offerings worth noting were Hell's Bells, a comedy that had Shirley Booth and Humphrey Bogart in its cast, and the Little Theatre Tournament that was held at Wallack's for one week in May. The fact that little theatre groups from across the country were able to perform in a Broadway playhouse was an example of how far the little theatre movement had progressed in a little over a decade.

At the Eltinge, the 1924-25 season began with the same production of Plain Jane that had previously been seen at the New Amsterdam and the Harris. The Eltinge then hosted two other productions that had premiered at different

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[21] "Lease Theatre Properties," 29 October 1924, p. 36; "Lease Frazee Theatre," New York Times, 4 November 1924, p. 38.

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theatres: High Stakes with Wilton Lackaye and Dawn, which had opened at the Sam Harris. The first new production of the season at the Eltinge was The Piker, a drama starring Lionel Barrymore that ran for seven weeks. It was followed at the beginning of March by the Actors Theatre production of Candida starring Katharine Cornell and Pedro de Cordoba. The last show of the season at the Eltinge was The Fall Guy, a comedy by James Gleason and George Abbott that opened in March and remained through the summer.

The 1924-25 season at the Sam H. Harris began with Be Yourself, a musical with book by George Kaufman and Marc Connelly that starred Jack Donohue and Queenie Smith. Georgia Caine, who had played a leading role in A Reign of Error, the production that had opened Hammerstein's Victoria in 1899, was cast as a grandmother in Be Yourself. The show ran for ninety-three performances, after which it was replaced by a drama called Dawn, which had Robert Montgomery in a supporting role. At the end of December, Dawn was moved to the Eltinge to make room for Topsy and Eva, a musical version of Uncle Tom's Cabin that featured the Duncan Sisters in the title roles. This curiosity proved popular enough to run for almost five months. The last show of the year at the Harris was White Collars, which had premiered at another theatre; it remained at the Harris though the summer.

The Selwyn began its season with Kid Boots, a musical that had premiered at the Earl Carroll Theatre on New Year's Eve in 1923. With Eddie Cantor in the lead,

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Kid Boots had been running for nine months when it moved to the Selwyn. It added another five and a half months to its total during its run at the Forty-second Street theatre. Kid Boots was followed into the Selwyn by Two By Two, a comedy that lasted for just two weeks. In March, a melodrama called Puppets played the Selwyn; featured in its cast were Miriam Hopkins and Frederic March. After fifty-four performances it closed, and was replaced by The Sapphire Ring, a play that had Helen Gahagan and Libby Holman among its players. The last show of the year at the Selwyn was The Gorilla. Advertised as "the greatest of all thrillers," The Gorilla opened in April and ran for six months.

The 1924-25 season began at the Times Square with Charlot's Revue, which had been moved from the Selwyn. At the end of September, the Times Square hosted Dear Sir, a Jerome Kern musical with lyrics by Howard Dietz. Despite the presence in the cast of such popular musical comedy performers as Oscar Shaw, Genevieve Tobin, and Walter Catlett, Dear Sir ran for less than two weeks. It was replaced by The Busybody, a show that had opened at another theatre. In November, a musical called Annie Dear opened at the Times Square. With book, music, and lyrics by Clare Kummer, Annie Dear was produced by Ziegfeld for his wife, Billie Burke. It ran for three months. In February, Grace George adapted a French comedy as a vehicle for herself. Called She Had to Know, it ran at the Times Square for ten weeks. In April, a drama entitled Mismates premiered and

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ran at the Times Square for a month. The last show of the season was Kosher Kitty Kelly, a musical whose plot attempted to capitalize on the popularity of Abie's Irish Rose. It was withdrawn after a single performance.

Next door at the Apollo, the season began with the continuation of the 1924 edition of George White's Scandals that had opened the previous summer. When the Scandals ended its run in December, it was followed by The Sap, a comedy starring Raymond Hitchcock that occupied the theatre for a month. The next show at the Apollo was The Valley of Content, a play starring Marjorie Rambeau that remained for five weeks, after which the theatre was used for motion pictures for several weeks. Beginning in mid-April, the Apollo housed The Fourflusher, a comedy that ran for seven weeks.

During the summer of 1925, virtually every theatre on Forty-second Street was open for at least part of the season. Several of the theatres housed attractions that had begun their runs in the spring or earlier: Abie's Irish Rose at the Republic, Aloma of the South Seas at the Lyric, the Ziegfeld Follies at the New Amsterdam, Lady, Be Good at the Liberty, The Fall Guy at the Eltinge, White Collars at the Harris, and The Gorilla at the Selwyn. Wallack's hosted two new productions during the summer: All Wet, a play that ran for one week; and White Cargo, a lurid melodrama that ran through the summer and into the fall. At the Apollo, a new edition of George White's Scandals opened in June and ran through the summer and fall. The only theatre on the

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block to be dark during the summer of 1925 was the Times Square.

In addition to the increase in theatrical activity on Forty-second Street during 1925, the block was further enlivened by the opening of Hubert's Museum and Flea Circus on the site formerly occupied by Murray's Restaurant. The new enterprise, a copy of Huber's Museum on Fourteenth Street, began as a freak show. Among the acts on the opening bill were Ajax the Sword Swallower and Libera, a "double-bodied individual." In later years, the more popular acts at the museum included Chief Amok, a headhunter; Albert-Alberta, a half-man, half-woman; and magician Al Flosso. Former boxing champion Jack Johnson and baseball player Grover Cleveland Alexander also appeared at Hubert's.[22] As Brooks Atkinson has observed, when it first opened Hubert's was considered to be too raucous and uncouth for the theatre block, but as the decades passed and the rest of the street became less and less reputable, Hubert's became regarded as a more and more respectable institution.[23] Hubert's remained a fixture on the theatre block until it closed in 1975.[24]

New York theatre was in high gear for the 1925-26 season, when seventy-five Broadway playhouses offered a

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[22]"Penguins That Write Under Water," Variety, 14 January 1959, pp. 1, 26.

[23]Broadway, p. 426.

[24]"A Sideshow Buff's Lament for Hubert's Museum & Flea Circus," Variety, 8 January 1975, p. 152.

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total of 255 new productions.[25] Forty-second Street had its share in the outpouring of productions that occurred that year. Abie's Irish Rose completed its fourth year at the Republic and looked as if it was going to remain at the theatre forever. The Lyric's season began with a musical called Holka Polka which lasted for only three weeks. In early November, it was succeeded by another musical: The Florida Girl starred Vivienne Segal and featured the Ritz Brothers in its cast, but could not muster enough ticket sales to survive for more than five weeks. On December 8, it was replaced by The Cocoanuts, another musical, this time with book by George S. Kaufman and score by Irving Berlin. Little of the book or score ever made an impression on the show's audiences, however, for the stars of The Cocoanuts were the four Marx Brothers. Their anarchic comedy made the show a big hit, and it remained at the Lyric for the summer before moving to another theatre.

The New Amsterdam also housed a hit musical during the 1925-26 season. On September 22, Flo Ziegfeld presented Sunny, a circus musical that reunited Marilyn Miller and Jerome Kern, the star and composer of Sally, Ziegfeld's hit musical of 1920. Featured in the cast of Sunny were Clifton Webb, Jack Donohue, and Joe Cawthorn. With all that talent in addition to an opulent Ziegfeld production, Sunny ran at the New Amsterdam for over a year.

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[25] Poggi, pp. 48, 47.

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The Frolic Theatre on the New Amsterdam roof was once again in use for part of the 1925-26 season. In the fall it housed Appearances, a play written by Garland Anderson, a West Coast bellhop.

At the Liberty the season got underway with Human Nature, a comedy by J. C. and Elliott Nugent that lasted only four performances. It was followed at the beginning of October by Edgar Allen Poe, a biographical drama that folded after one week. On October 26, the Liberty housed the premiere of The City Chap, a Jerome Kern musical whose cast included Skeets Gallagher, Irene Dunne, George Raft, and Betty Compton. Despite this array of talent, The City Chap ran for only nine weeks. The Liberty finally had a hit show when Tip-Toes opened there at the end of December. Tip-Toes reunited the creative team of Lady, Be Good: Bolton and Thompson for the book, and the Gershwins for the score. The cast included Queenie Smith, Allen Kearns and Jeanette MacDonald. Tip-Toes ran out the season at the Liberty.

Down the block from the Liberty, Wallack's was housing one of its few long-run shows while the Eltinge was having uncharacteristic difficulty in finding a profitable tenant. At Wallack's the early fall saw the continuation of the run of White Cargo. In November, it was replaced by Laff That Off, a comedy produced by Earl Carroll with Shirley Booth in a featured role. In the middle of December, Laff That Off was moved to another theatre in order to make room for Chivalry, a play that

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was withdrawn after three weeks. At the beginning of January, Laff That Off was brought back to Wallack's where it stayed for the rest of its 390-performance run.

The season at the Eltinge was marked by a series of mediocre productions, some modestly successful, others financial and artistic failures. The year began with All Dressed Up, a drama by Guthrie McClintic that was withdrawn after two weeks. Next came Stolen Fruit, adapted from an Italian drama. With Ann Harding and Rollo Peters in leading roles, Stolen Fruit managed a run of ninety-six performances, bringing it near the dividing line between failure and profit.[26] At the end of December, the Eltinge hosted a two-week engagement of Gladys Wallis in The School for Scandal. The next production at the theatre was Hello, Lola, a musical version of Booth Tarkington's Seventeen that ran for six weeks. In February, it was replaced by One of the Family, a show that had premiered at another theatre. One of the Family remained at the Eltinge until the summer. Meanwhile, in September 1925, it was announced that the Shuberts had acquired 50% of the Eltinge's lease from Al Woods and would book the shows that would appear there. Under the terms of the agreement shows that were booked into the Eltinge would have to play Shubert houses when they

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[26] Poggi points out that during the twenties, 100 performances was generally accepted as the minimum run needed for a show to return a profit on its initial investment (p. 74).

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toured,[27] a proviso that was reminiscent of the restrictions created by the Theatrical Syndicate at the turn of the century.

At the Harris, the fall season began with the continuation of the run of White Collars. At the beginning of November, it was succeeded by The Carolinian, a drama by Rafael Sabatini and J. Harold Terry that lasted for three weeks. It was followed by Alias the Deacon, a comedy starring Berton Churchill that proved to be an audience favorite. It was moved to another theatre at the end of December in order to clear the way for The Monkey Talks, a drama adapted from the French by Gladys Unger, with Luther Adler and Wilton Lackaye in its cast. The Monkey Talks was in turn moved to another theatre after five weeks in order to make room for Love 'Em and Leave 'Em, a comedy by George Abbott and John V. A. Weaver that ran for the rest of the season.

As the 1925-26 season began at the Selwyn, The Gorilla was still drawing spectators to the theatre. It remained there until November, when it was succeeded by Charlot's Revue of 1926, a reworking of the 1924 edition that included the best of the old material and some new songs and sketches. With Jack Buchanan, Gertrude Lawrence, and Beatrice Lillie again heading the cast, Charlot's Revue, 1926 ran for 138 performances. When it closed in March, the Selwyn was used for motion pictures

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[27] "Shuberts To Book Plays in Eltinge," New York Times, 10 September 1925, p. 29.

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for two months before The Gorilla returned for a two-week engagement. At the end of May, the Selwyn hosted Fakir Rahman Bey in a demonstration of the "Science of Fakirism." For two weeks, the Fakir demonstrated such techniques as body rigidity, cataleptic anesthesia, thought reading, and burial alive.

At the Times Square, the season began with The Pelican, an unremarkable drama that ran for eight weeks. The next production housed there was Channing Pollock's play The Enemy, an antiwar drama that ran for six months. During the run of The Enemy, Ruth Draper appropriated the Times Square on Sunday evenings for her one-woman show of character sketches. At the conclusion of The Enemy's run, the Times Square was used for films for several weeks. Finally, on May 31, Love 'Em and Leave 'Em was moved from the Apollo to the Times Square, where it stayed until July 3.

Next door at the Apollo, the 1925-26 season began with the 1925 edition of George White's Scandals which had opened in June and remained for most of the fall. The Scandals was followed by the drama Stella Dallas which had premiered at another theatre. In mid-May, the Apollo housed Love 'Em and Leave 'Em for two weeks after it left the Harris.

The 1925-26 season was in many ways the high point in the history of the Broadway stage. It was estimated in 1926 that 750,000 people passed through Times Square each evening on their way to the area's theatres, restaurants,

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and hotels.[28] In order to keep up with this population of amusement-seekers, the number of legitimate theatres in Times Square doubled in just ten years, and more than twice as many new productions premiered in the 1925-26 season than had opened a decade before.[29] Such increased activity resulted in a shortage of theatres, a development that made building or owning a theatre a lucrative investment. In a book published in 1927, Broadway publicist Will A. Page described the method by which theatres were being financed at the time.[30] First, a real estate speculator would option several lots on a side street near Broadway. Since there were still many lots occupied by old tenements, and since the rental on these buildings could barely pay their property taxes and mortgages, the lots were relatively easy to obtain. Next, the real estate promoter would interest someone in building a theatre. A small legitimate house could be built for about $300,000. In order to pay for the theatre's construction, the as yet nonexistent theatre would be rented to an angel for twenty years at $60,000 a year, provided that the angel pay the first and last year's rent in advance. With that $120,000 in the bank, the real estate man could begin building the theatre. The money needed to complete the theatre could be obtained through a second mortgage.

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[28] The Broadway Association, Broadway: The Grand Canyon of American Business (New York: The Broadway Association, 1926), p. 38.

[29] Poggi, pp. 48, 47.

[30] Behind the Curtains of the Broadway Beauty Trust, pp. 191-93.

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Once the theatre was erected, the holder of the long-term lease would sublet the house to various producers for around $4,500 a week. This rental fee would total about $180,000 a year for a forty-week season, or approximately three times the amount of rent the lessee was paying the real estate operator. At the end of twenty years, the lessee would have taken in $3,600,000 in rent, and have paid the real estate operator $1,200,000. Out of the latter amount, the real estate operator would pay off the mortgages, would clear over $800,000, and would still own the theatre.

This elaborate system of financing was predicated on a steady rental income over a forty-week season. In order to protect this income, a minimum guarantee clause was built into the rental agreements for the theatres. According to these clauses, if a show did not provide a minimum income, usually $4,000-$5,000 a week to the owner, it could be thrown out of the theatre and replaced with a potentially more profitable attraction. The owner was thereby guaranteed a minimum income that would add up to a large profit by the end of the year. In addition, owners also received a share of the weekly gross (usually 30-40%) above the minimum guarantee. A successful show playing to packed houses would thus add substantially to the theatre owner's profits. Out of this income the owner paid the theatre's overhead, usually $1,500-$6,000 a week depending

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on the theatre, but the profits would still be substantial.[31] It is not surprising, therefore, that more and more nontheatre people became involved in the building and leasing of theatres.

One effect of this system of economics was that there was even greater pressure on producers to bring in long-running hit shows that would meet the minimum guarantee and provide a steady profit, while more and more shows were being forced to close before they had a chance to develop an audience. In 1925, seventy-two percent of the shows that reached Broadway failed to make a profit.[32] This domination by theatre owners lasted for as long as there was a shortage of theatres, a situation that reached an acute stage during the 1925-26 season. One reason for the shortage of theatres during that period was the influx of Wall Street investors and "butter and egg men" into the production side of the theatre. Shows that were put together by inexperienced writers, directors, and performers were backed by newly-rich stock market speculators. Unconcerned about the artistic quality of the shows they financed, these investors knew that they could recoup their investment by turning over large blocks of tickets to the cutrate ticket dealers. For a while these haphazard productions glutted the theatres and gave theatre owners the

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[31] Howard Barnes, "The Broadway Real Estate Racket," The Theatre 50 (November 1929): 15, 16.

[32] Show Biz, p. 285.

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upper hand in rental negotiations.[33] The prosperity of the theatre during the middle years of the 1920s was thus based upon an economy distorted by an unbalanced relationship between supply and demand and by the influx of shows produced by parties unconcerned with creating works of theatrical quality.

The theatres on Forty-second Street participated in these economic developments to some extent and had additional problems of their own. Many of the producer-managers who had built the Forty-second Street theatres were no longer involved with them. Oscar Hammerstein had died in 1919; David Belasco no longer operated the Republic; the Shuberts had given up their interest in the Lyric; Sam Harris was about to pull out of the theatre bearing his name. Flo Ziegfeld was forced to dissolve his partnership with Dillingham and Erlanger, and although he continued to produce shows on Forty-second Street, most of his attention was taken up with the construction of his own theatre further uptown. Property rights and long-term leases to several of the theatres were taken over by investors: for example, the land under the Liberty and the Eltinge had been sold and then resold in 1923; the Frazee, leased in 1924 by Meister Builders and the Chanin Construction Company, was quickly subleased to John Cort, who in turn rented it out to other producers.

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[33] "Are There Too Many Theatres?," New York Times, 16 May 1926, sec. 8, p. 2.

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Investment on Forty-second Street was not confined to the theatres. Anticipating a further increase in property values when the Eighth Avenue Subway was completed, speculators continued to buy all of the available lots on the theatre block. As we shall see as we continue through the late twenties, some of the new owners made plans to develop their property, while others chose to hold onto their land until they could resell it at a substantial profit. In very few of these plans did theatres or theatre-related business have a large place; rather, most of the development schemes involved office buildings and stores. The theatre shortage kept the Forty-second Street theatres open, but the plans of the real estate speculators suggested that the future of the theatre block might lie in a different direction.

