The Routledge Guide to Broadway

Ken Bloom
The
Routledge Guide to
Broadway
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“Broadway may only be a street to some people, but to some of the rest of us it’s a religion.” So claimed Eddie Foy Sr. on stage at the Palace Theater, and thousands of people have proved his statement true.

Times Square is the only spot where the hundreds of different worlds that comprise New York City meet face to face. The result has been funny, dramatic, and sometimes deadly. Times Square mixes hookers, Broadway stars, gangsters, newspapermen, schnorrers and bon vivants, rubber neckers and passersby. These worlds all coexist in ten blocks of Broadway.

The history of Times Square goes back before the founding of the United States. In 1776, the English general William Howe attacked Manhattan from the East River, near what is today 37th Street. This later became the subject of Robert E. Sherwood’s play Small War on Murray Hill and the Rodgers and Hart musical Dearest Enemy. When news of Howe’s landing reached General George Washington, he immediately brought his troops down from Harlem, where they were headquartered. From downtown came the American General Israel Putnam (who later had a Times Square building named after him). Putnam’s guide was Aaron Burr.

Washington and Putnam occupied sites on what are now Bryant Park, behind the New York Public Library on 42nd Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, and the area near the present-day Broadway between 43rd and 44th Streets. Years later, Washington would enjoy taking his wife, Martha, on a carriage ride through the area.

During the early 1800s, this area was the home of squatters who settled along the creek known as Great Kill. The stream was later filled in and became 42nd Street. The area was known for its goat farms and as the site of manure dumping, a big business given the importance of the horse in the nineteenth century. Dutch farmers began settling the area and erecting farms.

John Jacob Astor and William Cutting purchased a seventy-acre plot of land between Broadway and the Hudson River, bounded by 42nd Street to the south and 46th Street to the north, for $25,000 and built Medreef Eden farm. Astor had arrived in the country in 1784 from Waldorf, Germany. He began a fur trade called the American Fur Company (the Astor Place subway station features a beaver in tile decoration as a tribute to Astor). Astor built a series of forts in Oregon to protect his fur business and began trading with China from the Pacific Coast. He also dealt in English pianofortes.

John J. Norton owned a large farm on the west side of 42nd Street. On September 28, 1825, he ceded a part of his farm, the Hermitage, to the city so that it could construct 42nd Street. The city paid Norton $10 for the rights of passage.

In 1829, a local paper carried an advertisement that read in part: “To let-large and commodious house and garden spot situated on Forty-second and Forty-third Streets, and 100 feet from Eighth Avenue. Well calculated for boarding school, summer retreat or private family-being pleasantly situated on high ground with view of North River. House has 25 rooms, good well and pump in cellar. Garden is laid out and at present planted for spring vegetables.”

The streetcar line finally reached the summer homes around East 42nd Street in 1839.
The 42nd Street thoroughfare was used to drive cattle from the docks to slaughter houses on the East Side. The cattle arrived at 42nd Street on the Weehawken Ferry from New Jersey. Horsecar lines from the ferry also took passengers downtown.

Houses, stores, schools, and churches were built in the area. Bloomingdale's Baptist Church (1841), the Forty-second Street Presbyterian Church (1868) and the Methodist-Episcopal Asylum for the Aged and Infirm (c. 1855) all opened on 42nd Street. The Bloomingdale's Baptist Church became the Central Baptist Church in 1868, the Forty-second Street Presbyterian Church became St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church in 1875, and the Asylum closed its doors in 1883 and was converted into the Clinton Apartment House. In 1878, St. Louis College “for Catholic boys of refined families” occupied 224 West 58th Street. The Church of St. Mary the Virgin at 228 West 45th Street was an Episcopal church with 600 members. In 1866, the Sisterhood of St. John the Baptist opened the Midnight Mission “for the reclamation of fallen women, who are here given homes, and, if found worthy, aided in obtaining permanent homes or employment.” The mission was at 208 West 46th Street. The George Bruce Memorial Circulating Library was situated at 226 West 42nd Street beginning in 1883.

The area, named after London's Long Acre, became the center of the carriage industry. Where the Winter Garden theater now stands was Tattersall's American Horse Exchange. Harness shops and stables made up the majority of the businesses on Longacre Square. As the theater industry moved into the area, the carriage shops moved northward and were transformed into garages and automobile showrooms when the horse became passé.

Slowly but surely, the New York theater industry came uptown from the City Hall area to 14th Street and Union Square to 23rd Street and Madison Square to 34th Street and Herald Square. The theaters followed the diagonal swath that Broadway cut through the city.

Little by little, new theaters began nearing Longacre Square. Among the first theaters built in the Longacre Square area was the Metropolitan Concert Hall at 41st and Broadway. Built in May 1880, the concert hall was never a success. It became the Metropolitan Casino, Alcazar, Cosmopolitan Theatre, a roller-skating rink, and an exhibition hall. It was demolished in 1887 to make way for the Broadway Theatre, a very successful venture.

T. Henry French and two partners built the Broadway, which opened on March 3, 1888, with a production of La Tosca starring Fanny Davenport. French was the son of Samuel French whose name graces the still popular play-publishing business he founded. The new Romanesque building seated 1,776 patrons with a 75-foot-wide stage. Like many theaters of the time, the Broadway was home to acting companies, in this case led by De Wolf Hopper and Francis Wilson. Both companies specialized in comic operas. The Broadway Theatre left the legitimate field in 1908 when vaudeville and movies took over its stage. The theater was torn down in 1929 and replaced with a garment-center building.

