Re-remembering the Royal Theater: Public History, Place, and Urban History

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I. INTRODUCTION

Philadelphians have long seen South Street as a centerpiece in the city's history. Located just a half-mile south of Market Street, South Street served as the southern border of the city until 1854 when the townships of Moyamensing and Southwark became part of Philadelphia as a result of the Act of Consolidation.[1] Currently, South Street is a mix of boutiques, bars, restaurants, music stores, and the occasional tattoo parlor. On warm weekends, traffic comes to a near stand-still on the one-way street and the sidewalks teem with people. As a popular website states, "visitors, residents, teenagers and adults, preppies and punk rockers, artists and attorneys all mix seamlessly together," looking for sensory stimulation and consumer opportunities in this eclectic enclave.[2] South Street has become iconic of Philadelphia and it is a suggested destination for all new visitors to the city.

While the current image of South Street seems almost inseparable from the fabric of present-day Philadelphia, there was a time when this landmark was to be buried. The growth of a car culture in America, rapid suburbanization after World War II, a decrease in the urban financial base, and urban revitalization programs all converged to create an urban design plan which placed the car at the forefront of planning. With profit as the central motivating factor, downtown businessmen and city planners made highways a centerpiece of planning.[3] Consequently, planners designed highways that indiscriminately cut through downtowns because they believed that the new roadways would allow greater access to city centers. In New York and New Orleans, for example, new roadways cut through established neighborhoods and

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[1] Robert I. Alotta, *Mermaids, Monasteries, Cherokees and Custer: The Stories Behind Philadelphia Street Names* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1990).
[2] Official Visitor Site for Greater Philadelphia, 1998, <http://www.gophila.com/C/Philly_Favorites/380/U/South_Street/1173.html>, (March 31, 2009).
[3] James Howard Kuntsler, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 89.

destroyed generations of organic urban growth. Although planners and politicians believed expressways were necessary for continued growth, many citizens fought against the inevitable destruction these projects brought to their communities. These conflicts raised significant questions. Who had ownership over contested urban space? Did planners and politicians have say over how the land should be used or were residents with neighborhood roots entitled to their homes? Journalist and activist Jane Jacobs argued that expressways "eviscerate great cities."[4] Though they had been overlooked in the past, local residents began to take control in shaping the future of their communities nationwide.

Philadelphia was not immune to this planning predicament. First proposed in 1945, the Crosstown Expressway offered an east-to-west high-speed expressway connection between the Delaware and Schuylkill Expressways. It would run fifty-feet below ground level, uncovered, along the South Street corridor. Consequently, the expressway would have created a one-square block wide canyon across upper South Philadelphia. Debate over the proposed expressway raged throughout Philadelphia communities, city hall, development organizations, and city planning organizations for four decades. The debate reached its peak during the late-1960s and early-1970s as community members saw the effect expressway construction had throughout the nation. Residents of upper South Philadelphia did not want to witness similar fragmentation along South Street and so, during the 1960s, a number of community organizations from the impoverished South Street quarter mobilized in opposition to the expressway.

My thesis examines this South Street community and its concerns during the 1960s and early 1970s. Examining the circumstances of the community provides a better understanding of

[4] Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 4.

the key factors that shaped its response to the planned expressway. While the story of the Crosstown Expressway is a critical component of Philadelphia history and the history of evolutions in city planning as a whole, it is the largely unknown story of a small South Street community that sheds new light on the impact of evolving trends in urban development and city planning on urban populations and communities. My examination of city planning moves from a broad interpretation of regional and national planning efforts to an in-depth and nuanced exploration of one community's response to a shifting landscape and evolving economic and political priorities.

I achieve this by examining one critical piece of the community: The Royal Theater. Opened in 1920, at 1524 South Street, the Royal Theater was the first black-run theater in Philadelphia and it sought to "provide [a] first-class theater for Negroes."[5] During its six-decade run, the 1,200 seat theater provided patrons with a range of entertainment. Musical legends such as Bessie Smith and Fats Waller performed there. First-run movies accompanied African American-run theater productions. The Royal even broadcasted heavyweight boxing matches.[6] The first half of the twentieth-century saw a growth in the number of theaters in Philadelphia, both African American and white. At the same time, and amid segregation, theaters reinforced and celebrated African American culture in African American communities. The Royal Theater was no exception.

