Landmarks Preservation Commission
August 6, 1985; Designation List 182
LP-1308

AMBASSADOR THEATER, first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, and attached decorative elements; 215-223 West 49th Street, Manhattan. Built 1919-21; architect, Herbert Krapp.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1021, Lot 15.

On June 14 and 15, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Ambassador Theater, first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, and attached decorative elements; 215-223 West 49th Street, Manhattan, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing was continued to October 19, 1982. Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Eighty- three witnesses spoke in favor of designation. Three witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The owner of the theater was among those in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The interior of the Ambassador Theater survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. Built shortly after the end of World War I, the Ambassador was among the numerous theaters constructed by the Shubert Organization, to the designs of Herbert J. Krapp, that typified the development of the Times Square/Broadway theater district.

Founded by the three brothers Sam S., Lee and J.J. Shubert, the Shubert organization was the dominant shaper of New York's theater district. Beginning as producers, the brothers expanded into the building of theaters as well, and eventually helped cover the blocks east and west of Broadway in Midtown with theaters whose auditoriums were defined by proscenium arches.

Herbert J. Krapp, who designed almost all the Shuberts' post-World War I theaters, was the most prolific architect of the Broadway theater district. Having worked in the offices of Herts & Tallant, premier theater

designers of the pre-war period, Krapp went on to design theaters for the two major builders of the post-war era, the Shubert and Chanin organizations.

The Ambassador represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history. Beyond its historical importance, its interior is an excellent example of the elegant Adamesque style in which Herbert Krapp worked.

For half a century the Ambassador Theater has served as home to countless numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater. As such, it continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

The development of the Broadway Theater District

The area of midtown Manhattan known today as the Broadway theater district encompasses the largest concentration of legitimate playhouses in the world. The theaters located there, some dating from the turn of the century, are significant for their contributions to the history of the New York stage, for their influence upon American theater as a whole, and in many cases for their architectural design.

The development of the area around Times Square as New York's theater district at the end of the 19th century occurred as a result of two related factors: the northward movement of the population of Manhattan Island (abetted by the growth of several forms of mass transportation), and the expansion of New York's role in American theater. The northward movement of Manhattan's residential, commercial, and entertainment districts had been occurring at a steady rate throughout the 19th century. In the early 1800s, 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 14th and 23rd Streets, eventually moving to Herald Square and Fifth Avenue at the turn of the century; the hotels, originally located near the stores and theaters, began to congregate around major transportation centers such as Grand Central Terminal or on the newly fashionable Fifth Avenue; while the mansions of the wealthy spread farther north on Fifth Avenue, as did such objects of their beneficence as the Metropolitan Museum of Art. [1]

The theater district, which had existed in the midst of stores, hotels, and other businesses along lower Broadway for most of the 19th century, spread northward in stages, stopping for a time at Union Square, then Madison Square, then Herald Square. By the last two decades of the 19th century, far-sighted theater managers had begun to extend the theater district even farther north along Broadway, until they had reached the area that was then known as Long Acre Square and is today called Times Square.

A district of farmlands and rural summer homes in the early 1800s, Long Acre Square had by the turn of the century evolved into a hub of mass

transportation. A horsecar line had run across 42nd Street as early as the 1860s, and in 1871, with the opening of Grand Central Depot and the completion of the Third and Sixth Avenue Elevated Railways, it was comparatively simple for both New Yorkers and out-of-towners to reach Long Acre Square. Transportation continued to play a large part in the development of the area; in 1904 New York's subway system was inaugurated, with a major station located at 42nd Street and Broadway. The area was then renamed Times Square in honor of the newly erected Times Building.[2] The evolution of the Times Square area as a center of Manhattan's various mass transit systems made it a natural choice for the location of legitimate playhouses, which needed to be easily accessible to their audiences.

The theater business that invaded Long Acre Square at the end of the 19th century consisted of far more than a few playhouses, for at that time New York was the starting-point for a vast, nationwide entertainment network known as "the road." This complex theater operation had its beginnings in the 1860s when the traditional method of runnng a theater, the stock system, was challenged by the growing popularity of touring "combination" shows. In contrast to the stock system, in which a theater manager engaged a company of actors for a season and presented them in a variety of plays, the combination system consisted of a company of actors appearing in a single show which toured from city to city, providing its own scenery, costumes, and sometimes musical accompaniment. Helped by the expansion of the nation's railroads after the Civil War, the combination system soon killed off the majority of stock companies.[3] By 1904 there were some 420 combination companies touring through thousands of theaters in cities and towns across the country.[4]

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 theater city in America, it is not surprising that it became the headquarters for the combination system. In addition to the many theaters needed for an initial Broadway production for the combinations before they went on tour, New York's theater 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 theater 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.

As theaters 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. Theater people gathered 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.[5]

The theater 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.

The movement of the theater district north along Broadway had proceeded at a steady pace during the latter part of the 19th century. The Casino Theater was opened on the southeast corner of Broadway and 39th Street in 1882. A year later, it was joined by a most ambitious undertaking--the construction of the Metropolitan Opera House on Broadway between 39th and 40th Streets. In 1888, the Broadway Theater was erected on the southwest corner of Broadway and 41st Street. Five years later, the American Theater opened its doors at Eighth Avenue between 41st and 42nd Streets, as did Abbey's Theater at Broadway and 38th Street and the Empire Theater at Broadway and Fortieth Street.

It remained for Oscar Hammerstein I to make the move into Long Acre Square itself. At the close of the 19th century, Long Acre Square housed Manhattan's harness and carriage businesses, but was little used at night, when it seems to have become a "thieves' lair."[6] In 1895 Hammerstein erected an enormous theater building on Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets. The original plan for the Olympia called for a "perfect palace of entertainment--which would have included three theaters, a bowling alley, a turkish bath, cafes and restaurants."[7] Only part of this visionary plan ever became a reality. On November 25, 1895, Hammerstein opened the Lyric Theater section of the building, and a little over three weeks later he inaugurated the Music Hall section. Never a financial success, the Olympia closed its doors two years after it opened. Nevertheless, it earned Hammerstein the title of "Father of Times Square."

By the turn of the century Hammerstein had built two more theaters in the Long Acre Square area, and in the years 1901-1920 a total of forty-three additional theaters appeared in midtown Manhattan, most of them in the side streets east and west of Broadway. Much of this theater-building activity was inspired by the competition between two major forces in the industry, the Theatrical Syndicate and the Shubert Brothers, for control of the road. As each side in the rivalry drew its net more tightly around the playhouses it owned or controlled, the other side was forced to build new theaters to house its attractions. The result was a dramatic increase in the number of playhouses, both in New York and across the country. After World War I, as the road declined and New York's theatrical activity increased, the general economic prosperity made possible the construction of thirty additional playhouses in the Times Square area, expanding the boundaries of the theater district so that it stretched from west of Eighth Avenue to Sixth Avenue, and from 39th Street to Columbus Circle.[8]

The stockmarket crash of 1929 and the resulting Depression caused a shrinkage in theater activity. Some playhouses were torn down, many were converted to motion picture houses, and later to radio and television studios. From the time of the Depression until the 1960s no new Broadway playhouses were constructed. Fortunately, the theaters that survive from the early part of the century represent a cross-section of types and styles, and share among them a good deal of New York's rich theatrical history.

(MMK)

Evolution of Theater Design

The frenzy of theater construction that occurred in New York during the first thirty years of this century brought with it an evolution in architecture and decoration.[9] At the close of the 19th century American theaters were still being built in the style of traditional European opera houses, with high proscenium arches, narrow auditoriums, two or three balconies built in a horseshoe configuration, and dozens of boxes, some set into the front of the first balcony. Although contemporary notices of the theaters attributed specific (though often vague) styles or periods to them, their interiors were more often than not a melange of styles and colors.

With the increase of theater construction after the turn of the century came a new attitude toward theater architecture and decoration as firms such as Herts and Tallant, Thomas W. Lamb, and others, began to plan the playhouse's exterior and interior as a single, integrated design. The Art Nouveau style New Amsterdam Theater, which opened in 1903, signalled this new seriousness in theater design.

Perhaps influenced by such European experiments as Wagner's Festival Theater at Bayreuth, American theater architects after the turn of the century began to structure their playhouses along different lines. Proscenium openings were made lower and wider, auditoriums were made shallower, seating was planned in a fan shape, and the number of balconies was usually reduced to one. Boxes were cut back to a minimum. The theaters that were built just before and after World War I for the most part shared this new configuration.

Because many of New York's extant playhouses were built during the period in which New York was serving as the starting-point for nationwide tours, they represent a style of theater architecture that is characteristic not only of New York but also of other cities across the United States, for a show which was originally produced in a New York theater would require similar conditions in the theaters in which it toured, and theater owners often hired the same architects to design and build theaters in several cities. Thus, New York's theaters set the standard for theater construction across the United States, as an inspection of designs for theaters in various cities will show.[10]

(MMK)

The Broadway Theater in American Theatrical History

The playhouses still standing in the Broadway theater district share among them over eighty years of American theatrical history. In the early years of the century, when American theater was still heavily influenced by Europe, the theaters played host to such great international stars as Sarah Bernhardt, Eleonora Duse, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and to adaptations of such European successes as The Merry Widow and Floradora.

