

The Boyd Theater

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Urban Culture and Society
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October 5, 1992

The Vicinity of the Boyd

The Boyd SamEric Theater, a two-and-a-half story building, stands on the southeast corner of Chestnut and 19th Streets in Center City, Philadelphia. The area surrounding the Boyd offers many conveniences, several of which are within a one-block radius. For instance, a Wawa grocery store may be found one block away. On the same block, there are two bookstores, Robin's Books and Magazines across Chestnut, only a few storefronts down from Waldenbooks. Movie theaters abound in this area as well. Aside from the Boyd, there is another SamEric on Chestnut closer to 20th Street, and towards 18th there is an AMC theater. Along Chestnut between 20th and Broad Streets is considered to be a heavy movie theater district in Philadelphia, so this cluster comes as no surprise. There is also a mall nearby, at 17th and Chestnut Streets in Liberty Place. Police stations and hospitals are not in such immediate vicinity, although they are also not so far away as to be inaccessible in an emergency. The closest hospital is perhaps the Graduate Hospital at 19th and Spruce Streets, about six blocks away. There are two nearby police stations, according to a couple of informants, at 12th and Locust Streets, and at City Hall. Neither station is considered to be closer than the other.

The area remains accessible to public transportation. For example, at the corner across 19th from the Boyd one may catch the M 21 bus which ends at Penn's Landing. One may also take the Suburban Station link to the rest of the Philadelphia area.

Judging from this urban context, also expressed in the map of the area (Appendix I), the Boyd acts as what Kevin Lynch might term a path through Philadelphia. The central location of this area generates transient elements. For instance, a Wawa convenience store, which is chain-owned and not dependent on the immediate area for the chain's commercial livelihood, fosters the atmosphere of transience. The variety of commercial life also reflects the transitory nature of this area.

The Boyd Theater

On the contrary, the Boyd's façade lends a more enduring presence to the busy intersection. The building looks old and stately, but it follows no single architectural theme. Rather, it is an amalgam of baroque, Beaux Arts, neo-classical and art deco styles.

A wall of marble clothes the first floor, although it is contrasted by brown corrugated aluminum at the entrance. Two sets of double glass doors straddle the ticket booth, and two sets of brown metal doors on either façade serve as exits. The second story is composed of brown brick, accented with pilasters, and divided into bays with single windows. White limestone constitutes the pilasters, window frames, and entablature. The Chestnut Street façade is ornate compared to the 19th Street façade, where the bays are filled in with brick. The most distinct aspect of the Boyd is the large overhanging marquee. It wraps around the corner broadcasting the theater's featured movies, simultaneously drawing focus to the Boyd's entrance. (Refer to Appendix II-III)

Historic Preservation

The façade easement program offered by the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation (PHPC) could preserve the Boyd theater as a historic building. The process of donating a façade easement is as follows:

(I) The building must either be listed in the National Register of Historic Places and be certified as contributing to the district, or nominated by the owner to be put on the list.

(II) The owner must pay a deposit to the PHPC to cover the costs of historical research, architectural consultation and restoration.

(III) With the money from a second deposit, the PHPC will draft an easement document for the owner, attorney and accountant. This is a legal description of the property, the restoration and maintenance requirements, and visual documentation of the existing building for reference in future restoration, etc.

(IV) The owner must get the building appraised, accounting for any necessary restorations.

(V) Before the settlement is final, the owner should submit the consent of the mortgagee and an insurance certificate. At the final settlement, more money is given to the PHPC to pay for

outstanding expenses, future inspections and administrative expenses. The PHPC then records the easement and informs the owner of the recording.

In 1987, the Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC) certified the Boyd Theater as historic. However, the owner, Merton Shapiro, argued that the theater was not an exceptional example of art deco architecture, and that the interior had been greatly changed when SamEric purchased and renovated the theater in 1971. In addition, he argued that designating the theater as historic would impose strict restrictions and requirements on the owner. In this sense, the owner of the theater should reserve the right to do as he wishes with his building.

