

# **How has the Theatre District in Times Square Changed?**

Shanae Clarke

Ella-Lisa Horne

Amalia Beckett

Hawa Kamara

LIB 2205ID section D958

Professor Chin & Professor Swift

December 5<sup>th</sup> 2016

## Running Head: How has the Theatre district in Times Square Changed?

Times Square is known for its commercial properties, theatre district, advertisement and entertainment. It has been one of New York's most iconic tourist destinations. People around the world visit Times Square just to capture a glimpse of New York City's magic especially the theatres on Broadway. Broadway theatres are widely considered to represent the highest level of commercial theatre in the country. However, these theatres haven't always been this picturesque. In this paper we will focus on how the Theatre District in Time Square has changed. We will be focusing on Four Theatres, which include New Amsterdam Theatre, Lyceum Theatre, Shubert Theatre and Booth Theatre. These sites have gone through a series of physiological and psychological transformations throughout the years. Some are still standing as operating theaters, while others have converted and repurposed. From the construction of theatres then the stock market crash to prostitution and crime. Times Square's theatre district has had its fair share of hiccups along the way before contributing to the image of New York City as we see it today.

Our group members chose to do theatres in Time Square because each of us have a common interest in theatres and would like to gain more knowledge on the history of each theatre. In the beginning of the semester, we visiting Times Square and found deep fascination with the theatre district and how its construction and architecture style has changed. Our first place of interest in finding information about the theatres was the Shubert Archive located at the Lyceum Theatre. Unfortunately, by policy, they don't accept undergraduate study and had suggested using their online website [shurbertarchive.org](http://shurbertarchive.org). The website had given us very limited information so we had to continue to search for other resources. The City Tech library and online database provided books about the history of Times Square, however, information about the individual theatres was limited, so we had to search further. We were lucky enough to be able to visit The New York Historical Society's Library where we were able to find books, maps, and pictures of each theatre. After visiting this site, we were able to put together an archive report to demonstrate an in depth research report of each theatre. Amalia Beckett will be covering the New Amsterdam Theatre. Ella-Lisa Horne will be covering the Lyceum Theatre. Shanae Clarke will be covering the Shubert Theatre and Hawa Kamara will be covering the Booth Theatre. We hope to give viewers further understanding on most of the events that led up to today's theatre and give knowledge on the why the theatres are the way they are today.

## Running Head: How has the Theatre district in Times Square Changed?

Times Square was formerly known as “Longacre Square”. Times Square served as the early site for William H. Vanderbilt’s American Horse Exchange. In the late 1880s – early 1900’s, Long Acre Square consisted of a large open space surrounded by drab apartments. Soon, however, the neighborhood began to change. Theater advertisements and streetlights transformed public space into a safer, more inviting environment. “Times Square” received its name in 1904, after the New York Times Building on 42nd St. Businesses and Theatre had just begun to arise. The economy began to grow. Many of these theatres enjoyed great success, until later during the 1930’s when the Great Depression hit.

The Great Depression (1929-39) was the deepest and longest-lasting economic downturn in the history of the Western industrialized world. The Great Depression began soon after the stock market crash of October 1929, which wiped out millions of businesses and many theatres in Times Square. Over the next several years, consumer spending and investment dropped, causing steep declines in industrial output and rising levels of unemployment as failing companies laid off workers. Times Square was under extreme pressure. New Amsterdam Theatre closed but the Shubert, Booth and Lyceum managed to stay open. Because of the Great Depression, waves of city residents migrated uptown (where rent was cheaper) and deserted Times Square. Low attendance and impossible real estate costs forced theaters to close. In place, after the 1930’s, entrepreneurs constructed saloons and brothels. Soon after burlesque halls, vaudeville stages, and prostitution solidified Times Squares.

Today Times Square has evolved to one of the most spectacular places in the world. Time Square gives New York the name the “City that never sleeps” because of its bright lights, big billboards and non- stop 24hour action. Times Square has adopted the name theater district. There are about 43 theaters located throughout Times Square from 41st to 53rd. Locals or visitors can visit the theaters to see anything from Lion King to Shakespeare on Broadway. Shows here are considered the pinnacle of theatrical performances and are widely respected and recognized around the world.