The Casino Theatre, built in 1882 at the corner of 39th Street and Broadway, was a favorite of audiences and performers. In 1900, the same year that Macy's moved from the "Ladies Mile" to Herald Square, the Casino had a roof garden built over its auditorium, the first of a popular breed of theaters around the turn of the century.

One year after the construction of the Casino, the Metropolitan Opera House opened on Broadway between 39th and 40th Streets. The arrival of the distinguished opera company gave the area a new cachet, and soon society began to look at the West Side as an attractive area. The Opera House suffered a major fire in 1892, but was rebuilt and lasted until 1966 when a new (and inferior) Metropolitan Opera House was constructed in Lincoln Center.

By 1893, New Yorkers were spending $6 million a year on entertainment. That same year (the year of the World's Columbian Exposition and Grover Cleveland's inauguration as president), land owner Robert Goelet built
a theater on his plot of land on 38th Street and Broadway and called it Abbey’s Theatre after producer Henry Abbey. *King’s Handbook of New York* (1893) predicted that the Abbey would occupy “a prominent and worthy place among the most notable theatres of New York and the world.” But this was not to be. Abbey left the theater in 1896, and the name was changed to the Knickerbocker Theatre under the auspices of Al Hayman. The Knickerbocker was torn down in 1930.

The first theater on 42nd Street was the American Theatre built in 1893, the year of a great stock market panic. The parcel of land included property on 41st Street, 42nd Street, and Eighth Avenue and was purchased for producer T. Henry French by theatrical real estate agent Hartie I. Phillips from seventeen different owners. The theater was next to the Franklin Savings Bank directly on the corner and across the street from J. Wieland’s Pharmacy, which stood on the northeast corner. Although the theater proper was built on land bounded by 41st Street and Eighth Avenue, the entrance, due to the plot’s odd makeup, was on 42nd Street. Later theaters like the Lyric, wanting a 42nd Street facade, would copy the example set by the American architect Charles C. Haight.

French promised that the 1,900-seat Spanish Renaissance-style theater would be “the largest and the handsomest combination theatre in the United States.” The *New York Times* said that “the first impression one gets of it is not of great size; its lines are such that every spectator, even those in the upper gallery, is brought in close relation with the stage.” The *Times* also reviewed the theater’s roof garden where vaudeville acts were presented. The paper reported: “The main garden is 90 feet square, and is brilliantly lighted by arches and trefoils or powerful electric lights. It will accommodate 650 persons, who, in case of rain, can take refuge in two large-roofed apartments, where free air is a feature and shelter is perfect. The stage is large and some say it is the largest among the roof garden stages.”

The main auditorium’s opening production was *The Prodigal Daughter*, an import from London. The show was a spectacle with a cast of almost two hundred, along with nine racehorses, which actually ran a steeplechase course, complete with water hazard and hurdles constructed on a moving treadmill. The show also had a full complement of hounds for the hunt. All did not always go well in the difficult scene. George Odell wrote in *Annals of the New York Stage*: “In the race scene, on May 26th… the horse, Columbus, fell, in jumping over the hurdles, and rolled upon his rider, Guttenberg Billy. The fiery steed, Rochefort, ridden by Leonard Boyne, attempted to climb over the iron balcony. The panic was completed when Julia Arthur employed the leading lady’s privilege of fainting…. Thenceforth, so far as I know, the horses behaved according to the script of the play.”

The show was a great success and the *New York Dramatic Mirror* exclaimed: “No midsummer theatrical performances in this city have ever met with the phenomenal success of those at Mr. French’s American Theatre.” But subsequent offerings were not successful in drawing audiences; the American suffered losses and finally became a vaudeville house, and its name was changed to the American Music Hall. It briefly presented motion pictures before turning, in 1929, to burlesque. The theater couldn’t weather the Great Depression and was demolished in 1932.

In 1895, in the area known as “thieves lair” by locals, Oscar Hammerstein I built his Olympia theater complex. Electric lights had just been installed in the Long Acre area. The theaters that made up the Olympia complex on Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets were not a success, although they managed to draw attention to the Square as an entertainment center.

The area along Broadway from 37th Street and 42nd Street was dubbed “the Rialto.” Soon the Longacre theater district would also be called “the Rialto.” In the 1950s and 1960s, Sam Zolotow wrote a popular theater column in the *New York Times* called “News of the Rialto.”
Almost eighty theaters were constructed in the Times Square area. Many were built by producers and actor/managers who headed their own stock companies. They leased the land from the original owners who were intelligent enough not to let go of their land holdings. More and more producers like David Belasco and Daniel Frohman had their own houses built. Later, just before, and during the 1920s, impresarios like Florenz Ziegfeld and Earl Carroll would build theaters to house their productions.

Most of the successful theaters in the area were owned by the six members of the Theatrical Syndicate, a trust that was happy to force out its competition. The syndicate was put out of business in 1916 and replaced by another equally powerful group—the Shubert Brothers. The Shuberts’ power cannot be overestimated.

During the Depression, when breadlines snaked around Duffy Square at Broadway and 47th Street, it was the Shuberts who kept American theater alive. The Shuberts were forced to break up their near monopoly in the 1950s.