It was in the Broadway theaters that the beginnings of a distinctly American drama could be seen in the Western melodramas of David Belasco, the social comedies of Clyde Fitch and Langdon Mitchell, and the problem plays of Edward Sheldon and Eugene Walter. With the rise of the "little theater" movement in the second decade of the century, it seemed that theatrical leadership had passed from Broadway to such experimental "art"

theaters as the Provincetown Playhouse and the Neighborhood Playhouse. Before long, however, the innovations of the little theaters infused Broadway with new life. Beginning with the production of Eugene O'Neill's first full-length play, Beyond the Horizon, on Broadway in 1920, the playhouses of Broadway presented the work of a new generation of playwrights, including, in addition to O'Neill, Maxwell Anderson, Philip Barry, S.N. Behrman, Rachel Crothers, Sidney Howard, George S. Kaufman, George Kelly and Elmer Rice.

The Depression of the 1930s brought with it a new concern with political and social issues, and the dramas presented in the Broadway playhouses reflected that concern. Commercial producers gave us plays by Lillian Hellman, Robert E. Sherwood, and Thornton Wilder, while the Group Theater and other new organizations introduced such writers as Clifford Odets and Sidney Kingsley. The Broadway theaters continued to house challenging plays during the 1940s and 1950s, when new talents such as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and William Inge first began writing for the theater.

Meanwhile, musical comedy had blossomed from the adaptations and imitations of European operetta popular at the turn of the century to a uniquely American art form. By the 1940s and 1950s the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern, and many others, were being exported from the stages of Broadway to theaters around the world.

The 1960s and 1970s were decades of ferment and change, both in and out of the theater. As in the 1920s, the impetus for theatrical experimentation came from outside of Broadway, and as in the 1920s, the experimentation helped to revitalize the Broadway theater. Today, the playhouses of Broadway are showcases for the best plays of the Off- and Off-Off Broadway theaters, as well as for exciting productions from theatrical workshops, regional theaters, and outstanding foreign companies.

Having moved gradually northward all during the 19th century, New York's theater district finally came to rest at Times Square, where it has remained for almost ninety years. The economic Depression of the 1930s discouraged speculative ventures such as the construction of new theaters, while after prosperity returned in the wake of World War II, the cost of renting land and constructing a theater was prohibitively high. The northward movement of the theater district may also have been discouraged for a number of years by the existence of the Sixth Avenue Elevated Railway, which crossed from Sixth to Ninth Avenues at 53rd Street, thereby providing a natural northern boundary for the theater district.[11]

The interior of the Ambassador Theater, as one of the Broadway theater interiors surviving today in the theater district, contributes to the totality of the district's history by virtue of its participation in that history.

(MMK)

Notes

1. The discussion of the northward movement of Manhattan's business and

theaters is based on Mary Henderson, The City and the Theatre (Clifton, N.J.: James T. White and Co., 1983), pp. 130-131, 168-170.

2. W.G. Rogers and Mildred Weston, Carnival Crossroads: the Story of Times Square (New York: Doubleday, 1960), pp. 39-78; Howard B. Furer, New York: A Chronological and Documentary History 1524-1970 (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1974), p. 34 ff.; The New York Subway (New York: Interborough Rapid Transit Co., 1904; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, n.d.).

3. Alfred L. Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre (New York: Actors Equity Association, 1932; reprint ed., New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), p. 26.

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

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

6. Philip Paneth, Times Square, Crossroads of the World (New York: Living Books, 1965), p. 20.

7. Henderson, p. 263.

8. Henderson, p. 195-196.

9. The discussion of the developments in American theater architecture is based upon: Ned A. Bowman, "American Theatre Architecture: the Concrete Mirror Held Up to Yankee Nature," The American Theatre: The Sum of its Parts (New York: French, 1972), pp. 199-233; Burr C. Cook, "Twenty Years of Theatre Building," Theatre 36 (August 1922), 98-99; Arthur S.Meloy, Theatres and Picture Houses (New York: Architects' Supply and Publishing Co., 1916), p. 29.

10. See, for example, the discussion of various theaters in Randolph Williams Sexton and Ben Franklin Betts, eds., American Theaters of Today, 2 vols. (New York: Architectural Book Pubs., 1927, 1930; reprint ed., New York: Vestal, 1977).

11. Stanley Buder, "Forty-Second Street at the Crossroads: A History of Broadway to Eighth Avenue," West 42nd Street: "The Bright Light Zone" (New York: Graduate School and University Center, CUNY, 1978), p. 62.

THE SHUBERTS

Sam S. Shubert (d.1905), Lee Shubert (c.1873-1953), and Jacob J. Shubert (c.1877-1963) formed perhaps the most powerful family Broadway has ever seen. Children of an immigrant peddlar from Czarist Lithuania,[1] the Shuberts rose to become the dominant force in legitimate theater in

America. By 1924 they were producing 25 per cent of all the plays in America, and controlled 75 percent of the theater tickets sold in this country.[2]

The Shuberts' career in the theater actually began in front of a theater: Lee Shubert sold newspapers outside Wieting's Opera House in Syracuse. Soon his brother Sam began to help him. The manager of Wieting's then made Lee his personal errand boy. Sam Shubert was the first in the family actually to work in a theater: soon after his brother's promotion to errand boy he was given a small role in a Belasco production at Wieting's. Belasco was to remain Sam Shubert's idol throughout his career.[3]

Sam Shubert was the driving force behind the family's rise in the theater industry. From a first job as program boy at the Bastable Theater in Syracuse, he moved to Syracuse's Grand Opera House as assistant treasurer (ticket seller) and then treasurer. At eighteen he returned to Wieting's Opera House as treasurer.[4] In 1894 he assembled enough money to buy the road rights of Charles Hoyt's A Texas Steer, and took the play on a tour of inexpensive houses. The tour was a success and the next season he repeated it with Hoyt's A Stranger in New York.[5] In 1897 the Shuberts used the money of local backers to build their own theater in Syracuse, the Baker, with Jacob Shubert serving as manager.

Their success upstate convinced the Shuberts that they were ready to enter the theater world in New York City. In 1900 Sam and Lee Shubert obtained the lease of New York City's Herald Square Theater at Broadway and 35th Street (demolished 1915), while Jacob managed their upstate business. The Herald Square Theater at that time was unpopular with theatergoers, but the Shuberts changed that with a successful production of Arizona by Augustus John. They proceeded to engage the well-known actor Richard Mansfield, and he appeared at the Herald Square in 1901 in a popular production of Monsieur Beaucaire.[6] The success of these productions encouraged the Shuberts to expand their activities in New York City. In 1901 Sam Shubert leased the Casino Theater on 39th Street; he secured the American rights to the London hit A Chinese Honeymoon and in 1902 it opened at the Casino to rave revues. The show ran for more than a year, and three companies presented it on the road.[7]

The Shuberts followed the success of A Chinese Honeymoon with further expansion in New York City. In 1902 they acquired the lease of the old Theater Comique on 29th Street and Broadway, remodeled the interior and reopened it as the Princess. As an opening attraction they brought Weedon Grossmith and his English company to America in their popular production of The Night of the Party. The following year, 1903, the Shuberts leased the New Waldorf Theater in London and the Madison Square Theater in New York City. They also sold a property on 42nd Street to the composer Reginald DeKoven, who built the Lyric Theater there as a home for the American School of Opera and leased it back to the Shuberts.[8] The Shuberts then signed a ten-year agreement with Richard Mansfield to open each season at the Lyric, to be followed by DeKoven's productions with the American School of Opera.

By this time the Shuberts were outgrowing the financial means of their upstate backers. Lee Shubert found two new financial backers, Samuel

Untermyer and Andrew Freedman. Untermyer was a New York attorney with connections to many New York bankers and investors. Freedman was the owner of the New York Giants baseball team, had extensive New York real estate holdings as well as associations with the Morgan Bank, and was among the small group building New York's first subway. With the political influence and capital made available to the Shuberts by Untermyer and Freedman, they were able to expand their theater holdings in cities across the country, including Chicago, Boston, New Haven, St. Louis, and Philadelphia.

