1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: The Town Hall

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 123 West 43rd Street Not for publication:

City/Town: New York Vicinity:

State: New York County: New York Code: 061 Zip Code: 10036

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property		Category of Property	
Private:	X	Building(s):	X
Public-Local:	___	District:	___
Public-State:	___	Site:	___
Public-Federal:	___	Structure:	___
		Object:	___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
___	___ buildings
___	___ sites
___	___ structures
___	___ objects
___	___ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

Designated a
National Historic Landmark
MAR 0 2 2012
by the
Secretary of the Interior

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

_____ _____
Signature of Certifying Official Date

_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

_____ _____
Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ Entered in the National Register
___ Determined eligible for the National Register
___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
___ Removed from the National Register
___ Other (explain): _____

_____ _____
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Recreation and Culture; Social Sub: auditorium; clubhouse

Current: Recreation and Culture; Education Sub: auditorium; school

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Classical Revival

MATERIALS:
Foundation: concrete
Walls: brick
Roof: tar paper
Other: stone

Statement of Significance

Town Hall is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 for its association with the history of American public affairs radio broadcasting. From this site, *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (*ATMA*), called "the most famous civic education program of the 1930s," originated and was broadcast between 1935 and 1956.[1] The development of radio, with its potential to reach citizens in their homes, was an exceptionally important event in American culture, and many believed it held the promise of democratizing cultural exchange. Among numerous radio programs conceived in this spirit, *ATMA* was extraordinarily successful. Conceived to promote the free, fearless debate and open discussion of public issues, the show unflinchingly brought differing opinions over a wide range of controversial topics before the American public. More than simply the location of the show, Town Hall was an important component of the broadcast itself drawing on its own long association with public education and historic imagery familiar to all Americans. Town Hall has exceptional value in representing the history of *ATMA*, an important program in the radio era and a social phenomenon of immense importance in shaping and giving voice to American culture.

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Town Hall is located on the north side of West 43rd Street in mid-town Manhattan, occupying a mid-block location between 6th Avenue and Broadway in New York's theater district. The building is sited close to the street between a narrow four-story, late nineteenth-century, mixed-use building to the west, and a tall, multi-story ca. 1970s office building to the east. Immediately across the street is a contemporary parking garage. The building to the west, once owned by the Town Hall predates the nominated building, and was known as the annex and was used for office space. The building is now under separate ownership; however, Town Hall retains the use of space on one floor, which is accessible by a wall opening in the mezzanine. Other than this one access point, the buildings are totally separate structurally and mechanically. The former annex is not included in the nomination. Although newer buildings have been constructed east and south of Town Hall, the street itself, with its mix of nineteenth- and twentieth-century buildings, some of which are used as theaters, presents an appropriate setting for the resource. Today, the auditorium survives with near perfect integrity to the period of significance, preserving an outstanding association with the important events that took place here.

Exterior

The Town Hall is four stories tall and nine bays wide. It is constructed of brick laid up in Flemish bond and trimmed with limestone. On the west, the façade is flush with the adjacent building, while on the east, the façade treatment wraps around the corner of the building which was originally exposed. Because the contemporary building to the east has a deep setback, a portion of the east wall of Town Hall, built of common brick and originally concealed, is now visible. The rear elevation abuts a building on West 44th Street and cannot be seen.

The Town Hall façade is divided into three primary sections separated by limestone belt courses with Greek key moldings and topped with a limestone frieze, cornice, and balustrade. The lowest level takes in the building's entrances and mezzanine. This section is characterized by a seven-bay arcade of two-story limestone fluted arches with keystones flanked by undecorated end bays. Each arch contains double-entrance doors, glass within wood frames, surmounted by transoms with decorative multi-pane glazing. Because the building site slopes slightly to the east, the entrances are approached by either one or two limestone steps from the sidewalk. Each

[1] Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Popular Culture in the United States, 1920-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 25. Note: although the program was broadcast until 1956, the period of significance ends at 1952, as explained in the narrative that follows.

entrance is surmounted by a limestone panel. Above the impost blocks, each arch is filled with a recessed tripartite window grouping which lights the mezzanine. Three deep iron and glass canopies, which are suspended from large iron rods, extend over the sidewalk to provide shelter for each of the end entrances and the three in the center; the two intervening entrances are without canopies. The underside of each canopy is outlined by rows of light bulbs, which are concealed by a continuous row of opaque glass shades. The arch at the east end is the box office entrance; the five in the center mark the theater entrances, and that on the west provides access to the upper floors. Flanking the arcade, each of the end bays has double metal equipment doors recessed within rectangular openings with splayed brick lintels. These doors provide access to long narrow corridors that lead to the backstage areas. Each set of doors is surmounted by a single window with double-hung multi-pane wood sash.

Most of the middle section of the façade, which fronts the theater space, is without openings. The central feature is a large, rectangular limestone plaque within a molded surround. The plaque is engraved: "The Town Hall Founded by the League for Political Education, 1894-1920. Ye Shall Know the Truth and the Truth Shall Make You Free." The plaque is flanked by two double-height niches within limestone enframements. Their round arches with keystones mimic those of the arcade below. Above the plaque and niches, a row of double-hung, six-over-six wood sash windows with brick surrounds and limestone sills denotes offices.

The upper section is characterized by a row of large, double-hung, six-over-six wood sash windows with brick and limestone enframements. Each window has an iron grille across the bottom and a limestone lintel with keystone. Windows are separated by recessed brick panels with diamond-shaped limestone lozenges in their centers. The row of windows is flanked by larger recessed panels, each with a recessed circular window at its center. The frieze is a limestone band with incised Adamesque decoration. This is surmounted by a row of dentil moldings and a projecting limestone balustrade.

Plan and Secondary Spaces

The interior plan was designed to accommodate the theater and its associated spaces on the lower floors and club facilities above. The large, semi-circular theater fills a double-height space at the center of the building; lobbies, a box office, elevator bays, stairways, backstage areas, and dressing rooms surround it. Long narrow corridors along each outer wall of the building connect the backstage area with the street. Five sets of doors provide access to the narrow, ground level lobby, which features terrazzo floors, classical pilasters, and a paneled ceiling. Although the lobby is generally rectangular in shape its inside wall follows the slightly curved rear wall of the theater. Centered on this wall is the main entrance to the theater, a tripartite grouping of double doors flanked by marble, engaged Ionic columns, pairs of windows, and Doric pilasters. The entrance is flanked by two broad, sweeping marble stairways with slender, wrought-iron classical balusters and walnut hand railings. Additional entrances to the theater are located beneath each set of stairs and are accessed through low, arched hallways. Double sets of multi-pane glass doors at each end of the lobby provide access to the small, square box office on the east and to the short hallway and block of elevators to the upper floors on the west. The two stairways lead to the mezzanine, which is essentially a narrow, curving hallway featuring entrances to the loge and balcony, stairs to the upper level of the balcony, restrooms, and a small center lounge.

Theater

The theater is a large, semicircular space without intervening structural members. There are two levels of seating, a main floor, and a cantilevered balcony with loge. The stage is relatively shallow; however, its outside edge is curved so that it projects slightly into the auditorium. Walls are marble on the lowest level and rusticated artificial stone above. Corners are marked by fluted, gilded pilasters with Composite capitals. The

stage is set within a semi-elliptical proscenium arch decorated with Greek key moldings and a foliate keystone and supported on pilasters with Renaissance-inspired ornament and Composite capitals. The cornice is supported on tapered modillions with guttae and features gilded acanthus leaves. The coffered ceiling is outlined by Greek key and guilloche moldings and marked by a large central medallion with delicate, gilded Adamesque decoration. A large ornamental light fixture hangs from the medallion, and similar but smaller fixtures are found throughout the auditorium. Two recesses on each side wall are marked by arches that mirror the proscenium. The most decorative features are the large, round-arched organ screens flanking the stage. Each arch rests on a narrow shelf supported by scrolled brackets and decorated with foliate ornament. The arches contain pedimented tripartite screens surmounted by garlands and swags. Although the organ has been removed, the current trompe l'oeil design replicates the original pipes. Below each arch is a large rectangular marble panel. The exterior wall of the balcony is a curved, decorative wrought-iron screen. Original seating survives except in the loge, where original wicker chairs have been replaced with theater seats. The original projection booth also survives; this simple box is decorated with fluted pilasters.

Club

Former club rooms are located on the second, third, and fourth floors and are accessed from the small elevator hall west of the entrance lobby. As originally designed, the second and third floors featured offices, a library, a lounge, a bar, and dining rooms. The fourth floor included a kitchen, food storage space, and locker rooms for employees. The plan of the upper floors was compromised when these spaces were adapted for later uses; however, many of the original finishes and decorative details survive and are identical to others seen throughout the building. These include plaster walls and ceilings, a wrought-iron stair with slender balusters like that in the lobby; large, square paneled piers with Doric capitals; and neoclassical moldings and trim. The integrity of the upper floors is not essential to the significance documented in this nomination.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide: _ Locally:

Applicable National Register Criteria:	A X B _ C X D
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):	A _ B _ C _ D _ E _ F _ G
NHL Criteria:	1
NHL Theme(s):	III. Expressing Cultural Values 1. Educational and Intellectual Currents 4. Mass Media
Areas of Significance:	Communication, Education, Social History, and Politics/Government
Period(s) of Significance:	1935-1952
Significant Dates:	1935
Significant Person(s):	N/A
Cultural Affiliation:	N/A
Architect/Builder:	Teunis J. van der Bent of McKim, Mead and White: building exterior, lobby, and theater; Louis E. Jallade: upper floor interiors
Historic Contexts:	XV. Communication D. Radio

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Town Hall is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 for its association with the history of American public affairs radio broadcasting. From this site, *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (*ATMA*), called "the most famous civic education program of the 1930s," originated and was broadcast between 1935 and 1956.[2] The development of radio, with its potential to reach citizens in their homes, was an exceptionally important event in American culture, and many believed it held the promise of democratizing cultural exchange. Among numerous radio programs conceived in this spirit, *ATMA* was extraordinarily successful. Conceived to promote the free, fearless debate and open discussion of public issues, the show unflinchingly brought differing opinions over a wide range of controversial topics before the American public. More than simply the location of the show, Town Hall was an important component of the broadcast itself drawing on its own long association with public education and historic imagery familiar to all Americans. Town Hall has exceptional value in representing the history of *ATMA*, an important program in the radio era and a social phenomenon of immense importance in shaping and giving voice to American culture.

SUMMARY OF *AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR*

The development of radio broadcasting was immensely important in the cultural history of the United States. In the decades before World War I, westward expansion, the growth of cities and an influx of immigrants led American culture to become more diverse. Within this diffuse culture, providing opportunities for civic education became more difficult. For many, the development of radio, revolutionary in its ability to reach an immense, scattered, and varied audience, held the promise of democratizing cultural exchange by virtue of its ability to reach people in their own homes. Radio could, it was believed, strengthen social connections among all Americans, eradicate hierarchies created by location, class, income, access to education, and other social and environmental factors, and create a better informed electorate. These goals motivated some of the earliest radio broadcasters, many of whom were associated with nonprofit and educational institutions. However, early efforts to win government sponsorship for the new medium failed, and as radio became increasingly popular, the 1920s and 30s were marked by continued tensions between public service and economic interests. Bolstered by the Radio Act of 1927, which created the Federal Radio Commission (FRC), radio broadcasting evolved from a decentralized network of amateur operators into a corporate enterprise based on commercial sponsorship. As content was increasingly developed and controlled by commercial sponsors and advertising agencies, nonprofit broadcasters were marginalized, and the educational programming that had dominated early broadcasts gradually faded from the airwaves.

In the early 1930s, as debate intensified over a successor to the 1927 law, broadcast reformers began an active campaign to restore radio to the public domain by advocating legislation to preserve a percentage of channels for non-commercial broadcasting. It was in this period that commercial networks, eager to demonstrate their commitment to education and avoid the loss of revenue-producing channels, undertook an ambitious agenda of public broadcasting, increasing the number of shows developed and produced by the networks themselves and donating free airtime and production support to nonprofit and educational groups. The period between 1930 and 1938 witnessed some of the most prestigious and ambitious experiments in public service broadcasting of the era, as networks introduced numerous programs designed to combine civic enrichment with entertainment. Shows such as *American School of the Air* (1930), *University of Chicago Round Table* (1931), *The American*

[2] Craig, *Fireside Politics*, 25. Note: although the program was broadcast until 1956, the period of significance ends at 1952, as explained in the narrative that follows.

Forum of the Air (1934), *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (1935), and *The People's Platform* (1938) were touted for their efforts to bring substantive issues of national importance before the American people, for the high caliber of their guests, and for their innovative formats.

George V. Denny Jr. of the League for Political Education created *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (*ATMA*) for the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in 1934. The league was founded in 1894 to provide an opportunity for citizens to acquire civic education. By the 1930s, it boasted a thirty-year commitment to public education built on its sponsorship of hundreds of lectures and classes on the philosophy and details of democratic government. In 1921 the league built its first permanent headquarters, Town Hall, on West 43rd Street in New York's theater district. Designed by McKim, Mead and White, Town Hall was specifically intended to be a community center for the city, a place where citizens could gather to discuss common interests and general welfare. During his long tenure at the league (1930-1952), Denny embraced and advanced civic education, continuing to sponsor a full program of lectures and classes at Town Hall as well as creating and hosting the radio show. Denny conceived *ATMA* to promote the free, fearless, and open discussion of public issues, and he took advantage of radio to bring these debates into the homes of Americans across the country. Each show featured brief presentations on important social and/or political issues by four speakers of opposing views, followed by a question and answer session with the live audience.

ATMA was one of the first radio shows to incorporate a live audience, and its participation was crucial to the show's success. The audience brought the voices of everyday people onto the airwaves to discuss issues of vital concern to the American public. Denny allowed audience members a great deal of freedom to engage with the presenters, and the unpredictable nature of their responses added both drama and intimacy, making the show livelier for the radio audience while also creating a sense of connection with the individual listener.

Throughout its twenty-two-year history, *ATMA* addressed a wide range of controversial topics, including civil liberties, totalitarianism, war, isolationism, interventionism, communism, and racism. Rather than attempt to solve problems, *ATMA* aimed to promote a broader and more informed consideration of them. In this, *ATMA* embraced some of the goals of the early twentieth-century forum movement, popularized by educators who provided Americans with a refresher course in democratic values designed to help them hone the tools that were needed to work toward the public welfare. These goals became especially important during the 1930s, as the threat of totalitarianism and impending war motivated educators to bolster citizen involvement in the difficult decisions facing the nation regarding American involvement in European affairs. *ATMA*, which drew its speakers from the highest echelons, was widely recognized in its own time. It was immensely popular, received a high volume of letters, and was among the few public affairs shows to be broadcast in primetime. It was highly regarded by critics and won numerous awards, including two prestigious Peabody Awards for excellence in broadcasting.[3] In addition, its programs were frequently referenced in scholarly journals and widely recommended by American educators. Contemporary scholars of radio history consistently mention *ATMA* as among the most influential and educational public service shows of the 1930s to 1950s.

As the site of *ATMA's* broadcast, Town Hall is outstandingly associated with the history of radio during its heyday (c.1930-c.1951). Beyond hosting this show, Town Hall was an important component of the broadcast itself. *ATMA*'s venue was key to its success. No other show became so closely identified with the location of its broadcasts. An announcer opened each *ATMA* broadcast by declaring "Live from historic Town Hall," and the show drew upon Americans' deep symbolic associations with the New England town meeting as one of the highest exemplars of the virtues of public discussion and direct democracy. Further, the radio show emanated from a building that had been specifically built to foster public education and democracy. *ATMA* was the

[3] The Peabody Award is an international award for excellence in radio and television broadcasting sponsored by the National Association of Broadcasters and administered by the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Georgia.

culmination of the League for Political Education's decades-long commitment to bolstering these ideals, carrying the league's late nineteenth-century ambitions into the modern age of electronic communication and extending its reach from Manhattan to the nation. The league's creation of a town hall building in the nation's largest city had a direct parallel to Denny's goal to establish a virtual town hall of the airwaves. The design of Town Hall's auditorium, with its clear sight lines and excellent acoustics, ensured that everyone could be included in the discussion. The period of significance (1935-1952) encompasses the era of *ATMA*'s greatest importance. This coincides with the period in which Denny, who conceived, developed, and hosted the program, was associated with it. Denny was replaced as host in 1952 and the radio show gradually faded in importance until it was cancelled in 1956.

HISTORY AND CONTEXTS

League for Political Education

In 1894, delegates to New York's constitutional convention defeated a proposal to grant women the right to vote. In the ensuing months, a group of six prominent New York women cited women's general lack of political education as instrumental in the defeat and they resolved to provide an opportunity for both women and men to acquire a more sophisticated understanding of political, cultural, and civic issues. On 16 November 1894, the League for Political Education was founded at the home of Eleanor Butler Sanders. Among its six founding members were Catherine A. B. Abbee, who also founded the City History Club; Lucia Gilbert Runkle, the first American woman to write for the editorial page of a major American newspaper; Adele M. Fielde, a former missionary; Lee Wood Haggin; and Mary Putnam Jacobi, a physician and outspoken advocate for women's rights. Within months of its establishment, the league had attracted nearly fifty members. The new organization quickly initiated a broad program of lectures on diverse topics, including literature and art, science and philosophy, and citizenship and public affairs. Professor Franklin H. Giddings presented the first lecture, "Some Duties of the Citizen," in January 1895.[4] By 1899 the club boasted six hundred members, and it was incorporated in 1904. Although lectures were open to both women and men, the first programs were held in the mornings and drew mostly women. That changed in 1907, after the Economic Club of New York, an outgrowth of the league, was organized by Robert Ely and J. W. Beatson. The new club was founded to "aid in the creation and expression of an enlightened public opinion on the important economic and social questions of the day."[5] The club, which counted a number of prominent men among its members, held its meetings in the evening and was responsible for significantly expanding the league's constituency. A third organization, the Civic Forum, also became a part of the league's extended family. The Civic Forum, also formed in 1907, aimed to "promote a finer national life and a better understanding of the peoples of other countries."[6]

Although the League for Political Education came into being through the vision of its founding female members, a number of prominent men assumed important roles in its early growth and development. Among the most influential were Elgin R. L. Gould, founder of the City and Suburban Homes Company, who served as chair of the board after 1905, and John Graham Brooks, a professor of economics at Harvard, who drew large audiences with his early lectures. Robert Erskine Ely (1861-1948), also of Harvard, who was invited to give a series of lectures in 1899, was of seminal importance in the league's history. After a brief stint as part-time director, Ely became the league's executive director in 1901 and served in that position until he retired in 1937. Under his leadership Town Hall was constructed and its auspicious programs of lectures and musical events were developed. Following Ely's retirement, George V. Denny Jr. became director. Denny had joined the staff

[4] Some sources cite the first lecture as "Some Duties of Citizenship."
[5] "Times Square to Have a Million-Dollar Town Hall," *New York Times*, April 27, 1919.
[6] Ibid.

in 1931 and in 1934 was responsible for the development of *ATMA*, and he remained host of the show until 1952.

The league's earliest meetings, including its very first lecture, were held at the home of Eleanor B. Sanders. However, as early as December 1894, the organization rented a room in the Berkeley-Lyceum building (23 West 44th Street) for club business meetings and classes, and held lectures in the building's theater. As membership and attendance increased, the league began to rent larger venues for its lectures, which, in addition to the Berkeley-Lyceum Theatre, were held in Aeolian Hall, the Engineering Society Building, the Cort Theatre, the Park Theatre, the Hudson Theatre, and Carnegie Hall. Additional classes were held in the Ladies Athletic Club. By 1911, the growth in league membership and the success of its programs led the organization to acquire a home of its own. A $1,000 donation by Anna Blaksley Bliss (1850-1935) in 1912 (followed by a more substantial donation the following year) initiated the building program, and a group of the league's directors formed the Societies Realty Company to make the real estate transactions. In 1914 the *New York Times* reported that the league had an option on a site on the south side of West 49th Street and was planning to erect a twelve-story building. The building would house the society, the Economic Club and the Civic Forum, and, in addition to a hall and offices, the building would boast a gymnasium, swimming pool, baths, and a roof garden.[7] The building had already been designed by the architect of City and Suburban Homes; this was presumably James E. Ware, who had designed the latter complex between 1898 and 1905. No building permit was filed for a Ware design, and in 1917 the real estate committee purchased a different site, a 125' x 100' parcel on the north side of West 43th Street on Times Square, for $425,000. This time, news reports announced that plans for a four-story building had been prepared by McKim, Mead and White and that the building would house an auditorium and office space.[8]

The building parcel was located in a changing neighborhood. Times Square's rapid development as New York's theater district began around the turn of the twentieth century. For most of the nineteenth century, theaters had been located in a mixed neighborhood on lower Broadway. But as the city expanded northward, new forms of transportation, such as the Third and Sixth Avenue elevated railways and the New York subway system, as well as the opening of Grand Central Depot nearby, made the area a desirable place to locate attractions intended to draw visitors from the city and beyond. As early as the 1890s, construction of new playhouses and theaters began in what was then known as Long Acre Square (renamed Times Square in 1904 following completion of the New York Times Building). Businesses associated with the entertainment industry also began to locate in the area. These included rehearsal halls, offices of agents and producers, and businesses that were involved with providing costumes, lighting, and make up. Finally, a number of boarding houses, offering homes to aspiring actors, dotted the neighborhood. Between 1900 and 1920, a total of forty-three new theaters were built in the mid-town area, mostly on the side streets east and west of Broadway. By the onset of the Depression in 1929, an additional thirty playhouses had been built, and the theater district was generally defined as the area between 39th Street and Columbus Circle and Sixth and Eighth Avenues.[9] On West 43rd Street, the parcel acquired for Town Hall was directly across from Henry Miller's Theater (recently renamed the Stephen Sondheim Theatre); this new building was designed by Allen, Ingalls, and Hoffman in 1917-1918. The *New York Times* noted that the site for Town Hall had been selected both because it was in the heart of the fast growing city center and because of its proximity to major transportation systems.[10]

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[7] "Societies to Put Up a 12-Story Building," *New York Times*, February 26, 1914.

[8] "Times Square Million-Dollar Town Hall." It is not known what prevented the society from purchasing the West 49th Street site or what became of the plans said to have been prepared by James E. Ware.

[9] Information about the history of New York's theater district largely drawn from Margaret Knapp, "Henry Miller Theater Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Report," New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, LP-1357, 1987.

[10] "Times Square Million-Dollar Town Hall."

In July 1919, contractor Russell B. Smith began demolition of the rowhouses that occupied the site, and construction commenced on 10 October 1919. In January 1920, Colonel Theodore Roosevelt Jr. laid the cornerstone on behalf of his wife, Eleanor Butler Alexander, niece and namesake of the late Eleanor Butler Saunders, the club's first president.[11] Construction was completed during the following year and the building opened on 12 January 1921. The initial cost of the land and building was $1,350,000. Although the program for the four-story structure constructed in 1921 was considerably scaled down from that described in the 1914 article, the first building campaign raised only enough money to complete the exterior of the building, the auditorium, and the lobby. However, another gift from Anna Blaksley Bliss ($500,000) in 1922 spurred a new subscription drive, which secured the funds necessary to complete the upper floor interiors and eliminate the building's $600,000 mortgage. More than four thousand people donated to the construction of the building, and the league, which boasted six thousand members in 1921, prided itself in being historically "free from political influence."[12] An important factor in ensuring the success of the endeavor was the plan's evolution from a hall for the League for Political Education to a building called "Town Hall," which was defined as a community center for the city of New York, a venue for "public meetings of all kinds related to the general welfare [where citizens may gather] to discuss their common interests." Like the league, Town Hall was dedicated to a "constructive educational purpose."[13] However, the expanded definition of the league's fellowship to the city itself broadened its base, brought additional subscribers, and made its long-held aspiration feasible.[14]

In addition to the meeting hall itself, the building housed the offices of the League for Political Education, the Economic Club, and the Civic Forum.[15] In 1925, after completion of the building's interior, the new Town Hall Club became the fourth tenant, occupying space on the top two floors. The Town Hall Club was founded on the premise that "sociability promotes acquaintance and mutual understanding" and prided itself on its egalitarian principles.[16] Dedicated to promoting "a finer public spirit and a better social order" through the interrelationship of social and educational programs, the club was progressive in admitting both men and women to full membership.[17]

Construction History[18]

By the time McKim, Mead and White received the commission for Town Hall, founding members Stanford White (1853-1906) and Charles F. McKim (1847-1909) were dead, and William R. Mead (1846-1928) had withdrawn from active practice. In their stead, a younger group of designers, led by four new partners, William M. Kendall, William S. Richardson, Burt L. Fenner, and Teunis J. van der Bent, was producing the firm's designs. Teunis J. van der Bent (1863-1936) emigrated to the United States from the Netherlands, where he had studied at the University of Delft. In 1887, at the age of twenty-four, he secured work as a draftsman at McKim, Mead and White, where he worked on such projects as the Hotel Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Terminal Station, several buildings at Columbia University, additions to the Metropolitan Museum, and Cornell University Medical School. In 1909, van der Bent became a partner in the firm, and in 1928 he succeeded Mead as head of its office of business management. Records indicate that van der Bent was responsible for the design of Town Hall, a restrained, yet dignified example of the Georgian Revival style that evoked associations with the building's civic purpose and the architecture of early America.

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[11] Mrs. Roosevelt was unable to attend the ceremony due to illness.
[12] Robert Erskine Ely, *A Beginning* (New York: Town Hall, 1944), 33.
[13] "The Town Hall," Program of the Opening Ceremonies [1921], 2.
[14] Ely, *Beginning*, 30.
[15] All of its occupants, including the League for Political Education, were expected to pay rent until the hall was debt free.
[16] Ely, *Beginning*, 36.
[17] "New Civic Club Planned; Being Organized by the League for Political Education," *New York Times*, February 24, 1918.
[18] Information on the construction of Town Hall was drawn in part from Ruth Seldon-Sturgill, "Town Hall Designation Reports," New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, LP -1011 and LP-1012, 1978.

Due to funding limits, McKim, Mead and White was commissioned to design only the exterior of the building, its lobbies and auditorium. The estimated cost of completing the remaining interior spaces, including a library, lounge, and restaurant, was $500,000. After Anna Blaksley Bliss's 1922 donation, New York architect Louis E. Jallade (1866-1957) was hired to complete the interior. Jallade was trained at the Metropolitan Museum of Art School before graduating from the École des Beaux-Arts in 1902. In 1923, Jallade was a partner in the firm Lindsay and Warren; however, he later formed a partnership with his son at 597 Fifth Avenue. Jallade served as president of the New York Society of Architects and was a member of the Architectural League and the Brooklyn Committee for Better Housing.[19]

Tradition holds that the internationally famed acoustical engineer Wallace C. Sabine of Harvard was consulted in the design of Town Hall's auditorium. However, at the time the plans were being developed, Sabine was involved in projects in Europe and he died in 1919, before the construction of Town Hall commenced. After years of experiments with various materials and shapes, Sabine had developed a precise formula for building an acoustically perfect hall. In 1900, McKim, Mead and White had been the first architectural firm to follow Sabine's acoustical instructions in the design of Boston's Symphony Hall, which is noted for its fine acoustics. Having worked with Sabine on a number of other projects, it is likely that McKim, Mead and White employed Sabine's successful scientific analysis of acoustical properties in its design for the Town Hall auditorium.

In 1930, Town Hall published a limited edition monograph that appears to have been part of a campaign to enlarge the building. The book included a rendering showing the McKim, Mead and White design enlarged by three additional bays on the west side (incorporating the rowhouse known as the "annex," purchased in the 1930s) and four additional stories.[20] The text restated and reenergized the building's original dedication to purpose as a public meeting place and listed all of the diverse cultural, civic and religious groups that had used the facility. It stated that one thousand lectures had been given and that Town Hall's program had influenced millions of people. The booklet's only reference to a potential expansion was the observation that "still more millions await only an extension of the facilities now available."[21] The proposed enlargement was never completed; however, Town Hall did expand part of its operations into the annex.[22] In fact, Town Hall has experienced only minor physical changes since it was completed in 1923, and both the exterior and the interior lobby and auditorium remain almost exactly as built.

The Town Hall

The Town Hall has been described as "an idea with a roof over it."[23] As such, the building was designed and built in the service of an ideal: to foster civic education. This purpose has been clearly expressed in all of the literature related to its history, from the genesis of the League for Political Education through the history of *ATMA*. In fact, the two are linked by an outstanding correlation of thematic and programmatic concerns over more than a century.

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[19] Among Jallade's works are the Thompson Meter Company in Brooklyn, the Welfare Island Dispensary, the New York City Department of Hospitals, and the International House on Riverside Drive.

[20] Plans for a sixth story were mentioned in "The Town Hall, New York City," *Architecture and Building* 53 (February 1921): 13.

[21] *The Town Hall, New York* (New York: League for Political Education, 1930), 12.

[22] The annex is extant but no longer owned by Town Hall. Although Town Hall still uses one floor for storage, the annex is a separate building and is not included in this nomination. A history of Town Hall published in 1938 discussed a then-ongoing campaign to add what the author called the "five long-projected stories to the building." The authors discussed Town Hall's overcrowded classes and outgrown plant, while also suggesting plans for an expanded program of adult education proposed for the enlarged building. However, like the 1930 proposal, the 1937 addition was never completed. "Town Hall Plans Five More Stories," *New York Times,* April 16, 1937; Louis E. Jallade, Rendering of Town Hall Expansion, 1939.

[23] Harry A. Overstreet and Bonaro W. Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1938), 71.

The association of the league's new building with the New England town hall that became so important in the conceptualization of the radio show began before the building was even constructed. Writing about the cornerstone ceremony in 1920, Hildegard Hawthorne observed that "America was born in her town halls. Our forefathers met [there] to talk freely of all matters related to the civic life."[24] Other reporters alluded to the same theme, some embellishing their stories with folksy language, such as the writer who declared that "New York's small town longings rise in the concrete. You are to have a Town Hall on West 43rd Street. If you want to know what your neighbors think...you may go clearly to town meetin' regular as preachin' and have your say too."[25] Architectural critics were quick to reinforce the connection. One article opened with a romantic description of the New England "Common House," a "rough structure of logs" as the "first purely American architectural tradition, one that still exists in its purity in our small villages" before moving on to discuss McKim, Mead and White's design for Town Hall, while another began with contemporary references to the need for a town hall in the heart of the city, described the league's high civic ambition, and concluded that the architect's design "well expresses the purpose of the building."[26] These associations clearly originated with the league itself, not only in the name chosen for the new building but in its educational purpose. As Henry W. Taft, then president of the board, asserted, "no instrumentality for the education of men and women in the history of the world has been so effective as the old institution of the New England Town Meeting. We are, in a measure, trying to restore, in a great community, the fundamental ideas of the Town Meeting."[27] The idea for the venue caught on quickly, and the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that in the first year "more than 200,000 have used the Town Hall...as an open forum in the heart of New York."[28]

Town Hall's dedication to the creation of an open forum clearly reflects the original goals of the league's founders. Its very first lecture, in 1884, addressed the duties of citizenship. Those that followed delved optimistically into the philosophy and details of government, addressing such topics as "The Citizen and the Public Purse," "On Elections," "The Peculiar Fascinations of the Study of Our Government," "The Relation of the Citizen to the Criminal," "The Dream and Reality of Social Equality, and "The Distribution of Wealth." Indeed, Robert Erskine, who became the league's first director, was initially hired in 1901 to give a series of lectures on political economy. Other league lectures addressed some of the major social issues of the day, including "The Economic Independence of Women," "The American Trade Union and Its Critics," "Race Problems," "What America Owes to the Foreigner," "How to Clear the Slums," and "Human Nature Behind Prison Bars." In 1914, members heard both sides of the league's founding issue, with lectures entitled "Why I Believe in Women's Suffrage" and "Why I am Opposed to Women's Suffrage."

With the construction of Town Hall, the league's emphasis on education with an open forum continued. political education, social problems, and current events continued. Topics during the 1920s covered political, social, and current events with lectures such as "Russia Today and Tomorrow," "The Problem of Main Street," "The New Political Power of Women," "Justice and Efficiency for Capital and Labor," "The Outlook for World Peace," "What is the American Way," "What Does Democracy Mean," "Is Our Freedom in Danger," "Personal Liberty and the Modern State," and "The Challenge of Self-Government."

Town Hall assumed a prominent place in the life of the city at its inception, attracting leading scholars, artists, and politicians. Program speakers included women activists such as suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt and reformer Jane Addams, as well as intellectuals and literary figures like Henry James, Thomas Mann, Carl

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[24] *New York Evening Post*, February 21, 1920; quoted in Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town*, 74.
[25] *New York Evening Post*, January 28, 1920; quoted in Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town*, 76.
[26] "The Civic Forum for New York City," *American Architect* 117 (January 1920); "The Town Hall, New York City," n.p.
[27] Quoted in Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town*, 77.
[28] *Christian Science Monitor*, February 17, 1922, quoted in Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town*, 79.

Sandburg, and Edna Ferber. General John J. Pershing and Rear Admiral Bird addressed military topics, while African American leader Booker T. Washington spoke to racial issues, and Samuel Gompers addressed labor concerns. Counted among the prominent political speakers were Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, Woodrow Wilson, and Winston Churchill.

Although presentation of musical entertainment was originally deemed secondary to the building's main purpose as a venue for the civil and democratic exchange of ideas, Town Hall was designed with a world class performance space. It is not certain if this was a conscious decision by the board or a suggestion of the architects; however, Robert Ely reported that the original seating plan was changed so that the seats could be arranged in a more democratic way, making them of equal value for everyone attending the performance.[29] The building's sophisticated acoustical engineering also suggests an original intent to use the auditorium as a performance space. A 1921 letter from McKim, Mead and White to Robert Ely confirms that the architects designed the hall "for public meetings, lectures and the like [and] to be rented for concerts, moving pictures exhibitions and similar entertainments."[30]

Throughout its history, Town Hall has been a popular venue for musical performances of all types. The league began this initiative slowly, renting the auditorium for private recitals as a source of revenue. However, as the auditorium's reputation for acoustical excellence spread, the demand grew, and from 1930 to 1931 Town Hall sponsored its first Endowment Series. Among the hundreds of notable artists who performed there are Richard Strauss, 1921; Pablo Casals, 1923; Paul Robeson, 1927; Andres Segovia, 1929; Sergei Rachmaninov, 1932; Feodor Chaliapin, 1932; Lily Pons, 1938; Isaac Stern, 1939; Bela Bartok, 1940; Billie Holliday, 1942; Sarah Vaughn and Lester Young, 1947; Leontyne Price, 1954; Thelonious Monk, 1959; Igor Stravinsky, 1959; and Charles Mingus, 1962. Those who made their debuts here include Lotte Lehmann, Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, Joan Sutherland, and Marian Anderson. A 1945 jazz concert featuring Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Don Byas, Al Haig, Curley Russell, and Max Roach was an early and important public performance of bebop. Today, Town Hall remains one of the most well-known and active concert halls in the city.

In 1958, Town Hall merged with New York University (NYU), which managed the hall and leased the auditorium for a variety of purposes. During the university's ownership, the upper floors of the building became the home of the NYU Club, which had been founded in 1951 by a group of alumni. In 1973, NYU formed the Town Hall Foundation to operate the hall. In 1978, the building was acquired from the university and a new board of directors and management team was formed.[31]

Development of Radio after World War I

The early twentieth century marked a series of major changes in American society. The various effects of immigration, industrialization, and urbanization, America's involvement in World War I, and technical advances that facilitated transportation and communication all stimulated the development of a broader, more diverse, and more accessible cultural experience for many Americans. Among the many ways that citizens experienced and participated in this rapidly changing culture, the development of radio broadcasting was especially significant. The new media was revolutionary in its ability to reach an immense, scattered, and diverse audience. Many touted radio for its potential to democratize cultural exchange, while others hoped that

[29] Ely, *Beginning*, 41.

[30] McKim, Mead and White to Robert Ely, May 20, 1921; quoted in Seldon-Sturgill, "Town Hall Designation Reports," LP-1012.

[31] Several newspaper articles refer to these and other specifics about the sequence of ownership; they include "The Evolution of a Legacy at the NYU Club," *New York University Alumni Connect Newsletter* (July 2009), accessed August 25, 2010, http://www.nyu.edu/alumni/connect/archive/0709/special.htm (site discontinued); Nadine Brozan, "N.Y.U. Club Is Shut Down, Perhaps Permanently," *New York Times*, July 22, 1989. However, the information in this paragraph was provided by current Town Hall staff.

it might serve to promote social consistency for an increasingly diverse population and aid in the assimilation of the growing immigrant population. Still others worried about the potential for a loss of cultural cohesion as unregulated access to the airways enabled broadcasters to target specific races, classes, religions, and political beliefs. The possibility that labor union leaders, jazz musicians, African Americans, and communists, among others, might gain unfettered use of the airwaves unleashed fears that "mainstream" cultural values might be lost or threatened. These various themes influenced the larger political, economic, and social struggle over who should control the content and accessibility of the new medium.

By 1921, nearly ten thousand licensed amateurs were competing for the limited available frequencies.[32] But as radio's promise began to generate interest among providers and users, there was still no agreement about how the new media would be regulated and financed. Strict government control of radio during wartime led some to fear continued government censorship. Simultaneously, the proliferation of uncontrolled broadcasts prompted others to fret that a lack of government regulation would threaten a heretofore stable American identity. As early as 1922, David Sarnoff, a Russian-Jewish immigrant who held a job with American Marconi before it was purchased by General Electric Corporation had proposed the establishment of a high quality nationwide broadcast company.[33] While Sarnoff imagined a national non-commercial network, it was not until after American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) demonstrated the feasibility and profitability of chain broadcasting that Radio Corporation of American (RCA) was motivated to create NBC, the first radio network. Sarnoff assumed management of the company, later becoming its president.

RCA promoted the new network as "seeking…to provide machinery, which will ensure a national distribution of national programs, and a wider distribution of programs of the highest quality." Initially NBC saw itself as a public service provider that sold only enough time to support its non-commercial programming.[34] But despite its emphasis on quality, NBC was still a privately owned, profit-making company responsible to its stockholders.[35] At the end of its first year, NBC had forty-eight affiliates, and the following year the company divided itself into two networks: NBC Red, which presented more popular programming and generated more profit, and NBC Blue, which offered primarily cultural or educational programs. In 1927, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) was established with sixteen affiliates. By 1929, the three networks presented 359 hours of national programs a week.[36] A fourth network, the Mutual Broadcasting System, was established in 1934 as a cooperative venture among four stations that shared all the expenses of programming and broadcasting.[37]

During the 1920s and 30s, NBC and CBS pioneered the system of sustaining and sponsored programs. Sustaining programs were supported or produced by the networks, either by providing airtime and production assistance to nonprofit organizations or by producing programs themselves as a public service. The latter were touted as "quality" programming, with educational or cultural content. But despite the public service premise, sustaining broadcasts were often presented with the hope that they would be picked up by sponsors. Sponsored broadcasts were commercial broadcasts produced by paying sponsors that purchased airtime. By 1934, half of

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[32] Michele Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2007), 30.

[33] Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Perseus Book Group, 2004), 355.

[34] Robert W. McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935* (New York: Oxford Press, 1993), 15-16.

[35] Michele Hilmes, ed., *NBC: America's Network* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 7.

[36] Ibid., 16.

[37] By the 1940s, Mutual had more affiliates than either of the other networks but it claimed fewer listeners. It was known for several popular shows, for its sports broadcasts, and for its news division. After 1952 it was no longer run cooperatively; it survived until 1999.

network time was sold for sponsored broadcasts.[38] As advertising became the accepted economic foundation of broadcasting in the early 1930s, advertising agencies went beyond simply financing broadcasts to determining the actual content of the programs, and networks lost creative control over broadcasting.[39] By 1931, almost all sponsored programs were actually developed and produced by advertising agencies, and by 1934 more than 50 percent of revenue was generated from ten advertising firms.[40] By the mid-1930s, even the FCC had little control over advertisers, and it was clear that the companies paying the bill were in control of the content.[41]

The Communications Act of 1934 largely reinforced the system developed by the Radio Act of 1927. Under the new act, the FRC was replaced with the FCC, which was charged with regulating radio, telegraph, cable and telephone. The weak requirement that the FCC study the issue of independent broadcasting represented the failure of those who mounted a significant challenge to commercial radio.[42] When the promised hearings were held, Congress found that commercial broadcasters had ample time for educational and other nonprofit needs and were most eager to serve the public.[43] It was in this era that the networks began to promote their public service broadcasting more actively, largely with a significant increase in sustaining broadcasts. The networks also donated free airtime and production support for groups such as the United States Department of Agriculture, the National Parent-Teacher Association, the Academy of Medicine, and the Federation of Women's Clubs. They focused on mainstream groups, avoided radicals, and steered clear of controversial issues such as economic inequality or discrimination.[44]

By the mid-1930s, educational stations had a significantly smaller presence on the airwaves. More than half of the two hundred educational stations licensed by the 1920s had ceased to exist. In contrast, commercial radio made major strides in this period. Perhaps most important, the marketplace model had been institutionalized as an "icon of American freedom and culture."[45] Though the heads of both major networks publically championed commercial radio as the protector of democracy, the success of radio as a commercial medium meant that serious public affairs and educational programs received increasingly short shrift. Speaking in 1936, NBC's Sarnoff asserted that "we cannot have a controlled radio and retain a democracy." A year later, CBS president William Paley declared that "he who attacks the fundamentals of the American [broadcasting] system attacks democracy itself."[46] In order to justify the democratic potential of the commercial system, the networks supported a few important education programs. *ATMA* was one of these.

Radio and Democracy

As early as the 1840s, the development of the telegraph was hailed as ushering in a new era of communication in America and offering a new opportunity to develop an enlightened citizenry. Proponents had great hopes that instant electronic communications could be used to inform and educate citizens of a far flung nation, thus helping to augment national unity at a time when the republic was still growing.[47] With the emergence of popular radio in the first decades of the twentieth century, similar idealistic goals for enhancing access to

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[38] Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, vol. 2, 1933-1953 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 17.

[39] Hilmes, *NBC*, 16-21.

[40] Barnouw, *Golden Web*, 17.

[41] Ibid., 35.

[42] Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications), 34-35.

[43] Barnouw, *Golden Web*, 26.

[44] Hilmes, *NBC*, 20-21.

[45] Robert McChesney, in Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*, 40.

[46] Eugene E. Leach, "Tuning Out Education: The Cooperative Doctrine in Radio," History of Public Broadcasting in the United States, accessed February 9, 2010, http://www.current.org/coop/coop1.shtml (site discontinued). Both speeches were made to the National Conference on Educational Broadcasting.

[47] Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*, 12.

information and promoting democracy were revived. Before World War I, the amateur network created by more than one thousand ham radio transmitters suggested that almost universal access to uncensored communication was possible, while after the war the surge in independent radio broadcasters brought a democratic cacophony of viewpoints before radio listeners. At the same time, the fallout from several decades of immigration reshaped the culture in the 1920s. Between 1927 and 1935, the percentage of American households with radios rose from 25 percent to 93 percent. As radio became more accessible to the general population, many recognized that the ability to reach citizens in their own homes could play a valuable role in creating and/or defining a national public; yet, goals varied, ranging from those who embraced an opportunity to foster cultural diversity to those who promoted more rigorous assimilation. For example, while some thought that the ability to listen to stations from different regions could affirm the nation's distinctions and promote mutual understanding, others believed that radio had a special mission to raise the tone of American culture.[48] Nevertheless, there was general agreement that broadcasting could strengthen the social connections with American culture for those who were isolated and enable the electorate to be better informed. One writer expressed awe over an automobile trip during which he kept in touch with the news via radio: "...radio networks are supplying [people in remote parts of the country] with all of the news that comes into Times Square. You can think of them as lonely people listening to radios in waste places, or you can think of them as a populace and an electorate."[49] Numerous writers in the same era extolled the new medium's potential to facilitate political discourse, and many expressed the common theme that "radio would...do nothing less than resurrect the values of the early Republic."[50]

Radio's promise as an agent of democracy was rooted in the belief that the nation is best governed by an informed citizenry able to engage in a free exchange of ideas, to debate them openly, and to arrive at decisions about solving mutual problems that are supported by the majority. However, in the first decades of the twentieth century, many worried that the country's rapid expansion was creating a nation of individuals, rather than communities, one in which those in outlying areas or overcrowded cities had fewer opportunities to obtain information and interact as neighbors and were thus hampered from participating fully in the rights and duties of citizens. Among the most exciting prospects of early radio was its potential to bring information directly to Americans who were separated by geographic or social distances. Optimists believed that radio might provide a way for all Americans to gather instantly to consider critical problems. As one scholar put it, "the magnificent distances we boast of also estrange us. An idea holds us together - the idea that...[we] are all citizens of the same commonwealth. Radio will achieve the task of giving a reality to this idea.... Radio is destined to transform the United States...into a huge auditorium."[51] The idea of creating "neighborhoods" via radio informed many of the most ambitious public affairs programming of the 1930s.