Most of the Forty-second Street theatres remained open over the summer of 1926. Abie's Irish Rose was still firmly entrenched at the Republic. The Cocoanuts remained at the Lyric until August, when it was replaced by Sunshine, a comedy that ran for two weeks to round out the theatre's summer season. At the New Amsterdam, Sunny continued to draw spectators throughout the summer, but down the block the Liberty was closed from June through September. Wallack's was occupied by Laff That Off during the summer, and the Eltinge housed One of the Family until July 10, after which the theatre was closed for the rest of the summer. The Harris was dark from the end of May

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until July 18 when Honest Liars premiered there. A farce that starred Robert Woolsey, Honest Liars proved popular enough to remain at the Harris until September and then continue its run at another theatre. The Selwyn also offered a new production during the summer of 1926: The Man From Toronto, a mediocre comedy that lasted for four weeks. It was followed by The Blonde Sinner, a musical that had opened at the Cort Theatre a few weeks before. It stayed at the Selwyn for a month before moving to the Lyric. Love 'Em and Leave 'Em was moved to the Times Square from the Harris on May 31 and stayed at the former theatre until the beginning of July. At the Apollo, the 1926 edition of George White's Scandals opened on June 14 and remained for almost a year. The score for this year's show was written by DeSylva, Brown, and Henderson and included such hit songs as "Birth of the Blues" and "The Black Bottom."

The summer of 1926 turned out to be the last year when there would be activity in virtually all of the Forty-second Street theatres during June, July, and August. When the theatre economy began to slump in 1927, '28, and '29, one of the first casualties would be warm weather entertainment. As theatre owners and producers found it harder and harder to keep their theatres occupied during the winter months, there seemed to be less effort to keep the houses open during the summer unless the long run of a smash hit show made the summer season viable.

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During the 1926-27 season, the great theatrical boom began to level off. No new theatres opened that season, and the number of productions increased only slightly, from 255 in 1925-26 to 263 in 1926-27. Significantly, the number of "theatre weeks" decreased from 2,852 in 1925-26 to 2,806 in 1926-27.[34] Although the number of theatres and the number of productions fluctuated only slightly over the next few years, the number of theatre weeks declined steadily after reaching a high point during the 1925-26 season. If the number of productions was remaining the same or even slightly increasing while the number of theatre weeks was decreasing, the inescapable conclusion is that shows were averaging shorter runs, the average no doubt brought down by the number of quick failures during the period. By the end of October 1926, for example, there were many empty theatres in the Times Square area, even though the season was well underway.[35] The decline in theatre weeks also indicates that theatres were gradually becoming a less profitable investment, since the owners' and lessees' profits were predicated on the theatres' being rented for at least forty weeks of the year. This slowdown in theatrical activity and the resulting decrease in profits manifested itself indirectly on

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[34] Poggi, pp. 48, 47, 50. A theatre week represents one production occupying one theatre for one week. The total number of theatre weeks therefore indicates the total amount of theatrical activity in any given season.

[35] "Rialto Gossip," New York Times, 31 October 1926, sec. 8, p. 1.

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Forty-second Street as three of the theatres changed hands during the season and announcements were made that other property on the block would be developed for nontheatrical purposes.

As the 1926-27 season began at the Republic, Abie's Irish Rose entered the final year of its phenomenal run. The Lyric housed The Blond Sinner for three weeks before the musical moved on to the Frolic. The next show at the Lyric was The Ramblers, a musical with book by Guy Bolton and score by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby. With Clark and McCullough providing the comedy, The Ramblers stayed at the Lyric for eight months. At the end of May, the Lyric housed Tales of Rigo, a "music drama" produced by Joseph Oppenheimer, who now controlled the theatre's lease. Tales of Rigo lasted for two weeks, after which it was replaced by The Woman of Bronze, a revival starring Margaret Anglin that remained until the middle of July.

During the spring of 1927, the Lyric's ownership changed hands. E. E. Smathers, who had bought the Lyric from the De Koven estate in 1920, sold the playhouse to the Lyric Operating Company, controlled by Jacob and Joseph Oppenheimer, who were then the lessees of the theatre. The purchase price was $2,500,000, of which $750,000 was in cash and the rest in mortgages. The Oppenheimers announced in April that they would demolish the Lyric and replace it with a thirty-story office building containing a 1,700-seat theatre which would be devoted to musicals. The new building,

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which would cost $5,000,000, was to be designed in a series of setbacks, and in a style to match the Times Annex and Paramount Building which faced it on Forty-third Street. The theatre was to have one balcony since, according to the Oppenheimers, "the public seems definitely antagonistic to the second balcony." The owners expected the new building to be completed within eighteen months.[36] Although this detailed announcement made it seem as if the new office building was well on its way to becoming a reality, no plans for it were ever filed with the Buildings Department, and the Oppenheimers were forced to give up control of the Lyric a little over a year later.

The New Amsterdam, traditionally occupied by the Ziegfeld Follies for at least a part of each season, was forced to fill in with a number of other shows during 1926-27 because of Ziegfeld's financial difficulties. The run of Sunny, which had continued through the summer, occupied the theatre during the fall. On December 28, it was succeeded by Betsy, a Rodgers and Hart musical whose best known song was an interpolation--Irving Berlin's "Blue Skies." Betsy could muster a run of only thirty-nine performances, after which it was succeeded by an all-star revival of Trelawney of the Wells, with Helen Gahagan, Wilton Lackaye, Henrietta Crosman, Otto Kruger, John E. Kellerd, Rollo Peters, Estelle Winwood, Pauline Lord, John Drew, Effie Shannon,

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[36] "New 30-Story Theatre and Office Building To Rise on Site of Lyric, Sold for $2,500,000," New York Times, 7 April 1927, p. 1.

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and several other distinguished actors in its cast. Trelawney remained at the New Amsterdam for seven weeks and then went on a nationwide tour. On March 22, the New Amsterdam housed the premiere of Lucky, a musical by Otto Harbach, Bert Kalmar, Harry Ruby, and Jerome Kern. The star of Lucky was Mary Eaton, Charles Dillingham's answer to Ziegfeld's star Marilyn Miller. Skeets Gallagher, Walter Catlett, and Ruby Keeler were also in the cast of Lucky. Despite their efforts the musical ran for only nine weeks. The last production of the year at the New Amsterdam was a revival of Julius Caesar starring James Rennie, William Courtleigh, Tyrone Power, and Basil Rathbone. It ran for one week in June.

The Frolic Theatre on the New Amsterdam roof housed three productions during the 1926-27 season. The first was the musical The Blonde Sinner, which had begun at the Cort and had played at the Selwyn and the Lyric before being transferred to the Frolic, where it ran from September into December. It was succeeded by Night Hawk, a play that ran for 152 performances. In May, a comedy called He Loves the Ladies played the Frolic for one week, during which it had the dubious distinction of raising the curtain for a Thursday matinee to a completely empty house.[37]

At the Liberty, the 1926-27 season began in late September with Happy Go Lucky, a musical produced by A. L.

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[37]Show Biz, p. 299.

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Erlanger, who had once again become active in presenting attractions. Lina Abarbanell, who had played the title role in Madame Sherry at the New Amsterdam sixteen years before, was cast in a small role in Happy Go Lucky. In November, the show was replaced by Twinkle, Twinkle, a weak musical that was bolstered by some interpolated songs of Kalmar and Ruby and the clowning of Joe E. Brown. It managed a five-month run. The next show at the Liberty was Lady Do, a musical presented by a team of neophytes. Like Lucien Denni, the composer of Happy Go Lucky, Abel Baer wrote his first and last Broadway score with the music for Lady Do. It closed after a seven-week run.

Wallack's had a characteristically mediocre season in 1926-27, with no show lasting longer than twelve weeks. Among the more interesting productions were They All Want Something, a comedy that included tennis star Bill Tilden in its cast; What Ann Brought Home, a comedy starring Mayo Methot, wife of Humphrey Bogart; and The White Sister, an operatic version of the novel by F. Marion Crawford.

The 1926-27 season at the Eltinge began with a mystery drama called The Ghost Train that numbered Claudette Colbert among its cast. It closed in less than eight weeks, after which the Eltinge housed two shows that had begun at other theatres: If I Was Rich and We Americans. In January, the Eltinge offered The Love Thief, a drama originally titled Praying Curve. A month later it was replaced by Crime, a melodrama that had a cast including

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Sylvia Sidney, Chester Morris, and Kay Francis. Crime was a hit, and it was moved to the Times Square in April to make room at the Eltinge for Tommy, which marked Howard Lindsay's debut as a playwright after several years of acting and directing. Tommy remained at the Eltinge into the summer season.

At the Sam H. Harris, the season began with No Trespassing, a comedy that lasted for three weeks. The next production was We Americans, a drama starring Paul Muni (billed as Muni Wisenfrend, a variation of his real name, Frederich Weisenfreund) and Luther Adler. In November, We Americans was moved to the Eltinge. The rest of the season at the Harris was devoted to the films What Price Glory? and Seventh Heaven, both of which had orchestral accompaniments written for them by composer Erno Rapee. Rapee very shrewdly wrote a romantic theme for each picture with the heroine's name as the title: "Charmaine" for What Price Glory? and "Diane" for Seventh Heaven. Both became popular song hits shortly after the movies were released, and thus helped to create audience interest in the films.

In September 1926, the Harris was sold by Sam Harris to the Shuberts at an estimated price of $1,000,000. The leaseholders at the time of the transfer, the Wilkes Theatre Corporation, received back their $90,000 deposit. Although the Shuberts now controlled the theatre, they

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rarely produced their own shows there, preferring to rent it out to other managers.[38]

Across the street, the Selwyn began its season with Castles in the Air, a musical with Vivienne Segal and J. Harold Murray that ran for twenty weeks. It moved out of the Selwyn in December to clear the way for The Constant Nymph, a play produced, co-authored, and staged by Basil Dean. It, too, managed a respectable run of 148 performances. The Selwyn's next three productions were not so successful. One Glorious Hour, a romantic comedy adapted from the German, lasted less than three weeks; The Lady Screams was around for only one week; and Namiko-San, a Japanese musical personally supervised by Sessue Hayakawa, ran for two weeks to end the Selwyn's season.

The year at the Times Square began with Number 7, a drama produced by Earl Carroll that ran for five weeks. It was moved out of the Times Square on September 28 to make room for Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, a comedy based on Anita Loos' best-selling novel about the exploits of gold-digger Lorelei Lee and her friend Dorothy. With June Walker as Lorelei, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes ran for 199 performances. The final show of the season at the Times Square was Crime, which was moved from the Eltinge in March and remained at the Times Square into the summer. Next door at the Apollo, the 1926 edition of George White's Scandals, which had

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[38] "Shuberts Purchase Sam H. Harris Theatre," New York Times, 20 September 1926, p. 20.

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opened in June, stayed at the theatre through the winter season.

The summer of 1927 was marked by a significant amount of real estate activity on Forty-second Street. The Schulte Realty Company, which had gained sole ownership to Wallack's the previous October, sold it to an investor at the end of June. The Schulte Company also purchased two pieces of property on the north side of the block: the Clinton Apartment Houses and a four-story building at 251-257 West Forty-second Street.[39] In early July, United Artists acquired a half interest in the lease of the Rialto Theatre from Publix Theatres Corporation, a Paramount affiliate.[40] A few days later it was announced that the Robert E. Miller and Meyer Coleman estates had sold substantial parcels of land on Forty-second and Forty-first Streets to Nathan S. Goldstein. Goldstein's intention was to hold onto the land until the completion of the Eighth Avenue Subway, when his property's value would be increased by its proximity to the new transit line.[41] Earlier in the 1926-27 season, the land at 241 West Forty-second Street had been purchased by the building firm of Zimmer, Reznick and Locker for the purpose of erecting a

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[39]"Wallack's Theatre Sold," New York Times, 30 June 1927, p. 49.

[40]"United Artists Buys in Rivoli and Rialto," New York Times, 2 July 1927, p. 21.

[41]"42D St. Properties in $1,000,000 Deal," New York Times, 7 July 1927, p. 44.

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2,000-seat theatre. Like many of the playhouses already built on the theatre block, the new building was to be situated on Forty-third Street, with a narrow entranceway leading to Forty-second Street.[42] For some reason, perhaps the slump in theatre business, this playhouse was never built. Instead, the Forty-third Street property was to become the site of the Hotel Dixie.

The number of real estate transactions taking place on Forty-second Street reflects the mania for building and development that was to reach its peak in New York in 1928.[43] The nature of the purchases and the uses planned for the property also indicate that although some developers still considered the theatre block a good location for a playhouse, others saw Forty-second Street's importance in terms of its proximity to new forms of mass transit. In the next two and a half years, buildings and parcels of land on Forty-second Street would continue to change hands, plans for development would continue to be made, and a few of the plans would be actually carried out before the stock market crash and resulting depression would put an end to most of the development schemes.

Some of the theatres on Forty-second Street remained open and active for all or part of the summer of 1927. Abie's Irish Rose reached the end of its incredible run on

[42] "Buy Site for Theatre Near Times Square," New York Times, 9 December 1926, p. 17.

[43] Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1931; repr. 1964), p. 239.

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September 1 after 2,318 performances, making it the longest-running play up to that time. Today, over fifty years after it closed, it is still third on the list of long-running Broadway plays. In July, the Lyric housed Behind the Footlights (also called Footlights), a mediocre musical that lasted for five weeks. In August, Ziegfeld finally produced a new edition of the Follies at the New Amsterdam. This time around, the stars were Eddie Cantor and Ruth Etting, and Ziegfeld spent an unprecedented $289,000 on the production.[44] Although the 1927 edition was not able to match the long runs achieved by some of the earlier shows in the series, it did run for over twenty weeks. This was to be the final edition of the Follies produced at the New Amsterdam. The 1931 show, the last supervised by Ziegfeld, was presented at the new theatre bearing his name, and the editions produced by the Shuberts after Ziegfeld's death were all housed at the Winter Garden.

Wallack's offered three productions during the summer of 1927. The first was One For All, a show moved from another theatre for a three-week run at Wallack's. The next was The Mating Season, which had opened at the Selwyn a week earlier. It also lasted for three weeks. The final show for the summer, and the only one originating at Wallack's, was Babies a la Carte, a farce that kept the theatre occupied for another three weeks. The Harris continued to house the film version of Seventh Heaven during

[44]Bordman, p. 427.

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the summer season, while the Selwyn hosted two new productions. The Mating Season was a farce written by, staged by, and starring William A. Grew. After a week it moved to Wallack's. On August 3, The Manhatters moved to the Selwyn after its opening in Greenwich Village. A revue with lyrics by George S. Oppenheimer, the show ran for nine weeks at the Selwyn. At the Times Square, the run of Crime continued until July 30, after which the theatre closed for the remainder of the summer.

At the opening of the 1927-28 season, the lessees of the Republic were forced to seek a new production for the first time in five years. Their first offering was The Mulberry Bush, a comedy by Edward Knoblock with Claudette Colbert in its cast. After a month, it was withdrawn and replaced by the Theatre Guild's production of DuBose and Dorothy Heyward's play Porgy, which spent most of its long run at the Republic, remaining there through the summer.

At the Lyric the season started out slowly but gained momentum after the Christmas holidays. The first show in the fall was The Enchanted Isle, a musical play with book, music, and lyrics by Ida Hoyt Chamberlain; it ran for a month. Next came Out of the Night, a mystery comedy that ran for seven weeks. On December 26, the Lyric received the musical Rio Rita that had opened at the Ziegfeld Theatre the previous February. Rio Rita ended its run in mid-March when it was succeeded by The Three

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Musketeers, the last of Rudolf Friml's classic operettas. With Dennis King and Vivienne Segal in leading roles, The Three Musketeers ran for 318 performances. In March, the Lyric Operating Company (headed by the Oppenheimers) encountered financial difficulties, and the S. S. Lyric Company (E. E. Smathers and Charles B. Shaffer), which held the mortgage on the theatre, took back the lease.[45] It would take almost two years for the complicated financial dealings involving the Lyric to be straightened out.

The Ziegfeld Follies of 1927 occupied the New Amsterdam during the fall. On January 10, it was replaced by Rosalie, a Ziegfeld production starring Marilyn Miller, with music by the unlikely team of George Gershwin and Sigmund Romberg. Alexander Woollcott's often-quoted description of Marilyn Miller's first entrance in Rosalie sums up both the popularity of Miller and the dramatic instincts of Ziegfeld and his assistants.

> There comes a time once in every two or three years when the vast stage of that playhouse [the New Amsterdam] begins to show signs of a deep and familiar agitation. Down in the orchestra pit the violins chitter with excitement and the brasses blare. The spotlight turns white with expectation. Fifty beautiful girls in simple peasant costumes of satin and chiffon rush pellmell onto the stage, all squealing simple peasant outcries of "Here she comes!" Fifty hussars in fatigue uniform of ivory white and tomato bisque march on in columns of four and kneel to express an emotion too strong for words. The lights swing to the gateway at the back and settle there. The house holds its breath. And on walks Marilyn Miller.[46]

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[45] "Lyric Theatre in Suit," New York Times, 20 March 1928, p. 21.

[46] Quoted in Robert Kimball and Alfred Simon, The Gershwins (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 88.

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Rosalie drew audiences to the New Amsterdam for ten months. In April 1928, A. L. Erlanger purchased 333-1/3 shares in the New Amsterdam Realty Company from the estate of Samuel F. Nirdlinger, giving Erlanger a total of 1,333-1/3 shares in the property, which was now assessed at a value of $1,820,000. The only other shares in the New Amsterdam were held by J. Fred Zimmerman and his son. One year later, Erlanger obtained the remaining shares and became the sole owner of the theatre.[47]

Meanwhile, the New Amsterdam roof was once again being used for theatrical productions. In October, a comedy called Jimmie's Women was moved to the Frolic from the Biltmore. It remained at the roof theatre until early April. In May, the Frolic hosted the annual Little Theatre Tournament for one week. A month later, a comedy called The Cyclone Lover opened at the theatre and ran for four weeks. Its co-author was Charles Bickford, later a prominent motion picture actor.

The season at the Liberty was a disappointing one for legitimate productions, and the managers were forced to rely on films to keep the house open. The year began with Black Velvet, a play that lasted less than two weeks. The next offering was Skin Deep, a comedy that despite a fine cast including Bertram Harrison, Reginald Owen, Chrystal

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[47] "Erlanger Gets Nirdlinger Shares," New York Times, 28 April 1928, p. 30; "Erlanger Sole Owner of New Amsterdam," New York Times, 21 May 1929, p. 29.