*New Amsterdam Theatre*

The New Amsterdam Theatre is located at 214 West 42nd Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues in the Theater District of Manhattan, New York City. It was built in 1903 by producers A.L. Erlanger and Marcus Klaw and designed by architects Hertz & Tallent. The style of the building is Beaux-Arts and Art Nouveau. It was built for theatre and entertainment purposes. The theater was the largest on Broadway at the time with 1,702 seats. It is also one of the oldest theaters in Times Square. It originally had a Roof Garden where more risqué shows were shown, but that part no longer exists.

From 1913 to 1927, the New Amsterdam had a lot of success as the home to the Ziegfeld Follies, a kind of show that was somewhere between a later Broadway show and high-class vaudeville act. The theatre enjoyed great success in the early part of the 1900's, but didn't do well during the Great Depression when Stock Market Crash Hit. In 1936, the New Amsterdam was the last theater on 42nd Street but then was forced to close due to the economic crisis. It reopened in 1937 and converted to a movie theatre which stayed open up until 1985.

Much like many of the theaters in Times Square, the New Amsterdam was bought by the Shubert Organization in 1982, but still remained quite unused and in a state of disrepair. This theatre went through a lot of stress do to the economy and did not fully recover until the 1990's, when Disney Theatrical Productions signed a 99-year lease. The New Amsterdam attracted the attention of Michael Eisner, then the CEO of Disney, who purchased the theater and hired Hugh Hardy to restore it to its original state. It reopened in 1997 with *The Lion King* and what was once the rooftop theater now houses the offices of Disney Theatrical. It has since housed many of the company's biggest Broadway hits, including *The Lion King*, *Mary Poppins*, and its current resident musical, *Aladdin*.

### *Lyceum Theatre*

The Original Lyceum Theatre of New York City was built in 1885 on the west side of Fourth Avenue between 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> streets. It was built and operated by Steele MacKaye and Gustave Frohman. The theatre became home of the Lyceum School of Acting and soon called The American Academy of Dramatic Arts. “On October 3, 1886, the Academy first opened its doors ....and the history of acting in America was changed forever.” (The American Academy of Dramatic Arts, 2016) Though the success of the Academy, theatre on Broadway was able to finesse its’ quality through the hiring of trained actors.

In 1886 Daniel Frohman took over the theatre and organized the Lyceum Stock Company. The Stock Company was composed of resident actors that had a repertoire of performances. In 1902, the old Lyceum Theatre closed its doors and was demolished to make way for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Tower. However, this was not the end for the Lyceum Theatre and Daniel Frohman.

Frohman opened up the new Lyceum Theatre on November 2, 1903. It’s located at 149 West 45<sup>th</sup> street between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> avenues near Times Square. The Theatre was designed by the architectural firm Herts & Tallant. Their design style reflected the French Beaux Arts Style. The exterior of the theatre has 6 large Corinthian columns and a gray limestone façade. Its’ interior has 2 grand marble stair cases which lead to the mezzanine which provided a luxurious atmosphere amongst the theatre goers. The theatre was modern for its time. Thanks to engineer Herts, the theatre did not have any support beams getting in the way of the audiences’ view. “In addition, the theatre contained carpentry and costume shops, scene painting studios, 14 dressing rooms, and

Running Head: How has the Theatre district in Times Square Changed?

an apartment in which Frohman resided in. “(Bloom, 2013) Herts & Tallant also designed the New Amsterdam Theatre, the Shubert Theatre on 44<sup>th</sup> street as well as the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Upon opening the new Lyceum Theatre, Frohman wanted to continue the Lyceum Stock Company, however, with the changing theatrical trends, repertory was no longer in style. Frohman had to adhere to long running productions which had become common amongst the surrounding theatres. The very first performance and long running play at the new Lyceum Theatre was “The Proud Prince” which opened on November 2, 1903. (The Landmarks Preservations, 1974)

The Lyceum Theatre ran smoothly and made a lot of money until the Great Depression. The economy struggled and many theatres were forced to close. The theatres that remained open chose to accept vaudeville performances to subsidize for their loss of profit. Fortunately, the Lyceum Theatre was able to keep its doors ajar despite the economic crisis. Frohman had refused to allow anything but legitimate theatre productions at the Lyceum. In fact, the theatre was able to host 39 plays. According the Bloom “although the theatre was semi successful, Daniel Frohman’s career suffered and his finances plummeted for the worse” (Bloom, 2013). With no other option, Frohman was forced to sell the Lyceum to investors George Kaufman, Moss Hart and Max Gordon in 1939 (Botto, 2002) In 1949, the Lyceum Theatre was sold to the Shubert organization.

