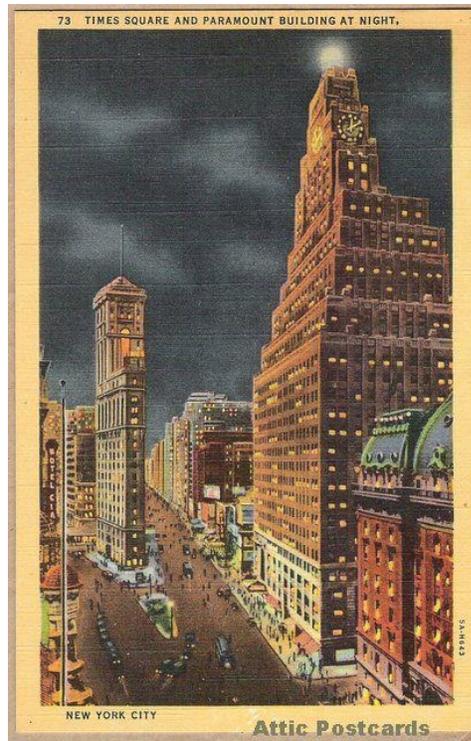




The Historical Development and Culture Of Times Square Relative to Our Buildings



Ryan Richards

Alejandro Colmenares

Daley Holder

Ryan Richards

Alejandro Colmenares

Daley Holder

The Historical Development and Culture Of Times Square Relative to Our Buildings

The research topic that our group covered, is how our specific buildings developed along with the development of Times Square in the 20th century. We take a deep look into Times Square as it was developing, as we take a look into specific developments of our theater buildings at the time. We chose these buildings not only because of their age, but because they show the most work being done, while still standing today. It is to show the massive changing of Times Square as these buildings changed whether in practices or image. We, not only as a group, but as a class can see the history of these areas in relation to each other being part of the entertainment scene.

Ryan's process researching his building and Times Square was mixture between difficult, interesting, and substantial. In the beginning of the class my initial research topic was sixth Avenue on the block that has multiple restaurants and hotels, I proposed the idea to both professors and that mixed responses which ultimately led to me developing an interest in the

PlayStation theater/the Astor Plaza. Researching this block led to reaching a new level of depth in research. I was able to access databases that the average civilian doesn't have access to. I was taught how to access articles, journals, and historical text all accessed from the computer. I accessed map warp, which enabled me to have a physical view of what my Seventh Avenue district looked like as early as the late 1800s. We were able to access the library archives about Times Square and our theaters.



Prior to April

8, 1904, Times Square was known as Long Acre Square. Hotel Astor was one of the first hotels to arrive to Times Square, it was conceived of by William Waldorf as the next iteration of the Waldorf – Astoria Hotel. This building was French inspired, and it had a green copper mansard roof, also a ballroom. The Astor hotel also had a rooftop garden for entertainment, drinking and dining.

Since its “birth” on Times Square was the early site for William H. Vanderbilt’s American Horse Exchange. In the late 1880s, Long Acre Square (now Times Square today) consisted of a large open space surrounded by little apartments. Soon, however, the neighborhood began to change. After about 1900, electricity, mainly in the forms of streetlights and theater advertisements, greatly contributed to public space into a safer, more inviting environment. Likewise, the construction of New York’s first rapid transit system, the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT), gave New Yorkers great mobility in the city.

The IRT birthed a lot of attention from businessmen who believed that increased foot traffic in the area would generate business profits. Adolph S. Ochs, was the owner and publisher of The New York Times from 1896 to 1935, he saw an opportunity and selected a highly visible location to build the Times Tower, which was the second tallest building in the city at the time. In 1904, the Hotel Astor was built on Seventh Avenue. In January 1905, the Times finally moved into their new headquarters, built between Broadway and Seventh Avenue and 42nd and 43rd Streets.

After the great depression, the Hotel Astor got reconstructed into the One Astor Plaza in 1968. And later got reconstructed in 2004 to be the Playstation Theater today. An interesting observation about the land in which these buildings are/were built on, is a prominent location, from the late 1800’s until the present day, not only the building, but the specific location, and the district itself, is a performance.



Alejandro's process has been a troubling one to say the least. Typing in general keywords about the Paramount building was not doing me any favors. Although a lot of websites gave brief information about my building and adjacent theater, it was not as detailed as I wanted it to be. Therefore, I continued with the related websites, but I was reading them more carefully. I went through them, and read to see if they any citations I have not seen before. I checked the site they linked and saw whether it would help my project or not. At the time I was only getting general information about the building, with only a few sights being detailed about its development or the workings of the theater. Most were pictures, which were helpful, but not contextually what I needed out of the research. It was only until I have looked for books at the school's library that I found answers to one of the main questions, and went to library for the other part of the question.

What Alejandro had also discovered about the Paramount building, is that it was made by Adolph Zukor, with the architecture by C.W and George L. Rapp. It was made with an astounding 18 million dollars, 3 million of which was made for the theater. The building has 35 stories to it, 3 of which was used for theater. The theater held 3,664 seats. The Grand hall was made with so much marble it reopened a 10 year old mine in Italy just to finish its construction. The hall was 150x45x50, while the ceiling housed a mural that was 125 feet long. There were many reasons as to why theater was not doing so well, but it mostly revolved around the troubles in Times Square. Prostitution started becoming a prominent thing after the First World War, since it brought about the great depression. The constant economic struggles, led to some to that sort of survival. After the Second war, returning in New York were in a more aggressive state of mind. Being overseas, and pleased whenever they wanted, was a tough transition going back to regular mundane lives. The thrill of having the women open as they are, further heightened the need for prostitution in Time Square. It was an increasing issue, as people all over the world still saw it as symbol of development and attraction, From the 50s, there have been some stings in which operations were shutdown preventing the act. However its run has been so successful because there were mobsters in control, while police were allowed a better access allowing them to continue. Since these rings were popping up all over, it led the use of drugs as well in the area, and Times Square no longer became a place of beauty and sanctity. Another hurtful blow to theater, is the invention of the television. Since being created the amount of people watching television, greatly surpassed the amount of people going out for a show. Why go out an attraction, when you can be at home and watch it? “In 1950, 4.4 million American households owned a television set; by 1960 the figure had reached 60 million.