The Square’s preeminence was solidified in 1904 when the *New York Times* (founded in 1851) tore down the Pabst Hotel and built its new headquarters, the Times Tower. It is telling that the entrance of the Pabst Hotel faced downtown while the new Times Tower faced uptown.

The move by the *New York Times* to the Square led to the City Council’s voting to rename Longacre Square to Times Square. In April 1904, the mayor signed the designation.

The Times Tower gained prominence in the square when the Motogram electric zipper sign was wrapped around the building. The Motogram gave the latest news; thousands of New Yorkers, in the years before the widespread use of radio, would gather in the Square to see the latest reports. Even during radio’s and, later, television’s prominence in timely news reporting, the Times Tower remained the focal point. New Yorkers gathered to see election results, news of the Japanese surrender in World War II (and the resultant V-J Day celebration), and sports finals.

The Square was also used for mass rallies to sell war bonds for publicity stunts, political demonstrations, and for the annual New Year’s Eve celebration. Parades, including Macy’s annual Thanksgiving Day parade, marched down Broadway through the Square.

On October 27, 1904, the West Side Subway was opened from Fourth Avenue to 42nd Street on the East Side then across the thoroughfare to Broadway and up to 125th Street. Within one year, the Times Square subway stop had been used by over 5,000,000 people. The laying of the new subway lines through the city, the consolidation of many train lines into Grand Central Terminal at 42nd Street and Vanderbilt Avenue in 1878, and the completion of the Third Avenue and Sixth Avenue elevated trains also in that year increased the popularity of burgeoning Times Square.

In 1905, gasoline-driven buses replaced the horse-drawn streetcars. The city saw its first metered taxi cabs in 1907. Unfortunately, many of the theaters were not built to screen out the increased noise from the traffic. Patrons sitting in the last rows of the orchestra at the Republic Theater could not hear Mrs. Patrick Campbell in *Magda*. Press agent A. Toxen Worm had a brainstorm when George Tyler facetiously suggested that the problem could be solved if 42nd Street were covered with tree bark. Worm thought the idea was the ideal publicity stunt and ordered the street so covered.

The construction of Madison Square Garden on 50th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues brought many sports enthusiasts to the area. The money to be made in area nightclubs and later speakeasies, not to mention the money laundering through Broadway investments, led to an influx of gangsters.

The opening of such hotels as the Astor, the Metropole at 41st Street between Broadway and Seventh Avenue (the home of George M. Cohan and Enrico Caruso), the Vendome at Broadway and 41st Street, the Claridge, and the Knickerbocker brought tourists and
travelers to the area. The docks, only four avenues away, hosted the arrivals and departures of the giant luxury liners making their port in New York. The Times Square hotels were the nearest deluxe accommodations for these travelers and were halfway between the ports and the rail lines. Fancy restaurants like Rector’s, Shanley’s, Murray’s Roman Gardens, and Churchill’s served upper-class patrons such as Anna Held and Diamond Jim Brady. The years following World War I were boom years for Times Square. Money was plentiful and New York was the richest American city. This wealth led to changes along the Great White Way. The theatrical unions, such as Actors’ Equity, gained power and demanded increases in pay. Inflation, spurred by the success of the stock market, raised production costs, and ticket prices reflected the increased costs and increased taxes needed to support the growing metropolis.

The boom era culminated both financially and artistically with the theatrical season of 1927–28, when 257 plays opened in the 71 theaters around Times Square. Shortly after this, however, the industry suffered three major blows, one financial and two artistic. The first was the stock market crash of 1929, which forced many producers and their backers into receivership. Even the powerful Shuberts lost many theaters. The second was the acceptance of sound pictures by the public. Great movie palaces were built along Broadway in the late 1920s. The construction of these massive halls culminated with the greatest of all, the Roxy Theater, under the auspices of S. L. (“Roxy”) Rothafel, the man most responsible for the development of the movie palace. The third big effect on the industry was the emergence of radio as a mass-entertainment force.

During the 1930s, many theaters were darkened by the sudden drop off of theatrical ventures. Many of the houses were converted to radio (and later television) studios or burlesque houses. Still more were demolished or left empty. The Federal Theater Project managed to keep some of the theaters lit. The burlesque houses slowly led to the eventual decline of the 42nd Street area. When Mayor LaGuardia outlawed burlesque, the theaters became grind movie houses and attracted an even lower class of clientele. Soon, low entertainments like Ripley’s Odditorium and Hubert’s Museum and Flea Circus attracted a decidedly less-risqué crowd to the Great White Way.

World War II brought a new prosperity to the area, but it was a middle-class and lower-class area. Still, the theater remained the center of the nation’s entertainment industry. Due to the popularity of its vigor and unique signage, especially that of Douglas Leigh and the Art-kraft Strauss Sign Company, Times Square itself became a great attraction.

The 1960s and 1970s saw a worsening of the area and a drop in the number of legitimate shows produced on Broadway. Many of the 42nd Street theaters fell into further disrepair and showed kung-fu or porno films round-the-clock. The opening of the Port Authority Bus Terminal brought runaways and vagrants into the area, and Eighth Avenue became known as one of New York’s most undesirable locations. Hustlers of three-card monte and other scams mixed with pickpockets. Peddlers selling fake Gucci bags and imitation Rolex watches crowded the sidewalks. As drugs and prostitution flourished around 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue, numerous plans, all discarded, promised to clean up the area.