The Public Forum

Democracy also relies on an educated public, an appreciation for a wide range of values, and an awareness of an ever-changing world. In the 1930s and 40s in particular, increasingly disturbing news about the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and the long buildup to World War II led many to believe that the American people needed a refresher course in democratic values so that they would be able to help their government through the difficult decisions that lay ahead. One response to this was a renewed interest in public forums as a means of adult education. Advocates of the forum movement (which had its antecedent in the late nineteenth-century Chautauqua model) promoted a formalized system of public education intended to train adults for better

[48] Starr, *Creation of the Media*, 388.
[49] Bernard DeVoto, "Main Street Twenty Years After," *Harper's* (November 1940): 585-87, in William C. Ackerman, "The Dimensions of American Broadcasting," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 9 (Spring 1945): 1-18.
[50] Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 321.
[51] Waldemar Kaempffert, "Who Will Pay for Broadcasting," *Popular Radio* (December 1922): 236-45.

citizenship. The League for Political Education itself had been established based on the forum model. The public forum contained a set format that involved a specific topic, a moderator, a formal lecture by an expert, questions from the floor, a general discussion, and a recap.[52] During the early 1930s, John Ward Studebaker, a school administrator from Ohio, brought national prominence to the forum movement. In 1932, Studebaker secured a grant from the Carnegie Corporation to develop a series of forums as an experiment in public education. Later, as U.S. commissioner of education (1934-1948), Studebaker established the Federal Forum Project (1936-1941) based on the same model. The Federal Forum Project sponsored thousands of forums all over the county, and by 1938 forums were drawing more than three million participants a year. Studebaker believed that the forums protected civil liberties by giving citizens the chance to exercise them.[53] His goal was to nurture democracy.[54] In *Plain Talk*, written in 1936, Studebaker argued that people had lost faith in their ability to deal with major social problems because they no longer understood them and that such "civic illiteracy endangers modern democracies."[55] Another scholar suggested that public forums helped to increase the political literacy of the voter, providing an aptitude for interpreting the things that he or she must judge in everyday life.[56]

For proponents of forums, who believed that education could give citizens the tools they needed to work democratically toward the public welfare, radio presented an opportunity to extend these benefits to a significantly larger audience. One enthusiast attested that "there were numerous indications that the public would accept public forum meetings and discussions by means of radio broadcasts."[57] In fact, Studebaker, who also chaired the United States Radio Education Committee, reported that in 1937 his forum centers presented nearly one thousand radio discussions.[58] The Albuquerque Public Affairs Forum, for example, which held twelve public forums in 1938, also sponsored a live broadcast of *ATMA* followed by an open discussion from the Albuquerque High School.[59] Thus, for those who despaired of an informed public, radio allowed information to be transmitted right into the American living room, thereby leveling hierarchies that were created by distance, isolation, poverty, disability, access to education, and other social and environmental factors.[60] Advocates believed that radio could offer those in remote places the same kind of information that they would seek if they had access to large universities.[61] This was seen as a tremendous resource in such a rapidly growing population and changing society. One author who believed that radio could bring valuable information into each and every home praised *ATMA* as "a significant expression of the forum idea."[62]

Finally, participation in a democracy also presupposes a sharing of ideas, the ability to listen to different ideas, to gather in groups to debate, discuss, and reach consensus. Here, proponents of radio believed that the new medium had the potential to present listeners with a wide range of views and to promote the free exchange of ideas, both on the air and among listeners, who, it was believed, would listen in groups, repeating and rearguing

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[52] Carroll D. Champlin, "The Public Forum as an Educational Agency," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 21 (November 1938): 74.

[53] John W. Studebaker, "Dr. Studebaker Pictures the Future for Public Forums as Part of the New Trend to Real Democracy in Life," *New York Times,* April 11, 1937.

[54] John Gastil and William M. Keith, "A Nation That (Sometimes) Likes To Talk: A Brief History of Public Deliberation in the United States," in *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook*, eds. John Gastil and Peter Levine (n.p.: John Wiley and Sons, 2005), 11-12.

[55] John W. Studebaker, *Plain Talk* (Washington: National Home Library Foundation, 1936), 128.

[56] J. T. Salter, "The Pattern of Politics: 1. The Politician," *Journal of Politics* 1, no. 2 (May 1939): 130-36.

[57] Champlin, "The Public Forum," 74.

[58] Studebaker, "Dr. Studebaker Pictures."

[59] "Albuquerque Federal Forum Project Scrapbook," The University of New Mexico, University Libraries, Center for Southwest Research, accessed February 15, 2010, http://rmoa.unm.edu/printerfriendly.ph [radio station KOB].

[60] Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*, 18.

[61] John Erskine, "The Future of Radio as a Cultural Medium," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Special issue, *Radio: The Fifth Estate* 177 (January 1935): 216-17.

[62] Salter, "Pattern of Politics," 135.

the debates they heard. Advocates for radio romanticized the medium by casting it as a "town hall" for the modern age, an ethereal meeting place where citizens could gather to exchange ideas and make decisions for the common good. The latter reflects a renewed interest in the idea of the New England town meeting as the embodiment of deliberative democratic decision making. This view of the town hall dated back through to the nineteenth century and reflected a reverence for New England's colonial era government structure, in which town members gathered in person, rather than through elected representatives, to discuss, debate, and decide local matters, as one of the purest expressions of the democratic ideal. Similar to the public forum, the town hall was also lauded as a school for democracy. Alexis de Tocqueville had observed that "Town Meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people's reach, they teach men how to use and enjoy it."[63] Although the town hall idea had lost some credence during the Progressive Era, with its emphasis on professional management of government, the desire to empower citizens to counter threats presented by the specter of totalitarianism promoted a renewal of interest in the decentralized democracy represented by the town hall during the 1930s.[64] Among public discussion's advocates, John Studebaker insisted that "democracy must have a channel whereby public questions may be discussed as frankly and as freely as they were in the old New England town hall meeting."[65]

The new town hall advocates focused on encouraging the exchange of viewpoints as a way to understand them and sort out their relative merits. In "Radio Builds Democracy," George Denny decried the public's tendency to read and listen only to those who shared their own views.[66] He later remarked that "it is only in orderly discussion that lies are unmasked" and asserted that when mass meetings replace town meetings danger arises.[67] "Discussion as democracy" was a popular idea in the early twentieth century, and in a book of the same name, one scholar defined democracy as "governance through talk."[68] Although face-to-face communication was highly praised and encouraged, many worried that the country had grown too large for effective discussion among citizens. Here radio advocates believed that the new medium could significantly expand the average citizen's exposure to a wide range of views. Shows such as *ATMA* emphasized the breadth of topics and participants (many of whom were decision makers in government) and prioritized exchanges between guests that elucidated differences over similarities. Furthermore, audience participation held the potential for an even more generous exchange of views, as did the opportunity for the home audience to respond by mail. Radio offered everyone the opportunity to listen to, think about, and perhaps participate in lively discussions of current affairs with important leaders in government and industry, helping to approximate the perceived virtues of the New England town hall meetings.

Public Service Broadcasting

Public service broadcasting embraces many of the principles promoted by broadcasters, idealists and reformers since the earliest days of radio. The idea that radio should serve everyone equally, promote cultural diversity, represent all viewpoints, allow for an exchange of ideas, help to ensure an informed electorate, and provide cultural and educational enrichment pervades discussion of the media from its earliest history. Since it was formed in 1927, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a non-commercial public monopoly service chartered by the British government and funded by a fee (or tax) charged to all users, has provided an almost

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[63] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835), quoted in Frank M. Bryan, *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How It Work*s (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 27.

[64] Bryan, *Real Democracy,* 25-40.

[65] William H. Bristow, "Extending the Adult-Education Horizon," Review of *Plain Talk* by John W. Studebaker," *The School Review* 45 (April 1937): 309.

[66] George V. Denny Jr., "Radio Builds Democracy," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 14 (February 1941): 370.

[67] S. J. Woolf, "The Umpire of the Town Meeting," *New York Times*, June 6, 1943.

[68] Robert Danisch, Review of *Democracy as Discussion: Civic Education and the American Forum Movement* by William Keith. *Rhetorical Review* 6 (June 2008): 9.

universally admired model for public benefit broadcasting. Nevertheless, many Americans found the BBC model, which implies that a public trustee would be immune from political and commercial interests, an insufficient guarantee that radio would be free from government censorship. In 1941 Arthur Garfield Hays, general counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, observed that "our traditions make us hesitate to give the government the power of monopolizing the radio. It is not the American way."[69] In the following decades, the example of German takeover of radio in the 1930s was frequently cited as a cautionary tale. But without government support or protection in its formative decades, American radio broadcasting was marked by tension between public service and economic interests and increasing dominance by commercial broadcasters. Although the FCC always required broadcasters to present a reasonable amount of sustaining programming, it was not until the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 that the U.S. government mandated funding for public radio.

Nevertheless, dedication to purpose, high idealism, a concern for image and reputation, a general desire to curry favor with the government, and even commercial gain motivated both independent and network broadcasters to present programs that met some or all of the goals championed by advocates of public service radio. Before the advent of commercial broadcasting, corporate stations such as those owned by RCA were presenting public service programs, and even as sponsored programming solidified its place as the basis for radio broadcasting in the United States, networks continued to produce sustaining programs that promised education or enlightenment. While public service radio has always encompassed a wide range of programming, from classical music to the latest news, programs with an educational or civic component or those that sought to enhance participation in public affairs or advance democracy through the creative use of the new medium were a natural fit with the broadly conceived goal of radio as a new public forum.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats," which began in 1933, have been hailed as a landmark in public service broadcasting because they demonstrated radio's potential for achieving exactly the goals that idealists had imagined for the new media. Broadcast directly from the White House, the chats linked a diffuse public, provided information to everyone at the same time, and fostered an exchange of ideas about mutual problems. A large part of their success has been attributed to the president's skillful presentation, which gave listeners the feeling that he was talking directly to them and inviting their response. Roosevelt used straightforward language and addressed the public as friends and neighbors. Calling the addresses "chats," suggested both an intimacy and a two-way conversation. And the public responded appreciatively. Staggering amounts of mail followed the broadcasts, with writers, many of whom were from the middle and lower middle classes, responding as they might to the president himself. One person replied warmly, saying "you are the first President to come into our homes, to make us feel that you are working for us; to let us know what you are doing." Another writer admitted that "until last night, to me, the President of the United States was merely a legend." The radio chat seemed to change all that. Now "you are real. I know your voice; what you are trying to do."[70] Studies showed that people tended to listen to the broadcasts in groups, continuing to explore the issues discussed after the broadcast.[71] Roosevelt's fireside chats verified the promise of radio and exemplified a style suitable for mass communication via electronic media.

In 1931, the *University of Chicago Roundtable* made its debut as a cooperative venture with a local radio station. Two years later, the show was picked up by NBC, where it was initially funded by grants and aired on the Red network. The highly regarded roundtable, one of the first nationwide radio discussion programs, was among the most successful and well known of NBC's public affairs offerings. Each Sunday, three or four University of Chicago professors would gather for a discussion of one of the controversial issues of the day.

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[69] Arthur Garfield Hays, "Civic Discussion Over the Air," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Special issue, *New Horizons in Radio* 23 (January 1941): 39.

[70] Both letters cited in Starr, *Creation of the Media*, 374.

[71] Discussion of fireside chats in Starr, *Creation of the Media*, 374-75 and Barnouw, *The Golden Web*, 7-8.

The roundtable was informal and unrehearsed, yet educational, with the university supplying bibliographies and discussion aids so that listeners could investigate the topics in more depth. The show was carried on as many as ninety stations and remained on the air until 1955.

Between 1934 and 1956, *American Forum of the Air*, originally the *Mutual Forum Hour*, aired on the Mutual Broadcasting System. Hosted by Theodore Granik, this popular program has been hailed as the first public affairs panel discussion and featured many notable guests, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, and Senators Harry Truman and Robert Taft. Topics discussed ranged from politics to matters of cultural concern. The format included opening remarks, a panel discussion, and questions from the audience. *The World Is Yours* was a half-hour broadcast produced by NBC with the Smithsonian Institution. Broadcast on NBC Red between 1936 and 1942, the show drew on the broad range of the museum's collections. A host known as the "Oldtimer" guided the audience through each half-hour episode.

American School of the Air, CBS's premier half-hour educational program, was introduced in 1930 and had an eighteen-year run. In the late 1930s, it was heard in more than one hundred thousand classrooms nationwide. *American School*, modeled after Ohio State University's 1929 *School of the Air*, presented educational programming in a different discipline each day.[72] For example, Monday was devoted to industry and agriculture, while Tuesday was reserved for American music. Among many notable programs, musicologist Alan Lomax contributed a twenty-six week historical overview of American folk music in 1939.

Among CBS's other offerings in this genre was *American Labor and the Nation*, a series of speeches sponsored by the American Federation of Labor in 1932. *The Columbia Workshop* (1936-1943, 1946-1947), another of CBS's sustaining programs, was developed by Irving Reis. Reis was interested in experimental modes of narrative, and the show premiered many technological innovations while presenting dramatizations of plays, stories, etc. *The People's Platform*, a CBS program, aired 1938-1952. Dr. Lyman Bryson, a former assistant to George Denny at Town Hall, professor of education at Teachers College, and chair of the Adult Education Board at CBS, developed and hosted the show. Bryson's invited four or five people with different views to dinner, following which they would discuss controversial subjects. There were no prepared speeches and discussion was kept informal and spontaneous. Bryson encouraged candor by concealing the microphone, and one of the four guests was always an average citizen. Although there was no live audience, the program featured a spirited exchange of ideas.

Overall, this programming did not prove profitable for the networks. NBC Red, with its popular fare, was vastly preferred by advertisers, while NBC Blue, with its higher cultural content, became a refuge for the less popular but more respected educational and public affairs programs. The Blue network was valuable to NBC as a demonstration of the network's commitment to high ideals, yet it remained an economic liability, and when NBC was forced to divest in 1943, it dumped the Blue network altogether.[73] Overall, public affairs broadcasting was said to be less popular than other shows; however, several shows, such as *University of Chicago Round Table*, *ATMA,* and the *People's Platform,* succeeded in drawing respectable audiences.[74] Even though several of these shows had long runs, network commitment to sustaining broadcasts decreased in the 1940s.

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[72] The *Ohio School of the Air* (1929-1937) was an early effort to use radio in public education. Founded by Benjamin Darrow, the school offered a number of subjects to primary and secondary school students and was heard in as many as twenty-two states.

[73] Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, vol. 1, -- to 1933 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 272. NBC Blue became the foundation of the American Broadcasting Company (ABC).

[74] Public affairs programs usually generated between three and four thousand letters a week, sometimes as high as ten thousand. Letters about entertainment broadcasts generally brought in thirty to forty thousand letters a week.

America's Town Meeting of the Air

ATMA was the initiative of George V. Denny Jr. (1899-1959), who joined the staff of the League for Political Education in 1931 as assistant to Robert Erskine Ely. Denny served as moderator for *ATMA* for nearly its entire run (until 1952) and replaced Ely as director (later president) of the league (later Town Hall, Inc.) after the latter's retirement in 1937. During his tenure as president, Denny embraced and advanced the ideals of the League for Political Education, asking "what…is more important and more urgent for the safety of American democracy than an honest system of political education?"[75] Denny, a native of North Carolina, brought valuable skills from his varied background as a student of commerce, actor, stage manager, and educator. In the latter capacity he served as director of the extension program at Columbia University and thus embraced some of the same optimistic views of public education as the public forum advocates.[76] He respected and carried on the legacy of Josiah Holbrook's early nineteenth century Lyceum Movement, the Chautauqua program, and other pioneering efforts in adult education, including the League for Political Education itself.[77] Throughout his career, he continued to believe that "a substantial percentage of the American people are not...close-minded" and welcomed efforts to expand their mental horizons.[78] Denny came to the league with a mixture of optimism, idealism, and artistic ability that strongly informed the choices that he made about its direction and that directly inspired the development of *ATMA*.

The oft-repeated and perhaps apocryphal genesis of *ATMA* was Denny's indirect encounter with a narrow-minded neighbor who had refused to listen to one of Roosevelt's fireside chats simply because he disapproved of Roosevelt. It was said to be this experience in 1934 that crystallized Denny's fears that Americans, hampered by ignorance, lack of education, practice or opportunity, or perhaps just isolated by remote locations or busy lives, were falling victims to the tyranny of the closed mind. Denny worried that without hearing and debating all sides of an issue, Americans would be more susceptible to the thoughtless "mass thinking" that Hitler was both encouraging and capitalizing on in Germany during the 1930s. Believing that the American public needed to be conscious of its power and responsibilities, Denny declared that "its members must be taught to listen to both sides of an argument and to reason together honestly and objectively."[79] Whether real or not, Denny's one-dimensional neighbor served as a metaphor for a nation of citizens who lacked empathy for others.

In the aftermath of this epiphany, Denny conceived the idea for an uncensored radio program "reviving our native tradition of a free and unfettered exchange of opposing views."[80] Denny's own history of *ATMA* began with a fundamental statement of his belief that "free discussion of public issues has always been a basic function of democracy" and an allusion to the construction of a place for town meetings as the first act of the New England colonists.[81] Denny clearly embraced both the historicist and practical implications of calling his proposed broadcast a "town meeting of the air." During the 1930s, the town hall had once again become a powerful symbolic metaphor for American democracy. Denny also grasped the potential for modern technology to turn "every home into a potential town hall."[82] Finally, like Roosevelt, Denny embodied the sense of showmanship and style needed to make it a success.

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[75] Quoted in Orrin E. Dunlap Jr., "Open Forum Is Applauded, Freedom of Speech and Assembly for Discussion are Commended by Listeners in Tune with Town Hall of the Air," *New York Times*, June 30, 1935.
[76] David Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest: America's Town Meeting of the Air," in Hilmes, *NBC*, 45.
[77] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy," 370-71.
[78] Ibid., 375-76.
[79] Denny, quoted in Woolf, "The Umpire."
[80] Ibid.
[81] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy, 70.
[82] Woolf, "The Umpire."

Denny pitched his idea to John Royal, NBC's vice president for programming, and received approval for an initial series of six programs in the spring of 1934. Denny's timing was fortuitous. With the recent surge of interest in the successful Federal Forum Project, Royal observed that NBC had been besieged with forum proposals.[83] Denny's proposal also coincided with debate over the Communications Act of 1934, a period in which the network was eager to demonstrate its commitment to public affairs broadcasting. NBC agreed to finance the program, and the first six shows were broadcast between May and June of 1935.

The first broadcast, which took place on 30 May 1935, proved to be a landmark in broadcast history. Denny wasted no time in initiating discussion of a controversial yet timely topic: "Which Way America: Fascism, Communism, Socialism or Democracy?" Speakers, who represented each of the stated four ideologies, were Lawrence Dennis, A. J. Muste, Norman Thomas, and Raymond Moley.[84] Lawrence Dennis was an American diplomat, consultant, and author who argued that capitalism was doomed and advocated fascism during the Great Depression. Norman Thomas was a pacifist and American Socialist Party leader who ran for president six times. Raymond Moley was a lawyer, political scientist, member of FDR's "brain trust," and staunch defender of capitalism. Each delivered a prepared ten-minute talk and took questions from the audience of 1,500. Despite the fact that it aired on only eighteen stations with little advance publicity, the show received three thousand letters, only four of which were negative. Among the positive comments, one writer exclaimed that "last night you made radio history. My heartiest congratulations on the best radio program I have ever heard." Several praised the "splendid" programming, while another rejoiced to have "an example of this freedom of speech which has never been so much talked about and so little practiced as today." Yet another listener asserted that "if our country is to be rescued from the reactionaries on the one hand, and the radicals on the other, none can be of more service than your program....If the people knew of it you would have tens of thousands of listeners.[85] Denny later boasted that "nothing like it had occurred before in radio," differentiating *ATMA* from other radio discussion programs and forums by the audience's participation and their ability to question the speakers directly.[86]

After the six trial programs, *ATMA* became a regular part of NBC's evening schedule, airing on NBC Blue for eight years as a sustaining broadcast. The show was broadcast weekly and Denny produced between twenty-four and twenty-nine episodes per season. Responses averaged 1,103 letters a week in the first year, and by the late 1930s the show was receiving more than two thousand letters a week.[87] After inheriting *ATMA* along with the rest of the Blue network, ABC solicited commercial support for the broadcast, and the 1944-45 season was sponsored by *Reader's Digest*. Between 1947 and its demise in 1956, the show was aired as a "cooperative," which meant that local sponsors shared its costs.[88] The show was televised for two brief periods, between October 1948 and June 1949 and for several months in the first half of 1952. Although Denny moderated the first TV run, the 1952 shows were moderated by John Daly. In the same year, Denny was replaced on the radio broadcasts as well. The show continued on radio for another four years, and the final broadcast occurred on 24 June 1956.

George Denny was the central figure in planning and executing *ATMA* from its inception until its last few years and his involvement was crucial to the show's success. He worked with Town Hall's Radio Forum Division in

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[83] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 45.

[84] Though NBC promised that there would be no censorship, the network did indeed object to one of the proposed speakers, communist leader Earl Browder, and he was replaced with Muste, chair of the Workers Party of the United States. Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 49.

[85] Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town,* 8-12.

[86] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy," 373.

[87] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 49. Goodman notes that during the late 1930s and early 1940s the most popular broadcasts received more than four thousand letters per week.

[88] Ibid., 49-50.

selecting the speakers, who were always chosen from the top echelons of their fields, and the division director handled the logistics of the programs.[89] During the show, Denny introduced the speakers, moderated the debate, and read the questions from the audience.[90] The format remained consistent, with four presenters speaking briefly from prepared scripts before taking questions from the audience. Speakers met the morning of the broadcast and had the option of spending the afternoon revising their remarks. They were instructed to stress their differences in their opening remarks, so that they could summarize the points on which they agreed at the end. Audience questions, which were limited to twenty-five words, had to be written and approved by a committee to eliminate "personal" remarks.[91] The audience was crucial to the success of the program, and Denny allowed them a great deal of freedom. Described [by Denny] as "spectators-hecklers," audience members could be heard cheering, hissing, and/or booing. The unpredictable nature of their reaction added drama, a sense of risk, and a certain intimacy, drawing the radio listeners into the moment. By 1936 it was possible for radio listeners to call in from throughout the country, which further enhanced the connection between the forum and its listening audience.[92] The format for the live question period developed for *ATMA* has been called a "significant innovation in American broadcasting," and it clearly reflected Denny's larger intent to "dramatize the power of discussion."[93]

Part of *ATMA*'s success can be attributed to Denny's skills as a host and moderator. Presumably, his acting experience had given him a sense of performance that facilitated his handling of the live event in New York. He also understood how to make the broadcast an engaging experience for the home listener. He was skillful in mediating between guests who were accustomed to deference and unruly audience members and straddling the line between education and entertainment. He maintained that "conventional classroom methods cannot be used on the air. When the words 'talk' or 'education' occur in the radio-program listings in the paper, they are assiduously avoided by most listeners."[94] He relied heavily on reinforcing the ideological associations with the New England town hall by using corny effects that were intended to create an historicist atmosphere for the home audience, such as ringing a loud bell to open the show and calling out "good evening neighbors, town meetin' tonight." These associations were further reinforced for members of the live audience, who were seated by ushers wearing colonial costumes.[95] And although Denny himself didn't dress like a Puritan, a cartoon figure of a man resembling one was used for the show's promotional brochure.

Mail was steady in volume and generally supportive. Listeners expressed a keen interest in learning as well as understanding and appreciating Denny's goals for the program. For example, one writer appreciated "discussion of vital questions at an adult level." Another called the show "the best thing that has happened to my mind in a longer time than I can remember," and a third professed that "[t]here has never been a time when it was more important for intelligent people to use every means at hand to strengthen democracy."[96] Denny also reported receiving mail from all kinds of listening groups, including those formed in schools, colleges, churches, and social clubs. He described one group that listened in the back of a drugstore and others that gathered in the homes of friends and neighbors.[97] In 1936, researchers found that 50 percent of listeners usually continued discussion after the show, and 34 percent reported changing their opinion at least once after listening

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[89] Information about the Radio Forum Division from Max Wylie, ed., *Best Broadcasts of 1938-39* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1939), 189.

[90] In his duties as director of the league (and then Town Hall, Inc.), Denny also continued to help select lecturers for the league's morning lectures and assist in the management of the concert department.

[91] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 48.

[92] John Dunning, *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31.

[93] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 48.

[94] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy," 376.

[95] R. M. Ely, in Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 47.

[96] The first two quoted in Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town*, 212-13. The third quoted in Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 49.

[97] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy," 373-74.

to a broadcast.[98] In 1938, in response to numerous requests for assistance, Denny initiated the Town Hall Advisory Service, organized by Chester D. Snell, which prepared materials for discussion groups. Among these materials were advance information about broadcasts, a bibliography, a discussion leader's handbook, and a guide for discussion group members. By 1941, more than one thousand discussion groups had registered with Town Hall, and the American Association for Adult Education estimated that more than three thousand groups met regularly to listen to and discuss the program.[99] Denny's handbook adhered closely to his intent that the show should provide information and spark discussion rather than solve problems, and he reminded leaders that "judgment should be reserved on many proposals."[100] As Robert E. Ely phrased it, *ATMA* was not an attempt to solve problems but to promote a better informed, broader consideration of them.[101]

Although most broadcasts originated from Town Hall, Denny toured with *ATMA* several times. In 1938 he presented the show from a series of educational institutions: Harvard, Chautauqua Institution, Northwestern University, the University of Denver, and the University of California at Berkeley. And in 1949, the show took a world tour, broadcasting from London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Ankara, Tel Aviv, Cairo, Karachi, New Delhi, Manila, Tokyo, Honolulu, and Washington. The latter series focused on race relations in America and included representatives of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and The National Council of Negro Women. The show's reach expanded internationally in 1950, when *ATMA* was broadcast over Voice of America, an international broadcasting service funded by the United States government with the intention of bringing democracy to totalitarian countries.

Denny, *ATMA*, and NBC all won numerous accolades for the show. Among them were two awards for best radio performance from the Women's National Radio Committee (before 1938) and an award for best educational program of the year from the Ohio Conference on Radio and Education (for the Willkie-Jackson discussion, 6 January 1938). The same broadcast was also honored as best public discussion in Max Wylie's *Best Broadcasts of 1938-38.* Wylie judged the broadcast, "How Can Government and Business Work Together," with Robert Jackson and Wendell L. Willkie, as "one of the most effective public discussions ever broadcast in this country."[102] The Women's Press Club of New York and the National Federation of Press Women awarded a certificate of merit for the "best unbiased discussion on economic, political and international problems" (before 1938), and the American Legion Auxiliary awarded a silver plaque for "the program most acceptable and worthwhile to the general family audience" (before 1938). The show won the prestigious Peabody Award for outstanding educational program twice, in 1943 and 1945, and took a first place in Network Public Issues Broadcasts from the Institute for Education by Radio at Ohio State University, 10th American Exhibition of Education Radio Programs, in 1946. The show was also cited twice by the National Council of Teachers of English, in 1946 and 1947, for its excellence.

In addition, throughout the 1930s and 40s, *ATMA* received repeated notice in various scholarly journals. Its published broadcast transcripts were noted more than fifteen times in the *American Economic Review*'s new books feature, which highlighted those relating to economic policy, business, and labor issues. *ATMA* broadcasts were also cited in bibliographies for articles published in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, the *Michigan Law Review*, the *Yale Law Review*, the *Virginia Law Review*, the *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *American Anthropologist*, the *American Political Science Review*, and the *Journals of Politics.* During the same period, the show and/or its published transcripts were also recommended in numerous journals for educators, including the *Phi Delta Kappan*, *College English*, the *English Journal*, the

[98] Research was by psychologist Hadley Cantril of Princeton, in 1936. Reported in Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 49.
[99] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy," 374.
[100] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 52.
[101] Ely, *Beginning*, 46.
[102] Wylie, *Best Broadcasts of 1938-39*, 190.

Clearing House, *Library Quarterly*, the *Peabody Journal of Education*, the *Journal of Negro Education*, *History of Education Quarterly*, *Review of Educational Research*, the *School Review*, the *Elementary School Journal*, and others.

Programs[103]

Although *ATMA* presented a great many diverse programs over its twenty-two year history, the overall content of the show's broadcasts can be generally divided into three periods. The show's earliest years (1934-1939), which coincided with the Great Depression, were marked by the greatest diversity and the greatest willingness to explore new ideas. During these years, the show came closest to achieving its goal of promoting free, fearless, and open discussion, giving time to advocates of alternative political, social, economic systems, and allowing discussion of fundamental social and political questions. Among those who spoke were Earl Browder and Clarence Hathaway, representatives of the American Communist Party, and Olivia Rossetti Agresti, who defended fascism. Shows from this era that address important political and social issues include: "Personal Liberty and the Modern State" (1935); "The Supreme Court and the Constitution" (1936); "What Does Democracy Mean?" (1938); "Can Democracies Avoid Dictatorship?"(1937); "Which Way Capitalism-Competition or Cooperatives?"; "Can We Solve the Crime Problem?"; "The State and Civil Liberties"; "Does Our Tax System Need to Be Revised?" (1937); and "Do We Have a Free Press?" (1939).

The latter ("Do We Have a Free Press?") was a landmark program in which Harold Ickes, secretary of the interior, faced Frank E. Gannett, a well-known newspaper publisher. While Gannett described members of the press in heroic language and championed them as courageous, Ickes accused Gannett of specific conflicts of interest.[104] In citing examples that the press was beholden to advertisers, Ickes referred to the results of a 1933 study by Dr. Raymond Pearl of Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Pearl, who was also on the program, is believed to have been one of the first scientists to link smoking to a shorter life span. The results of his study had been made widely available to every paper in America through the wire services. Ickes claimed that nearly all of the major urban papers had suppressed it, a decision that he attributed to pressure from tobacco advertisers.[105] The following year, Ickes followed up the debate with a book on the subject (*America's House of Lords, An Inquiry into Freedom of the Press*), asserting that publishers were men of wealth and power working against the interests of the common man.[106] The *ATMA* broadcast itself, with an audience of millions, may have been among the first public mentions of the potentially deadly effects of tobacco.[107] This program has been cited as one of *ATMA*'s stellar offerings and was rebroadcast in 1953 as part of *ATMA*'s twentieth-anniversary celebration.

Guests from this era, one of great uncertainty for the United States, also examined the serious economic and social problems the county faced and debated proposed new government policies and the philosophies behind them. In 1935, *ATMA* asked: "Has the New Deal Promoted or Retarded Business Recovery?" The question was discussed by Merwin K. Hart of the New York State Economic Council and future Supreme Court Justice

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[103] The section on programs was drawn in part from the analysis by David Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 49-60.

[104] "The Press: Suppression of News," *Time,* January 23, 1939, accessed November 16, 2010, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,760627,00.html.

[105] "Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil: The Story of In Fact - Part Two," adapted from George Seldes, *Never Tire of Broadcasting* (n.p.: Lyle Stuart, 1968), accessed November 17, 2010, http://www.brasscheck.com/seldes/infact2.html (site discontinued). Note: Seldes apparently undertook a library search and found that no large urban newspaper other than the *Washington Post* had published the story. Pearl disagreed. Seldes discussed the controversy in several articles of *In fact*.

[106] "The Press: Debate Continued," *Time,* January 23, 1939, accessed November 17, 2010, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,762759,00.html.

[107] "Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil."

Hugo L. Black. Another 1935 program addressed the question: "Will the Demands of Organized Labor Promote Recovery?" This two-part series featured Sidney Hillman, president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union, and James A. Emory, general counsel of the National Council of America Manufacturers. Hillman has been called one of the greatest labor leaders in American history, while his opponent was once quoted as saying that labor unions were "more tyrannical than George III."[108] In 1935, Labor Secretary Frances Perkins debated journalist George E. Sokolsky over the merits of the newly passed Social Security Act ("Should We Plan for Social Security?"). Sokolsky, a strong supporter of the National Association of Manufacturers, argued that the New Deal promoted a collectivist agenda. During the *ATMA* debate, he told Perkins that liberty was not to be "sacrificed for bread alone." Sokolsky felt that the federal government had overstepped its jurisdictional bounds and had used the federally subsidized insurance as a bounty to coerce state governments into going along with it. He called the 10 percent tax retained by the federal government a "service charge for coercion."[109]

In a 1936 program, "Will Unionization Promote Industrial Recovery," Matthew Woll, vice president of the American Federation of Labor, appeared opposite Ralph Robey, assistant professor of banking at Columbia University and author of *Roosevelt vs. Recovery*. In 1937, *ATMA* addressed the controversial topic of health care reform ("What System of Medical Care Should We Have?"). In this show, Dr. Arthur C. Christie spoke for the AMA, arguing against "the evils of health insurance or state medicine," while Dr. Gilbert Hague spoke in favor of socialized medicine. Three years later, *ATMA* returned to the topic ("Does America Need Compulsory Health Insurance?" 1940). This time Dr. Terry Townsend took the AMA's position against compulsory health insurance, while Charles Edward Winslow, a professor of public health at Yale University, strongly endorsed it. Howard claimed that "compulsory health insurance is the mark of decadent medicine everywhere it exists." Winslow declared (to applause) that "while we stand still and quarrel about details...men and women and children suffer and die for the lack of the resources of modern medical science."[110] And in 1938, former New Deal supporter Wendell Willkie and Robert H. Jackson, a prominent advocate for Roosevelt's programs, had a spirited debate on the merits of the New Deal that was later selected as the "best public discussion" of 1938 (Max Wylie's *Best Broadcasts of 1938-38)*. At the end of the 1930s, *ATMA* also ventured tentatively into the question of racial equality. A 1939 program featuring Earnest A. Hooton, a physical anthropologist at Harvard and Ashley Montagu, a professor of anatomy, asked "Should We Ignore Racial Differences?" In the same year, Mary McLeod Bethune, vice president of the NAACP and an important influence on civil rights policy during Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, appeared on a program entitled "What Does American Democracy Mean to Me?" Bethune, the daughter of slaves, spoke eloquently of envisioning "mutual respect and understanding between [the] races."[111]

As the situation in Europe deteriorated and the nation edged closer to war and then entered the fighting itself (1940-1945), broadcasts were dominated by discussions of international relations. The prelude to war actually began in the late 1930s, with programs such as "Can America Remain Neutral?" (1937), "How Should Democracies Deal With the Dictatorships?" (1938), and "What are the Real Issues in the War?"(1939). Guests for these broadcasts included a variety of journalists, foreign correspondents, and military intelligence experts. By the 1940-41 season, twenty-seven of twenty-nine broadcasts were about some aspect of this topic. Many of

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[108] "Assails the Unions, J. A. Emory, at Manufacturers' Dinner, Charges them with Tyranny," *New York Times*, January 29, 1909.

[109] Social Security Administration, "Should We Plan for Social Security?" American's Town Meeting of the Air, Radio Broadcast: December 19, 1935, Social Security History, accessed November 17, 2010, http://www.ssa.gov/history/1935radiodebate.html.

[110] John McDonough, "Echoes of 1930s in Health Care Debate: NPR," August 28, 2009, accessed November 12, 2010, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112345150.

[111] "Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955), 'What Does American Democracy Mean to Me'," *America's Town Meeting of the Air,* November 23, 1939, American RadioWorks, "Say it Plain," accessed November 12, 2010, http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/mmbethune.html.

these broadcasts examined the ways in which a democratic nation should respond to a war of aggression outside its shores. Specific topics included: "What Are We Preparing to Defend?" (1940); "Is This Our War?"; "How Should We Meet Totalitarian Aggression in the Americas?"(1940); "Is A Hitler Defeat Essential to the United States?"(1941); "Must America and Japan Clash?"; "Should the President's National Defense Program Be Adopted?" (1940); and "Must We Fight Japan?" In 1941 *ATMA* spotlighted the heated debate about American intervention twice. In April, in a program entitled "Should Our Ships Convey Arms to Britain?," Ernest W. Gibson, national chair of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, spoke in favor of the convoys, while Sen. C. Wayland Brooks, a decorated World War I veteran, argued passionately against them. Only a month late, in May 1941, the similarly titled "Should Our Ships Convoy Materials to England?" featured Reinhold Niebuhr, chair of the Union for Democratic Action, who supported the aid, and John Flynn, a founder of the America First Committee, who opposed it. In June 2010 a recording of the latter broadcast was chosen for inclusion in the National Recording Registry at the Library of Congress.

The debates and the audience reactions during this period were marked by a gradual increase in tension, and Denny himself began to fear that "the audience would get completely out of control."[112] The most divisive conflicts arose between isolationists and interventionists, a disparity that no doubt reflected the divided sentiments of the country. People on both sides of the issue were less willing to listen to views that contradicted their own and, perhaps even worse, were quick to challenge the patriotism of members of the opposition. It may have been the emergence of a serious threat to democracy that made it difficult to maintain objective views, which in turn compromised *ATMA*'s ideals for free thinking and open debate. In addition, as some listeners gave in to fear and suspicion, their correspondence shamelessly erupted into stereotyping and racism, such as the letter from "twelve listeners" from Brooklyn, who wrote that "those noisy Jews, who packed the Town Hall Meeting of the Air tonight, spoiled the program for the listening audience....[T]he Jews, by their actions, convince the radio listeners that...Hitler is 100% right."[113] Letters such as these contrasted sharply and shockingly with the open embrace of diversity that greeted the show's earliest broadcasts.

The horrors of war, which were perhaps worse than even imagined beforehand, presented a challenge to the champions of open debate, who now questioned whether freedom, even of discussion, was too dangerous. Even Denny seemed to rethink his priorities, realizing that one was just as free to be evil as to be good.[114] He and other idealists wondered whether, with such evil at loose in the world, unity was more important than "tolerance, reason and justice."[115] Some commentators even questioned whether open forums with live questions should continue during the war.[116] After one broadcast in 1941, Chester S. Williams, director of the Federal Forum Project, wrote to Denny that "the live audience encouraged participants to speak 'according to crowd psychology' and that forums of this kind served the cause of totalitarianism rather than democracy. Williams blamed open forums for creating 'that disgusted state of mind which is ready to embrace a dictator rather than carry on with a confusion of tongues' and concluded that 'this kind of thing can wreck American democracy'."[117]

In the immediate aftermath of the war, *ATMA* presented several programs that focused on issues of international importance. Among them was the debate that preceded the Nuremberg war crimes trials, which presented society with the question of how to deal with crimes that were so horrible as to be outside the legal system. During *ATMA*'s show of February 10, 1944, "How Should the Axis War Criminals be Tried?," panelists Emil Ludwig, Samuel Grafton, and Louis Nizer brought the issue before Americans nearly two years before the trials

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[112] Quoted in Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 51.
[113] Ibid., 53.
[114] Denny raised this issue in a 1943 speech, quoted in Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 54-55.
[115] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 54.
[116] Ibid., 51.
[117] Ibid., 53.

began (in November 1945). And in 1945, a panel consisting of Undersecretary Joseph C. Grew, Sen. Tom Connelly of Texas, Harold E. Stassen, chair of the Council for Democracy; Raymond Swing; William Shirer; and H. V. Kaltenborn discussed the founding of the United Nations. Some of the participants expressed hope that the new organization would serve as a major catalyst to world order and peace.

Although Denny struggled to retain his belief in openness and tolerance, he emerged from the war as a fierce opponent of communism and, ultimately, a less tolerant thinker. Whereas he had once held an unwavering faith in a "public sphere of discussion," by the mid- 1940s he began to despair that "openness and tolerance...were no longer enough in a world of evil....that discussion must be anchored in some innate moral sense."[118] Between 1946 and Denny's replacement as host in 1952, the show's focus turned to the Cold War and the increasingly heated debate about the Communist threat. The notorious anti-communist Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy appeared on the program three times. In a 1947 show ("Should the Communist Party Be Outlawed in the United States?"), the then little-known McCarthy made one of his first public statements about communism, explaining why he thought the party should be banned; in 1948, McCarthy stated that the U.S. was losing the war against communism, linking this to a possible Russian takeover; and in 1950, at his most outspoken, he said that American policy was being made by "stooges and dupes of the Kremlin." In another show in this era, "Who Are the Troublemakers in Our Democracy?" (1952), panelists Arnold Foster of the Anti-Defamation League; Merle Miller, a writer and war correspondent; and Victor Riesel, a columnist for the *New York Mirror*, debated whether the true troublemakers were members of the Communist Party, the zealots who demonized them, perhaps based on racial or religious bigotry, or those who favored the suspension of American civil rights in order to stop the Communists.[119] As David Goodman has pointed out, the need to debate the meaning of democracy, within the context of the Cold War, was viewed as less important than the need to spread democracy around the world. In response to the threat of communism, democracy was now generally understood to be an existing achievement, rather than a work in progress. Denny's thinking in this era paralleled the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy.[120]

To its credit, however, *ATMA* continued to address controversial issues, even when fear and/or intolerance tainted the discussion. In an article called "TV and the Popularization of Fear," J. Fred MacDonald compared *ATMA* favorably with other media shows of the era and noted some of ATMA's important Cold War programs such as "How is Peace with Russia Possible?" (1948); "Can Modern Capitalism Meet the Needs of Modern Man?" (1949); and "How Do We Fare in the Cold War?" (1952).[121]

Also among *ATMA*'s postwar highlights were a number of shows that courageously and honestly addressed racial issues. These include: "Are We a Unified People?"; "Let's Face the Race Question" (1944); "Are We Solving America's Race Problem?" (1945); "Should the Government Guarantee Job Equality for All Races?" (1947); "What Can We do to Improve Race and Religious Relationships in America?" (1947); "Should the President's Civil Rights Program Be Adopted?" (1948)"; and "What Should We Do About Race Segregation?" (1948).

These programs returned to some of the same spirit of open and honest debate that inspired the show in the 1930s. One scholar, Barbara Savage, has argued that radio and non-governmental officials led the way in addressing racial problems in the United States. Two *ATMA* programs in particular stand out for their unusually candid discussions. In 1944, "Let's Face the Race Question" featured renowned African American poet

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[118] Ibid., 54-55.

[119] "Who Are the Troublemakers in Our Democracy," *America's Town Meeting of the Air*, May 27, 1952, recorded broadcast, accessed November 16, 2010, https://texasgypsy.wordpress.com/2010/02/07/americas-town-meeting-of-the-air-1935-1952/.

[120] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 58.

[121] J. Fred McDonald, "TV and the Popularization of Fear," accessed November 23, 2010, http://jfredmacdonald.com/trm/11tvfear.htm.