By 1905 the Shuberts controlled thirteen theaters. They had also found two additional backers who enabled the growing Shubert empire to expand still further, George B. Cox of Ohio and Joseph L. Rhinock of Kentucky. Cox was the immensely wealthy political boss of Cincinnati and Rhinock was a member of Congress who had extensive race track and real estate holdings. In May of that year, however, Sam Shubert was killed in a train wreck. He had been the driving force behind the Shubert empire, and many in the theater industry thought the Shuberts' dramatic rise would now end. Lee Shubert, however, took over his brother's role and within six months of the latter's death had quadrupled the Shubert chain and planned five memorial theaters to Sam.[9]

The Shuberts' success in acquiring and building theaters across the country and in booking and producing shows brought them into conflict with the central booking agency controlled by Marc Klaw and A.L. Erlanger. In 1905 Klaw and Erlanger's Syndicate managed most of the roughly one thousand lucrative theaters of the approximately 3000 theaters in the country.[10] Every touring company had to pass through the Syndicate's stage doors. The Shuberts began to fight in earnest with Klaw and Erlanger in 1904 when they learned that their musical The Girl From Dixie wouldn't be able to get a road booking unless the brothers stopped renting their own theaters. Following his brother's death, Lee Shubert announced to the press that Harrison Fiske, David Belasco and the Shuberts were joining forces and were inviting "other independent producers" to join them in an "open door" independent circuit. The need for such a circuit was emphasized in November 1905 when Mme. Sarah Bernhardt arrived in New York for a Shubert tour. Klaw and Erlanger denied her the use of any of their theaters thinking that this action would force the Shuberts to accept their terms. The idea backfired and created enormous public support for the Shuberts as Mme. Bernhardt played in tents and town halls across the country. The struggle for control of theatrical bookings between the Shuberts and Klaw and Erlanger continued through the 1910s. By 1920, after countless lawsuits, the Shuberts gained supremacy.

In the five years following Sam Shubert's death the family continued to expand their holdings in New York City. In 1908 they hired Ben Marshall of Marshall & Fox, Chicago, to design a playhouse on West 39th Street. In what was to become a common Shubert practice, they named the theater after one of their stars, calling it Maxine Elliott's Theater (demolished). This was the first theater that the Shuberts built themselves, neither remodeling nor leasing an existing theater. In 1909 they were involved, along with a number of other investors, in the building of the New (later Century) Theater on Central Park West at 62nd Street (demolished). At the same time they were building a second theater of their own in New York on West 41st Street, the Comedy Theater, designed by architect D.G. Malcolm (demolished). In 1910 the Shuberts hired architect Albert Swasey to design

a small playhouse on West 39th Street, named Alla Nazimova's 39th Street Theater (demolished).

During the 'teens the Shuberts continued to expand their control of New York's theaters. Lee Shubert became the business director of the Century Theater on Central Park West. There he met Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt who owned the American Horse Exchange on Broadway at West 50th Street. The Shuberts acquired the Exchange from Vanderbilt and hired Swasey to remodel it as a theater. It opened in 1911 as the Winter Garden Theater with Jacob Shubert as manager. The Shuberts also bought the Astor Theater on Broadway and 45th Street (demolished) as well as an interest in three Manhattan theaters owned by the Selwyn brothers, and continued to build their own New York theaters. In 1913 they opened two theaters designed by the firm of Henry B. Herts, the Sam S. Shubert Memorial Theater on West 44th Street and the connecting Booth Theater (with Winthrop Ames as a partner) on West 45th Street. The Shubert Theater building also became home to the family's corporate offices.

Over the following decade the Shuberts proceeded to cover the Times Square area with Shubert theaters, all designed by architect Herbert J.Krapp, formerly of the Herts & Tallant office. In 1917 three new Shubert houses opened: the Morosco on West 45th Street (demolished), named for West Coast producer Oliver Morosco; and a second adjoining pair, the Broadhurst on West 44th and the Plymouth on West 45th, just east of the Shubert-Booth pair. The Broadhurst was initially managed by playwright George Broadhurst and the Shuberts, while the Plymouth was built in partnership with producer Arthur Hopkins. In 1918 the Shuberts built the Central Theater on Broadway and 47th Street (it survives today as the Forum 47th Street movie theater).

In the 1920s the Shuberts continued their fast-paced expansion both in New York and in other cities across the country. In 1920 they acquired complete ownership of the Century Theater on Central Park West.[11] That same year, they announced plans for six new theaters on West 48th and 49th Streets, all to be designed by Herbert J. Krapp. Of the four of these theaters eventually built, three opened in 1921: the Ritz on West 48th Street, and the Ambassador and the Forty-Ninth Street (demolished) on West 49th. The Edwin Forrest (today called the Eugene O'Neill) on West 49th Street opened in 1925.

While the Shuberts were building and acquiring theaters for use as legitimate houses they were also involved in other aspects of the entertainment business, many of them in competition with the legitimate stage. Lee Shubert at one time owned one-third of Samuel Goldwyn's motion picture company and later sat on the boards of both Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and United Artists.[11]

The Shuberts also became involved in vaudeville. In 1910 in Syracuse the Shuberts had reached an agreement with B.F. Keith, who virtually controlled vaudeville in the East. They agreed to stay out of vaudeville for ten years in return for a share in Keith's Syracuse profits.[12] With the agreement's expiration in 1920, Lee Shubert announced plans to produce vaudeville shows, making inevitable a battle with Keith's United Booking Office (UBO) and its monopoly of the eastern vaudeville circuit. The

booking battle with Keith caused intense competition for stars and control of theaters. Eventually, however, it became clear that vaudeville was no competition for the growing popularity of motion pictures, and the Shuberts abandoned the enterprise.

In 1924 the Shuberts issued four million dollars worth of Shubert theater stock. The prospectus detailed the assets owned by the Shuberts, not the least of which was their control or ownership of 86 "first class" theaters in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and 27 other major cities. The 30 theaters they owned or controlled in New York City represented half of the seating capacity on Broadway. The Shuberts owned seven of Chicago's fifteen theaters, and they booked three of the others. They went on to announce in their prospectus that the producers who booked through their organization included the Theater Guild, Winthrop Ames, Brady, Comstock, Gest, Hopkins, Sam Harris, William Morris and 40 others. Finally the Shuberts noted that 20 percent of the total time on their circuit was devoted to their own productions.[13] The stock sold out.

In addition to the four theaters on 48th and 49th Streets announced in 1920, the Shuberts built Krapp-designed theaters throughout the Times Square area. In 1921 Jolson's 59th Street Theater opened (demolished). The Shuberts named it for Al Jolson who opened it but never appeared in it again. In 1923 they opened the Imperial Theater on West 45th Street and in 1928 the Ethel Barrymore on West 47th Street. In addition to building their own theaters, the Shuberts owned or leased at various times many other New York theaters including the Belasco, the Billy Rose (now the Nederlander), the Cort, the Forty-Fourth Street, the Harris, the Golden, the Royale and the St. James.

While the Shubert Organization continues to function today (the sole survivor among the early 20th century theater entrepreneurs), its contribution to the stock of Broadway theaters ended with the Depression. That contribution, however, was of enormous importance for the creation of the Broadway theater district, and the surviving Shubert-built theaters today bear witness to the productivity of one of the most active and influential families in American theater history.

(EH)

Notes

1. Jerry Stagg, The Brothers Shubert, (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 3.

2. Stagg, p. 217.

3. Stagg, p. 12.

4. Ibid.

5. Sam S. Shubert, obituary, New York Dramatic Mirror, May 20, 1905, p. 13.

6. Reviewed in The Theatre, January, 1902.

7. Sam S. Shubert obit., p. 13.

8. Stagg, p. 208.

9. Stagg, p. 75.

10. Stagg, p. 98.

11. Stagg, p. 165.

12. Stagg, p. 164.

13. Stagg, p. 230.

Herbert J. Krapp

The character of today's Broadway theater district owes more to architect Herbert J. Krapp (1883-1973) than to any other architect. He designed sixteen of the extant Broadway theaters (almost half the total),[1] fourteen of which are in active theatrical use, as well as five that have been demolished.[2] Despite his enormous output, however, little is known today of his life and work.

Herbert Krapp's career coincided with the rise of the Shubert organization as the major force in the New York theater. Upon his graduation from Cooper Union, Krapp joined the office of noted theater architects Henry Herts and Hugh Tallant, who had designed some of the handsomest early twentieth-century theaters in New York, including the Lyceum (1903), New Amsterdam (1902-03), Helen Hayes (1911, demolished), and Longacre (1912-13). According to Krapp's daughter, the partners were becoming increasingly debilitated by morphine addiction, and gradually entrusted Krapp with responsibility for design and office operations.[3] Be that as it may, when the Shuberts next decided to build new theaters, in 1916, they turned to Krapp for designs, and proceeded to commission from him a dozen theaters in Times Square in as many years (1916-1928). Throughout his professional career Krapp remained the preferred Shubert architect. He designed their theaters in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and elsewhere, supervised Shubert theater alterations nationwide, and was even the architect for their private residences.[4]

Besides his twelve Shubert theaters, Krapp designed nine other Times Square houses. Six, built between 1924 and 1927, were for the Chanin Construction Company. Only three, the Alvin, the Hammerstein (now the Ed Sullivan), and the Waldorf (demolished) were designed for independent interests. A brilliant acoustician and gifted architect of great invention, Krapp was responsible for scores of theaters throughout New York City and State (including three movie houses in Queens: the Sunnyside in Woodside and the Jackson and the Boulevard in Jackson Heights) and others stretching from Palm Beach to Detroit. His office records document alterations to literally hundreds of theaters across the country.

