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## THE PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICAN THEATRES.

### INTRODUCTION.

WE are informed that dramatic history in New York began more than a century and a half ago. The first dramatic performance ever seen in America was given in this city during the last week in September, 1732. The first playhouse was the Nassau Street Theatre, on the east side of Nassau Street—then called Kip—between John Street and Maiden Lane. It was a wooden structure, and opened March 5, 1750. Kean and Murray were the managers, and the play for the first night was *Richard III*. There were performances twice a week, and the season lasted for five months. This house gave way to a new one, built in 1753 by Lewis and William Hallen, the one a manager, the other an actor; but in a few years the new house was converted into a church for the use of the German Calvinists.

David Douglass built in 1761 a theatre at Nassau and Beekman streets, where Temple Court now stands, at which, on November 26th of the same year, *Hamlet* was presented for the first time in America. The cost of this playhouse was \$1625. The dimensions were 40 by 90 feet.

From 1761 to the present time what a contrast and advancement are perceptible!

The Madison Square Garden and the Metropolitan Opera

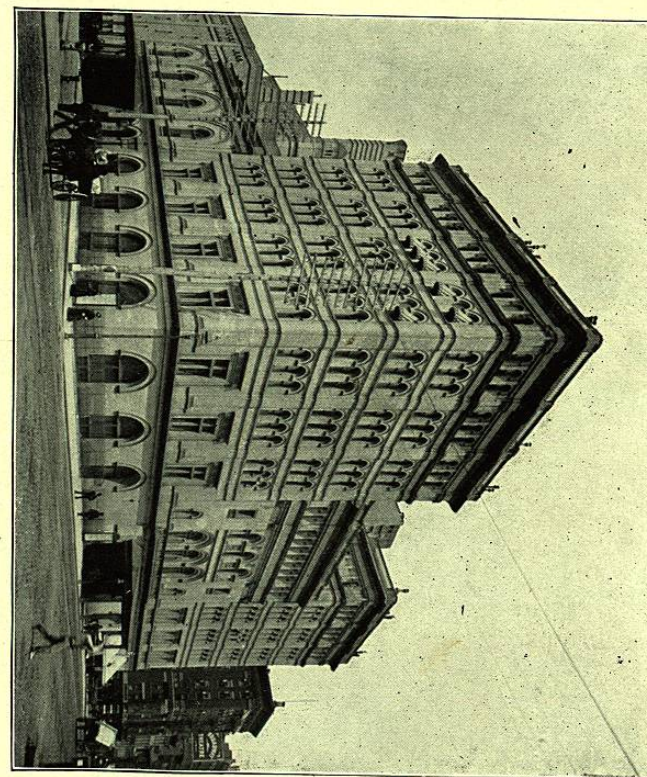


House, built within the last six years, are of special prominence because of their magnitude as buildings and of the expenditure of enormous sums of money.

The Madison Square Garden in magnitude is the more important of the two. It is the largest building in America devoted entirely to amusements, and cost about \$3,000,000. It occupies the entire block bounded by Madison and Fourth avenues, Twenty-sixth and Twenty-seventh streets. It is 465 feet long and 200 feet wide, and its walls rise to a height of 65 feet. Architecturally it is a magnificent structure, because of the simplicity of the construction and the absence of trifling details in the ornamentation. The style is in the Renaissance, and the materials buff brick and terra cotta. The roof is flat, or nearly so, but the sky-lines are broken by a colonnade which rises above the roof at the Madison Avenue end and extends along either side for 100 feet; by six open cupolas, with semi-spherical domes, which rise above the colonnade; by two towers at the Fourth Avenue corners; and by a magnificent square tower which rises from the Twenty-sixth Street side, with its lines unbroken for 249 feet, and then in a series of open cupolas, decreasing in diameter, on the smallest and topmost of which is posed a figure of Diana, of heroic size, the crown of whose head is 332 feet from the sidewalk.