I propose that we can use the Royal Theater as a gauge of the neighborhood's response to a time of potential physical and social upheaval. Through the activism of local coalitions, the

[5] Clay Dillon, "Royal Theatre Closed After 50 Yrs.; Now 'Gravestone' in a 'Dying Era'." *Philadelphia Tribune,* p. 1, December 7, 1968, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 12, 2010).
[6] See Image 1, p. 59 for a picture of the mural on the façade which highlights some of the Royal's most significant acts.

Crosstown Expressway was never built, thus saving the Royal Theater from being destroyed. As a tool for historical study, the story of the Royal Theater can be placed within a variety of historical discussions such as the decentralization of the American downtown, the evolution of urban planning, urban revitalization, suburbanization, the proliferation of automotive culture in America, and Civil Rights. This thesis tests these possibilities by using the Royal Theater to understand the evolution of the Crosstown Expressway controversy from the 1940s to the 1970s. Finally, even though the Royal Theater is currently vacant, its place on South Street makes it a site of public memory that can still be utilized by the community. I conclude by exploring a case study of theater rehabilitation that suggests one possible future for an otherwise forgotten theater.

II. THE CROSSTOWN IN CONTEXT

The story of the Royal Theater and its relationship to the Crosstown Expressway controversy touches on a variety of historiographical conversations. Among these, the most significant for my purposes include the decentralization of the American city, the significance of African American theaters during the first half of the twentieth-century, automobility in urban planning, and Public History projects that re-purpose old buildings. Each shed light on the Crosstown's significance.

Before I could understand the story of the Royal Theater and the Crosstown Expressway, I first had to grasp what was happening in American cities during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Robert M. Fogelson's *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (2001) challenged historians' assumptions about the forces that cause change in downtowns. Fogelson is curious about what transforms downtowns from thriving business districts into underutilized spaces. He is surprised by how quickly the change occurs in center cities and argues that it is usually a result of urban power struggles.[7]

Downtown is not a bottom-up history, but rather suggests that a few power-players had the ability to exert influence on the physical structure of the city. Fogelson believes that business interests promote change in the city. As suburbanization pulled more professionals away from the city during the 1940s, the presence of low-income residents who lived just outside the central business core became more glaring. In an effort to spur growth downtown, businessmen formed coalitions that advocated for slum-clearance projects, which they believed would attract middle class white people back downtown.

[7] Robert Fogelson, *Downtown: Its Rise and Fall, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 1-8.

Allison Isenberg's *Downtown America* (2004) follows Fogelson's argument about the centrality of commerce in the shaping and eventual decline of downtown. Unlike Fogelson, Isenberg centers her argument on commerce.[8] She argues that downtown was the place where city residents once did their entire daily shopping. But, Isenberg believes, decentralization perpetuated a cycle of downtown decline that lessened people's reliance on the downtown for their needs. As commercial interests waned, residents relocated outside the city. In Isenberg's estimation, the loss of downtown commerce was at the center of urban decline.

Downtown decentralization left an indelible mark on the future of urban planning in the United States. As accessibility to the suburbs became easier for city-dwellers, downtown businessmen fought to maintain their piece of the economic pie. The goal of protecting center city economic interests brought forth a new type of urban planning that focused on the automobile and ways in which people could easily move in and out of the city. This new form of planning ran highways through downtown and irrevocably altered communities. As we will see, Philadelphia acquiesced to the power of the automobile. But it was not alone. After World War II, the Federal Highway Act (1956) spread highway construction in earnest. Scholarship on this topic is enormous, mainly because highway planning was so instrumental in the nation's postwar growth.

Almost from the inception of this new planning shift, theorists and scholars have lamented the spread of highways. In 1953, Lewis Mumford was one of the first and most vocal opponents of large-scale highway planning. In *The Highway and the City* (1963) Mumford recognizes the liberating power of the personal automobile, but argues how it, along with plans for its use, would be the downfall of the American city. Mumford saw the car as a compliment

[8] Alison Isenberg, *Downtown America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 1-12.

to mass transportation, but feared that it would likely supersede mass transit. He predicts a reliance on the automobile that will be so strong that it will destroy cities: "This overconcentration [of cars in cities], moreover, is rapidly destroying our cities, without leaving anything half as good in their place."[9] Though more of a theorist than a scholar, much of Mumford's critique of highway planning has come to pass.