Krapp's Broadway theaters closely reflect the interest and needs of a new breed of theatrical entrepreneur, the large-scale speculative

owner/builder. Prior to the rise of the Shuberts as major theater owners, most theaters had been erected for independent impresarios, including Oscar Hammerstein who built the first Times Square theater and whose Victory Theater (1899) still stands on 42nd Street, Daniel Frohman who built the Lyceum (1903), Charles Dillingham who built the Lunt-Fontanne (1910), and David Belasco and John Cort who built the theaters that bear their names (1907 and 1912). At the turn of the century, Klaw and Erlanger's Theatrical Syndicate dominated most of the Times Square theaters, but did not sponsor a unified building campaign as the Shuberts eventually did. Since the Shuberts were building theaters largely as financial ventures, most of their buildings tended to be simpler than those designed for the impresarios who were attempting to draw attention both to their theaters and to themselves. The theaters that Krapp designed for the Shuberts are relatively restrained on both the exterior and interior, but they reflect Krapp's mastery of theater layout, as well as the general stylistic trends established by the earlier and more elaborate theater designs in the Times Square theater district.

Krapp's earliest theaters, the Plymouth (1916-17) and Broadhurst (1917), were built as a pair located immediately to the west of Henry Herts's earlier Shubert pair, the Shubert and Booth. The designs of the Plymouth and Broadhurst echo those of the earlier theaters. Like the Shubert and Booth, Krapp's houses have rounded corners that face towards Broadway (the direction from which most audience members arrived). Each corner is accented by an entrance with a broken pedimented enframement and by an oval cartouche. These forms imitate, in a simplified manner, the ornamental forms on Herts's buildings. In addition, Krapp's theaters are faced with bricks separated by wide, deeply inset mortar joints in a manner favored by Herts. The Plymouth and Broadhurst facades are simpler than their neighbors, but they were clearly designed to complement Herts's theaters and create a unified group of Shubert houses.

The Plymouth and Broadhurst are not adorned with a great deal of applied stone or terra cotta. This lack of architectural ornament is typical of Krapp's designs for the Shuberts;[5] the facades of these theaters are generally enlivened by diaper-patterned brick and occasionally by the use of ornamental iron balconies. The use of diaper-patterned brick can be seen on the Plymouth and the Broadhurst, but it is most evident on the Morosco (1917, demolished), Ritz (1921), Ambassador (1921), and the 46th-Street facade of the Imperial (1923). Krapp's use of diaperwork might have been inspired by Herts & Tallant's use of an ornate diaper pattern of terra cotta on their Helen Hayes Theater (1911).

After building a large number of new theaters between 1916 and 1923 the Shuberts undertook very little construction in the Times Square area from 1924 through 1927. During these years the Chanin Construction Company emerged as the major theater builder in the area. The Chanins also turned to Krapp for their theater designs. Major New York City builders, the Chanins considered theaters to be sound financial investments from which they could not fail to profit. The six theaters that Krapp designed for the Chanins are more ornate than those he designed for the Shuberts. One reason may be that the Chanins, new to the theater world, decided that their theaters should project an elegant image; another, that as a building company, they were more concerned than the Shuberts about the exterior appearance of their buildings. Still another factor may have the greater

availability of money in the middle of the 1920s as compared to the years during and immediately following World War I when most of the Shubert theaters were erected.

Krapp's first two theaters for the Chanins, the Forty-Sixth Street (1924) and the Biltmore (1925), are neo-Renaissance style structures with extensive terra-cotta detail that includes rusticated bases, monumental Corinthian pilasters, and ornate cornices and balustrades. Krapp's next commission, the Brooks Atkinson (1926), has a facade with the Mediterranean flavor that came to be favored by the Chanins. Referred to at the time as "modern Spanish" in style[6], the Brooks Atkinson is a brick building articulated by three Palladian openings supported by twisted columns. Roundel panels and a Spanish-tiled parapet are additional Spanish forms on the facade. Krapp's largest commission from the Chanins was a trio of theaters, the Golden, Royale, and Majestic, all built between 1926 and 1927 in conjunction with the Lincoln Hotel (now the Milford Plaza Hotel). Like the Brooks Atkinson, these three theaters were described as being "modern Spanish in character."[7] All three were constructed of yellow brick and adorned with areas of decorative terra-cotta pilasters, twisted columns, arches, parapets, and columned loggias.[8]

Following his work for the Chanins, Krapp designed three independent houses, all of which were stylistically unusual. The Waldorf (1926, demolished) which stood on West 50th Street was an ornate French neo-Classical-style structure; the Alvin (1927, now the Neil Simon) an impressive neo-Federal style red brick building; and the Hammerstein (now the Ed Sullivan) a neo-Gothic theater housed in a tall office building. The latter two were commissioned by theatrical impresarios, hence their more elaborate design as compared to Krapp's work for the Shubert and Chanin theater chains.

In 1928 the Shuberts commissioned their final theater from Krapp. The Ethel Barrymore is among Krapp's finest and most unusual designs. The theater is a monumentally scaled structure combining an extremely ornate rusticated Beaux-Arts-style base with a superstructure boldly modeled after the windowed facade of a Roman bath.[9]

Like the exteriors of his buildings, Krapp's interiors are stylistically varied, reflecting the design eclecticism of the first decades of the twentieth century. On many occasions the style of the interior has little to do with that of the exterior. Most of the theater interiors designed for the Shuberts have Adamesque style ornament, a style deriving from the neo-Classical designs originated by the eighteenth-century English architect Robert Adam. Krapp's Adamesque interiors display the refined, elegant forms common to the style, and such features as delicate garlands, rosettes, and foliate bands. The "Spanish" theaters that Krapp designed for the Chanins have interior details such as twisted columns, arcades, and escutcheons that match the style of the exteriors. All of Krapp's interiors were designed to create a relaxing and comfortable environment for the theatergoer. The decor of the auditoriums is simple yet elegant, and generally complemented by similarly designed lobbies and lounges.

Although Krapp lived to the age of 86, he apparently designed no theaters during the last forty years of his life. Because of the theater

glut caused by financial problems during the Depression, theaters ceased being a lucrative architectural specialty. Krapp survived as a building assessor for the City of New York, and turned increasingly to industrial design. A twentieth-century Renaissance man, he supplemented his architectural practice with the patterning of silver- and flatware and especially with his design of mechanical couplings.[10] The theaters he designed in the early decades of this century, however, remain a lasting legacy, and many of his buildings, such as the Majestic, Imperial, Plymouth, and 46th Street Theaters, are counted among the most successful and sought-after on Broadway.

(ASD)

Notes

1. Krapp's sixteen theaters are the Alvin (now the Neil Simon), Ambassador, Brooks Atkinson, Ethel Barrymore, Biltmore, Broadhurst, 46th Street, Golden, Imperial, Majestic, Eugene O'Neil, Plymouth, Ritz, Royale, and Ed Sullivan (originally Hammerstein). The Central (1567 Broadway at 47th Street) is now a movie house and all but its cornice is covered with billboards.

2. The five theaters designed by Krapp that have been demolished are the Bijou (209 West 45th Street), Century (932 Seventh Avenue between 58th and 59th Streets), 49th Street (235 West 49th Street), Morosco (217 West 45th Street), and Waldorf (116 West 50th Street).

3. Interview with Mrs. Peggy Elson, Herbert Krapp's daughter, by Janet Adams, November 16, 1984.

4. Herbert Krapp papers, currently in the possession of Mrs. Peggy Elson, New York City.

5. The 49th Street Theater (1921) was an exception. This building had a terra-cotta facade articulated by fluted pilasters.

6. Brooks Atkinson Theater, Souvenir Program of the dedication (as Mansfield Theater), Feburary 15, 1926, n.p. Billy Rose Theater Collection, Lincoln Center branch, New York Public Library.

7. Royale Theater, Souvenir Program of the dedication, January 11, 1927, n.p. Billy Rose Theater Collection.

8. The use of restricted areas of very ornate detail set against an otherwise unornamented facade is reminiscent of Spanish Baroque or Churrigueresque architecture.

9. This theater is often overlooked because the present rectilinear marquee cuts the facade in half, hiding the ornate base and destroying the subtle juxtaposition between the top and bottom sections of the building.

10. Herbert Krapp papers, and interview with Mrs. Peggy Elson.

The Ambassador Theater

The Ambassador Theater is one of the numerous speculatively built Shubert houses designed by Herbert Krapp. One of the six theaters planned by the Shuberts for their holdings on West 48th and 49th Streets between Broadway and Eighth Avenue (as announced in 1920), it was one of the four actually built, one of the three surviving, and one of the three that actually opened in 1921.