Langston Hughes; Carey McWilliams, a white progressive; John Temple Graves, a white southerner; and James Shepard, a conservative black president of the North Carolina College for Negroes. During this show, Hughes blamed segregation for undermining the "morale of Negro soldiers." He also spoke bluntly about its causes, asserting in part that it concealed a profound fear of intermarriage, and called for a comprehensive federal civil rights program. His comments were considerably more daring than radio audiences were used to hearing, a fact that Graves reinforced by praying (during the broadcast itself) that "nothing tonight will increase the sum total of race hate in America." Nevertheless, the show was enormously popular, received a high volume of positive letters, and was praised by both blacks and whites for its fair and open discussion of a sensitive issue. [122]

The following year, in "Are We Solving America's Race Problem?" (1945), well-known African American novelist Richard Wright and Elmer Carter, a black former editor of the National Urban League's *Opportunity*, took opposing views as to whether the race problem was being solved. They were joined by Irving Ives, a New York State assemblyman and Jerry Voorhis, a liberal black congressman from California. Wright delivered an attack on racism that was far more direct and aggressive even than that of Hughes. Savage noted that Wright's command of language overpowered the other speakers, as well as the moderator, allowing him to dominate the show. He called upon blacks to protest segregation actively, referring to it as a moral duty, and again raised the taboo subject of intermarriage. This show shocked listeners, who were highly critical of Wright's comments and especially of his remarks about intermarriage, the discussion of which they described as revolting, disgraceful, deplorable, and appalling. This show has been called one of *ATMA*'s most "controversial and tumultuous broadcasts," and it generated an enormous volume of mail, most of it revealing the anxiety of a white population fearful that their long-held conceptions about the relative places of blacks and whites in society might be tested.[123] It also demonstrated the rising importance of racial issues in the American consciousness. But although many whites took offense at Wright's remarks, members of the African American community were pleased. The African American members of the 477th Bombardment Group (the Tuskegee Airmen) contacted Wright directly, writing "from all of us, thanks a million....We do not *ask* for democracy, we demand it."[124] Savage observed that African Americans took advantage of opportunities to appear on political discussion shows such as *ATMA* to introduce arguments that other political commentators were not yet courageous enough to make. However, she concluded, despite the speakers' blunt appeals and the eloquence of their arguments for an end to segregation, this goal was not even "rhetorically acceptable" to most whites in 1945.[125] Nevertheless, frank discussions of racial problems on radio "illustrated radio's enormous potential as a medium for cultural and political education," helped to "expand the concept of Americanness," and prepared the way for the Civil Rights movement.[126]

Some scholars attribute the demise of *ATMA* to the development of the Cold War, when divergent opinions were considered unpatriotic. J. Fred MacDonald described *ATMA* as "the product of an earlier era in broadcasting when divergent thought was tolerated as necessary to public debate." MacDonald credited *ATMA* with continuing its tradition of presenting all sides of controversial issues during its two brief runs on television (1948-49; 1952), while other TV shows aimed for a narrow ideological consensus that reflected the "simplified emotionalism of the anti-Communist era." MacDonald concluded that *ATMA*'s divergence from the norm engendered its rapid and final disappearance from the television.[127] Likewise, Stephen J. Whitfield also

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[122] Barbara Savage, "Radio and the Political Discourse of Racial Equality," in *The Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, eds. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002), 231-32.

[123] Ibid., 236.

[124] Barbara Dianne Savage, quoted in Arthur Zilversmit, Review of *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War, and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), *History of Education Quarterly* 40 (Winter 2000): 511-13.

[125] Savage, "Radio and the Political Discourse," 241.

[126] Savage, quoted in Zilversmit, Review of *Broadcasting Freedom,* 511-13.

[127] J. Fred MacDonald, "Television and the Red Menace: the Video Road to Nam," accessed 24 August 2010, http://jfredmacdonald.com/trm/11tvfear.htm.

contrasted Depression era radio (such as *ATMA*), which offered a "less constricted political perspective" with Cold War era television, where official views were "rarely and insufficiently challenged." Whitfield credited *ATMA* with bringing its distinctive format to TV, but he noted that the program was dropped in 1952 because "the availability of a forum for left-wing opinion might generate unnecessary friction, might even appear vaguely unpatriotic when unity against Communism was sought."[128] Thus, although George Denny's high principles were tested and perhaps even tainted by World War II, the show remained a standard bearer for free speech and ideological independence throughout Denny's association with it.

Comparative Analysis and Critical Assessment

Contemporary critics and subsequent scholars have been consistent in identifying the most influential educational and public service shows from period c1930-c1950. Nearly all of the books and articles consulted for this nomination have cited the *American School of the Air* (1930), the *University of Chicago Round Table* (1931), *The American Forum of the Air* (1934), *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (1935), and/or *The People's Platform* (1938) on their lists of exemplary programs. Among these, the half-hour *American School of the Air* is most often commended for its early date and contribution to public education. The *University of Chicago Round Table*, *ATMA*, *The American Forum of the Air* and *The People's Platform* are all cited for their efforts to bring substantive issues of national importance before the American people, the high caliber of their guests, and their innovative formats. Neither *The People's Platform* nor *University of Chicago Round Table* had live audiences; however, the Chicago program was among the first national radio discussion programs and a pioneer in preparing handouts for further study. Meanwhile, the "dinner table" format made *The People's Platform* lively and entertaining. In addition, the latter show always included an "average citizen," which made it less predictable and established a more personal connection with the audience. *The American Forum of the Air*, which did take questions from an audience, is said to have been the first public panel discussion; however, neither the *American Forum* nor the *Chicago Round Table* was broadcast during prime time. In this regard, *ATMA*, an evening show broadcast Thursday at 9:30 p.m., enjoyed a higher profile and had the potential for a much larger audience.

Among all of these shows, *ATMA* excelled in its use of a live audience. Because audience members became "on-air participants in the debate," *ATMA* succeeded in "bringing the voices of everyday people onto the national airwaves arguing important topics of the day."[129] In Max Wylie's assessment of *ATMA*'s 6 January 1938 show as among the best broadcasts of 1938-39, he noted that "because they know they are to have the privilege of questioning the guest speakers [audience members] have a feeling of direct personal participation in the program."[130] As one reporter noted, "questions for the audience are generally regarded as the high point of the discussion hour, and not only the punch but the program's meaning would be lost if the audience were curbed."[131]

From the show's inception, critics acknowledged that Denny had tapped into a deeply felt need among Americans. After the show's first broadcast in 1935, the *New York Times* observed that "what the listener apparently likes about Town Hall is that freedom of speech is the guiding principle...Town Hall [is] a 'safety valve' for interesting debate and discussion."[132] Academics also quickly realized the show's educational potential. By 1939 radio, as a medium of communication, had received support from the New York State Board

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[128] Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 155.

[129] Michele Hilmes, "Evaluation of Significance of *America's Town Meeting of the Air*" for National Historic Landmark Designation of Town Hall," February 2009.

[130] Wylie, *Best Broadcasts of 1938-39,* 190.

[131] Herbert Lyons Jr., "Free Speech in Action," *New York Times*, May 25, 1941.

[132] Dunlap, "Open Forum is Applauded."

of Regents, and educators recommended *ATMA* as "a stimulating demonstration of the democratic process."[133] Teachers also praised *ATMA* and its contemporaries for their exploration of important issues, noting that "[the] objective of English teachers is that of developing a purposeful interest in current social problems....Radio experiences, too, can result in giving us social understandings. We can encourage students to listen to such programs as the University of Chicago Round Table, The People's Platform, America's Town Meeting of the Air [and] we can organize our own classes into 'town meetings' around significant social problems."[134] The show remained highly regarded by educators, as "thousands of teachers have, in the past six years, made use of 'America's Town Meeting of the Air' in their classes....'America's Town Meeting of the Air' represents such a significant contribution to the strengthening and improvement of American democracy that no school can afford to fail to introduce its students to the program."[135]

The show continued to be highly regarded by critics, including one who called it a "national institution."[136] Another noted that "millions of Americans find *ATMA* stimulating, interesting, and informative."[137] And a third saluted the show's intentions, stating that "Denny is certain that a democratic government will want the people to get all the information they need on subjects that are not military history…and sees the nation's thirst for unbiased and well-rounded information, plus an instinctive sense of fairness, as a deep rooted American trait."[138] The show's testament to free speech remained strong even during the 1940s, as the sum of its ideals were tested. One period critic noted that "Town Meeting owes it success to the fact that Americans enjoy free speech…George Denny [has] applied modern science to an institution older than the nation and turned every home into a potential town hall."[139] More than a decade later, after Denny's death, Town Hall was hailed as his greatest achievement. His obituary recalled that "in its heyday, *America's Town Meeting of the Air* was estimated to have more than ten million listeners through more than 170 radio stations" and noted that the programs "pioneered in audience participation."[140] A more contemporary critic called *ATMA* "the most famous civic education program of the 1930s" and argued that its attempt to recreate the tradition of self-government became "symbolic of the ways in which democracy might fight back against totalitarianism."[141]

In the introduction to his article "Programming in the Public Interest," radio historian David Goodman provided a succinct assessment of the significance of *ATMA*:

> *ATMA* was the jewel in the crown of NBC's public service programming, an oft-cited piece of evidence that the network was responsible and civic minded and already carrying out the public service work of a national broadcaster….[Radio] stimulated new hopes for American democracy, the prospect of historically novel levels of democratic awareness and activism in citizens. The history of *ATMA* reminds us of the civic ambition of the golden age of network radio.[142]

Goodman concluded the article by praising *ATMA* as:

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[133] Walter Ginsberg, "Radio Programs for High-School English," *The English Journal* 28 (December 1939): 837.
[134] Seerley Reid, "Radio—From Blurbs to Baby Snooks," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 21 (May 1939): 440-41.
[135] Ralph Adams Brown, "The 'Town Crier' in the English Class," *The English Journal* 30, no. 9 (November 1941): 769.
[136] William E. Utterback, "Political Significance of Group Discussion," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 250 (March 1947): 36.
[137] Hays, "Civic Discussion Over the Air," 41.
[138] Lyons, "Free Speech in Action."
[139] Ibid.
[140] "George V. Denny, Radio Host, Dead," *New York Times*, November 12, 1959.
[141] Craig, *Fireside Politics,* 25.
[142] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 44.

> one of NBC's more significant public service programs. It was for NBC in its heyday a great success story - a program that both presented and provoked national debate. It provided a practical demonstration of a new kind of radio public sphere, one that was both constrained and enabled by the network's commercial basis.[143]

Michele Hilmes, expert and the author of several books on the history of radio and television, has written an assessment of *ATMA*'s significance. Hilmes observed that *ATMA*'s programming was "more inclusive and adventurous" than that of similar programs and that it made an effort "to portray and debate all aspects of American life through the contentious years of the Depression, New Deal, and the interventionist debates preceding World War II." She also noted that *ATMA* directly inspired other public affairs programs, such as *The People's Platform* and *Freedom Forum*, a BBC production that significantly influenced public affairs programming in Britain.[144]

According to Hilmes, "the Town Hall venue itself was key to the show's appeal and success." In this *ATMA* is truly exceptional. No other radio show became so closely identified with its broadcast location. For *ATMA*, the association between venue and program went far deeper than simply the site of the broadcast. *ATMA* was the culmination of a thirty-year commitment to public education that began when six women founded the League for Political Education in 1894 and continued with the construction and use of Town Hall in the 1920s and early 1930s. *ATMA* carried the goals of the league into the modern age of electronic communication, extending the opportunity for Americans to become better citizens from Manhattan to the entire country. Remarkably, Town Hall's original program was not overshadowed by the radio broadcast; rather, the organization continued to host public lectures, educational forums, and classes concurrently with the development and success of *ATMA*.

Town Hall is significant not just as the location for a significant event, but as a physical embodiment of the event itself. Although the building was constructed before *ATMA* was conceived, the ideals embodied in its original design and program are inextricably linked to those of the radio show. The intent of Town Hall's builders to erect a "town hall" in the heart of a metropolis prefigured George Denny's intent to establish a virtual town hall for an immense country. The producers of *ATMA* went out of their way to reinforce the show's association with the building's symbolism, heralding each broadcast with an announcement that it came from "historic Town Hall in New York City."[145] The space from which the program originated, an intimate auditorium designed to provide each attendee a seat of equal value, excellent sight lines, and superb acoustics, also enhanced the goals of *ATMA*'s creators to bring everyone into the discussion. After nearly a century of use, the space in which the Town Hall lectures were given and *ATMA*'s meetings were held retains virtually complete integrity, thus preserving an outstanding association with the important events that took place there.

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[143] Ibid., 58.
[144] Hilmes, "Evaluation of Significance."
[145] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 47.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

__ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_X_ Previously Listed in the National Register.
__ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
__ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
__ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
__ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
__ Other State Agency
__ Federal Agency
__ Local Government
__ University
__ Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References:	**Zone**	**Easting**	**Northing**
	18	585727	4512176

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated parcel is defined as Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 996, Lot 32 and is outlined on the enclosed map.

Boundary Justification: The boundary was drawn to include the original parcel associated with this building.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Kathleen LaFrank, Historic Preservation Program Analyst
New York State Historic Preservation Office

Address: Peebles Island State Park
Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188

Telephone: (518) 237-8643 x3261

Date: November 2010

Edited by: Susan Cianci Salvatore, Historian
National Park Service
National Historic Landmarks Program
1201 I St., NW, 8th Fl.
Washington, DC 20005

Telephone: (202) 354-2256

DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
March 2, 2012

Photo 1. The Town Hall façade. Photograph by Kathleen LaFrank, 2009.

Photo 2. The Town Hall historic view, 1921. Photographer unknown.

Photo 3. View to main stage from upper level. Photograph by Kathleen LaFrank, 2009.

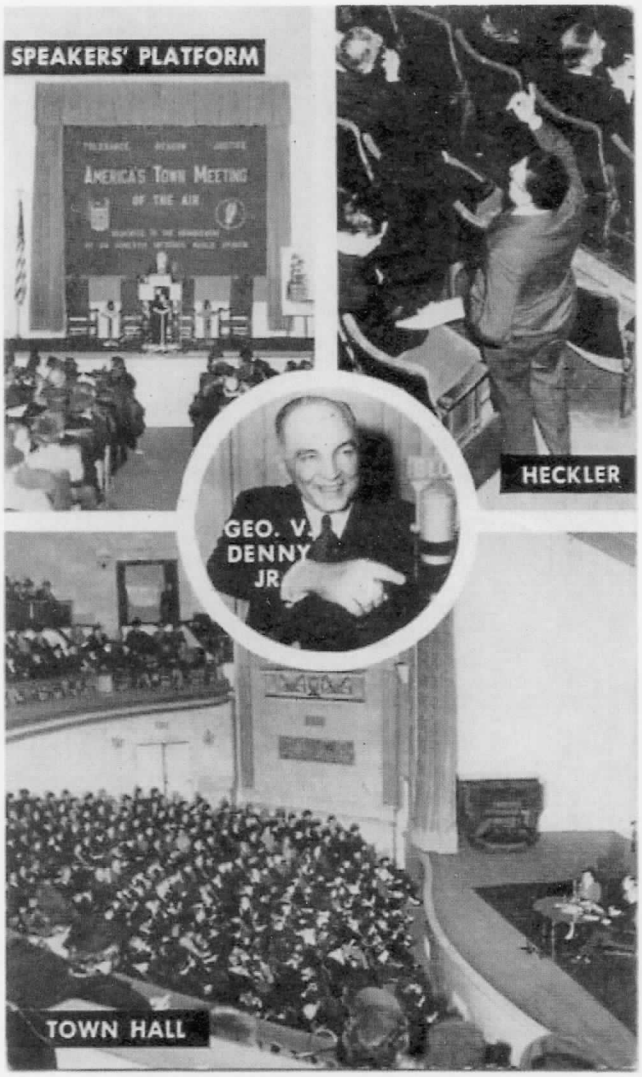


Photo 4. 1945 Town Hall postcard

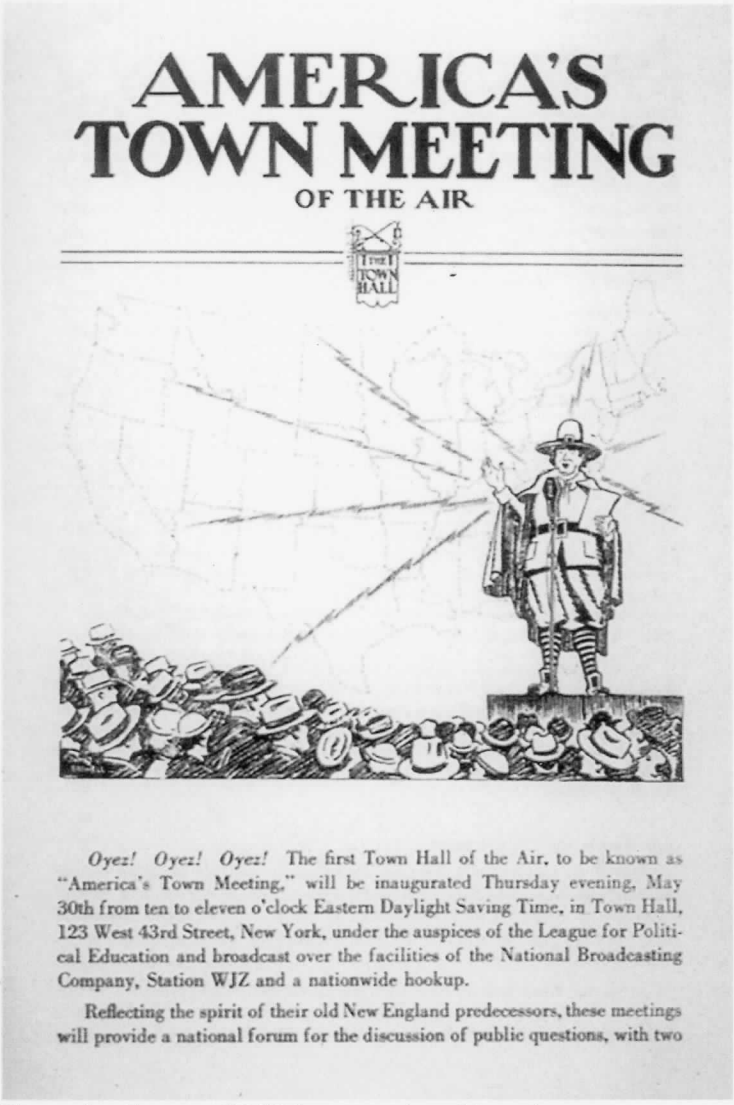


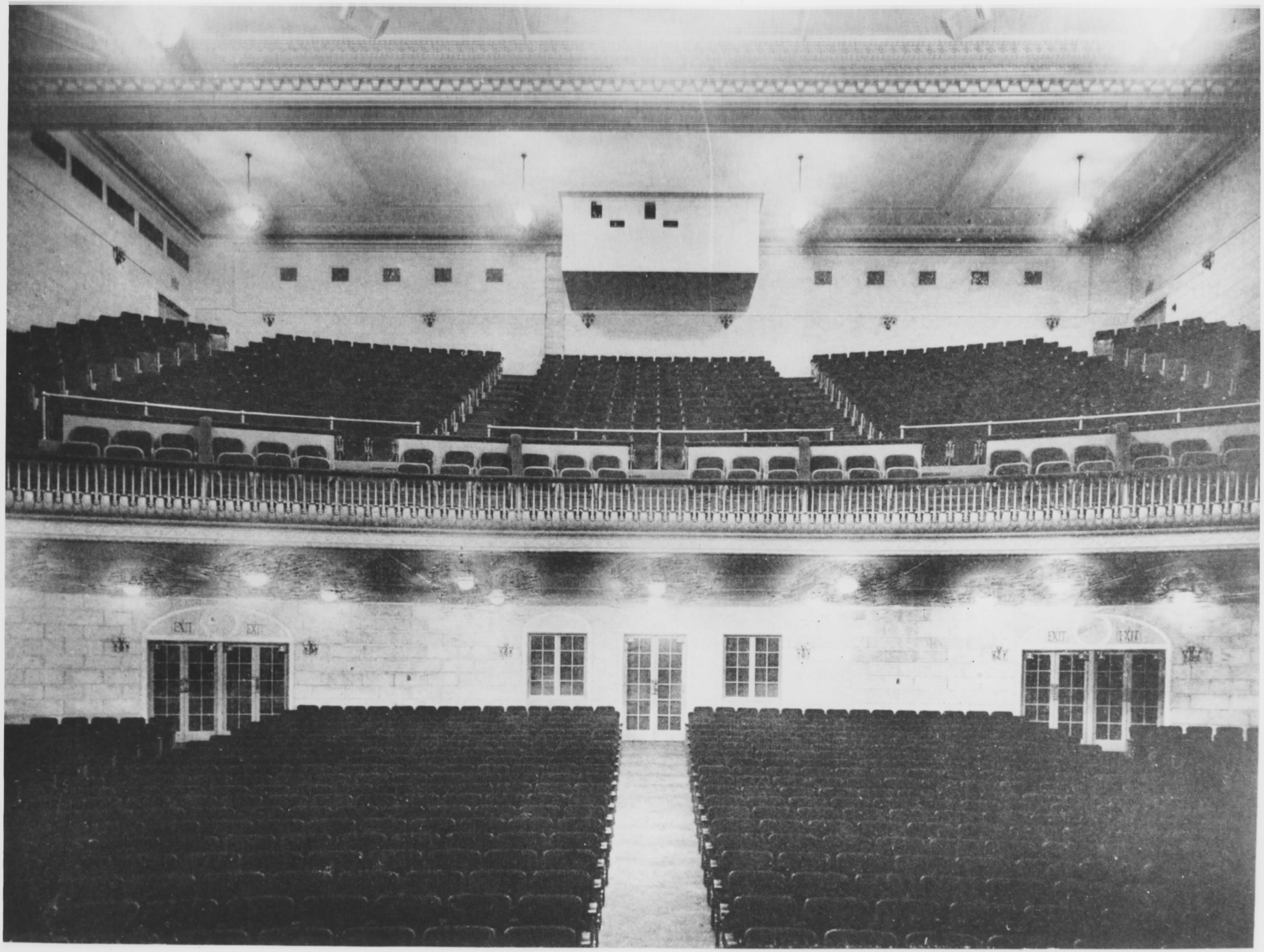
Photo 5. Cover of 1935 promotional brochure

Figure 1. 1977 Sanborn Map Company showing location of The Town Hall.

Figure 2. USGS Central Park, New York Quad.

Knickerbocker
RESTAURANT

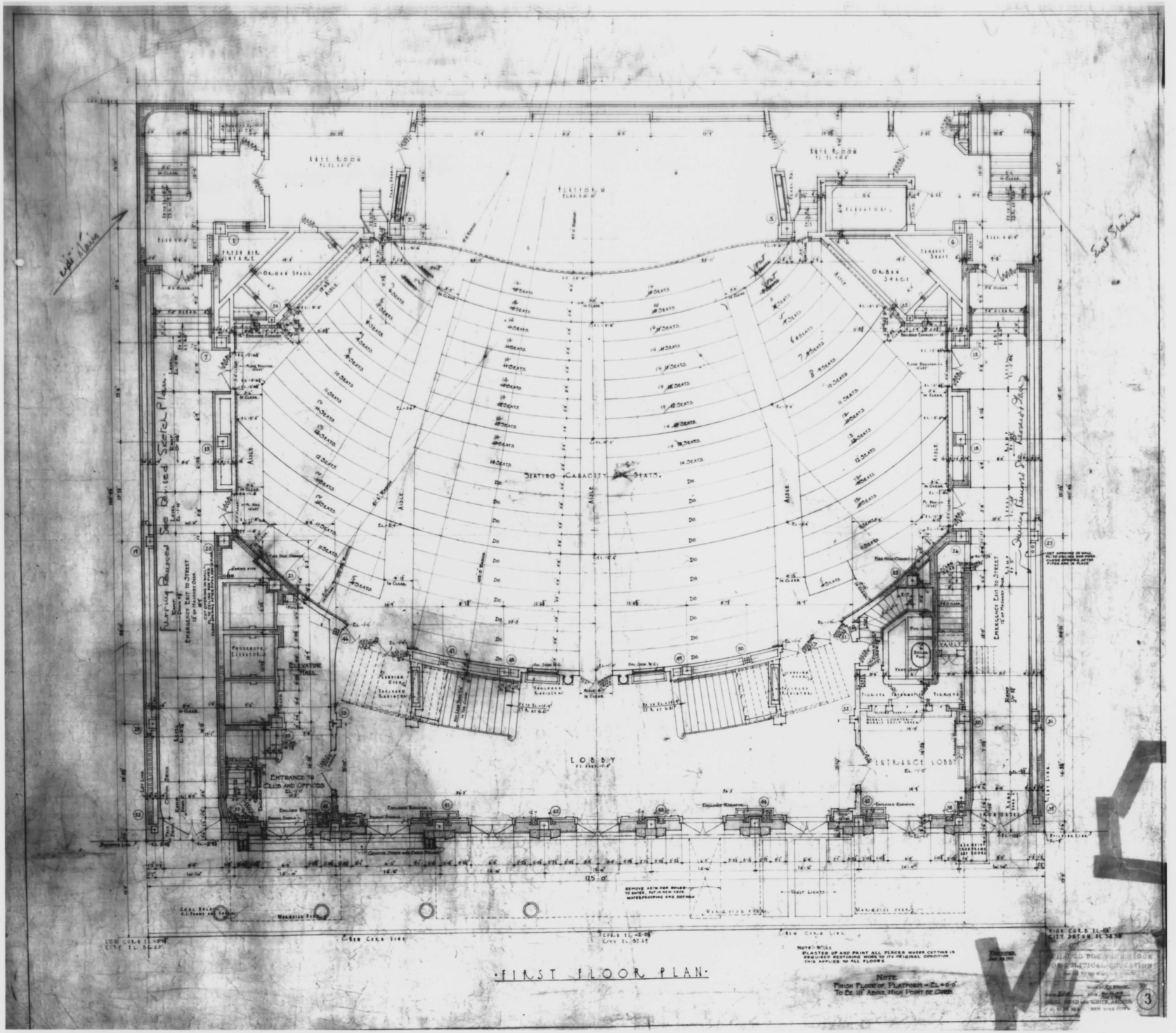
Town Hall
New York Co. NY
historic view, c 1921
photographer unknown
facade looking northeast


EXIT
EXIT
EXIT
EXIT

Town Hall
New York Co. NY
historic view, c 1921
photographer unknown

auditorium from
the stage

Town Hall
New York Co. NY
historic view, c1921
photographer unknown
lobby, showing entrance
to theater + stairs
to mezzaine


FIRST FLOOR PLAN
SEATING CAPACITY ____ SEATS.
LOBBY
ENTRANCE LOBBY
ENTRANCE TO CLUB AND OFFICES
ELEVATOR HALL
PASSENGER ELEVATORS
VAULT
TICKETS
ORCHESTRA
ORCHESTRA PIT
STAGE
EAST ROOM
EAST ROOM
PLATFORM
ORCHESTRA
ORCHESTRA
Floating Reinforced Re Raised Steel Plate
Sterling Reinforced Re Reinforced Slab
Left Stairs
East Stairs
EMERGENCY EXIT TO STREET
EMERGENCY EXIT TO STREET
125'-0"
NOTE:
FINISH FLOOR OF PLATFORM = EL. +0.0'
TO BE 1/8" ABOVE HIGH POINT OF CURB.
NOTE: NOTICE
PLASTER UP AND PAINT ALL PEACES WHERE CUTTING IS REQUIRED RESTORING WORK TO ITS ORIGINAL CONDITION THIS APPLIES TO ALL FLOORS
3

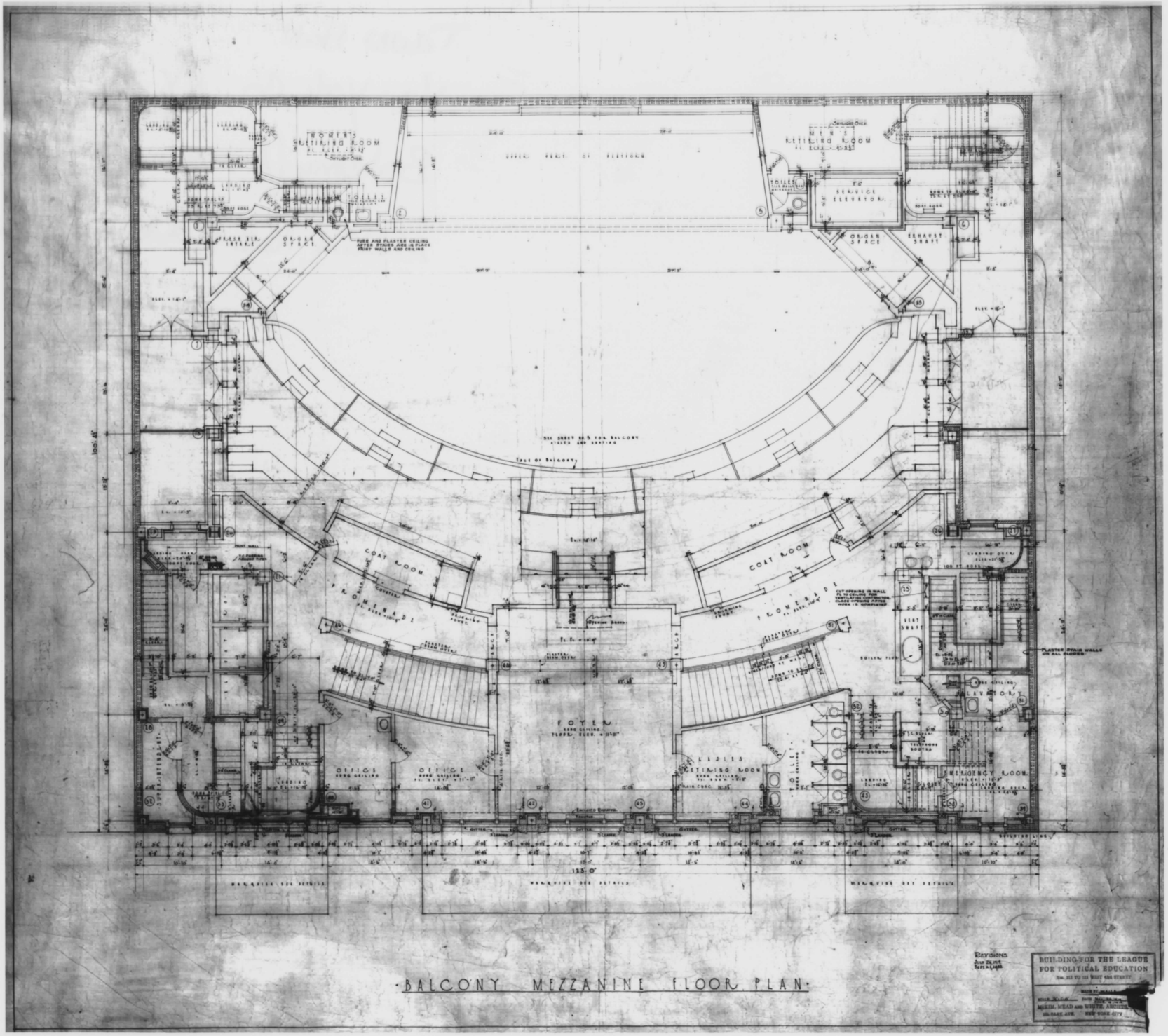
Town Hall

New York Co. NY

First floor plan

McKim Mead + White, Architects

117603349OO.JPG 7 AUX
7499200O6 007 N N N N---



BALCONY MEZZANINE FLOOR PLAN

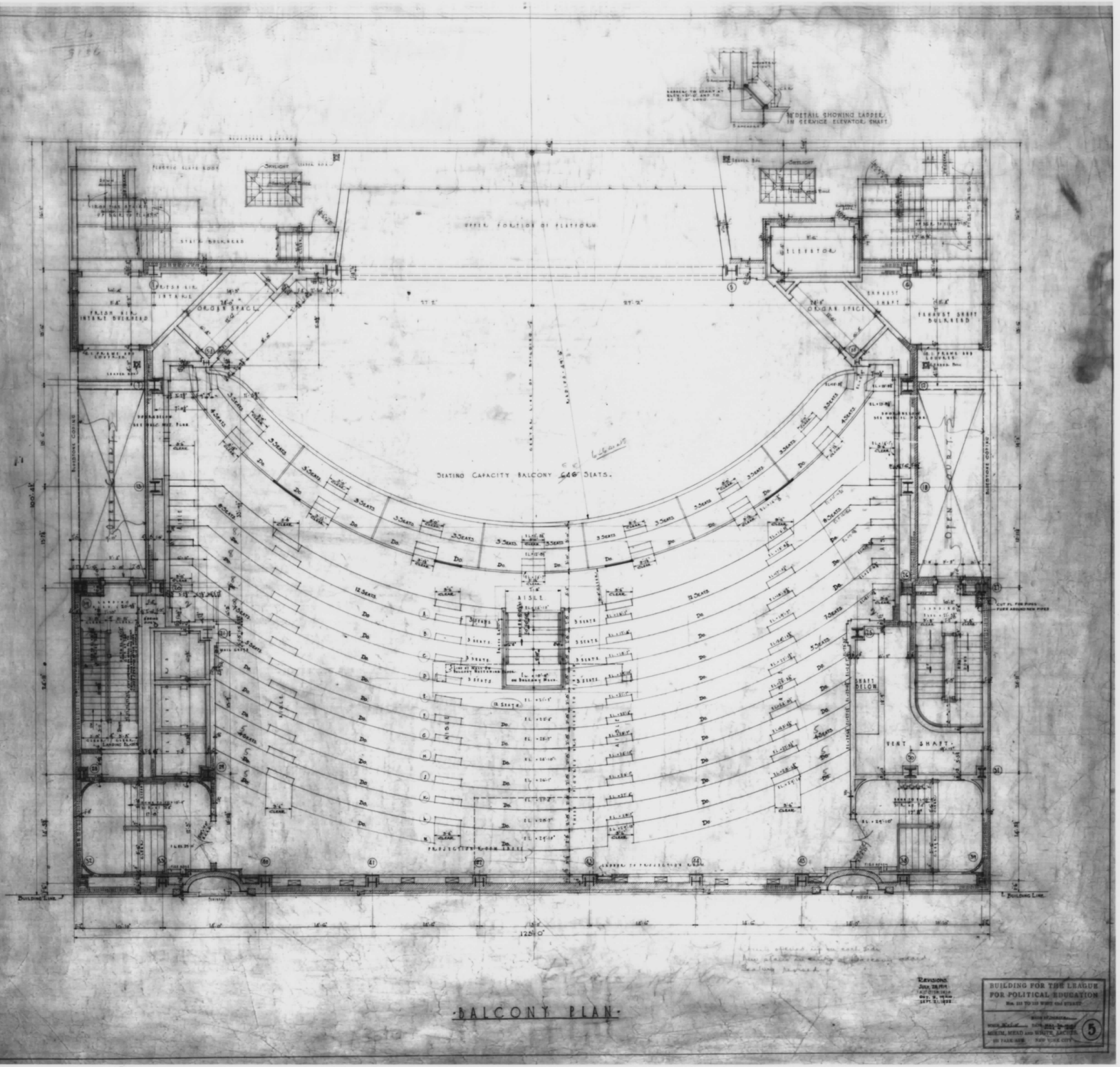
Revisions
June 26, 1928
Sept 21, 1928

BUILDING FOR THE LEAGUE FOR POLITICAL EDUCATION
Nos. 112 TO 118 WEST 66th STREET

MAYER, WHITTLESEY & GLASS
MORRIS, MEAD AND WHITE, ARCHITECTS
101 PARK AVE. NEW YORK CITY

Town Hall
New York Co. NY
Balcony / Mezzanine Floor Plan
McKim, Mead + White, Architects

1176033500.JPG 4 AUX
74992000 007 N N N N---



BALCONY PLAN

Town Hall
New York Co. NY
Balcony Plan
McKim, Mead + White, Architects

1176033510O.JPG 2 AUX
74992000G 007 N N N N---

BYE BYE
HENRY MILLER'S THEATRE
BOX OFFICE STRAIGHT
AHEAD ON THIS BLOCK!

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: facade, looking
northeast

#1

TOWN HALL
Duvel

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: Marquee, looking east

#2

123
ROBIN
WILLIAMS

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: entrance detail

#3

PARK
PARK
8.89

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. Hatfrank, 2009
view: east elevation,
looking northwest

#4

WOODSTOCK
TOWN HALL

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: facade and east elevation, looking northwest

#5

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: first floor lobby, showing main entrance into theater

#6

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: first floor lobby, showing stair to second floor lobby, side entrance to theater, and door to box office

#7

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: second floor lobby, central lounge space

#8

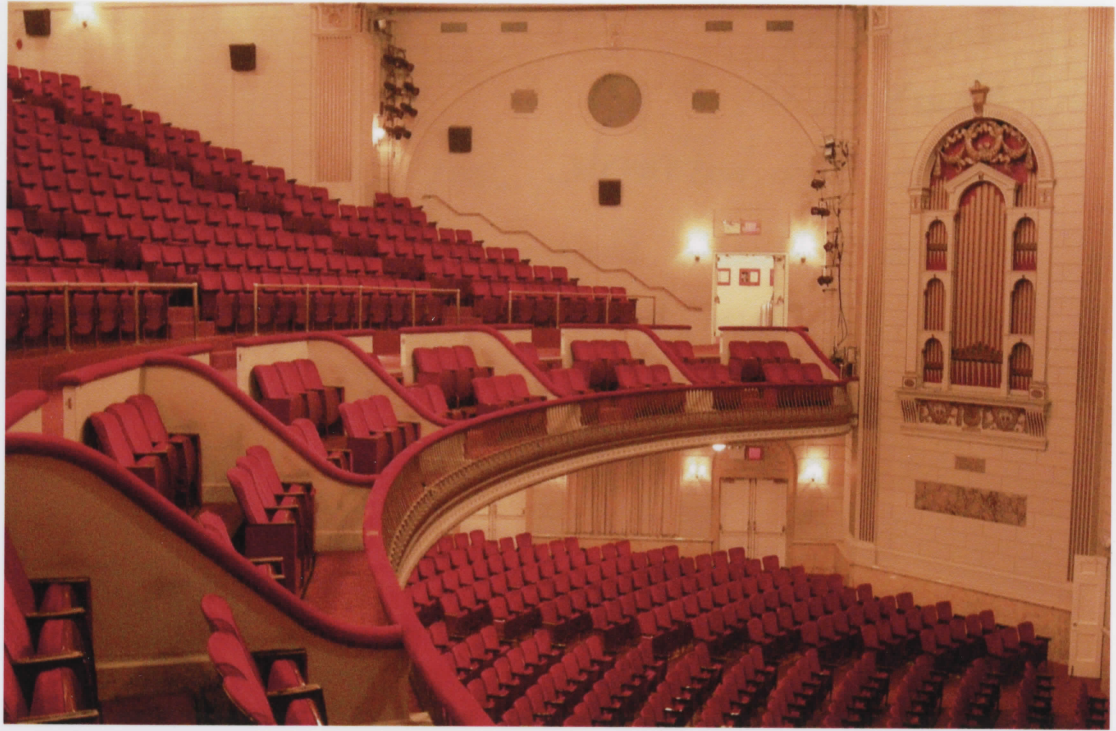
Women

Town Hall
Newyork Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: second floor lobby at top of entrance stair

#9

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: theater, looking at main stage from upper level

#10



Town Hall
New York Co, NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: theater, showing original boxes,
first floor seating, and west wall

#11

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: theater, main stage

#12

Town Hall
New York Co., NY
photo: K. LaFrank, 2009
view: theater, main stage, looking toward first and second tiered seating and main entrance at rear

#13

Town Hall

New York Co., NY

photo: K. LaFrank, 2009

View: center light in front of stage

#14

For Thinking Americans

a "must" program

America's Town Meeting of the Air

Old fashioned debates presenting both sides of questions of world importance, led by speakers of national and world fame in every field.

EVERY TUESDAY 8 to 8:45 p.m. KXYZ - 1320 ON YOUR DIAL

Sponsor - The

SECOND NATIONAL BANK OF HOUSTON

MAIN AT RUSK

CAPITAL AND SURPLUS 15 MILLION DOLLARS

Member Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation

Town Hall

New York Co, NY

Advertising blotter

for America's Town

Meeting of the Air

~~put~~ out by ~~programs~~

Second National

Bank of Houston

date unknown

SPEAKERS' PLATFORM
TOLERANCE REASON JUSTICE
AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING
OF THE AIR
HECKLER
GEO. V.
DENNY
JR.
TOWN HALL

Town Hall
New York Co. NY

America's Town Meeting
of the Air
1945 postard

AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING

OF THE AIR

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! The first Town Hall of the Air, to be known as "America's Town Meeting," will be inaugurated Thursday evening, May 30th from ten to eleven o'clock Eastern Daylight Saving Time, in Town Hall, 123 West 43rd Street, New York, under the auspices of the League for Political Education and broadcast over the facilities of the National Broadcasting Company, Station WJZ and a nationwide hookup.

Reflecting the spirit of their old New England predecessors, these meetings will provide a national forum for the discussion of public questions, with two

Town Hall

New York Co., NY

America's Town Meeting
of The Air

Cover of 1935
promotional brochure

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

CENTRAL PARK QUADRANGLE
NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY
7.5-MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

Produced by the United States Geological Survey

Topography compiled 1966. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1977 and other sources. Photoinspected using imagery dated 1995; no major culture or drainage changes observed. Survey control current as of 1966. Boundaries, other than corporate, revised 1999

Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS charts 226, 274, 745, 746, and 747 (1966). This information is not intended for navigational purposes

North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27)

Projection: New York coordinate system, Long Island zone (transverse Mercator)

10 000-foot ticks: New York coordinate system, Long Island zone and New Jersey coordinate system

1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 18

North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software

There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map

Information shown in purple may not meet USGS content standards and may conflict with previously mapped contours

MN GN
13½° 240 MILS
0° 42′ 12 MILS
UTM GRID AND 1999 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

20% TOTAL RECOVERED FIBER

SCALE 1:24 000

1 0.5 0 KILOMETERS 1 2
1000 0 METERS 1000 2000
1 0.5 0 1
MILES
1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 8000 9000 10000
FEET

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
TO CONVERT FROM FEET TO METERS, MULTIPLY BY 0.3048
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET, DATUM IS MEAN LOWER LOW WATER
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY
4 FEET IN THE HUDSON RIVER AND 5.7 FEET IN THE EAST RIVER

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

NEW YORK
QUADRANGLE LOCATION

1	2	3
4		5
6	7	8

1 Hackensack
2 Yonkers
3 Mount Vernon
4 Weehawken
5 Flushing
6 Jersey City
7 Brooklyn
8 Jamaica

ADJOINING 7.5′ QUADRANGLE NAMES

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway hard surface ..... Light-duty road, hard or improved surface .....
Secondary highway hard surface ..... Unimproved road .....
Interstate Route U.S. Route State Route

INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA—1999

CENTRAL PARK, NY-NJ
1995
NIMA 6265 IV SW-SERIES V821

ISBN 0-607-92025-4

Town Hall
123 W. 43rd St
New York Co.
New York
Central Park
Quad
18/585727/4572176

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: The Town Hall

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 123 West 43rd Street Not for publication:

City/Town: New York Vicinity:

State: New York County: New York Code: 061 Zip Code: 10036

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property		Category of Property	
Private:	X	Building(s):	X
Public-Local:		District:	
Public-State:		Site:	
Public-Federal:		Structure:	
		Object:	

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	____ buildings
	____ sites
	____ structures
	____ objects
1	____ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

_____ _____
Signature of Certifying Official Date

_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

_____ _____
Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

_____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ Entered in the National Register
___ Determined eligible for the National Register
___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
___ Removed from the National Register
___ Other (explain): _____

_____ _____
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: RECREATION AND CULTURE; SOCIAL Sub: auditorium; clubhouse

Current: RECREATION AND CULTURE; EDUCATION Sub: auditorium; school

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Classical Revival

Materials:
Foundation: concrete
Walls: brick
Roof: tar paper
Other: stone

Statement of Significance

Town Hall is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 for its association with the history of American public affairs radio broadcasting. From this site, *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (*ATMA*), called "the most famous civic education program of the 1930s," originated and was broadcast between 1935 and 1956.[1] The development of radio, with its potential to reach citizens in their homes, was an exceptionally important event in American culture, and many believed it held the promise of democratizing cultural exchange. Among numerous radio programs conceived in this spirit, *ATMA* was extraordinarily successful. Conceived to promote the free, fearless debate and open discussion of public issues, the show unflinchingly brought differing opinions over a wide range of controversial topics before the American public. More than simply the location of the show, Town Hall was an important component of the broadcast itself, drawing on its own long association with public education and historic imagery familiar to all Americans. Town Hall has exceptional value in representing the history of *ATMA*, an important program in the radio era and a social phenomenon of immense importance in shaping and giving voice to American culture.