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Herne, and Spring Byington, ran for only one week. At the end of October, the Liberty hosted the production of Out of the Night which had begun at the Lyric. It stayed until early December, after which the Liberty was occupied by films until April. It returned to legitimate use with Forbidden Roads, a play adapted from a Spanish original. Forbidden Roads lasted for eight performances. The final production of the year was the Liberty's only success of the season. Blackbirds of 1928, with songs by Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh and a cast headed by Bill Robinson and Adelaide Hall, was an immediate hit, and stayed at the Liberty through the summer before continuing its long run at the Eltinge.

Wallack's also had a disappointing season during which a total of ten different productions opened and closed. The more interesting offerings included High Gear, a comedy that lasted for only three weeks but provided another role for Shirley Booth; and a revival of the melodrama Ten Nights in a Barroom that drew audiences for over a month in the late spring.

Like Wallack's, the Eltinge could not boast of a single solid hit during the 1927-28 season. Of the nine productions that played at the theatre during the year, those worth noting were: Tenth Avenue, a melodrama that lasted for eleven weeks; Out of the Sea, a play staged by Walter Hampden with Claude Rains in its cast; These Modern Women, a comedy by Lawrence Langner that was staged by

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Rouben Mamoulian; Her Unborn Child, an "ultra-modern play" that purported to give "the truth about birth control" (three matinees a week were set aside for ladies); and Keep Shufflin', a Black musical starring Miller and Lyles, with Fats Waller, the show's composer, playing piano in the orchestra pit. Keep Shufflin' had premiered at Daly's in February. It moved to the Eltinge in April and remained there for a few weeks.

At the Harris, the 1927-28 season was slightly better than at some of the other Forty-second Street theatres. It began with Merry-Go-Round, a musical that had opened at the Klaw Theatre in May. This revue featured such talented newcomers as performers Leonard Sillman and Libby Holman, and sketch writers Morrie Ryskind and Howard Dietz. It stayed at the Harris for three weeks. The next show, also a musical, was called Yes, Yes, Yvette, a title that proclaimed its resemblance to No, No, Nanette. The new show boasted Jeanette MacDonald in the title role, but could only sustain a run of five weeks. The next month at the Harris was occupied by And So To Bed, a play about Samuel Pepys that had premiered at the Shubert Theatre. And So To Bed was most notable for the American acting debut of Emlyn Williams. At the end of December, the Harris presented Lovely Lady, a mildly successful musical based on the French farce. The first (and only) show produced by the Shuberts in the theatre they now controlled, Lovely Lady ran at the Harris for twenty-one weeks. In June the drama,

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The Trial of Mary Dugan, was moved from the National to the Harris, where it remained for the summer.

The Selwyn began its season with The Garden of Eden, a comedy adapted by Avery Hopwood from a German play. It lasted for three weeks, after which it was replaced by Pickwick, a dramatization of Dickens that had opened at another theatre. In November, the Selwyn presented Nightstick, a melodrama with Lee Patrick and Thomas Mitchell in its cast. At the end of December, the Selwyn housed its first hit of the season. The Royal Family, a comedy by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber, was loosely based on the exploits of the Barrymore family. A cast that included Haidee Wright and Otto Kruger amused audiences for over ten months.

The entire 1927-28 season at the Times Square was devoted to films, particularly to F. W. Murnau's film Sunrise, which in its elaborate, expressionistic effects represented the apotheosis of silent film art. Ironically, at virtually the same time that Sunrise was playing at the Times Square, Warner Brothers was introducing the first "talkie"--"The Jazz Singer"--to Broadway. Although it took the movie studios a few months to convert to the new film process, the future of such silent films as Sunrise was cut short by the immense popularity of talking pictures.

Next door at the Apollo, the entire season was given over to the run of Manhattan Mary, a musical comedy that served as a vehicle for the comic talents of Ed Wynn. In a

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variation of the Cinderella formula, the plot of Manhattan Mary had a poor girl wind up a star in George White's Scandals. To add authenticity, George White played himself in the show, in addition to helping to write and stage it. To further emphasize the show's connection with the Scandals, one scene was laid at the Apollo Theatre, and another at Hubert's Museum across the street. Manhattan Mary proved popular enough to run for eight weeks.

Over the summer of 1928, several of the Forty-second Street theatres stayed open, either for the continuing run of shows that had premiered during the winter, or to present new shows. The holdovers were Porgy at the Republic, The Three Musketeers at the Lyric, Rosalie at the New Amsterdam, Blackbirds of 1928 at the Liberty, The Trial of Mary Dugan at the Harris, and The Royal Family at the Selwyn. The new shows at Wallack's were Wanted, a comedy lasting two weeks; The Lawyer's Dilemma, a show that had premiered at another theatre; and Guns, a "story of gangdom" that opened in August and ran for six weeks. On July 2, a new edition of George White's Scandals opened at the Apollo. This was the last Scandals for which DeSylva, Brown, and Henderson wrote the score. The 1928 edition ran for 230 performances.

At the end of July, the New York Times reported that the Lyric Theatre's property had been taken over by Philip . Meyrowitz, President of the Carabel Realty Corporation. Meyrowitz had secured the contracts for purchase from Jacob

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and Joseph Oppenheimer, whose financial difficulties had forced them to abandon the scheme to demolish the Lyric and replace it with a theatre/office building.[48] A more optimistic note was sounded during the summer of 1928 by J. W. Danahy, Managing Director of the Eighth Avenue Association, who confidently predicted that Eighth Avenue was about to become Manhattan's new theatre center. Danahy reasoned that since several hotels and amusement centers had been built along Eighth Avenue during the past year, it was just a matter of time before the legitimate theatres would follow suit.[49] This sanguine view of the future of Eighth Avenue is one reason why real estate operators like Philip Meyrowitz were willing to buy properties like the land under the Lyric Theatre, for they could only increase in value if the area surrounding the theatre block became a center for new commercial and amusement activities.

The 1928-29 season began at the Republic with Adventure, a play lasting for three weeks. It was followed by Crashing Through, produced by Oliver D. Bailey, the theatre's lessee. After forty performances, Crashing Through was replaced by Tin Pan Alley, a drama with Claudette Colbert featured in the cast. At the end of December, the Theatre Guild moved its revival of Shaw's Major Barbara to the

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[48] "Review of the Day in Realty Market," 26 July 1928, p. 37.

[49] "Sees 8th Av. Area As Theatre Centre," New York Times, 29 July 1928, sec. 10, p. 1.

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Republic. With Winifred Lenihan, Elliot Cabot, and Dudley Digges in starring roles, Major Barbara remained for three weeks at the Republic. The next three weeks were devoted to One Way Street, a play that had begun at the Cohan. Finally, on February 12, the Republic housed its first hit of the season. My Girl Friday, a play by William A. Grew (who also staged and appeared in it), stayed at the Republic for eight months.

The Lyric's season began with a continuation of the run of The Three Musketeers, which stayed through the fall. In January it was replaced by Polly, a musical based on David Belasco's play Polly With a Past. Although it lasted for only two weeks, Polly did serve to advance the career of Fred Allen, who would become a star a few months later in the revue The Little Show. After Polly closed, the Lyric devoted the rest of the season to films.

The 1928-29 season at the New Amsterdam involved the end of one long-run attraction and the beginning of another. Rosalie, which had remained at the theatre through the summer, finished its run during the fall. On December 4, it was succeeded by another Ziegfeld-produced musical, Whoopee. Based on The Nervous Wreck, a comedy that had played at the Sam H. Harris during the 1923-24 season, Whoopee featured Eddie Cantor and Ruth Etting as its stars. The musical was a big hit, and contributed the songs "Makin' Whoopee" and "Love Me or Leave Me" to the catalogue of American popular standards. Whoopee settled into the New

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Amsterdam for a run that would eventually total 407 performances.

The Liberty was not as fortunate as the New Amsterdam in its new productions for 1928-29. In early October, Blackbirds of 1928 was moved to the Eltinge in order to make room for Mr. Moneypenny, a "verbal cartoon" by Channing Pollock that was staged by Richard Boleslavsky. Van Heflin made his Broadway debut in this production, which also had Hale Hamilton, Donald Meek, and Margaret Wycherly in its cast. It closed after sixty-one performances. At the end of November New Americana, a reworked version of Americana, a revue that had in turn been a revision of a successful 1926 show, played at the Liberty for two weeks. On December 25, the Liberty hosted Houseboat on the Styx, a play starring Blanche Ring and Hal Forde that managed a three-month run. The final show of the season at the Liberty was Lady Fingers, a modestly pleasing musical that had begun at the Vanderbilt in January and that remained at the Liberty from early April to the end of May.

The first production for the fall season at Wallack's was Relations, a play that had begun at the Theatre Masque. At the end of December, a farce called Back Seat Drivers had a two-week run at Wallack's; in March the theatre hosted another farce, She Got What She Wanted, that ran for the rest of the season.

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The Eltinge housed one show during the 1928-29 season. Blackbirds of 1928, which had premiered at the Liberty the previous May, was transferred to the Eltinge in October and remained there until May 1929. The Harris was less successful in finding a tenant. The season began with brief engagements by three shows that had premiered elsewhere: The Silent House, Gang War, and Luckee Girl. At the end of November, the Harris offered its only new production of the season. Congai, starring Helen Menken, was the last show produced by Sam H. Harris at the theatre bearing his name. It ran for 135 performances, after which the Harris showed films for the rest of the season.

At the Selwyn, the run of The Royal Family continued into the early fall. On November 7, it was succeeded by This Year of Grace, a revue written by, and starring Noel Coward, with Beatrice Lillie also prominently featured. This Year of Grace ran for twenty weeks, after which the Selwyn, too, was used for motion pictures for the rest of the season.

Most of the 1928-29 season at the Times Square was devoted to the run of The Front Page, the Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur newspaper comedy that opened in August and stayed at the Times Square until the end of April. To round out the season, the theatre offered Harlem, a play that had premiered at the Apollo, followed by a two-week engagement of a comedy called Borrowed Love.

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The fall season at the Apollo consisted of the remainder of the run of the 1928 Scandals. After the revue closed in February, it was replaced by Harlem, a drama that gave Black actors a rare opportunity to appear on Broadway in a nonmusical attraction. By the beginning of May, the Apollo was offering films. Customers who attended one performance demanded their money back when mechanical problems caused a loud buzz in the theatre's new sound equipment.[50]

During the 1928-29 season, indications were mounting that the enormous amount of theatrical production that had occurred during the mid-twenties was soon to be a thing of the past. The number of new productions that year was 225, a significant decrease from the record-breaking 264 shows introduced during the 1927-28 season. The number of theatre weeks (that is, the total of all the weeks that all of the Broadway productions played that year) had steadily declined from a high of 2,852 during the 1925-26 season to 2,432 in 1928-29.[51] Since the number of legitimate theatres remained more or less constant between 1925 and 1930, the decrease in productions and theatre weeks meant that there was no longer a theatre shortage; in fact, observers of the Broadway scene began to suggest that there were now too many playhouses. In an editorial published in December 1928, the New York Times blamed the bad theatre

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[50]"Walk Out on Balky Talkie," New York Times, 7 May 1929, p. 40.

[51]Poggi, pp. 47, 50.

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business that year on the number of new theatres. According to the Times, the existence of the new playhouses made it possible for shows to be produced which would otherwise not have been seen on Broadway.[52] By July, the Times was noting that a pause in the construction of new theatres had occurred, presumably because a saturation point had been reached.[53] A few weeks later, Al Woods asserted that there were forty too many theatres in New York, and that at least thirty of the playhouses in Times Square had been dark off and on during the season.[54]

In February 1929, Alfred L. Bernheim published an article in The New Republic called "The Theater: A Depressed Industry," in which he analyzed the financial problems that the Broadway theatre faced. Bernheim quoted Variety as reporting that not long after New Year's Eve (the busiest time of the year for the theatres) one out of five Broadway playhouses was dark, and that twenty shows had closed in the first two weeks of 1929, nearly all of them failures. Bernheim felt that the problem had reached such serious proportions during the 1928-29 season because of a particularly poor crop of new plays, but that the causes of the theatre's financial difficulties were more deeply rooted.

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[52] "Poor Theatrical Business," 19 December 1928, p. 26.

[53] "A Momentary Pause in Playhouse Building," 28 July 1929, sec. 8, p. 1.

[54] "Woods for Closing 40 Theatres Here," New York Times, 10 September 1929, p. 26.

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He blamed the high cost of productions, the inefficient system of ticket distribution, the surplus of theatre buildings, the decline of the road, and the competition of other forms of amusements for the theatre's difficulties. He felt that high costs and the inadequate ticket distribution system were especially important factors in the reduction of the profitability of the Broadway theatre.[55]

Kenneth MacGowan, in an article published in Harper's Monthly, also expressed concern about the surplus of theatres and the high cost of productions. MacGowan pointed out that although the legitimate theatre had withstood the challenges of vaudeville and the automobile before World War I, the silent film for fifteen years, and radio in the past three or four seasons, that talking films were the medium closest to the theatre's own art, and were therefore the most formidable opponent that Broadway had yet faced.[56]

This generally recognized decline in the financial well-being of the theatre had its effect on Forty-second Street. The theatre block was considered a prime piece of Manhattan real estate. Even as the theatres hit the doldrums, other properties on the block were being developed for nontheatrical uses. A number of banking institutions

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[55]Alfred L. Bernheim, "The Theater: A Depressed Industry," The New Republic 57 (February 13, 1929): 341.

[56]"The Crisis on Broadway," 158 (December 1928): 112-18.

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opened offices on or near Forty-second Street: the Franklin Savings Bank, which had been on the block for fifty years, was now joined by the Bryant Bank at 22 West Forty-second Street and the Corn Exchange Bank Building on the northwest corner of Forty-second Street and Eighth Avenue.[57] Other development on the block was also planned: the Loft Restaurant chain leased property at 251-255 West Forty-second Street upon which they built the largest store and restaurant in their chain.[58] Six old tenements on Forty-third Street were demolished to make room for the Hotel Dixie, and the venerable Clinton Apartments, once the Methodist-Episcopal Asylum for the Aged and Insane and later the home of theatrical luminaries like Nat Goodwin and Rose Coghlan, was torn down to make way for a six-story building. The property at 241 West Forty-second Street, which had been occupied by a two-story building, was also cleared to make room for a store and office building. That particular piece of land, occupying a lot twenty feet wide by one hundred feet deep, had changed hands several times over the years, and its rapidly increasing value was an indication of the increasing value of all the land in the vicinity of the theatre block. The plot had been sold for $38,000 around

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[57] "Expanding Business Interests in Times Square Section," New York Times, 9 December 1928, sec. 13, p. 1; "Changing Scenes Along 42d Street," New York Times, 6 January 1929, sec. 13, p. 1.

[58] "Says Times Square Has Many Advantages."

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1905. A year later, it was resold for $45,000, and resold a little later for $50,000. By 1929, its assessed land value was over $150,000 and one real estate expert estimated that its current market value was over $250,000.[59]

With the land on Forty-second Street continuing to increase in value, and with the theatres becoming less profitable, it was only a matter of time before some of the playhouses would be torn down to make way for buildings that would generate a larger and more dependable income. In May 1929, the American Theatre's lease, held at the time by the Alurion Realty Corporation (a holding company for the Zborowski Estate), was transferred to the Bethlehem Engineering Corporation. Bethlehem acquired an eighty-eight-year lease on the property at a total rental of more than $12,000,000. Their plan was to demolish the theatre and replace it with a thirty-story office building. Bethlehem revealed that actual construction might be delayed for two years, and that their purchase of the property had been prompted by the development of Eighth Avenue and the anticipated completion of the new subway.[60] According to a Times reporter, the announcement that the American would be replaced by a commercial building "revives the question mentioned lately by realty experts,--that eventually some of the playhouses in the theatrical block are likely to

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[59] "Landmarks Pass in Times Square," New York Times, 5 May 1929, p. 2; "Changing Scenes."

[60] "Skyscraper to Replace American Theatre."

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give way to commercial needs. The influence of the Eighth Avenue subway may exert a tendency in that direction within the next half dozen years."[61] Thus, in the summer of 1929, the theatre block seemed to be on the brink of a transformation to a commercial center.

Because the spring season had not generated many long-run hits, the summer of 1929 was a quiet one for the theatres on Forty-second Street. The Republic housed My Girl Friday throughout the warm months, and the New Amsterdam was kept open by the success of Whoopee. The Selwyn opened briefly at the end of June for a musical revue called Keep It Clean which folded after two weeks. The Apollo continued to show films during the earlier part of the summer. The rest of the theatres remained closed. In June, it was announced that the lease of Wallack's (which was held by Theatre Estates, Inc., headed by Isaac Meister), originally scheduled to expire in 1934, had been extended for another sixty-three years. The net annual rent for the first twenty-one years of the new lease was to range from $50,000 to $70,000, with subsequent rentals on a 6% reappraisal basis. Theatre Estates was also given an option to buy the property during the first five years on terms offered the owner by any other party.[62] Since the lessee did not announce any plans for the property, it seems likely

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[61] "Landmarks Pass in Times Square."

[62] "Extend 42D Street Lease," New York Times, 23 May 1929, p. 52.

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that the company intended to continue operating the theatre while awaiting the development of the block after the opening of the Eighth Avenue Subway.

During the summer of 1929, new plans were revealed for the New Amsterdam's roof theatre. During the theatre shortage of the mid-twenties, the roof had been occupied by a series of legitimate productions and Little Theatre Tournaments. Now that the shortage was over, the roof was no longer in such demand. In June 1929, A. L. Erlanger announced that the roof would be converted into a house for theatrical attractions, radio broadcasts, and the showing and recording of talking films. A soundproof glass curtain was to be installed that could be lowered in front of the stage. When the curtain was in use, the audience would hear the sound through amplifiers. Erlanger also announced that when television was perfected scenes would be broadcast visually from the New Amsterdam roof. The theatre was to be renamed the Aerial (actually a return to its original designation) and was to open in late September.[63]

As the fall 1929 season began on Forty-second Street there were a few holdovers from the previous season. The Republic began the fall with the continuation of My Girl Friday. In October, it housed the premiere of The House of Fear, a mystery farce with Effie Shannon in a prominent role. It ran for six weeks, after which the Republic hosted It

[63] "Frolic Theatre to Be Remodeled," New York Times, 20 June 1929, p. 19.