At the Madison Avenue end, and extending on either side for a distance of 150 feet, there is an open arcade which covers the sidewalk, and the roof of which rests upon pillars of polished granite and brick piers. The top of the arcade is laid out as a promenade. The main entrance to the building is at the Madison Avenue end, through a triple doorway, and above it is the most prominent feature of exterior decoration, an elaborate arch in terra cotta set in relief into the wall.

From the entrance a lobby 100 feet long and 23 feet wide



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METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE, N. Y.  
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leads to a foyer, and this opens into the amphitheatre, which is the main feature of the building. This hall is 300 feet long, 200 feet wide, and 59 feet to the bottom of the girders. In the centre is the arena floor, 268 feet long and 122 feet wide, with parallel straight sides and semi-circular ends, and from this floor rise the box tiers and rows upon rows of seats, extending back to the walls. No attempt has been made at decoration, other than to leave all the construction open to view, and to paint the columns, roof-girders, etc., a light buff tint; and the beauty of the interior resides in the simplicity and in the light and graceful appearance of the construction.

Properly speaking there is no stage, but when one is required it is constructed at the east end. There are 110 arena boxes around the edges of the floor, 52 in the first tier, 26 in the second, and 26 in the third. With the floor left open for a performance like that of a circus, for example, there are seats for 5000 people. With the floor occupied by chairs, as for concerts, leaving space either in the centre or at the eastern end for a band-stand, the seating capacity is 9000, and there is standing room for many thousands more. On the opening night, June 16, 1890, with a concert by Edward Strauss's orchestra, there were present 17,000 people; and that ample provisions for exit had been made was shown in the fact that the amphitheatre was vacated after the performance in  $4\frac{1}{2}$  minutes.

There are ten exits, and all of them save on Fourth Avenue are on inclines without stairs.

In the Madison Avenue and Twenty-sixth Street corner of the building there is on the first floor a café 115 feet long and 70 feet wide. Above it is a concert-hall, elaborated in white and gold, with two balconies, the lower of which is divided into 36 open boxes. The seating capacity is 1100. Opening from the lower balcony there is an assembly or



dining hall, 69 by 32 feet; and connected therewith is a kitchen equipment.

Above the Madison Avenue end of the building there is a roof-garden 200 by 80 feet, with a small stage or bandstand. This was opened for the first time on May 30, 1892, and it is estimated that 3500 people were present.

At the Madison Avenue and Twenty-seventh Street corner, occupying a space 115 feet long and 70 feet wide, is the Garden Theatre. The auditorium, with eight boxes, a balcony, and a gallery, has a seating capacity of about 1200. The Garden Theatre was opened September 27, 1890.

The Metropolitan Opera House, which occupies the whole block bounded by Broadway, Seventh Avenue, Thirty-ninth and Fortieth streets, is perhaps the second establishment of importance in the country. It was built by a corporation and cost about \$1,500,000. The building is of buff brick, stone, and iron, in the Italian Renaissance style of architecture. The exterior dimensions are: on Broadway, 205 feet; Thirty-ninth Street, 284 feet; Seventh Avenue, 197 feet; Fortieth Street, 229 feet. The main auditorium is reached from the front through a vestibule 65 by 35 feet, and from either side through vestibules which are 33 feet wide and 70 and 50 feet in length, respectively. All three vestibules open into a semi-circular corridor which extends around the auditorium to the proscenium wall on either side.

The Opera House was opened October 22, 1883, and the interior was destroyed by fire August 27, 1892. On Tuesday, November 28, 1893, the building was again opened, with the interior entirely remodelled. The first circle of boxes originally placed on each side of the house is removed, and the floor lowered three and one half feet to allow three rows of chairs, forming the orchestra circle, to be placed around the entire auditorium under the *parterre* tier of boxes. The entire seating capacity is 3,200.

REMODELLED INTERIOR OF METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE, BROADWAY, BETWEEN THIRTY-  
EIGHTH AND THIRTY-NINTH STREETS, N. Y.  
J. B. McLEPATRICK & SON, ARCHITECTS.