Today, the Lyceum Theatre is the oldest continuously running legitimate theatre of Times Square. It has survived 110 years despite the ever evolving theatre district. Although it has three levels, the Lyceum Theatre is one of the smallest theatres on Broadway in terms of capacity of 950 seats.

### *Shubert Theatre*

The flagship of the Shubert Organization Sam Shubert Theatre opened in September 1913. It was founded by two brothers name Lee and Jacob.J Shubert. Before the theater was completely opened Lee, Jacob and Sam were all fighting to be apart of the theater business. Sam Shubert pushed his brothers interest in developing the theatre organization. Unfortunately, before they could have victory in that fight Sam Shubert died in a train accident in 1905. The brothers decided to name the theatre after their late brother Sam Shubert. The theatre is located in the heart of the Theater District at 225 W 44th St, New York, NY 10036. The Sam Shubert Theatre was designed by architect Henry B. Herts. It had a Venetian Renaissance style exterior and the interior was very elegant with elaborate plasterwork and theatrically-themed painted panels that was all around the theatre including the ceilings. The Theatre maximum capacity is 1460 seats. The Orchestra has 670 seats, the Mezzanine has 410 seats and the balcony has a total of 351 seats. There are 16 box seats, 13 Pit seats, 16 Aisle Transfer Arm, 26 Standing and 7 Wheelchair accessible. The bathroom is located on the lower floor and there are no elevators. The Sam Shubert Theatre has two balconies. Lee Shubert built an apartment above the theatre. (This apartment is now the Shubert Organization executive office. The organization itself owns many of the theaters in the Times Square.)

The opening show at the Sam Shubert Theatre was Hamlet. Over the years the Sam Shubert Theatre had many productions. Productions such as The Merchant of Venice and Othello. To list a few more significant plays; *Copperhead (1918)*, *The Blue Flame (1920)* *Cove on the Dole (1936)*, *Mac West's Catherine was great (1944)* and *The Constant Wife*. During the Great Depression the theater continues to produce successful shows such as The Philadelphia Story and There were also musical such as *Babes Arms (1937)*. In the 1970s Times Square began to change. They began to have pornography, drugs and peep shows in that area so people started to stay away from the area. Then in (1976) *A Chorus Line* brought people back to Times Square. In 1993 "A Chorus Line" stop showing. Today at the Shubert Theatre *Mathilda* is showing.

### **Booth Theatre**

Booth Theatre is located at 222 West 45th Street in Times Square, New York. Booth was open sixteen days after the Shubert Theatre on October 16 1913. The only thing that separated these two theatres was the thick firewall running above and below the stage. The theater was produced by Winthrop Ames who wanted to create an interment theater space where serious theatrical works could play. Henry B. Herts is the Architect. This theatre was named after Edwin Booth, who was a famous 19th-century American actor who performed Shakespearean plays. The opening show was call “the Great Adventure” produced by Arnold Bennett’ and all 704 seating was filled.

Amos wanted a contemporary European style theater so Herts use the Beaux Arts style. The façade of the building is a Tan brick, stone and terra cotta type. An unusual feature of the Booth was a wall that partitioned the entrance from the auditorium, preventing street and lobby noises and drafts from coming to the interior of the house. The theatre had wooden wainscoting two- thirds up the sides of the walls. There were 9 dressing rooms on the right side of the stage, an Orchestra pit, a tearoom, an owner level and two level with box seating. Winthrop Ames retired in 1932, and sixteen years later the Shubert’s took over management of the Booth. The Shubert’s bought the theatre in 1948 from the Astor Estate.

In conclusion, The Booth theatre has been around for 103 years. It has hosted two shows a year from the time it has been open. Booth has housed five winners of the Pulitzer Prize: Kaufman and Hart’s “You Can’t Take It With You” 1936; Jason Miller’s “That Championship Season” 1972; and Sondheim’s “Sunday in the Park with George” 1984; For Colored Girls 1976: Mass Appeal 1981; “Mass Appeal” 1981; Most recently “Next To Normal” 2009; The currently playing now is “Les Liaisons Dangereuses” a Play by Christopher Hampton until January 08, 2017.



Running Head: How has the Theatre district in Times Square Changed?

