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ROLES OF HISTORIC THEATRES IN URBAN REVITALIZATION:
THE DETROIT THEATRE DISTRICT AND
PHILADELPHIA'S AVENUE OF THE ARTS

Johnette Ella Davies

A THESIS

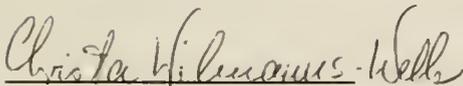
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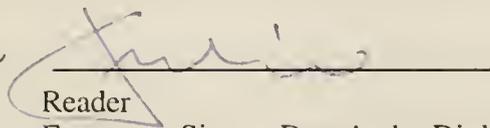
Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

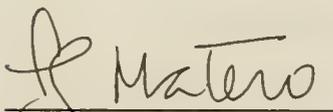
1997



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Acknowledgments

I owe a great many thanks to a great many people who helped, encouraged, prodded, and listened throughout the course of this year as this thesis took shape. To begin with the more formal thanks, I would like to acknowledge the many people in Philadelphia and Detroit who took the time to speak and/or meet with me to discuss my topic, or even send information in one form or other. There are more than mentioned here, but I feel that it is necessary to keep the acknowledgments shorter than the thesis itself.

In Detroit, Norman Cassell, Arthur Mullen, and Alexander Pollock (Detroit City Planning Department); Mark Nikita (Archive D.S.); Charles Forbes (Forbes Management, Inc.); Glenn Lapend (Detroit Renaissance); Diane Jones (Zachary & Associates); Al Sebastian (Olympia Development, Inc.); Jennifer Cansfield (University Cultural Center Association); and a special thanks to Michael Hauser of Preservation Wayne for making the time to give both information and feedback along the way.

In Philadelphia, Warren Huff (Philadelphia City Planning Commission); Ashleigh (Office of the Dean of Student Services, University of the Arts); and Matthew Schultz of Avenue of the Arts, Inc., for the informative interview and access to the “archive.”

Of course, I would also like to mention my advisor, Christa Wilmanns-Wells, for prodding me to explore different areas that I had not considered and for knowing when to let me go and figure things out on my own.

No acknowledgment would be complete without the mention of my friends and family (you know who you are). Thanks for listening and for various other forms of support in these years at Penn and throughout my life. Thank-you.

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Roles of Historic Theatres in Urban Revitalization: The Detroit Theatre District and Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts

Part I: Setting the Scene

1.1 Introduction

When the preservation of historic buildings takes place in an urban environment, such preservation may strongly influence and even shape and re-form the perception of and the activities in a major part of what defines that environment: the built fabric.

Cities are rightfully perceived as concentrations of people, places and things. We see the people who live in, work in, or otherwise visit the city; the places in terms of destinations - stores, homes, restaurants, municipal buildings, schools, cultural institutions and event venues; and, of course, things - the objects - for sale, for looking at, for use and for taking up space.

The particular cities in this study, Detroit, Michigan and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, possess all of these elements. Perhaps some aspects, such as the cultural institutions and event venues, however, are more actively presented than others. In these two cities, historic preservation, as a practice and as a point of view, it seems, has been received in radically different ways, both by the public and the city government. This is a function of the differing history and the character of the respective places. Something that these two cities do have in common, however, is the need for planning and urban revitalization projects to stave off decline and to stimulate growth. Both cities have also explored a concept related to the idea of the "cultural district," building upon the existing and potential built environment, and the philosophical and empirical evidence of the validity of such

endeavors, to achieve these aims. The circumstances of planning and project implementation in Detroit and Philadelphia, however, have been quite different.

Philadelphia, as one of the great cities of the New World since colonial days, has seen many prosperous years, mixed with periods and pockets of stagnation and decline. When it was perceived that its central core along Broad Street was in need of renewed attention and investment, the city turned to the idea of using its historic cultural core as a focus for redevelopment. Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts, currently a mixture of historic theatres and new development, has grown both physically and conceptually within a short period of time.

On the other hand, it is probably common knowledge in this country that the city of Detroit has been in a state of decline or relative developmental inactivity for the last few decades. Many of the citizens, especially of the upper and middle classes, left the city limits, and the industry and jobs on which the city depended soon followed. Racial tensions, as demonstrated by the 1967 riot, have also been present. The loss of an office/retail population base downtown has led to the general decline of the central business district. All of these factors (and more) have led to the perception that Detroit is empty, unsafe and all but a wasteland.

Although both public and private investment have been used over the years to (re)invigorate the city through projects such as post World War II slum clearance and public housing, building a riverfront convention and civic center, a five tower hotel/office/retail complex (Renaissance Center), and an elevated rail loop around much of the central business district, with the exception of projects such as the convention center (Cobo Hall, etc.), these projects have not garnered the returns that many had hoped for.¹

¹ Robert Conot, *American Odyssey* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986) p. 444-445 and

Recently, another effort has been under way in the Central Business District (CBD) to bring new life to downtown Detroit. An historic concentration of movie and performance theaters has emerged as a force to be reckoned with in the current well-being and the planning for the future of the City.

The purpose, then, of this thesis is twofold: First, to describe and assess what is now called the Detroit Theatre District in its historical and present context within the City, and secondly, to surmise how the District and its proponents may learn from other examples, namely Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts, in order to succeed and thrive in the future. This study will involve considering the roles of specific historic theatres in each civic context to see how they differ and how they are alike in their reasons for stabilization or restoration, and how the theatres subsequently have been used in the revitalization of their urban context. The current issues regarding the preservation and utilization of Detroit's historic theatres will also be explored, as will the relevance of "cultural" programming to successful reuse.

1.2 The Relevance of “Culture” and Programming to Revitalization

In any discussion of a cultural or arts district, ultimately questions of program and function arise. In the creation and marketing of such a district, one thought or idea must be foremost in the minds of those who plan and market the area, and that is the *goal*. In this case, the *goal* of the Detroit Theatre District and the Avenue of the Arts in Philadelphia is to increase the number of people in an area and, thereby, to increase interest in and revenue for business and the city, as well as to be an outlet for the regional and touring arts communities. This infusion of people is ideally on a long-term basis, and at all different times of day and evening. Planners and proprietors might then utilize programming in the venues to attract those potential customers and spin-off businesses. This section will explore how the term “culture” is applied to these districts and the type of programming which they offer to the audience.

Obviously, the word “culture” has many different shades of meaning for different people. Agricultural and anthropological definitions aside, there are three basic interpretations listed in Webster’s College Dictionary.² A common thread that weaves these definitions together, however, is the combination of intellect, learning, and the arts. For many, “culture” in the late 20th century has come to embody that which has to do with intellectual and artistic refinement, appreciated especially by the elite.

This is in contrast to American society through the mid to late 19th century. Certain artistic endeavors which we currently view as “culture” (“high culture”) were familiar and desired fare for our “non-elite” predecessors. In his book *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, Lawrence Levine makes a compelling

² *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*: (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 330.

argument for the development of a cultural hierarchy in America.³ For instance, Shakespeare, Italian operas, and even symphony orchestras were quite popular among a broad (“lowbrow”) societal stratum, and familiar among a great number of the general population in the 19th century. As American society has developed, Levine argues, opera and the symphony have become elitist activities, and the words of Shakespeare have become a foreign language.

Today, “lowbrow” activities are usually characterized by high accessibility and popular enjoyment. In taking part in these activities, we need not be elevated or refined intellectually. Attending a movie or pop concert, or reading the latest lawyer crime novel (as opposed to something like Homer’s *Iliad*) are activities which, although in the realm of the arts, are not necessarily affiliated with the act of learning or development. This is what sets the “highbrow” and “lowbrow” worlds apart. Samuel Lipman described this point precisely when comparing rock music to the opera. He said that while rock music speaks to younger people, at a specific time in life, “High civilization is clearly subject matter for one’s whole life, from the first exposure to death.... High culture has in it *nourishment* and attractive power throughout the participant’s life.”⁴

In the late 1950’s, A.W. Zelomek addressed the challenge of “culture” in quite a balanced approach. The author addressed “culture” as a larger umbrella term encompassing “high” and “low” culture basically as they have been described here, only using the terms “fine arts” and “mass culture,” respectively, to reflect these terms.⁵ These definitions and attitudes are important, for they have direct bearing on the “funding

³ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁴ Samuel Lipman, “Dismal Thoughts on the Present and Future,” in *Arguing for Music: Arguing for Culture* (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, with American Council for the Arts, 1990), p. 212. Emphasis on *nourishment* my own.

potential” for “cultural” preservation and restoration. Zelomek’s belief that “fine arts” have an educational and developmental purpose is reiterated in his discussion regarding the reasons for corporate support for education, culture and the arts. The reasons that he gave for corporate support were particularly in reference to the city. As he saw it, cultural advantages, entertainment, and the arts were catalysts to bring workers and their families to the city. Areas reserved for the opportunity, especially for the children, to be exposed to the arts and for people to be entertained were viewed by Zelomek (and *corporations*) as ways to bring people into the city and “to revive downtown areas by making them centers....”⁶ Zelomek saw this as indicative of the growing interest in cultural activities, but it is also evidence of the power of these places to draw people and the validity of such places as a tool for planners and private investors for urban revitalization.



Figure 1. “Cities are the creative backdrop from which culture is produced.”
Poster found on the boarded-up facade of the Madison Theatre, Detroit, MI,
October, 1996.

⁵ A.W. Zelomek, *A Changing America: At Work and Play* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1959), p. 106.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

Cultural centers have been used since Zelomek's writing in 1959 as just such a force. New construction has been a large part of this phenomenon. Perhaps the most well-known of these projects, Lincoln Center in New York city, was designed precisely as a vehicle for revitalization.⁷ Historic venues, however, cannot be overlooked as a resource in urban revitalization developments. Projects such as Cleveland's Playhouse Square Center and San Antonio's Arts District have successfully utilized historic theatres, new development, and a mixture of programming to attract patrons. In the example of the Fox Theatre in Detroit, which will be discussed in a later section, items that would be considered "highbrow" culture, as defined by Levine, have been displayed next door to the State Theatre, which has housed a weekly night club for nearly ten years, with reasonable success. The Fox Theatre itself has offered a mix of programming itself that has made it one of the most profitable theatres of its size in the country.⁸

In the case of Detroit, it cannot be said that this degree of success is attributable merely to its central location, a great perception of safety, or necessarily the relentless demand for "highbrow" cultural activities. The latter of these, especially, may also apply in other cases as well. Instead, these projects demonstrate that the type of programming in an "arts" or "cultural" district need *not* conform to the commonly held definition of all "culture" as "high" culture, and hence utilize programming meant for an elite audience, in order to be successful.

⁷ Edward B. Young, *Lincoln Center: The Building of an Institution* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), p. 36.

⁸ "Fox comes out on top," *Oakland Press*. Jan. 16, 1997.

Part II: Detroit: Reflections on the Past, Prospects for the Future

Detroit is a city plagued by its own reputation. Mention of the place in casual conversation generally precludes a sort of shock and perplexity in the listener: “What is left?” The progressive boomtown of yesteryear has faded to a city of diminished population and prosperity. What remains of Detroit has been likened to a ghost town and more-or-less a standing Ruskinian ruin.⁹

Despite the many losses the city has sustained, hopes for the future have buoyed the municipality against extinction. The very character of the place, at least through the twentieth century, is one based upon progress and “the next best thing.” As these nineteenth-century ideals carried the citizens of the past, the future that they envisioned is not represented by the current status of the city. By examining the history of this intriguing city, we can see how what is now known as the Detroit Theatre District is a telling expression of the attitudes and development of the city as it came of age in the early 20th century. As some have already recognized, the remaining survivors of history have the potential also to be a key to a vital future for the city in general.

2.1 Historical Development

Like many other colonial cities in North America, Detroit was founded as a fortification on a body of water. In 1701, Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac of France arrived in the land of the Ottawa and Wyandot Indians and established Fort Pontchartrain on the straits of what is now called the Detroit River.¹⁰ Minimal growth occurred for a number of

⁹ Jerry Herron, *AfterCulture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), p. 99

¹⁰ Frank B. Woodford and Arthur M. Woodford, *All Our Yesterdays*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 32.

“de trois” is French for “the straits,” according to Conot, p. 9.

years as few Europeans ventured to this trading post in the wilderness. As the threat of British invasion encroached around 1730, however, the post was bolstered and a thriving community ensued.¹¹ After control of the colony changed over to the British in 1760, the fort was the site of conflict between the British, French, Native Americans, and (soon to be American) colonists until a formal peace treaty was signed in 1783, giving the Northwest Territory to the newly formed United States.¹² The British continued to occupy the fort when the Jay Treaty was signed in 1794, and in 1796, years after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, the city was finally occupied by American troops and officially claimed as a U.S. territory. Many remnants of the French occupation, however, remain in street names, place names and surnames of residents of the region.

Although growth had necessitated expansion outside of garrisoned walls, Detroit remained centered around its fort near the river into the nineteenth century. Just as the Atlantic seaboard colonists, the citizens built their homes and businesses of the most readily available material - wood. The great success of lumbering and milling in later years are a testament to the vast amounts of the resource present in the area and, indeed, throughout the state.

The city's history of "ownership" and trade led to the establishment of a rather cosmopolitan population, with citizens of French, British, Scottish, Irish and American origin eventually residing together when peace among the nations was established.¹³ Not long after the city was incorporated in 1805, Detroit suffered a devastating stunting of its growth.¹⁴ A fire of major proportions swept through the town in 1805, leaving all inhabitants but those in the fort and along the river, apart from the clustered wooden city,

¹¹ Woodford, p. 43.

¹² Ibid., p. 72.

¹³ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁴ Conot, p. 8.

destitute and homeless.¹⁵ The churches and neighbors who survived the flames aided the citizens while they awaited approval to rebuild. The instinct was, of course, to begin immediately in the same area, in the same cramped fashion, and using the same plentiful materials as were used before. A certain member of the newly appointed government officers, however, had another idea.

2.2 The Woodward Plan

Augustus Woodward, judge, personal friend of Thomas Jefferson, and one of five appointees to the governorship of the Michigan Territory, arrived in Detroit within days of the devastating fire.¹⁶ Woodward's vision for a new Detroit was based on the baroque design of the Washington D.C. plan. With a copy of L'Enfant's plan in hand, Judge Woodward devised a scheme for Detroit which consisted of large hexagonal plots of land and green areas, interconnecting links, and grand radial boulevards which connected the city to points north, west, east, and along the Detroit River. As Woodward conceived it, the plan was to allow for infinite growth to accommodate the denizens who would migrate to "the Paris of the West."¹⁷ The Plan took shape as roads and plazas were constructed until Judge Woodward was defeated in the (since established) election for office, after which his plans were abandoned and a grid was constructed where building was still left to be done.¹⁸

¹⁵ Woodford, p. 105-7.

¹⁶ Conot, p. 8.

¹⁷ Woodford p. 109, and Conot, p. 8.

¹⁸ Woodford, p. 109.

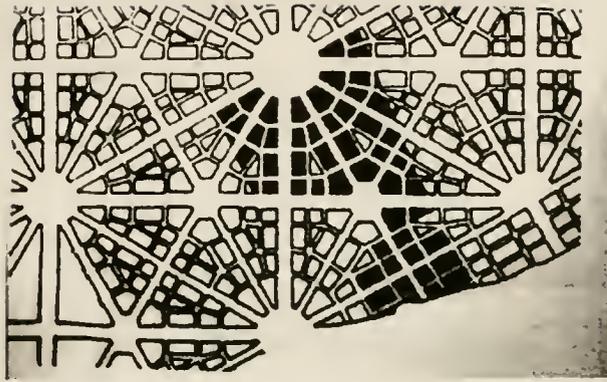


Figure 2. Detail of the Woodward Plan. The areas in black denote the portion of the plan actually constructed. These areas remain in this basic configuration today.