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Town Hall is located on the north side of West 43rd Street in mid-town Manhattan, occupying a mid-block location between 6th Avenue and Broadway in New York's theater district. The building is sited close to the street between a narrow four-story, late nineteenth-century, mixed-use building to the west, and a tall, multi-story c.1970s office building to the east. Immediately across the street is a contemporary parking garage. The building to the west, once owned by the Town Hall predates the nominated building, and was known as the annex and was used for office space. The building is now under separate ownership; however, Town Hall retains the use of space on one floor, which is accessible by a wall opening in the mezzanine. Other than this one access point, the buildings are totally separate structurally and mechanically. The former annex is not included in the nomination. Although newer buildings have been constructed east and south of Town Hall, the street itself, with its mix of nineteenth- and twentieth-century buildings, some of which are used as theaters, presents an appropriate setting for the resource. Today, the auditorium survives with near perfect integrity to the period of significance, preserving an outstanding association with the important events that took place here.

Exterior

The Town Hall is four stories tall and nine bays wide. It is constructed of brick laid up in Flemish bond and trimmed with limestone. On the west, the façade is flush with the adjacent building, while on the east, the façade treatment wraps around the corner of the building which was originally exposed. Because the contemporary building to the east has a deep setback, a portion of the east wall of Town Hall, built of common brick and originally concealed, is now visible. The rear elevation abuts a building on West 44th Street and cannot be seen.

The Town Hall façade is divided into three primary sections separated by limestone belt courses with Greek key moldings and topped with a limestone frieze, cornice, and balustrade. The lowest level takes in the building's entrances and mezzanine. This section is characterized by a seven-bay arcade of two-story limestone fluted arches with keystones flanked by undecorated end bays. Each arch contains double-entrance doors, glass within wood frames, surmounted by transoms with decorative multi-pane glazing. Because the building site slopes slightly to the east, the entrances are approached by either one or two limestone steps from the sidewalk. Each

[1] Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Popular Culture in the United States, 1920-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 25. Note: although the program was broadcast until 1956, the period of significance ends at 1952, as explained in the narrative that follows.

entrance is surmounted by a limestone panel. Above the impost blocks, each arch is filled with a recessed tripartite window grouping which lights the mezzanine. Three deep iron and glass canopies, which are suspended from large iron rods, extend over the sidewalk to provide shelter for each of the end entrances and the three in the center; the two intervening entrances are without canopies. The underside of each canopy is outlined by rows of light bulbs, which are concealed by a continuous row of opaque glass shades. The arch at the east end is the box office entrance; the five in the center mark the theater entrances, and that on the west provides access to the upper floors. Flanking the arcade, each of the end bays has double metal equipment doors recessed within rectangular openings with splayed brick lintels. These doors provide access to long narrow corridors that lead to the backstage areas. Each set of doors is surmounted by a single window with double-hung multi-pane wood sash.

Most of the middle section of the façade, which fronts the theater space, is without openings. The central feature is a large, rectangular limestone plaque within a molded surround. The plaque is engraved: "The Town Hall Founded by the League for Political Education, 1894-1920. Ye Shall Know the Truth and the Truth Shall Make You Free." The plaque is flanked by two double-height niches within limestone enframements. Their round arches with keystones mimic those of the arcade below. Above the plaque and niches, a row of double-hung, six-over-six wood sash windows with brick surrounds and limestone sills denotes offices.

The upper section is characterized by a row of large, double-hung, six-over-six wood sash windows with brick and limestone enframements. Each window has an iron grille across the bottom and a limestone lintel with keystone. Windows are separated by recessed brick panels with diamond-shaped limestone lozenges in their centers. The row of windows is flanked by larger recessed panels, each with a recessed circular window at its center. The frieze is a limestone band with incised Adamesque decoration. This is surmounted by a row of dentil moldings and a projecting limestone balustrade.

Plan and Secondary Spaces

The interior plan was designed to accommodate the theater and its associated spaces on the lower floors and club facilities above. The large, semi-circular theater fills a double-height space at the center of the building; lobbies, a box office, elevator bays, stairways, backstage areas, and dressing rooms surround it. Long narrow corridors along each outer wall of the building connect the backstage area with the street. Five sets of doors provide access to the narrow, ground level lobby, which features terrazzo floors, classical pilasters, and a paneled ceiling. Although the lobby is generally rectangular in shape, its inside wall follows the slightly curved rear wall of the theater. Centered in this wall is the main entrance to the theater, a tripartite grouping of double doors flanked by marble, engaged Ionic columns, pairs of windows, and Doric pilasters. The entrance is flanked by two broad, sweeping marble stairways with slender, wrought-iron classical balusters and walnut hand railings. Additional entrances to the theater are located beneath each set of stairs and are accessed through low, arched hallways. Double sets of multi-pane glass doors at each end of the lobby provide access to the small, square box office on the east and to the short hallway and block of elevators to the upper floors on the west. The two stairways lead to the mezzanine, which is essentially a narrow, curving hallway featuring entrances to the loge and balcony, stairs to the upper level of the balcony, restrooms, and a small center lounge.

Theater

The theater is a large, semicircular space without intervening structural members. There are two levels of seating, a main floor and a cantilevered balcony with loge. The stage is relatively shallow; however, its outside edge is curved so that it projects slightly into the auditorium. Walls are marble on the lowest level and rusticated artificial stone above. Corners are marked by fluted, gilded pilasters with Composite capitals. The

stage is set within a semi-elliptical proscenium arch decorated with Greek key moldings and a foliate keystone and supported on pilasters with Renaissance-inspired ornament and Composite capitals. The cornice is supported on tapered modillions with guttae and features gilded acanthus leaves. The coffered ceiling is outlined by Greek key and guilloche moldings and marked by a large central medallion with delicate, gilded Adamesque decoration. A large ornamental light fixture hangs from the medallion, and similar but smaller fixtures are found throughout the auditorium. Two recesses on each side wall are marked by arches that mirror the proscenium. The most decorative features are the large, round-arched organ screens flanking the stage. Each arch rests on a narrow shelf supported by scrolled brackets and decorated with foliate ornament. The arches contain pedimented tripartite screens surmounted by garlands and swags. Although the organ has been removed, the current trompe l'oeil design replicates the original pipes. Below each arch is a large rectangular marble panel. The exterior wall of the balcony is a curved, decorative wrought-iron screen. Original seating survives except in the loge, where original wicker chairs have been replaced with theater seats. The original projection booth also survives; this simple box is decorated with fluted pilasters.

Club

Former club rooms are located on the second, third, and fourth floors and are accessed from the small elevator hall west of the entrance lobby. As originally designed, the second and third floors featured offices, a library, a lounge, a bar, and dining rooms. The fourth floor included a kitchen, food storage space, and locker rooms for employees. The plan of the upper floors was compromised when these spaces were adapted for later uses; however, many of the original finishes and decorative details survive and are identical to others seen throughout the building. These include plaster walls and ceilings, a wrought-iron stair with slender balusters like that in the lobby; large, square paneled piers with Doric capitals; and Neoclassical moldings and trim. The integrity of the upper floors is not essential to the significance documented in this nomination.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide: _ Locally:

Applicable National Register Criteria:	A X B _ C X D
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):	A _ B _ C _ D _ E _ F _ G
NHL Criteria:	1
NHL Theme(s):	III. Expressing Cultural Values 1. Educational and Intellectual Currents 4. Mass Media
Areas of Significance:	Communication, Education, Social History, and Politics/Government
Period(s) of Significance:	1935-1952
Significant Dates:	1935
Significant Person(s):	
Cultural Affiliation:	
Architect/Builder:	Teunis J. van der Bent of McKim, Mead and White: building exterior, lobby, and theater; Louis E. Jallade: upper floor interiors
Historic Contexts:	XV. Communication D. Radio

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Town Hall is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 for its association with the history of American public affairs radio broadcasting. From this site, *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (*ATMA*), called "the most famous civic education program of the 1930s," originated and was broadcast between 1935 and 1956.[2] The development of radio, with its potential to reach citizens in their homes, was an exceptionally important event in American culture, and many believed it held the promise of democratizing cultural exchange. Among numerous radio programs conceived in this spirit, *ATMA* was extraordinarily successful. Conceived to promote the free, fearless debate and open discussion of public issues, the show unflinchingly brought differing opinions over a wide range of controversial topics before the American public. More than simply the location of the show, Town Hall was an important component of the broadcast itself, drawing on its own long association with public education and historic imagery familiar to all Americans. Town Hall has exceptional value in representing the history of *ATMA*, an important program in the radio era and a social phenomenon of immense importance in shaping and giving voice to American culture.

SUMMARY OF *AMERICA'S TOWN MEETING OF THE AIR*

The development of radio broadcasting was immensely important in the cultural history of the United States. In the decades before World War I, westward expansion, the growth of cities and an influx of immigrants led American culture to become more diverse. Within this diffuse culture, providing opportunities for civic education became more difficult. For many, the development of radio, revolutionary in its ability to reach an immense, scattered, and varied audience, held the promise of democratizing cultural exchange by virtue of its ability to reach people in their own homes. Radio could, it was believed, strengthen social connections among all Americans, eradicate hierarchies created by location, class, income, access to education, and other social and environmental factors, and create a better informed electorate. These goals motivated some of the earliest radio broadcasters, many of whom were associated with nonprofit and educational institutions. However, early efforts to win government sponsorship for the new medium failed, and as radio became increasingly popular, the 1920s and 30s were marked by continued tensions between public service and economic interests. Bolstered by the Radio Act of 1927, which created the Federal Radio Commission (FRC), radio broadcasting evolved from a decentralized network of amateur operators into a corporate enterprise based on commercial sponsorship. As content was increasingly developed and controlled by commercial sponsors and advertising agencies, nonprofit broadcasters were marginalized, and the educational programming that had dominated early broadcasts gradually faded from the airwaves.

In the early 1930s, as debate intensified over a successor to the 1927 law, broadcast reformers began an active campaign to restore radio to the public domain by advocating legislation to preserve a percentage of channels for non-commercial broadcasting. It was in this period that commercial networks, eager to demonstrate their commitment to education and avoid the loss of revenue-producing channels, undertook an ambitious agenda of public broadcasting, increasing the number of shows developed and produced by the networks themselves and donating free airtime and production support to nonprofit and educational groups. The period between 1930 and 1938 witnessed some of the most prestigious and ambitious experiments in public service broadcasting of the era, as networks introduced numerous programs designed to combine civic enrichment with entertainment. Shows such as *American School of the Air* (1930), *University of Chicago Round Table* (1931), *The American*

[2] Craig, *Fireside Politics*, 25. Note: although the program was broadcast until 1956, the period of significance ends at 1952, as explained in the narrative that follows.

Forum of the Air (1934), *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (1935), and *The People's Platform* (1938) were touted for their efforts to bring substantive issues of national importance before the American people, for the high caliber of their guests, and for their innovative formats.

George V. Denny Jr. of the League for Political Education created *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (*ATMA*) for the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in 1934. The league was founded in 1894 to provide an opportunity for citizens to acquire civic education. By the 1930s, it boasted a thirty-year commitment to public education built on its sponsorship of hundreds of lectures and classes on the philosophy and details of democratic government. In 1921 the league built its first permanent headquarters, Town Hall, on West 43rd Street in New York's theater district. Designed by McKim, Mead and White, Town Hall was specifically intended to be a community center for the city, a place where citizens could gather to discuss common interests and general welfare. During his long tenure at the league (1930-1952), Denny embraced and advanced civic education, continuing to sponsor a full program of lectures and classes at Town Hall as well as creating and hosting the radio show. Denny conceived *ATMA* to promote the free, fearless, and open discussion of public issues, and he took advantage of radio to bring these debates into the homes of Americans across the country. Each show featured brief presentations on important social and/or political issues by four speakers of opposing views, followed by a question and answer session with the live audience.

ATMA was one of the first radio shows to incorporate a live audience, and its participation was crucial to the show's success. The audience brought the voices of everyday people onto the airwaves to discuss issues of vital concern to the American public. Denny allowed audience members a great deal of freedom to engage with the presenters, and the unpredictable nature of their responses added both drama and intimacy, making the show livelier for the radio audience while also creating a sense of connection with the individual listener.

Throughout its twenty-two-year history, *ATMA* addressed a wide range of controversial topics, including civil liberties, totalitarianism, war, isolationism, interventionism, communism, and racism. Rather than attempt to solve problems, *ATMA* aimed to promote a broader and more informed consideration of them. In this, *ATMA* embraced some of the goals of the early twentieth-century forum movement, popularized by educators who provided Americans with a refresher course in democratic values designed to help them hone the tools that were needed to work toward the public welfare. These goals became especially important during the 1930s, as the threat of totalitarianism and impending war motivated educators to bolster citizen involvement in the difficult decisions facing the nation regarding American involvement in European affairs. *ATMA*, which drew its speakers from the highest echelons, was widely recognized in its own time. It was immensely popular, received a high volume of letters, and was among the few public affairs shows to be broadcast in primetime. It was highly regarded by critics and won numerous awards, including two prestigious Peabody Awards for excellence in broadcasting.[3] In addition, its programs were frequently referenced in scholarly journals and widely recommended by American educators. Contemporary scholars of radio history consistently mention *ATMA* as among the most influential and educational public service shows of the 1930s to 1950s.

As the site of *ATMA's* broadcast, Town Hall is outstandingly associated with the history of radio during its heyday (c.1930-c.1951). Beyond hosting this show, Town Hall was an important component of the broadcast itself. *ATMA*'s venue was key to its success. No other show became so closely identified with the location of its broadcasts. An announcer opened each *ATMA* broadcast by declaring "Live from historic Town Hall," and the show drew upon Americans' deep symbolic associations with the New England town meeting as one of the highest exemplars of the virtues of public discussion and direct democracy. Further, the radio show emanated from a building that had been specifically built to foster public education and democracy. *ATMA* was the

[3] The Peabody Award is an international award for excellence in radio and television broadcasting sponsored by the National Association of Broadcasters and administered by the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Georgia.

culmination of the League for Political Education's decades-long commitment to bolstering these ideals, carrying the league's late nineteenth-century ambitions into the modern age of electronic communication and extending its reach from Manhattan to the nation. The league's creation of a town hall building in the nation's largest city had a direct parallel to Denny's goal to establish a virtual town hall of the airwaves. The design of Town Hall's auditorium, with its clear sight lines and excellent acoustics, ensured that everyone could be included in the discussion. The period of significance (1935-1952) encompasses the era of *ATMA*'s greatest importance. This coincides with the period in which Denny, who conceived, developed, and hosted the program, was associated with it. Denny was replaced as host in 1952 and the radio show gradually faded in importance until it was cancelled in 1956.

HISTORY AND CONTEXTS

League for Political Education

In 1894, delegates to New York's constitutional convention defeated a proposal to grant women the right to vote. In the ensuing months, a group of six prominent New York women cited women's general lack of political education as instrumental in the defeat and they resolved to provide an opportunity for both women and men to acquire a more sophisticated understanding of political, cultural, and civic issues. On 16 November 1894, the League for Political Education was founded at the home of Eleanor Butler Sanders. Among its six founding members were Catherine A. B. Abbee, who also founded the City History Club; Lucia Gilbert Runkle, the first American woman to write for the editorial page of a major American newspaper; Adele M. Fielde, a former missionary; Lee Wood Haggin; and Mary Putnam Jacobi, a physician and outspoken advocate for women's rights. Within months of its establishment, the league had attracted nearly fifty members. The new organization quickly initiated a broad program of lectures on diverse topics, including literature and art, science and philosophy, and citizenship and public affairs. Professor Franklin H. Giddings presented the first lecture, "Some Duties of the Citizen," in January 1895.[4] By 1899 the club boasted six hundred members, and it was incorporated in 1904. Although lectures were open to both women and men, the first programs were held in the mornings and drew mostly women. That changed in 1907, after the Economic Club of New York, an outgrowth of the league, was organized by Robert Ely and J. W. Beatson. The new club was founded to "aid in the creation and expression of an enlightened public opinion on the important economic and social questions of the day."[5] The club, which counted a number of prominent men among its members, held its meetings in the evening and was responsible for significantly expanding the league's constituency. A third organization, the Civic Forum, also became a part of the league's extended family. The Civic Forum, also formed in 1907, aimed to "promote a finer national life and a better understanding of the peoples of other countries."[6]

Although the League for Political Education came into being through the vision of its founding female members, a number of prominent men assumed important roles in its early growth and development. Among the most influential were Elgin R. L. Gould, founder of the City and Suburban Homes Company, who served as chair of the board after 1905, and John Graham Brooks, a professor of economics at Harvard, who drew large audiences with his early lectures. Robert Erskine Ely (1861-1948), also of Harvard, who was invited to give a series of lectures in 1899, was of seminal importance in the league's history. After a brief stint as part-time director, Ely became the league's executive director in 1901 and served in that position until he retired in 1937. Under his leadership Town Hall was constructed and its auspicious programs of lectures and musical events were developed. Following Ely's retirement, George V. Denny Jr. became director. Denny had joined the staff

[4] Some sources cite the first lecture as "Some Duties of Citizenship."
[5] "Times Square to have a Million-Dollar Town Hall," *New York Times*, 27 April 1919.
[6] Ibid.

in 1931 and in 1934 was responsible for the development of *ATMA*, and he remained host of the show until 1952.

The league's earliest meetings, including its very first lecture, were held at the home of Eleanor B. Sanders. However, as early as December 1894, the organization rented a room in the Berkeley-Lyceum building (23 West 44th Street) for club business meetings and classes, and held lectures in the building's theater. As membership and attendance increased, the league began to rent larger venues for its lectures, which, in addition to the Berkeley-Lyceum Theatre, were held in Aeolian Hall, the Engineering Society Building, the Cort Theatre, the Park Theatre, the Hudson Theatre, and Carnegie Hall. Additional classes were held in the Ladies Athletic Club. By 1911, the growth in league membership and the success of its programs led the organization to acquire a home of its own. A $1,000 donation by Anna Blaksley Bliss (1850-1935) in 1912 (followed by a more substantial donation the following year) initiated the building program, and a group of the league's directors formed the Societies Realty Company to make the real estate transactions. In 1914 the *New York Times* reported that the league had an option on a site on the south side of West 49th Street and was planning to erect a twelve-story building. The building would house the society, the Economic Club and the Civic Forum, and, in addition to a hall and offices, the building would boast a gymnasium, swimming pool, baths, and a roof garden.[7] The building had already been designed by the architect of City and Suburban Homes; this was presumably James E. Ware, who had designed the latter complex between 1898 and 1905. No building permit was filed for a Ware design, and in 1917 the real estate committee purchased a different site, a 125' x 100' parcel on the north side of West 43th Street on Times Square, for $425,000. This time, news reports announced that plans for a four-story building had been prepared by McKim, Mead and White and that the building would house an auditorium and office space.[8]

The building parcel was located in a changing neighborhood. Times Square's rapid development as New York's theater district began around the turn of the twentieth century. For most of the nineteenth century, theaters had been located in a mixed neighborhood on lower Broadway. But as the city expanded northward, new forms of transportation, such as the Third and Sixth Avenue elevated railways and the New York subway system, as well as the opening of Grand Central Depot nearby, made the area a desirable place to locate attractions intended to draw visitors from the city and beyond. As early as the 1890s, construction of new playhouses and theaters began in what was then known as Long Acre Square (renamed Times Square in 1904 following completion of the New York Times Building). Businesses associated with the entertainment industry also began to locate in the area. These included rehearsal halls, offices of agents and producers, and businesses that were involved with providing costumes, lighting, and make up. Finally, a number of boarding houses, offering homes to aspiring actors, dotted the neighborhood. Between 1900 and 1920, a total of forty-three new theaters were built in the mid-town area, mostly on the side streets east and west of Broadway. By the onset of the Depression in 1929, an additional thirty playhouses had been built, and the theater district was generally defined as the area between 39th Street and Columbus Circle and Sixth and Eighth Avenues.[9] On West 43rd Street, the parcel acquired for Town Hall was directly across from Henry Miller's Theater (recently renamed the Stephen Sondheim Theatre); this new building was designed by Allen, Ingalls, and Hoffman in 1917-1918. The *New York Times* noted that the site for Town Hall had been selected both because it was in the heart of the fast growing city center and because of its proximity to major transportation systems.[10]

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[7] "Societies to Put Up a 12-Story Building," *New York Times*, 26 February 1914.
[8] "Times Square to have a Million-Dollar Town Hall." It is not known what prevented the society from purchasing the West 49th Street site or what became of the plans said to have been prepared by James E. Ware.
[9] Information about the history of New York's theater district largely drawn from Margaret Knapp, "Henry Miller Theater Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Report," New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, LP-1357, 1987.
[10] "Times Square to have a Million-Dollar Town Hall."

In July 1919, contractor Russell B. Smith began demolition of the rowhouses that occupied the site, and construction commenced on 10 October 1919. In January 1920, Colonel Theodore Roosevelt Jr. laid the cornerstone on behalf of his wife, Eleanor Butler Alexander, niece and namesake of the late Eleanor Butler Saunders, the club's first president.[11] Construction was completed during the following year and the building opened on 12 January 1921. The initial cost of the land and building was $1,350,000. Although the program for the four-story structure constructed in 1921 was considerably scaled down from that described in the 1914 article, the first building campaign raised only enough money to complete the exterior of the building, the auditorium, and the lobby. However, another gift from Anna Blaksley Bliss ($500,000) in 1922 spurred a new subscription drive, which secured the funds necessary to complete the upper floor interiors and eliminate the building's $600,000 mortgage. More than four thousand people donated to the construction of the building, and the league, which boasted six thousand members in 1921, prided itself in being historically "free from political influence."[12] An important factor in ensuring the success of the endeavor was the plan's evolution from a hall for the League for Political Education to a building called "Town Hall," which was defined as a community center for the city of New York, a venue for "public meetings of all kinds related to the general welfare [where citizens may gather] to discuss their common interests." Like the league, Town Hall was dedicated to a "constructive educational purpose."[13] However, the expanded definition of the league's fellowship to the city itself broadened its base, brought additional subscribers, and made its long-held aspiration feasible.[14]

In addition to the meeting hall itself, the building housed the offices of the League for Political Education, the Economic Club, and the Civic Forum.[15] In 1925, after completion of the building's interior, the new Town Hall Club became the fourth tenant, occupying space on the top two floors. The Town Hall Club was founded on the premise that "sociability promotes acquaintance and mutual understanding" and prided itself on its egalitarian principles.[16] Dedicated to promoting "a finer public spirit and a better social order" through the interrelationship of social and educational programs, the club was progressive in admitting both men and women to full membership.[17]

Construction History[18]

By the time McKim, Mead and White received the commission for Town Hall, founding members Stanford White (1853-1906) and Charles F. McKim (1847-1909) were dead, and William R. Mead (1846-1928) had withdrawn from active practice. In their stead, a younger group of designers, led by four new partners, William M. Kendall, William S. Richardson, Burt L. Fenner, and Teunis J. van der Bent, was producing the firm's designs. Teunis J. van der Bent (1863-1936) emigrated to the United States from the Netherlands, where he had studied at the University of Delft. In 1887, at the age of twenty-four, he secured work as a draftsman at McKim, Mead and White, where he worked on such projects as the Hotel Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Terminal Station, several buildings at Columbia University, additions to the Metropolitan Museum, and Cornell University Medical School. In 1909, van der Bent became a partner in the firm, and in 1928 he succeeded Mead as head of its office of business management. Records indicate that van der Bent was responsible for the design of Town Hall, a restrained, yet dignified example of the Georgian Revival style that evoked associations with the building's civic purpose and the architecture of early America.

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[11] Mrs. Roosevelt was unable to attend the ceremony due to illness.
[12] Robert Erskine Ely, *A Beginning* (New York: Town Hall, 1944), 33.
[13] "The Town Hall," Program of the Opening Ceremonies, 1921, 2.
[14] Ely, *A Beginning*, 30.
[15] All of its occupants, including the League for Political Education, were expected to pay rent until the hall was debt free.
[16] Ely, *A Beginning*, 36.
[17] "New Civic Club Planned; Being Organized by the League for Political Education," *New York Times*, 24 February 1918.
[18] Information on the construction of Town Hall was drawn in part from Ruth Seldon-Sturgill, "Town Hall Designation Reports," New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, LP -1011 and LP-1012, 1978.

Due to funding limits, McKim, Mead and White was commissioned to design only the exterior of the building, its lobbies and auditorium. The estimated cost of completing the remaining interior spaces, including a library, lounge, and restaurant, was $500,000. After Anna Blaksley Bliss's 1922 donation, New York architect Louis E. Jallade (1866-1957) was hired to complete the interior. Jallade was trained at the Metropolitan Museum of Art School before graduating from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1902. In 1923, Jallade was a partner in the firm Lindsay and Warren; however, he later formed a partnership with his son at 597 Fifth Avenue. Jallade served as president of the New York Society of Architects and was a member of the Architectural League and the Brooklyn Committee for Better Housing.[19]

Tradition holds that the internationally famed acoustical engineer Wallace C. Sabine of Harvard was consulted in the design of Town Hall's auditorium. However, at the time the plans were being developed, Sabine was involved in projects in Europe and he died in 1919, before the construction of Town Hall commenced. After years of experiments with various materials and shapes, Sabine had developed a precise formula for building an acoustically perfect hall. In 1900, McKim, Mead and White had been the first architectural firm to follow Sabine's acoustical instructions in the design of Boston's Symphony Hall, which is noted for its fine acoustics. Having worked with Sabine on a number of other projects, it is likely that McKim, Mead and White employed Sabine's successful scientific analysis of acoustical properties in its design for the Town Hall auditorium.

In 1930, Town Hall published a limited edition monograph that appears to have been part of a campaign to enlarge the building. The book included a rendering showing the McKim, Mead and White design enlarged by three additional bays on the west side (incorporating the rowhouse known as the "annex," purchased in the 1930s) and four additional stories.[20] The text restated and reenergized the building's original dedication to purpose as a public meeting place and listed all of the diverse cultural, civic and religious groups that had used the facility. It stated that one thousand lectures had been given and that Town Hall's program had influenced millions of people. The booklet's only reference to a potential expansion was the observation that "still more millions await only an extension of the facilities now available."[21] The proposed enlargement was never completed; however, Town Hall did expand part of its operations into the annex.[22] In fact, Town Hall has experienced only minor physical changes since it was completed in 1923, and both the exterior and the interior lobby and auditorium remain almost exactly as built.

The Town Hall

The Town Hall has been described as "an idea with a roof over it."[23] As such, the building was designed and built in the service of an ideal: to foster civic education. This purpose has been clearly expressed in all of the literature related to its history, from the genesis of the League for Political Education through the history of *ATMA*. In fact, the two are linked by an outstanding correlation of thematic and programmatic concerns over more than a century.

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[19] Among Jallade's works are the Thompson Meter Company in Brooklyn, the Welfare Island Dispensary, the New York City Department of Hospitals, and the International House on Riverside Drive.

[20] Plans for a sixth story were mentioned in "The Town Hall, New York City," *Architecture and Building* 53 (February 1921), 13.

[21] *The Town Hall, New York* (New York: League for Political Education, 1930), 12.

[22] The annex is extant but no longer owned by Town Hall. Although Town Hall still uses one floor for storage, the annex is a separate building and is not included in this nomination. A history of Town Hall published in 1938 discussed a then-ongoing campaign to add what the author called the "five long-projected stories to the building." The authors discussed Town Hall's overcrowded classes and outgrown plant, while also suggesting plans for an expanded program of adult education proposed for the enlarged building. However, like the 1930 proposal, the 1937 addition was never completed. "Town Hall Plans Five More Stories," *New York Times,* 16 April 1937; Louis E. Jallade, Rendering of Town Hall Expansion, 1939.

[23] Overstreet, Harry A. and Bonaro W. Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1938), 71.

The association of the league's new building with the New England town hall that became so important in the conceptualization of the radio show began before the building was even constructed. Writing about the cornerstone ceremony in 1920, Hildegard Hawthorne observed that "America was born in her town halls. Our forefathers met [there] to talk freely of all matters related to the civic life."[24] Other reporters alluded to the same theme, some embellishing their stories with folksy language, such as the writer who declared that "New York's small town longings rise in the concrete. You are to have a Town Hall on West 43rd Street. If you want to know what your neighbors think...you may go clearly to town meetin' regular as preachin' and have your say too."[25] Architectural critics were quick to reinforce the connection. One article opened with a romantic description of the New England "Common House," a "rough structure of logs" as the "first purely American architectural tradition, one that still exists in its purity in our small villages" before moving on to discuss McKim, Mead and White's design for Town Hall, while another began with contemporary references to the need for a town hall in the heart of the city, described the league's high civic ambition, and concluded that the architect's design "well expresses the purpose of the building."[26] These associations clearly originated with the league itself, not only in the name chosen for the new building but in its educational purpose. As Henry W. Taft, then president of the board, asserted, "no instrumentality for the education of men and women in the history of the world has been so effective as the old institution of the New England Town Meeting. We are, in a measure, trying to restore, in a great community, the fundamental ideas of the Town Meeting."[27] The idea for the venue caught on quickly, and the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that in the first year "more than 200,000 have used the Town Hall...as an open forum in the heart of New York."[28]

Town Hall's dedication to the creation of an open forum clearly reflects the original goals of the league's founders. Its very first lecture, in 1884, addressed the duties of citizenship. Those that followed delved optimistically into the philosophy and details of government, addressing such topics as "The Citizen and the Public Purse," "On Elections," "The Peculiar Fascinations of the Study of Our Government," "The Relation of the Citizen to the Criminal," "The Dream and Reality of Social Equality, and "The Distribution of Wealth." Indeed, Robert Erskine, who became the league's first director, was initially hired in 1901 to give a series of lectures on political economy. Other league lectures addressed some of the major social issues of the day, including "The Economic Independence of Women," "The American Trade Union and Its Critics," "Race Problems," "What America Owes to the Foreigner," "How to Clear the Slums," and "Human Nature Behind Prison Bars." In 1914, members heard both sides of the league's founding issue, with lectures entitled "Why I Believe in Women's Suffrage" and "Why I am Opposed to Women's Suffrage."

With the construction of Town Hall, the league's emphasis on education with an open forum continued. political education, social problems, and current events continued. Topics during the 1920s covered political, social, and current events with lectures such as "Russia Today and Tomorrow," "The Problem of Main Street," "The New Political Power of Women," "Justice and Efficiency for Capital and Labor," "The Outlook for World Peace," "What is the American Way," "What Does Democracy Mean," "Is Our Freedom in Danger," "Personal Liberty and the Modern State," and "The Challenge of Self-Government."

Town Hall assumed a prominent place in the life of the city at its inception, attracting leading scholars, artists, and politicians. Program speakers included women activists such as suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt and reformer Jane Addams, as well as intellectuals and literary figures like Henry James, Thomas Mann, Carl

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[24] *New York Evening Post*, 21 February 1920; quoted in Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town*, 74.
[25] *New York Evening Post*, 28 January 1920; quoted in Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town*, 76.
[26] "The Civic Forum for New York City," *American Architect* 117 (January 1920); "The Town Hall, New York City," np.
[27] Quoted in Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town*, 77.
[28] *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 February 1922, quoted in Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town*, 79.

Sandburg, and Edna Ferber. General John J. Pershing and Rear Admiral Bird addressed military topics, while African American leader Booker T. Washington spoke to racial issues, and Samuel Gompers addressed labor concerns. Counted among the prominent political speakers were Theodore Roosevelt, Calvin Coolidge, Woodrow Wilson, and Winston Churchill.

Although presentation of musical entertainment was originally deemed secondary to the building's main purpose as a venue for the civil and democratic exchange of ideas, Town Hall was designed with a world class performance space. It is not certain if this was a conscious decision by the board or a suggestion of the architects; however, Robert Ely reported that the original seating plan was changed so that the seats could be arranged in a more democratic way, making them of equal value for everyone attending the performance.[29] The building's sophisticated acoustical engineering also suggests an original intent to use the auditorium as a performance space. A 1921 letter from McKim, Mead and White to Robert Ely confirms that the architects designed the hall "for public meetings, lectures and the like [and] to be rented for concerts, moving pictures exhibitions and similar entertainments."[30]

Throughout its history, Town Hall has been a popular venue for musical performances of all types. The league began this initiative slowly, renting the auditorium for private recitals as a source of revenue. However, as the auditorium's reputation for acoustical excellence spread, the demand grew, and from 1930 to 1931 Town Hall sponsored its first Endowment Series. Among the hundreds of notable artists who performed there are Richard Strauss, 1921; Pablo Casals, 1923; Paul Robeson, 1927; Andres Segovia, 1929; Sergei Rachmaninov, 1932; Feodor Chaliapin, 1932; Lily Pons, 1938; Isaac Stern, 1939; Bela Bartok, 1940; Billie Holliday, 1942; Sarah Vaughn and Lester Young, 1947; Leontyne Price, 1954; Thelonious Monk, 1959; Igor Stravinsky, 1959; and Charles Mingus, 1962. Those who made their debuts here include Lotte Lehmann, Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, Joan Sutherland, and Marian Anderson. A 1945 jazz concert featuring Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Don Byas, Al Haig, Curley Russell, and Max Roach was an early and important public performance of bebop. Today, Town Hall remains one of the most well known and active concert halls in the city.

In 1958, Town Hall merged with New York University (NYU), which managed the hall and leased the auditorium for a variety of purposes. During the university's ownership, the upper floors of the building became the home of the NYU Club, which had been founded in 1951 by a group of alumni. In 1973, NYU formed the Town Hall Foundation to operate the hall. In 1978, the building was acquired from the university and a new board of directors and management team was formed.[31]

Development of Radio after World War I

The early twentieth century marked a series of major changes in American society. The various effects of immigration, industrialization, and urbanization, America's involvement in World War I, and technical advances that facilitated transportation and communication all stimulated the development of a broader, more diverse, and more accessible cultural experience for many Americans. Among the many ways that citizens experienced and participated in this rapidly changing culture, the development of radio broadcasting was especially significant. The new media was revolutionary in its ability to reach an immense, scattered, and diverse audience. Many touted radio for its potential to democratize cultural exchange, while others hoped that it might serve to promote social consistency for an increasingly diverse population and aid in the assimilation of

[29] Ely, *A Beginning*, 41.
[30] McKim, Mead and White to Robert Ely, 20 May 1921; quoted in Seldon-Sturgill, "Town Hall Designation Reports," LP-1012.
[31] Several newspaper articles refer to these and other specifics about the sequence of ownership; they include "The Evolution of a Legacy at the NYU Club," *New York University Alumni Connect Newsletter*, July 2009, http://www.nyu.edu/alumni/connect/archive/0709/special.htm (25 August 2010); Nadine Brozan, "N.Y.U. Club Is Shut Down, Perhaps Permanently," *New York Times*, 22 July 1989. However, the information in this paragraph was provided by current Town Hall staff.

the growing immigrant population. Still others worried about the potential for a loss of cultural cohesion as unregulated access to the airways enabled broadcasters to target specific races, classes, religions, and political beliefs. The possibility that labor union leaders, jazz musicians, African Americans, and communists, among others, might gain unfettered use of the airwaves unleashed fears that "mainstream" cultural values might be lost or threatened. These various themes influenced the larger political, economic, and social struggle over who should control the content and accessibility of the new medium.

By 1921, nearly ten thousand licensed amateurs were competing for the limited available frequencies.[32] But as radio's promise began to generate interest among providers and users, there was still no agreement about how the new media would be regulated and financed. Strict government control of radio during wartime led some to fear continued government censorship. Simultaneously, the proliferation of uncontrolled broadcasts prompted others to fret that a lack of government regulation would threaten a heretofore stable American identity. As early as 1922, David Sarnoff, a Russian-Jewish immigrant who held a job with American Marconi before it was purchased by General Electric Corporation had proposed the establishment of a high quality nationwide broadcast company.[33] While Sarnoff imagined a national non-commercial network, it was not until after American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) demonstrated the feasibility and profitability of chain broadcasting that Radio Corporation of American (RCA) was motivated to create NBC, the first radio network. Sarnoff assumed management of the company, later becoming its president.

RCA promoted the new network as "seeking…to provide machinery, which will ensure a national distribution of national programs, and a wider distribution of programs of the highest quality." Initially NBC saw itself as a public service provider that sold only enough time to support its non-commercial programming.[34] But despite its emphasis on quality, NBC was still a privately owned, profit-making company responsible to its stockholders.[35] At the end of its first year, NBC had forty-eight affiliates, and the following year the company divided itself into two networks: NBC Red, which presented more popular programming and generated more profit, and NBC Blue, which offered primarily cultural or educational programs. In 1927, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) was established with sixteen affiliates. By 1929, the three networks presented 359 hours of national programs a week.[36] A fourth network, the Mutual Broadcasting System, was established in 1934 as a cooperative venture among four stations that shared all the expenses of programming and broadcasting.[37]

During the 1920s and 30s, NBC and CBS pioneered the system of sustaining and sponsored programs. Sustaining programs were supported or produced by the networks, either by providing airtime and production assistance to nonprofit organizations or by producing programs themselves as a public service. The latter were touted as "quality" programming, with educational or cultural content. But despite the public service premise, sustaining broadcasts were often presented with the hope that they would be picked up by sponsors. Sponsored broadcasts were commercial broadcasts produced by paying sponsors that purchased airtime. By 1934, half of network time was sold for sponsored broadcasts.[38] As advertising became the accepted economic foundation of

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[32] Michele Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Group, 2007), 30.
[33] Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Perseus Book Group, 2004), 355.
[34] Robert W. McChesney, *Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy: The Battle for Control of U.S. Broadcasting, 1928-1935* (New York: Oxford Press, 1993), 15-16.
[35] Michele Hilmes, ed., *NBC: America's Network* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 7.
[36] Ibid., 16.
[37] By the 1940s, Mutual had more affiliates than either of the other networks but it claimed fewer listeners. It was known for several popular shows, for its sports broadcasts, and for its news division. After 1952 it was no longer run cooperatively; it survived until 1999.
[38] Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States,* Vol. II - 1933-1953 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 17.

broadcasting in the early 1930s, advertising agencies went beyond simply financing broadcasts to determining the actual content of the programs, and networks lost creative control over broadcasting.[39] By 1931, almost all sponsored programs were actually developed and produced by advertising agencies, and by 1934 more than 50 percent of revenue was generated from ten advertising firms.[40] By the mid-1930s, even the FCC had little control over advertisers, and it was clear that the companies paying the bill were in control of the content.[41]

The Communications Act of 1934 largely reinforced the system developed by the Radio Act of 1927. Under the new act, the FRC was replaced with the FCC, which was charged with regulating radio, telegraph, cable and telephone. The weak requirement that the FCC study the issue of independent broadcasting represented the failure of those who mounted a significant challenge to commercial radio.[42] When the promised hearings were held, Congress found that commercial broadcasters had ample time for educational and other nonprofit needs and were most eager to serve the public.[43] It was in this era that the networks began to promote their public service broadcasting more actively, largely with a significant increase in sustaining broadcasts. The networks also donated free airtime and production support for groups such as the United States Department of Agriculture, the National Parent-Teacher Association, the Academy of Medicine, and the Federation of Women's Clubs. They focused on mainstream groups, avoided radicals, and steered clear of controversial issues such as economic inequality or discrimination.[44]

By the mid-1930s, educational stations had a significantly smaller presence on the airwaves. More than half of the two hundred educational stations licensed by the 1920s had ceased to exist. In contrast, commercial radio made major strides in this period. Perhaps most important, the marketplace model had been institutionalized as an "icon of American freedom and culture."[45] Though the heads of both major networks publically championed commercial radio as the protector of democracy, the success of radio as a commercial medium meant that serious public affairs and educational programs received increasingly short shrift. Speaking in 1936, NBC's Sarnoff asserted that "we cannot have a controlled radio and retain a democracy." A year later, CBS president William Paley declared that "he who attacks the fundamentals of the American [broadcasting] system attacks democracy itself."[46] In order to justify the democratic potential of the commercial system, the networks supported a few important education programs. *ATMA* was one of these.

Radio and Democracy

As early as the 1840s, the development of the telegraph was hailed as ushering in a new era of communication in America and offering a new opportunity to develop an enlightened citizenry. Proponents had great hopes that instant electronic communications could be used to inform and educate citizens of a far flung nation, thus helping to augment national unity at a time when the republic was still growing.[47] With the emergence of popular radio in the first decades of the twentieth century, similar idealistic goals for enhancing access to information and promoting democracy were revived. Before World War I, the amateur network created by more than one thousand ham radio transmitters suggested that almost universal access to uncensored

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[39] Hilmes, *NBC*, 16-21.
[40] Barnouw, *Golden Web*, 17.
[41] Ibid., 35.
[42] Ralph Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America: A Political History* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications), 34-35.
[43] Barnouw, *Golden Web*, 26.
[44] Hilmes, *NBC*, 20-21.
[45] Robert McChesney, in Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*, 40.
[46] Eugene E. Leach, "Tuning Out Education: The Cooperative Doctrine in Radio," History of Public Broadcasting in the United States, http://www.current.org/coop/coop1.shtml (9 February 2010). Both speeches were made to the National Conference on Educational Broadcasting.
[47] Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*, 12.

communication was possible, while after the war the surge in independent radio broadcasters brought a democratic cacophony of viewpoints before radio listeners. At the same time, the fallout from several decades of immigration reshaped the culture in the 1920s. Between 1927 and 1935, the percentage of American households with radios rose from 25 percent to 93 percent. As radio became more accessible to the general population, many recognized that the ability to reach citizens in their own homes could play a valuable role in creating and/or defining a national public; yet, goals varied, ranging from those who embraced an opportunity to foster cultural diversity to those who promoted more rigorous assimilation. For example, while some thought that the ability to listen to stations from different regions could affirm the nation's distinctions and promote mutual understanding, others believed that radio had a special mission to raise the tone of American culture.[48] Nevertheless, there was general agreement that broadcasting could strengthen the social connections with American culture for those who were isolated and enable the electorate to be better informed. One writer expressed awe over an automobile trip during which he kept in touch with the news via radio: "...radio networks are supplying [people in remote parts of the country] with all of the news that comes into Times Square. You can think of them as lonely people listening to radios in waste places, or you can think of them as a populace and an electorate."[49] Numerous writers in the same era extolled the new medium's potential to facilitate political discourse, and many expressed the common theme that "radio would...do nothing less than resurrect the values of the early Republic."[50]

Radio's promise as an agent of democracy was rooted in the belief that the nation is best governed by an informed citizenry able to engage in a free exchange of ideas, to debate them openly, and to arrive at decisions about solving mutual problems that are supported by the majority. However, in the first decades of the twentieth century, many worried that the country's rapid expansion was creating a nation of individuals, rather than communities, one in which those in outlying areas or overcrowded cities had fewer opportunities to obtain information and interact as neighbors and were thus hampered from participating fully in the rights and duties of citizens. Among the most exciting prospects of early radio was its potential to bring information directly to Americans who were separated by geographic or social distances. Optimists believed that radio might provide a way for all Americans to gather instantly to consider critical problems. As one scholar put it, "the magnificent distances we boast of also estrange us. An idea holds us together - the idea that...[we] are all citizens of the same commonwealth. Radio will achieve the task of giving a reality to this idea.... Radio is destined to transform the United States...into a huge auditorium."[51] The idea of creating "neighborhoods" via radio informed many of the most ambitious public affairs programming of the 1930s.