This issue came to the fore when the SamEric Corporation was planning to demolish the lot. Such an act must be approved by the PHC. Later, the PHC reviewed and rejected the application from SamEric to raze the Boyd theater. Both the exterior and the interior were found to be worthy of preservation.

Census Information

According to the *1980 Census of Population and Housing Census Tracts* for Philadelphia, the Boyd Theater is located in Philadelphia Census Tract Number Seven. This tract is a narrow strip bordered on the north by Chestnut Street, on the south by Walnut Street, on the east by Broad Street, and on the west by the Schuylkill.

The population of Tract Seven is 2448. As of 1980, the tract was 84 percent white and 10.5 percent black. 2330 were 25-34 years of age; 1023 were 35-44 years old. Of 2368 people age 15 or older, slightly over half were single, with the rest evenly distributed among married, divorced, widowed or separated.

Many college students lived in this area. Of 481 total students enrolled in school, 395 were enrolled in college. Also, most people 16 years of age or older worked in the Philadelphia area. Of those working, the most popular mode of transportation to work was walking, followed by public transportation.

There were 1910 housing units in Philadelphia's Tract Seven. Only 17.5 percent were owner-occupied. Most residents in this tract were renters, and of 1704 occupied housing units, 1161 contained only one person. There were many apartment buildings; 1022 of the total housing units were located in structures with 50 or more housing units. The rents varied: the largest group of people paid the highest rent, 390 paid only \$400/month or more, and the smallest group paid the least—13 people paid less than \$80/month. The median rent was \$277/month.

People Traffic

In order to define the urban context of the Boyd Theater, we decided to track the circulation of what we will term "people traffic." Hence on five (5) separate occasions, we took note of the race, age, and gender of persons either in the immediate or near vicinity of the Boyd. Recordings were made only of those who moved within 60 feet of the theater. While the neighborhood claims a rather diverse collection of office, business, and residential spaces, the theater proved not to serve as the primary source of attraction in the area. The purpose of this study is to make an objective note as to the characteristic makeup of the trekkers through the neighborhood, information which may not necessarily be obtained from an ordinary passer-by or even resident.

At times there were over 30 or 40 persons in the studied area. It must be noted that people may have been recorded more than once and the observer may have occasionally been confused as to the exact age, race and gender of subjects. More importantly, as the study involved several variables, slight error may be due to misrecorded data. (Raw data is in Appendices IV-VIII.)

The largest number of people passed in front of the theater during rush hour on both Thursday, October 1 and Saturday, October 3, at a rate of about 34 persons per minute. The observer recorded on a Thursday at 5:31 pm, during rush hour. It should be noted that Liberty Towers glimmer just a few blocks away. Most persons seemed to have been traveling from that area, down Chestnut Street toward the theater.

Interestingly, only about ten percent of Thursday's crowd even looked up at the movie selections offered. Their apathy toward the moviehouse may indicate lack of interest in seeing a movie right after work. More importantly, the Boyd theater may simply be an ordinary element in everyday travels.

During the afternoon on Saturday, October 3, an average of 27 persons per minute passed near the theater at 3:53 pm, with only four percent stopping at the ticket window. However, 14 percent did look at the selection of movies offered. By 5:15 pm, the number of passers-by increased to approximately 34 persons per minute. Eighteen percent of those people looked at the sign, and a total of about 30 percent actually stopped in and bought tickets. Of this number, one hundred percent fell within the "0-40" age group.

Saturday may have seen the heaviest flow of people traffic for those in the "0-20" and "21-40" age categories. This may have been due either to a spillover from the College Fair along the Franklin Parkway or the particular movie showing. Also, persons in the "21-40" range tended to show up in couples, whereas the "0-20" category generally appeared in groups of three or more.

The number of black passers-by increased as it became later in the day. This may be seen on Saturday, September 26 at 8:11 pm, when 67 percent of persons were black and 32 percent were white. This is compared with 7:58 pm, when distribution was 41 percent black and 43 percent white. The numbers of Asians and Hispanics remained relatively constant throughout each recording session.