The resulting layout created a city which, even today, confuses visitors and some citizens. The practiced traveler can navigate the one-way streets of the resulting grid and wheel successfully if s/he does so with knowledge and care. In addition to navigation difficulties, however, the city gained a hub in Woodward's only grand circus to be constructed, dubbed Grand Circus Park. Grand Circus Park is situated just less than a mile from the riverfront, and at the time of its construction, was well out of reach of the core of the city. After the Erie Canal and steamboat travel allowed relatively easy access to the city in the 1810's and 1820's, Detroit's population boomed.¹⁹ Woodward's only hexagon to survive was called Campus Martius, and it came to boast the city's first opera house and its government buildings, the latter use of which survives to this day.

As the population grew, the abundance of land and lack of later skyscraper technology allowed the city to grow horizontally rather than vertically. As people and businesses packed into the city's core, the more affluent citizens were able to migrate outward. Some moved along the shores of the Detroit River and Lake St. Claire to the

¹⁹ Conot, p. 15-17.

east, and some chose to inhabit the large plots farther north along Detroit's main street, the aptly named Woodward Avenue.²⁰

2.3 Transportation

Throughout the nineteenth century, Detroit's prominence grew as an important manufacturing city. Woodworking, carriage-building, foundries, and meat-packing, to name a few, were industries which attracted thousands of workers to the city daily.²¹ The need for transportation routes for goods and workers was great. Raw materials flowed to the city via waterways, railroads, and the great radial thoroughfares. By the late 19th century, the people who were to form the materials into goods for sale had various routes by which to reach their destinations. Horse-drawn cabs and buses gave way to horse buses on rails during the Civil War and, in 1893, electrified trolley cars began to run through the streets of Detroit.²²

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the central business district extended from the river north along Woodward Avenue to the southern border of Grand Circus Park.²³ This is reflected in the trolley service in the area. Local trolleys and interurbans traveled the city on the main radial arteries, north, south, east, and west routes, and converged upon Campus Martius, also known as Cadillac Square.²⁴ This was an ideal location as it was the heart of business and government in the city. The independent companies which ran the

²⁰ The communities east of Detroit, such as Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Shores and others, are still some of the wealthiest areas of metropolitan Detroit. As Woodward Avenue developed, however, the wealth kept moving farther and farther away until the suburbs became established, and the less fortunate were left to populate the inner city core. Woodford, page 191.

²¹ Woodford, p. 201-2.

²² Jack E. Schramm, and William H. Henning, *Detroit's Street Railways*, vol. 1, 1863-1922. (Chicago: Bulletin #7, Central Electric Railfans' Association, 1978), p. 9.

²³ Leonard S. Wilson, *Functional Areas of Detroit, 1890-1933*, Vol. XXII, (Reprinted from *Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters*, 1936. Published 1937), p. 402.

²⁴ R.H. McCormick, Chief Engineer, *Map of the City of Detroit, Michigan, 1901*, (Detroit: Calvert Lithography Co., 1901). Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

transportation lines soon came under the auspices of a single company, the Detroit United Railways (DUR). After complaints of bad service and the filing of lawsuits, the city bought DUR in 1922 as the basis for a municipal transportation system.²⁵

During the years of the DUR, Detroit continued to grow. In 1910, the central business district (CBD) extended three blocks beyond Grand Circus Park and, by 1920, had extended quite a bit beyond that. The district also continued to broaden east/west, and occupy more area along the radial boulevards.²⁶ Trolley service existed on these byways, and increased somewhat, to satisfy the growing needs of the citizens.²⁷

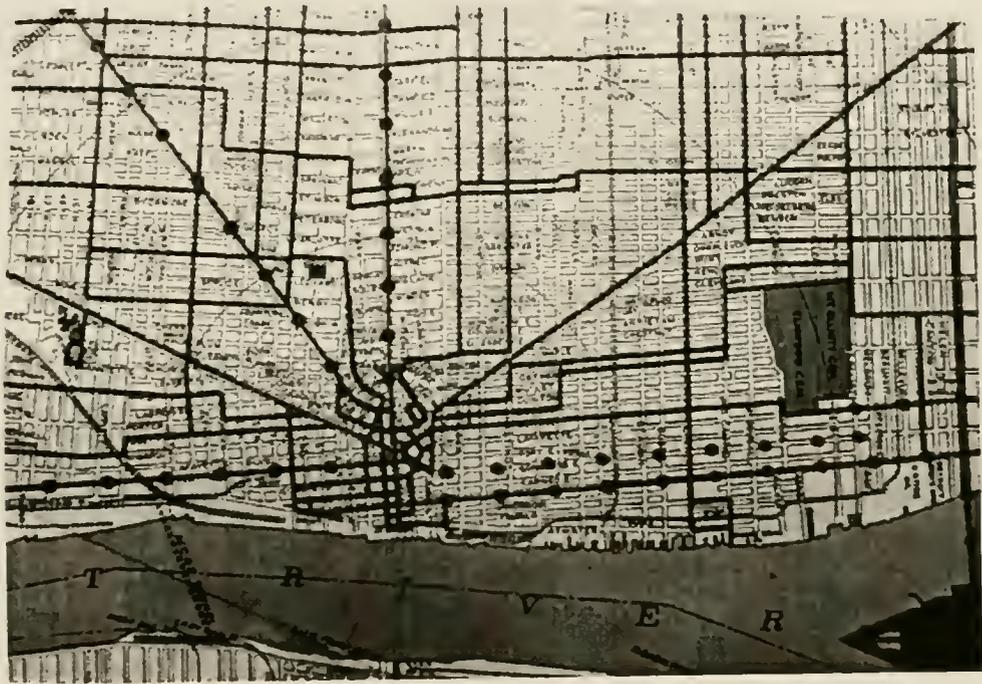


Figure 3. Detail of *Federal Map of Detroit and Environs* (1920). The bold lines denote the presence of "private" trolley/interurban lines, while the dots show the presence of city coach routes.

The growth of the industrial city boomed through the early 20th century due to a favorable economy and the culmination of years of experiments with the self-propelled

²⁵ Don Lochbiler, *Detroit's Coming of Age 1873-1973*, (Detroit: The Detroit News, Inc., 1973), p. 103-5.

²⁶ Wilson, p. 402-5.

buggy: the automobile. Manufacturing plants such as Packard, Oldsmobile and, of course, Ford sprang up in and about the city. Employment was plentiful, and leisure time could be spent in many ways. The interurban lines and automobile gave the opportunity for travel, Belle Isle in the Detroit River had been attracting visitors to its beautiful park and seasonal activities for decades, and other clubs, societies, and places of entertainment could be found in the city. The rise of the motion picture, however, had a great impact on the activities of the nation's citizens as well as on the landscape of the city of Detroit.

2.4 The Development of the Grand Circus Park Theatre District

Through much of the nineteenth century, "legitimate" theater had been a part of city life in Detroit. From make-shift venues and stages to the Detroit Opera House on Campus Martius, live performances were given regularly. As the twentieth century approached, however, a new kind of entertainment was on the horizon. In 1896, a Mexican bullfight shown at the Opera House was the first taste of moving pictures in Detroit.²⁸ As technology developed, Detroiters followed the progress. The first theatre in Detroit used specifically for showing moving pictures was the Casino, located on Monroe Street near Campus Martius, in 1905.²⁹ After a short time, investors began building theaters to quench the public thirst for moving pictures. By 1908, Monroe Street and its immediate surrounds held over twelve movie theatres, "including seven of major proportion and architectural merit..."³⁰

²⁷ Federal Lithograph Company, *Federal Map of Detroit and Environs*, (Detroit: Federal Lithograph Co., 1920). Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

²⁸ Herron, p. 134.

²⁹ Woodford, p. 238.

³⁰ Andrew Craig Morrison, *Nickel Show, Opera House, and Palace*, (Dearborn, MI: Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, 1974). Introduction. This book does not contain page numbers. Therefore, citations are found under the theatre name or other corresponding heading.

As the technology of motion pictures developed and the wage of local workers increased (Ford's \$5 day was introduced in 1914), so did demand for the movies.³¹ Movie house architecture was coming into its own in terms of grandeur and facilities. In sheer numbers, theatre building was a hot commodity. By 1928, 296 theatres had been built in Detroit, including "ordinary" and "fireproof."³² This was more than the number of factories in this historically manufacturing city, and approximately two-thirds the number of office buildings.³³ In order to accommodate these increasingly massive buildings and to take advantage of the transportation links, the motion picture "palaces" of the 1910's and '20's were built around Grand Circus Park.³⁴ The area also came to be known as "Kunsky's circle" due to the large number of theatres that John Kunsky, owner of the previously mentioned Casino, built there. Many of these movie houses contained amenities familiar from the opera and legitimate theatre, including a large orchestra pit so that the house orchestra could accompany the films and live acts and otherwise entertain the patrons.³⁵ By the time the Fox Theatre was built in 1928, Grand Circus Park had long surpassed the Monroe Block as the place to see a movie. The older theatres could not compete with the spacious, ornate, and truly "palatial" movie houses of Grand Circus Park. The area included the Michigan Theatre, United Artists, the Capitol (also known as the Broadway, Broadway-Capitol or Grand Circus), Adams, State, Fox, Oriental, and the Madison.³⁶ Throughout its heyday, the immediate surrounding area also came to include the Wilson (Music Hall), TeleNews, and the Little (now called the Gem). Although these

³¹ Conot, p. 164.

³² *Land Valuation Maps of the City of Detroit*, (Detroit: Board of Assessors, June 30, 1928)

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Herron, p. 136.

³⁵ Sidney Glazer, *Detroit: A Study in Urban Development*, (New York: Bookman Associates, Inc., 1965), p. 112.

³⁶ Morrison, introduction

were not on the order of the great movie palaces, they did round out the selection of venues around the Park.

The decades following the building and economic boom of the 1920's were relatively kind to the theatre district. Theatres, large and small, continued to attract patrons both local and from outside of the area. Various pieces of tourist literature produced in the city are indicative of the role that the theatres played in Detroit's economy and tourist interest.

The Detroit Board of Commerce, in 1910, published *Detroit, The Recreation Side of a Big American City*. The booklet describes the city and its various assets before the onslaught of theatre building. When describing the city's recreation facilities, the Board focused on outdoor activities. The Detroit River, Belle Isle ("the city's island park"), Palmer Park, and other activities of different types and season were described in nice detail. Theatres, the orchestra, and other forms of entertainment were left out, except for the orchestras which could be heard on some of the steamers to Belle Isle. Diversions such as legitimate theatres and orchestras were considered commonplace and, therefore, further explanation or description was felt unnecessary: "In this little booklet we have excluded mention of the entertainments common to large cities, such as the theaters... the libraries, the art museums, etc....."³⁷ After the appearance of the various movie theatres and "palaces," however, Detroit changed its attitude about the unique traits and inherent value in the city's particular brand of entertainment. The Hotel Webster published a guide for their customers called "The Detroit Visitor." The year 1937 was examined to track the status of the theatres roughly ten years after the opening of the Fox, the last of the palaces built around Grand Circus Park. "The Detroit Visitor" consistently reported what films

³⁷ Detroit Board of Commerce, *Detroit, The Recreation Side of a Big American City*, (Detroit: Detroit Board of Commerce, 1910), p. 18. Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

were showing where and who had live entertainment throughout the city. Of the Grand Circus Park area, the Madison, Michigan, United Artists, Palms-State, Broadway-Capitol, and the Masonic Temple, as well as Orchestra Hall and the Fisher Theatre (at Grand Boulevard and 2nd), were consistently featured in the pages of the guide.³⁸

The World War II years were not a dry spell for entertainment in Detroit. In 1943, the Fox, Michigan, United Artists, Palms-State, and other theatres which were considered “neighborhood” theatres, were offered to the visitor in *For the Guest in Detroit*.³⁹ Subsequent issues of this publication through 1945 also reported films at the Broadway-Capitol and opera at the Wilson Theatre. The November 3, 1944 production at the Wilson was “The Merry Widow.”⁴⁰

2.5 The City’s Continued Development

Post-World War II, Detroit was on its way to a new identity. Dynamic changes in the city’s population had been occurring for nearly a century. Beginning after the Civil War, many southern blacks had migrated to Detroit looking for economic opportunity. The number of African-Americans, immigrants, and poor whites swelled in the days of the burgeoning auto industry, with the major influx occurring in the African-American population; their numbers in Detroit increased by 8 times to 40,000+ between 1910 and 1919, and again during wartime production from 150,000 to 200,000 between 1941 and 1943.⁴¹ Massive migrations tend to precipitate strained social fabric, and the most exasperated relationships were those between African-Americans and whites. After all,

³⁸ Hotel Webster Hall, “The Detroit Visitor,” (June 26 - November 13, 1937). Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

³⁹ *For the Guest in Detroit*. (Highland Park: Guest Publishing Co., July 16, 1943). Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

⁴⁰ *For the Guest in Detroit*. (Highland Park: Guest Publishing Co., November 3, 1944). Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

most immigrants could be assimilated, but an African-American could not change skin color to meld into the white majority. Racial tensions continued to build as people competed for well-paying jobs. An early, massive indicator of these tensions was the riot of 1943.⁴² The fear that these events engendered, combined with the increasing availability of housing in the suburbs for those who could afford to move (mostly white), were major incentives for people to leave the city of Detroit.

In the 1950's and 60's, the suburbs around Detroit became a place that was not strictly residential. While in the beginning the suburbs, for many workers, resembled a kind of bed & breakfast community, they grew into places where, in addition to the resident population, the business and industry of the City decided it would also rather be.⁴³ The riot of 1967, again born of economic struggle, racial tension, and lack of swift and effective police action, confirmed the fears of many still living in the city.⁴⁴ A total of 339,000 people left Detroit between 1950 and 1970, taking into consideration the outward migration of 608,000 whites and the influx of 357,000 African Americans. Of the migration during this twenty-year period, 399,000 members of the working population were lost.⁴⁵

When the residential sector leaves a city, it is a devastating blow to the economy, safety, and perception of the area. When the businesses leave, those former residents no longer have as much reason to come back into the city. The suburbs become self-contained and the heart of the metropolis slows to a comatose rhythm.

What did all of this mean for the business at the theatres of Grand Circus Park? Actually, the theatres remained functional and were attended. During Jerry Cavanaugh's

⁴¹ Conot, p. 194, 377.

⁴² Ibid., p. 382.

⁴³ Sidney Glazer, p. 114.

⁴⁴ Conot, p. 627.

reign as Mayor in the 1960's, the theatres were still advertised to tourists in visitor literature. The visitor's guide and map publicized the still mostly "first-run" theatres (Adams, Fox, Madison, United Artists, Music Hall Cinerama, and Grand Circus). However, the main attraction for entertainment was the Fisher Theatre which brought "...to Detroit the top in professional entertainment."⁴⁶ The Fisher had been converted from a movie theatre to a performance space in 1961.⁴⁷

As people continued to leave the city, however, business declined. A newspaper columnist for the *Detroit News* wrote in 1962, "Good night clubs and high class places with entertainment and dancing simply can't exist on local business.... Sure, New Yorkers and Chicagoans go out on the town on birthdays and anniversaries, but the visitors and tourists keep the entertainment spots going."⁴⁸ With residential use declining and a worsening reputation for the city, many stayed away from the theatres. As business declined, there was less and less incentive and money to make repairs and do general maintenance. The buildings shared in the decline. By 1970, one guide book to the city told of the decline of the theatres in its own way. The book separated the theatres into categories: "cinema" theatres included the Music Hall and Fox; "motion picture" theatres included the Adams, Madison, and Michigan. Even in the seemingly classier "cinema" category, however, the Music Hall was listed as being threatened by declining business, and the programming at the Fox "...usually deal[t] with race or sadism."⁴⁹ These were probably not great draws for conventioners down on the Detroit River at Cobo Hall.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 642.