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Never Rains, a comedy that became a popular hit. It Never Rains was moved out at the end of December and was followed into the Republic by Seven, a drama in seven episodes that gave Preston Foster one of his early roles. Seven managed a run of thirty-five performances.

The Lyric began the fall with The Ghost Parade, a melodrama that lasted for less than two weeks. It was followed on November 27 by Fifty Million Frenchmen, a musical with book by Herbert Fields and score by Cole Porter. William Gaxton was the star. Fifty Million Frenchmen ran for almost eight months.

The New Amsterdam continued to house Whoopee during the early fall, and then on November 25 presented a revival of Sherlock Holmes with William Gillette in the title role, as he had been for the play's premiere in 1900. The revival lasted for forty-five performances. At the Liberty, the sole production for the fall was Subway Express, a drama that opened in late September and ran for eight months.

Wallack's had its usual difficulties in finding a long-run show during the fall of 1929. It offered four comedies, none of which lasted for more than four weeks. The Eltinge also had difficulty in finding a long-running tenant. Of the five productions it offered during the fall, three had moved from other theatres. The two premieres were Murder on the Second Floor, a drama that was notable only for the New York debut of Laurence Olivier; and Top o' the Hill, staged by Worthington Miner, who later became a prominent television director.

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The first productions of the season at the Sam H. Harris were two dramas: Scotland Yard, which ran for three weeks; and Veneer, which lasted for four weeks. Beginning at the end of November, the Harris hosted Mendel, Inc., a comedy starring Alexander Carr (of the "Potash and Perlmutter" series) and the comedy team of Smith and Dale, who had gotten their early training in the vaudeville shows at the Victoria Theatre a quarter of a century earlier.

Most of the fall season at the Selwyn was devoted to films. On December 30, the house returned to live theatre with Wake Up and Dream, the second Cole Porter musical to open on the theatre block that season. At the Times Square, the first offering of the fall was The Middle Watch, an English farce that ran for four weeks. During its run the Times Square was occupied by concerts on Sunday nights by Victor Chenkin, a Russian singer and actor. In mid-November, the theatre housed the three-week run of the comedy Other Men's Wives, and then at the beginning of December received the play Many Waters from the Maxine Elliott Theatre. Next door at the Apollo the fall season was taken up with the 1929 edition of George White's Scandals which opened in September and ran for six months.

The two nonlegitimate theatres on Forty-second Street were also in the news during the fall of 1929. The American, which had been operated by the Loew Organization as a small-time vaudeville and movie house since 1911, was now leased by a burlesque company, a harbinger of the future

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for the theatre block. At the opposite end of the block the Rialto announced plans to offer an additional showing of its films each night at 1:30 a.m., with another show at 3:00 a.m. on Saturday nights.[64] This was the beginning of the "grind" or continuous showing policy on Forty-second Street, a policy that the movie houses on the block still adhere to today.

The most important event for Forty-second Street during the fall of 1929 did not directly concern the theatre, although Variety conceded it a front-page headline--"Wall St. Lays an Egg."[65] The stock market crash, which brought an abrupt end to what had seemed an unending spiral of prosperity, did not have an immediate effect on the Broadway theatres. In fact, on the day after the crash, the New York Times reported that the Broadway playhouses had had more patronage than usual on the previous evening.[66] At the end of the 1929-30 season, it was discovered that the number of new productions had actually risen to 233, as compared with 225 the previous season. On the other hand, the number of theatre weeks had dropped substantially, from 2,432 to 2,108, an indication that many of the new productions were not able to sustain long runs.[67]

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[64]"Rialto Plans Regular Late Shows," New York Times, 1 November 1929, p. 22.

[65]30 October 1929, p. 1.

[66]"Show Business Holds Up," 30 October 1929, p. 42.

[67]Poggi, pp. 47, 50.

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Although the long-term effects of the stock market crash and resulting depression, coupled with the economic problems that had begun to affect the theatre in earlier years, were not felt right away, they were destined to have a profound influence on the theatre block during the next decade.

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CHAPTER VII

DEPRESSION AND AFTERMATH (1930-1944)

On March 9, 1933, the "42d Street Special," a private train that had departed from Hollywood on February 21, arrived at Grand Central Station in New York. Filled with Warner Brothers contract players such as Bette Davis, Preston Foster, and Tom Mix, the train had been sent East to publicize the studio's newest musical film, 42nd Street. Upon arriving in New York the Hollywood party, led by Tom Mix on horseback, marched the length of Forty-second Street. On the evening of March 9, the movie had its New York premiere at the Strand Theatre on Broadway and Forty-seventh Street.

The events surrounding the premiere of the film 42nd Street are in some ways symbolic of the status of the theatre block during the depths of the Depression. The glamorous mystique that had enveloped the street in the first three decades of the century was still powerful enough to make 42nd Street an appropriate title for a film dealing with the backstage lives of Broadway producers, directors, and performers. On the other hand, by 1933 the reputation of the theatres on Forty-second Street had declined to such an extent that the film's premiere was held in a theatre five blocks away. As the title song in the

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movie characterized it, the theatre block had by now become "naughty, bawdy, gawdy, sporty, Forty-second Street."[1] While the Warner Brothers' film was settling in for a long run at the Strand, the real Forty-second Street was struggling against the harsh economic realities of the 1930s. In the three and a half years since the stock market crash, half of the ten remaining legitimate theatres on the block had given up live productions. Two of those theatres had been converted to burlesque houses, while the theatres showing films discovered that they could no longer command important first-run movies and had to settle for films that had already premiered at other houses. By the time the fifth anniversary of the stock market crash occurred in the fall of 1934, only the New Amsterdam was still used for legitimate productions, and even its season included many periods when the house was dark. Property owners and merchants had begun to complain about the tawdry burlesque houses with their suggestive sidewalk displays, their barkers, and "steerers." The decay of West Forty-second Street, still being deplored fifty years later, thus began in the early years of the Depression.

Why did the theatre block degenerate so quickly after the stock market crash? Some of the causes can be traced back to the economic problems faced by the theatres even before the advent of the Depression. As we have seen in the previous chapter, there was a steady decline in legitimate

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[1] "42nd Street," music by Harry Warren, lyrics by Al Dubin, 1933.

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theatre production (as measured in theatre weeks) beginning in the 1926-27 season. By early 1929, this continuing slump had resulted in a surplus of Broadway theatres used for live shows. Once the stock market had crashed, it was quite clear that theatrical production had been dangerously inflated in the mid-1920s, and that those peaks might never be attained again. Therefore, the surplus of theatres that had become noticeable in the late 1920s was now viewed as a more or less permanent condition. As fewer and fewer shows were produced, it was inevitable that many legitimate playhouses would have to close, to be demolished or be converted to films, vaudeville, or burlesque.[2] A process of "survival of the fittest" began to take place, and the Forty-second Street theatres were, for a number of reasons, unable to outlast the other Broadway playhouses. First of all, they were older than the many playhouses that had been built during the 1920s, and for that reason were less appealing to potential producers. Second, they were now a part of the southernmost boundary of the theatre district. As the Depression worsened, the theatre district contracted towards its center, so that the playhouses on the outer fringes were the first to close.[3] Third, because of the existence of two burlesque houses on the block from 1931 to 1942, the street was perceived as a less desirable location for legitimate

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[2] According to Poggi, the number of legitimate playhouses in New York City decreased from sixty-four during the 1930-31 season to thirty-two during the 1940-41 season (p. 48).

[3] Henderson, p. 198.

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productions. A final reason for the quick surrender of the houses on the theatre block was the fact that there was no one left to fight for them. Almost every theatre on Forty-second Street had changed hands during the 1920s and was no longer controlled or owned by theatrical producers: the American, run by Marcus Loew before his death in 1927, had been obtained by the Bethlehem Engineering Corporation in 1929. Oliver D. Bailey was forced to give up his lease of the Republic in 1930. The Victoria had long ago been demolished to make room for the Rialto. The Lyric was owned and operated by nontheatrical people. The New Amsterdam managed to remain a legitimate house until 1937, but its three managers died in the early part of the decade--Erlanger in 1930, Ziegfeld in 1932, and Dillingham in 1934. Erlanger's death also left the Liberty without a theatrical figure in charge. Wallack's had been controlled by speculators since H. H. Frazee had given it up in 1924. Financial reverses forced Al Woods to relinquish his share of the Eltinge in 1931 and the Shuberts, facing bankruptcy, quickly gave up their share as well. The Shuberts also unloaded their interest in the Sam H. Harris during the time when their interests were run by a receivership. The Selwyn brothers faced major financial setbacks in the early 1930s. Edgar fled to Hollywood, where he resumed his career as a motion picture producer. Arch Selwyn held on a while longer, but by 1935 he, too, was bankrupt. Thus, by the mid-1930s, the Forty-second Street playhouses had all passed

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out of the control of legitimate producer-managers and had become the property of banks or of motion picture exhibitors.

During the 1930s, the surviving theatres were converted to movie, burlesque, or vaudeville houses, with occasional use as rehearsal halls for shows that were destined to open at other theatres. There were continual reports that one or more of the houses was about to return to legitimate use, but the rumors never became fact. By the middle of World War II, all of the theatres on West Forty-second Street (except for the Rialto) were in the hands of the companies which own and operate them in 1981.

In the first few months after the 1929 stock market crash, it would have been difficult to notice a difference on Forty-second Street, as the theatres continued to present the kinds of drama, comedy, and musical comedy that they had offered in the 1920s. The Republic's spring season began with a continuation of the run of Seven. At the end of January, the production of Subway Express that had opened at the Liberty the previous fall was moved to the Republic, where it remained for the rest of the season. Next door at the Lyric, the musical Fifty Million Frenchmen continued to draw audiences throughout the spring.

At the New Amsterdam, the early spring was devoted to the continuation of Sherlock Holmes. In February, the William Gillette revival was succeeded by Ripples, a musical with score by Oscar Levant and Albert Sirmay

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and lyrics by Irving Caesar and Graham John. The stars of Ripples were dancer/comedian Fred Stone, his wife and two daughters. Ripples survived for seven weeks.

The first new production of the spring at the Liberty was a revival of Sari starring Mitzi, who had also played the title role when the musical had first opened at the Liberty sixteen years earlier. Sari ran for two weeks, after which it was replaced by Joseph, a comedy starring George Jessel and Ferdinand Gottschalk that closed after two weeks. At the beginning of March, the Theatre Guild took over the Liberty to present revivals of their productions of R.U.R., Marco Millions, and Volpone. Each show ran for one week. The last production of the spring at the Liberty was I Want My Wife, a comedy that opened on March 20 and closed after twelve performances.

The season at Wallack's got underway with a melodramatic satire called Phantoms that folded after seven weeks. It was succeeded by Live and Learn, a drama that was withdrawn after five performances. The Eltinge housed four productions during the spring of 1930, none of them particularly successful. Recapture, a drama by Preston Sturges, featured future movie stars Melvyn Douglas and Glenda Farrell in its cast. It ran for three weeks, after which the Eltinge housed Love, Honor and Betray, a translation of a drama by Andre Antoine. Among the cast members during its six-week run were Alice Brady, Clark Gable, George Brent, and Glenda Farrell. The final production of the season was a

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comedy called Little Orchid Annie that ran for a few weeks at the end of the spring.

At the Sam H. Harris, the spring season began with So Was Napoleon (also called Sap from Syracuse), a farce that closed after three weeks. In mid-February, Herman Shumlin produced a tragedy called The Last Mile at the Harris. With Spencer Tracy in a leading role, The Last Mile drew audiences for eight months.

Most of the spring season at the Selwyn was taken up with the continuing run of Wake Up and Dream, the Cole Porter musical that had opened at the end of December. At the beginning of May, it was replaced by Lost Sheep, a comedy starring Ferdinand Gottschalk and Cecilia Loftus that managed to run through the summer. Down the block at the Times Square, most of the spring season was devoted to the Gershwins' musical Strike Up the Band, whose satirical book by Morrie Ryskind and George S. Kaufman presaged the success that the same team would achieve a few years later with their Pulitzer-prize-winning musical Of Thee I Sing. With Clark and McCullough providing the comedy, Strike Up the Band remained at the Times Square until June.

Next door at the Apollo, the early spring saw the continuation of the 1929 edition of George White's Scandals. In early March it was succeeded by Flying High, a musical by DeSylva, Brown, and Henderson that was produced by George White. The cast was headed by Bert Lahr and Kate Smith, and the score was destined to be the last produced for Broadway

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by the songwriting trio. Flying High ran at the Apollo for 357 performances.

During the summer of 1930, the theatre block was less active than it had been during the mid-1920s, but it did host a number of premieres and continuing runs. At the Lyric, Fifty Million Frenchmen lengthened its run by asking the cast to take a cut in pay. This generosity was not matched by the theatre's lessees, who demanded a guarantee that their rental fees would be paid. The show was forced to close on July 5.[4]

On July 1, the New Amsterdam housed the premiere of Earl Carroll's Vanities of 1930. Although it suffered by comparison to the great editions of the Ziegfeld Follies that had played at the New Amsterdam in earlier years, the Vanities managed to gain enough audience interest (mainly through trouble with the police over nudity and vulgarity) to remain for six months. The Liberty housed the rehearsals of three plays over the summer of 1930. Reunion folded at the end of July after three weeks of rehearsals; Bad Girl and American Tempo were also rehearsed there over the summer but neither was deemed worthy of a Broadway opening.[5]

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[4] "Cast's Move to Cut Pay May Hold 'Frenchmen' on B'way for Summer," Variety, 18 June 1930, p. 73; List of shows currently running on Broadway, Variety, 9 July 1930, p. 55.

[5] "'Reunion' Repairs," Variety, 30 July 1930, p. 88; List of plays in rehearsal, Variety, 10 September 1930, pp. 9, 61.

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At Wallack's, a new production was offered to the public on June 20. Find the Fox, a farce that lasted for only three performances, proved to be the last legitimate offering at the theatre. The Harris, the Selwyn, and the Apollo stayed open over the summer with shows that had opened during the spring: The Last Mile, Lost Sheep, and Flying High, respectively. Considering the overall economic gloom of the Broadway theatre, the summer of 1930 was slightly better than average on Forty-second Street. On July 30, Variety reported that only thirteen shows were running on Broadway at that time.[6] Of those thirteen, four were playing on Forty-second Street, a fairly high percentage for the theatre block. This comparative prosperity was to be short-lived, however, for by the end of the 1930-31 season, three of the theatres on the block would be lost to legitimate use, and one would be burned beyond repair.

In November 1930, I. H. Herk, head of the Mutual Burlesque Circuit, signed a new lease on the American Theatre. The Bethlehem Engineering Corporation, which owned the house, insisted that the lease contain a clause providing that the burlesque company would move out at any time upon receiving thirty days' notice from Bethlehem. This clause was included because Bethlehem, which had once planned to build a thirty-story office building on the site, was now trying to sell the

[6] "With but 13 Legit Shows on B'way Low Mark of Season is Reached," 30 July 1930, p. 91.

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property.[7] Five weeks after Variety had announced the new lease, a fire started in the balcony of the American shortly after the burlesque show's customers had left the theatre at the end of an evening performance. As the fire spread through the house, firefighters halted trolley service east and west of Eighth Avenue. The fire burned for at least an hour and a half before it was brought under control.[8] The theatre was too extensively damaged to be rebuilt; it remained vacant for a year and a half before being razed.

The 1930-31 season was also a difficult time for the Rialto. In early June, the representatives of Paramount Publix Corporation, which still retained a half interest in the theatre, announced that the house would be closed for eight weeks because there was a scarcity of good motion pictures and the owners did not wish to mar the Rialto's reputation by showing "bad" films. Three days later, it was announced that the Rialto would remain open with revivals of older films. The admission price was to be lowered for such showings.[9] This device seems to have carried the Rialto over the film shortage.

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[7] "Mutual's $250 More Wkly Saves American," Variety, 12 November 1930, p. 51.

[8] "American Theater Wrecked by Fire Just After Night Audience Leaves," New York World, 9 December 1930, in the American Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

[9] "'Good Films' Dearth to Close the Rialto," New York Times, 2 June 1931, p. 35; "Rialto to Present Movie Revivals," New York Times, 5 June 1931, p. 26.

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At the legitimate theatres on the block, the full impact of the Depression was being felt during the 1930-31 season. The Republic began the year with Frankie and Johnnie, a melodrama that ran for eight weeks, the last three of which were made possible by the company's willingness to accept a 10% salary cut.[10] In the middle of November, the Republic housed the two-week run of the comedy Pressing Business, followed by two weeks of Light Wines and Beer, moved from the Waldorf. On December 13, Oliver D. Bailey relinquished his lease of the Republic to its owner, Arthur Hammerstein. According to Mr. Hammerstein the theatre was to be wired for talking pictures, which would be shown at the theatre on a "grind policy."[11] The Republic Amusement Corporation was assigned the lease to the theatre on December 31 for the purpose of exhibiting motion pictures, but less than a month later it was announced that a twenty-year lease to the Republic had been given to Billy Minsky and Joseph Weinstock, who intended to convert the house to burlesque beginning on February 12. The theatre would present two burlesque performances a day, with an admission of $1.00 in the afternoon and $1.50 at night. The Minskys, who already controlled the Apollo Theatre on 125th Street and the National Winter Garden downtown, planned to

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[10] "'Frankie' Salary Chop," Variety, 29 October 1930, p. 66.

[11] "Republic To Be Wired for Talking Pictures," New York Times, 13 December 1930, p. 22.

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form a circuit of their theatres so that they could exchange the various shows from time to time.[12]

When it reopened as Minsky's Republic on February 12, the theatre sported two new illuminated runways so that customers could get a closer look at the show's thirty-two chorus girls. Variety characterized the company playing at the Republic as "too inelegant, too dumb and too dirty to be even called a troupe . . ." and called the show itself "just rotten, with parts of it lousy, comprising as it does the cheapest dirt, the dirtiest coochers ever forced upon a stage or platform and with no talent."[13] Apparently others agreed with Variety's assessment, for in April the Society for the Prevention of Vice complained to the New York City Police Department. The Republic was raided on April 10, and the theatre's manager was arrested, along with six of the girls in the cast and the candy vendor (who was accused of selling indecent literature).[14] Despite periodic objections such as this, the Republic continued as a burlesque house for over ten years.