Essentially, the most important information about the Boyd Theater in relation to its environment flows from the observations made on Saturday, October 3. As a movie was being shown at 5:45 pm at the Boyd, the neighborhood saw an increase of seven persons per minute. This strongly indicates that the SamEric attracts persons to a neighborhood who would not ordinarily be there. Perhaps it is due to the theater's presence that the area receives such a large number of persons traipsing through the

area on the weekends. However, evidence suggests that the Boyd does not augment people traffic during rush hour or on business days.

Personal Interviews

Through interviews, comments and observation, we were able to get a more authentic perspective of the area surrounding the Boyd Theater. We talked to a variety of people who lived, worked and spent time in that vicinity.

The people who live in this immediate neighborhood, as defined by the map, are mostly older people, over 60. There are three optical centers, a variety of shops to satisfy their needs, and senior citizen discounts at all three of the theaters. The area caters to an older group of people.

One of the people we spoke with was a 76-year-old Jewish man, Mr. Diamond. He lives in an apartment building near the theater, and speculated that the youngest woman living there is 85 years old. When we met Mr. Diamond, he was on his way to buy some gifts at a toystore around the block on 18th Street. On his way home, he was going to stop at the nearby liquor store to make a purchase for that evening. He also shared that he enjoys having lunch at restaurants in the area, and he especially enjoys going to Borders Bookstore, at 18th and Walnut Streets.

A 92-year-old man we talked to did not live in the neighborhood; he took a bus from 47th Street. Although we obtained no other pertinent information from him, he gave us the impression that he comes to the area regularly, at least to have breakfast.

The theater employees were also interviewed. None of them lives in the area. The manager, in his late thirties, drives 45 minutes to work, but sometimes the trip takes only 20 minutes, after rush hour. The two ushers, both in their twenties, take about ten minutes to walk to work, but don't live in the area. Both of the ushers have spent time in the area in their off-work time. One of them likes the book stores, and the other said he likes two pubs that are within walking distance, Carolina's on 20th Street and Rittenhouse Square, and another pub on 15th and Spruce Streets.

Some Conclusions

The main function of the area around the Boyd Theater depends on the time of the day and varies on the weekend. For example, the transitional nature of the intersection is most apparent at peak hours of the work day (8-9 am, 4-6 pm). Passers-by used the area as an intermediate path between work and home. Most of the people viewed at these times were not seen as consumers, but as commuters.

However, at other points during the day, the elderly population emerges as the majority of pedestrians. Their activities included running errands to neighborhood destinations. This is contrasted with the evening and weekend shift in population to a movie-going crowd, when the three theaters along Chestnut Street, between 20th and 18th Streets, become magnets for the area.