⁴⁶ City of Detroit Department Report & Information Committee, *Visit Dynamic Detroit*. Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

This visitor's guide and map did not have a date, but did bear the signature of the mayor at the time, Jerry Cavanaugh.

⁴⁷ Sidney Glazer, p. 121.

⁴⁸ Clayton Irwin, "Detroit Tourism: The Job Ahead," *Detroit News*. Aug. 9, 1962.

⁴⁹ Sheldon Annis, ed., *Detroit: A Young Guide to the City*, (Detroit: Speedball Publications, 1970), p. 165.

Another devastating blow to the district was a decision from a court case in the 1970's which struck down the exclusive rights of theatres in the city to show first-run films. From that point on, first-runs could be seen in the comfort and close proximity of the suburban cineplex.⁵⁰ The fate of the theatres had been sealed.

It is no secret that some years of social and economic stagnation plagued Detroit thereafter. Disinvestment and disinterest turned much of the city into a virtual ghosttown. Investor Charles Forbes recalls watching tumbleweed drift down Woodward Avenue in the late 1970's.⁵¹ Ironically, this is a major reason for the district's survival. Lack of economic interest in the area kept the properties from being bought up and the buildings being torn down.⁵² Instead, the theatres stood quietly and waited.

In 1978, the Palms building on Woodward Avenue finally went up for sale. Local investor Charles Forbes saw the advertisement and was intrigued. He went to look at the building and its location, and decided it was a good deal for the price of \$250,000.⁵³ The building just happened to include the State Theatre. Mr. Forbes, a Detroit native, was pondering retirement from his position at Ford Motor Company where he was Regional Manager of the Dealership Real Estate Office. At Ford, Forbes had developed a knack for spotting lucrative properties. Forbes had managed the capital to buy the Palms after making a sum of money on another real estate deal out of the state. He had been investing with others in real estate since 1968.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Herron, p. 145.

⁵¹ Amy Gamerman, "Detroit Dusts Off Its Grand Old Theaters," *The Wall Street Journal*. Thursday, Oct. 25, 1990. A20.

⁵² Michael Hauser and John Fischer, "Detroit's Growing Theatre District: The Rebirth of Grand Circus Park." *Marquee*, 1st Quarter, 1992. p. 12.

⁵³ From an interview with Charles Forbes, President, Forbes Management, Inc. December 18, 1996. Incidentally, according to Mr. Forbes, the price of the Palms building in 1979 is the average price of a home in the suburb of Birmingham today.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

While refurbishing the State Theatre for use as a movie house and live performance theatre, Forbes increased the occupancy rate of office space above. Recognizing the resources in the area, Mr. Forbes and his son, who works for his father's company, carried out a study on a potentially revitalized theatre district, and they developed a master plan. In 1983, their plan for the "Detroit Theatre District" was pitched and "accepted by city and community leaders as being a vital stepping stone to the rebirth of Downtown Detroit."⁵⁵ Another plan for the area, prepared by urban design students at the Lawrence Institute of Technology in conjunction with Mr. Forbes, city planners, and community groups, was completed in 1987 as an assessment and proposal for the entire area.⁵⁶ By this time, Forbes Management, Inc. had accrued 40 land holdings in the area, which included the Gem Theatre across the street from the State Theater (Palms building), the Fox Theatre next door, and plenty of parking space for patrons.

Soon thereafter, Forbes Management, Inc. began trying to garner financial backing for the project. In spite of all the praise for the idea, no one was willing to back it with a start-up investment. As of March 1987, the only public moneys invested in the Theatre District plan was the rent paid to Forbes Management, Inc. by the Detroit Police Department who were renting space in two Forbes-owned buildings.⁵⁷ It was at this time that the Ilitch family and Little Caesar Enterprises, Inc. became interested in the District.

Michael Ilitch is also a Detroit native and has an interest in the condition of the city of Detroit. As owner of the Detroit Red Wings, the local hockey team, Mr. Ilitch did not want people to be afraid to attend Red Wings games at the Joe Louis Arena in downtown

⁵⁵ Publicity biography for Charles Forbes.

⁵⁶ "Detroit Theatre District Urban Design Report," (Urban Planning, Lawrence Institute of Technology, 1987). Provided courtesy of Mark Nikita, Archive DS, Detroit, MI.

⁵⁷ John Lindstrom, "Curtain Up: Financing is final act for theatres." *Crain's Detroit Business*. March 1, 1987. p. 1 and 25.

Detroit.⁵⁸ He also lamented the condition the city had sunk to in recent years. In the vision of the Theatre District, Mr. Ilitch saw an opportunity for his company and for the city.

After some amount of negotiating on all sides, Chuck Forbes was persuaded to sell the Fox Theatre (arguably the “gem” of the district) to the City of Detroit, who in turn sold it to Little Caesar Enterprises, Inc..⁵⁹ Michael Ilitch had the incentive and desire to restore the Fox, as had Mr. Forbes. However, one thing that Ilitch possessed that Forbes did not was the capital and something further to offer to the city. The final terms of agreement to sell to Ilitch occurred with the conditions that the City of Detroit would give \$12 million in grants and loans in return for the restoration and functionality of the Fox as a theatre, and for the relocation of the Little Caesar’s world headquarters in the empty upper office space in the Fox.⁶⁰ The city also provided funding for street and sidewalk improvements.⁶¹ By 1989, these goals had been accomplished, and the Fox opened to rave reviews from the city, the public, and preservationists.

Concurrently and as a result, other buildings in the area have been restored or are in the process of restoration. Forbes Management, Inc. has fully restored the Gem Theatre, and it is operating successfully as a dinner theatre. They have also restored the Elwood Bar and Grill, directly across Woodward Avenue from the State Theatre, and it is also successful in catering to workers at lunchtime and people who come for an “evening out.” The Music Hall has been restored as a house for the non-profit Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts. Orchestra Hall has been restored farther north on Woodward Avenue, and the Michigan Opera Theatre has bought the Broadway-Capitol and Madison Theatres.

⁵⁸ Kathy Jackson, “Ilitch halts new HQ, mulls downtown site.” *Crain’s Detroit Business*, (n.d.) p. 35.

⁵⁹ John Lindstrom, “Ilitch plans boost Forbes’ theatre-area properties,” *Crain’s Detroit Business*, July 13, 1987. p. 31.

⁶⁰ David A. Markiewicz and David Sedgwick, “Ilitch plans mall near Fox Theatre,” *Detroit News*, Feb. 23, 1988. 4A.

⁶¹Gameran, A20.

The Broadway-Capitol has been mostly restored and is in use by the Opera and by touring companies while the restoration is ongoing. The Madison may be developed later for use as a rental property or as a smaller performance space.⁶² These are located across from one another at Broadway Street on the southern end of Grand Circus Park. The restored venues form a sort of link from Orchestra Hall, to Wayne State University's Bonstelle Theatre, to the Fox- Gem-State area, to the Michigan Opera Theatre, and to the Music Hall. Not entirely in a vacuum, many other community and business revitalization projects have sprung up along Woodward Avenue and the area near Music Hall and the Opera Theatre.⁶³ Vacant theatres in the area other than the Madison include the TeleNews, United Artists, and the Adams.

For the purposes of this study, I have selected three venues to illustrate in further depth the rich history of Detroit's Theatre District and to demonstrate the roles of these and the other theatre buildings in the future development of the city of Detroit. Although this is a small sampling of venues and possibilities, the others in the areas will not be ignored in this study. The importance of a synergistic effect in the development of the Theatre District cannot be emphasized enough. However, the scope of this study does not allow for full and equal treatment of each theatre in the district. The venues that I have chosen are the Music Hall, Orchestra Hall, and the Fox Theatre. Music Hall demonstrates a building in continuous use which, after significant restoration, houses a non-profit organization dedicated to family and community-oriented productions in addition to more well-known acts. The Fox Theatre, also a building in continuous use, is an example of private/corporate investment working with city government and other local resources to actively use a restored theatre and its surroundings to bring about positive change and further investment

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Liz Goldner, "Speeding Down Woodward," *Metro Times*, May 22-28, 1996. p. 26.

into the city of Detroit. Orchestra Hall, though outside of the Theatre District proper, is an important effort by a cultural institution to create new investments and partnerships and demonstrate their commitment to the resurgence of the city at large. The history of these three examples will now be described in greater detail to illustrate their historical roles in the city and the theatre district around Grand Circus Park.

2.6 Orchestra Hall

Orchestra Hall was a labor of love for the city. Detroit had boasted musical organizations for some time when the forty-member Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) was organized in 1872.⁶⁴ The group performed until they disbanded in 1910.⁶⁵ In 1919, the DSO attempted a revival and performed with a guest conductor, the Russian Ossip Gabrilowitsch, at a theatre in town, the Arcadia.⁶⁶ Due to the success of the program, Gabrilowitsch was asked to stay on permanently. The conductor was quick to accept on one condition: that a suitable concert hall was built to house the orchestra on a permanent basis. An amazing six months after groundbreaking, Gabrilowitsch and the DSO premiered in their new home: Orchestra Hall.

In the 1920's, Orchestra Hall was linked to the Grand Circus Park theatres not only by trolley cars down Woodward Avenue, but also by many smaller theatres and nickelodeons which could be found along this, the city's main street.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Sidney Glazer, p. 175.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

⁶⁶ Morrison, Orchestra Hall.

This story of Gabrilowitsch is the same as found in many other books in discussion of the DSO.

⁶⁷ Herron, p. 141. Some of these, such as the Majestic and Wayne State University's Bonstelle Theatre are now restored and operating, while others such as the Fine Arts are standing vacant.



Figure 4. Orchestra Hall, Detroit, MI, March, 1997.

The man who was to become a master at theatre architecture, particularly the movie “palace,” designed Orchestra Hall. C. Howard Crane, a Connecticut native, had established his practice in Detroit, and Orchestra Hall was a demonstration of his skill with material and form. At the time, the concert hall was considered one of the finest in the country for its beauty and excellent acoustics.⁶⁸

The DSO remained in the building until 1939 when they moved to the Masonic Auditorium, itself close to the Theatre District (and on the National Register) and, subsequently, to other venues throughout the city. In the Orchestra’s absence, the Hall had incarnations as a movie and vaudeville theatre (for which it was equipped when it was built), as a showcase for leading African-American entertainers (renamed the Paradise Theatre during the 1950’s), and as a home for the Church of Our Prayer.⁶⁹ The Hall had been empty for some time when it was bought by the Gino’s restaurant chain with the

⁶⁸ Andrew Craig Morrison and Lucy Pope Wheeler, “Orchestra Hall - Detroit,” *Marquee*, Vol. 21 No. 4 4th Quarter 1989. p. 6.

This is a portion of the HABS report published in the *Marquee*, which is the Journal of the Theatre Historical Society.

⁶⁹ Morrison, Orchestra Hall.

purpose of demolition in 1970. "Save Orchestra Hall," a group of orchestra and community members, formed in response to the threat, and Orchestra Hall has since been restored to its original use.⁷⁰ The building was placed on the National Register in 1971.⁷¹ The DSO officially returned to Orchestra Hall in 1989 as owner and tenant.⁷²

In 1996, the DSO announced a partnership with the Detroit Public School System and the Detroit Medical Center for the creation of a performing arts center and corporate headquarters on the Orchestra Hall grounds.⁷³ The project entails the expansion of Orchestra Hall on a secondary facade without altering the primary aesthetic or acoustics, a parking structure, a new Detroit Public High School for the Performing Arts, office space for the DSO and Detroit Medical Center, and space for galleries and retail.⁷⁴ The complex, to be called "Orchestra Place," has already broken ground and the office portion should be open by the end of 1997.⁷⁵

2.7 Music Hall

The Music Hall was built as the Wilson Theatre by Matilda Dodge Wilson, widow of auto manufacturer John F. Dodge and lumber executive Alfred Wilson, in 1928.⁷⁶ The Spanish-inspired theater, designed by Smith Hinchman and Grylls, was the only structure in the present Theatre District proper to have been originally built for use as a performing arts theatre.⁷⁷ The building also includes office space above.

⁷⁰ Morrison and Wheeler, p. 4.

⁷¹ *National Register of Historic Places 1966 to 1994*, (Washington D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1994), p. 399.

⁷² Morrison and Wheeler, p. 8.

⁷³ Detroit Symphony Orchestra Hall Press Release, "\$80 Million Performing Arts - Education Center to Contribute to Detroit's Revitalization," January 17, 1996. p. 1.

⁷⁴ "Facts About Orchestra Place," *DSO Hall News*. p. 1.

⁷⁵ DSOH Release, p. 6.

⁷⁶ "The Music Hall Trust at a Glance," Detroit, 1991.

⁷⁷ Kathryn Eckert, *Buildings of Michigan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 77.

After almost two decades of presenting a variety of performances to audiences, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra moved into the building in 1945. The name changed from the Wilson Theatre to the Music Hall at that time.⁷⁸ The DSO took advantage of the second largest stage in the city, ample dressing rooms, and the wonderful acoustics that the Music Hall boasts. Still financially stricken, the Orchestra moved once again and left the theatre to be used only on occasion until the arrival of Cinerama.⁷⁹ This adventure in movie-going lasted at the Music Hall through most of the 1960's.

Never having been a consistent financial success, the theatre was being threatened with closure and demolition in the early 1970's. In 1973, a grant was acquired through the Kresge Foundation and Detroit Renaissance (a local corporate leadership group) to make emergency repairs and reopen the theatre.⁸⁰ At this time, the Music Hall returned to presenting a variety of performing arts to its patrons. The Music Hall was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977, followed by state registration in 1979.⁸¹ Part of the criteria for which the hall received National Register status was "a property achieving significance within the past fifty years if it is of exceptional importance."⁸² This building's importance lies in its architectural prowess and its adaptability over the last half century (and more) to cater to the urban audience.

Acknowledgment of the great asset of Music Hall to the performing arts and general community was recognized further when the Music Hall Trust Fund was established in 1989 to provide for immediate repairs and future preservation.⁸³ Major capital fundraising was undertaken in the 1980's, and restoration of the theatre

⁷⁸ "The Music Hall Restoration - A Bright Light in the Theatre District," Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts, Detroit, 1991.

⁷⁹ Morrison, Wilson.

⁸⁰ "NBD in the Community," February 1991. p. 2.

⁸¹ "Tour of Detroit's Historic Music Hall Theatre," (Detroit: Preservation Wayne), and *National Register*.... p. 400.

subsequently took place in three stages, beginning in 1989 and ending in late 1995.

Currently, the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts (also known as “Music Hall” and “Music Hall Center”) is a non-profit organization with a mission “to preserve and maintain its historic theatre setting, and to present a variety of excellent performing arts programs and educational opportunities....”⁸⁴ In accord with their mission, Music Hall Center boasts three major residency programs: Youtheatre, specializing in youth



Figure 5. Music Hall, Detroit, MI. August, 1996.

and family oriented productions; Ford Montreaux Detroit Jazz Festival, “the largest FREE jazz festival in North America;” and the Dance Theatre of Harlem Detroit Residency.⁸⁵

⁸² *National Register*.... p. 400.

⁸³ “NBD,” p. 2.

⁸⁴ Music Hall Center mission statement as found in “Welcome to Preservation Wayne’s Tour of Detroit’s Historic Music Hall Theater,” (Detroit: Preservation Wayne).

⁸⁵ Announcement for the 14th Annual Grand Prix Ball, a fundraising event for the Music Hall Center in conjunction with the ITT Automotive Detroit Grand Prix, June 1996.

2.8 Fox Theatre

The Fox Theatre is located on Woodward Avenue, two blocks north of Grand Circus Park. Constructed in 1928, the 5,000+ seat theatre was part of the burgeoning William Fox moving picture empire.⁸⁶ The Fox Theatres Corporation, founded in 1925, sought to meet rising demand for movies by building theatres of large capacity near transit lines and stops.⁸⁷ These principles are embodied in the Detroit Fox. The location was ideal in terms of high traffic and proximity to trolley lines.