The Public Forum

Democracy also relies on an educated public, an appreciation for a wide range of values, and an awareness of an ever-changing world. In the 1930s and 40s in particular, increasingly disturbing news about the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and the long buildup to World War II led many to believe that the American people needed a refresher course in democratic values so that they would be able to help their government through the difficult decisions that lay ahead. One response to this was a renewed interest in public forums as a means of adult education. Advocates of the forum movement (which had its antecedent in the late nineteenth-century Chautauqua model) promoted a formalized system of public education intended to train adults for better citizenship. The League for Political Education itself had been established based on the forum model. The public forum contained a set format that involved a specific topic, a moderator, a formal lecture by an expert,

[48] Starr, *Creation of the Media*, 388.
[49] Bernard DeVoto, "Main Street Twenty Years After," *Harper's (*November 1940): 585-87, in William C. Ackerman, "The Dimensions of American Broadcasting," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 9 (Spring 1945): 1-18.
[50] Susan J. Douglas, *Inventing American Broadcasting, 1899-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 321.
[51] Waldemar Kaempffert, "Who Will Pay for Broadcasting," *Popular Radio* (December 1922): 236-45.

questions from the floor, a general discussion, and a recap.[52] During the early 1930s, John Ward Studebaker, a school administrator from Ohio, brought national prominence to the forum movement. In 1932, Studebaker secured a grant from the Carnegie Corporation to develop a series of forums as an experiment in public education. Later, as U.S. commissioner of education (1934-1948), Studebaker established the Federal Forum Project (1936-1941) based on the same model. The Federal Forum Project sponsored thousands of forums all over the county, and by 1938 forums were drawing more than three million participants a year. Studebaker believed that the forums protected civil liberties by giving citizens the chance to exercise them.[53] His goal was to nurture democracy.[54] In *Plain Talk*, written in 1936, Studebaker argued that people had lost faith in their ability to deal with major social problems because they no longer understood them and that such "civic illiteracy endangers modern democracies."[55] Another scholar suggested that public forums helped to increase the political literacy of the voter, providing an aptitude for interpreting the things that he or she must judge in everyday life.[56]

For proponents of forums, who believed that education could give citizens the tools they needed to work democratically toward the public welfare, radio presented an opportunity to extend these benefits to a significantly larger audience. One enthusiast attested that "there were numerous indications that the public would accept public forum meetings and discussions by means of radio broadcasts."[57] In fact, Studebaker, who also chaired the United States Radio Education Committee, reported that in 1937 his forum centers presented nearly one thousand radio discussions.[58] The Albuquerque Public Affairs Forum, for example, which held twelve public forums in 1938, also sponsored a live broadcast of *ATMA* followed by an open discussion from the Albuquerque High School.[59] Thus, for those who despaired of an informed public, radio allowed information to be transmitted right into the American living room, thereby leveling hierarchies that were created by distance, isolation, poverty, disability, access to education, and other social and environmental factors.[60] Advocates believed that radio could offer those in remote places the same kind of information that they would seek if they had access to large universities.[61] This was seen as a tremendous resource in such a rapidly growing population and changing society. One author who believed that radio could bring valuable information into each and every home praised *ATMA* as "a significant expression of the forum idea."[62]

Finally, participation in a democracy also presupposes a sharing of ideas, the ability to listen to different ideas, to gather in groups to debate, discuss, and reach consensus. Here, proponents of radio believed that the new medium had the potential to present listeners with a wide range of views and to promote the free exchange of ideas, both on the air and among listeners, who, it was believed, would listen in groups, repeating and rearguing the debates they heard. Advocates for radio romanticized the medium by casting it as a "town hall" for the modern age, an ethereal meeting place where citizens could gather to exchange ideas and make decisions for the common good. The latter reflects a renewed interest in the idea of the New England town meeting as the

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[52] Carroll D. Champlin, "The Public Forum as an Educational Agency," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 21 (November 1938):74.
[53] John W. Studebaker, "Dr. Studebaker Pictures the Future for Public Forums as Part of the New Trend to Real Democracy In Life," *New York Times,* 11 April 1937.
[54] John Gastil and William M. Keith, "A Nation That (Sometimes) Likes To Talk: A Brief History of Public Deliberation In the United States," *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook*, ed. John Gastil and Peter Levine (n.p.: John Wiley and Sons, 2005), 11-12.
[55] John W. Studebaker, *Plain Talk* (Washington: National Home Library Foundation, 1936), 128.
[56] J. T. Salter, "The Pattern of Politics: I. The Politician," *Journal of Politics* 1 (May 1939): 130-36.
[57] Champlin, "The Public Forum," 74.
[58] Studebaker, "Dr. Studebaker Pictures."
[59] "Albuquerque Federal Forum Project Scrapbook," The University of New Mexico, University Libraries, Center for Southwest Research, http://rmoa.unm.edu/printerfriendly.ph (15 February 2010) [radio station KOB].
[60] Engelman, *Public Radio and Television in America*,18.
[61] John Erskine, "The Future of Radio as a Cultural Medium," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* Vol. 177, *Radio: The Fifth Estate* (January 1935): 216-17.
[62] Salter, "Pattern of Politics," 135.

embodiment of deliberative democratic decision making. This view of the town hall dated back through to the nineteenth century and reflected a reverence for New England's colonial era government structure, in which town members gathered in person, rather than through elected representatives, to discuss, debate, and decide local matters, as one of the purest expressions of the democratic ideal. Similar to the public forum, the town hall was also lauded as a school for democracy. Alexis de Tocqueville had observed that "Town Meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people's reach, they teach men how to use and enjoy it."[63] Although the town hall idea had lost some credence during the Progressive Era, with its emphasis on professional management of government, the desire to empower citizens to counter threats presented by the specter of totalitarianism promoted a renewal of interest in the decentralized democracy represented by the town hall during the 1930s.[64] Among public discussion's advocates, John Studebaker insisted that "democracy must have a channel whereby public questions may be discussed as frankly and as freely as they were in the old New England town hall meeting."[65]

The new town hall advocates focused on encouraging the exchange of viewpoints as a way to understand them and sort out their relative merits. In "Radio Builds Democracy," George Denny decried the public's tendency to read and listen only to those who shared their own views.[66] He later remarked that "it is only in orderly discussion that lies are unmasked" and asserted that when mass meetings replace town meetings danger arises.[67] "Discussion as democracy" was a popular idea in the early twentieth century, and in a book of the same name, one scholar defined democracy as "governance through talk."[68] Although face-to-face communication was highly praised and encouraged, many worried that the country had grown too large for effective discussion among citizens. Here radio advocates believed that the new medium could significantly expand the average citizen's exposure to a wide range of views. Shows such as *ATMA* emphasized the breadth of topics and participants (many of whom were decision makers in government) and prioritized exchanges between guests that elucidated differences over similarities. Furthermore, audience participation held the potential for an even more generous exchange of views, as did the opportunity for the home audience to respond by mail. Radio offered everyone the opportunity to listen to, think about, and perhaps participate in lively discussions of current affairs with important leaders in government and industry, helping to approximate the perceived virtues of the New England town hall meetings.

Public Service Broadcasting

Public service broadcasting embraces many of the principles promoted by broadcasters, idealists and reformers since the earliest days of radio. The idea that radio should serve everyone equally, promote cultural diversity, represent all viewpoints, allow for an exchange of ideas, help to ensure an informed electorate, and provide cultural and educational enrichment pervades discussion of the media from its earliest history. Since it was formed in 1927, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a non-commercial public monopoly service chartered by the British government and funded by a fee (or tax) charged to all users, has provided an almost universally admired model for public benefit broadcasting. Nevertheless, many Americans found the BBC model, which implies that a public trustee would be immune from political and commercial interests, an insufficient guarantee that radio would be free from government censorship. In 1941 Arthur Garfield Hays,

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[63] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835), quoted in Frank M. Bryan, *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting and How It Work*s (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 27.
[64] Bryan, *Real Democracy,* 25-40.
[65] William H. Bristow, "Extending the Adult-Education Horizon," Review of *Plain Talk* by John W. Studebaker," *The School Review* 45 (April 1937): 309.
[66] George V. Denny Jr., "Radio Builds Democracy," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 14 (February 1941): 370.
[67] S. J. Woolf, "The Umpire of the Town Meeting," *New York Times*, 6 June 1943.
[68] Robert Danisch, Review of *Democracy as Discussion: Civic Education and the American Forum Movement* by William Keith. *Rhetorical Review* 6 (June 2008): 9

general counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, observed that "our traditions make us hesitate to give the government the power of monopolizing the radio. It is not the American way."[69] In the following decades, the example of German takeover of radio in the 1930s was frequently cited as a cautionary tale. But without government support or protection in its formative decades, American radio broadcasting was marked by tension between public service and economic interests and increasing dominance by commercial broadcasters. Although the FCC always required broadcasters to present a reasonable amount of sustaining programming, it was not until the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 that the U.S. government mandated funding for public radio.

Nevertheless, dedication to purpose, high idealism, a concern for image and reputation, a general desire to curry favor with the government, and even commercial gain motivated both independent and network broadcasters to present programs that met some or all of the goals championed by advocates of public service radio. Before the advent of commercial broadcasting, corporate stations such as those owned by RCA were presenting public service programs, and even as sponsored programming solidified its place as the basis for radio broadcasting in the United States, networks continued to produce sustaining programs that promised education or enlightenment. While public service radio has always encompassed a wide range of programming, from classical music to the latest news, programs with an educational or civic component or those that sought to enhance participation in public affairs or advance democracy through the creative use of the new medium were a natural fit with the broadly conceived goal of radio as a new public forum.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Fireside Chats," which began in 1933, have been hailed as a landmark in public service broadcasting because they demonstrated radio's potential for achieving exactly the goals that idealists had imagined for the new media. Broadcast directly from the White House, the chats linked a diffuse public, provided information to everyone at the same time, and fostered an exchange of ideas about mutual problems. A large part of their success has been attributed to the president's skilful presentation, which gave listeners the feeling that he was talking directly to them and inviting their response. Roosevelt used straightforward language and addressed the public as friends and neighbors. Calling the addresses "chats," suggested both an intimacy and a two-way conversation. And the public responded appreciatively. Staggering amounts of mail followed the broadcasts, with writers, many of whom were from the middle and lower middle classes, responding as they might to the president himself. One person replied warmly, saying "you are the first President to come into our homes, to make us feel that you are working for us; to let us know what you are doing." Another writer admitted that "until last night, to me, the President of the United States was merely a legend." The radio chat seemed to change all that. Now "you are real. I know your voice; what you are trying to do."[70] Studies showed that people tended to listen to the broadcasts in groups, continuing to explore the issues discussed after the broadcast.[71] Roosevelt's fireside chats verified the promise of radio and exemplified a style suitable for mass communication via electronic media.

In 1931, the *University of Chicago Roundtable* made its debut as a cooperative venture with a local radio station. Two years later, the show was picked up by NBC, where it was initially funded by grants and aired on the Red network. The highly regarded roundtable, one of the first nationwide radio discussion programs, was among the most successful and well known of NBC's public affairs offerings. Each Sunday, three or four University of Chicago professors would gather for a discussion of one of the controversial issues of the day. The roundtable was informal and unrehearsed, yet educational, with the university supplying bibliographies and discussion aids so that listeners could investigate the topics in more depth. The show was carried on as many as ninety stations and remained on the air until 1955.

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[69] Arthur Garfield Hays, "Civic Discussion Over the Air," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 23, *New Horizons in Radio* (January 1941): 39.
[70] Both letters cited in Starr, *Creation of the Media*, 374.
[71] Discussion of fireside chats in Starr, *Creation of the Media*, 374-75 and Barnouw, *The Golden Web*, 7-8.

Between 1934 and 1956, *American Forum of the Air*, originally the *Mutual Forum Hour*, aired on the Mutual Broadcasting System. Hosted by Theodore Granik, this popular program has been hailed as the first public affairs panel discussion and featured many notable guests, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, and Senators Harry Truman and Robert Taft. Topics discussed ranged from politics to matters of cultural concern. The format included opening remarks, a panel discussion, and questions from the audience. *The World Is Yours* was a half-hour broadcast produced by NBC with the Smithsonian Institution. Broadcast on NBC Red between 1936 and 1942, the show drew on the broad range of the museum's collections. A host known as the "Oldtimer" guided the audience through each half-hour episode.

American School of the Air, CBS's premier half-hour educational program, was introduced in 1930 and had an eighteen-year run. In the late 1930s, it was heard in more than one hundred thousand classrooms nationwide. *American School*, modeled after Ohio State University's 1929 *School of the Air*, presented educational programming in a different discipline each day.[72] For example, Monday was devoted to industry and agriculture, while Tuesday was reserved for American music. Among many notable programs, musicologist Alan Lomax contributed a twenty-six week historical overview of American folk music in 1939.

Among CBS's other offerings in this genre was *American Labor and the Nation*, a series of speeches sponsored by the American Federation of Labor in 1932. *The Columbia Workshop* (1936-1943, 1946-1947), another of CBS's sustaining programs, was developed by Irving Reis. Reis was interested in experimental modes of narrative, and the show premiered many technological innovations while presenting dramatizations of plays, stories, etc. *The People's Platform*, a CBS program, aired 1938-1952. Dr. Lyman Bryson, a former assistant to George Denny at Town Hall, professor of education at Teachers College, and chair of the Adult Education Board at CBS, developed and hosted the show. Bryson's invited four or five people with different views to dinner, following which they would discuss controversial subjects. There were no prepared speeches and discussion was kept informal and spontaneous. Bryson encouraged candor by concealing the microphone, and one of the four guests was always an average citizen. Although there was no live audience, the program featured a spirited exchange of ideas.

Overall, this programming did not prove profitable for the networks. NBC Red, with its popular fare, was vastly preferred by advertisers, while NBC Blue, with its higher cultural content, became a refuge for the less popular but more respected educational and public affairs programs. The Blue network was valuable to NBC as a demonstration of the network's commitment to high ideals, yet it remained an economic liability, and when NBC was forced to divest in 1943, it dumped the Blue network altogether.[73] Overall, public affairs broadcasting was said to be less popular than other shows; however, several shows, such as *University of Chicago Round Table*, *ATMA,* and the *People's Platform,* succeeded in drawing respectable audiences.[74] Even though several of these shows had long runs, network commitment to sustaining broadcasts decreased in the 1940s.

America's Town Meeting of the Air

ATMA was the initiative of George V. Denny Jr. (1899-1959), who joined the staff of the League for Political Education in 1931 as assistant to Robert Erskine Ely. Denny served as moderator for *ATMA* for nearly its entire

[72] The *Ohio School of the Air* (1929-1937) was an early effort to use radio in public education. Founded by Benjamin Darrow, the school offered a number of subjects to primary and secondary school students and was heard in as many as twenty-two states.
[73] Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel: A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, vol. I – to 1933 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 272. NBC Blue became the foundation of the American Broadcasting Company (ABC).
[74] Public affairs programs usually generated between three and four thousand letters a week, sometimes as high as ten thousand. Letters about entertainment broadcasts generally brought in thirty to forty thousand letters a week.

run (until 1952) and replaced Ely as director (later president) of the league (later Town Hall, Inc.) after the latter's retirement in 1937. During his tenure as president, Denny embraced and advanced the ideals of the League for Political Education, asking "what…is more important and more urgent for the safety of American democracy than an honest system of political education?"[75] Denny, a native of North Carolina, brought valuable skills from his varied background as a student of commerce, actor, stage manager, and educator. In the latter capacity he served as director of the extension program at Columbia University and thus embraced some of the same optimistic views of public education as the public forum advocates.[76] He respected and carried on the legacy of Josiah Holbrook's early nineteenth century Lyceum Movement, the Chautauqua program, and other pioneering efforts in adult education, including the League for Political Education itself.[77] Throughout his career, he continued to believe that "a substantial percentage of the American people are not...close-minded" and welcomed efforts to expand their mental horizons.[78] Denny came to the league with a mixture of optimism, idealism, and artistic ability that strongly informed the choices that he made about its direction and that directly inspired the development of *ATMA*.

The oft-repeated and perhaps apocryphal genesis of *ATMA* was Denny's indirect encounter with a narrow-minded neighbor who had refused to listen to one of Roosevelt's fireside chats simply because he disapproved of Roosevelt. It was said to be this experience in 1934 that crystallized Denny's fears that Americans, hampered by ignorance, lack of education, practice or opportunity, or perhaps just isolated by remote locations or busy lives, were falling victims to the tyranny of the closed mind. Denny worried that without hearing and debating all sides of an issue, Americans would be more susceptible to the thoughtless "mass thinking" that Hitler was both encouraging and capitalizing on in Germany during the 1930s. Believing that the American public needed to be conscious of its power and responsibilities, Denny declared that "its members must be taught to listen to both sides of an argument and to reason together honestly and objectively."[79] Whether real or not, Denny's one-dimensional neighbor served as a metaphor for a nation of citizens who lacked empathy for others.

In the aftermath of this epiphany, Denny conceived the idea for an uncensored radio program "reviving our native tradition of a free and unfettered exchange of opposing views."[80] Denny's own history of *ATMA* began with a fundamental statement of his belief that "free discussion of public issues has always been a basic function of democracy" and an allusion to the construction of a place for town meetings as the first act of the New England colonists.[81] Denny clearly embraced both the historicist and practical implications of calling his proposed broadcast a "town meeting of the air." During the 1930s, the town hall had once again become a powerful symbolic metaphor for American democracy. Denny also grasped the potential for modern technology to turn "every home into a potential town hall."[82] Finally, like Roosevelt, Denny embodied the sense of showmanship and style needed to make it a success.

Denny pitched his idea to John Royal, NBC's vice president for programming, and received approval for an initial series of six programs in the spring of 1934. Denny's timing was fortuitous. With the recent surge of interest in the successful Federal Forum Project, Royal observed that NBC had been besieged with forum

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[75] Quoted in Orrin E. Dunlap Jr., "Open Forum Is Applauded, Freedom of Speech and Assembly for Discussion are Commended by Listeners in Tune With Town Hall of the Air," *New York Times*, 30 June 1935.
[76] David Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest: America's Town Meeting of the Air," in Hilmes, *NBC*, 45.
[77] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy," 370-71.
[78] Ibid., 375-76.
[79] Denny, quoted in Woolf, "The Umpire."
[80] Ibid.
[81] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy, 70.
[82] Woolf, "The Umpire."

proposals.[83] Denny's proposal also coincided with debate over the Communications Act of 1934, a period in which the network was eager to demonstrate its commitment to public affairs broadcasting. NBC agreed to finance the program, and the first six shows were broadcast between May and June of 1935.

The first broadcast, which took place on 30 May 1935, proved to be a landmark in broadcast history. Denny wasted no time in initiating discussion of a controversial yet timely topic: "Which Way America: Fascism, Communism, Socialism or Democracy?" Speakers, who represented each of the stated four ideologies, were Lawrence Dennis, A. J. Muste, Norman Thomas, and Raymond Moley.[84] Lawrence Dennis was an American diplomat, consultant, and author who argued that capitalism was doomed and advocated fascism during the Great Depression. Norman Thomas was a pacifist and American Socialist Party leader who ran for president six times. Raymond Moley was a lawyer, political scientist, member of FDR's "brain trust," and staunch defender of capitalism. Each delivered a prepared ten-minute talk and took questions from the audience of 1,500. Despite the fact that it aired on only eighteen stations with little advance publicity, the show received three thousand letters, only four of which were negative. Among the positive comments, one writer exclaimed that "last night you made radio history. My heartiest congratulations on the best radio program I have ever heard." Several praised the "splendid" programming, while another rejoiced to have "an example of this freedom of speech which has never been so much talked about and so little practiced as today." Yet another listener asserted that "if our country is to be rescued from the reactionaries on the one hand, and the radicals on the other, none can be of more service than your program....If the people knew of it you would have tens of thousands of listeners.[85] Denny later boasted that "nothing like it had occurred before in radio," differentiating *ATMA* from other radio discussion programs and forums by the audience's participation and their ability to question the speakers directly.[86]

After the six trial programs, *ATMA* became a regular part of NBC's evening schedule, airing on NBC Blue for eight years as a sustaining broadcast. The show was broadcast weekly and Denny produced between twenty-four and twenty-nine episodes per season. Responses averaged 1,103 letters a week in the first year, and by the late 1930s the show was receiving more than two thousand letters a week.[87] After inheriting *ATMA* along with the rest of the Blue network, ABC solicited commercial support for the broadcast, and the 1944-45 season was sponsored by *Reader's Digest*. Between 1947 and its demise in 1956, the show was aired as a "cooperative," which meant that local sponsors shared its costs.[88] The show was televised for two brief periods, between October 1948 and June 1949 and for several months in the first half of 1952. Although Denny moderated the first TV run, the 1952 shows were moderated by John Daly. In the same year, Denny was replaced on the radio broadcasts as well. The show continued on radio for another four years, and the final broadcast occurred on 24 June 1956.

George Denny was the central figure in planning and executing *ATMA* from its inception until its last few years and his involvement was crucial to the show's success. He worked with Town Hall's Radio Forum Division in selecting the speakers, who were always chosen from the top echelons of their fields, and the division director handled the logistics of the programs.[89] During the show, Denny introduced the speakers, moderated the

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[83] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 45.
[84] Though NBC promised that there would be no censorship, the network did indeed object to one of the proposed speakers, communist leader Earl Browder, and he was replaced with Muste, chair of the Workers Party of the United States. Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 49.
[85] Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town,* 8-12.
[86] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy," 373.
[87] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 49. Goodman notes that during the late 1930s and early 1940s the most popular broadcasts received more than four thousand letters per week.
[88] Ibid., 49-50.
[89] Information about the Radio Forum Division from Max Wylie, ed., *Best Broadcasts of 1938-39* (New York: Whittlesey House,

debate, and read the questions from the audience.[90] The format remained consistent, with four presenters speaking briefly from prepared scripts before taking questions from the audience. Speakers met the morning of the broadcast and had the option of spending the afternoon revising their remarks. They were instructed to stress their differences in their opening remarks, so that they could summarize the points on which they agreed at the end. Audience questions, which were limited to twenty-five words, had to be written and approved by a committee to eliminate "personal" remarks.[91] The audience was crucial to the success of the program, and Denny allowed them a great deal of freedom. Described [by Denny] as "spectators-hecklers," audience members could be heard cheering, hissing, and/or booing. The unpredictable nature of their reaction added drama, a sense of risk, and a certain intimacy, drawing the radio listeners into the moment. By 1936 it was possible for radio listeners to call in from throughout the country, which further enhanced the connection between the forum and its listening audience.[92] The format for the live question period developed for *ATMA* has been called a "significant innovation in American broadcasting," and it clearly reflected Denny's larger intent to "dramatize the power of discussion."[93]

Part of *ATMA*'s success can be attributed to Denny's skills as a host and moderator. Presumably, his acting experience had given him a sense of performance that facilitated his handling of the live event in New York. He also understood how to make the broadcast an engaging experience for the home listener. He was skillful in mediating between guests who were accustomed to deference and unruly audience members and straddling the line between education and entertainment. He maintained that "conventional classroom methods cannot be used on the air. When the words 'talk' or 'education' occur in the radio-program listings in the paper, they are assiduously avoided by most listeners."[94] He relied heavily on reinforcing the ideological associations with the New England town hall by using corny effects that were intended to create an historicist atmosphere for the home audience, such as ringing a loud bell to open the show and calling out "good evening neighbors, town meetin' tonight." These associations were further reinforced for members of the live audience, who were seated by ushers wearing colonial costumes.[95] And although Denny himself didn't dress like a Puritan, a cartoon figure of a man resembling one was used for the show's promotional brochure.

Mail was steady in volume and generally supportive. Listeners expressed a keen interest in learning as well as understanding and appreciating Denny's goals for the program. For example, one writer appreciated "discussion of vital questions at an adult level." Another called the show "the best thing that has happened to my mind in a longer time than I can remember," and a third professed that "[t]here has never been a time when it was more important for intelligent people to use every means at hand to strengthen democracy."[96] Denny also reported receiving mail from all kinds of listening groups, including those formed in schools, colleges, churches, and social clubs. He described one group that listened in the back of a drugstore and others that gathered in the homes of friends and neighbors.[97] In 1936, researchers found that 50 percent of listeners usually continued discussion after the show, and 34 percent reported changing their opinion at least once after listening to a broadcast.[98] In 1938, in response to numerous requests for assistance, Denny initiated the Town Hall

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1939), 189.

[90] In his duties as director of the league (and then Town Hall, Inc.), Denny also continued to help select lecturers for the league's morning lectures and assist in the management of the concert department.

[91] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 48.

[92] John Dunning, *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio (*New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31.

[93] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 48.

[94] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy," 376.

[95] R. M. Ely, in Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 47.

[96] The first two quoted in Overstreet and Overstreet, *Town Meeting Comes to Town*, 212-13. The third quoted in Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 49.

[97] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy," 373-74.

[98] Research was by psychologist Hadley Cantril of Princeton, in 1936. Reported in Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 49.

Advisory Service, organized by Chester D. Snell, which prepared materials for discussion groups. Among these materials were advance information about broadcasts, a bibliography, a discussion leader's handbook, and a guide for discussion group members. By 1941, more than one thousand discussion groups had registered with Town Hall, and the American Association for Adult Education estimated that more than three thousand groups met regularly to listen to and discuss the program.[99] Denny's handbook adhered closely to his intent that the show should provide information and spark discussion rather than solve problems, and he reminded leaders that "judgment should be reserved on many proposals."[100] As Robert E. Ely phrased it, *ATMA* was not an attempt to solve problems but to promote a better informed, broader consideration of them.[101]

Although most broadcasts originated from Town Hall, Denny toured with *ATMA* several times. In 1938 he presented the show from a series of educational institutions: Harvard, Chautauqua Institution, Northwestern University, the University of Denver, and the University of California at Berkeley. And in 1949, the show took a world tour, broadcasting from London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Ankara, Tel Aviv, Cairo, Karachi, New Delhi, Manila, Tokyo, Honolulu, and Washington. The latter series focused on race relations in America and included representatives of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and The National Council of Negro Women. The show's reach expanded internationally in 1950, when *ATMA* was broadcast over Voice of America, an international broadcasting service funded by the United States government with the intention of bringing democracy to totalitarian countries.

Denny, *ATMA*, and NBC all won numerous accolades for the show. Among them were two awards for best radio performance from the Women's National Radio Committee (before 1938) and an award for best educational program of the year from the Ohio Conference on Radio and Education (for the Willkie-Jackson discussion, 6 January 1938). The same broadcast was also honored as best public discussion in Max Wylie's *Best Broadcasts of 1938-38.* Wylie judged the broadcast, "How Can Government and Business Work Together," with Robert Jackson and Wendell L. Willkie, as "one of the most effective public discussions ever broadcast in this country."[102] The Women's Press Club of New York and the National Federation of Press Women awarded a certificate of merit for the "best unbiased discussion on economic, political and international problems" (before 1938), and the American Legion Auxiliary awarded a silver plaque for "the program most acceptable and worthwhile to the general family audience" (before 1938). The show won the prestigious Peabody Award for outstanding educational program twice, in 1943 and 1945, and took a first place in Network Public Issues Broadcasts from the Institute for Education by Radio at Ohio State University, 10th American Exhibition of Education Radio Programs, in 1946. The show was also cited twice by the National Council of Teachers of English, in 1946 and 1947, for its excellence.

In addition, throughout the 1930s and 40s, *ATMA* received repeated notice in various scholarly journals. Its published broadcast transcripts were noted more than fifteen times in the *American Economic Review*'s new books feature, which highlighted those relating to economic policy, business, and labor issues. *ATMA* broadcasts were also cited in bibliographies for articles published in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, the *Michigan Law Review*, the *Yale Law Review*, the *Virginia Law Review*, the *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *American Anthropologist*, the *American Political Science Review*, and the *Journals of Politics.* During the same period, the show and/or its published transcripts were also recommended in numerous journals for educators, including the *Phi Delta Kappan*, *College English*, the *English Journal*, the *Clearing House*, *Library Quarterly*, the *Peabody Journal of Education*, the *Journal of Negro Education*,

[99] Denny, "Radio Builds Democracy," 374.
[100] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 52.
[101] Ely, *A Beginning*, 46.
[102] Wylie, *Best Broadcasts of 1938-39*, 190.

History of Education Quarterly, *Review of Educational Research*, the *School Review*, the *Elementary School Journal*, and others.

Programs[103]

Although *ATMA* presented a great many diverse programs over its twenty-two year history, the overall content of the show's broadcasts can be generally divided into three periods. The show's earliest years (1934-1939), which coincided with the Great Depression, were marked by the greatest diversity and the greatest willingness to explore new ideas. During these years, the show came closest to achieving its goal of promoting free, fearless, and open discussion, giving time to advocates of alternative political, social, economic systems, and allowing discussion of fundamental social and political questions. Among those who spoke were Earl Browder and Clarence Hathaway, representatives of the American Communist Party, and Olivia Rossetti Agresti, who defended fascism. Shows from this era that address important political and social issues include: "Personal Liberty and the Modern State" (1935); "The Supreme Court and the Constitution" (1936); "What Does Democracy Mean?" (1938); "Can Democracies Avoid Dictatorship?"(1937); "Which Way Capitalism-Competition or Cooperatives?"; "Can We Solve the Crime Problem?"; "The State and Civil Liberties"; "Does Our Tax System Need to Be Revised?" (1937); and "Do We Have a Free Press?" (1939).

The latter ("Do We Have a Free Press?") was a landmark program in which Harold Ickes, secretary of the interior, faced Frank E. Gannett, a well-known newspaper publisher. While Gannett described members of the press in heroic language and championed them as courageous, Ickes accused Gannett of specific conflicts of interest.[104] In citing examples that the press was beholden to advertisers, Ickes referred to the results of a 1933 study by Dr. Raymond Pearl of Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Pearl, who was also on the program, is believed to have been one of the first scientists to link smoking to a shorter life span. The results of his study had been made widely available to every paper in America through the wire services. Ickes claimed that nearly all of the major urban papers had suppressed it, a decision that he attributed to pressure from tobacco advertisers.[105] The following year, Ickes followed up the debate with a book on the subject (*America's House of Lords, An Inquiry into Freedom of the Press*), asserting that publishers were men of wealth and power working against the interests of the common man.[106] The *ATMA* broadcast itself, with an audience of millions, may have been among the first public mentions of the potentially deadly effects of tobacco.[107] This program has been cited as one of *ATMA*'s stellar offerings and was rebroadcast in 1953 as part of *ATMA*'s twentieth-anniversary celebration.

Guests from this era, one of great uncertainty for the United States, also examined the serious economic and social problems the county faced and debated proposed new government policies and the philosophies behind them. In 1935, *ATMA* asked: "Has the New Deal Promoted or Retarded Business Recovery?" The question was discussed by Merwin K. Hart of the New York State Economic Council and future Supreme Court Justice Hugo L. Black. Another 1935 program addressed the question: "Will the Demands of Organized Labor Promote Recovery?" This two-part series featured Sidney Hillman, president of the Amalgamated Clothing

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[103] The section on programs was drawn in part from the analysis by David Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 49-60.
[104] "The Press: Suppression of News," *Time,* 23 January 1939, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,760627,00.html (16 November 2010).
[105] "Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil: The Story of In Fact - Part Two," adapted from George Seldes, *Never Tire of Broadcasting* (n.p.: Lyle Stuart, 1968) http://www.brasscheck.com/seldes/infact2.html (17 November 2010) . Note: Seldes apparently undertook a library search and found that no large urban newspaper other than the *Washington Post* had published the story. Pearl disagreed. Seldes discussed the controversy in several articles of *In fact.*
[106] "The Press: Debate Continued," *Time,* 23 January 1939, http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,762759,00.html (17 November 2010).
[107] "Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil."

Workers Union, and James A. Emory, general counsel of the National Council of America Manufacturers. Hillman has been called one of the greatest labor leaders in American history, while his opponent was once quoted as saying that labor unions were "more tyrannical than George III."[108] In 1935, Labor Secretary Frances Perkins debated journalist George E. Sokolsky over the merits of the newly passed Social Security Act ("Should We Plan for Social Security?"). Sokolsky, a strong supporter of the National Association of Manufacturers, argued that the New Deal promoted a collectivist agenda. During the *ATMA* debate, he told Perkins that liberty was not to be "sacrificed for bread alone." Sokolsky felt that the federal government had overstepped its jurisdictional bounds and had used the federally subsidized insurance as a bounty to coerce state governments into going along with it. He called the 10 percent tax retained by the federal government a "service charge for coercion."[109]

In a 1936 program, "Will Unionization Promote Industrial Recovery," Matthew Woll, vice president of the American Federation of Labor, appeared opposite Ralph Robey, assistant professor of banking at Columbia University and author of *Roosevelt vs. Recovery*. In 1937, *ATMA* addressed the controversial topic of health care reform ("What System of Medical Care Should We Have?"). In this show, Dr Arthur C. Christie spoke for the AMA, arguing against "the evils of health insurance or state medicine," while Dr. Gilbert Hague spoke in favor of socialized medicine. Three years later, *ATMA* returned to the topic ("Does America Need Compulsory Health Insurance?" 1940). This time Dr. Terry Townsend took the AMA's position against compulsory health insurance, while Charles Edward Winslow, a professor of public health at Yale University, strongly endorsed it. Howard claimed that "compulsory health insurance is the mark of decadent medicine everywhere it exists." Winslow declared (to applause) that "while we stand still and quarrel about details...men and women and children suffer and die for the lack of the resources of modern medical science."[110] And in 1938, former New Deal supporter Wendell Willkie and Robert H. Jackson, a prominent advocate for Roosevelt's programs, had a spirited debate on the merits of the New Deal that was later selected as the "best public discussion" of 1938 (Max Wylie's *Best Broadcasts of 1938-38)*. At the end of the 1930s, *ATMA* also ventured tentatively into the question of racial equality. A 1939 program featuring Earnest A. Hooton, a physical anthropologist at Harvard and Ashley Montagu, a professor of anatomy, asked "Should We Ignore Racial Differences?" In the same year, Mary McLeod Bethune, vice president of the NAACP and an important influence on civil rights policy during Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, appeared on a program entitled "What Does American Democracy Mean to Me?" Bethune, the daughter of slaves, spoke eloquently of envisioning "mutual respect and understanding between [the] races."[111]

As the situation in Europe deteriorated and the nation edged closer to war and then entered the fighting itself (1940-1945), broadcasts were dominated by discussions of international relations. The prelude to war actually began in the late 1930s, with programs such as "Can America Remain Neutral?" (1937), "How Should Democracies Deal With the Dictatorships?" (1938), and "What are the Real Issues in the War?"(1939). Guests for these broadcasts included a variety of journalists, foreign correspondents, and military intelligence experts. By the 1940-41 season, twenty-seven of twenty-nine broadcasts were about some aspect of this topic. Many of these broadcasts examined the ways in which a democratic nation should respond to a war of aggression outside its shores. Specific topics included: "What Are We Preparing to Defend?" (1940); "Is This Our War?"; "How Should We Meet Totalitarian Aggression in the Americas?"(1940); "Is A Hitler Defeat Essential to the United

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[108] "Assails the Unions, J. A. Emory, at Manufacturers' Dinner, Charges them with Tyranny," *New York Times*, 29 January 1909.
[109] "Should We Plan for Social Security?" *America's Town Meeting of the Air*, 19 December 1935. Social Security Online, http://www.ssa.gov/history/1935radiodebate.html (17 November 2010).
[110] John McDonough, "Echoes of 1930s in Health Care Debate: NPR," 28 August 2009, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112345150 (12 November 2010).
[111] "Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955), 'What Does American Democracy Mean to Me'," *America's Town Meeting of the Air,* 23 November 1939, American RadioWorks, "Say it Plain," http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/mmbethune.html (12 November 2010).

States?"(1941); "Must America and Japan Clash?"; "Should the President's National Defense Program Be Adopted?" (1940); and "Must We Fight Japan?" In 1941 *ATMA* spotlighted the heated debate about American intervention twice. In April, in a program entitled "Should Our Ships Convey Arms to Britain?," Ernest W. Gibson, national chair of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, spoke in favor of the convoys, while Sen. C. Wayland Brooks, a decorated World War I veteran, argued passionately against them. Only a month late, in May 1941, the similarly titled "Should Our Ships Convoy Materials to England?" featured Reinhold Niebuhr, chair of the Union for Democratic Action, who supported the aid, and John Flynn, a founder of the America First Committee, who opposed it. In June 2010 a recording of the latter broadcast was chosen for inclusion in the National Recording Registry at the Library of Congress.

The debates and the audience reactions during this period were marked by a gradual increase in tension, and Denny himself began to fear that "the audience would get completely out of control."[112] The most divisive conflicts arose between isolationists and interventionists, a disparity that no doubt reflected the divided sentiments of the country. People on both sides of the issue were less willing to listen to views that contradicted their own and, perhaps even worse, were quick to challenge the patriotism of members of the opposition. It may have been the emergence of a serious threat to democracy that made it difficult to maintain objective views, which in turn compromised *ATMA*'s ideals for free thinking and open debate. In addition, as some listeners gave in to fear and suspicion, their correspondence shamelessly erupted into stereotyping and racism, such as the letter from "twelve listeners" from Brooklyn, who wrote that "those noisy Jews, who packed the Town Hall Meeting of the Air tonight, spoiled the program for the listening audience....[T]he Jews, by their actions, convince the radio listeners that...Hitler is 100% right."[113] Letters such as these contrasted sharply and shockingly with the open embrace of diversity that greeted the show's earliest broadcasts.

The horrors of war, which were perhaps worse than even imagined beforehand, presented a challenge to the champions of open debate, who now questioned whether freedom, even of discussion, was too dangerous. Even Denny seemed to rethink his priorities, realizing that one was just as free to be evil as to be good.[114] He and other idealists wondered whether, with such evil at loose in the world, unity was more important than "tolerance, reason and justice."[115] Some commentators even questioned whether open forums with live questions should continue during the war.[116] After one broadcast in 1941, Chester S. Williams, director of the Federal Forum Project, wrote to Denny that "the live audience encouraged participants to speak 'according to crowd psychology' and that forums of this kind served the cause of totalitarianism rather than democracy. Williams blamed open forums for creating 'that disgusted state of mind which is ready to embrace a dictator rather than carry on with a confusion of tongues' and concluded that 'this kind of thing can wreck American democracy'."[117]

In the immediate aftermath of the war, *ATMA* presented several programs that focused on issues of international importance. Among them was the debate that preceded the Nuremberg war crimes trials, which presented society with the question of how to deal with crimes that were so horrible as to be outside the legal system. During *ATMA*'s show of February 10, 1944, "How Should the Axis War Criminals be Tried?," panelists Emil Ludwig, Samuel Grafton, and Louis Nizer brought the issue before Americans nearly two years before the trials began (in November 1945). And in 1945, a panel consisting of Undersecretary Joseph C. Grew, Sen. Tom Connelly of Texas, Harold E. Stassen, chair of the Council for Democracy; Raymond Swing; William Shirer;

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[112] Quoted in Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 51.
[113] Ibid., 53.
[114] Denny raised this issue in a 1943 speech, quoted in Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 54-55.
[115] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 54.
[116] Ibid., 51.
[117] Ibid., 53.

and H. V. Kaltenborn discussed the founding of the United Nations. Some of the participants expressed hope that the new organization would serve as a major catalyst to world order and peace.

Although Denny struggled to retain his belief in openness and tolerance, he emerged from the war as a fierce opponent of communism and, ultimately, a less tolerant thinker. Whereas he had once held an unwavering faith in a "public sphere of discussion," by the mid- 1940s he began to despair that "openness and tolerance...were no longer enough in a world of evil....that discussion must be anchored in some innate moral sense."[118] Between 1946 and Denny's replacement as host in 1952, the show's focus turned to the Cold War and the increasingly heated debate about the Communist threat. The notorious anti-communist Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy appeared on the program three times. In a 1947 show ("Should the Communist Party Be Outlawed in the United States?"), the then little-known McCarthy made one of his first public statements about communism, explaining why he thought the party should be banned; in 1948, McCarthy stated that the U.S. was losing the war against communism, linking this to a possible Russian takeover; and in 1950, at his most outspoken, he said that American policy was being made by "stooges and dupes of the Kremlin." In another show in this era, "Who Are the Troublemakers in Our Democracy?" (1952), panelists Arnold Foster of the Anti-Defamation League; Merle Miller, a writer and war correspondent; and Victor Riesel, a columnist for the *New York Mirror*, debated whether the true troublemakers were members of the Communist Party, the zealots who demonized them, perhaps based on racial or religious bigotry, or those who favored the suspension of American civil rights in order to stop the Communists.[119] As David Goodman has pointed out, the need to debate the meaning of democracy, within the context of the Cold War, was viewed as less important than the need to spread democracy around the world. In response to the threat of communism, democracy was now generally understood to be an existing achievement, rather than a work in progress. Denny's thinking in this era paralleled the trajectory of U.S. foreign policy.[120]

To its credit, however, *ATMA* continued to address controversial issues, even when fear and/or intolerance tainted the discussion. In an article called "TV and the Popularization of Fear," J. Fred MacDonald compared *ATMA* favorably with other media shows of the era and noted some of ATMA's important Cold War programs such as "How is Peace with Russia Possible?" (1948); "Can Modern Capitalism Meet the Needs of Modern Man?" (1949); and "How Do We Fare in the Cold War?" (1952).[121]

Also among *ATMA*'s postwar highlights were a number of shows that courageously and honestly addressed racial issues. These include: "Are We a Unified People?"; "Let's Face the Race Question" (1944); "Are We Solving America's Race Problem?" (1945); "Should the Government Guarantee Job Equality for All Races?" (1947); "What Can We do to Improve Race and Religious Relationships in America?" (1947); "Should the President's Civil Rights Program Be Adopted?" (1948)"; and "What Should We Do About Race Segregation?" (1948).

These programs returned to some of the same spirit of open and honest debate that inspired the show in the 1930s. One scholar, Barbara Savage, has argued that radio and non-governmental officials led the way in addressing racial problems in the United States. Two *ATMA* programs in particular stand out for their unusually candid discussions. In 1944, "Let's Face the Race Question" featured renowned African American poet Langston Hughes; Carey McWilliams, a white progressive; John Temple Graves, a white southerner; and James Shepard, a conservative black president of the North Carolina College for Negroes. During this show, Hughes

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[118] Ibid., 54-55.
[119] "Who Are the Troublemakers in Our Democracy," *America's Town Meeting of the Air*, 27 May 1952, recorded broadcast, texasgypsy.wordpress.com/..../americans-town-meeting-of-the-air-1935-1952/ (16 November 2010).
[120] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 58.
[121] J. Fred McDonald, "TV and the Popularization of Fear," http://jfredmacdonadl.com/trm11tvfear.htm (23 November 2010).

blamed segregation for undermining the "morale of Negro soldiers." He also spoke bluntly about its causes, asserting in part that it concealed a profound fear of intermarriage, and called for a comprehensive federal civil rights program. His comments were considerably more daring than radio audiences were used to hearing, a fact that Graves reinforced by praying (during the broadcast itself) that "nothing tonight will increase the sum total of race hate in America." Nevertheless, the show was enormously popular, received a high volume of positive letters, and was praised by both blacks and whites for its fair and open discussion of a sensitive issue. [122]

The following year, in "Are We Solving America's Race Problem?" (1945), well-known African American novelist Richard Wright and Elmer Carter, a black former editor of the National Urban League's *Opportunity*, took opposing views as to whether the race problem was being solved. They were joined by Irving Ives, a New York State assemblyman and Jerry Voorhis, a liberal black congressman from California. Wright delivered an attack on racism that was far more direct and aggressive even than that of Hughes. Savage noted that Wright's command of language overpowered the other speakers, as well as the moderator, allowing him to dominate the show. He called upon blacks to protest segregation actively, referring to it as a moral duty, and again raised the taboo subject of intermarriage. This show shocked listeners, who were highly critical of Wright's comments and especially of his remarks about intermarriage, the discussion of which they described as revolting, disgraceful, deplorable, and appalling. This show has been called one of *ATMA*'s most "controversial and tumultuous broadcasts," and it generated an enormous volume of mail, most of it revealing the anxiety of a white population fearful that their long-held conceptions about the relative places of blacks and whites in society might be tested.[123] It also demonstrated the rising importance of racial issues in the American consciousness. But although many whites took offense at Wright's remarks, members of the African American community were pleased. The African American members of the 477th Bombardment Group (the Tuskegee Airmen) contacted Wright directly, writing "from all of us, thanks a million....We do not *ask* for democracy, we demand it."[124] Savage observed that African Americans took advantage of opportunities to appear on political discussion shows such as *ATMA* to introduce arguments that other political commentators were not yet courageous enough to make. However, she concluded, despite the speakers' blunt appeals and the eloquence of their arguments for an end to segregation, this goal was not even "rhetorically acceptable" to most whites in 1945.[125] Nevertheless, frank discussions of racial problems on radio "illustrated radio's enormous potential as a medium for cultural and political education," helped to "expand the concept of Americanness," and prepared the way for the Civil Rights movement.[126]

Some scholars attribute the demise of *ATMA* to the development of the Cold War, when divergent opinions were considered unpatriotic. J. Fred MacDonald described *ATMA* as "the product of an earlier era in broadcasting when divergent thought was tolerated as necessary to public debate." MacDonald credited *ATMA* with continuing its tradition of presenting all sides of controversial issues during its two brief runs on television (1948-49; 1952), while other TV shows aimed for a narrow ideological consensus that reflected the "simplified emotionalism of the anti-Communist era." MacDonald concluded that *ATMA*'s divergence from the norm engendered its rapid and final disappearance from the television.[127] Likewise, Stephen J. Whitfield also contrasted Depression era radio (such as *ATMA*), which offered a "less constricted political perspective" with Cold War era television, where official views were "rarely and insufficiently challenged." Whitfield credited

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[122] Barbara Savage, "Radio and the Political Discourse of Racial Equality," in *The Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002), 231-32.
[123] Ibid., 236.
[124] Barbara Dianne Savage, quoted in Arthur Zilversmit, Review of *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War and the Politics of Race, 1938-1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), *History of Education Quarterly* 40 (Winter 2000): 511-13.
[125] Savage, "Radio and the Political Discourse," 241.
[126] Savage, quoted in Zilversmit, Review of *Broadcasting Freedom,* 511-13.
[127] J. Fred MacDonald, "Television and the Red Menace: the Video Road to Nam," http://jfredmacdonald.com/trm/11tvfear.htm (24 August 2010).