More recently, John F. Bauman's study of highway planning in Philadelphia shows how local planners, in hopes of reviving economic growth in downtown Philadelphia and relieving traffic congestion through the center city, moved towards a planning program that utilized high speed expressways.[10] Bauman focuses his research on the construction of the Schuylkill Expressway, but he brings several other Philadelphia expressways into the discussion. Bauman's central argument aligns with much of what Mumford laid out almost forty-years prior. Mumford contends that highways will neither alleviate congestion in downtowns nor spur economic growth and Bauman proves Mumford's contention. From the day the Schuylkill Expressway opened, it was constantly congested during peak hours. Instead of relieving congestion, the expressway encouraged more cars to use the new high-speed thoroughfare.[11] Ultimately, Bauman faults the planners who did not heed the warnings of urban theorists such as Mumford.

Other historians have reconceptualized the discussion of automobiles in American life. According to Clay McShane, for instance, although many saw the growth of automobile supremacy as a given, other Americans during the late 1800s still thought of the street as a social space. As road technology advanced, however, the street slowly became only a means for

[9] Lewis Mumford, *The Highway and the City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 235.
[10] John F. Bauman, "The Expressway 'Motorists Loved to Hate': Philadelphia and the First Era of Postwar Highway Planning, 1943-1956", *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 115, no. 4 (October, 1991), p. 504.
[11] Ibid, pp. 513-17.

transportation.[12] McShane argues that the wide-spread popularity of the car was caused by the shift in automotive technology. But, he also wants scholars to recognize that a confluence of social factors aided the growth of American car culture. McShane helps us recognize that automobile culture was not a result of economic and planning decisions alone.

Evan Bennett discusses highway planning and its impact on cities in a different light. Previous historical discussions examined how highway planning affected major cities in the North. Much of the discussion focused on how cities hoped to bring people back to the city. The majority of the literature on the impact of planning argues that, as a result of the growth of interstate highways, Northern businesses had a network of roadways that allowed them to move away from their point of sale. In an effort to increase profits, following World War II, companies began relocating to the emerging Sun-Belt. In these Southern and Western states, companies found lower production costs, more space, and labor laws that promoted economic growth. Southern cities, therefore, hoped for the growth associated with interstate highway construction.[13]

Bennett uses the example of Starke, Florida, which is southwest of Jacksonville. He argues that early highway planning allowed for major growth in towns like Starke. But, as the national interstate highway system spread, towns like Starke, which were not located along those arteries, suffered from decline. While many cities prospered because of the expansion of the interstate system, others were left behind in its wake.[14] Bennett demonstrates how urban decline at the hands of the interstate system was not limited to the urban Northeast.

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[12] Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: The Automobile and the American City*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), Chapter 4.
[13] Evan P. Bennett, "Highways to Heaven or Roads to Ruin? The Interstate Highway System and the Fate of Starke, Florida," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (Spring 2000), p. 453.
[14] Ibid, pp. 451-52.

In those urban centers, however, community-based organizations formed to combat displacement. In a few instances, these grassroots organizations succeeded in thwarting expressway construction. Raymond Mohl acknowledges the impact of grassroots organizations, but he argues against crediting them with too much success. He argues that grassroots organizations must be recognized along with a shift in the "political, legislative and bureaucratic environment of Washington D.C." While Congress responded to oppositional grassroots movements, they also considered the position of various influential special-interest groups.[15]

Jeremy Packer expands the discussion of suburbanization with the concept of automobility. Packer presents a three-part definition of automobility: 1) automobiles increased mobility for their owners, 2) new driving technologies removed physicality from the automobile experience, and 3) automobiles insulated their owners from the outside world.[16] Packer also argues that with the 1936 publication of the *Man and the Motorcar* safety manual, the automobile was seen to be a way of creating a better American citizen. Driver's education courses, for example, taught Americans how to be responsible drivers, which in turn transformed them into good citizens.[17] Packer's analysis provides a new way of thinking about the growth of transportation-based planning. In his formulation, automobility becomes a moral imperative. One must own an automobile if one wants to belong. This way of thinking arguably fueled the increased number of cars on the road and the expansion of roadways that were needed to accommodate them.