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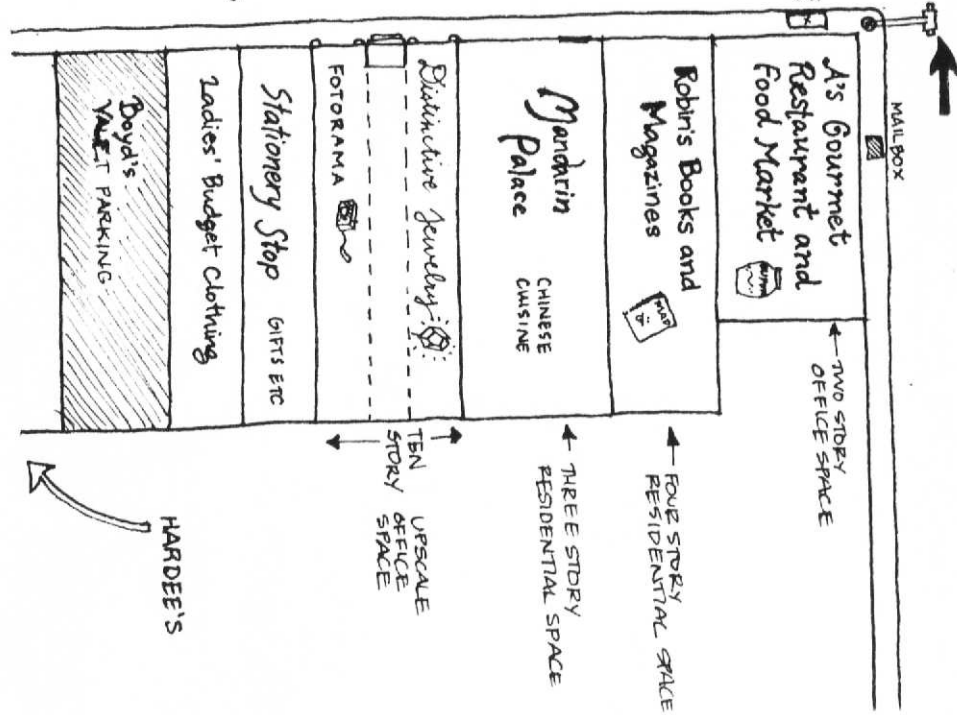
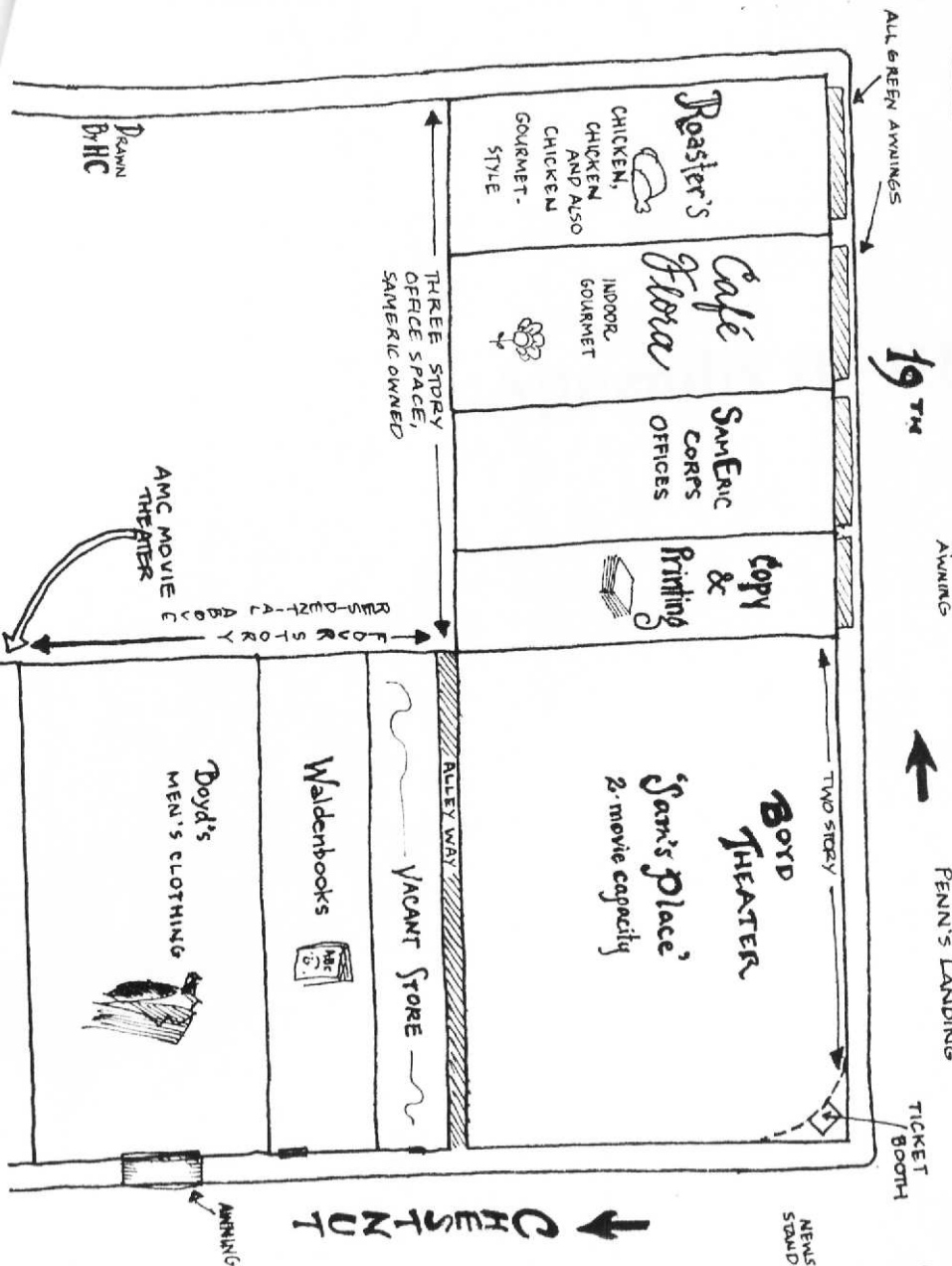