Perhaps because they were attempting a number of projects at once, or perhaps because in the years immediately following the end of World War I money was tight, the first of this group of theaters to be completed were somewhat sparer in design than such elaborate pre-War Shubert houses as the Shubert and Booth. The Ambassador and Ritz, in particular, have very simple exterior designs, whose only ornamental effects derive from the use of patterned brick and, in the case of the Ambassador, a rounded entrance corner like those of the earlier Shubert, Booth, Plymouth and Broadhurst theaters. Another restriction on the design of the Ambassador was the awkwardness of its site, as a result of which its auditorium was set diagonally from the lot line.

In the interiors of these theaters, however, Krapp was able to create the theatrical illusion of opulence through the lavish use of paint and plaster. In the Ambassador, the cameo and swag motifs in the walls near the boxes, the cameo panels in the arch spandrels over the boxes, and the extraordinary fan-like forms within arches on the balcony side walls are unusually handsome examples of Adamesque ornament. Although lacking the elaborate paintings of the Shubert, the elegant paneling of the Booth, and even the plaster friezes of the Plymouth and Broadhurst, the Ambassador's interior nevertheless displays some of Herbert Krapp's most inventive Adamesque style plasterwork surviving today. The plan with a single balcony divided into tiers and walls that curve into towards the proscenium also typifies Krapp's theaters.

(EH, AR)

The Ambassador Theater as a Playhouse

The Ambassador opened on February 11, 1921, with a musical comedy, The Rose Girl by William Carey Duncan and Ansel Goetzel.[1] Its greatest hit, however, arrived in September of that year: Blossom Time, by Dorothy Donnelly, with Sigmund Romberg's arrangements of Franz Schubert's music. The operetta became enormously popular and returned to the Ambassador in 1931 and again in 1943.

The 1922-23 season saw two popular musical comedies at the Ambassador. Lady in Ermine, with Wilda Bennett and Walter Woolf King opened the season. It was followed by Caroline with Tessa Kosta, John Adair and J. Harold

Murray, well-known at the time as the "Arrow Collar Man."

Victor Herbert's musical The Dream Girl opened in 1924 with Fay Bainter and Walter Woolf King. In 1926 The Great Gatsby, a drama based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, enjoyed a very successful run. The cast included Florence Eldridge, James Rennie, Eliot Cabot, Carol Goodner and Gladys Feldman. The Racket was a drama by the Chicago newspaperman Bartlett Cormack. It was voted one of the ten bast plays of 1927 and enjoyed a successful run at the Ambassador. Its cast included Willard Robertson, John Cromwell, Edward G. Robinson and Hugh O'Connell.

Over the next several years the Ambassador saw a series of brief engagements, revivals, and attractions which moved to the theater from sucessful runs at other theaters. Claudette Colbert and Chester Morris appeared in Fast Life; Max Reinhardt directed Redemption; Jeanette MacDonald sang in Angela; and in 1930 The Last Mile sent Spencer Tracy on his way to Hollywood. A revival of Blossom Time closed out the 1930-31 season.

The Ambassador's next big hit came in 1935 with the courtroom melodrama, Night of January 16 by Ayn Rand. Starring Walter Pidgeon, the mystery featured a "jury" of twelve members of the audience who nightly decided the verdict.

In 1937 the Abbey Theatre Players presented a season of Irish drama. In 1939 The Straw Hat Revue featured Imogene Coca, Danny Kaye, Jerome Robbins and Alfred Drake. Following a year as a radio playhouse the Ambassador returned to legitimate use in 1941 with Cuckoos on the Hearth by Parker W. Fennelly. Wine, Women and Song, a burlesque-vaudeville revue, was closed down by Mayor LaGuardia's administration, with the subsequent revocation of the Ambassador's licence. The theater reopened ten months later, in 1943, with another revival of Blossom Time. The Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company followed with a season of operettas.

Following eleven years of use as a radio and television studio, the Ambassador returned once again to legitimate stage productions in 1956 with The Loud Red Patrick, a comedy with Arthur Kennedy and David Wayne. In February of 1957, The Diary of Anne Frank moved to the Ambassador from the Cort Theater. This drama won the Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, and the Tony Award for the best play of 1956. Compulsion, with its anti-capital punishment theme, opened in 1957 and featured performances by Dean Stockwell, Howard DaSilva, Barbara Loden, Ina Balin and Suzanne Pleshette. That same season saw Tyrone Power and Faye Emerson in George Bernard Shaw's Back to Methuselah. E.G. Marshall and Melvyn Douglas performed in The Gang's All Here at the Ambassador in 1959. The Tenth Man, a play by Paddy Chayefsky and directed by Tyrone Guthrie moved to the Ambassador from the Booth in 1961, with a cast including Lou Jacobi, Jack Guilford and Gene Saks.

The 1960s saw a number of popular hits at the Ambassador. Stop the World - I Want to Get Off moved to the Ambassador for the 1963 season from the Shubert Theater. Anna Quayle won a Tony Award for her performance in this musical. You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running, a series of four one-act plays by Robert Anderson, opened at the Ambassador in 1967 and ran for more than a year, before moving to the Broadhurst and then the

Lunt-Fontanne. The cast included Martin Balsam who won a 1968 Tony Award for his performance.

The 1960s also saw performances at the Ambassador by Jason Robards, Jr. and Diana Sands in Joseph Heller's We Bombed in New Haven (1968), and Nicol Williamson and Constance Cummings in Hamlet (1969).

The decade of the 1970s began at the Ambassador with Judy Carne and Sandy Duncan in The Boyfriend. This was followed by Paul Sills's The Story Theatre which included Paul Sand's Tony Award-winning performance. The 1970s also saw a number of long-running hits at the Ambassador including Me and Bessie, a musical about Bessie Smith with Linda Hopkins; Godspell which moved to the Ambassador in 1977 after playing in the Broadhurst and Plymouth Theaters; Miss Margarida's Way with Estelle Parsons (1977); Eubie, a musical tribute to composer Eubie Blake (1978); and Dancin' which moved to the Ambassador in 1980 from the Broadhurst and played there for a year and a half.

(EH)

Notes

1. This production history of the Ambassador Theater, condensed from the fuller version in the Appendix, is based on listings compiled by Actors Equity and submitted as testimony at the Landmarks Preservation Commission's public hearings of June and October, 1982. Their submission has been checked by Landmarks Commission staff against The Biographical Encyclopedia & Who's Who of the American Theater, Walter Rigdon, editor (New York: James H. Heineman, Inc., 1966).

Description [1]

The Auditorium:

The auditorium is a large space with a single balcony and a segmental-arched proscenium flanked by boxes. Because of the confined site, the overall plan is arranged on the diagonal from the street. The walls are prominently curved as they accommodate this overall plan. The Adamesque decorative treatment is characteristic of Herbert Krapp's Broadway theater designs. The stage opens behind the proscenium arch, and the floor slopes down towards the proscenium arch. The proscenium is composed of paired engaged pilasters supporting a frieze and modillioned cornice. The curved sounding board above is composed of panels and grillework. Flanking the proscenium are boxes framed by paired engaged pilasters. While the orchestra level boxes have been removed, the paneled wall surface retains its cameo and swag motifs. Above at balcony level are two boxes on each side; the ones closest to the stage are curved. The box fronts are adorned with Adamesque medallion panels. An arched opening rises from the boxes on each side. The arch is framed by engaged pilasters flanking Adamesque panels and supporting a cornice. Cameo panels are placed in the arch spandrels. The ceiling above curves to meet the sounding board.

One enters the auditorium through doors in a modern partition at the rear and through doors at the sides adjacent to the box areas. At orchestra level the curved side and rear walls are of veined polished marble which terminates in a swag-adorned cornice. The standing rail at the rear and sides is of the same polished marble. Staircases by the side entrance doors lead up to the balcony level. At balcony level the walls take an irregular angled form to accommodate the structural needs of the theater on its site. The balcony is divided into two tiers by a crossover aisle. Particularly notable is the Adamesque treatment of the side walls. This consists of fan-like forms set within overall arch forms. Decorative panels, swags, and moldings further add to the effect. The angled rear walls are paneled plasterwork. The balcony front has a paneled Adamesque design, like that on the box fronts, now largely covered by an enclosed light box. The underside of the balcony is paneled plasterwork.

One of the major decorative elements of the auditorium is the Adamesque plasterwork ceiling, incorporating a central oval dome, from which is suspended a chandelier, and a semi-dome with fan-like treatment at the rear. The oval dome has characteristic Adamesque grotesque work in relief. The ceiling beyond the dome is subdivided into large coffered segments adorned with a large variety of Adamesque ornament in relief. A modillioned cornice above a frieze continues below the ceiling from the proscenium.

Air-conditioning ducts and grilles partially obscure some of the ceiling detail. The chandelier, ceiling lights below the balcony, and wall sconces are not original. The current color scheme dates from 1979.