The Lyric, whose lessees had forced Fifty Million Frenchmen to close over the summer, remained dark for

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[12]Conveyances, 1917-1937, Block 1014, New York City Office of the Register; "N.Y. Republic for Burlesque," Variety, 28 January 1931, p. 52; "Republic to Become a Burlesque House," New York Times, 29 January 1931, p. 21.

[13]"The Killer of Burlesque," 18 February 1931, p. 47.

[14]"Burlesque Show Raided," New York Times, 11 April 1931, p. 15.

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almost the entire 1930-31 season. On June 6, 1931, it re-opened with a comedy called Gasoline Gypsies that lasted for only three performances. At the New Amsterdam, Earl Carroll's Vanities remained until the end of the year. On January 28, Variety reported that Ziegfeld's new edition of the Follies had been intended for the New Amsterdam but had opened at the Ziegfeld instead. No reason was given for the change of theatres. At the time of the Variety report, it looked as if the New Amsterdam would remain dark until its next scheduled show arrived in April.[15] The house did receive an earlier tenant when a revival of James Barrie's comedy The Admirable Crichton opened on March 9. A fine cast headed by Walter Hampden kept the show running for seven weeks. The last production of the year at the New Amsterdam was one of its best. The Band Wagon, a revue with sketches by George S. Kaufman and Howard Dietz (who also provided lyrics) and music by Arthur Schwartz, boasted a cast that included Fred and Adele Astaire, Frank Morgan, Tillie Losch, and Helen Broderick. It opened on June 3, and ran for over seven months.

The 1930-31 season at the Liberty began with a modest success and concluded with two failures. The success was Brown Buddies, a Black musical that relied heavily on the talents of its two stars, Bill Robinson and Adelaide Hall. After the run of Brown Buddies ended, the Liberty was

[15] "Amsterdam's Darkness," 28 January 1930, p. 72.

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empty for several weeks before a drama called Greater Love opened there at the beginning of March. Co-authored by actress Mary Hay under the pseudonym of Bruce Spalding, Greater Love closed after one week. At the beginning of May, the Liberty housed a comedy called Betty, Be Careful for one week before the theatre closed for the summer.

In November 1930, the New York Times reported that Wallack's, which had been leased to Theatre Estates, Incorporated, was now subleased to Excello Estates, Incorporated, a company headed by Max Cohen.[16] This was the beginning of Cohen's forty-year involvement with the theatres on Forty-second Street. Wallack's was converted to a second-run motion picture house by Cohen.

At the Eltinge the season began with The 9th Guest, a mystery melodrama written by Owen Davis and produced by Al Woods, an association that had lasted since the days of the "blood and thunder" melodramas at the American Theatre at the turn of the century. The 9th Guest ran for nine weeks, after which the theatre was occupied by a drama called First Night that managed a run of eleven weeks. At the end of February, it was announced that Al Woods had subleased the Eltinge for two years at $45,000 a year to Max Rudnick, an operator of motion picture houses in Brooklyn who had occasionally produced legitimate shows on Broadway. Rudnick's plan for the Eltinge was to combine talking

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[16] "Wallack's Theatre To Be Movie House," 12 November 1930, p. 42.

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pictures with a stock burlesque show. There were to be three shows of burlesque a day, interspersed with motion pictures. Admission to all seats was to be 50¢, which would make the Eltinge a keen rival for the more expensive burlesque show at the Republic. The new policy was to begin at the Eltinge on March 6.[17] When the burlesque show opened, Variety predicted that it would not last for three months,[18] but burlesque continued to be the attraction at the theatre for another ten years.

The 1930-31 season at the Harris consisted of two shows. In October, the theatre received the comedy The Greeks Had a Word for It from the Selwyn, where it had premiered a few weeks before. The Greeks spent most of its seven-month run at the Harris. In May, it was succeeded by Rhapsody in Black, a revue produced by Lew Leslie. The stars of the show were Ethel Waters and the Cecil Mack Choir. Rhapsody in Black ran for ten weeks.

The season at the Selwyn began with the Zoë Akins comedy The Greeks Had a Word for It, which was moved to the Harris in mid-October to make room for Three's a Crowd, another Schwartz-Dietz revue, this time starring Fred Allen, Clifton Webb, and Libby Holman. Three's a Crowd played at the Selwyn until summer. In November 1930, Edgar Selwyn

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[17]"Burlesque for Eltinge," New York Times, 26 February 1931, p. 21; "Stock Burlesque Menace," Variety, 4 March 1931, pp. 1, 41.

[18]"Eltinge, New York," 11 March 1931, p. 45.

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disbanded his New York office and went to Hollywood where he operated his own production unit at MGM Studios.[19] His brother Arch remained in New York for a few more years and occasionally produced shows, but with Edgar's departure, the power and influence of the Selwyns was effectively at an end.

The Times Square housed six different shows during the 1930-31 season, only the last of which was a hit. The season began in late August with Hot Rhythm, a Black revue produced by Max Rudnick that ran for eight weeks. Next came a comedy called Blind Mice, which was written by novelist Vera Caspary and actress Winifred Lenihan. Blind Mice lasted for only two weeks. The third show of the year was As Good as New, a comedy produced by Charles Dillingham that remained at the Times Square for a month. At the beginning of December, Dillingham presented a two-week engagement of The Merchant of Venice starring Maurice Moscovitch and Selena Royle. At the end of 1930, a play called Queen at Home occupied the theatre for two weeks. Finally, on January 27, the Times Square had its first hit of the season. Noel Coward's comedy Private Lives opened on that date and ran for eight months, first with Coward and Gertrude Lawrence as its stars, and later with Otto Kruger and Madge Kennedy in the leading roles. The sticky

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[19] "Edgar Selwyn Disbands N.Y. Office--Coast Only," Variety, 5 November 1930, p. 27; "Edgar Selwyn, 68, Producer, is Dead," New York Times, 14 February 1944, in Edgar Selwyn Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

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problem of top billing for Private Lives was solved at the show's premiere by using both the Times Square's marquee and that of the empty Apollo Theatre. Since the two marquees were right next to one another on Forty-second Street, the producer of Private Lives employed both, putting Noel Coward's name alone above the play's title on one, and Gertrude Lawrence's name on the other.[20] This practice must have been abandoned by the time the Apollo reopened in March.

As the 1930-31 season began, the Apollo was still occupied by Flying High, which completed its run at the beginning of 1931. In the middle of March, the Apollo hosted the premiere of Channing Pollock's drama The House Beautiful, which was popular enough to run for the rest of the spring.

The 1930-31 season had been a disastrous one for Broadway as a whole. At the beginning of December, Variety reported that there were ten less shows running on Broadway than there had been in December 1929, and twenty-five less than in December 1928. Two weeks later, Variety revealed that there were thirty-one dark theatres in what it dubbed as Broadway's "worst week of [the] year." The economic difficulties faced by the Times Square theatres filtered down to the smaller businesses in the area which counted on patronage by passersby on their way to or from the play-houses and movie theatres in the district. By January 1931,

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[20]Photo in Cole Lesley, Graham Payn and Sheridan Morley, Noel Coward and His Friends (New York: William Morris and Co., 1979), p. 122.

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fifty-four of the stores on Broadway between Forty-second and Fifty-ninth Streets were vacant, an average of three on each block.[21] Given the depressed economy, it is no wonder that some of the theatres on Forty-second Street were forced to switch to movies or burlesque, or remained dark for several months at a time.

Over the summer of 1931, there was little theatrical activity on West Forty-second Street. The New Amsterdam and the Times Square stayed open with The Band Wagon and Private Lives, respectively, while the Harris continued to offer Rhapsody in Black until early July. There were no new productions on the block that summer.

By the fall of 1931, it was becoming increasingly clear that the character of the theatre block had changed. In November, the New York Times reported that "in West Forty-second Street the carnival spirit reigns high with burlesque shows at the Republic and the Eltinge, vaudeville at the Lyric, and a "grind" policy of films at Wallack's. Of these theatres, all but the last-named housed legitimate shows last season."[22] The burlesque theatres were major contributors to the block's "carnival spirit." A police raid on the Eltinge in March 1932 resulted in a dismissal of charges because the lines of dialogue taken down by a police

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[21] "10 Less B'way Shows Than in '29," 3 December 1930, p. 58; "New Broadway Leader Arrives in Theatres' Worst Week of Year," 17 December 1930, p. 53; "Those B'way Empty Stores," Variety, 28 January 1931, p. 57.

[22] "The Truant Playhouses," 22 November 1931, sec. 8, p. 1.

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stenographer at a performance of the burlesque show did not strike Magistrate Francis J. Erwin as indecent in themselves, although he admitted that a double meaning could be drawn from them.[23] A week later, the Forty-second Street Property Owners' Association began a new campaign against the burlesque houses. The Association's complaints focused on the employment of "barkers" and "pullers-in" to talk people into entering the theatre, and the Association also objected to displays of pictures of semi-nude women outside the theatres. The goal of the Association was to prevent the renewal of the theatres' licenses.[24]

Besides the declining reputation of the block, Forty-second Street theatre owners had to contend with the financial problems common to Broadway as a whole. During the 1931-32 season, the total number of theatre weeks was 1,496, or a little over half the total for the 1925-26 season.[25] At the end of October, when the season would normally be well underway, twenty-seven Broadway theatres were dark.[26] The theatre block continued to lose theatres either permanently or temporarily, and the few houses still

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[23] "Burlesque Show Cleared," New York Times, 25 March 1932, p. 22.

[24] "Prepare New Attack on Burlesque Shows," New York Times, 7 April 1932, p. 29; "Burlesque Houses Called Unsightly," New York Times, 10 May 1932, p. 25.

[25] Poggi, p. 59.

[26] "27 Dark Houses on B'way with No Spurt Expected Before New Year's," Variety, 30 October 1931, p. 55.

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committed exclusively to legitimate attractions found it difficult to present hit shows. After being dark for almost a year, the Lyric was rented by William and Harry Brandt for two years. The Brandts planned to use the Lyric to offer eight acts of vaudeville along with newsreels and short subjects on a grind policy of four shows a day. The theatre was to be renamed the Lyric Music Hall. The first vaudeville bill opened on October 24 with songwriter Joe E. Howard as the headliner and a Mickey Mouse cartoon among the short subjects. The house was nearly full on opening night, and Variety's reviewer, noticing that the audience was almost completely male, observed that the masculine audience was "natural on 42d Street, as the Brandts probably sense, since they are employing good-looking girls as ticket takers, candy sellers and usherettes."[27] This reference to the naturalness of an all-male audience on Forty-second Street suggests that one price of the "carnival spirit" on the block was the abandonment of the theatres by female spectators. Despite the large crowd on opening night, the vaudeville shows at the Lyric did not establish a steady clientele. After three weeks, the Brandts switched vaudeville bookers and reduced the number of acts to six so that a complete feature film could be shown, but even these maneuvers could not make the vaudeville and film

[27]"Lyric Music Hall," 27 October 1931, p. 35.

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policy pay. On December 12, the Lyric became a straight picture theatre for the rest of the season.[28]

Across the street the New Amsterdam was still managing to offer quality legitimate attractions. The Band Wagon continued its run at the theatre until after the New Year. On February 17, it was succeeded by Face the Music, a musical comedy with score by Irving Berlin and book by Moss Hart. One of the numbers in the show became a theme song of the Depression: "Let's Have Another Cup of Coffee." Face the Music attracted audiences to the New Amsterdam for five months.

At the Liberty, the 1931-32 season began with Singin' the Blues, a melodrama with musical accompaniment by Eubie Blake and his orchestra. It ran for six weeks, after which the Liberty, now leased by Max Rudnick, reverted to films for a few months. In April, Rudnick produced another musical revue at the Liberty, Blackberries of 1932. After three weeks, Blackberries closed. The Harris' legitimate season began in November 1931 with Sing High, Sing Low, a comedy that ran for eight weeks. The theatre's next offering, The Black Tower, was a melodrama that totaled seventy-two performances. It was moved in early February to make room for Trick for Trick, a drama that also had a nine-week run.

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[28] "Tried the Wrong Way," Variety, 15 December 1931, p. 26.

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The Selwyn offered several productions during the season, none of which was a hit. The first show, a musical called The Singing Rabbi, was withdrawn after four performances. In mid-November, the Selwyn offered Fast Service, a comedy written by, and starring, J. C. and Elliott Nugent. It closed in less than a week. Two months later, Arch Selwyn produced The Devil Passes, a comedy starring Diana Wynyard, Mary Nash, and Basil Rathbone. During its twelve-week run, the Selwyn also housed six performances of Sophocles' Electra starring Mrs. Patrick Campbell as Clytemnestra. For one week at the end of March, the Selwyn presented a drama called Life Begins that was notable only for the Broadway debut of Mildred Dunnock. The final production of the season at the Selwyn was A Thousand Summers, a play that starred Jane Cowl, Franchot Tone, Josephine Hull, and Osgood Perkins. A Thousand Summers was Jane Cowl's last play in a Forty-second Street theatre. It ran for six weeks.

The season at the Times Square began with a comedy called I Love an Actress, adapted from a Hungarian play. It lasted for less than three weeks. In mid-November, the Times Square housed Steel, a proletarian drama by John Wexley that could muster only a two-week run. The next show at this theatre was Wild Waves, a comedy about radio broadcasting that closed after three weeks. The final show of the season, Bloodstream, was a drama that folded in less than a month.

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The Apollo housed a new edition of George White's Scandals beginning in September 1931. The cast included Rudy Vallee, Ethel Merman, Ray Bolger, and Ethel Barrymore Colt. The score by Lew Brown and Ray Henderson included the hit song "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries," another example of optimism in the face of the Depression. The Scandals remained at the Apollo for six months.

The summer of 1932 was a lackluster season for the theatres on West Forty-second Street. The New Amsterdam housed Face the Music for the early part of the summer, and the Selwyn stayed opened with A Thousand Summers until the second week of July. Max Rudnick hoped to bring a revue into the Liberty over the summer, but his plans never came to fruition.[29] Over the summer, the Namsterdam Realty Corporation, owner of the New Amsterdam Theatre, sought to dispossess the theatre's leaseholders--Charles Dillingham and the Erlanger and Ziegfeld estates. This legal maneuver resulted from the lengthy and complex court settlement of the A. L. Erlanger estate; it did not have any effect on the actual lease or operation of the New Amsterdam.[30]

In July of 1932, the Bethlehem Engineering Corporation, unable to find anyone to sublease the American

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[29] Untitled article, New York Times, 16 June 1932, in the Max Rudnick Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

[30] "Amsterdam Theatre Owners Seek Right to Bring Ouster Proceedings," New York Times, 29 July 1932, in the New Amsterdam Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; "New Amsterdam Ouster Proceedings Technical Move for Jumbled Estate," Variety, 2 August 1932, p. 45.

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theatre property, surrendered their lease to the Zborowski estate. A few weeks later, it was announced that the American Theatre would be torn down and replaced by a single-story "taxpayer," a modest building that would bring in enough rent to pay the taxes on the property. The rest of the land was to be used for parking lots. Edward Walsh, the contractor in charge of the theatre's demolition, observed that it was large enough to hold two modern playhouses. The remains of the American were carted off to a swamp in Long Island City.[31] In September, the newly leveled ground was used for a carnival, complete with ferris wheel, that was sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Apparently Forty-second Street still retained some traces of respectability, for the only entrance the carnival was allowed to have was on the Forty-first Street side of the property. The contractor in charge of the carnival explained that "we're not trying to make Forty-second look like a boardwalk."[32] After two weeks, the carnival closed and construction began on the taxpayer.

The 1932-33 season turned out to be the last year when a majority of the Forty-second Street theatres housed

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[31]"American Theatre Site for Taxpayer," New York Times, 24 July 1932, secs. 10 and 11, p. 1; "Old American Theatre Gives Way to Wrecker," clipping in American Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

[32]"Theatre Razed, Carnival Slides Right Into Place," New York Herald Tribune, 17 September 1932, in American Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

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legitimate shows for some or all of their seasons. In June 1933, Variety called the season that had just ended "legit's worst year" and reported that of 117 shows that had opened during the season, only twenty-six broke even or made a profit.[33] The bleak economic picture also had an effect on the movie industry. In January 1933, Paramount-Publix Corporation went into receivership. The Rialto was closed because there were not enough films to support both that house and the Paramount Theatre on Broadway and Forty-third Street. Since the Rialto occupied one of the most valuable plots of land in Manhattan, the property taxes were very high, so a profitable use had to be found for the theatre.[34]

A month after it had closed the theatre, Paramount announced that it would be reopened as a film house under the management of Arthur Mayer, an employee in Paramount's advertising department. Mayer cut the theatre's weekly advertising budget from $5,000 to $500, eliminated the "free list" for complimentary tickets, and reduced the theatre's staff. Since the reopening of the theatre coincided with President Roosevelt's declaration of a bank holiday, Mayer announced that IOUs would be accepted at the box office. Through these means, Mayer was able to

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[33] "Legit's Worst Year Over," 6 June 1933, p. 51.

[34] "Rialto Theatre Closes Its Doors," New York Times, 2 February 1933, p. 21; "High Rent Shut Rialto Theatre," New York Times, 3 February 1933, pp. 16, 19.

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run the theatre at a profit. Paramount, impressed with his results, renegotiated their contract. Mayer was given a half interest in the theatre in addition to his management contract.[35]

The burlesque houses also faced difficulties during the 1932-33 season. Continuing pressure from civic groups almost cost the theatres their licenses in the early fall. They were finally granted on the condition that the theatres get rid of their large posters and their barkers, and that the shows themselves be toned down. On October 12, both theatres reopened, but no longer called themselves burlesque houses. The shows were now known as the Republic "Frolics" and the Eltinge "Follies." Although the producers claimed that their shows had been cleaned up, the Times reported that "the type of dance that contributed to their loss of licenses as burlesque houses was still to be seen in both performances."[36]

In February, Max Rudnick renewed his lease on the Eltinge for a period of five years. The lease contained a provision that it could be terminated upon notice after one year. In reporting the new lease, Variety commented that it would delay the improvement of Forty-second Street for at

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[35]Arthur Mayer, Merely Colossal (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), pp. 166-68.