Many New York landmarks, including Lindy’s Restaurant, the Astor Hotel, the Paramount Theater, and the Roxy Theater were demolished for high-rise office buildings, which increased land values and destroyed the low-rise ambiance of the area. Many of the great spectacular signs were taken down and replaced by simple illuminated billboards.

During the 1980s, there was a resurgence of activity around the area. Zoning changes made it more profitable to build in the area, and more and more skyscrapers were constructed, pushing out still more of the ancillary businesses that served the theater industry. Preservationists waged an unsuccessful battle to save the Helen Hayes and Morosco theaters. This led to an increased determination to save the
remaining theaters. In late 1987, most of the remaining theaters enjoyed landmark status (over the objections of their owners) and a major redevelopment of 42nd Street was announced by Mayor Edward Koch’s administration, but condemnation of buildings in the area and new construction were stalled by a series of lawsuits. The latest stock market crash, in October 1987, made new construction less attractive. Many of the individuals involved in the redevelopment plan were indicted, and the entire plan came under increased criticism. The Koch administration, astoundingly in favor of redevelopment, insisted on pursuing the plan even after it seemed unwise and unfair to do so.

The future of Times Square as New York’s entertainment center is uncertain. First-run films are not given premieres in the Square, and often open simultaneously throughout Manhattan and the suburbs; Broadway shows, with ever-increasing ticket prices and a reliance on blockbuster musicals, are pricing themselves out of existence.

Even blockbuster hits such as Phantom of the Opera, considered a massive Broadway show, cannot hold a candle to the spectacles of the past. Because salaries are expensive and scenery can be amortized, the physical productions grow and the casts shrink. The thought of producing a show the size of Cole Porter’s Anything Goes (11/21/34) with forty-one principals and a chorus of twenty-five (and this during the Depression) is unthinkable today. The recent Lincoln Center revival had a total of thirty-three cast members. Ziegfeld’s production of the musical comedy Show Boat (12/27/27) had thirty-three principals, thirty-one people in the Jubilee Singers, twelve dancers, and thirty-two ladies and sixteen gentlemen in the chorus—124 cast members in all. A more recent show, Oklahoma! (3/31/43), had twenty-three principals, sixteen singers, and eighteen dancers. Phantom of the Opera, currently at the Majestic Theater, has only thirty-five people in its cast, certainly not an extravaganza by traditional standards.

Very few productions originate on Broadway. The Shuberts and their ilk put their money behind tried-and-true productions that have been successfully mounted in London, off-Broadway, or regional theaters and that will appeal to the broadest possible audience.

There is less and less room, given runaway production costs, for independent producers to put work up on Broadway. The impresario with good ideas and not much capital cannot find a foothold in the new Times Square. The early geniuses who helped make the area so unique could not possibly have succeeded in today’s world. High rents and new construction are forcing out small stores and businesses and they are being replaced with chain stores and fast-food restaurants.

The increase in large skyscrapers further deprives the area of its shops, restaurants, signage locations, and vital nightlife. New buildings often close at 6 p.m. and leave their surrounding blocks empty. Times Square might soon become a ghost town after dark, much as the Wall Street area becomes deserted after the business day.

When Edward Arlington Robinson, on his way to a Broadway show, wrote “The White Lights, Broadway 1906,” he could not have realized just how prophetic his poem would be:

Here, where the white lights have begun
To seethe the way for something fair,
No prophet knew, from what was done,
That there was triumph in the air.

Let us hope that his words will remain true.
AARONS AND FREEDLEY · Today the Shuberts and Nederlanders are the theater owners of note, but prior to the Depression, most producers owned their own theaters. This was a logical outgrowth of the nineteenth-century tradition of the great actor-managers. These actor-managers produced their own shows in which they starred with their stock companies. That tradition faded in the late 1920s as a new generation of producers came on the scene. Other circumstances leading to the end of the actor-managers were the creation of Actors’ Equity and the increased costs of producing theater, which precluded keeping large companies on salary throughout the year.

Also, as American playwrights came into their own, their plays often replaced the European and British repertoire preferred by the old school. This change in drama led to a change in acting style, a change that was hastened by the new popularity of the movies.

As the theater district moved to Times Square, producers rushed to build theaters for their own productions. Owning their own theaters allowed producers to save costs and to avoid the control of competitors. Producers Alex Aarons and Vinton Freedley were no exception. The success of Oh, Kay! led the two producers to follow in the path of others and build their own theater. The name Alvin was arrived at by combining the first letters of each producer’s first names.

Alex A. Aarons was born in Philadelphia in 1891, the son of composer-producer Alfred E. Aarons. Vinton Freedley was born in the same year in the same city.

Among the shows produced by Aarons and Freedley, together and separately were La-La-Lucille (1919); For Goodness Sake (1922); Elsie (1923); Lady, Be Good! (1924) with Fred and Adele Astaire; Tell Me More! (1925); Tip-Toes (1925); Oh, Kay! (1926); Funny Face (1927); Here’s Howe! (1928); Hold Everything! (1928); Treasure Girl (1928); Spring Is Here (1929) and Girl Crazy (1930).

That show was the last at the Alvin Theater under Aarons and Freedley’s management. They lost their theater to the mortgage holders, as did many other theater owners during the Depression.

Aarons and Freedley continued their partnership both at the Alvin and at other Broadway houses after the loss of the Alvin.

Pardon My English (1933) was Aarons’ last Broadway show.