The Fox was built as a movie and vaudeville house. In keeping with the term “movie palace,” the Fox was indeed palatial. Mr. Fox’s wife Eve decorated some of her husband’s theatres, and the Detroit Fox could be counted among the most lavish.⁸⁸ The architectural style has been described as “Siamese Byzantine,” and the wonderful images that the term can produce in one’s mind are those that one encounters at the Fox. Larger-than-life, gem-eyed lions guarding the grand staircase, massive scagliola columns, 300 lb. amber and bronze chandeliers, a Hindu-design chenille rug covering the entire lobby floor, and rich red and gold coloring are only the beginnings of the treasures found in this “palace.”⁸⁹

The Fox was a resounding success as people flocked to see the wonder of the building... and the movies! The theatre continued to be used to show films and for live acts through much of its history. The Fox opened with the film “Street Angel” in 1928, and films such as Charlie McCarthy and Edgar Bergen’s “Letter of Introduction” played side-by-side with live acts like singer Tony Martin from the Burns and Allen radio show in the

⁸⁶ “Fox Theater,” *Preservation Wayne Theater Training Manual*, p. 1.

Mr. Fox also founded 20th Century Fox.

⁸⁷ *The Story of Motion Pictures and the Fox Theatres Corporation*, (20th Century Fox, 1928), p. 3.

⁸⁸ Mary Bagley, “An Interview with Angela Fox Dunn,” *Marquee*, Vol. 19 No. 4. Fourth Quarter 1987. p. 10.

⁸⁹Eckert, p. 72.

late 1930's.⁹⁰ In 1953, the Fox held a gala premiere for the new panoramic screen and stereophonic sound technique of CinemaScope in "The Robe," starring Richard Burton and Jean Simmons.⁹¹ Motown Reviews played in the 1960's with the likes of Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye and a slew of other Motown recording artists sharing the stage on a given night.⁹²

The decline of the city in the late 1960's and early '70's, coupled with the loss of exclusive rights to first run movies, took their toll on the Fox and other theatres in the City. The Fox stayed open, however, showing action and horror films for whatever audience they could muster.⁹³

In 1979, the theatre was purchased with the intention of restoration. Two years later, work began and the theatre reopened the same year. The building was sold again in 1984 to Charles Forbes, owner of the State Theatre next door to the south and the Gem Theatre across the street.⁹⁴ Under his ownership, the building was listed as a National Historic Landmark in 1985.⁹⁵ The current owners, Michael and Marian Ilitch, owners of Little Caesar Enterprises, Inc. pizza company, bought the Fox as a result of a deal with the city and Forbes in 1987.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Advertisement for "Letter of Introduction," Aug. 5, 1938, and "Fox Theater," *Preservation Wayne Theater Training Manual*, p. 2.

⁹¹ Advertisement for "The Robe," Oct. 1, 1953.

⁹² "Preservation Wayne Theater Training Manual," p. 7.

⁹³ Carol Howard, "Recapturing the Fox," *Detroit Monthly*, Dec. 1988. p. 121.

⁹⁴ Galbraith, Stuart. "Motor City Marquees," (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 1992).

⁹⁵ *National Register*..... p. 398.

⁹⁶ Bruce Alpert and David A. Markiewicz, "Fox plan helped by \$12 million in city aid," *The Detroit News*, July 11, 1987. p. 1B



Figure 6. Fox Theatre, Detroit, MI, August, 1996.

The Ilitch's contracted theatre restoration specialists Ray Shepardson and Sonya Winner in 1987 to carry out the full restoration of the theatre. 300,000 labor hours and \$8 million later, the Fox reopened for business November 19, 1988.⁹⁷ In 1989, the Ilitch's halted construction on a new suburban headquarters and relocated in the office space above the theatre, bringing more people and revenue into the city. Public amenities in the building include an upscale Italian restaurant (Tres Vite), America's Pizza Cafe, a gift shop, and a floral shop.⁹⁸

2.9 Historic Preservation in Detroit

As in many communities across the country, historic preservation is not pervasive in the city of Detroit. Historically, the very character of the inhabitants has been set against preservation in general, not just in the built fabric. The credo "newer is better" has

⁹⁷ Howard, p. 121.

Shepardson and Winner also worked on the State Theatre and the Gem, in addition to notable projects in other cities such as Cleveland, San Antonio, Louisville, and Seattle.

⁹⁸ "Fox Theater," *Preservation Wayne Training Manual*, p. 6.

permeated the collective mind, at least through the twentieth century, and probably since the revolutionary nineteenth century. So, how do you preserve a city whose memory is one of change?

This question has been on the mind of a small minority for some years now. Preservation groups have cropped up in the city over the last twenty years or so, concerned with the deteriorating built fabric as well as the social fabric of the city. Cityscape Detroit is one group in the city which focuses on urban design, architecture, planning and preservation, but the main preservation-focused group in Detroit has been Preservation Wayne, a non-profit volunteer historic preservation group located within the city. They perform National Register nominations and documentation, sponsor lectures, and offer educational tours throughout historic districts of the city, including the Detroit Theatre District.

Singular organizations, however, often find it difficult to have a major impact, especially in a city like Detroit which is most supportive of new development. Support from other local organizations, individuals, businesses, and the municipal government are a key to the success of preservation efforts. To that end, support is slowly growing throughout the community. Individuals like Charles Forbes, who had the foresight to invest when no one else would, are making their presence in the city count in the form of investing, volunteering, or in opening businesses.

Unfortunately, the majority are still skeptical about what preservation can do for the health of their community and for them personally. The municipal government is also included in this sector. Currently, the attitude is ambivalent about historic preservation and the positive things that it may offer to the city. The old credo is not dead yet. Hopefully, the recent success of efforts in the Detroit Theatre District will help to convince them that

newer is not always better. Bringing back a part of the city that people have fond memories of and that is intriguing to outsiders can only be helpful. Both residents and tourists have access, as do those who have left the city at various times for various reasons. What better way to stimulate increased traffic in the city than to bring back something that visitors from elsewhere will want to visit, and natives of the city will want to revisit?

2.10 Other Issues Concerning the Detroit Theater District

Currently, there are two, possibly major, threats to the District. The first is rather nebulous at this point, but it probably deserves mention. The voters in 1996 approved casino gambling in Detroit. As of now, it is uncertain how this will be incorporated into the city economy and into the city fabric. Previous reports had hypothesized the establishment of gambling facilities in the abandoned multi-story Hudson's department store in the center of the central business district. However, nothing has been put forth to substantiate that possibility.

The second and more immediate threat to the District is the proposed building of two new stadiums on land east of Woodward Avenue. The threat here is twofold:

- a. two sports stadiums in this area of town require the demolition of multiple buildings for construction and parking space. The resulting stadiums are in danger of drastically diminishing the overall scale of the District and further taking the theatres out of their historic context.

- b. the lots required for the stadiums include that occupied by the Gem Theatre. The battle on this issue raged on for months as Forbes Management, Inc. tried to negotiate a deal with the Stadium Authority (the body responsible for acquiring properties and overseeing the project) in which the city could have the

land it requires AND the Gem could be saved.⁹⁹ The possibility of enacting *eminent domain* has been explored and put forth by the Stadium Authority to acquire the land necessary for the stadiums. As the action of last resort, there are other feasible courses to take in which both parties could be satisfied. The word at the time of this land writing is that the Gem Theatre will be moved; the location and time is unknown.¹⁰⁰



Figure 7. Gem Theatre, Detroit, MI. August, 1996.

The issue of the sporting stadiums and their effect on the success of the Theatre District and the area as a whole is a critical one in developing and maintaining cohesion in the character and identity of the area. If significant efforts are not made to integrate the stadiums into the physical fabric and larger overall development concepts, the stadiums run the risk of further isolating portions of the Theatre District from one another, as well as isolating themselves from complementary business. The successful integration of the stadiums will be key in uniting various aspects of the Theatre District with other businesses and other areas of development which are growing in the vicinity such as Harmonie Park near the Music Hall.

⁹⁹ Hank Schaller, "Owner fights to save Gem," *The Oakland Press*, Nov. 5, 1996. A8.

¹⁰⁰ Julie Baumkel, "Detroit's Stadium Authority reaches land agreement," *The Oakland Press*, Nov. 28, 1996.

A large business interest is perceived in this controversy as one party may gain considerably from these recent developments.¹⁰¹ In addition to the Detroit Red Wings and the Fox Theatre, the Ilitch's Little Caesar Enterprises, Inc. also owns the Detroit Tigers, for whom one of the stadiums is being built.¹⁰² The accessibility and increased exposure for these mutually exclusive businesses (the Fox and the Tigers) may boost each other a considerable amount. This may also be true, however, for the other businesses in the area. In this case, it is difficult to see where increased profit interests end and boosting the city begins.

The Ilitch organization has been instrumental in stimulating interest in the Detroit Theatre District, as well as contributing much needed funding and project completion. There is a danger that lurks here, however, in the proverbial "putting all of your eggs in one basket." As of this writing, a downturn in the success of or disinvestment by the Ilitch organization is unforeseen and their commitment to the city of Detroit is more than obvious. However, the long-term interests of the city might be enhanced by a balance of interest and investment from other businesses and organizations. With a diversity of investment, programming, and product, investors in the Theatre District and other components of development in the area would complement each other in goods, services, and vitality. Large and small scale businesses, in addition to the variety previously mentioned, provide the mixed uses necessary for long-term success.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Kevin Walters, "Speaking Freely," *Holly Herald*. Feb. 6, 1997. p.4-5.

¹⁰² Ilitch Enterprises, Inc. also own the Adams Theatre, and they recently purchased the United Artists Theatre. Both of these are situated on Grand Circus Park.

¹⁰³ These ideas have also been expressed in a study performed by Archive D.S., an urban design firm in Detroit, MI. Their scheme for Columbia Street, in the heart of the district, encompasses the varied aspects of currently planned development as well as the other components of a successful mixed-use district.

Part III: Philadelphia's Historic Theatres on the Avenue of the Arts

The city of Philadelphia is one of the oldest surviving European settlements in North America. Entwined in the city's rich history of development and growth is the history of theater in the colonies and, later, the new nation. From the evasion of Quaker laws forbidding theaters in the budding colony, to the establishment of theatres for plays, opera, music and film, theatres in Philadelphia have played a major role in the lives of the public at large through the centuries.

Within the last decade or two, there has emerged an acknowledged need for more performance space for the performance groups of the city and region, as well as for touring companies. This need coincided with visions for a physically and economically improved Center City.¹⁰⁴ The result has been the creation of the Avenue of the Arts, located on Broad Street, the north-south axis through the center of downtown.

The designation of Broad Street as an arts and cultural district is not without precedent. From the mid-nineteenth century, Broad Street has been the site of several cultural landmarks in Philadelphia, some of which still exist today. This portion of the thesis is focused on Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts, including historical development, especially as it pertains to Broad Street, and the incorporation of a combination of historic theatres and new development to create a cultural district designed to bring substantial growth to the city of Philadelphia.

3.1 Historical Development

In 1682, nineteen years prior to the founding of Detroit, Philadelphia was established on the banks of the Delaware River. Instead of a wilderness trading post like

¹⁰⁴ Center City Philadelphia constitutes the area between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers and, officially, Vine to South streets.

Detroit, Philadelphia was laid out by William Penn as what could probably be called the first European planned community in the New World. The land was surveyed by Thomas Holme, and he mapped out the city as a grid between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers. The map was subsequently published in London to advertise the property that could be bought in William Penn's "Holy Experiment."¹⁰⁵ One of the major tenets of Penn's new town was the practice of religious tolerance.¹⁰⁶ As a result, many persecuted people from Europe fled to Penn's purported land of peace.

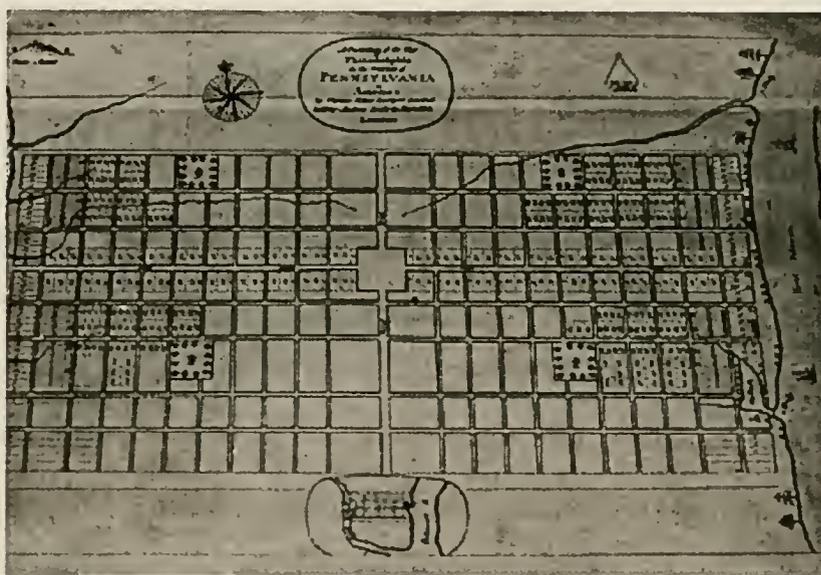


Figure 8. *Philadelphia*, by Thomas Holme. 1683.

Philadelphia grew quickly in the ensuing years. As people settled along the highly trafficked Delaware River, density increased. By the early eighteenth century, landowners had already begun to deviate from William Penn's large-block plan for the city by subdividing the lots to hold the maximum number of households and businesses near the

¹⁰⁵ Martin P. Snyder, *City of Independence: Views of Philadelphia Before 1800*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), p. 16.

¹⁰⁶ Russell Weigley, ed. *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), p. 1.

Delaware shore which was the lifeblood of the town.¹⁰⁷ These developments effectively destroyed any hope of achieving William Penn's vision of a "greene Country Towne."¹⁰⁸

Philadelphians defied Quaker beliefs regarding the evil nature of acting and the theatre early on by staging various forms of public entertainment. The first recorded performance in the Philadelphia area was a girl crossing a tightrope in 1723.¹⁰⁹ A few unsuccessful ventures in theatre operation occurred after that time, outside of the city limits at South Street, until the ultimate success of the Southwark, on the south side of South Street near Fourth, beginning in 1766.¹¹⁰

As the population pushed west from the Delaware through the nineteenth century, rowhouses and stately residences were built, followed closely by (and sometimes including) spaces for commercial endeavors, churches, and places of entertainment. For example, the Walnut Street Theatre at Ninth and Walnut Streets was built in 1809, and the Concert Hall at 1217 Chestnut was built in 1853.¹¹¹ After many renovations, the Walnut Street Theatre is still operating, while the Concert Hall was demolished in 1894.¹¹²

In time, the development of Philadelphia had reached William Penn's wide north-south boulevard through the city, Broad Street. Entertainment came to Broad Street early in the nineteenth century in the form of the Vauxhall Gardens. The Gardens were established in 1814, and a theater was erected there in 1816, only to burn in 1819.¹¹³ As development and traffic continued to grow on the avenue and throughout the city, public

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 8-9.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Irvin R. Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters*, (New York: The Athenaeum of Philadelphia and Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), p. xi.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 82

¹¹² Ibid. p. 82.

Also see Martin Eli Weil, "The Exterior Restoration of the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia," *Extrait de Monumentum*, Vol. XIV, (n.p., 1976), p. 51-58.