ATMA with bringing its distinctive format to TV, but he noted that the program was dropped in 1952 because "the availability of a forum for left-wing opinion might generate unnecessary friction, might even appear vaguely unpatriotic when unity against Communism was sought."[128] Thus, although George Denny's high principles were tested and perhaps even tainted by World War II, the show remained a standard bearer for free speech and ideological independence throughout Denny's association with it.

Comparative Analysis and Critical Assessment

Contemporary critics and subsequent scholars have been consistent in identifying the most influential educational and public service shows from period c1930-c1950. Nearly all of the books and articles consulted for this nomination have cited the *American School of the Air* (1930), the *University of Chicago Round Table* (1931), *The American Forum of the Air* (1934), *America's Town Meeting of the Air* (1935), and/or *The People's Platform* (1938) on their lists of exemplary programs. Among these, the half-hour *American School of the Air* is most often commended for its early date and contribution to public education. The *University of Chicago Round Table*, *ATMA*, *The American Forum of the Air* and *The People's Platform* are all cited for their efforts to bring substantive issues of national importance before the American people, the high caliber of their guests, and their innovative formats. Neither *The People's Platform* nor *University of Chicago Round Table* had live audiences; however, the Chicago program was among the first national radio discussion programs and a pioneer in preparing handouts for further study. Meanwhile, the "dinner table" format made *The People's Platform* lively and entertaining. In addition, the latter show always included an "average citizen," which made it less predictable and established a more personal connection with the audience. *The American Forum of the Air*, which did take questions from an audience, is said to have been the first public panel discussion; however, neither the *American Forum* nor the *Chicago Round Table* was broadcast during prime time. In this regard, *ATMA*, an evening show broadcast Thursday at 9:30 p.m., enjoyed a higher profile and had the potential for a much larger audience.

Among all of these shows, *ATMA* excelled in its use of a live audience. Because audience members became "on-air participants in the debate," *ATMA* succeeded in "bringing the voices of everyday people onto the national airwaves arguing important topics of the day."[129] In Max Wylie's assessment of *ATMA*'s 6 January 1938 show as among the best broadcasts of 1938-39, he noted that "because they know they are to have the privilege of questioning the guest speakers [audience members] have a feeling of direct personal participation in the program."[130] As one reporter noted, "questions for the audience are generally regarded as the high point of the discussion hour, and not only the punch but the program's meaning would be lost if the audience were curbed."[131]

From the show's inception, critics acknowledged that Denny had tapped into a deeply felt need among Americans. After the show's first broadcast in 1935, the *New York Times* observed that "what the listener apparently likes about Town Hall is that freedom of speech is the guiding principle...Town Hall [is] a 'safety valve' for interesting debate and discussion."[132] Academics also quickly realized the show's educational potential. By 1939 radio, as a medium of communication, had received support from the New York State Board of Regents, and educators recommended *ATMA* as "a stimulating demonstration of the democratic process."[133] Teachers also praised *ATMA* and its contemporaries for their exploration of important issues, noting that "[the]

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[128] Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 155.
[129] Michele Hilmes, "Evaluation of Significance of *America's Town Meeting of the Air*" for National Historic Landmark Designation of Town Hall," February 2009.
[130] Wylie, *Best Broadcasts of 1938-39,* 190.
[131] Herbert Lyons Jr., "Free Speech in Action," *New York Times*, 25 May 1941.
[132] Dunlap, "Open Forum is Applauded."
[133] Walter Ginsberg, "Radio Programs for High-School English," *The English Journal* 28 (December 1939): 837.

objective of English teachers is that of developing a purposeful interest in current social problems....Radio experiences, too, can result in giving us social understandings. We can encourage students to listen to such programs as the University of Chicago Round Table, The People's Platform, America's Town Meeting of the Air [and] we can organize our own classes into 'town meetings' around significant social problems."[134] The show remained highly regarded by educators, as "thousands of teachers have, in the past six years, made use of 'America's Town Meeting of the Air' in their classes....'America's Town Meeting of the Air' represents such a significant contribution to the strengthening and improvement of American democracy that no school can afford to fail to introduce its students to the program."[135]

The show continued to be highly regarded by critics, including one who called it a "national institution."[136] Another noted that "millions of Americans find *ATMA* stimulating, interesting, and informative."[137] And a third saluted the show's intentions, stating that "Denny is certain that a democratic government will want the people to get all the information they need on subjects that are not military history…and sees the nation's thirst for unbiased and well-rounded information, plus an instinctive sense of fairness, as a deep rooted American trait."[138] The show's testament to free speech remained strong even during the 1940s, as the sum of its ideals were tested. One period critic noted that "Town Meeting owes it success to the fact that Americans enjoy free speech…George Denny [has] applied modern science to an institution older than the nation and turned every home into a potential town hall."[139] More than a decade later, after Denny's death, Town Hall was hailed as his greatest achievement. His obituary recalled that "in its heyday, *America's Town Meeting of the Air* was estimated to have more than ten million listeners through more than 170 radio stations" and noted that the programs "pioneered in audience participation."[140] A more contemporary critic called *ATMA* "the most famous civic education program of the 1930s" and argued that its attempt to recreate the tradition of self-government became "symbolic of the ways in which democracy might fight back against totalitarianism."[141]

In the introduction to his article "Programming in the Public Interest," radio historian David Goodman provided a succinct assessment of the significance of *ATMA*:

> *ATMA* was the jewel in the crown of NBC's public service programming, an oft-cited piece of evidence that the network was responsible and civic minded and already carrying out the public service work of a national broadcaster….[Radio] stimulated new hopes for American democracy, the prospect of historically novel levels of democratic awareness and activism in citizens. The history of *ATMA* reminds us of the civic ambition of the golden age of network radio.[142]

Goodman concluded the article by praising *ATMA* as:

> one of NBC's more significant public service programs. It was for NBC in its heyday a great success story - a program that both presented and provoked national debate. It provided a practical

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[134] Seerley Reid, "Radio—From Blurbs to Baby Snooks," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 21 (May 1939): 440-41.
[135] Ralph Adams Brown, "The 'Town Crier' in the English Class," *The English Journal* (1941): 769.
[136] William E. Utterback, "Political Significance of Group Discussion," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 250 (March 1947): 36.
[137] Hays, "Civic Discussion Over the Air," 41.
[138] Lyons, "Free Speech in Action."
[139] Ibid.
[140] "George V. Denny, Radio Host, Dead," *New York Times*, 12 November 1959.
[141] Craig, *Fireside Politics,* 25.
[142] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 44.

> demonstration of a new kind of radio public sphere, one that was both constrained and enabled by the network's commercial basis.[143]

Michele Hilmes, expert and the author of several books on the history of radio and television, has written an assessment of *ATMA*'s significance. Hilmes observed that *ATMA*'s programming was "more inclusive and adventurous" than that of similar programs and that it made an effort "to portray and debate all aspects of American life through the contentious years of the Depression, New Deal, and the interventionist debates preceding World War II." She also noted that *ATMA* directly inspired other public affairs programs, such as *The People's Platform* and *Freedom Forum*, a BBC production that significantly influenced public affairs programming in Britain.[144]

According to Hilmes, "the Town Hall venue itself was key to the show's appeal and success." In this *ATMA* is truly exceptional. No other radio show became so closely identified with its broadcast location. For *ATMA*, the association between venue and program went far deeper than simply the site of the broadcast. *ATMA* was the culmination of a thirty-year commitment to public education that began when six women founded the League for Political Education in 1894 and continued with the construction and use of Town Hall in the 1920s and early 1930s. *ATMA* carried the goals of the league into the modern age of electronic communication, extending the opportunity for Americans to become better citizens from Manhattan to the entire country. Remarkably, Town Hall's original program was not overshadowed by the radio broadcast; rather, the organization continued to host public lectures, educational forums, and classes concurrently with the development and success of *ATMA*.

Town Hall is significant not just as the location for a significant event, but as a physical embodiment of the event itself. Although the building was constructed before *ATMA* was conceived, the ideals embodied in its original design and program are inextricably linked to those of the radio show. The intent of Town Hall's builders to erect a "town hall" in the heart of a metropolis prefigured George Denny's intent to establish a virtual town hall for an immense country. The producers of *ATMA* went out of their way to reinforce the show's association with the building's symbolism, heralding each broadcast with an announcement that it came from "historic Town Hall in New York City."[145] The space from which the program originated, an intimate auditorium designed to provide each attendee a seat of equal value, excellent sight lines, and superb acoustics, also enhanced the goals of *ATMA*'s creators to bring everyone into the discussion. After nearly a century of use, the space in which the Town Hall lectures were given and *ATMA*'s meetings were held retains virtually complete integrity, thus preserving an outstanding association with the important events that took place there.

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[143] Ibid., 58.
[144] Hilmes, "Evaluation of Significance."
[145] Goodman, "Programming in the Public Interest," 47.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

__ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
X Previously Listed in the National Register.
__ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
__ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
__ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
__ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

X State Historic Preservation Office
__ Other State Agency
__ Federal Agency
__ Local Government
__ University
__ Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References:

Zone	Easting	Northing
18	585727	4512176

Verbal Boundary Description: The nominated parcel is defined as Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 996, Lot 32 and is outlined on the enclosed map.

Boundary Justification: The boundary was drawn to include the original parcel associated with this building.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS PROGRAM
May 26, 2011

2009

Evaluation of significance of *America's Town Meeting of the Air*
For National Historic Landmark designation of New York's Town Hall

Michele Hilmes
University of Wisconsin-Madison

I concur fully with the materials compiled by the Town Hall group regarding the national significance of the site as the home of one of the most important and influential radio programs of the 1930s, 40s, and beyond. Though it was preceded on the air the *University of Chicago Round Table*, a half-hour discussion program that debuted on the NBC network in 1933, that show aired on Sunday afternoons and featured three faculty members from the University giving prepared statements on a specific issue, often joined by prestigious guests in its later years, with no participation from the audience. *American Forum of the Air,* broadcast on the Mutual network starting in 1934 at various times (usually early evening) and various lengths, did include a studio audience but only as a source of questions, with limited participation.

America's Town Meeting of the Air (1935-1956) is distinct from these two in several ways. First, *ATMA* was an hour-length program from the beginning, aired on the NBC Blue network during network weekday prime-time, usually on Thursday nights at 9:30. This gave it a much broader audience and higher profile than the others. Second, it was originated by George V. Denny of The League for Political Education. This well-established civic group had a forty-year record of encouraging public debate in New York City at its Town Hall headquarters, before venturing onto the air. This tradition led directly to its truly distinguishing characteristic: the active participation of the Town Hall audience, not only as a source of questions but as on-air participants in the debate, bringing the voices of everyday people onto the national airwaves arguing important topics of the day. A lively style of debate was encouraged among the guest speakers, as well. When Max Wylie compiled his book *Best Broadcasts of 1938-39,* nominating *ATMA* as "Best Public Discussion" program, he cited this aspect: "The audiences are keyed up and partisan, and because they know they are to have the privilege of questioning the guest speakers at the conclusion of their formal statements, they have a feeling of direct personal participation in the program" (190).

Thus the Town Hall venue itself was key to the show's appeal and success, as the place in which the audience gathered and most of the programs took place. As Wylie stated it, through its radio program the Town Hall "lengthened its shadow till it stretched to the Pacific Coast" (189); it became famous around the country and even abroad. The topics chosen ranged more freely than other shows. The *Chicago Round Table* tended towards less contentious, more academic topics, while the *Forum's* host, Ted Granick, banned spokesmen from the Communist party on his show. *ATMA* was more inclusive and adventurous, making an effort to portray and debate all aspects of American life through the contentious years of the Depression, New Deal, and the interventionist debates preceding World War II. The war years brought the show an even higher profile.

America's Town Meeting of the Air inspired other public affairs programs. The innovative *People's Platform* on CBS (1938-1952) was produced and directed by Leon Levine, who had learned his craft on *ATMA*. In 1939 the British Broadcasting Corporation approached NBC with the idea that a similar program might be tried there; the BBC had never before attempted unscripted public discussion on the air. They requested any information on planning and production of *ATMA* that NBC was willing to share, eventually resulting in *Freedom Forum* on the BBC North American Service, a program occasionally hosted by Edward R. Murrow. It had a great influence on British public affairs discussion programs after the war.

The program itself emphasized its setting in the Town Hall, opening with the sound of a town crier's bell and cry "Town meeting tonight!" and an announcement that the program came from "historic Town Hall in New York City," followed by Denny's greeting, "Good evening, neighbors!" As one scholar puts it, "The live audience – in Town Hall usually about 1500 people – contributed a great deal to the atmosphere and sound of the show. Listeners at home were aware of the reactions of the live audience and would comment in letters on what they heard and surmised about it" (Goodman 48). Thus not only the program itself, but its Town Hall setting, resonates to this day in national memory. No other public affairs radio program can claim that distinction.

Sources:

Goodman, David. "Programming in the Public Interest: *America's Town Meeting of the Air.*" In *NBC: America's Network*, ed. Michele Hilmes (University of California Press, 2007) 44-60.

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Goodman NPS Town Hall

The Town Hall building is associated with 'events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent, the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained' – most prominently because of its use for the broadcast of the important national radio program 'America's Town Meeting of the Air', but also more broadly because of its conception and construction as a center for public conversation. As a national radio program, listened to by millions across the country, ATMA played an exceptionally important part in American national life for a period of twenty years from the first broadcast in 1934. The Town Hall building was an integral part of the show, which always began with the reminder that it originated from 'historic Town Hall in New York city'. The building itself thus remains important in 'illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States in history . . . and culture', in this case in particular the earlier history of the broadcast era.

The Town Hall building deserves to take its place alongside New York's Cooper Union and City Hall as an important site of public discussion and, because of the network radio program, of national public discussion. The way that the 'democratic principles of The League were evident in the design of the auditorium' should be pointed out. The New York Town Hall was built as a public discussion site by a League committed to enhancing and improving American democracy, not as an administrative building with mixed public functions like an English town hall (or locally New York City Hall – and no doubt the choice of 'Town Hall' as a name deliberately invoked older and smaller community centers). Even the location of the building, between the cultural and financial institutions of Fifth Avenue and the entertainment district of Broadway and Times Square, seems symbolically important. ATMA had to be entertaining and serious at the same time. Town Hall had a wealthy and respectable clientele, but an aim of engaging the whole population in civic discussion. Its location and aims could be contrasted interestingly with eg Cooper Union further downtown.

'America's Town Meeting of the Air' illustrates and exemplifies an important phase of the history of broadcasting in the United States, and of American democracy at a time in the mid-twentieth century when democracy itself was to an unusual degree up for discussion and debate. ATMA was dedicated, the announcer explained in one 1936 broadcast, 'like the town meeting of old', to 'free speech, honest debate and the frank consideration of our common problems'. The first program famously asked 'Which Way, America – Fascism, Communism, Socialism, or Democracy?' – and in putting a fascist, communist, socialist and democrat to air exhibited a breadth of political vision unthinkable on commercial radio or TV in the US only 20 years later. ATMA aimed – and to a large extent succeeded – in dramatising the values of tolerance and fairness it always espoused. Later developments, such as the FCC's 1949 Fairness Doctrine, represent other important steps on the path of attempting to harness the new mass media in the United States not as instruments of propaganda but as a means of making the population more tolerant and open-minded. Town Hall's director George V. Denny's oft-repeated views on that issue can be used to illustrate the role he envisaged for the radio program, and the place of the building in generating multi-perspective discussion of national issues in front of a live audience.

Broadcast on NBC, the oldest radio network in the US, ATMA was unarguably the best known and most celebrated forum program. Reports of its

broadcasts made the newspapers as news stories; recommendations of upcoming broadcasts were prominent in newspaper radio columns. There were certainly other network radio forum programs in this era. But in my view the existence of the other forum programs adds to rather than detracts from the significance of ATMA. The forum programs were a very distinctive and important part of the public life of the radio era. The fact that each network needed one, that each had its own distinctive features, that each was until the 1940s free from commercial sponsorship, tells us something about the importance of radio's civic function in the decades after the 1934 Communications Act.

The University of Chicago Round Table was NBC's first forum program; it was an important show, which pioneered the public affairs discussion format. UCRT was quite a different kind of show from ATMA. Broadcast from 1933 to 1955, it featured studio discussion from university teachers, who would argue among themselves. The good performers on the show were invited back many times – the model worked best with a smaller stable cast of speakers who were known to each other and could argue in a way that was both accessible and entertaining to an outside audience. An important later variant on this model was Lyman Bryson's People's Platform, which ran from 1938 until 1952 on CBS, and offered listeners the dinner conversation of invited guests. Bryson had worked with George Denny on ATMA in its early years. He brought some of the same philosophy to the People's Platform. But instead of just professors, PP mixed speakers. One or two of the guests were always prominent public spokespersons for an issue or cause, but the other two were usually chosen from everyday life – ordinary people (identified by occupation, such as taxi driver, housewife, plumber) who would discuss and argue with the experts. Bryson's recipe for selecting guests was: one big name, one person who knows something about the topic, a woman, and then 'somebody from the street. He had to be a cab driver or a shoe clerk or a small bookkeeper or somebody.'[1] These forums were important, but they were studio-based programs.

It was the live audience present in the Town Hall that differentiated ATMA from the People's Platform or the Chicago Round Table. It was the live audience gave ATMA its edge and excitement. The Town Hall building is significant as the venue for the broadcasts and the site of that audience interaction for which the show was famous. Listeners at home were aware of the reactions of the live audience and would comment in letters on what they heard and surmised about it. Denny as moderator allowed the audience to be heard. Publicity for the program made much of the rowdiness this produced – 'spectator-hecklers' is how *Movie-Radio Guide* described the audience.[2] George Denny, observed one admiring magazine article, 'didn't invent heckling, but he is the first man to organize it and sell it as headline entertainment'.[3] ATMA had a wider mix of topics and speakers than some of the other radio forums – it ranged across not just political but also social, economic and cultural issues. Listener mail – in those days the most cited measure of a program's impact – was

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[1] "Reminiscences of Lyman Bryson", typescript of oral history interview with Frank Ernest Hill, 1951, Ora; History Research Unit, Columbia University, in Lyman Bryson papers, Library of Congress, Box 40, p. 121. Sometimes there was more than one woman – but the formula clearly rested upon the assumption that normally the expert, the big name and the man on the street would not be women.

[2] 'America's Town Meetng of the Air', *Movie–Radio Guide* 13-19 December 1941, p.38

[3] Frederick L. Collins, 'He Makes Democracy Think!', *Liberty* 9 December 1939, p.44

very high for a non-entertainment program. In 1941 it was reported that the program was receiving 165, 000 letters a year.[4] ATMA was then an important show in part because of the audience reaction it provoked.

The other live audience national radio forum program was Theodore Granik's 'American Forum of the Air', broadcast on the Mutual network from 1937 to 1949 (it was preceded by the Mutual Forum Hour from 1934). AFA had opening statements, panel discussion and audience questions. The show was broadcast from various hotels in Washington DC, or from the Department of the Interior's studio auditorium. Its guests were in the main members of Congress and spokespeople for national, Washington-based organizations. A newspaper reported in 1945 that Granik, a lawyer, 'knows just about everybody – legislators; government officials, high and low; newspapermen, diplomats, military leaders'.[5] Congressmen 'have made up the greater part of the guest list', Granik told the *New York Times*, 'mainly because their opinions were of greater importance on the topics selected'. The transcripts were read into the Congressional Record so that, Granik explained, further discussion of the radio topics could take place on the floor of the houses.[6] Inevitably, being on the smaller Mutual network, the show had a smaller audience than the forums on NBC and CBS. The somewhat narrower, Washington-insider political focus, also made AFA a different kind of show from ATMA, and one perhaps less likely to generate national newspaper comment and reporting – although transcripts of the show were appearing in the Congressional Record, because of the number of members of Congress appearing.

For all of these reasons then, Town Hall illustrates important aspects of the history of the broadcasting era in the US, and of the history of democracy and public discussion. The Town Hall building is in my view eminently deserving of National Historic Landmark status.

David Goodman
University of Melbourne

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[4] *Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star* 16 March 1941, p. D8

[5] *St Petersburg Times* 19 August 1945, p. 37

[6] R. W. Stewart, 'Where Free Speech Prevails', *New York Times* 15 September 1940, p. 142

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007

July 30, 1982

Mr. Larry Zucker
Administrative Director
Town Hall Foundation, Inc.
123 West 43rd Street
New York, N.Y. 10036

Dear Mr. Zucker:

I am delighted to learn of the Kresge Foundation's grant of $100,000 to Town Hall for your capital improvement program. As one of the City's first concert halls, Town Hall has an important place in New York City's cultural tradition. Your efforts to restore the Hall to its original splendor not only promises to bring back the top quality performances that made it famous, but also complements the City's program for the redevelopment of the 42nd Street area. Your undertaking is most timely.

Town Hall is an important provider of space for small and middle range performance companies which delight audiences of all age groups and many cultural heritages. Your goal of making inexpensive space available for educational and cultural programs -- as well as grand performances -- is important to the City.

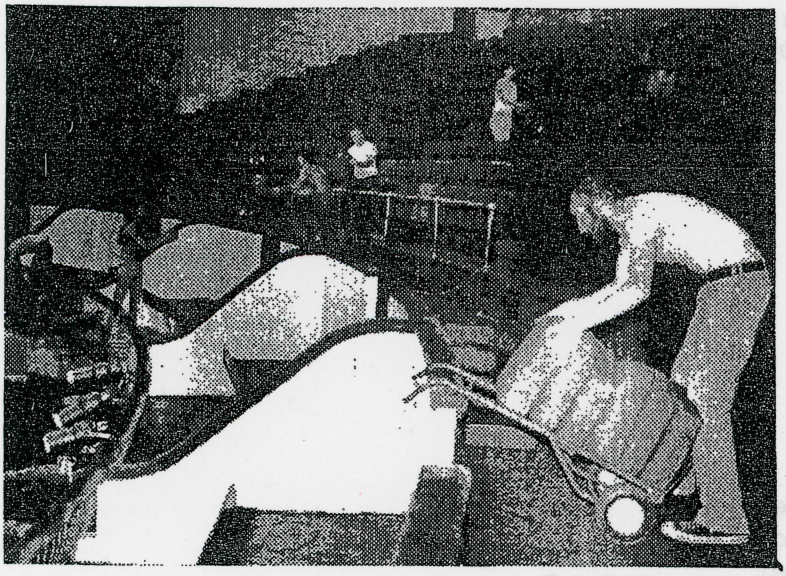
I am pleased that the Department of Cultural Affairs and the City's Public Development Corporation are lending their assistance. I wish you well in your undertaking.

Sincerely,

Edward I. Koch
MAYOR

A Refreshed Town Hall Will Make Fall Debut

THE NEW YORK TIMES
WEDNESDAY, JULY 18, 1984



The New York Times / Star Black

Workers dismantle seats in the auditorium of Town Hall, which is being refurbished. It will reopen in the fall.

By HAROLD C. SCHONBERG

The doors were open to the street, and through them one could glimpse the auditorium of Town Hall — gutted, without seats, workmen erecting scaffolding, the secret life of the once-great concert hall laid bare for all the world to see, the psychic vibrations that once carried the voices of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Joan Sutherland and Lotte Lehmann temporarily stilled.

"It's somehow sad," said Lawrence Zucker, the hall's director.

"No, not sad," said Marvin Leffler, the president of the Town Hall Foundation. "I look on it as a rebirth."

The 1,500-seat Town Hall, which opened in 1921, is receiving a $1.5 million facelift that, it is hoped, will bring it back to its original estate — and status — without harm to its admired acoustics. The seats will be repaired and recovered. New carpeting will be installed. The chandeliers will be cleaned. Cracks in the plaster will be filled and there will be a new paint job. All this will take several months.

A Varied Agenda

"It had better be completely finished by Oct. 14," Mr. Leffler said. "We are having a gala preview for the Town Hall family on that date."

Future Town Hall events of the 1984-85 season include a continuation of the Select Debut series, the 25th anniversary concert of the Marlboro Festival, series by the Dessoff Choirs, St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, the Philharmonia Virtuosi, the New Amsterdam Theater Company and the Peoples' Symphony, and a group of special concerts. Jazz will be represented, and lecture series and forums are booked.

For many years Town Hall, which is on 43d Street between Broadway and Avenue of the Americas, was the No. 2 concert hall in New York. Carnegie Hall was the home for orchestras and the big international stars. At Town Hall one heard chamber music, debut recitals, and also concerts by great performers who for one reason or another preferred its intimacy and glowing acoustics to the bigger surroundings of the 2,700-seat Carnegie Hall.

Some Good Conversation

One also heard lectures. Town Hall was built by the League for Political Education, and through the decades has served as a forum for ideas. United States Presidents, poets, intellectuals of all sorts lectured and debated there. Winston Churchill held forth. Margaret Sanger, the advocate of birth control, was arrested there. The police stopped her lecture and carried her to the 47th Street police station. For 21 years, starting in 1935, the Town Hall Meeting of the Air, offering lectures and debates, went out over a coast-to-coast radio broadcast.

Musical lectures also were given. One recalls with special fondness a witty, sophisticated ramble through Mozart's "Così fan tutte" presented by Sir Thomas Beecham, who backed up his musical points at the piano.

And the concerts one remembers! Town Hall was the preferred location of such artists as Harold Bauer, Ossip Gabrilowitsch, Ignaz Friedman, Erica Morini, Guiomar Novaes, Andrès Segovia, the Budapest String Quartet, the New Friends of Music, and many others.

Designated a Landmark

In recent years Town Hall fell upon bad times. The Times Square area deteriorated, Lincoln Center's 1,000-seat Alice Tully Hall proved a more glamorous location for small concerts. Town Hall came to be used very little. But in 1978 it achieved Landmark status, and a group of determined citizens began trying to restore it to its former glory.

Mr. Leffler, a manufacturer of metal products who serves Town Hall without pay, insisted that the hall is needed.

"There are many places where concerts are given in New York," he said. "But there are not many great concert halls available for rental. Carnegie Hall is very expensive, and since it started doing its own producing there are not that many open dates. Tully Hall does big business, but it too is expensive and also does not have many open dates. Most of the other halls sponsor their own series."

Town Hall charges $3,000 for a rental that includes such services as ushers, the house staff and everything except stage labor. Tully Hall charges $3,800, also with services. Carnegie Hall has a sliding scale, from $2,200 for morning events to $4,150 for Friday and Saturday evenings. Rental for the other evenings is $3,750. Rentals at the 300-seat Carnegie Recital Hall are $200 to $470.

Fear of Crime Deterred Some

A few years ago many people, especially the elderly, were afraid to come to Town Hall. Mr. Leffler thinks the scare is over. He notes that the Times Square redevelopment plans are under way. He believes that the new hotels, such as the Marriott, will bring more than a million people a year to the area, and that Town Hall cannot help but benefit from this.

What Mr. Leffler wants to do above all is rebuild the image of Town Hall. The current renovation is the first step in the process.

"When managers and the public see how beautiful it is," he said, "we will attract more and more business. Town Hall will again be a major factor in the concert business. Next season we have groups who have never before done a series here."

Part of the Town Hall fund-raising campaign is an offer to have the auditorium and other parts of the building named after donors. As Mr. Leffler remarked, "We aim at being a house that will present the best music at comparatively low prices. Big managers are starting to become interested. Do you know anybody who wants the auditorium of Town Hall named for him? Or her?"

The New York Times

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1984

Music: Songs Of Kern

By JOHN S. WILSON

A "CENTENARY GALA" that filled Town Hall on Sunday afternoon celebrated both the 100th anniversary of the birth of the composer Jerome Kern and the reopening of the West 43d Street auditorium, which had been closed for a $1.5 million refurbishing and restoration.

The gala, produced by the New Amsterdam Theater Company, whose concert productions of vintage American musicals have been regular tenants of Town Hall in recent years, covered Kern's career from 1905, represented by "How'd You Like to Spoon With Me" from the musical "The Earl and the Girl," to his last song, "Nobody Else But Me," composed for the 1946 film "Show Boat."

•

Thirty-two Kern songs were sung and danced to by a cast of 24 that included Larry Kert, Kaye Ballard, Liliane Montevecchi, Paula Laurence and Roderick Cook. And another seven or eight tunes were played in introductory medleys by the orchestra conducted Michael Battistelli.

Amid such musical quantity there was room for familiar Kern songs — "The Last Time I Saw Paris," "All The Things You Are," "The Folks Who Live On The Hill," "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" and "They Didn't Believe Me" — as well as an opportunity to hear rarely performed songs. Some were from his early Princess Theater shows but there were later ones, too: "The Things I Want" from the 1937 film, "High, Wide and Handsome," "In the Heart of the Dark" from "Very Warm For May" and a comedy song from the 1929 musical, "Sweet Adeline" — "My Husband's First Wife" delivered with rising venom by Miss Laurence.

There was one particularly memorable segment in a medley from "Show Boat" when Alteouise De Vaughn, a tall woman with a commanding presence and a rich voice, raised the members of the audience to their feet singing "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," only to be followed by Karla Burns, a short, round, headlong cannonball who beat them right back into their seats with her powerful belting of "Hey, Feller."

Handel and Banners Salute Town Hall's Restoration

A wind quintet played Handel's "Water Music" on West 43d Street yesterday as banners flew, lights glittered and an enthusiastic audience filled Town Hall to celebrate its restoration.

It took $1.5 million to clean, paint and put new red plush on the 63-year-old seats in the building, between the Avenue of the Americas and Broadway. Refurbishing of the hall, which began life as a meeting place for suffragists and later became a place for lectures and musical recitals, has been going on for the past year.

The celebration began with a Jerome Kern gala, for the composer's centenary. Then, a reception and dinner honored Kitty Carlisle Hart, chairman of the State Council on the Arts. Marvin Leffler, president of Town Hall's board of trustees, gave Mrs. Hart the Friend of the Arts award for her career as a performer and, currently, as a friend of the arts.

When the trustees came in five years ago, the hall was about to be closed. "We hope to give new people the opportunity to perform," Mr. Leffler said, "and provide a place for an audience that can't spend $40 or $50 a seat."

NEW YORK POST

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1984

Kern gala opens new Town Hall

NEW YORK'S fall music activities reached full stride recently as a refurbished Town Hall reopened with a Jerome Kern gala and the American Symphony and the Opera Orchestra of New York gave impressive season openers at Carnegie Hall.

By ROBERT KIMBALL

There were new seats, a new marquee, a new curtain and a new spirit at historic Town Hall Sunday afternoon when the New Amsterdam Theater Company presented a three-hour Jerome Kern centenary program.

It was an affable, festive, breathless tribute delivered with considerable gusto and affection.

Among the heroes of the occasion (in addition to the many among the performers) were Michael Battistelli, who took over the conducting chores with only three days notice and did creditably, Tommy Krasker, who coached and rehearsed the singers and Larry Moore and Russell Warner, whose orchestrations were in the spirit of the Frank Saddler and Robert Russell Bennett originals.

Some day, perhaps, with more money and support from the musical theater world, New Amsterdam could evolve into something like Eve Queler's magnificent Opera Orchestra of New York, which each year presents three rare scores in concert at Carnegie Hall.

Glinka's *A Life for the Czar* (or *Ivan Susanin*, as it is also known) opened the season Sunday night. Miss Queler conducted superbly. Martti Talvela, the great Finnish basso, was top-lined in the title role. He headed a wonderful quartet — young Czech soprano Jirina Markova, tenor Chris Merritt, and contralto Ortrun Wenkel.

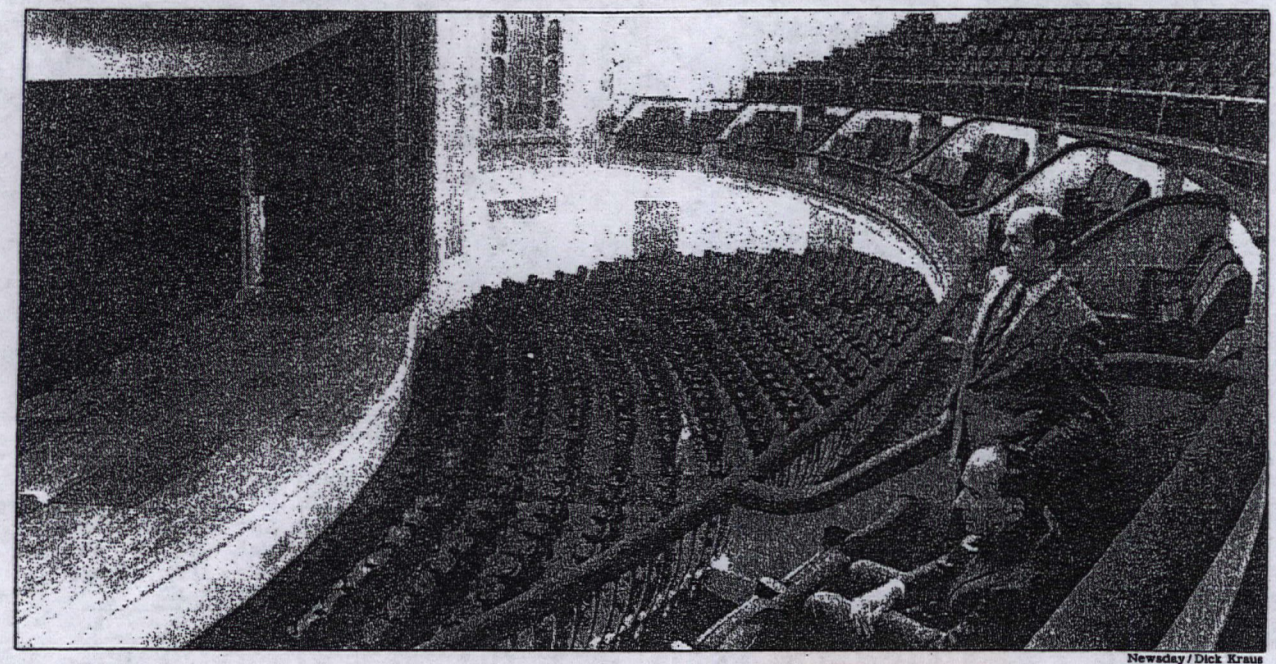
While Glinka's *A Life for the Czar* is not uniformly entrancing and is somewhat undercut by the new libretto grafted onto it by Soviet fiat after the Bolshevik Revolution, it is nonetheless a fascinating piece, a true beginning of Russian national opera and a great pleasure to hear performed so superbly.

In starting this season with Charles Ives' Fourth Symphony, the ASO consciously went back to its origins when 20 years ago Leopold Stokowski led the orchestra in the world premiere of Ives' fantastic 1916 musical kalidescope of America.

Jose Serebrier, who had assisted Stokowski on that special occasion in 1965, took charge this time and deserves many kudos for his skillful handling of the diverse, overlapping sounds.

Newsday

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1984



Newsday / Dick Kraus

Town Hall Foundation's Marvin Leffler, seated, and Lawrence Zucker survey the restored Manhattan concert hall, which reopens today.

GOODMAN / *A renewed Town Hall opens*

By Peter Goodman

IT IS ALL of 90 feet from the rear wall of the balcony to the rear of the stage at Town Hall — the distance from a pitcher's mound to home plate.

That may be one of the reasons that, in its 63 years of existence, Town Hall has been known for the warmth and intimacy of its acoustics. For this relatively shallow but wide space holds 1,500 seats, more than any of Manhattan's other concert halls except Carnegie and Avery Fisher. It's a hall that was designed for lectures; it was built by the League for Political Education to advance the cause of women's suffrage, and those who spoke there included Woodrow Wilson and Thomas Mann. But it became famous primarily as a music hall, for its performances by musicians ranging from Andres Segovia to Joan Sutherland.

Town Hall was once the city's No. 2 concert hall, after Carnegie. Its distinguished history is why Marvin Leffler and Lawrence Zucker are looking forward to the ceremonies today marking the reopening of Town Hall after a $1.5 million renovation intended to restore the hall to its original appearance. Leffler is the president of the Town Hall Foundation and Zucker is the executive director, and this marks the capstone of their efforts to refurbish the building, a McKim, Mead and White landmark on West 43rd Street just off Times Square.

Until 1978, when New York University, which owned the building, gave it to the foundation, the hall had been suffering through a long, slow deterioration. The opening of Lincoln Center in the early 1960s and the decay of the Times Square area combined to eat away at the luster of a Town Hall performance.

The growth of Lincoln Center had forced even Carnegie Hall to undertake a rescue program when it looked as if that venerable hall was going to be torn down. Town Hall slowly grew dingier and emptier.

But once it took over, the foundation began to turn things around. The hall itself now operates in the black, Leffler said (its current annual budget is about $600,000), and the foundation was able to raise the money needed for the restoration.

Over the past 2½ months, during which Town Hall has been closed, its seats have been rebuilt and recovered, the walls and ceiling painted, the lighting modernized. The stage has been sanded and polished, the facade has been washed. The building is as close as possible to its original, 1920 condition.

"Our motto is, 'Town Hall the way it was and the way it will be,'" Leffler said last week after a tour of the hall.

During the renovation, executive director Zucker recalled, passersby would often stick their heads in the doors to watch. "It was remarkable how many people would say they had gone here when they were 8 or 10 years old," he said. "People over and over talked of their debuts here."

The building was given landmark status in 1980, which means that while it may be renewed, it may not be changed. The designation has meant, for example, that seats were restored rather than replaced with new ones.

"LANDMARKING requires the preservation of appearance and acoustics," Leffler said. And since the chairs — roomy and soft, covered with plush burgundy cloth — contribute to the special sound of the room, they had to remain the same.

"We had them tested, put them in an acoustic chamber, measured the fiber content," he continued. The coverings themselves were a little bit of guesswork: The seatcovers had been repaired so often that no one knew what was original and what was new, Leffler said.

Concern for preservation went so far that the rear wall, made of cement marked off in rectangles so that it looks like stone, was coated with a preservative wash rather than painted, which might have affected the acoustics, he explained.

Now the hall glows warmly. The gold-leaf edging on the balcony gleams softly in the light from the chandeliers; the seats look rich and red. From the stage, the auditorium looks inviting, neither glitteringly austere nor immense and intimidating.

The 43rd Street location, which once had been a drawback, is once again an advantage, Leffler said: "We are in the hottest part of town right now. There are new hotels going up, and eventually Times Square is going to be refurbished. And it's a convenient place to get to."

Today's events begin at 4 p.m. with "An Afternoon of Jerome Kern," a celebration of the songwriter's 100th birthday produced by the New Amsterdam Theater Company, an ensemble based at Town Hall. Later there will be a dinner awards ceremony honoring entertainer Kitty Carlisle Hart, chairman of the New York State Council on the Arts.

TOWN HALL'S season includes subscription series by the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble and Orchestra, the theater company, the Dessoff Choirs and the Philharmonia Virtuosi. There also is the second year of the Peoples' Symphony series, a long-running, low-cost set of concerts that once had been based at Town Hall, but moved away for 12 years as the area deteriorated.

These series all are independently produced. Town Hall itself produces a Select Debut series, debut performances by promising young musicians. Leffler said he hopes that eventually Town Hall will return to its eminence as a major hall for debuts and for rentals.

Town Hall charges a rent of $3,000, including ushers and other house services. Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall costs $3,800, and Carnegie Hall has a sliding scale of from $2,400 to $4,150, depending on day and time.

"I hope that Town Hall can be what it was in the past in service to the community," Leffler said, "especially for those who can't afford high-priced tickets." He anticipated that tickets for most events would cost between $10 and $15. "And for emerging artists, it could give people an opportunity who can't get into the more expensive halls or who don't want the smaller halls. I don't put us in competition with anyone," he said. "This adds a place people will want to come to."

The foundation also hopes to regain its former prominence in other fields, in addition to music. Besides lectures — speakers of the past also included Winston Churchill and Booker T. Washington — it was for a long time host to the "Town Meeting of the Air" radio series broadcast over the NBC Blue Network.

Last spring, during the presidential primary campaign, a major debate among the seven Democratic contenders was held at Town Hall.

Leffler said he hopes to resume such discussions and lectures. Two sets of radio and television negotiations are under way.

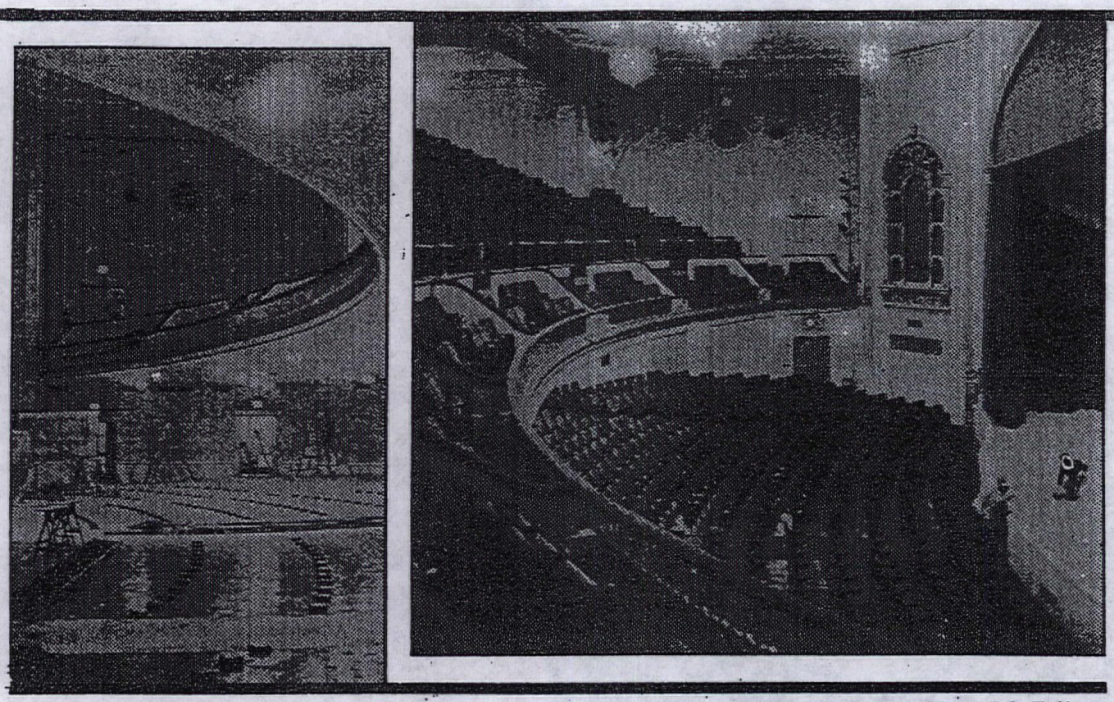
Whatever the outcome of those talks, the hall itself is being reintroduced to New York's musical and cultural life. Town Hall's acoustics are famous; now the question is whether it can make a new place for itself. /nl

1984

modern lighting

Exterior ?