After Aarons’ retirement in 1933, Freedley continued on his own (Aarons died on March 14, 1943). Freedley produced Anything Goes! (1934); Red, Hot and Blue! (1936); Leave It to Me! (1938); Cabin in the Sky (1940); Let’s Face It! (1941); Jackpot (1944); Memphis Bound! (1945); and Great to Be Alive! (1950). Freedley died in New York on June 5, 1969.

Aarons and Freedley had their greatest successes when presenting shows by inspired talents. They were not the sort of creative producers who could save weak shows though their own talents. But their long list of hits proves that they recognized talent and could put together attractive packages that enabled the artists to work to their best advantage.

The team had seven shows by the Gershwins to their credit. Four of these shows featured libretti by Fred Thompson in collaboration with a series of talents, including Guy Bolton, who was also responsible for four scripts. Five of the shows featured the duo-pianists Phil Ohman and Vic Arden. Freedley alone produced four
Cole Porter shows. Ethel Merman appeared in three of their shows.

The shows Aarons and Freedley produced were not necessarily the most artistic endeavors of the people they worked with, but they were among the most popular.

ABBOTT, GEORGE (1887–1995) · George Abbott, or Mr. Abbott as he was known by his contemporaries, enjoyed what is probably the most creative and certainly the longest career in the American Theater. He was involved with 122 productions as playwright, producer, director, actor or play doctor. Often he held more than one role in the same show.

He was responsible for giving many people their first breaks in the theater. Among those who scored their first successes with George Abbott productions were Leonard Bernstein, Garson Kanin, John Kander and Fred Ebb, Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Jerome Robbins, Frank Loesser, Jean and Walter Kerr, Harold Prince, Richard Bissell, Jerome Weidman, Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, Bob Merrill, as well as hundreds of performers, including Carol Burnett, Desi Arnaz, and Nancy Walker.

George Abbott was born in Forestville, New York, on June 25, 1887. His early jobs included Western Union messenger, cowboy, steel worker, swimming instructor, basketball coach, and salesman.

His first play, The Head of the Family, a one-act, was presented by the Harvard Dramatic Club in 1912. He first appeared on Broadway as an actor in The Misleading Lady (11/25/13) at the Fulton Theater (see Helen Hayes Theater).

His first writing assignment was in collaboration with James Gleason on The Fall Guy (3/10/25), which premiered at the Eltinge Theatre.

Among the important shows written, directed, and/or produced by George Abbott were Broadway (1926), which he would direct it again as his last Broadway assignment, opening on his one hundredth birthday, Chicago (1926); Coquette (1927); Twentieth Century (1932); Three Men on a Horse (1935); Jumbo (1935), the first musical directed by Mr. Abbott; Boy Meets Girl (1935) by Kaufman and Hart; On Your Toes (1936); Brother Rat (1936); Room Service (1937); Rodgers and Hart’s The Boys from Syracuse (1938), Too Many Girls (1939) and Pal Joey (1940); Martin and Blane’s Best Foot Forward (1941); On the Town (1944); Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn’s Phil Silvers starer High Button Shoes (1947); Where’s Charley? (1948) with Ray Bolger; Irving Berlin’s Call Me Madam (1950) with Ethel Merman; A Tree Grows in Brooklyn (1951); Wonderful Town (1953) with Rosalind Russell and Edith Adams; Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Me and Juliet (1953); Richard Adler and Jerry Ross’s The Pajama Game (1954) and Damn Yankees (1955); Once Upon a Mattress (1959); Bock and Harnick’s Fiorello! (1959) and Tenderloin (1960); Take Her, She’s Mine (1961); Stephen Sondheim and Burt Shevelove’s A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (1962); and Sumner Arthur Long’s Never Too Late (1962).

Mr. Abbott’s career continued through the late sixties, seventies, and eighties, although he had progressively fewer successes. Among his later productions were Fade Out-Fade In (1964) with Carol Burnett; Kander and Ebb and Liza Minnelli’s Broadway debut in Flora, the Red Menace (1965); and How Now, Dow Jones (12/7/67; 220 performances).

A major revival of On Your Toes, which opened at the Virginia Theater on March 6, 1983, was Mr. Abbott’s last Broadway success. A production of Broadway opened at the Royale Theater on June 25, 1987, Mr. Abbott’s one hundredth birthday. (Unfortunately, it played for only four performances.)

He continued actively pursuing his interests by directing at small theaters and continuing to write for the theater until his death. For exercise he enjoyed his lifelong interests in golf and ballroom dancing. George Abbott died on January 31, 1995.

ACTORS’ EQUITY · Actors’ Equity is the labor union of all professional actors in the American theater. The organization has juris-
diction over all Broadway, off Broadway and
League of Resident Theaters performers. It
represents these actors in all negotiations. Ac-
tors may join Equity by being cast in an Equity
production or by amassing points in smaller
regional and summer stock theaters.

The association was founded on Decem-
ber 22, 1912, by 112 actors as the American
Federation of Actors, but it took until May
26, 1913, for the constitution and bylaws to
be adopted.

Given the sorry state of the theater in-
dustry, four out of five Equity members are
unemployed. In the Times Square area, Eq-
uity members can often be found as waiters
and waitresses in theatrical restaurants and
handing out flyers at the TKTS Booth (where
discounted tickets for that night’s performances
are sold). Less than 5 percent of the member-
ship earns more than $10,000 annually in the
theater.