[36]"Burlesque Shows Reopen as 'Revues'," 13 October 1932, p. 22.

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least one year and possibly for as long as five years.[37] Thus, by 1933 there was a great deal of concern about the effect that the burlesque shows were having on the reputation of the theatre block.

The remaining legitimate theatres on West Forty-second Street struggled for survival during the 1932-33 season. The Lyric, which had become a second-run film house after its seven disastrous weeks as a music hall, was occupied for a few weeks by the "Teatro Dei Piccoli," an Italian marionette troupe imported by Sol Hurok. On March 1, the Lyric housed the premiere of a "Negro folk drama" called Run, Little Chillun. Written by Hall Johnson, Run Little Chillun lasted for sixteen weeks.

For the first time in its twenty-nine-year history, the New Amsterdam did not house an operetta or musical comedy during its 1932-33 season. The year did begin with music, however, as Fortune Gallo's San Carlo Grand Opera Company occupied the theatre for several weeks. On November 14, a tragedy called The Dark Hours premiered at the New Amsterdam. Written by Don Marquis, The Dark Hours employed a cast of sixty-one to recreate the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It ran for only a week. At the end of December, Walter Hampden revived Rostand's Cyrano de Bergerac for two weeks, after which the New Amsterdam was dark for a time. In February, Eva Le Gallienne took over

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[37] "Burley Renews Lease on Eltinge, Blocking Clean-Up of 42d St.," 28 February 1933, p. 59.

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the house for a brief season of her Civic Repertory Theatre productions of Alice in Wonderland and The Cherry Orchard. The cast of the latter play included Alla Nazimova, Josephine Hutchinson, and Eva Le Gallienne. The Civic Repertory season ended in early May.

The Liberty remained dark for practically all of the 1932-33 season. In November, Max Rudnick revived Cradle Snatchers for one week, and in March a comedy called Masks and Faces, the last legitimate show at the theatre, gave one performance. In February, Variety reported that there had been a plan to raze the Eltinge and Liberty and replace them with an office building, a movie theatre, and a radio broadcasting plant.[38] Nothing ever came of this plan. Instead, the Liberty became a motion picture house.

The Harris also had its last year as a legitimate house during the 1932-33 season. The first show was I Loved You Wednesday, a play that included Humphrey Bogart and Henry Fonda in its cast. It had a run of several weeks. In January, the Harris housed its last legitimate production. Pigeons and People, a play written by, produced by, and starring George M. Cohan, was a fitting choice for the theatre's final show, since Cohan had played an important part in the Harris' early history. In April 1933, the lease of the Harris passed from the Shubert Receivership to the

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[38] Ibid.

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T.C.A. Corporation, after which the theatre was used for motion pictures.[39]

The Selwyn had another mediocre season of legitimate productions in 1932-33. The first show of the year did not appear until the beginning of December. The Great Magoo, a drama by Ben Hecht and Gene Fowler, closed after eleven performances. At the end of December, the Selwyn housed The Little Black Book, a comedy-drama that folded after a week. At the end of January, the theatre hosted its last distinguished drama. Evensong, a play by Edward Knoblock and Beverly Nichols based on Nichols' novel, starred Edith Evans and Jacob Ben-Ami. It was withdrawn after two weeks. The Selwyn then housed Walk a Little Faster, a revue that had opened at the St. James in December. Starring Beatrice Lillie and the comedy team of Clark and McCullough, Walk a Little Faster remained at the Selwyn until the end of March. The final show of the season at the Selwyn was Shooting Star, a play starring Francine Larrimore that opened in the middle of June and closed two weeks later.

The 1932-33 season was the last year that the Times Square housed legitimate productions. The first show in

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[39] Conveyances, 1917-1937, Block 1013, New York City Office of the Register. The Register does not identify the head of the T.C.A. Corporation, but an entry for February 7, 1934 records the owner of the lease as the "Andear Amusement Corporation." Since Andear was an enterprise of Max Cohen, and since there is no record of the lease having changed hands in the intervening months, it seems safe to assume that T.C.A. was one of the many titles which Cohen used for his various holdings.

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the fall was Clear All Wires, a play by Bella and Samuel Spewack that starred Thomas Mitchell. It ran for almost three months. On January 11, a comedy called Foolscap premiered at the Times Square; it lasted for less than two weeks. The last production at the theatre was Forsaking All Others, a drama starring Tallulah Bankhead that opened in March and ran for three months.

In August 1932, the producing team of Lawrence Schwab and B. G. DeSylva announced that they would sublease the Apollo from George White in order to present a musical called Humpty Dumpty. The show was a failure when it opened out of town, but the producers made some repairs and brought it into the Apollo under a new name, Take a Chance. With a score by Nacio Herb Brown, Richard Whiting, and Vincent Youmans, and a cast headed by Ethel Merman and Jack Haley, Take a Chance ran until the beginning of July 1933.[40] Meanwhile, in November 1932, the Apollo's mortgage passed from its original owners to Timap, Incorporated, an organization headed by William and Harry Brandt.[41]

After Take a Chance closed, there was no legitimate theatrical activity on the theatre block during the summer of 1933. In the fall, another campaign against the burlesque houses was launched. In October, the city's

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[40]"Seek to Lease the Apollo," New York Times, 31 August 1932, p. 12; Stanley Green, Ring Bells! Sing Songs! (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1971), pp. 72-73.

[41]Mortgages, 1917-1937, Block 1014, New York City Office of the Register.

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License Commissioner, Sidney S. Levine, notified the Republic and Irving Place Theatres that they would lose their licenses if their shows were not cleaned up. On October 25, Levine issued summonses to the theatres' owners. A few days later, summonses were served on the owners of four more theatres, including the Eltinge.[42] The zeal of Commissioner Levine, which coincided with the mayoral election being held that fall, may have been an attempt by the incumbent officials to draw attention away from the campaign of reformer Fiorello LaGuardia, who was one of the candidates for mayor.[43] Once the election was over (LaGuardia won), the burlesque houses were left alone for several months.

Only four theatres on West Forty-second Street offered legitimate productions during the 1933-34 season. In May 1934, it was announced that the Lyric Theatre would house continuous vaudeville and tabloid dramatic stock beginning on May 14. This experiment does not seem to have succeeded, for at the end of June the theatre presented a musical called Gypsy Blonde, a modernized version of Balfe's The Bohemian Girl. It lasted for three weeks, after which the Lyric became a film house.

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[42]"Burlesque Shows Ordered to Change," New York Times, 15 October 1933, sec. 1, p. 25; "2 Burlesque Houses Face License Ban," New York Times, 26 October 1933, p. 22; "4 More Burlesques Face Ban by Levine," New York Times, 29 October 1933, sec. 1, p. 24.

[43]Ellis, pp. 548-50.

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The New Amsterdam managed to find another successful production during the 1933-34 season. Roberta, a musical with score by Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach, had George Murphy, Ray Middleton, Tamara, and Bob Hope among its cast members. Fay Templeton, who had first appeared on the New York stage in 1873, and who in 1895 had starred in Excelsior, Jr., the first show produced in Oscar Hammerstein's Olympia Theatre, played Aunt Minnie in Roberta. Blessed with an especially good Kern score that included "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," and "Yesterdays," Roberta ran for over eight months.

The Selwyn began its legitimate season in January 1934 with a drama called A Hat, A Coat, and A Glove, which featured Nedda Harrigan in its cast. It closed after two weeks. The final legitimate production at the Selwyn was Ragged Army, a drama starring Lloyd Nolan that opened at the end of the February and closed after two performances. In April, it was announced that the Dry Dock Savings Institution, which controlled the Selwyn, had leased it for three years to Max Cohen's Arnu Amusement Corporation for the purpose of exhibiting motion pictures. Cohen now controlled Wallack's, the Sam Harris, and the Selwyn.[44]

At the same time that Cohen was obtaining control of the Selwyn, the Brandts were leasing the Times Square.

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[44]"Selwyn Theatre Is Leased for Movies," New York Times, 23 April 1934, p. 33; "Selwyn Theatre Gets Movies," New York Times, 2 May 1934, p. 35.

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The theatre had been dark all season before the Brandts obtained a five-year lease and announced that it would be used for motion pictures.[45] Next door, the Apollo housed one last legitimate production. Blackbirds of 1933 opened at the beginning of December but managed only a three-week run. At the end of June, the Apollo was leased by Max Wilner's Okaybud Corporation for five years for the purpose of presenting burlesque. Paul Moss, the License Commissioner appointed by LaGuardia, refused to grant Wilner a license and announced that the denial was the first move to clean up burlesque in New York City.[46] The Apollo remained dark while the two sides brought the dispute to court.

The summer of 1934 was a quiet time for the theatre block. In the early part, the New Amsterdam housed Roberta and the Lyric was still offering Gyspy Blonde, but by August 1, there were no legitimate shows on the street. In July, the Dry Dock Savings Institution foreclosed on the mortgage held by the Selwyn Realty Corporation. A few weeks later, the Selwyn Theatre was auctioned off and bought back by the Dry Dock for $610,000. Arch Selwyn, who had earlier declared bankruptcy, was unable to save the theatre bearing his name.[47]

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[45]"Times Sq. Theatre Leased for Movies," New York Times, 13 April 1934, p. 25.

[46]"New Burlesque on 42D St. Barred," New York Times, 27 June 1934, p. 14.

[47]"Auctioneer to Sell Selwyn Theatre," New York Times, 16 July 1934, p. 29; "2 Theatres Sold on Auction

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The 1934-35 season saw a single playhouse presenting legitimate shows on the theatre block. Beginning in November, the New Amsterdam housed Revenge With Music, a Howard Dietz-Arthur Schwartz musical starring Libby Holman and Georges Metaxa. It ran for four and a half months.

Burlesque was prospering on Forty-second Street despite the efforts of city officials to close the houses down. In October 1934, Supreme Court Justice Koch ruled that Commissioner Moss must issue a burlesque license to the Apollo Theatre. On November 2, the Apollo began a four-a-day burlesque policy under the direction of Max Wilner.[48] The Republic and the Eltinge continued to operate as burlesque houses despite a series of police raids. At the end of November, two police detectives bought tickets to the show at the Eltinge, viewed the first half of the show, then went backstage at intermission and arrested the theatre's manager, assistant manager, and seven chorus girls. A crowd of about 1,000 onlookers gathered in the vicinity after the arrests were made. In December, the case came to trial. After a 200-pound policeman amused courtroom spectators by attempting to demonstrate the "hootchy-kootchy dance" that the chorus girls had performed, the judge dismissed the case, saying that it was up to Commissioner Moss

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Block," New York Times, 4 August 1934, p. 23; "Selwyn, Producer, Files as Bankrupt," New York Times, 16 June 1934, p. 20.

[48] "New Burlesque Midtown," New York Times, 17 October 1934, p. 26; "News of the Stage," New York Times, 1 November 1934, p. 24.

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to suspend or revoke the theatre's license if he felt the show was objectionable.[49]

In April, the Republic was raided; three "dancers" were arrested, along with the manager and stage manager. A few weeks later, a magistrate freed the three girls but held the manager and stage manager.[50] Despite raids such as these, the burlesque shows continued.

In November 1934, the Gerry Estates, owners of the property on which the Rialto stood, leased the land for twenty years to Rialto Times Square, Incorporated, a syndicate headed by Anthony Campagna, a builder of residential structures. The syndicate planned to demolish the existing theatre and replace it with a building that would contain offices, stores, restaurants, a rentable basement, a roof garden, and possibly a new theatre. By the time the plans were filed with the Buildings Department in January, the movie theatre had become a definite part of the structure.[51]

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[49] "Nine Are Arrested in Raid on Burlesque," New York Times, 17 November 1934, p. 30; "7 Chorus Girls Arrested In 42d St. Theatre Raid," New York Herald Tribune, 17 November 1934, in the Empire [Eltinge] Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; "Policeman Dances For Court In Vain," New York Times, 27 December 1934, p. 25.

[50] "Burlesque Show Raided," New York Times, 6 April 1935, p. 11; "Burlesque Girls Freed," New York Times, 8 May 1935, p. 22.

[51] "Rialto Site Leased for a New Building," New York Times, 14 November 1934, p. 21; "Rialto Theater To Be Razed for Store Building," New York Herald Tribune, 14 November 1934, in Victoria Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; "Campagna Backs Times Sq. Project," New York Times, 22 November 1934, p. 40; "Plan 4-Story Building on Site of the Rialto," New York Times, 10 January 1935, p. 38.

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The old Rialto showed its last film on May 15, 1935. At that time it was revealed that the theatre to be included in the new building would seat 700, would have no balcony, and would be designed to convert easily to television.[52] Arthur Mayer, who had been so successful in running the old Rialto, would also manage the new theatre, also to be called the Rialto. Mayer announced that he would run the new house as a men's theatre specializing in "hard-hitting, square-shooting fighters, ingenious, inscrutable detectives, terrifying monsters, beautiful spies and belly-bursting comedians." In order to increase the masculine appeal of the theatre "there will be an absence of geegaws, rococo plaster, plush carpets and paintings of cows in a lush meadow."[53]

The demolition of the Rialto took place over the summer of 1935, drawing crowds of onlookers almost as large as those that had attended the theatre's shows. By the end of July, all traces of the old theatre had disappeared.[54] While the Rialto was being razed, the Times Square and Apollo Theatres were being foreclosed. An auction was held and the theatres were obtained by Timap, Incorporated for a bid of $110,000 over the first mortgage of $800,000.[55] This sale

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[52]"Goodbye to the Rialto," New York Times, 12 May 1935, sec. 10, p. 3.

[53]"A New Deal for the Forgotten Man," New York Times, 26 May 1935, sec. 11, p. 3.

[54]Untitled clipping, Victoria Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

[55]"Theatres Bid In At Sale," New York Times, 7 June 1935, p. 40.

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did not have any immediate effect on the theatres. The Times Square continued to show films while the Apollo was housing a combination of burlesque and movies.

During the 1935-36 season, the New Amsterdam continued to hold out as the last legitimate theatre on the block. The theatre's season began on Christmas Day with a new edition of George White's Scandals starring Rudy Vallee, Bert Lahr, and Willie and Eugene Howard. The revue managed to run for three months. At the end of April, the New Amsterdam housed a return engagement of Walter Hampden in Cyrano de Bergerac that lasted for five weeks. In May, the New Amsterdam was foreclosed and taken over by the Dry Dock Savings Institution, which had made a nominal bid of $1,000 over the $1,653,649 in interest and taxes due on the property.[56] The bank then began to seek a purchaser for the theatre.

In September 1935, Commissioner Moss carried out his threat and suspended the Republic's license. The Minskys fought the suspension through the lower courts, and in March 1936 the Court of Appeals in Albany ruled that a theatre's license could not be revoked unless the operators had been convicted of a violation of the penal law.[57] The Republic soon reopened as a burlesque house. Although he

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[56]"Bank Takes Over Theatre Building," New York Times, 8 May 1936, p. 44.

[57]"Theatre Fights Closing," New York Times, 18 September 1935, p. 19; "Burlesque Show Wins In Appeals Court," New York Times, 18 March 1936, p. 27.

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lost this legal battle, Moss would continue his efforts to rid New York City of its burlesque houses.

In late December 1935, the new Rialto Theatre opened. As Mayer had promised, it was smaller and simpler than its predecessor. The color scheme employed was terra cotta, blue, and gold. The modernistic design included wood-paneled walls and a special electrical system that indicated vacant seats so that patrons could easily find a seat in the dark. In keeping with Mayer's policy of catering to masculine audiences, the opening film at the new theatre was Frank Buck's Fang and Claw. The admission was 25¢ in the morning, 40¢ at matinees, and 65¢ at night. The new policy of adventure, mystery, and horror films soon earned Mayer the nickname "the Merchant of Menace."[58]

As the 1936-37 season began, the theatres on West Forty-second Street continued with their established policies: the Rialto offered "masculine" films; the Republic, the Eltinge, and the Apollo presented burlesque; the Lyric, the Liberty, Wallack's, the Harris, the Selwyn, and the Times Square housed motion pictures; and the New Amsterdam was still a legitimate playhouse. The season began at the last-named theatre with Forbidden Melody, a Sigmund Romberg musical that lasted for only four weeks. In January, the New Amsterdam housed for three weeks a

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[58]"Rialto Will Open for Yule Season," New York Times, 20 December 1935, p. 19; Unidentified article from New York Evening Journal, 20 December 1935, in the Victoria Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; "The Merchant of Menace," New York Times, 20 December 1936, sec. 11, p. 6.

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production of Othello starring Walter Huston and Brian Aherne. This was the last legitimate production at the New Amsterdam. The forty-four-year history of legitimate theatre on Forty-second Street had ended. It would be another forty-two years before full-scale dramatic productions were again presented on the theatre block.