## Picture of New Amsterdam Theatre

Picture was taken in the NY Historical Archive



1980's

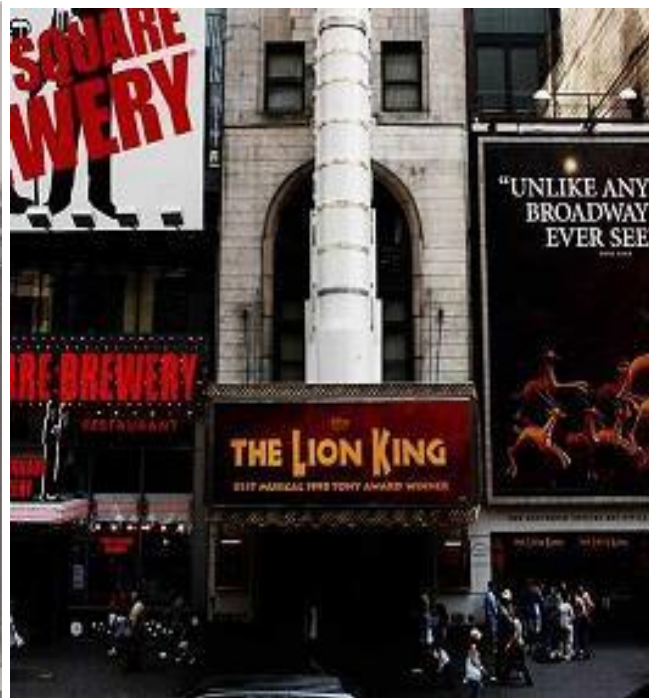


## Restoration

Before (1903)



After (2006)



[https://www.google.com/search?q=new+amsterdam+theatre+2006&biw=1920&bih=947&source=lnms](https://www.google.com/search?q=new+amsterdam+theatre+2006&biw=1920&bih=947&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiHv9zz0OfQAhWHipAKHZVACRMQ_AUIBigB#tbm=isch&q=new+amsterdam+theatre&imgcr=3HEyp53eJAFWCM%3A)  
&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiHv9zz0OfQAhWHipAKHZVACRMQ\_AUIBigB#tbm=isch&q=new+amsterdam+theatre&imgcr=3HEyp53eJAFWCM%3A

Running Head: How has the Theatre district in Times Square Changed?



1985



Renovation in 1990

What the interior of the New Amsterdam Theater looked like prior to its restoration & renovation. *Copyright* - See more at:

[http://jimhillmedia.com/editor\\_in\\_chief1/b/jim\\_hill/archive/2014/02/04/looking-back-on-why-the-walt-disney-company-decided-to-restore-the-new-amsterdam-theater-in-nyc.aspx#sthash.JujxysmY.dpuf](http://jimhillmedia.com/editor_in_chief1/b/jim_hill/archive/2014/02/04/looking-back-on-why-the-walt-disney-company-decided-to-restore-the-new-amsterdam-theater-in-nyc.aspx#sthash.JujxysmY.dpuf)



What the interior of the New Amsterdam Theater looked

like prior to its restoration & renovation. *Copyright* - See more at:

[http://jimhillmedia.com/editor\\_in\\_chief1/b/jim\\_hill/archive/2014/02/04/looking-back-on-why-the-walt-disney-company-decided-to-restore-the-new-amsterdam-theater-in-nyc.aspx#sthash.JujxysmY.dpuf](http://jimhillmedia.com/editor_in_chief1/b/jim_hill/archive/2014/02/04/looking-back-on-why-the-walt-disney-company-decided-to-restore-the-new-amsterdam-theater-in-nyc.aspx#sthash.JujxysmY.dpuf)

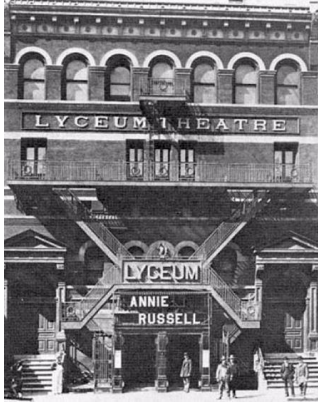


The crumbling, vacant theatre and surrounding buildings in 1985 before the renovation of 42nd Street

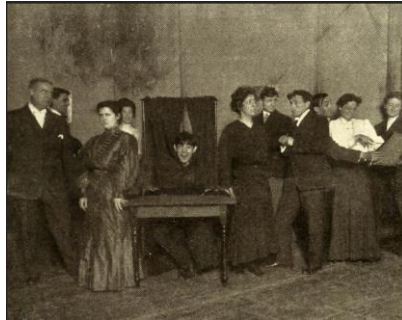
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Amsterdam\\_Theatre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Amsterdam_Theatre)