At the turn-of-the-century, the exploitation
of actors was rife throughout the theater indus-
try. Poor working and traveling conditions, as
well as exploitative employers, made actors’
professional lives difficult and precarious. This
lack of basic amenities worked into the hands
of unscrupulous producers who capitalized on
the bad communications and great distances
between them and their employees. The pro-
ducers were following in the footsteps of the
many captains of industry that exploited work-
ers as a basic economic practice.

While not all producers were untrustworthy,
the standard theatrical practices often left the
actors stranded in cities far from their home
base of New York. Often producers put shows
into rehearsal without the capitalization neces-
sary to open. Rehearsals (for which the actors
were not paid) could last months or until the
producer raised the money. Performers were
often expected to provide their own costumes
and keep them in reasonable shape. These
hardships may have made for many amusing
anecdotes in future biographies, but being
stranded in the middle of nowhere with hostile
locals and no money wasn’t something the ac-
tors looked forward to.

The Pabst Grand Circle Hotel in New York
was the scene of the first meeting to create the
organization. Francis Wilson was elected as the
first president. The original members of the
committee were Albert Bruning, Charles D.
Coburn, Frank Gillmore, William Harcourt,
Milton Sills, and Grant Stewart.

The preamble to the constitution of Actors’
Equity states that the organization will do what
it can to “advance, promote, foster and benefit
the profession.” It spells out the conditions
under which an actor may be employed, elabo-
rates on several benefits to the membership and
instructs the association to work for improved
legislation on behalf of the profession.

The producers didn’t take the fledgling orga-
nization seriously. Problems were exacerbated
by the producers’ unwillingness to discuss
problems with actors’ representatives. Clearly,
a strong action was necessary by the organi-
zation. Its first important action, the actors’
strike of 1919, lasted thirty days and closed
thirty-seven plays in eight cities, prevented the
opening of sixteen others, and was estimated
to cost the industry $3 million, a huge sum
at the time.

During the strike, George M. Cohan sided
with management. He had come up through
the ranks of performers and felt he had good
relationships with both actors and producers.
His attitude was more sentimental than logical.
Marie Dressler, who remembered her days as an
$8 dollar a week chorus girl, helped bring the
chorus girls into the strike. She became the first
president of the Chorus Equity Association,
which later merged with Actors’ Equity. This
strike resulted in Equity being recognized as the
official trade union of the acting profession.

In 1960, Broadway was again disrupted by
a second strike. Contractual negotiations were
undertaken between the association and the
League of New York Theaters, the producers’
organization. An agreement was reached under
which actors received higher rehearsal salaries,
higher minimum salaries, provisions for a pen-
sion plan and welfare benefits.

In 1961, the two organizations agreed that
no member of Equity would be required to
work in a theater “where discrimination is practiced against any actor or patron by reason of his race, creed or color.”

Equity has a reputation for a wariness and distrust of producers. Its newsletter, Equity News, reflects the bureaucracy of the main organization and echoes the attitudes of its staff and many of its more radical members. To its credit, Equity has been trying of late to represent the needs of those actors outside of the Broadway arena. But, too often, Equity seems to operate without an understanding of the legitimate problems producers and other theatrical professionals face. Critics accuse Equity of operating with too much rigidity, preferring to close shows and lose jobs rather than bend rules to allow for special exceptions.

Unfortunately, the current state of the theater industry encourages producers to cut corners and save money at the expense of others. Shows are produced by pharmaceutical heiresses, washed up television actors, and purveyors of ladies lingerie. Where once there was one name above a show title, there are now often five or six or more. Equity can hardly be blamed for being confused as to whom exactly is in charge.

It would seem time for all participants, including Actors’ Equity, to make concessions in order to control ticket prices and encourage investment. Like all the other theatrical trade unions, Actors’ Equity must share part of the blame for the depressed state of current theater.

ADAMS, MAUDE (1872–1953) · Maude Adams was the favorite actress of a generation of theaergoers from the turn of the century until the 1920s. Best known for her interpretations of the characters of James M. Barrie, Adams was perhaps the best-loved actress of her generation.

Born on November 11, 1872, to businessman James Kiskadden and actress Annie Adams, she made her first appearance in her hometown of Salt Lake City in her mother’s arms in the show The Lost Child. She was only nine months old. When the family moved to San Francisco in 1875, a year after arriving in California, she became known at age seven as “La Petite Maude.” On October 17, 1877, when she was seven years old she made her debut in the play Fritz. In 1882, having outgrown children’s parts, she attended a little over a year of school at the Collegiate Institute in Salt Lake City. It was to be her only formal schooling.

The next year she joined a traveling stock company in the company of her now-widowed mother. They arrived in New York City in 1888 and the young actress made her debut in The Paymaster, a series of roles with the E. H. Sothern stock company followed and in 1890 she was taken under the wing of producer Charles Frohman.

Frohman paired her with John Drew in October 1892 in an attempt to make them stars. They first appeared together in the French farce The Masked Ball, adapted by Clyde Fitch. Drew and Adams acted together for four years. Among the shows that Drew and Adams appeared in was 1894’s The Bauble Shop. During that time author James M. Barrie caught her performance and was inspired to adopt his novel The Little Minister into a vehicle for her. She opened in the play in 1897, already manager of her own company. Her performance as Barbie in Barrie’s play ensured her fame and began the love affair between her and her audiences.