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[15] Raymond Mohl, "The Interstates and the Cities: The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Freeway Revolt, 1966-1973," *The Journal of Policy History* 20, no. 2 (2008), pp. 193-94.
[16] Jeremy Packer, *Mobility Without Mayhem: Safety, Cars, and Citizenship*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 293.
[17] Ibid, p. 4.

Finally, Jeffrey R. Brown, Eric A. Morris and Brian D. Taylor argue that planners had ideas of how to integrate highways into cities but state highway departments and engineers were only concerned with maximizing the number of cars a roadway could carry and not the spaces destroyed by the roadway's path. This is significant because the state highway department and engineers were responsible for managing the project's funds, and they had final say regarding a highway's location.[18] Automobility paired with highway-centric planners created a mutually beneficial relationship of automobile-focused growth, but this new growth came at the detriment of cities.

Despite warnings, planners, engineers, and state highway departments pursued aggressive road projects that ignored social concerns and community bonds. The threat posed by highway construction would have been felt acutely at the Royal Theater, which like theaters throughout the nation, had become a community center. Clovis Semmes argues that theaters within African American communities were vital to the communities' identity. He details the history of the Regal Theater, an African American theater in an African American neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, between 1928 and 1968. He argues that the Regal Theater not only served as an entertainment space but strengthened community and maintained black culture.[19] The main goal of the Regal Theater was to show as many African American-produced performances as possible, including films, live music, dance, and comedy. The Regal was most known for its plays. According to Semmes, plays reinforced the concept of African American community and cultural norms. The utilization of community norms was significant during the life of the theater, especially in its early days. Segregation created a space which was uniquely African

[18] Jeffrey R. Brown, Eric A. Morris and Brian D. Taylor, "Planning for Cars in Cities: Planners, Engineers, and Freeways in the 20th Century", *Journal of the American Planning Association* 75, no. 2 (Spring 2009), pp. 163-65.
[19] Clovis E. Semmes, *The Regal Theater and Black Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 8.

American, and this allowed for a freedom which would not have been achievable within a white theater.

Semmes also argues that the African American community was able to exercise a sense of empowerment when color lines were crossed in the theater. Though the Regal was predominately an African American theater, white patrons frequently attended performances. When African American performers performed in white theaters, they often revamped their performances to appeal to the sensibilities of white audiences. Conversely, white patrons of the Regal were forced to accept cultural norms of the African American community. This created a uniquely black space where African Americans could be themselves even in the presence of white patrons.[20]

Patronage of theaters, however, began to decline by the mid-1950s due to the advances in home technologies and suburbanization. Semmes attributes the shift to a rise in television viewership and the Regal was not immune. At the same time, desegregation diffused the black middle-class to the suburbs and consequently the theater lost much of its audience. By the 1960s, it had fallen into disrepair. Semmes argues that all of these factors contributed to the eventual demise of the Regal Theater.[21]

Like Semmes, Janna Jones tells the story of six different theater houses in major cities across the American South. Jones analyzes how Americans choose to think about and preserve the past. Similar to Semmes, she argues that the theater became a space in which societal norms were reinforced. Jones discusses how specific Southern movie palaces attempted to create a space that attracted middle-class patrons. The Southern movie palace differentiated itself from the working-class theater with the presence of opulent interior decoration, air-conditioning, and

[20] Ibid, pp. 1-42.
[21] Ibid, pp. 171-214.

uniformed ushers who created a sense of order. [22] Both scholars agree about the centrality of the theater space to the American city during the first half of the twentieth-century. Just as Semmes identifies a golden-age for the Regal Theater, which was followed by steady decline, Jones confirms this observation in her discussion of theaters.[23]

Semmes examines a Northern urban city, whereas Jones focuses on multiple Southern cities. Jones' exploration of Southern decentralization differs from Semmes' interpretation because Jones describes Southern cities that were less densely populated. We can infer that decentralization takes a different shape in the South. Jones discusses decentralization in the South, but *The Southern Movie Palace* is an exploration into how a community relates to its past through preservation. The theaters that Jones highlights have been used as centerpieces for neighborhood revitalization in their respective cities. Ultimately, Jones asks the important question, that I will revisit later: how should such a space be utilized?