1. Significant architectural features are underlined.

(MP)

Conclusion

The interior of the Ambassador Theater survives today as one of the historic theater interiors that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation. One of the group of theaters constructed for the Shubert Organization during the early decades of this century, the Ambassador helped shape the character of the Broadway theater district. Designed for the Shuberts by Herbert J. Krapp, the most prolific architect of the Broadway theater district, the Ambassador represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history. Its interior is an excellent example of the elegant Adamesque style with which Herbert Krapp adorned the Broadway theaters he designed. Its plan with a single balcony divided into tiers and walls that curve in towards the proscenium also typifies Krapp's theaters.

For half a century the Ambassador Theater has served as home to countless numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater. As such, it continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

The preparation of this report has involved the work of a number of consultants, supervised and edited by Anthony W. Robins (AR), Deputy Director of Research. Individual authors are noted by initials at the ends of their sections. The consultants were Margaret Knapp (MMK), Andrew S. Dolkart (ASD), and Eugenie Hoffmeyer (GH).
Marjorie Pearson (MP), Director of Research, wrote the description.
Research Department staff who contributed to the report include Marion Cleaver, Gale Harris, and Jay Shockley.

The New York Landmarks Preservation Commission gratefully acknowledges the assistance rendered by many concerned citizens in studying the Broadway theaters. Special thanks are due the New York City Planning Commission; Community Planning Board 5, Manhattan; the New York Landmarks Conservancy; the Actors Equity Committee to Save the Theaters; and the individual theater owners.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Ambassador Theater, first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling,; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, and attached decorative elements; has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, New York State, and the nation, and the Interior or parts thereof are thirty years old or more, and that the Interior is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public, and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the interior of the Ambassador Theater survives today as one of the historic theaters that symbolize American theater for both New York and the nation; that, built in 1919-21, the Ambassador was among the group of theaters constructed for the Shuberts, one of the most active and influential families in American theater history; that during the early decades of this century the Shuberts and their theaters helped shape the character of the Broadway theater district; that it was designed for the Shuberts by Herbert J. Krapp, the most prolific architect of the Broadway theater district; that as a Shubert theater designed by Herbert Krapp it represents a typical and important aspect of the nation's theatrical history; that its interior is an excellent example of the elegant Adamesque style with which Herbert Krapp adorned the Broadway theaters he designed; that its plan with a singled balcony divided into tiers and walls that curve in towards the proscenium also typifies Krapp's theaters; that for half a century the Ambassador Theater has served as home to countless numbers of the plays through which the Broadway theater has come to personify American theater; and that as such it continues to help define the Broadway theater district, the largest and most famous concentration of legitimate stage theaters in the world.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Ambassador Theater, first floor interior consisting of the auditorium, the stage, the staircases leading from the first floor to the balcony floor; the balcony floor interior consisting of the balcony, the upper part of the auditorium and ceiling, the upper part of the stage house; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall and ceiling surfaces, and attached decorative elements; 215-223 West 49th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1021, Lot 15, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

APPENDIX

The following production history of the Ambassador Theater is based on listings compiled by Actors Equity and submitted as testimony at the Landmarks Preservation Commission's public hearings of June and October, 1982. Their submission has been checked by Landmarks Commission staff against The Biographical Encyclopedia & Who's Who of the American Theater, Walter Rigdon, editor (New York: James H. Heineman, Inc., 1966).

1921

THE ROSE GIRL 2/11/21 (99 perfs.)musical comedy; by William Carey Duncan, music Anselm Goetal; with Marjorie Gateson, Charles Purcell and Marcella Swanson.

BIFF! BING! BANG! 5/9/21; soldier revue.

1921-22

BLOSSOM TIME 9/28/21 (516 perfs.); operetta. By Dorothy Donnelly, music by Sigmund Romberg (adapted from Franz Schubert melodies); with Howard Marsh, Bertram Peacock, William Danforth and R. Cropper.

1922-23

THE LADY IN ERMINE 10/2/22 (238 perfs.) by Frederick Lonsdale and Cyrus Wood, Harry Graham, music by Jean Gilbert and Ernest Welisch; with Wilda Bennett and Walter Woolf King.

1923

CAROLINE 1/31/23 (151 perfs.) by Harry B. Smith and E. Kunneke, music by Edward Rideamus and Alfred Goodman; with Tessa Kosta, John Adair and J. Harold Murray.

THE NEWCOMERS 8/8/23 (20 perfs.), musical revue by Jo Burrows and Will Morrisey.

STEADFAST 10/29/23 (8 perfs.) by Albert Koblitz and S.J. Warshowsky.

A LOVE SCANDAL 11/5/23 (32 perfs.) by Carlos de Navarro and Sydney Stone.

1924

THE DREAM GIRL 8/20/24 (118 perfs.) by Rida Johnson Young and Harold Atteridge, music by Victor Herbert; with Fay Bainter and Walter Woolf King.

1924 (cont'd.)

PRINCESS APRIL 12/1/24 (24 perfs.) by William Cary Duncan and Lewis Allen Browne, lyrics & music by Carlo and Sanders.

BLUFFING BLUFFERS 12/22/24 (24 perfs.) by Thompson Buchanan and John Meehan; with Enid Markey.

1925

THE VIRGIN OF BETHULA 2/23/25 (17 perfs.) by Gladys Unger.

APPLE SAUCE 9/28/25 (90 perfs.) by Barry Conners; with Clara Blandick, Alan Dinehart, Gladys Lloyd and Walter Connolly.

1926

THE GREAT GATSBY 2/2/26 (113 perfs.) by Owen Davis based on the novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald; with Florence Eldridge, James Rennie, Eliot Calsot, Carol Goodner and Gladys Feldman.

NO MORE WOMEN 8/3/26 (7 perfs.) by Samuel Shipman and Neil Twomey.

QUEEN HIGH 9/8/26 (367 perfs.) by Laurence Schwab and B.G. De Sylva, lyrics by B.G. De Sylva, music by Lewis E. Gensler; with Charlie Ruggles, Mary Lawlor, Luella Gear and Frank McIntyre.

1927

THE MATRIMONIAL BED 10/12/27 (15 perfs.) by Seymour Hicks.

THE RACKET 11/22/27 (120 perfs.) by Bartlett Cormack; with Willard Robertson, John Cromwell, Edward G. Robinson and Hugh O'Connell.

1928

THE GREAT NECKER 3/6/28 (39 perfs.) by Elmer Harris.

THE OUTSIDER 4/9/28 (56 perfs.) by Dorothy Brandon; with Wallace Erskine, Beresford Lovett and Lionel Atwell.

THE MONEY LENDER 8/27/28 (16 perfs.) by Roy Harriman.

FAST LIFE 9/26/28 (20 perfs.) by Samuel Shipman and John B. Hymer; with Claudette Colbert and Chester Morris.

JUST A MINUTE 10/8/28 (80 perfs.) by H.C. Greene, lyrics by Walter O'Keefe, music by Harry Archer.

REDEMPTION 11/19/28 (20 perfs.) by Leo Tolstoi, adapted by August Scholz; directed by Max Reinhardt.

1928(cont'd.)

ANGELA 12/3/28 (40 perfs.) by Fanny Todd Mitchell; with Jeanette MacDonald.

LADY DEDLOCK 12/31/28 (50 perfs.) by Paul Kester, based on Charles Dickens' BLEAK HOUSE; with Ethel Griffies, Margaret Anglin and Francis Compton.

1929

A STRONG MAN'S HOUSE 9/16/29 (24 perfs.) by Lee Wilson Dodd.

STRIPPED 10/21/29 (24 perfs.) by Jane Murfin; with Jessie Royce Landis.

THE HUMBUG 11/27/29 (13 perfs.) by Max Marcin.

1930

THE LAST MILE 9/22/30 (285 perfs.) (First opened at the Sam Harris); by John Wexley; with Spencer Tracy.

SWEET CHARIOT 10/23/30 (3 perfs.) by Robert Wilder; with Frank Wilson and Fredi Washington.

1930-31

Shakespeare in repertory beginning 12/25/30; with Fritz Leiber and John Forrest:

KING LEAR 12/25/30 (4 perfs.)
HAMLET 12/26/30 (5 perfs.)
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE 12/27/30 (3 perfs.)
MACBETH 12/30/30 (3 perfs.)
AS YOU LIKE IT 12/31/30 (3 perfs.)
RICHARD III 1/3/31 (3 perfs.)

1931

DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY (revival) 2/16/31 (32 perfs.) by Alberto Casella and Walter Ferris; with Viva Berkett and Ralph Locke.

BLOSSOM TIME (revival) 3/4/31 (29 perfs.) by Dorothy Donnelly, music by Sigmund Romberg.

IF I WERE YOU 9/23/31 (76 perfs.) by Sholom Aleichem; with Edward Leiter, Harry Mervis, Maurice Schwartz and Natalie Browning.