Pictures of the Lyceum Theatre

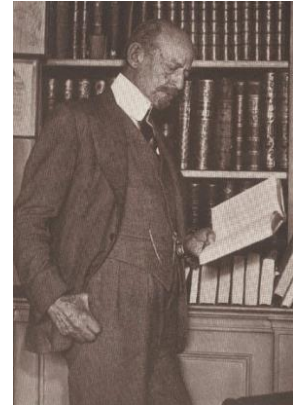
**Old Lyceum Theatre**



**Facial Expression Class 1906**



**Daniel Frohman**



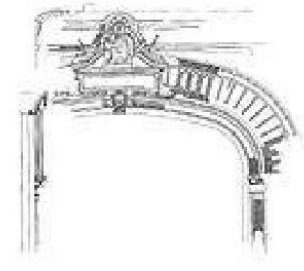
**Make Up Class 1906**



**Scene Painting Class 1906**



**Design of Proscenium**



**New Lyceum Theatre**

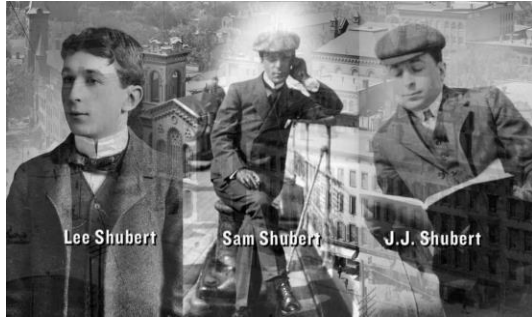


**Inside New Lyceum Theatre Lyceum during Great Depression**

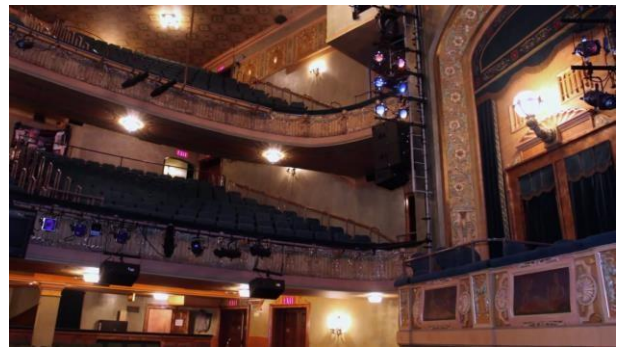


## Pictures of Sam Shubert Theatre

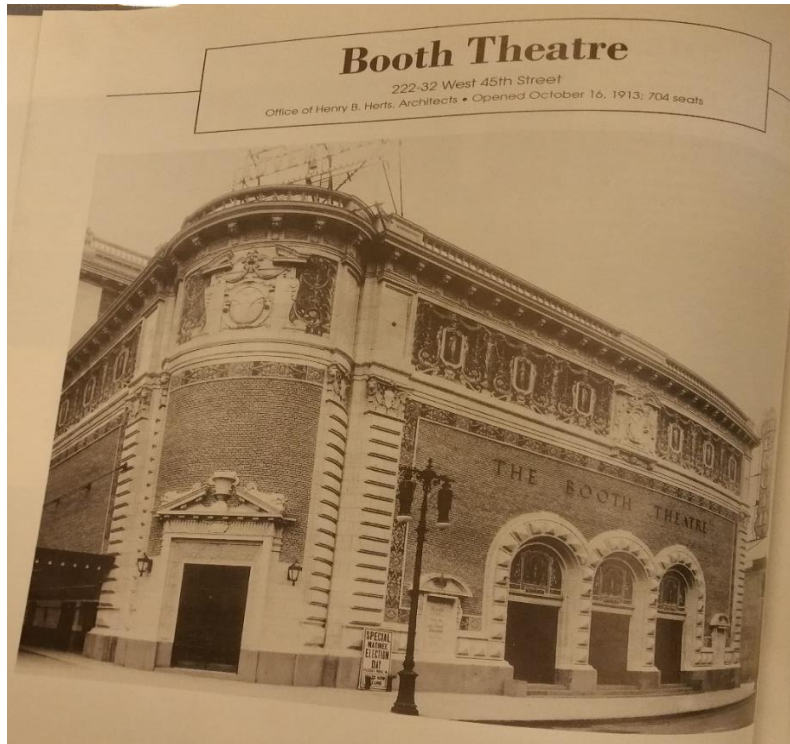
Shubert Brothers



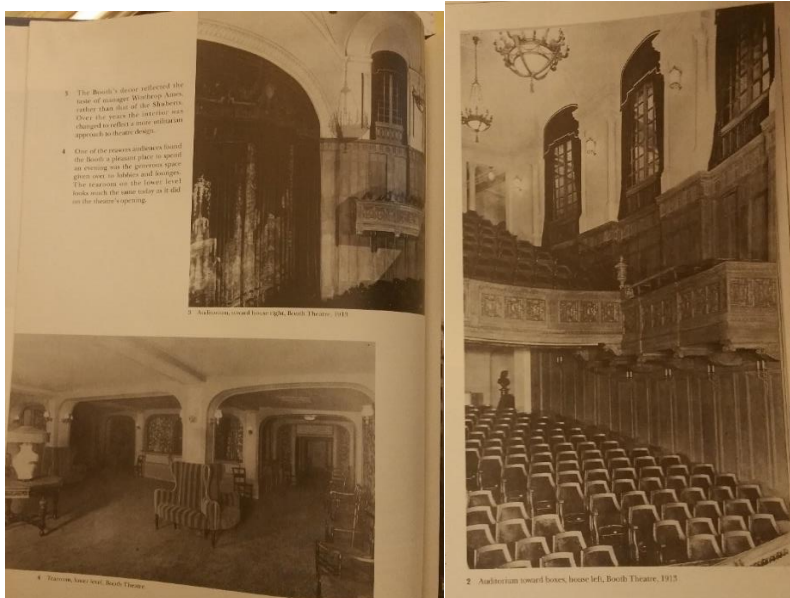
1900's Sketch of Shubert



Pictures for Booth Theatre



This is a picture of Booth Theatre when it first opened



These are pictures of the inside of the theatre when it first opened.

In conclusion, this project was really beneficial towards us. We gained a lot of knowledge on theatre district history in Times Square NYC. In addition to our knowledge that we've gained, we also received hands on archive materials towards this project. What helped us the most was looking at pictures of the past and actually being able to see these locations in person today. There were some challenges such as retrieving archive information, but with help from online resources such as "SpotlightOnBroadway" and the actual theatre's website, we were able to put more information together. If we could do this project differently, we would want to give us all the opportunity to visit each theatre towards our report. Originally, we all visited the Signature Theatre. If we would have went to a theatre that was related to our paper, we believe our experience would have been different. Ultimately, this project was a success. I would recommend this topic to future Library Architect Students.

The following are the current plays in the related theatres today:

- New Amsterdam Theatre: Aladin
- Lyceum: Oh, Hello on Broadway
- Shubert: Matilda
- Booth: Les Liaisons Dangereuses

## Running Head: How has the Theatre district in Times Square Changed?

### References

The internet Broadway Database

<http://www.shubertorganization.com/theatres/booth/>

<http://www.spotlightonbroadway.com/theater/booth> Vedio

Botto, L., & Viagas, R. (2002). *At this theatre: 100 years of Broadway shows, stories and stars*. New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books/Playbill.

<http://www.playbill.com/venue/view-more?venue=00000150-aacd-d8be-af71-ffef18970003>

<http://broadwayscene.com/a-g/the-booth-theatre/>

<http://thepeakofchic.blogspot.com/2009/01/design-legend-melanie-kahane.html>

<http://www.francescarusso.com/booth.htm>

<http://www.timessquarenyc.org/visitor-tips/history/index.aspx#.WEbexzp8PIU>

<https://blog.mcny.org/2015/07/14/from-dazzling-to-dirty-and-back-again-a-brief-history-of-times-square/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Times\\_Square](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Times_Square)

Eliot, M. (2001). *Down 42nd Street: Sex, money, culture, and politics at the crossroads of the world*. New York: Warner Books.

Homberger, E. (2005). *The historical atlas of New York City: A visual celebration of nearly 400 years of New York City's history*. New York: Owl.

[https://www.google.com/search?q=new+york+historical+society+library&biw=1440&bih=757&site=webhp&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjM4d7PndTQAhXD7CYKHSTXD7EQ\\_AUIBigB#tbm=isch&q=new+amsterdam+theatre+1903&imgrc=\\_WDqfwleguWdpM%3A](https://www.google.com/search?q=new+york+historical+society+library&biw=1440&bih=757&site=webhp&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjM4d7PndTQAhXD7CYKHSTXD7EQ_AUIBigB#tbm=isch&q=new+amsterdam+theatre+1903&imgrc=_WDqfwleguWdpM%3A)