¹¹³ Youcef Aissi, "Broad Street: The Grand Avenue of Philadelphia," (Master's thesis in Urban Design at the University of Pennsylvania, 1983), p. 6.

transportation became a consideration for major thoroughfares. In 1834, traffic volume and technology made it equitable to put railroad tracks on South Broad and Market streets to haul goods (especially coal) through the city and to the Delaware River.¹¹⁴ A map made of the “City Railroad” in 1851 shows the tracks as well as the coal drop-off points throughout the route.¹¹⁵

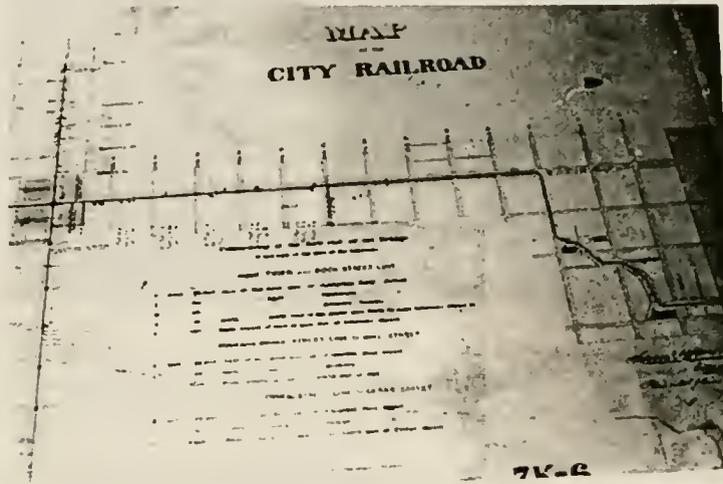


Figure 9. *Map of City Railroad*. Philadelphia, PA, c.1851 This map shows the railroad lines which existed on Market, Broad, and Dock streets in the mid-19th century. The small black marks coming off of the tracks are coal drop-off points along the route.

Grand homes, rowhouses, churches and businesses continued to populate the once wooded landscape as the city persisted in its westward expansion and growth east of the Schuylkill River.¹¹⁶

As the populace came to recognize Broad Street as the central location of the city, attitudes toward its function and appearance changed. In the later 1850’s, the railroad

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Sam P. [?], *Map of the City Railroad*, west sheet. (Philadelphia, 1851). Map Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

¹¹⁶ Hexamer & Locher, *Maps of the City of Philadelphia*, Vol. 3. (Philadelphia: Hexamer & Locher, 1858), plate 35. Map Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

tracks were removed from the street and beautification measures were announced; however, the plans were never carried out.¹¹⁷



Figure 10. *City of Philadelphia*. View east from the Schuylkill River, 1855. Market and Broad streets, the main thoroughfares, are quite visible in this view. The center square, where City Hall now stands, is noticeably vacant in the center.

Also in the 1850's, a site at Broad and Locust streets was chosen for the new opera house. The American Academy of Music opened there in January, 1857.¹¹⁸ Other fine buildings and institutions soon followed suit, giving Broad Street the air of a Paris boulevard. A contemporary author made this comparison and noted Broad Street's role as a sort of cultural center for the city:

“But while all new buildings for business purposes have been erected within a short distance of the Delaware River, those put up for ornament and recreation have sought a home on Broad Street. The Academy of Music is there, the Horticultural Hall is there, the Union League is there, the new Masonic Temple is there, the Academy of Fine Arts will be there....”¹¹⁹

This was written before the construction of City Hall on Center Square (also known as Penn Square) where Broad and Market streets, the main thoroughfares, intersect. Hence, it

¹¹⁷ Aissi, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Gustavus Andre, *History and Description of the Opera House or American Academy of Music, In Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: G. Andre & Co., Foreign and American Music Depot, 1857), p. 6.

appears from the above text that there was considerably less differentiation, if any, between North and South Broad streets at the time.¹²⁰ City Hall was constructed on Center Square from 1872-1901.

A major event for Philadelphians and, indeed, people around the world in 1876 was the Centennial Exhibition in Fairmount Park. Millions of visitors were expected from around the country and the world, and Philadelphia prepared for them. Broad Street continued its expansion in the arts and cultural endeavors as the home of three new theatres in 1876.¹²¹ Two of these were on North Broad at Cherry Street. The Broad Street Theatre, also known as Kiralfy's Alhambra Palace, was built across from the Academy of Music at Broad and Locust streets.¹²² Not in time for the Centennial, but still in the nineteenth century, was the construction of the Empire Theatre directly across from the Academy of Music at Broad and Locust streets in 1891.¹²³

Over the course of the following fifty years or so, through the first part of the twentieth century, Broad Street flourished as the actual and recognized center of Philadelphia. Support businesses such as restaurants, large hotels and some housing were interspersed with the cultural amenities.¹²⁴ Public transportation made its debut underneath the road with the Broad Street subway in 1928.¹²⁵ This allowed for the heightened accessibility necessary for the stability of Broad Street businesses, as well as decreasing congestion in the streets. The original portion of the subway stretched from City Hall to

¹¹⁹ *Broad Street, Penn Square, and The Park*, (Philadelphia: John Penington & Son, 1871), p. 9.

¹²⁰ This is in comparison to current attitudes toward the street. There has been concern in trying to unify North and South Broad streets into a cohesive Avenue of the Arts. I am not sure that it can be, or that the people necessarily want it that way.

¹²¹ Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters*, p. 82.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. xix.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

¹²⁴ Elvino Smith, C.E. *Atlas of the 5th to 10th Wards of the City of Philadelphia*. (Elvino Smith, C.E.: Philadelphia, 1927). plate 13-15.

¹²⁵ Tanya Barrientos, "Under-the-street beat," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 21, 1996. D-1

Olney Avenue in North Philadelphia, and the extensions south to (eventually) Pattison Avenue took place in increments in 1930, 1938, and 1973.¹²⁶

While business in Center City was brisk in the early twentieth century, and movie palaces popped up in the city and around the country, the decline of the arts and the Broad Street corridor already were beginning. According to Lloyd M. Abernethy, “Philadelphia’s diminishing role in the cultural leadership of the nation offered further confirmation of a loss of vitality.”¹²⁷ One example of this decline is the Metropolitan Opera House, built by Oscar Hammerstein, Sr., on North Broad at Poplar Street. Opened for opera and theatre in 1908, the Metropolitan was converted to a movie theatre by 1928, and stepped out of the arts altogether shortly thereafter.¹²⁸ After a successful start, as with many contemporary movie and legitimate theaters, the population could not support the plethora of artistic/cultural endeavors in the city.

The growth of the city’s major businesses away from Broad Street was also a factor in its decline. New office buildings and “modern” spaces west of City Hall on Market Street left behind high vacancy rates in the nineteenth-century structures up and down Broad Street, a problem which still lingers.¹²⁹

The portion of Broad Street north of City Hall extending to Montgomery County also took a turn for the worse. Population dropped dramatically between 1960 and 1990 - by nearly 28,000 persons according to the US Census Bureau.¹³⁰ Rioting in the 1960’s and an increased population of less-affluent minorities has led to the same problems that the

¹²⁶ Ibid., D-10.

¹²⁷ Weigley, p. 535.

¹²⁸ Glazer, *Philadelphia Theatres*, p. 7, and Ginny Weigand, “The struggle to save N. Phila. opera house,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 19, 1994. B-7.

¹²⁹ Nathan Gorenstein, “Commercial center shifts west,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 12, 1997. D-1.

¹³⁰ As cited in Anthony S. Twyman, “The Jump Street Blues,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, April 10, 1995. p. 21.

city of Detroit has experienced in terms of fear of the area, decreased density and tax revenue, and less attention to capital improvements.¹³¹

The challenge of the current plans for the Avenue of the Arts is to revitalize both North and South Broad streets according to their very different needs and to somehow unify the Avenue throughout its length. In comparing the Avenue of the Arts to the Detroit Theatre District, the issue is not necessarily so much about how the two compare in terms of building stock, geographic layout, and individual project potential, although these are critical in each case. Instead, the value lies in understanding how each entity has undertaken its task in dealing with the common issues of declining urban fabric. The Avenue of the Arts project on North and South Broad, the historic and geographic heart of the city, presents an interesting case of a continuing project to revive a (now) historic idea or cognitive understanding of the area in order to fuel its future growth and stability.

3.2 The Avenue of the Arts

“The city is alive through its arts and culture, for without them, the past would be forgotten and the present would be stale.”¹³²

The current project known as the Avenue of the Arts has been on the minds of a handful of planners and citizens for at least two decades. In the 1970’s, it seemed that for years South Broad Street had been relatively ignored in terms of new development and recognition. In order to attract new attention to the area, a festival was planned to take place on the “Avenue of the Arts” on South Broad Street. The success of festivals in 1978, and in subsequent years, probably helped a great deal to solidify the designation’s place in the

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Report of the Mayor’s Cultural Advisory Council, *Cultural Philadelphia: Choosing a Future*, (Philadelphia, 1985). p. 5.

Philadelphia urban planning lexicon as well as to concentrate attention on the needs and possibilities for the area.¹³³

The renewed attention to South Broad Street coincided with the growing awareness of the need for performance space in the city. A study performed by D.A.C.P. for the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation, published in 1981, confirmed this need and cited South Broad as the prime location for a new performance space.¹³⁴ Although not specific in citing particular areas of development, a report published by the Mayor's Cultural Advisory Council in 1985 also recognized this need. In addition, the report found that cultural activities greatly contributed to the quality of life in the city, in addition to being a valuable economic tool.¹³⁵ The report also recommended, among other things, to "Include culture in all City initiatives and strategies for economic development" and "Ensure that the significance and uniqueness of our architectural heritage is fully considered as development plans for the city are undertaken."¹³⁶

Many of the sentiments expressed in the report were taken to heart in the evolution of the Avenue of the Arts as a concept. Avenue of the Arts, Inc. (AAI), a non-profit organization, was created by Philadelphia Mayor Edward Rendell in November 1992 "to coordinate and promote future development on the avenue."¹³⁷ The organization consists of volunteer board members from the business and cultural communities, as well as citizens from the community itself.¹³⁸ Together with Executive Director Ellen Solms and Assistant Director Matthew Schultz, the Avenue of the Arts, Inc. has been actively pursuing its task. In the four and a half years of AAI's existence, they have taken on the

¹³³ Leonard Boasberg, "An old idea finally bearing fruit," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 22, 1993. G-1.

¹³⁴ Aissi, p. 13.

¹³⁵ Report of the Mayor's Cultural Advisory Council, p. 7.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11 and 13, respectively.

¹³⁷ Boasberg, "An old idea....," G-1.

¹³⁸ "Background - Avenue of the Arts, Inc.," in AAI press package. April 23, 1996. p. 2.

responsibilities of marketing, fund-raising, political advocacy, and economic development for the Avenue.¹³⁹ In doing so, AAI works with cultural organizations along the Avenue to aid in individual concerns with long-range planning and development, as well as to coordinate their efforts with others along the Avenue of the Arts.¹⁴⁰

In cultural districts, as in other development projects, certain structures are used as anchors or mainstays. In the development of the Avenue of the Arts, historic theatres have become the anchors on North and South Broad Street. The Academy of Music, perhaps the most visible and best known of the buildings, is the anchor for South Broad, while the Freedom Theatre, in the historic Edwin Forrest Mansion, is an anchor on North Broad Street. Renovations and restorations of theatres, such as the Uptown (north of Freedom Theatre) and the Merriam (south of the Academy of Music) play a part in the Avenue, as do new developments, such as the Wilma Theatre (opened in late 1996), Temple University's Apollo (under construction), and the new Regional Performing Arts Center (still in the planning stages). This combination of new development mixed with historic structures conforms with the notion of what makes a healthy city. Without new development, a city is perceived as (and perhaps is?) stagnant.¹⁴¹ With a mixture of old and new structures, the city continues its being as a dynamic and, ultimately, interesting place of attraction for residents and tourists alike.

Following the idea of the use of historic theatres in contemporary development schemes, three of the previously mentioned Philadelphia theatres in use on Broad Street will be presented. The specific theatres have been chosen due to their historic nature, their

¹³⁹ Interview with Matthew Schultz, Assistant Director, Avenue of the Arts, Inc. Oct. 31, 1996.

¹⁴⁰ "Background...", p. 2.

¹⁴¹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 189.

varying backgrounds, and their current involvement in the activity of the Avenue of the Arts.

The American Academy of Music, opened in 1857, is considered the mainstay of South Broad Street. As the current home of the Philadelphia Opera Company and Philadelphia Orchestra, the Academy is probably one of the busiest theatres in town. Its continued use over the last 140 years is a tribute to its suitability for live performances and its dedicated patrons and staff. The Merriam Theatre, next door to the Academy, has experienced the life of many early twentieth-century theatres throughout the country. From its success as part of the Shubert Brothers theatre empire through burlesque shows, fire, and closures, the Merriam, thankfully, has been one of the survivors. Now a part of the University of the Arts (also on South Broad Street), the Merriam has been fully renovated on the interior and exterior and currently hosts a variety of professional touring and local productions, in addition to those performed by students of the University of the Arts. The counterpart to these, the Freedom Theatre on North Broad Street, is a relatively recent phenomenon housed in a historic structure. Founded in the 1960's, the Freedom Theatre has been an outlet for African-American productions for over thirty years. The organization is very active in the North Philadelphia community and is currently renovating its home, the nineteenth-century Edwin Forrest mansion, to better suit the group's growing needs. These venues will now be described in further depth regarding their histories, current status, and roles in the development of the Avenue of the Arts.

3.3 The Freedom Theatre

*"Artists always lead the revolution"*¹⁴²

The brown sandstone and brick building which the Freedom Theatre now occupies, located at the southwest corner of North Broad and Master streets, was designed by Stephen Decatur Button and built for a local brewer, William Gaul, in 1852.¹⁴³ A mere three years later in 1855, renowned Philadelphia actor Edwin Forrest bought the three-story Italianate building, and he remained in residence there throughout his life.¹⁴⁴ Forrest died there in 1872.¹⁴⁵

The mansion then became home to the School of Design for Women and, after a merger in 1932, Moore College of Art.¹⁴⁶ During the years of the School of Design, a four-story wing was added as well as a garden.¹⁴⁷ After Moore College of Art left for a larger space in 1960, the building was bought, renamed Heritage House, and used by the Philadelphia Cotillion Society, an organization created to expose African-Americans (especially children) to cultural events, art, and history.¹⁴⁸

The Freedom Theatre was founded by John Allen, Jr., in 1966, and he and partner Robert E. Leslie began renting space in the Forrest mansion in 1968, finally buying the building in 1982.¹⁴⁹ The building included an existing 120-seat theater when they began renting.¹⁵⁰ Originally founded as a production company, the Theatre has produced

¹⁴² Robert E. Leslie, co-founder of Freedom Theatre, as quoted in Alan J. Heavans, "Act II for a mansion," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 25, 1995. F-1.

¹⁴³ Ibid., F-7

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Weigley, p. 453.

¹⁴⁶ Heavans, F-7.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Leonard Boasberg, "Freedom Theatre is getting a face lift," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 31, 1993, and Heavans, F-7.

¹⁵⁰ Heavans, F-7 and

Interview with Forrest Theatre current resident choreographer on KYW News 3 Weekend Sunday Edition, Philadelphia. Feb. 23, 1997.

approximately 300 plays, and it has trained about 10,000 people in various theatrical crafts (acting, scenery production, etc.) since 1972.¹⁵¹ In addition to productions by the resident African-American theatre group, the Theatre is currently pursuing a youth performance training program as part of their performing arts school in which students spend time learning their craft and working up to a production.¹⁵²

The building is currently undergoing a thorough renovation, including bringing the 120-seat theatre space to 300 seats, renovating areas for classrooms, offices, and apartments for artists-in-residence, a scenery shop, technical upgrades, and the creation of lots for off-street parking.¹⁵³

Funding for the \$10 million dollar project has been contributed by many sources, from corporations to the Department for Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Pew Charitable Trusts, and from the state of Pennsylvania as both independent funds and as an earmarked part of the funds received by



Figure 11. Freedom Theatre, Philadelphia, PA, March, 1997.