The New York Times
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1984



Todd Weinstein; The New York Times/Ruby Washington

Town Hall in the process of renovation earlier this year, left, and finishing touches being administered this week.

New Future for Restored Town Hall

By BERNARD HOLLAND

Town Hall holds a gala today to celebrate a restoration completed. The 63-year-old institution has its gleaming new interior as promised, and, with it, a place to house an artistic future. Now the people who run Town Hall have to figure out what that future is and how it will be managed.

Marvin Leffler, the president of the Town Hall Foundation, and Lawrence Zucker, the house's director, believe they have just such an approach, one that will again fill this historic old house with artists and audiences.

Town Hall — which opened in 1921, flourished for three decades and then went into a tailspin with the rest of the Times Square area — recently raised $1.5 million and some high hopes for its future. Refurbishing has been going on this past year. The work has been carefully controlled according to the hall's landmark status, which forbids major changes in historic buildings. Everything is clean and painted, with a new electrical system, seat coverings and a brand new curtain. Today's events include an "Afternoon of Jerome Kern" and a banquet afterwards.

This season's bookings have been tentative — with about 60 to 70 percent occupancy for dates stretching between now through the spring. "We hoped the reconstruction would be finished on time — and it was," Mr. Leffler said a few days ago. "But we couldn't be totally sure."

Joint Presentations Planned

What has emerged, however, is a plan — and a philosophy — of "co-presenting" to go along with the hall's normal rentals to performers and speakers. In these co-presentations, which will be arranged often in series of events rather than as separate ones, Town Hall and various artistic enterprises found worthy by the hall will merge their resources.

"A musical group can't always take all the financial risks of presenting themselves here," said Mr. Leffler. "We probably couldn't take all the risk either, but we can go to them and say, 'we'll let you have the house for a small rental charge, if you will take the money you would have given us and spend it on promoting the concerts.' Then we share the box-office receipts."

Variations on this plan run through four different series at Town Hall this year. They feature the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble and the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the New Amsterdam Theater Company — which does concert versions of American musicals — the Dessoff Choirs and the Philharmonia Virtuosi. In the case of the latter, a grant from General Foods, plus a low rental fee asked by Town Hall, allowed the orchestra to spend money on some expensive advertising. The result, said Mr. Leffler, has been 800 new subscriptions for the five-concert series. The listener gets an inexpensive concert ticket and, according to Town Hall, everyone gains. Mr. Leffler calls it subsidizing from both ends. "We can take worthwhile groups and approach foundations together," he said.

A similar arrangement has been arrived at for today's gala. For the afternoon tribute to Jerome Kern, the New Amsterdam Theater Company provides the show and pays no rental. Town Hall takes back tickets for its sustaining members, and the rest of the income serves to benefit the performing group.

Debut and Alumni Concerts

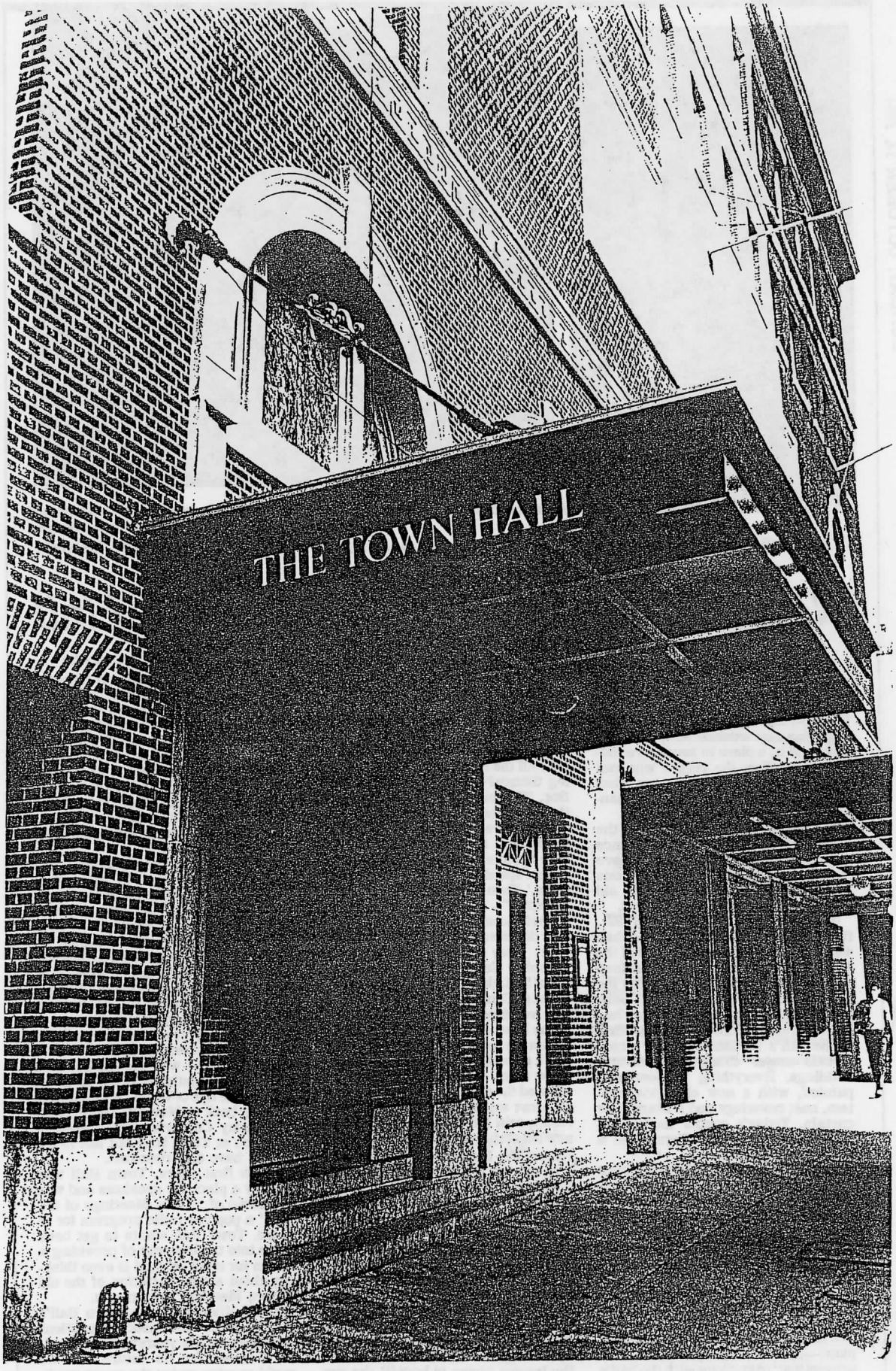
Town Hall seats 1,500 and rents for between $2,500 and $3,000. "Work by the stagehands costs extra," said Mr. Zucker, "programs and other minor services only a few dollars more." Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, in comparison, seats 1,100 and charges $2,500, says a Lincoln Center spokesman. (Ticket sales, poster space and programs are included at Tully; ushers, stage hands and rehearsal time are extra.)

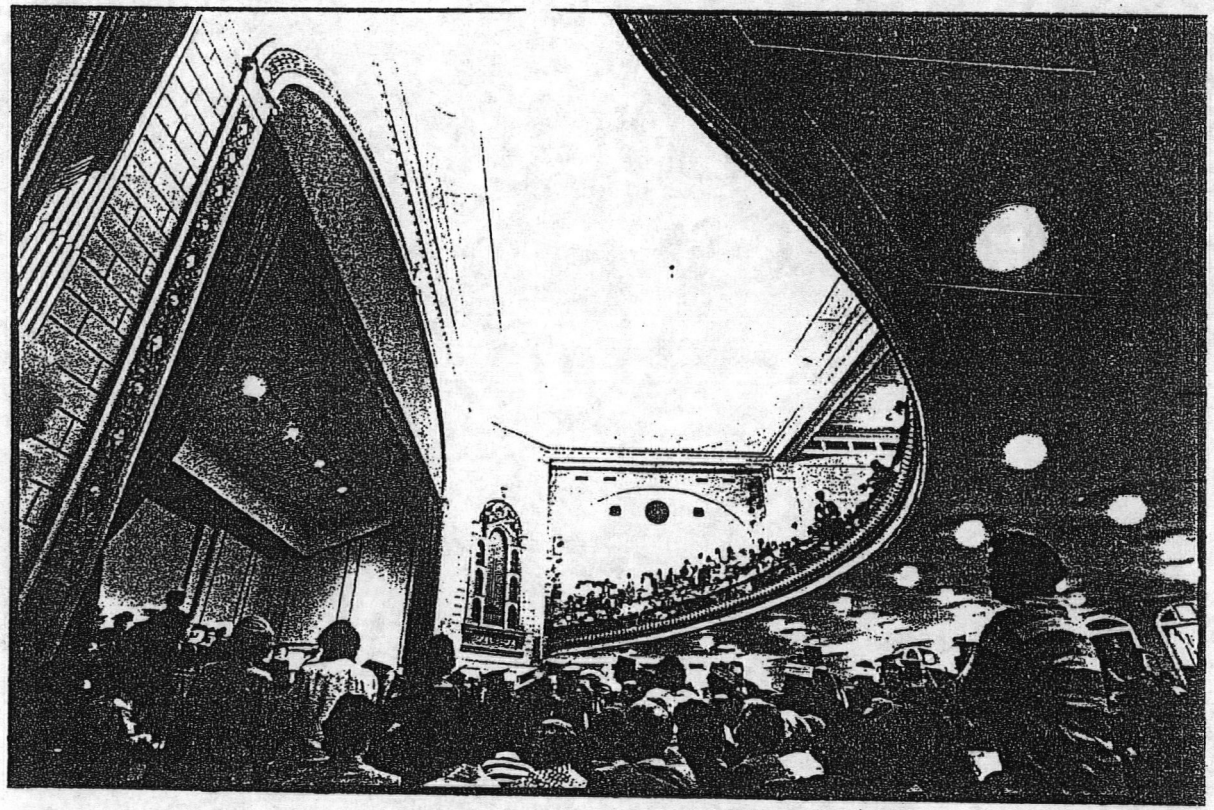
Mr. Leffler, a manufacturer who donates his services to the house, stresses that Town Hall is not a private business and that "no one is interested in making money."

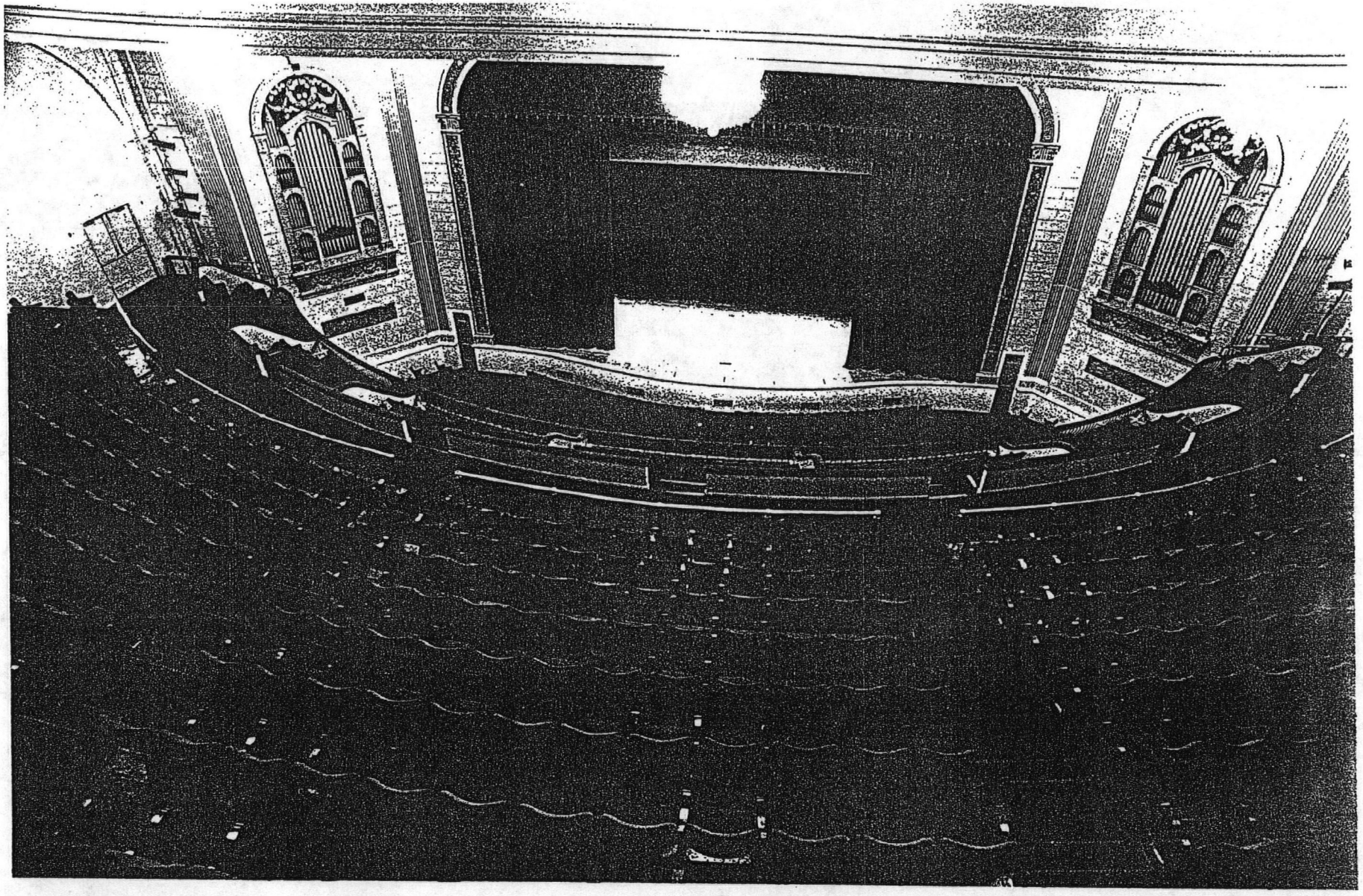
Town Hall will also continue its debut series for beginning artists and is looking for funding to expand it. Also hoped for is a series of "alumni reunions," concerts by performers who made important appearances in the hall many years ago and will return to commemorate them. Ruth Slenczynska — who played her 1934 debut (a sensational one) in Town Hall at the age of 4 — is, for example, coming back on Nov. 13. The Peoples Symphony Concerts, which used to perform at Town Hall but left in the 1970's, have also returned.

In its first years, Town Hall was largely a place for speakers and was the home of "Town Meetings of the Air," a popular radio program for 21 years. Town Hall wants to get back more into the business of providing a forum for opinions, and is even thinking about a new variation of the old "Town Meetings" programs.

Mr. Leffler points to Town Hall's ability to weather seedy conditions over the past few years as the best advertisement for its future. "If we could survive under the worst conditions," he said, "we ought to do well under the best."


THE TOWN HALL





NEW YORK STATE PARKS AND RECREATION

DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

This is to certify that

Town Hall

New York, New York County

in recognition of its

Historical and Architectural

significance and to encourage its preservation

was listed on the

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

by the

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

upon nomination by the State Historic Preservation Officer under provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

COMMISSIONER, NEW YORK STATE PARKS AND RECREATION
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER

23 April 1980

1980-81 Town Hall Contributors*

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$20,000 or more

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Marilyn Falk
Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Feit

(list continued on next page)

*list still in formation

CHARLES E. SCHUMER
NEW YORK

COMMITTEES:
BANKING
FINANCE
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RULES

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

RECEIVED 2280
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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

June 6, 2008

Mr. Paul Loether
Chief, National Historic Landmarks Program
National Park Service
1201 Eye Street, N.W.
8th Floor, Suite 2280
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Loether,

It is my pleasure to support the application of The Town Hall to be given National Historic Landmark status.

The Town Hall is one of the great cultural institutions of New York. A center for outstanding arts performance for nearly 90 years, the auditorium has hosted many of the world's finest performers in its outstanding acoustical settings. The Town Hall has also been one of the preeminent settings in this country for the exchange of ideas, providing the backdrop for debates, lectures, and forums with leaders of government, industry, and the arts. The McKim, Mead & White-designed building is a beautiful part of the streetscape and its façade is one of the most recognizable in New York.

While the historical and design significance of The Town Hall has long been recognized by its visitors and New Yorkers for decades, in 1978 the City of New York formally acknowledged its legacy when it was granted landmark status by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. Subsequently in 1980, the New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation included it on the National Register of Historic Places.

The rich history of The Town Hall is tightly woven into the fabric of American life, and deserves recognition as a National Historic Landmark. I hope you will look favorably on their application.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

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http://schumer.senate.gov

6/30/08

H34(2280)

JUN 30 2008

Ms. Donnalynn Scillieri Levine
Development Associate
The Town Hall Foundation, Inc.
123 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

Dear Ms. Levine:

Mr. Paul Loether has referred your letter of May 1, 2008, regarding your intention to submit The Town Hall for National Historic Landmark consideration to me. Information in your letter and in the Hall's National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (1980) has convinced us that The Town Hall should be evaluated for National Historic Landmark consideration.

To be considered a National Historic Landmark, a property must possess exceptional value in interpreting or illustrating the heritage of the United States and must also possess a high degree of integrity. While your letter conveys the Hall's importance in both the arts and in social, political, and cultural issues, we are specifically interested in one aspect of its history. We believe the Hall may possess exceptional value at the national level for the role it played in *America's Town Meetings of the Air*, the radio show which was started in 1935 to provide a national forum for the discussion of public questions.

Please contact Susan Salvatore of our staff to assist you with the documentation you will need to provide for the evaluation process. You may reach Ms. Salvatore at susan_salvatore@contractor.nps.gov. or 202-354-2256.

We look forward to working with you on this evaluation and greatly appreciate your interest in the National Historic Landmark program.

With regards,

Alexandra M. Lord

Alexandra M. Lord,
Branch Chief
National Historic Landmarks Program

bcc: 2285
2201
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A National Historic site, located in the heart of New York City's theatre district, The Town Hall is a non-profit organization serving the community since 1921with music, dance, film, lectures and drama.

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MAY - 2 2008
NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

May 1, 2008

Mr. Paul Loether
Chief of The National Historic Landmarks Program
National Park Service
1201 Eye Street, N.W., 8th Floor, Suite 2280
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Loether:

This letter conveys our intent to apply for National Historic Landmark status. The Town Hall was granted landmark status by the City Landmarks Preservation Commission on November 29, 1978 and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation on April 23, 1980. We would be honored to be re-classified and recognized as a National Historic Landmark.

The Town Hall has played an integral role in the cultural history of New York City and the Nation since it was built by the League for Political Education, a suffragist organization in 1921, after the 19th Amendment was ratified. Also, included with the new building was the Economic Club of New York, a group formed to "aid in the creation and expression of an enlightened public opinion on the important economic and social issues of the day," and the Civic Forum, an association to "promote a finer national life and a better understanding of other peoples of other countries." [1] The Hall originally served as a forum for a free exchange of ideas and in no time the legendary acoustics revealed themselves. For the past 87 years, The Town Hall has delighted audiences with performances in music, song, dance, theatre, spoken word, and has hosted lectures and debates of national and international significance.

Please note our rich history and the important role that The Town Hall has played not only in the arts but in social, educational and political issues since the turn of the last century. Many great people have graced The Town Hall and many momentous historical events have occurred on our stage.

Our history begins in 1894, twenty-seven years before The Town Hall was built. Eleanor Butler Sanders (1849-1905) had led five well-to-do women to testify at the New York State Constitutional Convention. The suffragist movement was rebuffed by both state and federal legislatures. At a meeting that followed the rejections, the very astute women knew that their domestic roles prevented them from gaining the

[1] "Times Square to Have a Million-Dollar Town Hall," The New York Times, 27-4-1919.

knowledge and experience necessary to vote as responsible citizens. The physician Mary Putnam Jacobi (d.1906) suggested they "form a committee pledged to organize a league to educate our selves." The unanimous decision included Catherine A.B. Abbe (president of the City History Club, d. 1920), Adele Fielde (missionary and lexicographer, d. 1916), Lee Woods Haggin (historian, d. 1934), and Lucia G. Runkle (journalist, d. 1927). The influential women proceeded to form the League for Political Education located on West 44th Street. Mayor William Russell Grace was instrumental in the League's development and ultimately the founding of The Town Hall. In addition to women's issues, the league's lectures focused on reform in New York City politics, labor, racism, poverty, child labor, crime and immigration.

In 1912, Anna Blakslee Bliss (d. 1935) gave a major contribution to expand the League's site that was purchased in 1914. The Trustees of The League for Political Education formed and incorporated an organization called The Societies Realty Company for the purpose of buying the land and erecting the building. With the end of World War I, earnest fundraising began and the renowned architects McKim, Mead & White were commissioned. The design of The Town Hall (Georgian Revival) reflects the democratic principles of the founders. The building has no separate box seats, and all seats have an unobstructed view, so the expression "not a bad seat in the house" was coined.[2]

To pay the mortgage, the Economic Club of New York and the Civic Forum along with the League for Political Education paid rent to The Societies Realty Company.[3] The Hall was available for anyone to rent for public meetings (two afternoons and two evenings a week) in the "interest of the general welfare, provided no admission was charged and the meeting was open to all for a nominal fee of $25 - $50. With all this in place, it was time to welcome the public.

The Town Hall finally opened on Wednesday, January 12, 1921, featuring a week of prominent speakers. The premiere evening was hosted by Henry W. Taft who effectively presented the "Origin and Possibilities of The Town Hall." Mr. Taft was joined by General John J. Pershing (in support of general disarmament and an appeal for European relief), Mrs. Corinne Roosevelt Robinson, Bishop Arthur S. Lloyd, Mrs. Ben Ali Haggin, John Graham Brooks, Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt and R. Fulton Cutting with 1,600 in attendance.[4] The rest of the week had lectures by Henry Morgenthau on "Adult Education in New York City," Alton B. Parker on "The People and Their Government," Professor Samuel McCune Lindsay on "Cooperation in Community Life and Work," Otto H. Kahn on "Popular Appreciation of Literature and Art," George W. Wickersham on "Working Together for Justice and Efficiency in Industry."[5] Also, the Historic Committee honored Mr. W. R. Grace as "one of the men and women who have served New York conspicuously..." Most exciting about the opening of The Town Hall was the congratulatory messages from President Woodrow Wilson, President-elect Warren G. Harding and Vice-president elect Calvin Coolidge.[6]

A month after the opening, our superb acoustics were accidentally discovered on February 12, 1921 during a recital by Spanish violinist Joan Manén. Later that year, Austrian composer Richard Strauss gave the Hall it's christening as an ideal space for musical performances. The Hall was inspired to create The Town Hall Endowment Series featuring many great artists such as Sergei

---

[2] "Program of the Opening Ceremonies of The Town Hall," The Town Hall, 12.1.1921 – 18.1.1921.
[3] Ibid.
[4] "Town Hall; Pershing Raps War," The New York Times, 13.1.1921.
[5] "Open Town Hall Jan 12 Prominent Speakers Will Attend Week's Evening Meetings," The New York Times, 10.1.1921.
[6] "Wilson and Harding Praise Town Hall," The New York Times, 16.1.1921.

Rachmaninoff, Andres Segovia and the Budapest String Quartet, Dame Joan Sutherland, Leonard Bernstein.

As the performances thrived in their success, so did the controversy surrounding free speech at the Hall, but not without resistance. Advocate Margaret Sanger and suffragist Mary Winsor were arrested and carried off the stage on November 13, 1921, while trying to speak about birth control. Monsignor Joseph P. Dineen met Police Captain Thomas Donohue of the West Forty-seventh Station under the orders of Archbishop Patrick J. Hayes to have the women stopped.[7] On August 23, 1929, the American Civil Liberties Union held the second anniversary remembrance of the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti when officials in Boston denied the use of Faneuil Hall or any other auditorium for the event.[8] Marian Anderson, contralto, made her New York debut here on December 30, 1935, after being denied an operatic career because of discrimination against African-Americans. Ms. Anderson had performed for four years throughout Europe before The Town Hall and went on to become the first African-American to perform at New York's Metropolitan Opera House.

The Economic Club of New York and the Civic Forum also brought many great leaders and innovators to The Town Hall. The Economic Club created and hosted "Four Dinner Meetings" a year for the discussion of public questions by eminent speakers from different points of view. The attendance ranged from eight hundred to two thousand men and guests. The members were generally officers of banks, trust companies, insurance companies, business corporations, industrial organizations, and their guests were mainly women. Some of the speakers were William H. Taft, Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Hoover, Right Honourable Winston Churchill, and Andrew Carnegie. The Civic Forum presented eight Medals of Honor for great human achievement at the Hall to George W. Goethals, Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas A. Edison, Herbert Hoover, Charles W. Eliot, Jean A. A. J. Jusserand, Elihu Root, Richard E. Byrd, Robert E. Peary, Keir Hardie and John J. Pershing.[9]

In 1935, George V. Denny, Jr., the Associate Director of the Hall, conceived the idea and established the Hall as a national and then international symbol of the free exchange of ideas. The radio series *America's Town Meetings on the Air* was launched on The National Broadcasting Company's Blue Network on Memorial Day. The first Town Meeting featured Lawrence Dennis, A.J. Muste, Norman Thomas and Raymond Moley debating "Which Way America? Fascism, Communism, Socialism or Democracy?" One of most "vehement encounters" pitted former Secretary of the Interior, Harold I. Ickes against Frank Gannett, publisher on the question, "Do We Have a Free Press?" Over the years, many speakers came to The Town Hall such as, Langston Hughes, Joseph Mc Carthy, Hubert Humphrey. As the show progressed, the one radio station and 500,000 listeners grew to 170 radio stations and 10 million listeners.[10] The Town Meetings toured the United States and three continents. Some 700 groups formed across the United States to listen to The Town Hall broadcasts and discuss them in their communities, similar to the original concept of the "town hall" from our founding fathers.[11] *America's Town Meetings on the Air* won numerous awards including the George Peabody Institute award in 1950 and in 1954.

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[7] "Birth Control Raid Made by Police on Archbishop's Order," The New York Times, 15.11.1921.
[8] "Sacco Memorial Here," The New York Times, 20.8.1929.
[9] Ely, Robert Erskine, A Beginning, (privately printed by The Town Hall0, New York, 1944.
[10] "George V. Denny." The New York Times, 12.11.1959.
[11] "Town Meetings," Time, New York, 17.1.1938,

The *Town Meetings* were not the only subject of interest at the Hall. Other political events took place, including First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt defending the New Deal, Buckminster Fuller, Richard Nixon, Theodore Roosevelt, Margaret Chase Smith, William Howard Taft, Booker T. Washington, and Woodrow Wilson. The successful, *Travelogues* series was dedicated to speakers sharing the exotic places they had visited around the globe. Various viewpoints on the arts were shared by Oscar Hammerstein II, Anaïs Nin, Carl Sandburg, and Orson Welles. Jane Addams, the first woman to receive the Noble Peace Prize; Thomas Mann, recipient of the 1929 Nobel Prize Laureate; Edna St. Millay the first woman to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry graced our stage. Additional topics were explored by Eve Curie, Alistair Cooke and Jacque-Yves Cousteau.

In the late 70's, the majestic Town Hall fell on hard times and nearly closed its doors but under the leadership and guidance of its current president, Marvin Leffler (Trustee Associate of New York University) and with the generosity of prominent contributors, the Hall was turned around. The Town Hall attained National Historic Landmark Status in 1978 and was completely refurbished. It is the fourth largest concert hall and one of the most respected cultural institutions in New York City today.

On Sunday, October 14, 1984 The Town Hall reopened its doors after a $1.5 refurbishing and restoration with Governor Carey, Mayor Koch and City Council President Carol Bellamy in attendance.[12] The gala for Hall's rebirth was complimented by the celebration of Jerome Kern's anniversary of his 100th birthday. Conducted by Michael Battistelli, thirty-two songs were performed by twenty-four Broadway veterans including Larry Kert, Kaye Ballard, Liliane Montevecchi, Paula Laurence and Roderick Cook. Following the performance, a dinner reception was held honoring Kitty Carlisle Hart, chairman of the State Council on the Arts.

The Town Hall continues on, 87 years later, as grand and as majestic as ever. The mission is to present quality artistic performances for diverse audiences at affordable prices; to provide educational performances for youth at the Hall as well as outreach programs in schools and underserved communities throughout New York City; and to preserve The Town Hall's historic and acoustically perfect auditorium for future generations. It is and has always been "The People's Hall."

On behalf of the staff and Board of Trustees, I thank you for your time and consideration of our request to become a National Historic Landmark.

Respectfully,

Donnalynn Scillieri Levine
Development Associate

It does not matter who you are, what you are, or from where you come, you are welcomed here. Whether man or woman, of whatever race or creed or party, whether New Yorker or from the North, South, East or West or from across the seas — you are welcome. The Town Hall is for people — all kinds. It aims to be a "House by the side of the road." 1921

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[12] Paul Goldberger, "Town Hall Celebrates the Staging of Its Comeback, The New York Times, 20.10.1980.

H34(2280)

JUL - 1 2008

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Schumer:

Mr. Paul Loether has referred your letter of June 6, 2008, regarding your support of National Historic Landmark consideration for The Town Hall to me. Last month we received a letter from Ms. Donnalynn Scillieri Levine of The Town Hall Foundation stating the organization's intent to submit The Town Hall for National Historic Landmark consideration. We wrote Ms. Scillieri of our interest in evaluating the building for the role it played in hosting *America's Town Meetings of the Air*, a radio show started in 1935 to provide a national forum for the discussion of public questions. In our letter, we suggested that she contact our staff regarding the information we need to conduct the evaluation.

If the information we receive indicates that The Town Hall warrants further consideration, we will send our formal notification entitled, "Notice of a Study to Determine Potential for Designation as a National Historic Landmark" to you. If we determine that The Town Hall meets National Historic Landmark criteria, we will schedule the nomination for review by the National Park System Advisory Board and will send you a copy of the nomination as part of a formal 60-day review period. If you so desire, you may then resubmit your letter of support.

Thank you for your support of the National Historic Landmark program.

Sincerely,

Alexandra M. Lord
Alexandra M. Lord, Ph.D.
Branch Chief
National Historic Landmarks Program

bcc: 2285
2201
7256 Office of Congressional & Legislative Affairs
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September 15, 2008

Ms. Susan Salvatore
National Park Service
National Historic Landmarks Program
1201 I Street NW (2280)
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Susan:

Enclosed please find a Twenty-Year Cavalcade cassette tape of The Town Hall's *America's Town Meeting of the Air.* Note that it was compiled for The Town Hall's 75th anniversary, which was celebrated in 1996. As you'll hear, the range of topics discussed run the gamut from utility rates in the United States and Canada, World War II, the incipient stages of the Cold War, to race relations in the United States. The illustrious roster of speakers includes Adlai Stevenson, Joseph McCarthy and Richard Nixon, among others. In contrast to the written page, this tape offers a taste of George Denny's style—trumpet fanfare and all!—and of the show's general tone. I believe you will enjoy listening to this wonderful compilation, and that it will further illuminate the importance of *America's Town Meeting of the Air.*

Thank you again, Susan, for your valuable input last week. I'm in the process of doing additional research in the areas you recommended. I'm also looking forward to continued communication with you in the upcoming months.

Kind regards,

Hilda Cabrera

Hilda Cabrera
Development Associate

Enclosure

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

November 19, 2008

Ms. Susan Salvatore
National Park Service
National Historic Landmarks Program
1201 I Street NW (2280)
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Susan:

Pursuant to our telephone conversation of November 6, enclosed please find a copy of the program from the opening ceremonies of The Town Hall. Also enclosed is a summary of historical events from 1921-1967. As you'll see, both the accomplishments of the participants and the nature of the activities were of the highest caliber.

I look forward to working with you in the upcoming weeks as the submission date for our proposal draws near.

Kind regards,

Hilda Cabrera

Hilda Cabrera
Development Associate

enclosures

PROGRAM OF THE OPENING CEREMONIES

of

THE TOWN HALL

Wednesday, January 12th, to Tuesday, January 18th, 1921

Founded by

THE LEAGUE FOR POLITICAL EDUCATION

GUESTS OF HONOR AND SPEAKERS

Partial List

GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING
GOVERNOR NATHAN L. MILLER
EX-GOVERNOR ALFRED E. SMITH
HERBERT HOOVER

REV. DR. HENRY M. SANDERS
CORINNE ROOSEVELT ROBINSON
HON. ABRAM I. ELKUS
MRS. CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT
HON. GEORGE W. WICKERSHAM
MRS. FRANK A. VANDERLIP
RT. REV. ARTHUR S. LLOYD
MONSIGNOR MICHAEL J. LAVELLE
EDITH WYNNE MATTHISON
RAYMOND B. FOSDICK
HENRY W. TAFT
OTTO H. KAHN
SAMUEL MCCUNE LINDSAY
MRS. THEODORE ROOSEVELT, JR.
HON. HENRY VAN DYKE
PRINCESS CANTACUZENE
HON. MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN
MRS. F. LOUIS SLADE
S. K. RATCLIFFE
JAMES SPEYER
BEATRICE FORBES-ROBERTSON HALE
RABBI STEPHEN S. WISE
REV. DR. HARRY E. FOSDICK
DR. JOHN A. HARRISS
FRANK A. VANDERLIP
HON. ALTON B. PARKER

THE TOWN HALL

113-123 WEST FORTY-THIRD STREET
Between Broadway and Sixth Avenue
New York City
TELEPHONE, BRYANT 2636

TOWN HALL The League for Political Education

Opens January 12, 1921
Reprints of Opening Week Events from New York Times submitted.

SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL EVENTS

1921-
Opening, major events include luncheons, dinners, fund raising events of a political nature--major speeches by local politicians on the nature of political forums/ accused of being radical Taft and Ely (board members) publicly deny this.
*Of possible interest to Cocktail Party idea:
Margaret Sanger first announced a series of lectures on Birth Control at Town Hall also announces plans to start the first Birth Control Clinic...She and her colleague E. Winsor are arrested at Town Hall when they attempt the lecture series for "disorderly conduct" and this is followed by a series of editorials and religous suppression attempts.

Speech by Depew on U.S. Presidents (can try to find if you want to excerpt)

1922-
Major activity includes plans to set up endowment fund, plans to dedicate seats, plaques , etc. Speech on India situation, dedication of Dickinson chair,
*Speech by Harriet Mills "Women running for office" (should I find?)
Harriman pleads endowment, celebration thereof, Luncheon to celebrate given by Lady Astor--luncheon meeting editorial also.
Various announcements and speeches urging U.S. political actions (nothing exciting enough for your purposes.)
Youth meeting in April, survey of use finds that Town Hall is a "public forum" many appeals for $$ anonymous gift by woman announced by Taft., Chosen as Jubilee site.

1923

Jubilee for New York City site...rented as Temple for religious services, prospectus of lecturers announced (details available)
Address by Zangwill on Town Hall

1924-1929

Funds raised, mortgage burned, X-mas party for employees,
*Speech by Samuel Desmond on "value"
SHOW__The Sidelights of New York--The historical pagaent
Concert of Opera Airs by students--no specific pieces named in program--just "Works by Handel, Bach, Beethoven and others"
** program does, however, specify a performance of RICHARD STRAUSS' Tales of the Blue Danube waltz could get waltz couple with tape for this?

1930-

Court order allows Dance Program on Sunday (usually reserved for sacred performances) plans to enlarge, extension of holdings, 5-story addition, 12-story annex, *program announcement of "continuing education" series of lectures
*ballet---HANSEL and GRETEL given for Children
IDEA you could get two ballet students(young) to do a portion of the ballet when the spot is on them...you might precede this with an announcement that it took a court order to allow this performance.

1931-

10th anniversary year--editorial ty ereon and celebration thereof (details available)
** Geraldine Farrar, Metropolitan Opera star gives benefit recital for Endowmant fund with Valentin Pavlovsky
program: Schumann's "Dedication"

"Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms"
(An old English melody)

"The Isle" by Sergei Rachmaninoff (He was present for this)

** Roland Hayes, Negro Spirituals and other works

program: MOZART Air from "Cosi fan Tutte"
SCHUBERT German Leider
WOLF two German Leiders
w/pianist Percival Parham
Negro Spirituals: "GO DOWN, MOSES"
"THE CRUCUFIXION"
(can get music for all of these)

** NYC History pagaent held in April

** Lily Pons, Metropolitan Opera Star program fothcoming
also Endowment concert program details, if available

1932

meetings,elections of board and various committe members, special meeting with theatrical people in which they remark upon what the theater needs--(with some digging, I could find their suggestions)
* for the party, you might read excerpts from these suggestions followed by ways in which they were carried out or by little performances indicating what one of these prominent theatre people were famous for....Dinner given, medal of honor to Booth Tarkington, amoung others (can get his acceptance speech)

1933-

Suit filed, fined for non-sacred Sunday performance (details coming from legal and artistic sources)

**FRITZ KREISLER performance for endowment fund
March 3, 1933. with Carl Lamson on piano

program:

composer	work
BEETHOVEN	"Kreutzer" Sonata
MOZART	Concerto in G Major

**Lawrence Tibbett, baritone Negro Spirituals

WAGNER	"Song to the Evening Star" from Tannhauser
GRUENBERG	"It's a-me O Lord" from Emporer Jones
HANDEL	
BRAHMS	
Schubert	works
Mussorgsky	
Coleridge-Taylor	

1934-

**YEHUDI MENUHIN benefit recital February 22

BEETHOVEN	C Minor Sonata
BACH	Sonata in C Major
CORELLI	Folia

**DOWNES/GIESKING Lecture/Recital Series

BACH	Partita #2 in C Minor
	Prelude in E Major
	Prelude and fugue in C# major f/Book I of WTC
	Fugue from Book II of Well-Tempered Clavier
SCARLATTI	5 Sonatas(of 500 written)
MOZART	Theme and Variations from
	The Sonata in A Major
	Fantasia in C Minor
BEETHOVEN	Sonata in F Minor Opus 2 #1
	Sonata in C# Minor Opus 27 #2

Other events: J.C. Thomas Concert series--less prominent artists but still a good source if you want other works involved (let me know)

1935

Slenczynski plays (can get program) Milstein/Bauer play research still in progress as to program. Music committee formed, plans for endowment other recital plans made.

1936

Artists for endowment announced, Subscription price doubles, bookings nearly complete, plaque of H.W. Taft dedicated, Annual report and editorials on the subject available

1937

Books played, announcement of endowments, plans made for a BACH Festival, Ditson plate dedicated, 5-story addition planned,
1938-TOWN MEETINGS OF THE AIR--forums of a serious nature can get subjects discussed, luncheons, discussions and decisions as to the future nature of programs--musical cycles favored. Concert of less prominent artists-can get program if you need it

1938

Several prominent Town Hall of The Air speakers, Kerensky, Mann, Young Artists Award given

1939-40

Comments on musical events, debates, series planned., decision to promote Caroling at X-mastime,
Activities report available
Broadcast--Bertrand Russell, J.L. Fly, concert series planned

1941

Concert Series program:

BACH	Toccata and Fugue in D Major
BEETHOVEN	Sonata Opus III
LISZT	St. Francis of Paula Walking Upon the Waters
RAVEL	Alborado del Gracioso
MOMPOU	Fetes Lointaines (N.Y.Premier)
SCHUBERT	Impromptu in G Major

also:

AARON COPELAND	VITEBSK, a study on a Jewish melody (in his honor) he performed the encore Ralph Berkowitz, pianist

V. Gottlieb , cello
E. Shapiro violin

Series, continued

EMMANUEL FEUERMANN/ALBERT HIRSH
cycle of Beethoven's works for Cello/Keyboard

Variations on a theme from HANDEL's Judas Maccabaeus
Sonatain G minor Opus 5 #2
Sonata in A Major Opus 69
Sonata in C major Opus 102 #2

Series of Lectures planned opened by Mrs. FDR can get excerpts
**for party--
Music forum planned, Dr. J. Huxley and LOTTE LEHMAN
honored at Town Hall dinner, performance to be planned,

1942-67

Fund concert of less prominent artists, can get program notes
Forum series planned, can get info
Several concerts and recitals planned including lecture given
**by F.H. La Guardia and an evening honoring George Washington
**Carver, manager changes, dinner for Ali Kahn
Town Hall sponsors Eastern Nations to visit U.S. Funds decline
new affiliation with N.Y.U. objections as to their operations,
Several awards dinners, E. SIMON conducts w/ R. Puyana,
still working on program in celebration of Debussy's birthday
Town Hall meeting rally for Oswald/Kennedy information
Oswald's mother shows, near riot, G. Maurice presents
singers awards, several avant-garde and contemporary American
chamber ensembles perform and find a home at Town Hall

CBH-

This a rough history of Town Hall there is plenty of information available as to the concert series but there id less detailed program information available as many of the concerts held there were for the benefir of the Endowment Fund and therefore are not as susceptible to the critical attentions or scrupulous chronicling that performances of a more lucrative nature (to the artist, that is)
As indicated there is more information available and the leads you gave me before are still being checked ouyt.

If you could possibly give me the years that some of the more prominent performances took place I could probably dig up reviews as weal as interviews with the artists as to their own reactions to performing at Town Hall. This might be a nice touch to your idea.

I hope this gives you some indication as to what you can accomplish and enough encouragement to proceed with your brainstorm. I am asking you to highligh any area you feel deserves more strict attention and any other information you may need as to how to carry these ideas through.

The details of the lecture series must be done in another branch of the library, but they are reproducable in any case.

Please give Kevin the Town Hall file if you are there, and don't need it (on the floor by your desk) All other details to follow.

Good Luck at your luncheon.

jr

OFFICE OF PARKS · RECREATION · HISTORIC PRESERVATION
NEW YORK STATE

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau • Peebles Island, PO Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189
518-237-8643
www.nysparks.com

David A. Paterson
Governor

Carol Ash
Commissioner

19 November 2010

Susan Salvatore
National Park Service
National Historic Landmarks Program
1201 I Street NW (2280)
Washington, DC 20005

RE: Town Hall
New York County, New York

Dear Susan:

I am enclosing the maps and photos for the proposed Town Hall National Historic Landmark nomination. The package includes the USGS quad and property map, color photos in tiff format and corresponding cd, and a group of supplementary materials, including historic photographs, floor plans, and advertising materials.

Please let me know if there if anything else that you think would enhance the nomination. I will send an electronic version of the final draft within the week as we discussed.

Sincerely:

Kathleen

Kathleen LaFrank
Program Analyst
Division for Historic Preservation

cc: Hilda Cabrera

An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Agency

printed on recycled paper

Compiled 1-19-11
and sent to Cary

FIRST NOTICE MAILING

The Town Hall Foundation
123 West 43rd Street
New York, NY 10036

Ms. Carol Ash, SHPO
Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
Agency Building #1
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12238

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Kristen E. Gillibrand
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Charles E. Schumer
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Carolyn B. Maloney
2332 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515-3214

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Notice of a Study to Determine Potential for Designation as a National Historic Landmark

MAR 0 9 2011

The National Park Service is pleased to announce that a study is being conducted on the following property to determine its potential for designation as a National Historic Landmark:

The Town Hall
New York, New York

National Historic Landmarks are nationally significant places that illustrate important themes, persons, or events in American history. The National Historic Landmarks Program recognizes properties of exceptional national significance in the nation's history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture. Once reviewed by the National Park System Advisory Board and designated by the Secretary of the Interior, each landmark may request an official bronze plaque from the National Park Service that recognizes this high distinction.

When the study is completed and scheduled for review by the National Park System Advisory Board, you will receive a copy of the nomination and have 60 days to comment in writing, if you so desire. After the 60-day period, the nomination and any comments received will be submitted to the National Park System Advisory Board.

For your information, we have enclosed a brochure that describes the National Historic Landmarks Program and a fact sheet that describes the effects of designation.