NEW CHAUVE-SOURIS 10/21/31 (29 perfs.) Russian musical revue by Nikita Balieff.

1932

INTIMATE RELATIONS 3/28/32 (24 perfs.) by Earle Crooker; with Blanche Ring.

CHAMBERLAIN BROWN'S SCRAP BOOK 8/1/32 (10 perfs.) potpourri of vaudeville.

THE SILENT HOUSE (revival) 11/8/32 (15 perfs.) by John G. Brandon and George Pickett.

1933

YOUNG SINNERS (revival) 3/6/33 (68 perfs.) by Elmer Harris; with Dorothy Appleby, Raymond Guion and Jackson Halliday.

SPRINGTIME FOR HENRY (revival) 5/1/33 (16 perfs.) by Benn W. Levy; with Henry Hull, Gavin Muir, Edith Atwater and Dorothy Appleby.

JUNE MOON (revival) 5/15/33 (273 perfs.) by Ring Lardner and George S. Kaufmann; with Lee Patrick and Harry Rosenthal.

UNDER GLASS 10/30/33 (8 perfs.) by Eva Kay Flint and George Bradshaw; with Ethel Barrymore Colt and Ross Alexander.

GROWING PAINS 11/23/33 (28 perfs.) by Aurania Rouverol; with Jean Rouverol and Johnny Downs.

THE LOCKED ROOM 11/25/33 (8 perfs.) by Herbert Ashton, Jr.; with Harold Kennedy, Lawrence Keating and Morton Flamm.

1934

BIOGRAPHY (revival) 2/5/34 (17 perfs.) by S.N. Behrman.

THE PERFUMED LADY 3/12/34 (40 perfs.) by Harry Wagstaff Gribble; with Brian Donlevy and Helen Brooks.

ARE YOU DECENT? 4/19/34 (188 perfs.) by Crane Wilbur; with Claudia Morgan and Lester Vail.

1935

A LADY DETAINED 1/9/35 (13 perfs.) by Samuel Shipman and John B. Hymer; with Claudia Morgan and Calvin Thomas.

NIGHT OF JANUARY 16 9/16/35 (232 perfs.) by Ayn Rand; produced by Al Woods; with Doris Nolan and Walter Pigeon.

1936

STORK MAD 9/30/36 (5 perfs.) by Lynn Root and Frank Fenton; with Percy Kilbride.

1937-38

THE ABBEY THEATER PLAYERS presented a repertory of plays opening 10/2/37:

KATIE ROCHE 10/2/37 (5 perfs.) by Teresa Deevy
THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS 10/7/37 (4 perfs.) by Sean O'Casey
THE FAR-OFF HILLS 10/11/37 (51 perfs.) by Lennox Robinson
THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD/IN A TRAIN 11/20/37 (9 perfs.) by J.M. Synge/ Hugh Hunt.
THE NEW GOSSOON 11/29/37 (8 perfs.) by George Shields
JUNO AND THE PAYCOCK 12/6/37 by Sean O'Casey
DRAMA AT INISH 10/13/37 (4 perfs.) by Lennox Robinson

1939-40

THE STRAW HAT REVUE 9/29/39 (75 perfs.) by Max Liebman & Sam Locke; music and lyrics by Sylvia Fine & James Shelton; with Imogene Coca, Danny Kaye, Jerome Robbins and Alfred Drake.

1940-41

Theater was used as a radio playhouse.

1941-42

CUCKOOS ON THE HEARTH 11/21/41 (129 perfs.) by Parker W. Fennelly; with Janet Fox, Carleton Young, Percy Kilbride, George Mathews and Howard St. John. (First opened at the Morosco)

1942-43

WINE, WOMEN AND SONG 9/28/42 (150 perfs.) burlesque and vaudeville; with Jimmy Savo and Margie Hart.

1943

BLOSSOM TIME (revival) 9/4/43 (47 perfs.);operetta. By Dorothy Donnelly; music by Sigmund Romberg.

1943-44

GILBERT AND SULLIVAN OPERA COMPANY played the following in repertory beginning 2/11/44:

THE MIKADO 2/11/44 (6 perfs.)
TRIAL BY JURY and H.M.S. PINAFORE 2/14/44 (7 perfs.)
COX AND BOX and THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE 2/17/44 (8 perfs.)
THE GONDOLIERS 2/21/44 (4 perfs.)
IOLANTHE 2/22/44 (4 perfs.)
PATIENCE 2/25/44 (4 perfs.)
RUDDIGORE 3/2/44 (4 perfs.)
THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD 3/3/44 (1 perf.)

1944-45

DOWN TO MIAMI 9/11/44 (8 perfs.) by Conrad Westervelt.

1944-45 (cont'd.)

SCHOOL FOR BRIDES 10/3/44 (375 perfs.) by Frank Gill, Jr. and George Carlton Brown. (First opened at the Royale)

1945-56

AMBASSADOR THEATER was used as a radio and television playhouse.

1956

THE LOUD RED PATRICK 10/3/56 (93 perfs.) by John Morouff from Ruth McKenny's book; with Arthur Kennedy and David Wayne.

PROTECTIVE CUSTODY 12/28/56 (3 perfs.) by Howard Richardson and William Berney; with Fritz Weaver and Faye Emerson.

1957

EUGENIA 1/30/57 (12 perfs.) by Randolph Carter, from Henry James's novel; with Tallulah Bankhead, Anne Meacham and Scott Merrill.

THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK 2/27/57 (717 perfs.) by Frances Goodrich and Albert Heckett; with Joseph Schildkraut, Lou Jacobi, Gusti Huber, Susan Strasberg, Jack Gilford. (First opened at the Cort Theater).

COMPULSION 10/24/57 (140 perfs.) by Meyer Levin; with Dean Stockwell, Howard Da Silva, Barbara Loden, Ina Balin, Patricia Roe, Suzanne Pleshette and James Ray.

1958

BACK TO METHUSELAH 3/26/58 (29 perfs.) by George Bernard Shaw; with Faye Emerson, Tyrone Power, Arthur Tracher, M'el Dowd and Dierdre Owen.

COMES A DAY 11/6/58 (28 perfs.) by Speed Lamkin; with Brandon de Wilde, Michael J. Pollard, Diana van der Vils, Judith Anderson, George C. Scott and Larry Hagman.

THIRD BEST SPORT 12/30/58 (79 perfs.) by Eleanor & Leo Bayer; with Celeste Holm, Judson Laire, William Prince.

1959

KATAKI 4/9/59 (20 perfs.) by Simon Wincelberg; with Ben Piazza and Sessue Hayakawa.

THE GANG'S ALL HERE 10/1/59 (132 perfs.) by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee; with E.G. Marshall, Jean Dixon, Melvyn Douglas, Arthur Hill and Bert Wheeler.

1960

CUT OF THE AXE 2/1/60 (2 perfs.) by Sheppard Kerman; with Thomas Mitchell.

1960 (cont'd.)

THE LONG DREAM 2/17/60 (5 perfs.) by Ketti Frings; with Al Freeman, Jr., Clarence Williams III, Clifton James, Helen Martin and Barbara Loden.

ONE MORE RIVER 3/18/60 (3 perfs.) by Beverly Cross; with Lloyd Nolan, Alfred Ryder, Harry Guardino and Robert Drivas.

THE 49TH COUSIN 10/27/60 (100 perfs.) by Florence Lowe and Caroline Francke; with Menasha Skulnik, Martha Scott, Marian Winters, Evans Evans, Gerald Hiken and John Boruff.

1961

THE TENTH MAN 1/27/61 (622 perfs.) by Paddy Chayefsky; with Lou Jacobi, Jack Gilford, George Voskovec, Jacob Ben-Ami, Donald Harron and Gene Saks. (First opened at the Booth Theater.)

1961-62

BLOOD, SWEAT AND STANLEY POOLE 12/11/61 (84 perfs.) by William and James Goldman; with Peter Fonda, Darren McGavin, John McMartin and Peg Murray. (First opened at the Morosco.)

1962

SOMETHING ABOUT A SOLDIER 1/4/62 (12 perfs.) by Ernest Knoy; with Sal Mineo, Ralph Mekker, Kevin McCarthy and Ken Kercheval.

A PASSAGE TO INDIA 1/31/62 (109 perfs.) by Santha Rama Rau; with Zia Mohyeddin, Eric Portman, Gladys Cooper, Anne Meacham, Donald Moffat, Margaret Braidwood and James Coco.

CALCULATED RISK 10/31/62 (221 perfs.) by Joseph Hayes; with Joseph Cotton, Frank Conroy, Roland Winters.

1963-64

STOP THE WORLD - I WANT TO GET OFF 9/9/63 (556 perfs.); book, lyrics and music by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley; with Anthony Newley and Anna Quayle. (First opened at the Shubert Theater.)

1964-65

ABSENCE OF A CELLO 9/21/64 (120 perfs.) by Ira Wallach; with Ruth White, Fred Clark, Ruth McDevitt, Charles Grodin, Murray Hamilton and Mala Powers.