¹⁵¹Heavans, F-7.

¹⁵² Freedom Theatre current resident choreographer, interview, Feb. 23, 1997.

¹⁵³ "Project Updates Avenue of the Arts Capitol Development Projects," in Avenue of the Arts press package, October 1996.

the Avenue of the Arts development project.¹⁵⁴ The variety of funding sources is telling in that it denotes a growing understanding of the importance of the existence of the Freedom Theatre - for itself and for its urban context. State funding, especially, for the Avenue shows the recognition of the need for Philadelphia to be healthy as a regional hub. Without Philadelphia, the focus is gone. The same can be said of any city, such as Detroit, which is the focal point of a metropolitan area. Many people have been aware for years of the conditions of North Philadelphia, and now increased amounts of money are being invested in the area, especially in its cultural attractions.

Designation as part of the Avenue of the Arts has no doubt been a catalyst for these developments. Not only does the designation increase the visibility of projects on North Broad, but it also lends credibility to places where some investors would otherwise never consider lending or granting funds.

When originally preparing a grant application for state funding, the Avenue project included only South Broad Street. Participants in review processes restated the need for investment on North Broad, and further research found the presence of many viable projects. Consequently, North Broad was added to the application and both North and South Broad received state funding under the Avenue of the Arts.¹⁵⁵

Another benefit of inclusion in the Avenue of the Arts, remarked Robert Leslie, is “there is now a lot more sharing among organizations.... There doesn’t seem quite as much competition as there used to be.”¹⁵⁶ This phenomenon is just as important as financial assistance in North Philadelphia. People, businesses, and organizations continually

¹⁵⁴ Stephen Salisbury, “N. Broad seizes a chance to build its future on arts,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 31, 1995. A-8.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

working together will be key to the ultimate success of North Broad and its adjacent neighborhoods.

3.4 The American Academy of Music

The American Academy of Music, designed by Philadelphia architects and design competition winners Napoleon LeBrun and Gustave Runge, was completed in January of 1857.¹⁵⁷ The building of the Academy was the result of a driven subscription campaign to build a first-class opera house in the city, the final in a string of similar, though unsuccessful efforts.¹⁵⁸ The support of the public for such a house was immense, and “the Building Committee had to pass unusually stringent resolutions in regard to the exclusion of visitors, whose presence tended to interfere with the operations of the workmen.”¹⁵⁹ Finally, upon completion, a grand ball was held to inaugurate the house.¹⁶⁰

To assure the proper acoustics for opera, Le Brun and Runge modeled the Academy after the La Scala Opera House in Milan, Italy, a renowned house of the day.¹⁶¹ The Academy’s success in this regard, as well as its aesthetic qualities, have contributed to its continued use over the last 140 years. The Academy of Music is currently the home of the Opera Company of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Orchestra, while hosting the Pennsylvania Ballet and other performances.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Leonard Boasberg, “Academy of Music is spruced up,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 24, 1993. E-1

¹⁵⁸ Andre’, p. 4.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 6. References to “the house” refer to the opera house, or Academy of Music.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Irvin R. Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters, A-Z*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 53.

¹⁶² Boasberg, “Academy of Music is spruced up,” E-1.



Figure 12. The American Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA, ca. 1860.

The location of the Academy of Music at Broad and Locust streets was chosen because it was central to the various developing areas of the city. There were thoroughfares on two sides to accommodate carriages and pedestrians, and “It [Broad Street] is besides not only a principle, but a favorite street; its dimensions are unusually great; and there is strong evidence that within a few years its attractions will be much enlarged, partly by private and partly by public expenditures.”¹⁶³

Mr. Foulke’s prediction was borne out. By the turn of the century, Broad Street had developed into the theatre center of the city. Just in the immediate area of South Broad Street, Horticultural Hall was built in 1867, next door to the Academy to the south; the Broad Street Theatre, at the northeast corner of Broad and Locust, was constructed in time for the Centennial Exhibition of 1876; and the Empire Theatre was built across the street from the Academy in 1891.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ William Peter Foulke, ca. 1857, as quoted in John Francis Marion, *Within These Walls*, (Philadelphia: Restoration Office- Academy of Music, 1984), p. 29.

¹⁶⁴ Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters*, (1994) p. 82.

The history of the Academy of Music is not entirely filled with a string of opera, symphony, and ballet performances. Receptions for events such as the Centennial Exhibition included children's programs, storytelling and song, while presidential visits by Taft and Ulysses Grant were also cause for celebration.¹⁶⁵ The opera house, also known as "The Grand Old Lady," hosted other events which its builders probably could have never foreseen.

A football game between the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton University was played in the Academy on March 7, 1889; the event was accompanied by a game of tug-of-war and a kicking exhibition.¹⁶⁶ Also, on March 19, 1908, following an opera performance, wrestling matches were held in the venerated hall.¹⁶⁷ As moving pictures gained a broader audience, they were used for education as well as entertainment. In the Academy's 1912-1913 season, the Burton Holmes Travelogues were shown at the theatre, consisting of "colored views" and "motion pictures" of the West Indies.¹⁶⁸ A similar traveling exhibition of Newman Traveltalks, "Seeing Europe - Impressions of 1931" played in the Academy in 1932.¹⁶⁹

Varied performances have continued through the twentieth century as the Academy weathered the loss of many neighboring theatres, and South Broad evolved into a more commercial and business center. The office buildings which were built to house business enterprises have slowly become vacant in recent years as businesses have moved to newer

¹⁶⁵ Marion, p. 88-89, 98.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 118. Supported by evidence from the *Public Ledger* on March 8, 1889, which gave an account of the spirited match.

¹⁶⁷ Walter F. Naedele. "Uncouth: A great concert hall's less-than-graceful past," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 3, 1982. B1-2.

¹⁶⁸ "Academy of Music Season 1912-1913." Building Files - Academy of Music. Theatre Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

¹⁶⁹ Academy of Music program. (Chicago: Hillison & Etten Co., 1932). Building Files - Academy of Music. Theatre Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

buildings which have developed on Market Street west of City Hall.¹⁷⁰ Due to its consistent and imposing presence, the Academy is now regarded as the “linchpin” for the Avenue of the Arts.¹⁷¹

As part of ongoing efforts to maintain the Academy and to improve its facilities for touring companies and musical performances, a few renovation schemes have been proposed for the building. Initial plans called for radical alterations to the structure and ambiance of the building, including an echo chamber above the chandelier, adjustable opera boxes, and a hovering acoustical disk.¹⁷² Outcry from the general public, the Mayor, preservation organizations, and the National Park Service, who recommended that the building’s National Historic Landmark status be revoked, helped to induce a change in the plans to what was deemed a more appropriate scheme.¹⁷³ These improvements, funded through various grants and fund-raisers, are now a part of the Avenue of the Arts Capital Development Projects.¹⁷⁴

The Academy, the oldest opera house in its original configuration and used for its original purpose in the United States, is poised for its own future in addition to that of Broad Street. As the focal point of restoration efforts and new development on South Broad Street, such as the Wilma Theatre and the proposed Regional Performing Arts Center, the Academy helps to connect Broad Street (and Philadelphia’s) past with its future.

¹⁷⁰ Gorenstein, D-1.

¹⁷¹ Boasberg, “Academy of Music is spruced up,” E-1.

¹⁷² Peter Dobrin, “Back to the future,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 17, 1994. E-1.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, E-8.

¹⁷⁴ “Project Updates....” p. 1.

3.5 The Merriam Theatre

The building now known as the University of the Arts' Merriam Theatre started out as the Sam S. Shubert Memorial Theatre. Designed by Herbert H. Krapp, the theatre opened in 1918 as part of the Shubert brothers' theatre empire.¹⁷⁵ "By October 1925, they controlled a chain of ninety-two first-class theatres, including thirty-two in New York, ten in Chicago, six in Philadelphia, five in Boston, four in Detroit, twenty-nine in three other large cities, and six in small towns."¹⁷⁶

Instead of a movie palace, which was fast becoming the rage at the time, the Shubert was built as a legitimate theatre. Built on the former site of Horticultural Hall next to the Academy of Music, the builders incorporated some of what remained of the burned-out Hall in the new structure, namely the back wall and a portion of the Tennessee marble staircase.¹⁷⁷

As the commissioners of the Academy of Music had noted over fifty years before, ease of transportation was recognized as a favorable asset to the success of the theatre. Lee Shubert, head of the Shubert Theatre, released a letter to the Transit Commission through the Shubert Press Department in which he praised an increase in subway service:

"I have received many communications since the new order was put into effect and all of them referred emphatically to the pleasure that theatregoing had become since the service in the subways had been increased. Happy theatre crowds mean better performances and better business in the playhouse."¹⁷⁸

The Shubert, shortly thereafter, embarked upon years of controversy. In 1923, Mayor J. Hampton Moore closed the theatre for "objectionable performances."¹⁷⁹ After

¹⁷⁵ Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters*, (1994), p. 22.

¹⁷⁶ Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 20.

¹⁷⁷ Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters, A-Z*, (1986), p. 208.

¹⁷⁸ G.P. Greneker (Shubert Press Dept.). "Theatre Conditions Bettered Since Increase in Subway Service, Declares Lee Shubert - Theatrical Head Writes Transit Commission of Results He Has

much back and forth argument, the theatre was reopened and ran until 1931. Two years later, in 1933, the Shubert opened as a burlesque theatre, and it remained open as such, intermittently, through the 1940's.¹⁸⁰ One of the dark periods in these years occurred as a result of a fire in January 1935. The fire broke out in the scenery and spread to the curtain. The customers in the theatre escaped unharmed and damage was limited to the stage, orchestra pit, and some smoke and water damage.¹⁸¹

The name of the theatre was changed in 1941 to "permanently" reflect the burlesque shows being presented there. The Sam S. Shubert Memorial Theatre became the "Follies" on September 3rd 1941.¹⁸² According to Irvin Glazer, noted Philadelphia theatre historian, the theatre suffered yet another fire, and a few years later it was reopened as a legitimate theatre.¹⁸³

In 1972, it was announced that the Philadelphia Musical Academy (which later evolved into the University of the Arts) would take over the Shubert.¹⁸⁴ Under the school's auspices, the Shubert was renovated by repainting the interior, installing new curtains, carpets and stage, and removing seats to increase the size of the orchestra pit.¹⁸⁵ The theatre ran as such with a variety of programming.

Observed." June 3, 1922. Building Files - Shubert/Merriam. Theatre Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

¹⁷⁹ Frank Brookhouser, "Strippers, stars, a Singing Watchman - and Rock; They've All Been Part of the Shubert Theater Story," *The Sunday Bulletin*, Aug. 12, 1973. p. 1-3. Building Files - Shubert/Merriam. Theatre Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ "1,000 Flee Fire in Shubert Theatre," *Evening Bulletin*, Jan. 19, 1935. Building Files - Shubert/Merriam. Theatre Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

¹⁸² "Shubert Theatre Changes Name; Now "Follies"," *Evening Public Ledger*, Sept. 3, 1941. Building Files - Shubert/Merriam. Theatre Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

¹⁸³ Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters, A-Z*, (1986). p. 209. Because Glazer does not give dates or other specific information regarding this detail, it is possible that this fire is in fact the fire of 1935, and that the theatre was dark for a time before reopening as a legitimate theatre. No other reference was found to support the notion of a fire after 1935, and Glazer does not specifically mention the 1935 fire either.

¹⁸⁴ Daniel Webster, "Cultural Center Planned for S. Broad St.," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 16, 1972. Building Files - Shubert/Merriam. Theatre Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

¹⁸⁵ Bob Sokolsky, "Curtain to Rise on Sparkling New Shubert," *The Sunday Bulletin*, Feb. 22, 1976. A-3. Building Files - Shubert/Merriam. Theatre Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

In 1985, the theatre was closed and, in 1987, was reopened after the first phase of renovations.¹⁸⁶ This phase included attention to the interiors which encompassed new seating, more orchestra space, and a new portable floor with air cushioning designed to be easier on dancers' joints.¹⁸⁷ As renovations continued, the name of the theatre was again changed in 1991. The University chose to honor John W. Merriam, a board member who contributed \$3 million to create an endowment for the maintenance of the theatre.¹⁸⁸ At the time, Peter Solmsson, University President, said that the trustees had been thinking about changing the name for some time. "There's no connection whatever between the Shubert enterprise and the theater...and we thought it should be a name connected to its university history."¹⁸⁹



Figure 13. Merriam Theatre, Philadelphia, PA, March, 1997.

¹⁸⁶ *The Columns*- Quarterly Publication of Philadelphia Colleges of the Arts. (Philadelphia, ca. 1986). Vol. 3, No 1. p. 2, and

Lucinda Fleeson, "At Shubert today, the premiere of a face lift," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 26, 1987. C-1. Building Files - Shubert/Merriam. Theatre Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

¹⁸⁷ Fleeson, C-8.

¹⁸⁸ Leonard Boasberg, "Merriam Theatre's pedigree is impeccable," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 25, 1993. E-4.

¹⁸⁹ Peter Solmsson, as quoted in Douglas J. Keating, "Exit the Shubert name, and enter the Merriam," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dec. 11, 1991. . Building Files - Shubert/Merriam. Theatre Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

Subsequent alterations to the theatre have included technical upgrades, new dressing rooms and backstage passage, a new proscenium mural, a new color scheme, and a new facade.¹⁹⁰

The Merriam now hosts a variety of productions including Broadway shows, regional performers, and performances by students of the University of the Arts.¹⁹¹

In 1987, the University of the Arts (then PCA) president Peter Solmsson said that the (then) Shubert developments would help in the larger goal of the creation of a cultural development along South Broad.¹⁹² With the later refurbishing complete, the Merriam has become one of the successes of the Avenue. The University of the Arts has also been highly involved in other areas of the Avenue. Several of its buildings line both sides of the street between Spruce and Pine, and they have renovated the South Philadelphia Savings Bank into the “Arts Bank,” on the southeast corner of Broad and South streets. The Arts Bank was the first of the new venues to be completed on the Avenue of the Arts, and it currently hosts a variety of student and local performances and other programming.¹⁹³

The University of the Arts’ strong presence in the area is felt in terms of its buildings and in its students and faculty. There are student discounts at some venues, and students are taking advantage of the cultural opportunities on and around the Avenue of the Arts.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Boasberg, “Merriam Theatre’s pedigree...,” E-4.

¹⁹¹ “Project Updates Avenue...,” p. 3.

¹⁹² Fleeson, C-8.

¹⁹³ “Project Updates...” p. 2.

¹⁹⁴ A survey of University of the Arts students was attempted from December 1996 through March 1997, in conjunction with the University Office of Student Services. Although only a few completed surveys were returned, they showed that among those surveyed, the Arts Bank and Merriam were the most popular venues for the students on the Avenue. Perhaps this has to do with student discounts offered there. Students also attended many movies, although they were disappointed that they had to travel so far from the University to do so. I recognize that the few returned surveys do not adequately represent the population at large; however, I believe that they do represent the concerns of students and residents of the area immediately around the Avenue of the Arts. Further results are included in the appendix.

With contributions to the University reaching record proportions, the University of the Arts will maintain its important presence on the Avenue of the Arts for years to come, and students also will continue to benefit from the unique learning and performance opportunities that they have on Broad Street.¹⁹⁵

Historic theatres on the Avenue of the Arts in Philadelphia have been both catalysts and anchors for the overall Avenue project. The institutions which occupy these theatres are well-established in the community and, in some cases, throughout the country and world. Inclusion in the Avenue of the Arts as an overall entity has given these buildings and institutions greater visibility and something greater to be a part of in the scheme of a cultural center in the city. The choice of Broad Street for the Avenue reflects its historic role in the city as well as its unique assets. The Avenue of the Arts and the individual organizations along Broad Street, established institutions as well as new developments, will benefit from each other in the future as a part of a return to the center of the city.