For further information on the National Historic Landmarks Program, including the designation process and questions on this specific study please contact: Ms. Patricia Henry, Historian, National Park Service, National Historic Landmarks Program, 1849 C Street NW (2280), Washington, DC 20240, or call 202/354-2216.

Additional information on the National Historic Landmarks Program is available at: www.nps.gov/history/nhl.

The Town Hall Foundation
123 West 43rd Street
New York, NY 10036

Ms. Catherine Turton
Architectural Historian
National Park Service, NERO
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Ms. Carol Ash, SHPO
Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
Agency Building # 1
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12238

The Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg,
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

The Honorable Jerrold Nadler
Member, United States House of
Representatives
2334 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kristen E. Gillibrand
United States Senator
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

H34(2280)

MAR 25 2011

Mr. Marvin Leffler, President
Board of Directors, The Town Hall Foundation
123 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

Dear Mr. Leffler:

The National Park Service has completed the study of The Town Hall, in New York City, New York, for the purpose of nominating it for designation as a National Historic Landmark. We enclose a copy of the nomination.

The Landmarks Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board will consider the nomination during its next meeting, at the time and place indicated on one of the enclosures. This enclosure also specifies how you may comment on the proposed nomination if you so choose. The Landmarks Committee will report on this nomination to the Advisory Board, which in turn will make a recommendation concerning this nomination to the Secretary of the Interior, based upon the criteria of the National Historic Landmarks Program.

If you wish to comment on the nomination, please do so within 60 days of the date of this letter. After the 60-day period, we will submit the nomination and all comments we have received to the Landmarks Committee.

To assist you in considering this matter, we have enclosed a copy of the regulations governing the National Historic Landmarks Program. They describe the criteria for designation (§65.4) and include other information on the Program. We are also enclosing a fact sheet that outlines the effects of designation.

Sincerely,

J. Paul Loether

J. Paul Loether, Chief
National Register of Historic Places
and National Historic Landmarks Program

Enclosures

PROPERTY STUDIED FOR
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION

THE TOWN HALL
NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

The Landmarks Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board will evaluate this property at a meeting to be held on May 24-26, 2011 beginning at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 24, and continuing at 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, May 25 and Thursday, May 26, in the 2nd Floor Board Room, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC. The Landmarks Committee evaluates the studies of historic properties being nominated for National Historic Landmark designation in order to advise the full National Park System Advisory Board. At a subsequent meeting the National Park System Advisory Board will consider those properties that the Committee finds meet the criteria of the National Historic Landmarks Program.

Owners of private properties nominated for NHL designation have an opportunity to concur with or object to designation, in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR 65. Any owner or partial owner of private property who chooses to object to designation must submit a notarized statement certifying that the party is the sole or partial owner of the private property and objects to the designation. Each owner or partial owner of private property has one vote, regardless of the portion of the property that the party owns. If a majority of private property owners object, a property will not be designated. Letters objecting to or supporting nominations may be sent to Mr. J. Paul Loether, Chief, National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks Program, at the National Park Service, 1849 C Street N.W. (2280), Washington, DC, 20240.

Should you wish to obtain information about these meetings, or about the National Historic Landmarks Program, please contact Historian Patty Henry at the National Park Service, at the address given above; by telephone at (202) 354-2216; or by e-mail at <patty_henry@nps.gov>.

IDENTICAL LETTERS SENT TO:

Owner: Mr. Marvin Leffler, President
Board of Directors, The Town Hall Foundation
123 West 43rd Street
New York, NY 10036

HEO: The Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

bcc: Northeast Regional Office, Catherine Turton

Patty Henry/WASO/NPS
03/25/2011 06:46 PM

To ruth.pierpont@oprhp.state.ny.us
cc Kathleen.LaFrank@oprhp.state.ny.us, mark.peckham@oprhp.state.ny.us
bcc
Subject From Paul Loether - NHL nominations notification

Ms. Ruth L. Pierpont, Director
Division of Historic Preservation

Dear Ms. Pierpont:

The National Park Service has completed the studies of Gardner Earl Memorial Chapel and Crematorium in Troy, New York; Montauk Point Lighthouse in Suffolk County, New York; USS *SLATER* in Albany, New York; The Town Hall in New York City, New York; and the West Point Foundry Archeological Site in Cold Spring, New York; for the purpose of nominating them for designation as National Historic Landmarks. You may find the nominations online at http://www.nps.gov/nhl/Spring2011Noms.html.

The Landmarks Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board will consider these nominations during its next meeting, at the time and place indicated on one of the enclosures. This enclosure also specifies how you may comment on the proposed nominations if you so choose. The Landmarks Committee will report on these nominations to the Advisory Board, which in turn will make a recommendation concerning these nominations to the Secretary of the Interior, based upon the criteria of the National Historic Landmarks Program.

If you wish to comment on the nominations, please do so within 60 days of the date of this letter. After the 60-day period, we will submit the nominations and all comments we have received to the Landmarks Committee.

To assist you in considering this matter, you may also find the regulations governing the National Historic Landmarks Program online at the address above. They describe the criteria for designation (§65.4) and include other information on the Program. There is also a fact sheet that outlines the effects of designation at the same address.

Sincerely,

J. Paul Loether, Chief
National Register of Historic Places
and National Historic Landmarks Program

Meeting information page.docx

Patty Henry

National Park Service
National Historic Landmarks Program-WASO
202-354-2216

PROPERTIES STUDIED FOR NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION

GARDNER EARL MEMORIAL CHAPEL AND CREMATORIUM
TROY, NEW YORK

MONTAUK POINT LIGHTHOUSE
SUFFOLK COUNTY, NEW YORK

THE TOWN HALL
NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

USS *SLATER*
ALBANY, NEW YORK

WEST POINT FOUNDRY ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE
COLD SPRING, NEW YORK

The Landmarks Committee of the National Park System Advisory Board will evaluate these properties at a meeting to be held on May 24-26, 2011 beginning at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 24, and continuing at 9:00 a.m. on Wednesday, May 25 and Thursday, May 26, in the 2nd Floor Board Room, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC. The Landmarks Committee evaluates the studies of historic properties being nominated for National Historic Landmark designation in order to advise the full National Park System Advisory Board. At a subsequent meeting the National Park System Advisory Board will consider those properties that the Committee finds meet the criteria of the National Historic Landmarks Program.

Owners of private properties nominated for NHL designation have an opportunity to concur with or object to designation, in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR 65. Any owner or partial owner of private property who chooses to object to designation must submit a notarized statement certifying that the party is the sole or partial owner of the private property and objects to the designation. Each owner or partial owner of private property has one vote, regardless of the portion of the property that the party owns. If a majority of private property owners object, a property will not be designated. Letters objecting to or supporting nominations may be sent to Mr. J. Paul Loether, Chief, National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks Program, at the National Park Service, 1849 C Street N.W. (2280), Washington, DC, 20240.

Should you wish to obtain information about these meetings, or about the National Historic Landmarks Program, please contact Historian Patty Henry at the National Park Service, at the address given above; by telephone at (202) 354-2216; or by e-mail at <patty_henry@nps.gov>.

NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF PARKS · RECREATION · HISTORIC PRESERVATION

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau
P.O. Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189
518-237-8643 Fax: 518-233-9049

Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Rose Harvey
Commissioner

RECEIVED 2280
APR – 6 2011
NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

March 29, 2011

J. Paul Loether
Chief
National Register of Historic Places and
National Historic Landmarks Programs
National Park Service
1849 C Street, NW (2280)
Washington, DC 20240

Re: NHL nominations:
Earl Mem. Chapel and Crematorium, Troy, NY
Montauk Lighthouse, Montauk, NY
The Town Hall, New York, NY
Destroyer Escort USS Slater, Albany, NY
West Point Foundry Site, Cold Spring, NY

Dear Mr. Loether:

Thank you for placing five New York State properties on the Landmarks Committee's May agenda for consideration as National Historic Landmarks. The New York State Historic Preservation Office strongly supports the designation of all five historic properties. Our office has been directly involved in encouraging these nominations and in most instances assisting the sponsors in preparing or editing the necessary documentation. Each of the proposed nominations is significant in the history of our nation and will make important contributions to the NHL program. Designation of these highly regarded buildings and sites will serve to broaden the public's appreciation for our diverse history while encouraging preservation. Please let me know if I or my staff can be of any further assistance to you in the designation process.

Sincerely,

Mark Peckham
Director
Historic Preservation
Field Services Bureau

KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND
NEW YORK
SENATOR

RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
SUITE 478
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205
202-224-4451

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
AGRICULTURE
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

May 24, 2011

Mr. J. Paul Loether, Chief
National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks Program
National Park Service
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Loether,

I am writing today to express my support for the nomination of The Town Hall in New York City for designation as a National Historic Landmark.

Located in midtown Manhattan, the Town Hall was specifically built to foster public education and democracy, and *America's Town Meeting of the Air (ATMA)* was broadcast from this site from 1935 until 1956. This program was one of the most important and widely listened to civic education programs in our nation's history. The Town Hall, in no small part, contributed to the success of this program by drawing on its own longstanding association with public education and American's deep symbolic associations with the New England town meeting.

The development of radio broadcasting was immensely important to the cultural history of the United States, and *ATMA*'s popularity helped fuel the rise of this form of communication. Throughout its twenty-two-year history, *ATMA* addressed a wide range of controversial topics, including civil liberties, war, communism, and racism, and aimed to promote a broader and more informed consideration of these issues.

No other radio show in our nation's history has become so closely identified with its broadcast location as *ATMA* has been with the Town Hall. As you review this nomination for potential designation, I urge you to consider the favorable findings of the National Park Service commissioned study regarding the merits for designation. National Historic Landmark designation would provide greatly needed resources for the further preservation of this site, which is significant not just as the location for *ATMA*, but as the physical embodiment of the values and tolerance *ATMA* promoted.

Sincerely,

Kirsten E. Gillibrand

Kirsten E. Gillibrand
United States Senator

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

H34(2280)

JAN 18 2012

Memorandum

To: Secretary

Through: Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

From: Director

Subject: Designation of Thirteen Properties as National Historic Landmarks: Director's Recommendation and Request for Secretarial Action

At its meeting on December 1, 2011, the National Park System Advisory Board recommended designation of the following properties as National Historic Landmarks:

1. MONTAUK POINT LIGHTHOUSE, Suffolk County, NY
   (Criterion 1)

2. BRADDOCK CARNEGIE LIBRARY, Braddock, PA
   (Criterion 1)

3. THE TOWN HALL, New York City, NY
   (Criterion 1)

4. FORT APACHE AND THEODORE ROOSEVELT SCHOOL, Fort Apache, AZ
   (Criterion 1)

5. DEER MEDICINE ROCKS, Rosebud County, MT
   (Criterion 1)

6. AKIMA PINŠIWA AWIIKI (CHIEF JEAN-BAPTISTE DE RICHARDVILLE HOUSE), Fort Wayne, IN
   (Criteria 1 and 2)

7. ST. PETER'S PARISH CHURCH, New Kent County, VA
   (Criterion 4)

8. EYRE HALL, Northampton County, VA
   (Criterion 4)

9. GARDNER EARL MEMORIAL CHAPEL AND CREMATORIUM, Troy, NY
   (Criterion 4)

10. MEADOW BROOK HALL, Rochester, MI
    (Criterion 4)

11. FLORIDA SOUTHERN COLLEGE HISTORIC DISTRICT, Lakeland, FL
    (Criterion 4)

12. USS *SLATER*, Albany, NY
    (Criteria 1 and 4)

13. CARRIZO PLAIN ARCHEOLOGICAL DISTRICT, San Luis Obispo County, CA
    (Criteria 5 and 6)

In accordance with National Historic Landmarks Program regulations, the Board reviewed the studies nominating these properties for Landmark status and found that these properties meet National Historic Landmarks Program criteria. The Board, therefore, voted to recommend that these properties be designated as National Historic Landmarks. The Certificate of Action by the National Park System Advisory Board is attached for your review.

Also, at its meeting on December 1, 2011, the National Park System Advisory Board recommended approval of additional documentation and a boundary clarification for the following National Historic Landmark:

1. FORT BENTON HISTORIC DISTRICT, Fort Benton, MT (Criterion 1)

In accordance with National Historic Landmarks Program regulations, the Board reviewed the additional documentation and boundary clarification study for this Landmark and found that the additional documentation and boundary clarification meet National Historic Landmarks Program criteria. The Board, therefore, voted to recommend that the additional documentation and boundary clarification for this National Historic Landmark be approved. The Certificate of Action by the National Park System Advisory Board is attached for your review.

Per the National Historic Landmark Program regulations, I hereby certify that the procedural requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 65.5 have been met.

I recommend that you approve the Board's December 1, 2011, recommendations, and designate as National Historic Landmarks the properties listed above, and approve the additional documentation and boundary clarification for the National Historic Landmark listed above.

APPROVE: Ken Salazar

DISAPPROVE: _____

DATE: MAR 02 2012

Attachments

H34(2280)

JAN - 4 2013

Mr. Marvin Leffler, President
Board of Directors, The Town Hall Foundation
123 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

Dear Mr. Leffler:

I am pleased to confirm that the Secretary of the Interior, on March 02, 2012, designated The Town Hall in New York, New York, a National Historic Landmark, in recognition of the property's national significance in the history of the United States.

The Historic Sites Act of 1935 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to identify and recognize nationally significant places that best represent the American experience. Landmark designation recognizes and encourages the preservation of places that have exceptional value for commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States, for the inspiration and benefit of all Americans.

The Secretary of the Interior designates National Historic Landmarks only after careful study by the National Park Service, extensive opportunities for public involvement, and review and recommendation by the National Park System Advisory Board, in accordance with National Historic Landmark criteria set forth in 36 CFR Part 65. National Historic Landmarks are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, making them eligible for the safeguards and benefits provided by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and other federal laws protecting historic properties.

We are delighted to enroll The Town Hall in New York, New York, as a National Historic Landmark – a designation that reflects the recognition of this property as an irreplaceable part of our nation's heritage.

Sincerely,

J. Paul Loether

J. Paul Loether, Chief
National Register of Historic Places
and National Historic Landmarks Program

IDENTICAL LETTER SENT TO:

Owner: Mr. Marvin Leffler, President
Board of Directors, The Town Hall Foundation
123 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

HEO: The Honorable Michael Bloomberg
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

SHPO: Ms. Rose Harvey, SHPO
Commissioner Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12238

bcc: Northeast Regional Office, B. Bolger

FEB - 1 2013

H34(2280)

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ms. Maloney:

I am pleased to confirm that the Secretary of the Interior, on March 02, 2012, designated The Town Hall in New York, New York, a National Historic Landmark, in recognition of the property's national significance in the history of the United States.

The Historic Sites Act of 1935 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to identify and recognize nationally significant places that best represent the American experience. Landmark designation recognizes and encourages the preservation of places that have exceptional value for commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States, for the inspiration and benefit of all Americans.

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We are delighted to enroll The Town Hall in New York, New York, as a National Historic Landmark – a designation that reflects the recognition of this property as an irreplaceable part of our nation's heritage.

Sincerely,

/s/ JON C. SMITH

for Stephanie Toothman, Ph.D.
Associate Director, Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Science

IDENTICAL LETTER SENT TO:

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kirsten E. Gillibrand
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

bcc: Northeast Regional Office, B. Bolger

TIMES SQUARE TO HAVE A MILLION-DOLLAR TOWN HALL

Handsome Structure to be Erected on Forty-third Street Just East of Broadway, With Auditorium Seating 1,800—Will House League for Political Education and New Club for Men and Women

Times Square is to have a million-dollar town meeting hall, ground for which will be broken early in May.

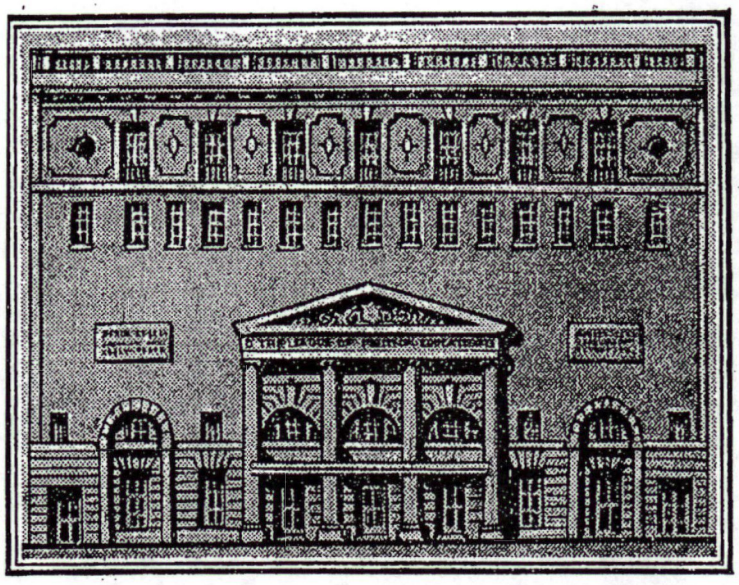
The structure is to be erected for the League for Political Education, the Economic Club, and the Civic Forum by the Societies Realty Company, Inc., as a kind of uptown Cooper Union, on the theory that efficient democratic government and healthy democratic life require a suitable meeting place for the public discussion of subjects related to the common welfare.

With this idea in mind, the officers of the League for Political Education, which will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of its organization next November, began to look about town several years ago for a site on which to erect a home of its own, as its growing membership and prestige demanded. The services of several of New York City's real estate experts, among them being Joseph P. Day, Alfred E. Marling, William R. Willcox, Robert E. Simon, and Walter Stabler, were secured.

After an exhaustive search and numerous meetings, this committee finally recommended as the best and most desirable site 113 to 123 West Forty-third Street. This property, now occupied by old three-story and basement dwellings, has a frontage of 125 feet just east of Broadway and a depth of 100 feet. It is opposite the Elks Club Building and the new Henry Miller Theatre, and was recommended for the reason that it was not only in the heart of the fastest-growing civic and commercial centre of the city, but midway between the two great railroad terminals of the city, and of easy access from any point in Greater New York.

The property was held at a high figure, but finally a price of $425,000 was agreed upon, and a New York corporation was formed, composed of F. A. Vanderlip, President; Robert Erskine Ely, Mrs. A. A. Anderson, E. H. Outerbridge, and William R. Willcox, to purchase the land and erect the building.

Plans for the new structure, which is to cost about $500,000, have been prepared by McKim, Mead & White, and it is expected that the building will be ready for occupancy by January. Russell B. Smith engineers have been retained as consulting and supervising engineers.



The principal feature of the building will be the auditorium, which will occupy the first four floors and have a seating capacity of about 1,800.

On the fifth floor will be the offices of the League for Political Education, the Economic Club, and the Civic Forum; library and reading room; and the sixth floor and roof will be used by a new club for men and women with very low dues and complete club service.

Robert Erskine Ely, First Vice President of the Societies Realty Company, Inc., said yesterday: "The practical enthusiasm with which the project has been pushed during the last year is the best answer to the question, 'Is New York City too big to have a real sense of city pride?'

"I speak with conviction when I say that I believe there is a finer public spirit in New York at this time than in any city on earth.

"Hardly a year goes by now without the building of some monumental structure for the furtherance of a noble ideal. One sees this in the rearing of cathedrals and hospitals, to say nothing of beautiful railway terminals and palatial hotels.

"This new building will be the permanent home of the Economic Club, the League for Political Education, and the Civic Forum. The theory of the projectors is that efficient democratic government and healthy democratic life require a suitable meeting place for the public discussion of subjects related to the common welfare.

"We figure the total investment at about $1,000,000. The sum of $175,000 has been paid on the purchase price. Until the mortgage indebtedness is entirely paid off, the League for Political Education, the Economic Club, the Civic Forum, and the new club will pay rent to the Societies Realty Company. The estimated net revenue will be from $25,000 to $30,000 annually."

The League for Political Education was founded in November, 1894, by Eleanor Butler Sanders, (Mrs. Henry M. Sanders,) with whom were associated five other notable women. Its object is to promote good citizenship, social justice, and general intelligence through education and expression of public opinion chiefly by means of lectures and addresses.

From the end of October to the middle of April the league has lectures four or five mornings a week, at present on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Saturdays in Carnegie Hall, and on Thursdays and Fridays in Aeolian Hall. These lectures are attended mainly by women.

At present the league has nearly 4,000 members. Seven hundred public school teachers paying annual dues of $3 are an important element in the membership. For some years the league has been entirely self-supporting, its income from membership dues approximating $40,000 annually. A. Barton Hepburn is Chairman of the Board of Trustees, the other members being Jacob H. Schiff, John Bates Clark, Mrs. Robert Abbe, Mrs. Henry A. Alexander, Clara B. Spence, Laura V. Day, Mrs. Ben Ali Haggin, Mary B. Cleveland, Henry M. Sanders, Robert G. Mead, John Martin, and Robert Erskine Ely.

The Economic Club of New York was organized in June, 1907, at the suggestion of J. W. Beatson, founder and Secretary of the Economic Club of Boston. The club's object is to "aid in the creation and expression of an enlightened public opinion on the important economic and social questions of the day." It endeavors to attain this object by having four dinners a year for the discussion of public questions.

The Civic Forum, like the Economic Club, was founded in the Spring of 1907. It grew out of the Peace Congress held in New York in April of that year. Its aim is to promote a finer national life and a better understanding of the peoples of other countries. The Forum has from three to six meetings a year.

Among the members of the League for Political Education are Mrs. J. Pierpont Morgan, Mrs. Andrew Carnegie, Mrs. Charles B. Alexander, Mrs. Douglas Robinson, Mrs. William K. Dick, Mrs. Simon Guggenheim, Mrs. Henry A. Alexander, Mrs. William H. Bliss, Mrs. A. A. Anderson, Mrs. Schuyler N. Warren, Jacob H. Schiff, A. Barton Hepburn, John Bates Clark, Mrs. P. A. Valentine, Miss Clara B. Spence, Mrs. Robert Abbe, Miss Charlotte S. Baker, Mrs. Ben Ali Haggin, Mrs. Warner M. Leeds, Mrs. Harry K. Knapp, Mrs. Henry Morgenthau, Mrs. Ogden Armour, Mrs. Ralph L. Shainwald, Mrs. Theodore Peters, Mrs. Daniel Guggenheim, Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Mrs. J. B. Greenhut, Mrs. Acosta Nichols, Mrs. Frederick Nathan, Mrs. William A. Perry, Mrs. Charles Oppenheim, Mrs. Warner M. Van Norden, Mrs. Chester A. Braman, Mrs. E. J. de Coppet, and Mrs. F. J. Van Beuren.

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TOWN HALL FOR NEW YORK

Three Civic Organizations Will Provide Free Meeting Place for Discussion

By HILDEGARDE HAWTHORNE

TIMES SQUARE is to be the site of a building to house the rebirth of an institution as old as America. New York City is to have its Town Hall, its public forum, its place for the free discussion of political and civic matters, where all sides will have equal privileges and where any law-abiding person may voice his opinion on affairs of the day.

From the day of the Pilgrim Fathers and the Puritans onward to the Revolution and the creation of the Constitution, each community had its meeting-house, its Town Hall, where the citizens met to talk things over. At these meetings, questions affecting the lives and fortunes of the citizens so far as their political and community interests went were thrashed out. Protests against existing laws, proposals concerning new ones, the fitness of office holders, or prospective office holders, came up for free discussion. The Town Hall was the place where the people as a whole could learn what was going on in their town, and put their own oar into the public pool. The Town Hall was as important in the civic life of those days as the church.

In an article in the July Century Glenn Frank commented on the disappearance of public meetings and discussions in the American politics of today. The hugeness and complexity of political machinery have gradually caused it to be run not by the people meeting in free discussion over contemplated changes or possible candidates, but by small, semi-professional groups. In the bulk, the average voter has never had a chance to ask a question or to express an opinion until actual electioneering starts. He is able, in the papers, to read what other men think and say on the various measures and men on whom he is to vote, but he has little to do with the formative processes, knows none of that give-and-take that made the old town meeting so valuable and so educative an institution. In regard to this Mr. Frank has the following remarks to make:

"If there ever was a time in American history when the need for setting up the instruments and methods for common discussion of common interests was imperative, it is imperative now in this time of flux, when reckless revolution and stupid reaction are alike coquetting with the public mind. * * * But the major difficulty with us is that we lack the machinery and have lost the habit of community discussion. * * * the average American must listen to discussion less and participate more. We need an agora, a forum, a folk-moot, a town meeting."

Well, that is exactly what New York will get when the building now in process of construction is completed. We have three notable organizations to thank for this addition to our civic life. These are the League for Political Education, the Civic Forum and the Economic Club of New York. These three organizations have long been engaged in informing, rather than in forming, the public mind. Naturally they have been attracted toward each other by this similarity of aim. For some time the same office force has been used by all three. But they wanted an auditorium of their own, a home. New York had none to offer them. Those existing were either too small or too large for their purposes. It remained to build.

With the determination to build a house that should meet their need came a broader outlook on the city's needs. New Yorkers, amazing as this statement may seem, are keen for education and are alive to demands of today for the best informed minds and the clearest judgments that can be obtained. The meetings of the three organizations are keenly appreciated. The men who are asked to speak from their platforms are eager to do so, no matter how famous, how busy, how burdened with other invitations.

Good Speakers Assured.

The League for Political Education has been in existence twenty-five years. Its slogan has always been. Give me both sides of every story—I don't want to be more familiar with my own than with the other fellow's. Its membership is open to all men and women on payment of membership dues, and all its lectures are free to members. These lectures are held in the morning, and are not therefore available for the usual busy person. But here the Civic Forum steps in, appealing to those whose evenings only are free. The Civic Forum was founded as a result of the calling of the Peace Conference in New York in 1907 by Andrew Carnegie, one of the founders being Henry Clews. The program of the league is arranged for the Spring preceding the Fall opening, but that of the Civic Forum is developed from week to week, according as events develop. It has never been turned down by any one asked to speak before it.

The league has a long list of speakers for the coming year, among them Major Gen. Leonard Wood, Granville Barker, Samuel Gompers, Maeterlinck, Margaret Deland, William H. Taft, James M. Beck, and Carter Glass. Charles Zueblin will give a series of lectures on "The Gospel of American Democracy;" S. K. Ratcliffe of London another series on conditions and aspects in Great Britain and Western Europe today. This is a hint of the work planned for the season.

The Economic Club gives four dinners a year, occasionally more, when the best minds of the day are heard on economic questions, and where there is opportunity for discussion. These discussions have proved of intense interest. The club's avowed object is to aid in the creation and expression of an enlightened public opinion.

The new building will be held as a trust for the public. In its auditorium any organization, institution or group of persons may meet for free discussion, and no rentals will be charged. The sole charge will be for light and usher service. The meetings must themselves be free. Here each political party may present its arguments to the public, and here the public can question and discuss the matter presented. The auditorium will seat 1,700 people, with 200 standees. A larger place than this has been proved bad for the special purposes of this hall.

People may say that Cooper Union provides such a meeting place, but the usefulness of Cooper Union is much hampered by its locality and its small size. It has largely ceased to be a meeting place for any but the people of its vicinity. The uptown New Yorker rarely attends one of its meetings. The situation of the new building could hardly be better. Within easy walk of all the subways as well as the elevated, at a point in the city where all the main lines of surface cars converge, not far from either of the two great railway stations, it stands, indeed, where the Town Hall should stand, in the heart of the city. About it are great hotels and the best of New York's shopping district. Just east of Broadway, on West Forty-third Street, it will be in the locality found by the theatrical world the most convenient in Manhattan.

Model Building Planned.

The building will be six stories in height, with arrangements which will permit the addition of four extra stories. The auditorium will be on the first floor and will be unlike any other in the city, since it is intended solely for speakers. There will be no stage, but a platform with seats in the rear. The acoustics will be exceptional. The auditorium will be four stories high, with a mezzanine floor which will hold the offices and retiring rooms for the three organizations it is to house. Above will be the executive offices of these organizations, and on the top floor club and rest rooms, lounges and dining rooms. In a penthouse on the roof will be the kitchen and servants' quarters. The auditorium, which is of course the most important thing in the building, will have only one balcony with a row of loges in front. There will be no boxes and no pillars to obstruct the view.

It is also planned to create a special Bureau of Information and Social Service which will be placed in the upper part of the building. Here you can go to find out where to go for what you want in the city. New York is so large that hardly any one part knows what the other parts are up to. With all sorts of educational, religious, and social organizations functioning, it gets to be more and more difficult to find what you yourself want. The bureau will give either the lost New Yorker or the bewildered stranger full information as a friendly service to the community.

There will in time be a library and reading room of social and political science, with expert service to direct searchers to the books they seek, either on the spot or in any of the libraries of the city.

An interesting part of the building will be the Memorial Foyer, which will be dedicated to the recognition of civic service. It will be a civic hall of fame, and will contain tablets to the men and women who have helped, in the past, the best life of the city. One of these tablets will commemorate the name of Eleanor B. Sanders, founder of the League for Political Education.

New York's Town Hall has come because it was demanded. It will be interesting to watch the city's response to the new opportunity offered, and just how great a part in the life of the body politic the new Town Hall is destined to play. The men and women behind it have no doubt that this response and this influence are to be great and fortunate.

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CORNERSTONE LAID FOR PUBLIC FORUM

Bishop Burch, Rabbi Wise, Father Bourke, and F. A. Vanderlip Among Speakers.

GET $150,000 AT LUNCHEON

"New York's Town Meeting Hall" Called Move for "Freedom Buttressed by Law."

The cornerstone of the Civic Auditorium, to be known also as "New York's Town Meeting Hall," was laid by Lieut. Col. Theodore Roosevelt under the auspices of the League for Political Education, at 113-123 West Forty-third Street, yesterday noon. Appropriate exercises preceded this ceremony at the Hippodrome in the morning, where the significance of the new auditorium as a place for free and open discussion of all civic problems of importance was interpreted by speakers, including Bishop Charles S. Burch, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Frank A. Vanderlip, Borough President Henry H. Curran, and the Rev. John J. Bourke, representing Archbishop Hayes. At a luncheon at the Astor following the laying of the cornerstone, $150,000 was raised toward the $1,250,000 building fund for the auditorium.

Bishop Burch said that never before had Americans needed more to heed voices that make clear distinction between freedom of speech and the abuse of that freedom which descends into license to give utterance of opinions subversive of law and order.

"This civic forum, as I understand it," said Bishop Burch, "is primarily for the utterance by experts of the best opinions on all social, economic, religious, artistic and other subjects which concern every one of us; and secondly, it is a place where men and women may come, and, please God, shall come, to express their own political opinions. They may be critical of the Government; they may not like the Government under which they are trying to fulfill their offices as American citizens. Very often you and I find fault with what the Government may be doing, but if you are not loyal to what that Government may be doing you are not true American citizens. It is up to us to yield obedience and allegiance to the utmost, expressing our criticism when we feel criticism is due, of course, but never expressing or harboring any thought that shall make us aliens to what our Government is trying to do.

Fears Parlor Reds.

"I am a little more afraid of those who are born right here in New Amsterdam, and who constitute what some are pleased to call our parlor anarchists or socialists, than I am of those who have lived over here twenty-seven years and who never have preached anything but sedition, who don't care for our Government and who show and speak openly their disrespect for our laws and institutions.

"Once more let me express the hope that this League for Political Education may take its just and due share in the education of those who have come over here for an asylum, whom we do not understand, whom sometimes we do not try to understand, and whom we ought to understand. How many of you in this auditorium this morning have ever gone down on the East Side and have talked with and tried to fraternize with these aliens who have segregated themselves there, or how many of you have ever gone up into the coal regions of Pennsylvania or Ohio and tried to understand those alien folk who fail to understand us? Is it their fault? No, it is because we have not tried to help them to understand us, our forms of Government, to sympathize with us, or to let us sympathize with them.

"We owe them a debt. We owe them just what we gave to them years ago, an asylum. But it should be an asylum where they can become not simply impressed with, but filled with enthusiasm for American institutions. And how are they going to be filled with enthusiasm unless you and I and other American citizens try to help them to understand what American citizenship means?

"That much talked of word 'Americanism' is not going to mean anything but a simple phrase, a careless phrase as we use it so frequently, unless we help those citizens to become Americans first. This League for Political Education is going to educate them in the principles that underlie this great republic of ours, help them to love those principles which mean freedom to express those opinions anywhere, any time, so long as they do not come into direct conflict with constituted authority."

Pays Tribute to League.

Speaking for Archbishop Hayes, who was unable to be present, Father John J. Bourke paid tribute to the vision of members of the league and its director, Robert Erskine Ely, in laying the cornerstore of a building which shall symbolize "freedom buttressed by law."

"No matter how much we may develop," he continued, "no matter into what different lines our civic and political activity may run, these two elements are the very basis of our democracy. Multitudes of every nationality are found here in vaster numbers, very often, than in the largest cities of the lands they have left. To understand their needs; to meet them half way; to exchange thoughts; to understand and recognize accidental differences; to show how with all that they possess in becoming American citizens they are but adding to the good that they have, and that they are but giving up that which is not for their good or benefit, or to the advancement of mankind—this is the supreme object of such an institution and such a building."

Rabbi Wise received vigorous applause when he suggested that it was a pity that Mr. Ely about two or three weeks ago did not establish a branch of the League for Political Education at Albany. He praised the league's director for believing that America is not going to be imperilled by any word which happens to be somewhat different from the word spoken yesterday or the day before.

"Most of us have to wait a century for a millennium," Rabbi Wise said. "My people are accustomed to awaiting millennia, but Mr. Ely starts out and within a quarter of a century realizes this great dream of his.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, if any proof were needed of what the league really means, look at the company on this platform. In the first place, the beloved Bishop of the Diocese of New York; and if the Rev. Father Bourke still be here we have a representative of a great church which seems old to most people, but which seems quite recent to me, representative of a great church. Now, Mr. Ely can bring us all together, and not merely say kind things of one another, but he has the genius for making men of all creeds and faiths and political parties stand together and fight for things worth while.

Voices Faith in America.

"The League for Political Education to me means this thing: America is not going to be endangered by free and untrammeled discussion. Personally, I don't believe in license. There is room in America neither for license nor for licenses. At the same time Mr. Ely and you and I think that he is a pretty poor American who thinks that America is imperilled by every wild speech. Let us have a little more faith in America.

"If America is so insecurely rooted that 5,000 or 10,000 persons who imagine that they have a better form of government than our American form of government in their heads—if 5,000 or 10,000 persons can undo America, America does not deserve to live. America consists of one hundred and ten millions of persons plus a spirit.

"May the League for Political Education continue to serve that America, which is a religion to you and to me. I have two religions; one of the religion of Israel, the other is the religion of America. And America is a religion to us; it is our hope and our faith; it is that to which we give ourselves with all love, loyalty and dedication."

Frank A. Vanderlip, who as President of the company organized to buy the land and erect the Civic Auditorium, introduced the speakers at the Hippodrome, prophesied that encouragement by the present success, similar town meeting halls would be built in other cities.

"More than ever," he thought, "we are coming to understand that we have got to give ourselves to democracy if democracy is to succeed. And that is what you are doing, giving your time and giving yourselves to a better understanding of public questions. In the measure that we do that, we are making the world safe for democracy; in the measure that we refrain, we are making it dangerous for democracy."

Telegrams were read from Governor Smith and Lyman Abbot, who were prevented from speaking at the meeting. The program had announced an original poem, written for the occasion by Henry van Dyke, but in its place another, "To New York Awakening," was read by Robert Underwood Johnson.

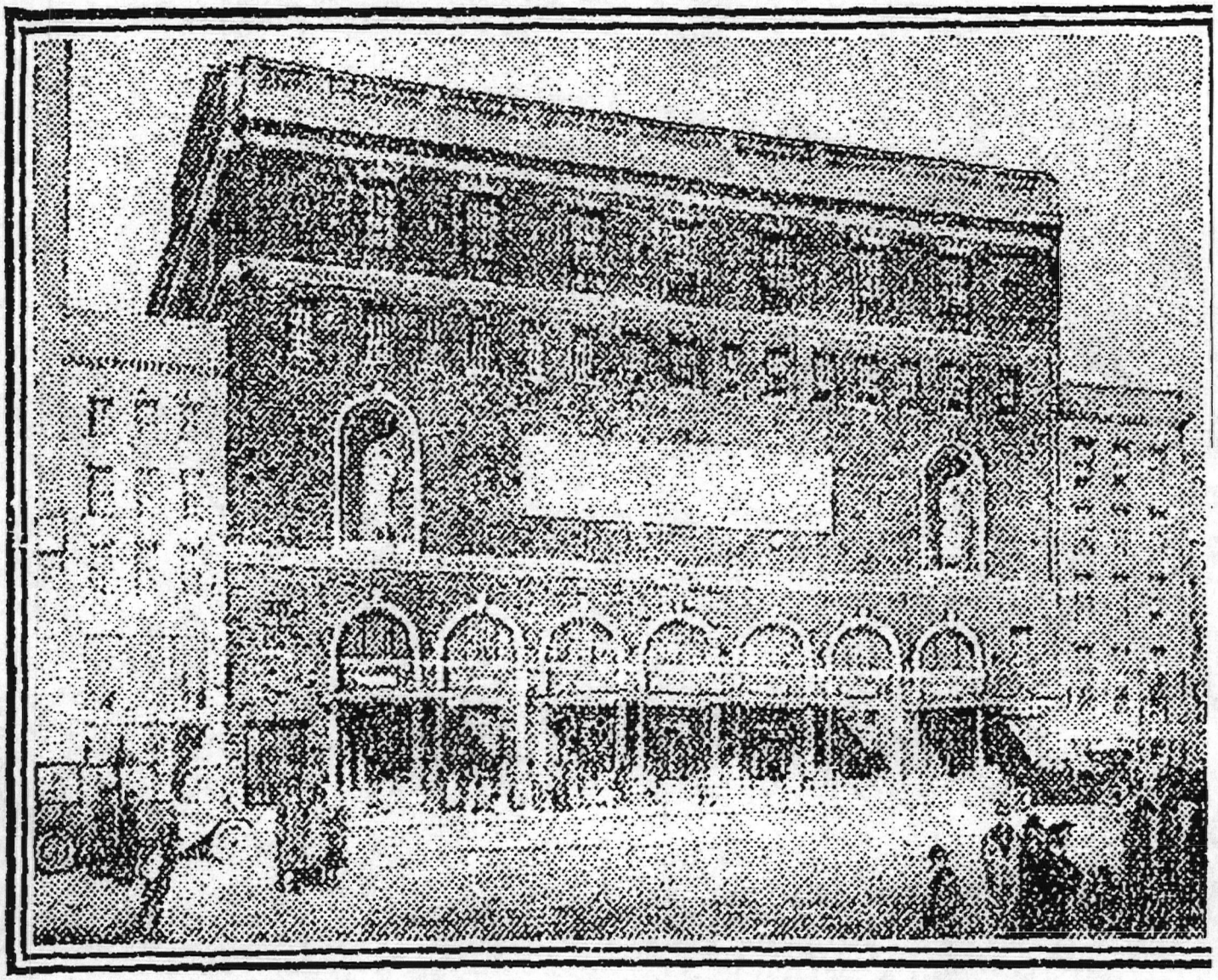
The cornerstone was to have been laid by Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., who is a grand niece of the league's founder, Mrs. Henry M. Sanders. Illness in Mrs. Roosevelt's family kept her at home, and the stone was laid in her stead by her husband, Assemblyman Theodore Roosevelt. A number of Mrs. Sanders's relatives assisted in the ceremony.

The building will be dedicated next Summer. The Auditorium, which will provide a town meeting place for New York, will seat about 3,700 persons, and will be held free from political control by the League for Political Education. The sixth floor and roof of the structure will be occupied by a club open to men and women on equal terms and moderate dues.

Those who contributed more than $1,000 to the fund raised at the luncheon were: Mrs. William M. Bliss, $25,000; Mrs. A. A. Anderson, $15,000; Mrs. Simon Guggenheim, $4,000; five anonymous donations of $5,000 each; Mrs. Warner Van Norden, $5,000; Mrs. Hartwell, a niece of Mrs. Henry M. Sanders, $5,000; Miss Ballantine, Mrs. J. B. Greenhut, and Mr. and Mrs. Harry A. Knapp, $2,000 each; Mrs. W. M. Martin, $1,500. Those who gave $1,000 were: Four anonymous subscribers, R. J. Caldwell, Mrs. J. Henry Dix, Mrs. Charles Soden, Frank A. Vanderlip, Mrs. T. R. Brown, Mrs. Charles Stewart Smith, Mrs. Henry A. Alexander, Mrs. Joseph P. Day, Mrs. R. A. C. Smith, Mrs. Theodore Wood, Mrs. H. B. McClintock, and Miss Laura V. Day.

The New York Times
Published: January 25, 1920

NEW YORK'S FIRST TOWN HALL



New Building at 113 to 123 West Forty-third Street Built for the League of Political Education to be Opened Next Wednesday.

The New York Times
Published: January 9, 1921
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WILSON AND HARDING PRAISE TOWN HALL

President and President-Elect Bespeak Success for Community Movement.

COOLIDGE SENDS LETTER

Former Governor Smith and T. V. O'Connor, Head of Longshoremen, Among Speakers.

The formal founding last night of the Town Hall Club in the Town Hall, 113 to 123 West Forty-third Street, was marked by congratulatory messages from President Woodrow Wilson, President-elect Warren G. Harding and Vice President-elect Calvin Coolidge and half a dozen addresses on "Co-operation in Community Life and Work." The speakers included ex-Governor Alfred E. Smith, Stephen H. Olin, member of the Board of Trustees of the New York Public Library; Mrs. Mary K. Simkhovitch, head of the Greenwich House Social Settlement; Thomas V. O'Connor, President of the International Longshoremen's Association, and Mrs. Beatrice Forbes-Robertson Hale, actress and author.

Professor Samuel McCune Lindsay, President of the Town Hall Club, presided. The audience arose and applauded as former Governor Smith was introduced. He said that he saw in the theory underlying the Town Hall meeting an absolute necessity in this State, and warned against an attempt to discuss too many questions in a single evening.

Mrs. Mary K. Simkhovitch spoke of the importance of neighborhood centres. "City neighborhoods," she said, "are cross-sections of American life, and no one can understand national life unless he can grasp the problems of local communities."

Professor Lindsay read the letter received from President Wilson and addressed to Henry W. Taft, a member of the Town Hall Committee. The President said:

The White House.
Washington.
Dec. 17, 1920.

My Dear Mr. Taft:

I need hardly assure you that it would be very delightful to Mrs. Wilson and me if we could participate in the formal opening of the Town Hall to take place at a series of meetings held from the 12th to the 18th of January, and it is with the greatest regret that we find that it will be impossible. I am sure you and those associated with you will understand how we come to this conclusion only under the pressure of necessity and much against our choice.

With the best wishes for the success of the occasion,

Cordially and sincerely yours,
WOODROW WILSON.

Mr. Henry W. Taft,
The Town Hall, New York City.

President-elect Harding wired this night letter:

Marion, Ohio, Jan. 12, 1921.

Dr. Samuel McCune Lindsay,
The Town Hall Club,
New York City, N. Y.

Congratulations to the citizens of New York upon the establishment of the Town Hall as a great civic centre for the cultivation of civic virtues, the development of sound thinking on public questions and co-operation with your government in city, State and nation for the promotion of social welfare. It is particularly fitting that the crown of the edifice which results from twenty-five years' work of such organizations as the League for Political Education, the Economic Club and the Civic Forum should be the Town Hall Club composed of men and women without regard to creed or politics and representing every section of our great republic and its national life as expressed in art, letters, science, civics and philanthropy. I hope to see better co-ordinated the social welfare activities of our national Government and look forward with great hopes to the service which private agencies such as your Town Hall group of organizations may render in co-operation with the Government through the development of a self-reliant spirit and an intelligent public opinion which does not look to government to do everything but which shall enable governments to do their part more effectively because courageous plain and straight thinking men and women are doing their civic duty in New York and in every city, town or hamlet throughout the country.

WARREN G. HARDING.

Vice-President-elect Calvin Coolidge's letter said he looked with the highest approval and satisfaction on the opening of the Town Hall and its dedication by loyal and patriotic societies to a "strengthening of our civic conscience and righteousness in government."

The New York Times
Published: January 16, 1921
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