In February 1937, Variety reported that the Dry Dock Savings Institution had rejected an offer of $1,500,000 for the New Amsterdam because it had been made by a burlesque firm. Dry Dock felt that there would be several legitimate shows on Forty-second Street by the end of the season and was therefore willing to wait for a more suitable purchaser to show up.[59] In April the Fabian Film Chain, owners of a group of Brooklyn movie houses, offered to buy the New Amsterdam. The offer was subsequently withdrawn, paving the way for Max Cohen, who already controlled the Harris and Wallack's, to purchase the New Amsterdam. The transaction, which took place in June, provided that Cohen pay $500,000 in cash and the remaining $1,000,000 in mortgages. A clause in the agreement stipulated that if the New Amsterdam were ever used for burlesque the mortgage would come due automatically and ouster proceedings would be initiated immediately.[60]

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[59] "Bank Expects Better Days," 10 February 1937, in New Amsterdam Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

[60] "Fabian Film Chain May Buy New Amsterdam Theatre," New York Times, 21 April 1937, p. 19; "New Amsterdam Theatre Sold," New York Times, 8 June 1937, p. 47; "New Amsterdam's Passing to Films Leaves 42d St. Without a

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On July 3, the New Amsterdam became a second-run movie house. The first film shown there was A Midsummer Night's Dream. It was an interesting coincidence that when the New Amsterdam had originally opened in 1903, the first play performed there was also A Midsummer Night's Dream. Movies were considered to be temporary at the New Amsterdam. By the end of July, Max Cohen had reportedly formed a company to present legitimate productions at the theatre in the fall and was then considering two plays and a musical.[61] This was the first of many rumors that the New Amsterdam was about to return to the legitimate fold. Meanwhile, Cohen had the exterior and lobby of the theatre renovated, and a new marquee erected.[62]

Over the summer of 1937, Max Cohen's lease on the Selwyn expired, and William Brandt obtained control of the theatre. During the fall of that year, the restrictive policies of the City finally had an effect on the burlesque houses, making it easy for the Brandts to acquire the lease of the Apollo. Both the Times Square and the Apollo were then used for motion pictures.[63]

Legiter," Variety, 2 June 1937, in New Amsterdam Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

[61]"New Amsterdam Turns Legitimate," New York Herald Tribune, 26 July 1937, in New Amsterdam Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

[62]"New Amst'dam Could Return to Legit," Variety, 7 July 1937, in New Amsterdam Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center. Much of the exterior's original sculpture and decoration was removed during this renovation.

[63]"Selwyn Theatre in New Hands," New York Herald Tribune, 21 August 1937, in William Brandt Clipping Folder,

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While the Apollo was discontinuing its burlesque policy, Commissioner Moss was once again considering revoking the licenses of the Republic and the Eltinge. In December, on the recommendation of a board of citizens that had been monitoring the theatres since the previous summer, Moss issued ninety-day licenses to the two theatres.[64] After that, the theatres had no major difficulties with the Commissioner for the next few years.

In the fall of 1937, the roof of the New Amsterdam was leased for one year by WOR Radio. The theatre, renamed the WOR-Mutual Playhouse, was to be used for broadcasts of a show called "Tim and Irene's Fun in Swingtime."[65] The New Amsterdam roof functioned as a radio studio for several years after that.

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the theatres on West Forty-second Street continued the policies that had been established by the fall of 1937. A few changes were made in the theatres. In August 1939, the backstage area of the Times Square, which ran at a right angle to Forty-second Street, was converted to a haberdashery store. In order not to interfere with the theatre's grind film policy,

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Lincoln Center; "Burlesque Show Closed by Minskys," New York Times, 26 November 1937, p. 26.

[64] "Moss Still Weighs Burlesque Licenses," New York Times, 27 November 1937, p. 20; "3 Theatres Get Licenses," New York Times, 11 December 1937, p. 22.

[65] "WOR-Mutual Playhouse First Program Tonight," New York Herald Tribune, 12 September 1937, in New Amsterdam Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

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the work of renovation took place from midnight to 8:00 a.m. each day.[66] At the end of September 1939, it was announced that the second floor and roof of the Rialto building had been leased for conversion to a ballroom at an aggregate longterm rental of $400,000.[67] During the late spring of 1940, Max Cohen purchased the property under Wallack's Theatre. His intention was to have the theatre torn down and replaced by a new, modernistic building containing shops and a six-hundred-seat theatre. According to city records, the theatre was not demolished but it was extensively altered. The two balconies were torn out and replaced with a single floor of stadium-type seating and a store.[68] The theatre was then renamed the Anco, a shortened version of Cohen's wife's name, Anne Cohen. In 1941, an article in International Projectionist revealed that the Rialto was the first commercial theatre in the United States to install a television system similar to those employed in England before the war. At the time, closed-circuit TV seemed to be regarded as the wave of the future.[69]

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[66]"Movie Is Building a Store Backstage; Shows Will Not Be Interfered With," New York Times, 6 August 1939, p. 36.

[67]"Ballroom to Open Atop Rialto," New York Times, 26 September 1939, p. 41.

[68]"Wallack's Theatre Will be Razed," New York Times, 16 June 1940, p. 7; Application to Alter Wallack's Theatre, filed with New York City Department of Buildings, June 28, 1940.

[69]Leroy Chadbourne, "First Commercial Television Theatre in America is Rialto, N.Y. City" 16 (May 1940): 7-9.

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The by now familiar pattern of movies and burlesque on West Forty-second Street was interrupted in February 1942 when License Commissioner Moss denied licenses to the Republic and the Eltinge.[70] This action brought an end to burlesque on the theatre block. The Eltinge tried to carry on with a revue featuring Black performers, but the "clean" show did not attract the theatre's former burlesque patrons. By the spring of 1944, the Brandts had acquired control of both theatres, renaming them in order to disassociate them from their past: the Eltinge became the Empire and the Republic became the Victory. During 1944, the Brandts also obtained control of the Liberty and the Lyric, so that with the previously-leased Selwyn, Times Square, and Apollo, the Brandts now operated seven of the theatres on West Forty-second Street.[71] The speed with which the Brandts gained control of the remaining Forty-second Street theatres during World War II was inspired by their belief that the theatre block would be revived and improved after the war. The Brandts' optimistic view was supported by several offers they had received to buy or lease their playhouses in order to return them to legitimate use.[72] In 1944, with Times Square flooded by soldiers on passes, off-duty

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[70]"Moss Denies Licenses to 2 'Follies' Houses," New York Times, 1 February 1942, p. 45.

[71]"Theatre Is Sold in Times Square," New York Times, 18 March 1944, p. 24; "Extends Holdings in Times Sq. Area," New York Times, 9 April 1944, secs. 8 and 9, p. 1; "Brandt Acquires 2 More Theatres," New York Times, 22 December 1944, p. 27.

[72]"Brandt Acquires 2 More Theatres."

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defense workers, and other amusement-seekers, it may have seemed to the Brandts that Forty-second Street had passed through its darkest days and was now on the brink of a brighter future.

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CHAPTER VIII

DECAY AND RENEWAL (1945-1981)

The predictions of a postwar boom period for West Forty-second Street never came true. The theatres continued to show movies on a grind policy from early in the morning to the middle of the night. From time to time, a rumor would circulate that one or more of the houses was about to return to legitimate use, but the rumors never became fact. One feeble attempt at returning live drama to Forty-second Street occurred in late 1949 when George Brandt experimented with presenting a tabloid version of a live stage production along with a film at the Selwyn. The first play to be given was Jean Paul Sartre's The Respectful Prostitute; during its first week, the Selwyn's receipts soared from $8,000 to $24,000. Encouraged by this success, Brandt planned a twenty-week circuit of legitimate companies in the Metropolitan area. Among the shows being readied for the circuit were Native Son, The Last Mile, Behind Red Lights, School for Brides, and Pickup Girl. Brandt was also hoping to present tabloids of such current hits as Born Yesterday and A Streetcar Named Desire. Despite Brandt's enthusiasm, the tabloid-play experiment seems to have been short-lived. A clue to its demise may be

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found in Brandt's estimate that 90% of the spectators at The Respectful Prostitute were seeing their first live stage play. Once the novelty of the live production wore off, these spectators, who may have had no interest in the theatre per se, and who may have been attracted by the play's suggestive title, would probably have preferred to see a second movie rather than the tabloid show.[1]

Whatever the reason for the failure of the tabloid experiment, the Selwyn soon returned to its grind policy and live theatre disappeared from Forty-second Street for another twenty-nine years. When wide-screen cinemascope movies became popular in the early 1950s, the box seats were ripped out of the theatres on the block so that they would not interfere with the sightlines from the balcony.[2] This action underscored the theatre owners' commitment to films rather than to live shows. By the early 1960s, the Brandt theatres on Forty-second Street were each specializing in a different type of film: the Times Square presented cowboy movies, the Victory specialized in action and war, the Empire in civilian violence, the Lyric showed first-run films, the Selwyn second-run, and the Liberty third-run. The Apollo presented foreign films, which drew

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[1]Murray Schumach, "Double Feature," New York Times, 19 February 1950, sec. 2, p. 3; Vernon Rice, "Curtain Cues," New York Post, 17 February 1950, p. 54.

[2]"7 Film Chains Seek Fox' Cinemascope," New York Times, 24 March 1953, p. 36.

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crowds of deaf spectators who were grateful for the subtitles.[3]

The roof of the New Amsterdam was the only theatre on the block that did not become a grind movie house. In 1950, it was leased for television, and runways were built out from the stage to accommodate the cameras.[4] It was also used as a rehearsal hall in the 1940s and 1950s. While rehearsing A View from the Bridge on the roof in 1955, Arthur Miller noticed that some old tape marks on the floor of the stage were confusing the actors. When he took a closer look, Miller discovered that the marks had been put down for rehearsals of Death of a Salesman in 1949.[5] In 1960, after it had functioned for several years as a rehearsal hall, Mark Finkelstein, then listed as co-owner of the theatre with Max Cohen, announced that the roof would again be available for legitimate use. The theatre was to be renovated and a new entrance added on Forty-first Street.[6] No one seems to have shown an interest in renting

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[3]Henry Hope Reed, Jr., and Gay Talese, "42nd Street," Show Magazine, January 1962, pp. 71-73.

[4]Harry Lines, "The New Amsterdam Aerial Gardens," The Theatre Historical Society Annual 5 (1978): 27-28. Kay Gardella, "Television," New York Daily News, 16 January 1981, p. 50, mentions that Bob Hope's first television show was broadcast from the New Amsterdam roof on Easter Sunday 1950.

[5]"Ghost," New York Times, 7 August 1955, in New Amsterdam Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

[6]"Theatre Revival," New York Times, 4 February 1960, p. 34.

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the roof theatre, however, and the new entrance on Forty-first Street never materialized.

The Rialto movie theatre continued under the management of Arthur Mayer until he retired in 1948. The theatre was then taken over by the Laffmovie Circuit, which ran it until 1954, when it was absorbed by the Harry Brandt theatre chain. In 1964, the Rialto was altered in order to become an "art movie" house. Brandt was so successful with the sex films he showed at the theatre that four years later he had a second auditorium built on the Forty-second Street side of the property, on the site of the former subway arcade. The policy of the small (300 seat) Rialto II was to be "class sex," i.e., artier sex films.[7]

The changes in the Rialto Theatre reflected the changes on the block as a whole. By the early 1950s, pornographic bookstores had appeared in the area, and prostitution and other street crimes were also frequently reported in the newspapers. Concerned citizens called for a cleanup of the Times Square area. In 1960, an in-depth analysis of the theatre block of Forty-second Street was

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[7] Arthur L. Mayer, "The 'Merchant of Menace' Gives Up the Ghost," New York Times, 2 May 1948, sec. 2, p. 5; A. H. Weiler, "The Local Screen Scene," New York Times, 28 February 1954 in the Victoria Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center; "Rialto to Adopt New Film Policy," New York Times, 7 January 1964, p. 37; "Bingo Brandt's 'Class Sex' Cellar As Mate for His One-Theme Rialto," Variety, 10 April 1968, in Victoria Theatre Clipping Folder, Lincoln Center.

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published in the New York Times. The article admitted that the section of Forty-second Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenue was considered the worst block in New York, but gave evidence that the street was not as bad as its image. This discrepancy between what actually happens on the block and the average New Yorker's (or out-of-towner's) image of the block has been a continuing theme of studies of Forty-second Street. The article concluded that "the street is unsightly, raucous, offensive and, at times, dangerous. Some sources feel the process of deterioration, now in its third decade, has been arrested. But no one seems to know any way to reverse it."[8]

Just as Forty-second Street's reputation seemed to hit an all-time low, a number of people began to call for a revitalization of the block. An imaginative plan was put forward by novelist Herman Wouk, who suggested that the city form a New York Theatre Authority to take possession of a number of Broadway theatres presently being used as movie houses or television studios and make them available for legitimate productions. Producers would be offered special economic arrangements under which all parties involved in the show would accept a lower salary, with the price of theatre tickets being similarly reduced. One of the side-effects of the project, according to Wouk, would be that "the Theatre Authority could be the means for the

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[8]Milton Bracker, "Life on W. 42d St. A Study in Decay," New York Times, 14 March 1960, pp. 1, 26.

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long-overdue restoration of Forty-second Street to its old status as one of the most attractive and famous streets in the world."[9]

A year after Wouk's proposal was published, the Broadway Association released architect Richard Snibbe's sketches of a plan for renovating Forty-second Street. The scheme included two pedestrian overpasses, an open mall, and an island with foliage down the middle of the street. Although this plan was endorsed by James Felt, then Chairman of the City Planning Commission, it was never put into effect.[10]

By the mid-1960s, businessmen in the Times Square area were expressing concern about the "social misfits" who congregated in the district.[11] The city's response was to announce a cleanup campaign which included a "top priority" crackdown. In March 1966, Mayor Lindsay appointed James Marcus to coordinate the efforts of the Departments of Buildings, Licenses, and Traffic, and other city agencies in cleaning up the area.[12] One of Marcus' suggestions for

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[9]Herman Wouk, "Proposal for Renewal," New York Times, 10 September 1961, sec. 2, p. 3.

[10]Louis Calta, "Civic Group Asks 42D St. Renewal," New York Times, 14 November 1962, p. 41; "Felt Backs Plan to Revitalize Block in Times Sq. Area," New York Times, 24 November 1962, p. 25.

[11]Edward C. Burks, "Businessmen Urge Crackdown on Midtown's Social Misfits," New York Times, 26 October 1965, p. 47.

[12]Clayton Knowles, "Cleanup Mapped for Times Square," New York Times, 23 February 1966, p. 41; Eric

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improving the district was to convert one of the Forty-second Street theatres back into a legitimate playhouse. For this purpose an unnamed foundation was supposedly getting clearances from Federal income tax authorities to use its funds to buy a theatre, renovate it, and rent it out.[13] A few months after Marcus' announcement, Mayor Lindsay went on an early-morning inspection of two Forty-second Street theatres to see if they could be converted to legitimate use. At that time, Louis Brandt, who went on the tour with Lindsay, announced that he planned to convert either the Apollo or the Lyric into a legitimate playhouse "very soon."[14] Four months later, Lindsay, in accepting a Drama Desk special award, announced the possibility that one or two Forty-second Street theatres were going legitimate.[15]

Six months later, in October 1967, the City Planning Commission reported that it would seek an amendment to the City's zoning laws in order to create a special theatre district running from Fortieth to Fifty-seventh Streets and from the Avenue of the Americas to halfway

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Pace, "New Police Drive Waged in 'Village' and Times Sq. Area," New York Times, 16 March 1966, p. 1.

[13]Will Lissner, "Future Times Sq.: 'Showcase' of U.S.," New York Times, 27 June 1966, p. 37.

[14]"Movie Theatre on 42d St. May House Stage Plays," New York Times, 18 December 1966, sec. 1, p. 68.

[15]"Theatre Writers Honor the Mayor," New York Times, 22 April 1967, p. 35.

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between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. In that district, theatres would be permitted to be built in office buildings. The Commission believed that such an amendment would revitalize the whole theatre district.[16] When the Board of Estimate approved the measure in December, Mayor Lindsay expressed the hope that it would lead indirectly to a clean-up of the Forty-second Street theatres.[17] A year later, Lindsay outlined a plan to redevelop Forty-second Street. Included in his scheme were six legitimate theatres located in new office buildings that would replace the movie houses and gift shops on the street.[18] Thus, in the space of two years, Lindsay's position on Forty-second Street went from a desire to save the existing theatres to a plan to tear them down and replace them with office buildings housing new theatres. Although the reasons for Lindsay's change of mind are not evident, we can imagine what the effects of his plan would have been by looking at the cavernous theatres built by Minskoff and Uris in office buildings further uptown.

After 1970, the business recession and New York's fiscal difficulties put an end to any hopes of a

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[16]Milton Esterow, "City Proposes More Theaters to Revitalize Midtown District," New York Times, 1 October 1967, p. 1.

[17]John Sibley, "Board of Estimate Approves Measure to Encourage Theater Construction," New York Times, 8 December 1967, p. 56.

[18]Richard Reeves, "Lindsay Outlines Programs To Improve City in 1969," New York Times, 30 December 1968, p. 1.

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city-generated solution to the problems of Times Square. As the area continued to degenerate, real estate values plunged. The office building on the southeast corner of Broadway and Forty-second Street, once the Knickerbocker Hotel and later occupied by Newsweek Magazine and the J. P. Stevens Company, was sold for $1.00 in 1976. The buyer inherited tax arrears of $700,000, while the mortgage lenders, Metropolitan Life, absorbed a loss of $1,370,000.[19]

Once again, just as the affairs of the theatre block seemed to reach a low ebb, the first positive signs of a renaissance for Forty-second Street came into being. To the west, the Port Authority Terminal was being expanded, the Manhattan Plaza housing complex was being completed, and the newly-created Forty-second Street Redevelopment Corporation was transforming massage parlors and other old buildings between Ninth and Dyer Avenues into "Theatre Row," a group of off-off-Broadway theatres. Other ideas being considered were the conversion of the West Side Airlines Terminal into a dance theatre, and the transformation of a parking lot between Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues into a farmers' market.[20]

The attention focused on Forty-second Street because of these renewal efforts resulted in a reappraisal of the

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[19]Alan S. Oser, "About Real Estate," New York Times, 30 June 1976, p. 63.

[20]Carter Horsley, "Signs of Life on 42d St.," New York Times, 21 November 1976, sec. 8, p. 1.

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legitimate playhouses on the "theatre block." On October 6, 1977, John Russell devoted his "Design Notebook" column in the Times to an appreciation of the architecture of the Lyric Theatre,[21] and twelve days later the Center for Advanced Study in Theatre Arts at the Graduate School of the City University of New York launched a project called "42nd Street: Theatre and the City," which included a photographic exhibition, symposia series, and walking tours of the legitimate theatres on Forty-second Street.