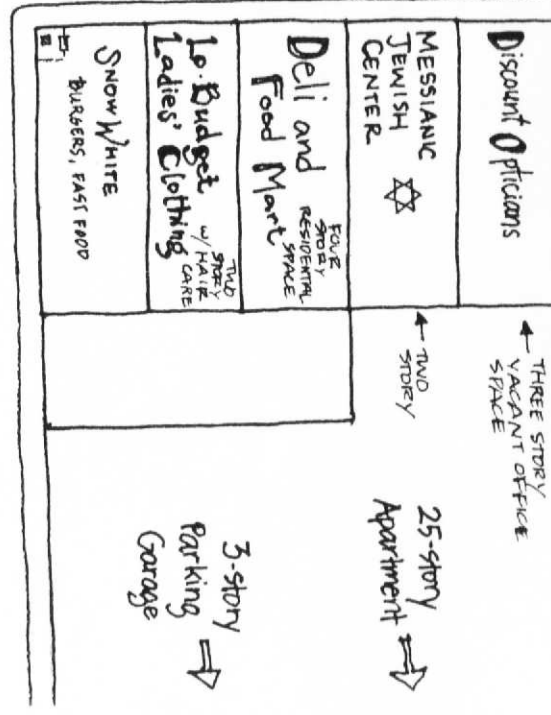
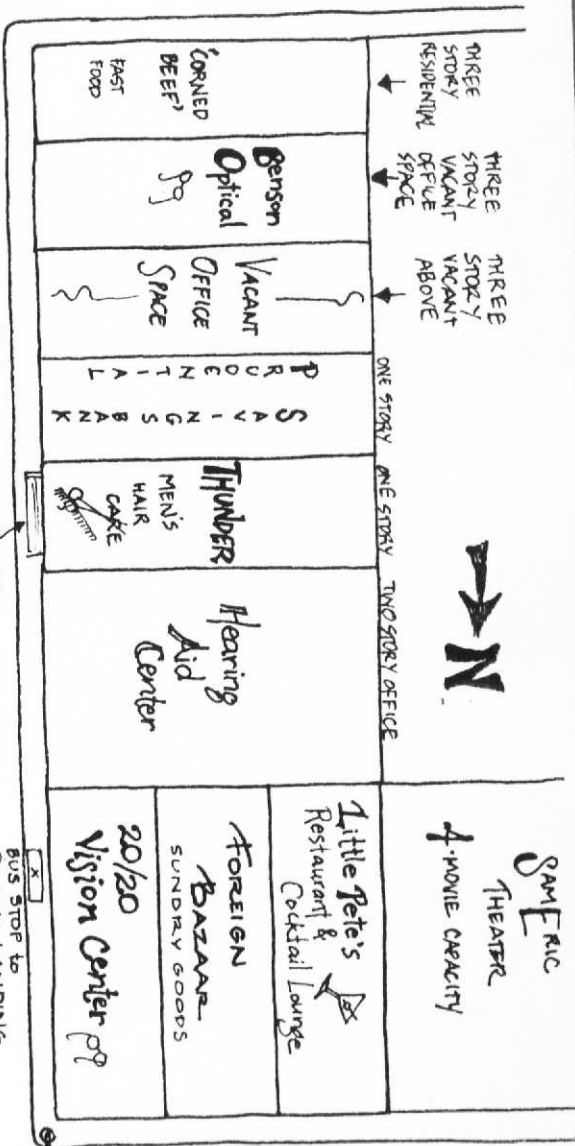
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