Through her career she became forever associated as the premiere interpreter of Barrie’s plays. In addition to The Little Minister, she also appeared in Quality Street (1901), What Every Woman Knows (1908), The Legend of Lenora (1914), and A Kiss for Cinderella (1916).

But Adams’ greatest success was in Barrie’s Peter Pan (11/6/05). The production was an immense success playing 223 performances—an amazing run for its time. It proved to be so popular that Adams made two return engagements on the Empire’s stage as the boy who wouldn’t grow up. Her subsequent New York appearances were in 1912 and 1915.

Of course, she also appeared in non-Barrie productions. These included two of Rostand’s plays, L’Aiglon in 1910 and Chantecler (1911).
She was such a success in the latter show, playing a rooster who thought his crowing makes the sun come up, that on one occasion she received twenty-two curtain calls.

In 1918, while touring in *A Kiss for Cinderella*, she was caught in the great influenza epidemic. After becoming deathly ill, she decided to retire from the stage. She did make a few more appearances, notably touring in 1931–32 opposite the great Otis Skinner’s Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Her Portia was well reviewed which wasn’t always the case with her attempts at Shakespeare. She appeared as Juliet in 1899 but her performance was not a success. She also played Viola in *Twelfth Night* for two performances in 1908 and one performance as Rosalind in *As You Like It* in 1910. She again played in *Twelfth Night* in 1934 as part of a summer stock tour but this time she played Maria.

Later that year, having retired once and for all from the stage, she recreated some of her best-loved roles for radio to great success.

Acting wasn’t her only interest; she was an avid lighting designer. She lighted all her tours and she designed the lighting bridge of Frohman’s Empire Theatre. Her interest in lighting led to her invention of an incandescent bulb used for color film. However, she didn’t patent it and refused to sue when others stole her ideas. From 1921 to 1923 she spent in Schenectady, New York working with General Electric Company engineers.

Her interest in the theater continued although she was retired from performing. In 1937 she founded the drama department at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri where she remained as a full-time teacher for a decade. Following three more years of part-time teaching she retired for good.

She died at her farm in Tannersville, New York, on July 17, 1953 following a heart attack.

**ADELPHI THEATER**  
· See GEORGE ABBOTT THEATER.

**AL HIRSCHFELD THEATRE**  
· 302 W. 45th Street. Architect: G. Albert Lansburgh. Opening as the Martin Beck Theatre: November 11, 1924; *Madame Pompadour*. Vaudeville impresario Martin Beck played out chapter one of his Broadway adventures when he built the Palace Theatre. Forced by the Keith/Albee vaudeville interests, Beck returned to his West Coast-based Orpheum Circuit. When he was forced out of the Orpheum Circuit he returned to New York for the second chapter of his life on Broadway. Beck built the theater bearing his name in 1924 on what many people considered the wrong side of Eighth Avenue. However, the 1,200-seat theater proved immensely popular with audiences and theater people.

The first attraction at the Byzantine-style theater was the operetta *Madame Pompadour*, with music by Leo Fall, a favorite of Viennese audiences. Broadway audiences, however, were growing tired of operetta by the end of the twenties and instead wanted musicals in a more modern vein. *Madame Pompadour* closed after eighty performances.

The famous Clyde Fitch play *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines* was adapted into a musical called simply *Captain Jinks* (1925). Actress Florence Reed shocked audiences as Mother Goddam in the sensational play *The Shanghai Gesture* (1926). The play was laughed at by the critics, but audiences couldn’t wait to see the proceedings. Actor James Gleason, who would later achieve much success as a character actor in Hollywood, wrote a play, *The Shannons of Broadway* (1927), which opened at the Martin Beck. Following this, the Theater Guild took over the stage of the Martin Beck with a series of plays.

The first Guild play at the theater was *Wings Over Europe* (1928) by Robert Nichols and Maurice Browne and directed by the great Rouben Mamoulian. Next, the Guild presented Dudley Digges, Claudette Colbert, Glenn Anders, and Helen Westley in Eugene O’Neill’s little-known play, *Dynamo* (1929). O’Neill himself described the play’s theme as “the passing of the old idea of a Supreme Being and the failure of Science, all-important in this day, to supplant it with something satisfying to the yearning soul of men permeated with the idea
that the creations of Science are miraculous as the creations of the Supreme Being.” Miriam Hopkins, Claude Rains, Henry Travers, Helen Westley, and Morris Carnovsky starred in the next Guild presentation, *The Camel Through the Needle’s Eye* (1929). The play was a natural for the Guild, which often presented middle-European light comedies.

Lee Strasberg, Luther Adler, Lionel Stander, George Tobias, Gale Sondergaard, and Franchot Tone starred in *Red Rust* (1929). This was the second Soviet play to play Broadway, and it was just as unsuccessful as the first, *The First Law*. It proved to be an important event nonetheless for it was the first play presented by the Theater Guild Acting Company, which later metamorphosed into the Group Theater.

Philip Barry’s drama *Hotel Universe* (1930) followed with Ruth Gordon, Morris Carnovsky, Glenn Anders, and Franchot Tone in the leading roles. *Roar China* (1930) featured a huge cast of mostly Asian actors. The drama concerned the Chinese rebellion and the British response. A model of a British warship filled the immense stage in a particularly stunning effect. The Lee Simonson set was among the most impressive of any in Broadway’s history. The first production of the new Group Theater, which evolved from the Theater Guild Acting Company, was *The House of Connelly* (1931) by Paul Green. It was presented at the Martin Beck Theatre under the auspices of the Theater Guild, with Franchot Tone, Art Smith, Stella Adler, Morris Carnovsky, Clifford Odets, and Robert Lewis in the cast.