The public interest generated by such reexaminations of the theatre block led to another round of proposals for revitalizing Forty-second Street. The Ford Foundation commissioned the Graduate School of the City University of New York to prepare a sociological study of the street. Appearing in 1978, West 42nd Street: "The Bright Light Zone" analyzed the theatre block's current usage, with sections devoted to the social ecology of the area, the businesses located there, problems generated by sex-related establishments, drug dealing, and other crimes. The Foundation next requested and obtained edited transcripts of the Graduate School's earlier "42nd Street: Theatre and the City" symposia. Acting on these reports and other research, the Ford Foundation developed a plan for Forty-second Street that involved condemning the entire block and erecting an elaborate structure that would contain theatres, studios, exhibitions, and multimedia displays. Some of the existing theatres would

[21] New York Times, p. C 10.

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have been retained under this plan. Robert Wagner, Jr., Chairman of the City Planning Commission at the time, approved the plan, and Mayor Koch gave his tentative approval as well.[22]

By the end of 1979 the plan, now called "The City at 42nd Street," had mushroomed to include Fortieth through Forty-third Streets between Seventh and Eighth Avenues; the blocks between Broadway and Seventh Avenues and Forty-first Street through Forty-third Streets; and the east blockfront of Broadway between Forty-second and Forty-third Streets. On these blocks in Times Square was to be built a complex that would be larger than Rockefeller Center. Besides the offices, shops, restaurants, hotels, and exhibitions housed in the complex, there would be a fifteen-story indoor ferris wheel jutting out over Seventh Avenue. The plan called for the retention of several of the existing theatres, with their interiors completely changed.[23] Ada Louise Huxtable characterized this plan as "unnecessary nonsense. The proposed construction is an overly brutal scheme tacked onto a questionable land use for Midtown, as well as more theatre destruction on the 42nd Street block than some of the city's planners think necessary."[24]

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[22]Paul Goldberger, "A New Plan for West 42d St.," New York Times, 31 January 1979, p. B 1.

[23]Carter B. Horsley, "Times Square's Potential Inspires the Developers," New York Times, 23 December 1979, sec. 8, p. 1.

[24]"Redeveloping New York," New York Times, 23 December 1979, sec. 2, p. 31.

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While the city planners and developers were inventing grand designs for the block, two theatres on Forty-second Street were being renovated to house legitimate attractions, a project first mentioned publicly as a new possibility at the "42nd Street: Theatre and the City" symposia. In December 1978, the Brandt Organization (now headed by Martin and Carl Levine, William Brandt's two sons-in-law) announced that the Apollo was undergoing a $350,000 renovation, and would reopen on February 22, 1979 with the drama, On Golden Pond. The Apollo's Forty-third Street lobby would become the main entrance to the theatre. The Brandts were also giving a facelift to the ornate Forty-third Street facade of the Lyric in anticipation of returning it to legitimate use.[25] The opening of the Apollo on February 28 brought out a horde of celebrities who were pleased with the "new" theatre. The actors in On Golden Pond were equally excited. Tom Aldredge stated that "the theater is a gem, just a joy--the acoustics are crystal clear. Why it ever closed for stage shows, I'll never know."[26] Since its reopening, the New Apollo has housed two other dramas, Bent and The Fifth of July. Despite the New

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[25]"New Policy for Apollo," New York Times, 13 December 1978, p. C 21; C. Gerald Fraser, "After 40 Years, Apollo Returns to Legitimate Stage," New York Times, 18 February 1979, p. 64; "Topics--New Look," New York Times, 6 December 1978, p. A 24.

[26]Laurie Johnston, "Celebrity-Studded Opening for New Apollo," New York Times, 1 March 1979, p. C 18.

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Apollo's success, the Brandt Organization has not been able to rent out the Lyric or the Selwyn. The Lyric's chief drawback seems to be its second balcony, which producers believe would be rejected by audiences.[27]

The rejuvenation of the Apollo inspired the owners of the Rialto (which had never been a legitimate house) to renovate the 499-seat theatre and offer it as an Off-Broadway house. After investing $250,000 in the conversion, the owners announced that it would open in February 1980 with a revival of The Canterbury Tales.[28]

While the Apollo and the Rialto were bringing legitimate theatre back to Forty-second Street for the first time in over forty years, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission was considering a petition to have the New Amsterdam Theatre declared a city landmark because of its architectural and theatrical significance. On October 23, 1979, the Commission decided to award a landmark designation to the theatre, thereby protecting it from demolition or alteration.

In February 1980, the New York Times reported that the Candler Building on West Forty-second Street had been purchased by Michael J. Lazar, former head of the city's

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[27]"'Bent' to Be 2d Play at New Apollo," New York Times, 17 November 1979, p. C 17.

[28]"'Bent' to Be 2d Play"; Carol Lawson, "Rialto Going Legitimate," New York Times, 26 December 1979, p. C 16; Michiko Kakutani, "Rialto to Reopen Feb. 7 as Legitimate Theater," New York Times, 15 January 1980, p. C 8.

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Taxi Commission, and David I. Berley, head of the Walter and Samuels Real Estate Company. The new owners planned a $4,500,000 rehabilitation of the building, after which the space was to be rented for $10 a square foot, or about half the usual price of office space in the midtown area.[29]

As these private efforts at reviving the theatre block were taking place, the developers involved in the "City at 42nd Street" project were pressuring the city for approval of their plans. Mayor Koch finally decided that instead of accepting the whole plan, he would prefer to see competitive bidding by several private developers. Koch placed the New York State Urban Development Corporation, headed by Richard A. Kahan, in charge of the development of the Times Square area. In June 1981, Kahan revealed the UDC's plan, which included some renovation along with demolition and new construction. The design would include office towers on the Avenue-ends of the theatre block, a hotel or apartment building on the northeast corner of Eighth Avenue and Forty-second Street, and an enormous wholesale mart across the street on the south side of Eighth Avenue from Forty-second to Fortieth Streets. The city's plan also included restoration of the historic theatres on the block. Proposals by developers were submitted to the

[29]Carter B. Horsley, "Two West 42d Street Towers Are Sold," 10 February 1980, sec. 8, p. 2. The other tower was the McGraw-Hill Building.

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UDC by September 4, 1981.[30] Among the concerns submitting proposals were the Brandt Organization and the Shubert Organization. The UDC has refused to release details of any proposals until it announces its decision in November or December 1981.[31] As of this writing, the future of the theatre block is being decided by the city and by the state's Urban Development Corporation.

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[30]"Koch Favors Competitive Bidding on Development of Times Sq. Area," New York Times, 5 June 1980, p. B 12; "Roadblocks for a New Times Sq.," New York Times, 8 June 1980, sec. 4, p. 6; Joyce Purnick, "Plan Calls on Big Developers to Smother Times Sq. Blight," New York Times, 5 June 1981, p. B 3.

[31]Joyce Purnick, "26 Rebuilding Proposals Submitted for Times Sq.," New York Times, 9 September 1981, p. B 1.

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CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

I'm just a Broadway baby,
Walkin' off my tired feet,
Poundin' Forty-second Street
To be in a show.
--Stephen Sondheim, "Broadway Baby," Follies (1971)

From its very beginning, Forty-second Street was destined to play an important role in the life of New York City. The street began to fulfill this destiny when it became a hub of transportation in the late nineteenth century with the extension of several streetcar lines and the completion of Grand Central and Pennsylvania Stations. The opening of the first subway line in 1904 consolidated Forty-second Street's position as the heart of New York's local and long-distance transportation systems.

Simultaneous with the development of Forty-second Street as a transportation center was the growth and movement of the city's theatre district. Originally located in what is now downtown Manhattan, the theatres had followed the northward movement of the city's population, settling in Union Square and then Herald Square. As live theatre expanded into the most popular form of entertainment in late nineteenth-century America, the New York theatre district grew in order to accommodate additional theatres as well as

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the numerous theatre-related businesses that had sprung up. With the old theatre district at Fourteenth Street bursting at the seams at precisely the time that West Forty-second Street was evolving into a center of transportation, it is no wonder that the Long Acre Square area became the next "rialto."

The first theatres to be built in the new district, French's American and Hammerstein's Olympia and Victoria, occasioned much comment, but as live theatre continued to burgeon and the need for presenting houses in New York became more acute, other theatre builders began to acquire land in Long Acre Square. The erection of playhouses in the area was further accelerated by the rivalry between the Theatrical Syndicate and the independent producer-managers. In the early years of the twentieth century West Forty-second Street became a major battleground in a theatrical war, with the north side of the block occupied by the Independent theatres--the Victoria, the Republic, and the Lyric--and the south side dominated by the Syndicate houses--the New Amsterdam and the Liberty.

By 1913, the block of Forty-second Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues contained eight legitimate playhouses, a movie-and-vaudeville theatre, and a major restaurant. It had been proclaimed as the "new rialto," but was known to most people connected with show business as the "theatre block." During the period before, during, and after World War I, the block continued to develop. Four new

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theatres were added to its roster, and its glamorous image was further enhanced by the arrival of the annual editions of the Ziegfeld Follies. In contrast to such positive signs were certain warning signals, indications that the conditions which aided the initial growth of West Forty-second Street as a theatre block were now changing. Many of the imposing theatrical figures who had contributed so much to the development of the theatres on the block were now disassociating themselves from their playhouses. Oscar Hammerstein lost interest in the Victoria after the death of his son Willie and in 1915 sold the theatre to a group of investors. David Belasco gave up his lease to the Republic in 1913 after a legal tussle with Oscar Hammerstein. The Shuberts produced only four shows in the Lyric after 1913. The Fields Theatre, which had been a white elephant practically from the beginning, had at last found stability and some prosperity under lessee-producer Henry B. Harris, only to drift into a long decline after Harris' death on the Titanic in 1912.

Other forces were also at work on the theatre block during the war years. The number of playhouses built in Times Square helped to create a theatre surplus that reached serious dimensions by the beginning of the 1920s, while the phenomenal growth of motion pictures during the prewar and postwar period was also contributing to the decline of the theatre block. Later, as movies began to supplant live theatre as the most popular form of entertainment throughout

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America, the Times Square area, once the heart of the nation's theatrical business, was transformed into a motion picture center as each studio built a big movie palace along Broadway. Existing playhouses were also pressed into service to house premieres of major films, as in the case of the opening of The Birth of a Nation at the Liberty in 1915.

Thus, by the dawn of the 1920s, the theatre block might be perceived as having already begun its decline. Many of the symptoms of decay were temporarily halted or at least masked by the increased theatrical activity of the 1920s. Theatres were no longer in surplus during the middle of the decade as an unprecedented number of new productions filled existing playhouses and caused several new theatres to be built. Even during this period, however, some theatres on Forty-second Street were occupied by films rather than live productions on several occasions. When the number of live productions began to decrease in the late 1920s, the Forty-second Street theatres were threatened with alteration or extinction. Plans were announced to replace the American and the Lyric with office buildings, while other theatres devoted more of their seasons to films and considered offering vaudeville or burlesque.

In the years following the 1929 stock market crash, major changes took place on the theatre block. Plans to demolish some of the playhouses to replace them with office buildings had to be abandoned, and theatre owners turned to movies, vaudeville, and burlesque to keep their doors open.

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The hard financial and economic realities of the early 1930s thus saved some of the theatres from extinction.

Although rumors were constantly reported during the 1940s and 1950s that one or more of the Forty-second Street theatres was about to return to legitimate use, the houses continued to show films and were firmly under the control of the Anco and Brandt movie chains, in whose possession they still remain. Unable to command prestigious, first-run films, most of the houses settled for second-run and "B" pictures. By the 1950s and 1960s, the block began to house pornographic bookstores and other sex-related businesses, and some of the movie houses began to feature pornographic films. In recent years, the reaction of business and civic leaders to the decay of the block has resulted in numerous plans for a revitalization of West Forty-second Street, but so far the decline of the block has not been reversed. The few positive steps toward renewal have been taken by the theatre owners themselves rather than by government officials or agencies.

This effort by theatre owners to revitalize the block underlines the historic relationship between live theatre and economic vitality on West Forty-second Street. While live theatre thrived on the street, the area as a whole thrived: the nontheatre buildings were filled with offices, shops, and restaurants, and the street gained an international reputation for glamor. As live theatre declined and died out on Forty-second Street, the area as

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a whole declined, both in reputation and in economic status. As city and state officials evolve their plan for the future of West Forty-second Street, they would do well to keep in mind that the economic well-being of the block has always been linked with a prosperous and diverse commercial theatre.

The developers of West Forty-second Street might also profit by a close look at the block's beginnings, which reveal that many of the basic conditions that made the initial development of the block possible are still in existence today. First, the theatre district, which had continually moved north during the nineteenth century, has remained in Times Square for over eighty years. Although the district contracted somewhat during the Depression, it has slowly expanded again in the past few years to include the Nederlander Theatre (formerly the National and the Billy Rose) on West Forty-first Street and the New Apollo on West Forty-third Street. Second, the recently opened addition to the Port Authority Terminal on Forty-second Street and Eighth Avenue attests to the fact that Forty-second Street is still the hub of New York's transportation system and is therefore still easily accessible to theatregoers from New York's five boroughs and from out of town. Third, theatre in New York is going through another period of prosperity similar in kind (if not in quantity of plays) to the boom that occurred around the turn of the century. During the 1980-81 season, a total of 10,975,711 tickets were sold for

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Broadway shows. In addition to a number of holdovers from previous seasons, sixty new shows were produced. The total revenue from the Broadway theatres was $196,969,519. Moreover, the road, which had seemed to die out in the 1960s and 1970s, was again showing signs of life with an estimated 16,300,000 tickets sold during 1980-81.[1] This increase in production has once again led to a shortage of theatres as long-running hits from previous seasons are preventing new productions from reaching Broadway. Unlike the boom in theatre at the turn of the century, however, the recent increase in productions is not likely to result in a new round of theatrebuilding because of the astronomical land values in the Times Square area.

A further resemblance between conditions in the New York theatre today and at the turn of the century may be noticed in the rivalry between the Shubert and Nederlander Organizations for control of several Broadway playhouses. The Shuberts, who came to New York to challenge the Theatrical Syndicate, are now being challenged themselves by the Nederlanders. Like the earlier theatrical rivalry, the new opposition has taken the form of acquiring control of playhouses. Unlike the earlier war, however, the new rivals have confined themselves to buying or leasing existing houses rather than building new ones. As the competition

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[1]Gail Karazin, League of New York Theatres and Producers, telephone conversation of June 24, 1981.

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for theatres increases, it is possible that the playhouses on Forty-second Street may become future acquisitions on either side.

Considering the conditions prevailing on Forty-second Street and in the New York theatre as a whole, it seems both simple and inevitable that the playhouses on West Forty-second Street be converted to legitimate use. The biggest problem that the theatre block faces today is its reputation as a crime-ridden, dangerous street. It is instructive to note, however, that up to the 1890s, the Times Square area was known as a "thieves' lair" and considered to be too dangerous for use as an entertainment center. But the neighborhood overcame its negative reputation as the need for new theatres was so great that the whole district was transformed virtually overnight. This fact suggests that if the theatre block is to overcome its present reputation, it will require a massive effort by businesses and the city so that the whole area is developed more or less simultaneously.

One factor in the theatre block's favor today that did not exist at the turn of the century is a continuing feeling of nostalgia invoked by the very name "Forty-second Street." Stephen Sondheim capitalized on that emotion when he wrote the song "Broadway Baby" for his 1971 musical, Follies. As sung by Ethel Shutta, who had appeared on the theatre block in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1924 and in Whoopee, "Broadway Baby," with its lyrics about "Poundin'

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Forty-second Street/To be in a show," epitomized the image that Forty-second Street still possesses for many people despite the decades of decay. Today, the David Merrick production of the musical 42nd Street again acknowledges the theatre block's glamorous past as the center of New York theatre.

With conditions in the New York theatre so favorable, and with the powerful spell of the theatre block's rich theatrical past still exerting itself, it seems that this may be the propitious moment for a reawakening of live theatre on Forty-second Street. As the New York Times stated in a recent editorial, "The time for renewal in Times Square may be right at long last."[2] It is now up to the city's Urban Development Corporation to decide whether Forty-second Street shall once again become the "new rialto."

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[2]"Seize the Time for Times Square," 23 June 1981, p. A 26.

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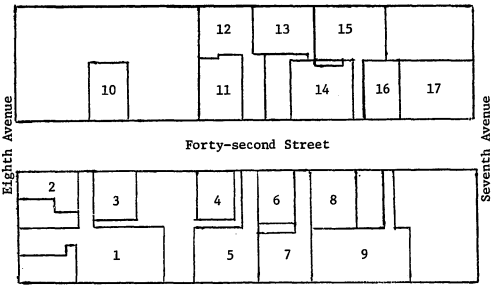
APPENDIX

Map of West Forty-second Street Between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, Showing Theatres and Other Important Buildings, circa 1920

Source: G. W. Bromley and Co., Atlas of the Borough of Manhattan, City of New York. Philadelphia, G. W. Bromley and Co., n.d.



1. American Theatre (American Music Hall. Roof: American Roof Garden, American Rose Garden)
2. Franklin Savings Bank
3. Frazee Theatre (Lew M. Fields, Hackett, Harris, Wallack's, Anco)
4. Eltinge Theatre (Empire)
5. Liberty Theatre
6. Murray's Restaurant (replaced by Hubert's Museum and Flea Circus)
7. Cohan and Harris Theatre (Candler, Sam H. Harris)
8. Candler Building (replaced Central Baptist Church)
9. New Amsterdam Theatre (roof: Aerial Gardens, Frolic, Dresden)
10. Clinton Apartments (replaced Methodist-Episcopal Asylum for the Insane)
11. St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church
12. Selwyn Theatre and Office Building
13. Apollo Theatre (New Apollo)
14. Times Square Theatre
15. Lyric Theatre
16. Republic Theatre (Theatre Republic, Belasco, Minsky's Republic, Victory)
17. Rialto (Victoria, Theatre of Varieties, Hammerstein's Victoria, Hammerstein's. Roof: Venetian Terrace Gardens, Hammerstein's Roof Garden. Also Rialto, Rialto II)

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