¹⁹⁵ Stephen Salisbury, "University of the Arts gets \$22 million," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 25, 1995. A-1 and Boasberg, "Merriam Theater's pedigree...."

Part IV: Some Effective Strategies for Revitalization

Exploring history, development, and evolution of a building and its context is crucial to understanding its historic and current roles in the city. Knowledge of these aspects gives insight into past and present use and context and perhaps, as in the case of the Detroit Theatre District and Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts, possible opportunities. This knowledge, however, is only one part of what makes a preservationist revitalization effort successful - for the building, the owner, the city, and the public. Other factors which are important to the success of the use of historic structures (theatres in this case) in urban revitalization efforts include the protection of structures by the backing of comprehensive historic preservation legislation, the support of the municipality, and effective organization and management. These issues will here be explored with respect to the Detroit Theatre District and Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts.¹⁹⁶

4.1 Legislation

National legislation regarding historic preservation came about in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This Act charged the U.S. Secretary of the Interior with the task of promoting and monitoring historic preservation throughout the country. Specifically, this includes the care of federally owned buildings by the National Park Service and the creation of the National Register of Historic Places.¹⁹⁷ Other functions include overseeing the listing of National Historic Landmarks (as defined in the 1935

¹⁹⁶ Another issue in these efforts is the support of the general public. Determination of overall public opinion on the subject of revitalization efforts is difficult to gauge without the aid of a massive survey campaign. Since this was outside of the scope of this thesis, it will not be discussed here. It should be noted, however, that the presence of public support is important to the success of large-scale projects such as these.

¹⁹⁷ *National Register*..... p. vii.

Historic Sites Act) and the development of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings. Although the Standards have been widely accepted as official guides and National Register nomination carries some psychological weight, none of these designations actually serve to protect the buildings from misuse or demolition.¹⁹⁸

The most directly applicable legislation in historic preservation is that of local government. This is where the thrust of the power lies in protective designation, the creation of historic districts, and the regulation of demolition procedures and changes to designated buildings. The presence and enforcement of protective legislation, however, do not always work in tandem as they should in any form of legislation.

Both Detroit and Philadelphia have legislation regarding historic structures and districts. The city of Detroit passed a preservation ordinance in 1980, in accord with state legislation passed in 1970, which created a local historic district commission and historic designation advisory board.¹⁹⁹ The City of Philadelphia's legislation regarding historic preservation predates that of Detroit by nearly 30 years. In 1955, the Historical Commission was created to act as a landmarks commission.²⁰⁰ In 1984, the Historic Buildings Ordinance already in place in Philadelphia was revised and put into effect on April 1, 1985. In addition to the general "declaration of public policy and purposes," this ordinance outlined the powers and duties of the Historical Commission, and enumerated procedures for public notices, permit acquisition, enforcement and appeals.²⁰¹ While the Philadelphia Ordinance is enforced by the Department of Licenses and Inspections (L&I),

¹⁹⁸ Pamela Dwight, ed. *Landmark Yellow Pages*, (Washington D.C: The Preservation Press, 1993), p. 45.

¹⁹⁹ *Michigan Compiled Laws* (p. 493-500), P.A. 1970, No. 169, Imd. Eff. Aug. 3, and Detroit Code, *History*, (p. 1863-1876), sec. 25-2.

²⁰⁰ Philadelphia Code, *Historic Buildings Structures, Sites, Objects and Districts* (1984), sec. 14-2007. p. 1.

the Detroit ordinance is enforced by the Building & Safety Engineering Department, which can be identified as essentially the same entity as Philadelphia's L&I.²⁰²

The general motives and explanations for creating historic preservation legislation given in the initial articles of these texts are very similar. A few key words are present which exemplify a common understanding as to why such legislation is important to these urban communities. Aside from placing a high value on each city's cultural, social, architectural, and other assets, the texts state the recognized importance of using historic structures to help fortify the economy, stabilize or improve property values, improve aesthetic qualities, and promote community pride.²⁰³ All of these values are inherent in the reuse of the historic theatres examined here.

Urban economic redevelopment in the form of cultural centers are commendable examples of the purported mission of these pieces of historic preservation legislation. The restoration and reuse of the theatres brings jobs to the area, while the restored buildings themselves improve the street aesthetic. In the case of both Detroit and Philadelphia, streetscape improvements have been included and executed as part of overall planning and development measures. Restored venues, once again useful and desirable, have been shown to stabilize or increase property values for these buildings and the lots around them.²⁰⁴ The establishment or resurgence of community pride is a more difficult thing to measure, and it will not be attempted here. However, the fact that the restored buildings are still enjoying steady business at the box office and that so much attention is being given to

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 7-8.

Also see: Detroit Code, *Enforcement*, (page 1869) 23-2-10, and Interview with Alexander Pollock, of the Historic District Commission, Detroit City Planning Department, Dec. 23, 1996. The Detroit ordinance identifies enforcement as coming from "the Department," however it does not define the specific department.

²⁰³ Detroit Code (p. 1863) and Philadelphia Code (p. 3-4).

issues of the future direction of the cities are indicative that, if nothing else, people are paying attention.

4.2 Municipal Support

Municipal support for restoration projects can come in many forms. From planning measures to financing and fund-raising, infrastructure to security, from approaching the subject with an open mind and an optimistic and realistic attitude to publicly giving support to a particular venture; municipal support is a great help to restoration and development projects. Without this involvement and support, massive restoration projects such as these run the risk of becoming merely commercial conglomerations, that is, if they happen at all. Planning and mayoral support will be the major components discussed here.

Much is said about a city in its master plan. Generally produced by the municipal planning agency and subject to the approval of the mayor and/or city council, the master plan gives major goals for the future development of the city. Social, economic, and physical planning are coordinated in such documents.

The City of Detroit's *Master Plan of Policies*, adopted in 1992, is a major work of comprehensive planning for the city. In this plan, the City demonstrates its cognizance of the importance of historic preservation to a city's well-being. The Detroit Theatre District is specifically mentioned as an important asset to the City, and worthy of support and action. Generally, in the "Economic Policies" section of the Plan, there is resolve to promote entertainment, convention business and tourism in the Central Business District (CBD), of which the Theatre District is a part, as well as the renovation and promotion of

²⁰⁴Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, *The Contribution of Historic Preservation to Urban Revitalization*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1979). p. 3.

the use of “historic buildings, warehouses, and movie palace structures.”²⁰⁵ The section of the Plan which deals with the Central Business District addresses the Theatre District specifically in creating a focus of activity ideal for culture and tourism:

“Support the continued growth of the Theatre District in the northern CBD area between Grand Circus Park and the Fisher Freeway. Improve landscaping in the area. Expand financing mechanisms to promote entertainment, concerts, theater productions. Encourage the bars, restaurants, and other entertainment and fitness facilities to promote the area and jointly recognize the increased access provided by the Downtown People Mover station, trolley, and mini-bus service.”²⁰⁶

In light of many such well-intended and ambitious policies, however, it should be noted that master plans are usually not binding documents. Instead, they serve as guidelines and *recommendations* for future action. Many planning agencies have little or no recourse for the implementation of their plans.

Planning in Philadelphia has taken a different course over the last few decades. The last comprehensive plan for the city was issued in 1960.²⁰⁷ This plan, probably as a function of the time it was written, contains no outlook on historic preservation as the current Detroit *Master Plan* does. Some mention of reusing buildings in the Plan, then, is intended to fill vacancies and available space and not necessarily as a way to protect buildings.

Subsequent publications by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission do address historic preservation and the use of historic buildings in economic (re)development. In 1986, several local consultants, architecture firms and the like prepared a document for the City Planning Commission entitled *Analysis of Historic Preservation Techniques for*

²⁰⁵ City of Detroit, *Master Plan of Policies*, p. II-41.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. III-5.

²⁰⁷ Philadelphia City Planning Commission, *Comprehensive Plan: The Physical Development Plan for the City of Philadelphia*. (1960) Government Publications, Free Library of Philadelphia.

Center City Philadelphia, which was then published by the Commission.²⁰⁸ In this document, the collaborators recognize the importance of historic structures to the physical and economic health of Philadelphia, as they state, “Historic properties should be viewed as assets that create special opportunities for economic development.”²⁰⁹ The 1988 *Plan for Center City* and 1996 *A Renewal Agenda for Off Broad East* further demonstrate that the Planning Commission does value Philadelphia’s abundant historic properties, and these properties are featured in development schemes for Center City.²¹⁰

Beyond the planning/publication projects, the Detroit and Philadelphia city planning agencies differ in their level of involvement in actual projects. Whereas the Philadelphia City Planning Commission mainly functions as a recommendation agency and deals with public property as it concerns the Avenue of the Arts, the Detroit City Planning Department contains the Historic Designation Commission which reviews changes to locally registered buildings.²¹¹ In order for a structure to come under such jurisdiction, then, it must go through a local designation process which is more rigorous than that of the National Register of Historic Places. This limits the possible effect of Commission Review to those buildings for which it has been demonstrated that someone cares about the structure and actively pursues its preservation. This is also the case with Philadelphia’s Historical Commission, which affects judgment upon locally designated buildings and districts, although it is separate from the Planning Commission.

²⁰⁸ John Rahenkamp Consultants, Inc., Lowenthal & Horwath, Ballard, Spahr, Andrews & Ingersoll, Martin Jay Rosenblum, R.A. & Associates. *Analysis of Historic Preservation Techniques for Center City Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, revised Oct. 30, 1986)

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²¹⁰ Philadelphia City Planning Commission, *The Plan for Center City*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1988), and Philadelphia City Planning Commission, *A Renewal Agenda for Off Broad East*. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 1996).

²¹¹ Interview with Warren Huff, Philadelphia City Planning Commission, March 25, 1997, and Interview with Norman Cassell, Detroit City Planning Department, Dec. 18, 1996.

Municipal planning and recommendations are an important step in acknowledging and attempting to utilize potential assets and developments. Without implementation capabilities, however, these projects may languish or remain merely “good ideas” until someone steps forward with some power to further publicize the project(s) and otherwise get things started. The mayor is one person who can wield such power.

Mayoral support for major development projects in the city may be crucial to the success of these projects. Detroit’s current mayor, Dennis Archer, stands poised to help his city capitalize on the private entrepreneurship which has worked hard thus far to restore, maintain, and attract patrons to venues in the Detroit Theatre District. Early support was helpful in contributing excitement and optimism for the District. Although Mayor Archer still supports the District as an asset to the community and region, recently attention has been diverted to other issues concerning the city, including the new stadiums and the late approval by voters of casino gambling for Detroit. As major issues for the City, these demand much time and energy, as well as press. However, in efforts to create a substantial “critical mass” around Grand Circus Park, these issues are *all* elements in the plan.

The stadiums and Theatre District (and perhaps gambling) are hoped to create a synergetic effect in bringing people to Detroit and creating a place for Detroit citizens to recreate and entertain themselves. As such , the stadiums and theatres should not be viewed as competing interests. Since the decisions have been made as to the placement of the stadiums basically within the Theatre District (indeed, buildings are already being torn down to make way), efforts should be made to bring positive attention to all components of the project. In terms of the all-important publicity role that the Mayor plays in the city, the Theatre District should not be sacrificed to the new stadiums. In effect, the Theatre

District has been nearly put “on hold” until the stadiums are built. Instead, positive publicity and funding should continue to be directed to the District while the stadium project unfolds. In this way, when the stadiums are finally open for business, there will not be an even longer wait for the fruition of the “critical mass” at Grand Circus Park. It will already be there waiting.

Mayor Edward Rendell of Philadelphia has met with quite a bit of success in this regard. Since the Avenue of the Arts, Inc. was created in 1992, the Mayor has been a tireless supporter of the project. Since Mayor Rendell has made the Avenue one of the highest priorities in his administration, publicity has remained high over the years. The Mayor also takes part in fund-raisers and works to solicit donations for the project.

One major difference between the Detroit Theatre District and Philadelphia’s Avenue of the Arts, which should be reiterated, is that while the Philadelphia project was most forcefully initiated *by the city*, the Detroit Theatre District has arrived on the backs of private and corporate investors and non-profit organizations. This difference is probably a critical element which differentiates the visibility and consistency of the two projects.

Another difference, perhaps not as critical but one which should be noted, is the differing personal styles of the two mayors. Whereas Ed Rendell has been called a “cheerleader” for the Avenue, Mayor Archer is much more subdued and careful in his selection of endorsements.²¹² While neither man lacks character or charisma, their styles of government and public personae are quite different. This may or may not have a direct bearing on the visibility of the projects. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze the effects of mayoral behavior on the perception of development projects, however, it seems to be a possible factor worth mentioning.

²¹² Jane Slaughter, “Mayoral Muscle,” *Metro Times*, July 24-30, 1996, p. 9

The differences in municipal support in these cases are due to a variety of factors, including mayoral support in generating publicity and differences in planning agencies. The most prominent factor, however, is probably due to the nature of the cities themselves. The context of the Avenue of the Arts in the City of Philadelphia as *the* major development project underway is greatly different from that of Detroit in which the Theatre District is one of several efforts at the revitalization of the city's physical fabric and economy. The basic differences in locale and context must be considered in any project comparison such as this. The evaluation of historical data, as presented here, is only one way of accomplishing this task.

4.3 Organization and Management

The organization and management of cultural centers is also critical. Many of the most successful cultural centers in the United States, although made up of individual business ventures, are organized in some form of conglomerate which allows them to work together toward common goals. Although this is probably not a necessity for success, these organizations are characteristic of various successful projects throughout the United States.

Cleveland's Playhouse Square Center, long regarded as one of the finest performing arts centers in the country, is made up of three restored historic theatres.²¹³ Rivaling Lincoln and Kennedy Centers, Playhouse Square provides venues for local and touring performance groups while bringing millions of dollars to Cleveland's economy.²¹⁴ Two established groups, the Playhouse Association and the Playhouse Square Operating

²¹³ Bill Golightly, "Cleveland's cultural vitality is measured with such institutions as Playhouse Square," *Horizon*. Vol. 29. Dec. 1986. p. 9.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9-10, and

Company, combined to form the Playhouse Square Foundation, which is responsible for overseeing the “management and redevelopment of the center...”²¹⁵

The case of New York City’s Times Square revival is dramatic. Touted as once having been “a symbol not only of the sleazy side of big-city America but also the intractability of its decay,” Times Square has started on its way to a complete turnaround in the last few years.²¹⁶ When the government decided that they had to act to turn the area around, the 42nd Street Development project, a division of the larger state organization - The Empire Development Corporation - , was required to carry out the “official renewal plan.”²¹⁷ Currently, a non-profit organization created by the city and state of New York, New 42nd Street Inc., supervises the development of the 42nd Street block.²¹⁸ Around the time of the commitment of the Disney Corporation to 42nd Street in 1995, agreements had been signed with AMC and Madame Tussaud’s, and recently a building for Conde Nast publishers was begun.²¹⁹

These major developments did not occur merely as a result of the change in management from a city agency to a non-profit organization. Instead, the purpose of this discussion lies in noting the creation of New 42nd Street Inc. as important in recognizing the placement of trust. The revitalization effort in New York’s Times Square is one of the largest and most publicized of cultural or entertainment centers in recent memory which began based around historic theaters. The fact that a non-profit organization was created and entrusted with such a monumental task is a testament to their empirical efficacy.

Frederick Rosen, “A Curtain Call for Old Theaters,” *The Saturday Evening Post*. Vol. 257. March 1985. p. 44.

²¹⁵ Golightly, p. 9-10.

²¹⁶ Anthony Bianco, “A Star is Reborn,” *Business Week*. July 8, 1996. p. 102.