The previous information was what I found to be the most interesting and helpful, since the later information, is essentially the end of what was once, one of the most substantial theaters of its time, up to its closing. Since the opening of moving pictures, it housed both movies and live performances all the way up to 1964. By this time, the television was invented, and productions started becoming too expensive to house. The theater at this point was only running movies, and ran the last movie of “The Carpetbaggers” in August 4 of 1964. After different leasings for the ear, it officially closed with the contractual premier, of “Thunderball” in December 21 of 1966.



Daley’s process finding our research question required some brainstorming. It took some effort, but we decided that we want to go deeper into the history of the area and find out how it came to be today. We used several library books and encyclopedias, as well as a few articles on the internet, to trace the history of Times Square from the past to the present. We decided on the sources by using an online library database. We also used Google to search for the sources containing the information we needed. We believe that we

have found enough sources to answer our research question. It took some effort, but we are sure that we have what we need to know how each of our buildings evolved with Times Square in the 20th Century.

By the 1940s and 1950s, Times Square was “a fabulously romantic place. The place showed its age, and its sores, in the daytime, but it was still glamorous and enthralling at night.” (Traub, 109) Even though it lost some of its luster during the Great Depression and World War II, Times Square, was still a gleaming district throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The area became lined with vibrantly colorful neon-lighted signage and animated displays. Even the theatres along Broadway had their names and marquees adorned with vibrant lighting.

Among those was the St. James Theatre on West 44th Street. The Shubert Organization was greatly affected by the Depression, and by the 1940s, pulled out of the stage production business. Still, the brothers J.J. and Lee Shubert continued to own some of Broadway’s most important theaters, such as the Winter Garden, the Sam S. Shubert, and the Imperial. In 1941, the Shuberts acquired the St. James Theatre from the Astor family. In 1943, the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *Oklahoma!*, made its Broadway debut at the St. James. While many thought the musical was going to flop, it instead became one of the most successful Broadway shows in history, running for a total of 2,212 performances over 5 years. The success of *Oklahoma!* launched what would become the “Golden Age of American Musicals.”

Even though changes had dimmed some of the magnificence, the St. James Theatre, along with Times Square, provided a sense that New York City in the 1940s and 1950s was still flourishing with the spectacular, both on the stage and in the streets.

Our research revealed a great deal of important research questions to us. We were able to find out the true historical development of Seventh Avenue landmarks. What were our buildings/theatres before what they are today, what the historical developments of the theaters, and more.

The research although long and difficult was a rewarding and informative one. There were things much unknown to us that we would not have known, some more interesting than others. It helped us to try and understand the ideals, and culture at the time as we were gathering the information about our question. All the information that we were gathering to give our specific buildings light, and a deeper knowledge of what the times has done to them and they interacted within the area. History and development is what our project touches upon on a personal and local level, and shows that even old locals, have incredibly worthwhile roots. Because of the numerous methods of research introduced to us in this class, our group was successfully able to intertwine the years of the development of our theaters to the historical make up of Times Square.

Bibliography

Traub, James. *The Devil's Playground: A Century of Pleasure and Profit in Times Square*. First edition. Random House, 2004.

Bloom, Ken. *Broadway: Its History, People, and Places : An Encyclopedia*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

"SL Green Closes Theater Deal.(Loews Astor Plaza Theatre at 1515 Broadway.) *Real Estate Weekly* Vol.50(51), P.10(1)." Ed. *Real Estate Weekly*. N.p., 04 Aug. 2004. Web.

Nash, Eric Peter., and Norman McGrath. *Manhattan Skyscrapers*. New York: Princeton Architectural, 1999. Print.

Theater, PlayStation. "Venue Info | PlayStation Theater." *PlayStation Theater*. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Nov. 2016.

"Adolph Zukor." - *New World Encyclopedia*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Nov. 2016.

Gabel, William. "Paramount Theatre." In *New York, NY*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Nov. 2016.

Book, Ryan. "A History of The Paramount Theater New York, 50 Years after The Animals Played There for The First Time." *Music Times RSS*. N.p., 04 Sept. 2014. Web. 09 Nov. 2016.

"History of Times Square." *Times Square Alliance* .: N.p., n.d. Web. 09 Nov. 2016.

Eliot, Marc. *Down 42nd Street: Sex, Money, Culture, and Politics at the Crossroads of the World*. New York: Warner, 2001. N. pag. Print.

Traub, James. *The Devil's Playground: A Century of Pleasure and Profit in Times Square*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2004. Print.

Bianco, Anthony. *Ghosts of 42nd Street: A History of America's Most Infamous Block*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005. Print.

"TIMES SQUARE PARAMOUNT | Louis Grell Foundation." Louis Grell Foundation. N.p., n.d. <<http://www.louisgrell.com/artworks/times-square-paramount/>>.

"Paramount Theatre - New York City." Paramount Theatre - New York City. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://www.nycago.org/Organs/NYC/html/ParamountTheatre.html>>.

"New York Architecture Images- 110 Paramount Building." New York Architecture Images- 110 Paramount Building. N.p., n.d. Web. 08 Dec. 2016. <<http://www.nyc-architecture.com/MID/MID110>>.