After moving their successful production of *Elizabeth the Queen* to the Martin Beck, the Lunts chose the theater for the opening of their next play, Robert E. Sherwood’s comedy *Reunion in Vienna* (1931). In 1932, another group took over the stage of the Martin Beck Theatre. The Abbey Irish Theater Players presented productions of *Playboy of the Western World*, *Shadow of a Gunman*, *The Far-off Hills* and *Juno and the Paycock* at the theater.

Next came Katharine Hepburn’s return to Broadway after success in Hollywood. The play was *The Lake* (1933), and the director was one of the most hated geniuses in the history of Broadway, Jed Harris.

_Yellow Jack* (1934) was Sidney Howard’s dramatization of the yellow fever epidemic in Cuba and the search for its cause by Walter Reed. In *Romeo and Juliet* (1935), Katharine Cornell received raves as Juliet, as did Basil Rathbone as Romeo. The production also boasted the enormous talents of Orson Welles, Brian Aherne, John Emery, and Edith Evans. Cornell kept her dressing room at the Martin Beck with a revival of her classic production of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1935). The story of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning also starred Brian Aherne, Brenda Forbes, and Burgess Meredith. Cornell continued her stay after the run of *Barretts* with a production of John van Druten’s *Flowers of the Forest* (1935).

Maxwell Anderson’s *Winterset* (1935) was written entirely in blank verse. Burgess Meredith, who had appeared in the last two Cornell productions, starred in the drama about Sacco and Vanzetti with Richard Bennett, Eduardo Ciannelli, and Margo. The Guild was the American representative of Shaw, but it was not consulted when the playwright gave permission to Guthrie McClintic, the husband of star Katharine Cornell, to produce and direct *Saint Joan* (1936).


The Martin Beck’s next success was Lillian Hellman’s antifascist drama *A Watch on the Rhine* (1941) with Paul Lukas, Mady Christians, George Coulouris, and Lucile Watson in the leads. The play examines the moral dilemma a man faces when forced to defend his beliefs.

In S. N. Behrman’s comedy *The Pirate* (1942), Alfred Lunt played an actor who
pretends to be a notorious pirate in order to impress a young innocent played by Lynn Fontanne. Behrman’s next play at the Martin Beck was even more successful. *Jacobowsky and the Colonel* (1944), Franz Werfel’s comedy, was adapted by Behrman for the talents of Louis Calhern, Annabella, J. Edward Bromberg, Oscar Karlweis, and E. G. Marshall.

After a transfer of the Leonard Bernstein, Betty Comden, and Adolph Green musical *On the Town* from the 44th Street Theatre came an original musical, *St. Louis Woman* (1946). The Harold Arlen and Johnny Mercer musical had a libretto by Arna Bontemps and Countee Cullen. The Arlen and Mercer score was among the greatest for any musical.


*The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1953), by John Patrick, opened with David Wayne, Paul Ford, and John Forsythe. The comedy was an immediate success and became one of the decade’s biggest hits. Patrick’s play won five Tony Awards, the New York Drama Critics Award, and the Pulitzer Prize.

An all-star revival of George Bernard Shaw’s *Major Barbara* (1956) starred Cornelia Otis Skinner, Burgess Meredith, Eli Wallach, and Glynis Johns along with director Charles Laughton. The next offering at the Martin Beck, the operetta satire *Candide* (1956), was also an all-star production. This time the stars were the creative team including Leonard Bernstein, Dorothy Parker, Lillian Hellman, Richard Wilbur, and Tyrone Guthrie.

Tennessee Williams had a flop at the Martin Beck when *Orpheus Descending* (1957) opened with Maureen Stapleton. Williams’ next offering was the next success at the Martin Beck. Geraldine Page, and Paul Newman starred in *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959). Williams summed up the play’s theme (and a thread running through all his works) when he stated: “Desire is rooted in a longing for companionship, a release from the loneliness which haunts every individual.”

The sixties began auspiciously for the Martin Beck with the first Broadway musical by the team of Charles Strouse and Lee Adams. They kicked off their long, successful Broadway collaboration with *Bye Bye Birdie* (1960).

Next, the Martin Beck hosted the work of another Broadway newcomer who would become one of the most successful writers of the musical theater. Jerry Herman’s *Milk and Honey* (1961), the story of a group of Americans visiting Israel, starred Robert Weede, Molly Picon, Mimi Benzell, and Tommy Rall.

The theater’s offerings during the remainder of the sixties showed great promise, but somehow none of the shows caught on with Broadway audiences. These included Edward Albee’s adaptation of Carson McCullers’ *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* (1963); *I Had a Ball* (1964), a musical with a fun, bright score by Jack Lawrence and Stan Freeman; the Royal Shakespeare Company’s importation *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat As Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (1965) with Glenda Jackson, Ian Richardson, and Patrick Magee; Edward Albee’s Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *A Delicate Balance* (1967) with Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, and Rosemary Murphy; and *Hallelujah, Baby!* (1967) with a superior score by Jule Styne, Betty Comden and Adolph Green.

The Martin Beck estate sold the theater to the Jujamcyns in 1968.