²¹⁷ Paul Goldberger, “The New Times Square: Magic That Surprised the Magicians,” *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 1996. p. C-11.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, and

Ned Cramer, “Theater restoration inaugurates Times Square revival,” *Architecture*. Vol. 85. Feb. 1996. p. 29.

Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts, Inc. is much the same. Instigated by Mayor Rendell, the group is a non-profit organization which oversees fund-raising, capital improvement projects, political advocacy, and economic development along the Avenue.²²⁰ Each of the theatres and cultural organizations along the Avenue of the Arts are individually owned and operated. What AAI provides is coordination among the individual organizations in the above stated manner to form a cohesive entity along the Avenue while addressing the needs of individual member organizations.

The theatres in the Detroit Theatre District are also individually owned and operated; one by a corporation, two by non-profit groups, and two by a private investor.²²¹ Although various development organizations exist in the area, there are none devoted exclusively to the development of the Theatre District. (The Grand Circus Park Association probably comes closest.) This may be something for theatre owners and the city to consider in propelling the project to its desired status as a premiere cultural/entertainment zone. Included in this organization would be representatives from the new stadiums. Although there would probably be a lot of work, frustration and compromise involved, this may lead to a cohesive "critical mass" in downtown Detroit.

An organization which is a nearby model of an inclusive non-profit organization is the University Center Cultural Association (UCCA). This organization, with its locus farther north around Woodward Avenue, counts 55 member groups and individuals in the

²¹⁹ Goldberger, C-12.

²²⁰ Interview with Matthew Schultz, Oct. 31, 1996.

²²¹ These are of the theatres which are currently open and operating within the District. Orchestra Hall, outside of the Theatre District proper, is owned and operated by the non-profit Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

area. The mission of the UCCA is to promote and enhance their area of Detroit.²²² The organizations basic goals and strategy are as follows:

“The UCCA bridges the various interests of the many organizations in the area and focuses on the common goals of physical development and maintenance and attracting people to the outstanding resources of the University Cultural Center.”²²³

Some UCCA activities include technical assistance for developers, beautification programs, producing a guide to residences in the area, and organizing various festivals and activities throughout the year. UCCA already counts the Ilitch family as members, and attends some meetings of the Grand Circus Park Association to keep up with issues and what is happening down Woodward Avenue toward the river.²²⁴ Perhaps representatives from the UCCA could serve in an advisory capacity for a fledgling Detroit Theatre District management organization.

It has already been shown that getting Theatre District member organizations to work together in a common interest may be challenging. Joint promotional activities have been difficult to assemble. Generally, one joint promotional event/ publication runs per year. Year-round joint promotion has not been worked out among potential participants.²²⁵

It is possible that the Detroit Theatre District is a place in which disparate viewpoints and concerns can be overcome in order to be able to work together as a whole. Private development has been reasonably successful in this endeavor already. There is always room for improvement, however, and organizing with a defined set of goals may be one way to begin.

²²² Conversation with Jennifer Cansfield, Community Development Coordinator with the University Cultural Center Association. March 10, 1997.

²²³ “University Cultural Center Area Guide,” pamphlet. (Detroit, MI, n.d.)

²²⁴ Conversation, Jennifer Cansfield.

²²⁵ Conversation with Diane Jones of Zachary & Associates, Detroit, MI. March 10, 1997.

Part V: Conclusion

The roles that historic theatres play in urban revitalization schemes have been of growing importance. From single theatres in small towns to cultural districts in large cities, redevelopment and reuse of the theatres have been varied and largely successful. The cases of the Detroit Theatre District and Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts are unique unto themselves, and yet similar in the basic needs of their surrounding communities.

The question remains in some part, "Why stabilize, renovate, restore, or reuse these theatres?" The resounding answer seems to be that it is because they are *needed* in some form or other. In addition to the vanishing architectural merits of theatres and old movie palaces, there is a continuing need for performance space in these communities, as well as a need for economic redevelopment. The reuse of these spaces presents the opportunity for less expensive capital building projects in return for wonderful spaces for performers and patrons alike. These buildings are major investment opportunities for owners, theatre groups, citizens, and the cities in which they reside. In using the buildings as such opportunities, economic and personal investors stand the chance of a great return.

In the cases presented here, theatres are individually owned, they are somehow organized into a development framework, and they have some general support from the municipalities and the citizens. The degree to which these elements exist, however, is of primary concern. While the Detroit Theatre District has been a standing development concept since the mid-1980's, the relatively recent (early 1990's) Avenue of the Arts in Philadelphia has shot ahead in terms of accomplishing district cohesion, identity, and development. This may be attributed to the various factors outlined here, especially the presence of a strong organization and their very active role in development and publicity, as well as public interest in Philadelphia. It has been stated that a major reason that Detroit

lags in realizing the Detroit Theatre District and other major projects is the lack of a supportive and taxable population. This may be true. However, the active participation of a well-organized group in marketing the project could result in sizable amounts of support from outside of the city tax base, as it has in Philadelphia.

Considering the three strategies for revitalization presented in the previous section, some suggestions may be heeded for future action in the development of the Detroit Theatre District:

- In terms of historic preservation legislation, enforcement clauses must not be ignored. The mere presence of laws and ordinances on the books does not make them effective or binding. The knowledge of the tools that historic preservation laws provide in terms of designation and protection should also be shared with property owners so that they may utilize them if they so choose. This suggestion applies to Philadelphia, Detroit, and any other community with this type of legislation in effect.
- Municipal support for large-scale historic preservation and revitalization projects is crucial to their integration into the public sphere and their ultimate success. Efforts by planning agencies to recognize the importance of such endeavors as the Detroit Theatre District and the Avenue of the Arts should be recognized and acted upon. These studies and recommendations, combined with the support and positive publicity generated by a figurehead such as the Mayor, could go a long way in establishing a knowledge of and public support for major revitalization projects using historic structures.
- A strong umbrella organization with a defined set of goals should be in place to provide various services for the members of the district. As Philadelphia's Avenue of the Arts and Detroit's UCCA have shown in differing degrees, such an organization may help

in combining the strengths of its members in forming a cohesive identity for the district. In addition to providing financial support/advice, political advocacy, and marketing strategies, the presentation of the district as a unit unto itself is important in achieving the kind of visibility and stability which is required for survival and success.

In developing a “critical mass” around Grand Circus Park, the Detroit Theatre District, instead of existing as a singular entity, is now emerging as a complementary aspect in a larger development plan for the area which includes the building of two new sports stadiums. Due to the seasonal nature of such sporting facilities, it is crucial that the Theatre District evolve further into a major presence for the city. As historic theatres are anchors on the Avenue of the Arts, the Detroit Theatre District should be the anchor for the larger cultural/entertainment area which is developing in Detroit. The successes of individual theatres in the District are indicative of the community and professional support that they have received. The goal now should be to further capitalize on that investment and success to make the Detroit Theatre District, together with its adjacent entertainment, sporting and retail areas, the jewel that it once was and can be once again.

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Other Sources of Primary Materials:

Preservation Wayne
4735 Cass Avenue
Detroit, MI 48202
Contact: Michael Hauser, Board member

Materials include historic and contemporary programs, posters, newspaper clippings, etc.; compiled histories; information on past and current restoration efforts in the Theatre District and throughout the city of Detroit.

Avenue of the Arts, Inc.
123 S. Broad St. Suite 2126
Philadelphia, PA 19109
Contact: Matthew Schultz, Assistant Director

Materials include newspaper clippings, newsletters, and programs; access to economic impact studies and other information on the Avenue and the surrounding area.

Theatre Collection
Free Library of Philadelphia
20th & Vine St.
Philadelphia, PA

Collection includes background material on the history of the theatre in general, and specifically in Philadelphia. Materials also include newspaper articles, photographs, programs, and others.

Detroit City Planning Department
2300 Cadillac Tower
Detroit, MI 48226

Data on file includes newspaper articles on the Detroit Theatre District in addition to other planning endeavors, mostly from the last thirty years. Also, maps, *Master Plan and Policies* for the City of Detroit, and other data generated in city planning projects.

Student Survey Data

Surveys of students were attempted at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. For students enrolled in programs related to the creative and performing arts, the venues in their area have the potential to serve an important teaching function by exposing the students to professional examples in their field of study that they may not otherwise experience. These surveys were attempted in order to determine how students at universities local to the studied districts use the cultural amenities and perceive their surroundings.

As shown in the example surveys included, many of the questions were free-answer, rather than yes/no questions. Also, not every respondent answered all of the questions in the survey. This accounts for the variety in the data sets. In the case of Wayne State University (Detroit), most respondents were pursuing careers outside of the performing or creative arts. The respondents taking part in film studies programs offered overwhelmingly more data in all categories.

Unfortunately, only a minimal number of surveys were filled out and returned. Of those returned, however (especially in Philadelphia), the data that they provide are useful to note in terms of future directed marketing or development projects. It is understood that this sample is not representative of the general population, nor of the student population at-large.

University of the Arts Student Survey

Please feel free to use the back or attach more sheets if you feel the need. Thanks A LOT for your participation!

Local address (block/street/city is sufficient)

Originally from (city/state)

Year in school

Fr. So. Jr. Sr. other

Age

17-25 26-30 31 & over

Sex

M F

Major(s)/Minor(s)

What do you like **and** dislike about the area where you live and attend school (if you live locally)?

Are you aware of organizations around your school which relate to your major?

Do you take advantage of them?

Do you attend concerts, theatre, films, museums or other cultural events in the area?

If so, where and how often?

How many times in the last year (or semester, specify) have you attended each of the following?

Arts Bank _____	Merriam Theatre _____
Clef Club _____	Academy of Music _____
Wilma Theatre _____	Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts _____
YM/YWHA _____	Rock Hall/Cornwell Dance Center (Temple U) _____
Walnut St. Theater _____	other (movies, theatre, music, etc.) _____

Are you aware of any of the venues offering student discounts?

Was the availability of these activities a factor in your decision of where to attend school?

Is your school affiliated with any of the above listed institutions/venues?

Do you see options for future involvement?

Do you feel safe in the area? Alone or with others/ day or night?

Can you suggest ways to make this area more attractive to people to come and attend events and functions at these venues and STAY in the city when the event is over?

DATA: University of the Arts, South Broad Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Total surveys returned: 12

Originally from Philadelphia: Yes=2 No=9 n/a=1

Year in school: Freshman=6 Sophomore=5 Junior=1

Sex: M=6 F=6 All respondents were between the ages 17-25.

Major/Minor: Theatre/Acting=2 Graphic Design=1
Visual Arts=1 Animation/Illustration=4
Photography=1 Art Therapy=1
Opera/Music Ed.=1 n/a=2

What they like about the area:
convenience=6 community=1
cultural events=2 history=2
refinishing of the Avenue=1

What they dislike about the area:
businesses, etc. close too early=2
unsafe=2 noise=1
movie theatres located too far away=1

Of choices provided, where students have attend in the last year events:
Arts Bank=22 Merriam Theatre=40+
Clef Club=2 Academy of Music=6
Wilma Theatre=7 PA Academy of Fine Art=2
Gershman YM&HA=8 Walnut Street Theatre=8
Temple University venues=0
Other (including music venues, galleries, movie theatres)=200+

Students aware of student discount: Majority are aware

Were cultural amenities a factor in the decision to attend the University?
Yes=4 No=7 n/a=1

Perceptions of safety:
Comfortable alone during the day=11 Comfortable alone at night=6
Comfortable with others at night=9

Suggestions for the area:
keep businesses, etc. open later=4 offer weekend discount=1
more youth-oriented activities=2 increase affordability of events=3
increase arts funding=1 increase security=1
deal more effectively with homeless/street people=1

DATA: University of the Arts, continued

It is worth noting that both students who mentioned that they disliked the feeling of not being safe in the area were female. Also, opinions and suggestions for improvements for the area seem somewhat in line with other surveys, such as *The State of Center City*, prepared by the Center City District (Philadelphia: CCD, January, 1996).

Wayne State University Student Survey

Please feel free to use the back or attach more sheets if you feel the need. Thanks A LOT for your participation!

Local address (block/street/city is sufficient)

Originally from (city/state)

Year in school		Age		Sex					
Fr.	So.	Jr.	Sr.	other	17-25	26-30	31 & over	M	F

Major(s)/Minor(s)

What do you like **and** dislike about the area where you live and attend school (if you live locally)?

Are you aware of organizations around your school which relate to your major?

Do you take advantage of them?

Do you attend concerts, theatre, films, museums or other cultural events in the area?

If so, where and how often?

How many times in the last year (or semester, specify) have you attended each of the following?

Fox Theatre _____	Gem Theatre _____
State Theatre _____	Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts _____
Orchestra Hall _____	The Majestic (specify restaurant, film, etc.) _____
Detroit Opera Theatre _____	Detroit Institute of Art (museum, film, etc.) _____
other _____	

Are you aware of any of the venues offering student discounts?

Was the availability of these activities a factor in your decision of where to attend school?

Is your school affiliated with any of the above listed institutions/venues?

Do you see options for future involvement?

Do you feel safe in the area? Alone or with others/ day or night?

Can you suggest ways to make this area more attractive to people to come and attend events and functions at these venues and STAY in the city when the event is over?

Plates



Plate 1. Map of the Detroit Theater District, highlighting all theatre buildings, including those which have been restored and those which are vacant.



Plate 2. The Adams Theatre, Detroit, MI, March 1997.
This building is currently owned by Little Caesar Enterprises, Inc. Specific development or rehabilitation plans are unknown at this time.



Plate 3. The Detroit Opera House, Detroit, MI, August 1996.
This photo shows the new facade, facing Grand Circus Park. Other historic facades have
been retained, such as that facing Broadway Street.



Plate 4. The Madison Theatre, Detroit, MI, March 1997.
This building is currently owned by the Michigan Opera Theatre, whose permanent home is across Broadway Street. This facade of the Madison Theatre faces Grand Circus Park, but is obscured by the elevated People Mover track.



Plate 5. The National Theatre, Detroit, MI, March 1997.
This is a remaining theatre on Monroe Street, the “original” theatre district in Detroit.
The building is currently vacant.



Plate 6. The State Theatre, Detroit, MI, March 1997.

The State was the first theatre property bought by Charles Forbes as an investment within what is now the Detroit Theatre District. Currently owned by Mr. Forbes' company Forbes Management, Inc., the State Theatre operates as a concert hall and night club. The office space in the floors above the theatre are over 80% occupied.



Plate 7. The United Artists Theatre, Detroit, MI, March 1997.
This former movie palace is currently vacant, and was recently bought by Little Caesar Enterprises, Inc. Development plans are unknown.



Plate 8. The TeleNews, Detroit, MI, March 1997.

Once a major source of news for the public and a fine arts movie theatre, the TeleNews (also known as the TeleArts) is currently vacant. It is located just south of Grand Circus Park on Woodward Avenue.



Plate 9. 1515 Broadway, Detroit, MI, March 1997.
This venue is multi-purpose, including dancing, performance art, legitimate performances,
and film, notably displaying the works of the Detroit Film Coalition.



Plate 10. Wayne State University's Bonstelle Theatre, Detroit, MI, March 1997. This theatre has been restored and is currently used for student and touring productions.



Plate 11. The Majestic, Detroit, MI, August 1996.
Recently restored and in use, the Majestic is one of the theatres which remains on Woodward Avenue north of the Detroit Theatre District.



Plate 12. The American Academy of Music, Philadelphia, PA, March 1997.



Plate 13. The Museum of American Art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Philadelphia, PA, March 1997.
Designed by Frank Furness, this is one of the cultural institutions on North Broad Street.



Plate 14. The Uptown Theatre, Philadelphia, PA, March 1997.
Designated as part of the Avenue of the Arts, plans are being developed for its restoration
and reuse.



Plate 15. Wilma Theatre, Philadelphia, PA, March 1997.
This theatre represents the new construction included in the Avenue of the Arts.

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