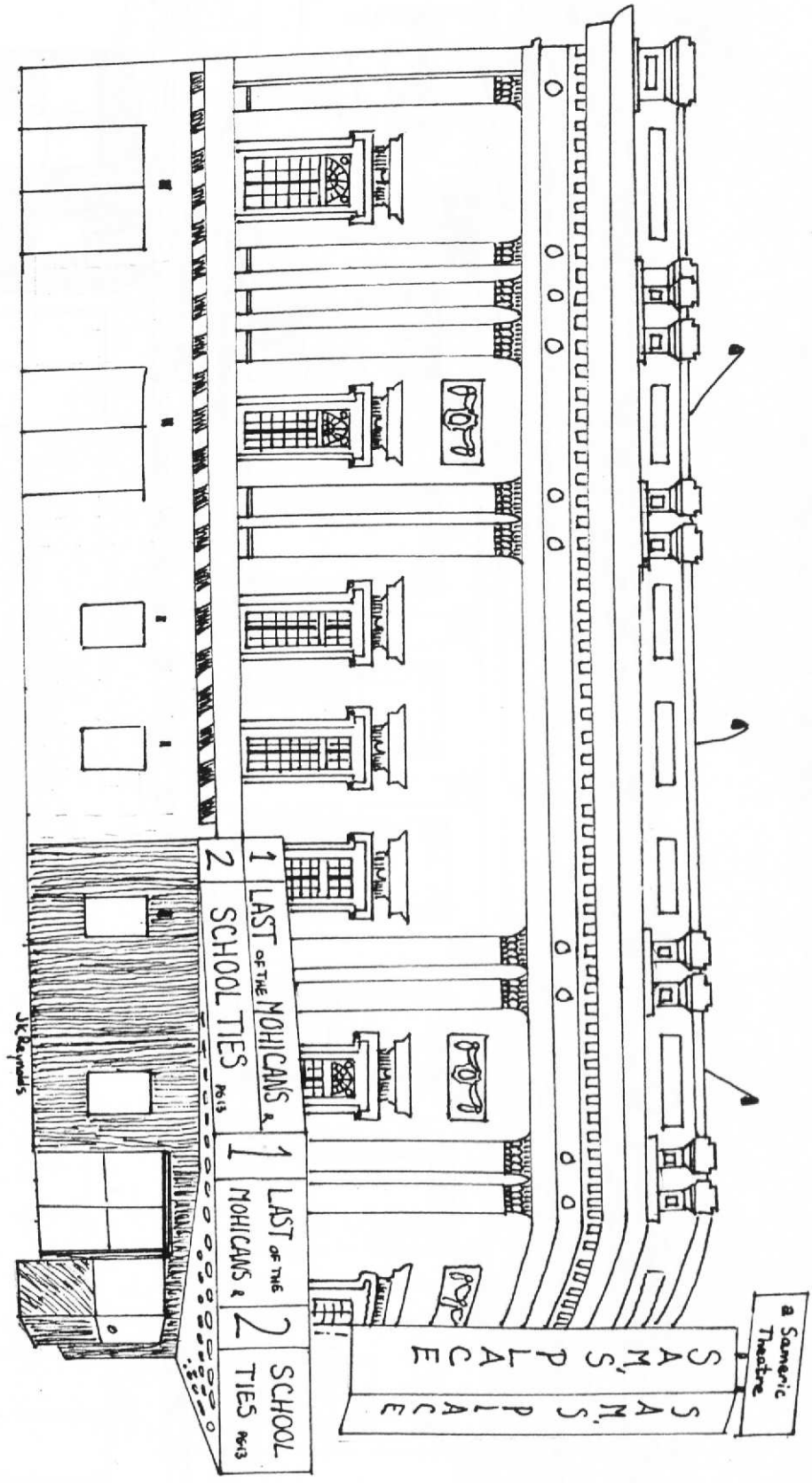
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Appendix I