1965-66

THE WORLD OF CHARLES AZNAVOUR 10/14/65 (29 perfs.); solo performance of songs -- many in French.

1966

THE LION IN WINTER 3/3/66 (92 perfs.) by James Goldman; with Robert Preston , Rosemary Harris, James Rado, Christopher Walken and Dennis Cooney.

1966-67

THE INVESTIGATION 10/4/66 (103 perfs.) by Peter Weiss; with Russell Baker, Leslie Barrett, Peter Brandon, Tom Gorman, Paul Larson and Tom Pedi.

1967-68

YOU KNOW I CAN'T HEAR YOU WHEN THE WATER'S RUNNING 3/13/67 (754 perfs.) by Robert Anderson; with George Grizzard, Eileen Heckert, Martin Balsam and Melinda Dillon.

1968

WE BOMBED IN NEW HAVEN 10/16/68 (85 perfs.) by Joseph Heller; with Jason Robards, Jr., Diana Sands, Ron Liebman, Anthony Holland and William Roerich.

1969

CELEBRATION 1/22/69 (109 perfs.); book and lyrics by Tom Jones; music by Harvey Schmidt; with Susan Watson, Ted Thurston, Keith Charles and Michael Glenn-Smith.

HAMLET 5/1/69 (52 perfs.) by William Shakespeare; with Nicol Williamson and Constance Cummings.

1970

THE BOY FRIEND (revival) 4/14/70 (111 perfs.) by Sandy Wilson; with Judy Carne, Sandy Duncan, Harvey Evans, Ronald Young, Jeanne Beauvais and Leon Shaw.

1970-71

PAUL SILLS' THE STORY THEATER 10/26/70 (236 perfs.) played in repertory with METAMORPHES 4/22/70 (48 perfs.); with Melinda Dillon, Paul Sand, Valerie Harper and Richard Libertini.

1971-72

AIN'T SUPPOSED TO DIE A NATURAL DEATH 11/17/71 (323 perfs.) by Melvin Van Peebles; with Arthur French, Gloria Edwards, Beatrice Winde and Bill Duke. (First opened at the Barrymore.)

1972

THE SECRET AFFAIRS OF MILDRED WILD 11/14/72 (23 perfs.) by Paul Zindel; with Maureen Stapleton, Elizabeth Wilson, Florence Stanley, Neil Flanagan, Joan Pape, Pat Corley, Bill McIntyre, Doris Roberts and Lee Wallace.

1973

WARP 2/14/73 (8 perfs.) by Bury St. Edmund and Stuart Gordon; with Andre De Shields and John Heard.

1973-74

Theater was dark during this season.

1974-75

SCAPINO (revival) 9/27/74 (176 perfs.) by Moliere; with Jim Dale.

1975

WE INTERRUPT THIS PROGRAM 4/1/75 (7 perfs.) by Norman Krasna; with Holland Taylor and Brandon Maggart.

ME AND BESSIE opened 10/22/75 (453 perfs.)by Hill Holt & Linda Hopkins; with Linda Hopkins.

1976

THE POISON TREE 1/8/76 (5 perfs.) by Ronald Ribman; with Danny Meehan, Cleavon Little and Moses Gunn.

DE JOURNEES ENTIERES DANS LES ARBES (DAYS IN THE TREES) 5/6/76 (12 perfs.) by Marguerite Duras; with Madeleine Renaud, Jean-Pierre Aumont.

I HAVE A DREAM 9/20/76 (80 perfs.); play with music based on the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; adapted by Josh Greenwald; conceived by Robert Greenwald; with Billy Dee Williams, Ramona Brooks and Judyann Elder.

1976-77

GODSPELL 1/12/77 (527 perfs.) by John-Michael Tebbak; music and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz; with Donny Scardino. (First opened at the Cherry Lane.)

1977

MISS MARGARIDA'S WAY 9/27/77 (128 perfs.) by Roberto Althazde. (First opened at the New York Shakespeare Festival Newman Theater.); with Estelle Parsons.

1978

THE MIGHTY GENTS 4/16/78 (9 perfs.) by Richard Wesley; with Dorian Harewood, Morgan Freeman and Howard E. Rollins, Jr.

SAME TIME, NEXT YEAR 5/16/78; by Bernard Slade; with Charles Grodin, Ellen Burstyn. (First opened at the Brooks Atkinson Theater.)

1978-79

EUBIE 9/20/78 (439 perfs.); musical tribute to composer Eubie Blake; by Julianne Boyd; with Gregory Hines, Maurice Hines and Ethel Beatty.

1979-80

GOODBYE FIDEL 4/23/80 (6 perfs.) by Howard Sackler; with Jane Alexander, Gale Sondergaard and Christopher Cazenove.

1980-82

DANCIN' 12/5/80 (1174 perfs.) (First opened at the Broadhurst.)

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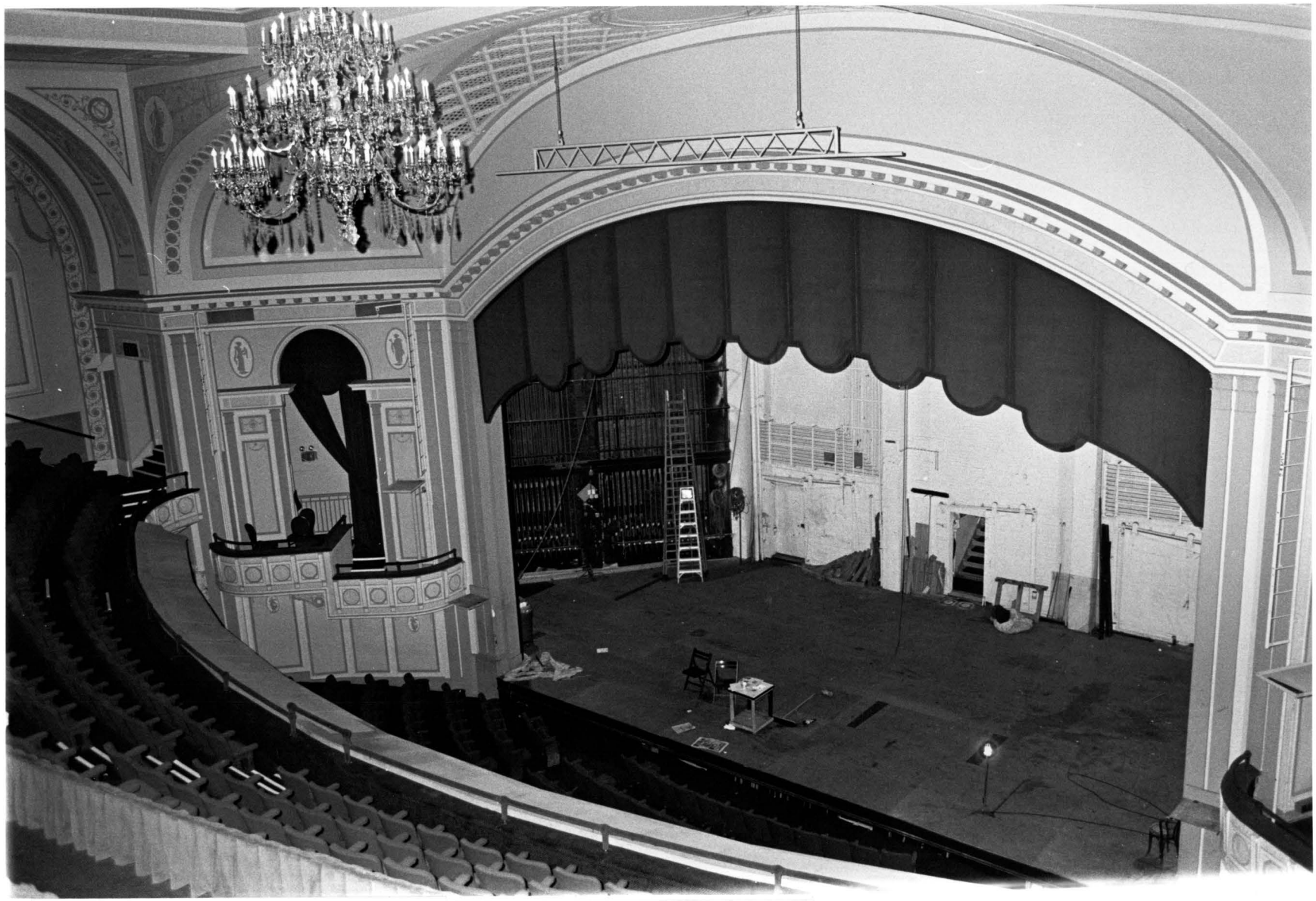

Ambassador Theater Interior
215-223 West 49th Street
Manhattan

Built: 1919-21
Architect: Herbert Krapp

Photo: Forster, LPC

Ambassador Theater Interior

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Ambassador Theater Interior

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