Appendix II - III

The Boyd Theater. Chestnut Street facade.



2. Sameric Theatre



Appendix IV - VIII

INTERNAL: 2000000

stored by:
P. Zwick

AGE	RACE						S.A.M. ERIC THEATER/BOYD	
	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	ASIAN	OTHER	WHO LOBBED?	WHO STOPPED?	
0-20	001111	11011					000	
21-40	111101001 101110010 01101	101110010 101001101	1010001			110100111 1111	11110 4.11W 2.00W -B	
41-50	000010	11011010		11		101	1 B	
51-60	110000	0110011		0		100	1 1.1A -W B	
61-↑	1	1111		1				
TOTAL	43	45	7	7	3	21	7	

NOTES

Q 8.09

Shod
in front
of the
theater
at
8:09.

NO
persons
entered,
stopped
or
looked

(One male
wounded)

Feb 2
persons
wound

2 per min

Side of Street. 2 standing
and waiting at north side
of street.

DATE: September 26 TIME: 8 11 PM INTERVAL: 5 min.

AGED	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	ASIAN	OTHER	SAM ERIC THOMPSON/BOYD WHO LOADED?	WHO STOPPED?	NOTES
0-20	0011101 00110111 0	001111				111001	00	
21-40	111100100 11100011101 01	101011010				11011110 0	1100011	C. 8'0 1 m of street into NYC for data.
41-50	10	110				1		2 3/4 west into E.
61-60								guy set up photo cam in front of vacant store.
61-70								
TOTAL:	62	20	0?	1	0	18	9	

12.4
per min

26.4

38.4

07.

11.

291.

145

Side of Street: West - near corner across
from Sawdust on 14th

DATE: October 3
Saturday

TIME: 5:15

INTERVAL: 5 minutes

AGE	RACE					SAM ERIC THAYER/BOYD		NOTES
	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	ASIAN	OTHER	WHO LOOKED?	WHO STOPPED?	
0-20	111101010010 100100010011 101100010011 110000010	00001011011	00111101	100100	000	0001010100 111100100000 101?	111010101000 100100100111 100111	
21-40	0101101001010 1001010011110 01011000001 10100101	100000001110 1000011010 10011001010	001	01111	110	11001010111 1	011101001110 101000111100 1010101011100	34 per min
41-50	10101002000	101000010 1100100001010 1000100110	111101	0010	0			46/1.3 under 40
51-60		110						48/2 was 40
61+								48/2 was 40
TOTAL	113	90	12	16	7	42	72	48/2 was 40

48/2
 was
 40
 46/1.3
 under
 40
 48/2
 was
 40
 48/2
 was
 40

used by:
0 = female

Side of Street: East sidewalk
blocks across from
park

DATE: October 3, 1971 TIME: 3:53 PM INTERVAL: 5 minutes
7 1/2 minutes

AGE	RACE					SAM ERIC THAYER/BOYD		NOTES
	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	ASIAN	OTHER	WHO LOOSED?	WHO STOPPED?	
0-20	10101111001 010170111 0010101110 1101011110	1000110000 10110010011 0	100010001100	000011	100	01011	00001	people do cross have direction of traffic
21-40	011010100011 10100111110	1011000101 0100111100 101010011	110			001101011		
41-50	110110011	101101011011 101100111100		11111		1		at lamp per minute
51-60	0011	010111100				10	10	
61-70		1011						
71-80								
TOTAL:	81	90	14	11	3	27	8	

4:11
4:51
7:11
8:11
1:21
1:41
4:11

Side of Street: West (near corner
across from Sam Eric
on 14th Street,
Overturn West side)

DATE: 10/1/92
Thursday

TIME: 5:20 PM
5:31 PM
INTERVAL: 5 min.

made by:
Eric Thompson

AGE	RACE			OTHER	SAM ERIC THOMPSON/BOYD		NOTES
	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC		WHO LOADED?	WHO STOPPED?	
0-20	111100 111100	111100 111100	00000		1	11000	
21-40	1111001101 110010101000	10101111010 110111001011 100101100	010	1110	1111	1011001	10
41-50	1100100010100 00	1011010000010 0111111100010 1010000	000		1	111010	00
51-60	0010	1111011110					
61+	1	110001					
TOTAL:	56	93	11	4	5	16	9

34 per
min.

23.1.

53.1.

7.1.

2.1.

3.1.

10/9/92

5.4. 5.1.