Both books provide a framework for analyzing the place of the theater in urban America. Both scholars explore the history of their chosen theaters and analyze how these spaces fit within a larger historiographical discussion. The comparison of Southern decentralization with Northern decentralization presents a critical lens in thinking about community and place. Both works highlight how a constantly evolving urban America, shifting wealth, and decentralization led to the eventual decline of once revered spaces.

This brief examination of recent scholarship allows us to put the story of the Royal Theater and the Crosstown Expressway into a national context. Growth in suburban development during the first half of the twentieth-century coupled with a top-down business

[22] Janna Jones, *The Southern Movie Palace: Rise, Fall and Resurrection*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), pp. 19-30.
[23] Ibid, pp. 31-9.

focus on slum-clearance diminished downtown commerce throughout the country. Simultaneously, the growth of the automobile industry and automobility spurred a new national transportation-based planning model. This happened just as urban African American communities were creating new cultural institutions in the wake of the Great Migration. During World War I, and in the years following the war, at least 330,000 African Americans migrated from the southern United States to cities of the North and West. African Americans were enticed by the prospect of new industrial jobs.[24] As African Americans began to settle in new cities, they sought to create institutions that reflected their community. As we will see, these changes happened as profoundly in Philadelphia as they did elsewhere in the United States.

[24] John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2000), pp. 374-6.

III. CROSSTOWN EXPRESSWAY

As we have seen, a major shift in transportation planning took place across the United States after World War II. Planners began to design around the use of the automobile in a way that had never been done before. Urban areas bore the brunt of this change and this phenomenon would have lasting effects throughout the nation. Philadelphia was not spared when it came to automobile-centric planning. The proposed Crosstown Expressway was one of the most highly-contested of these projects in Philadelphia because it was designed to cut through one of the city's most established African American communities. In this section, I explore the controversial history of the Crosstown Expressway and how localized activism contributed to the removal of the expressway from Philadelphia's highway master plan.

The middle decades of the twentieth-century saw major changes in American cities. Due in part to greater access to automobiles and the growth of the suburban housing market, white Americans left the city for the suburbs by the thousands. Cities responded by trying to spur new growth and one method was the construction of new, urban expressways. Planners and policy-makers intended for these new projects to be the panacea for ailing cities. However, instead of rescuing cities, many of these roadways destroyed urban communities across the United States.

Before the personal automobile became the transportation mode of choice, many people utilized public transportation, particularly the trolley. During the late nineteenth-century, trolleys pushed the boundaries of cities outwards because they allowed people to live farther from the downtown. The trolley created a "hub and spoke" model of development. Wherein the trolley embarked from its downtown 'hub' and travelled along its 'spoke' to suburban stations. Residents lived close to the trolley lines and development along the trolley routes occurred at a

rapid pace. Development between the spokes occurred much slower. The automobile made it possible to develop the spaces between the spokes.[25]

The end of World War II ushered in a new vision for urban planning in aging American industrialized cities. John F. Bauman notes that "the war had diverted attention from the basic maintenance of city property. Blight and decay engulfed an ever-widening region of the central-city."[26] The result was a type of planning which moved toward the decentralization of the city and an increased focus on suburbanization. No longer were cities going to provide all the daily needs for their inhabitants. New communities outside of city centers proliferated and, at the center of this shift was the growing number of cars on the road. More cars meant greater mobility, which in turn contributed to the suburbanization of America.

Planners faced two options. The traditional strategy centered on the infrastructural development of mass transportation and public space. These initiatives focused exclusively on increasing the quality of life within the city. The other option was to yield to the power of the automobile and to place it at center stage.[27] Jane Jacobs argued that planners gave-in to "the simple needs of automobiles." "A growing number of planners and designers," she wrote, "have come to believe that if they can only solve the problems of traffic, they will thereby have solved the major problems of cities."[28] Jacobs believed that the city is a complex, living organism in which quick fixes do not work.

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[25] McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path*, Chapter 2.
[26] John F. Bauman, *Public Housing, Race and Renewal: Urban Planning in Philadelphia, 1920-1974*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), p. 79.
[27] Fogelson, *Downtown*, Chapters 5 & 6.
[28] Jacobs, *Death*, p. 7.

Robert Moses, arguably one of the most prolific builders in New York City's history, was the most prominent proponent of automobile-centered planning and Jane Jacobs disdained Moses because of his lack of residential considerations in his designs.[29] One of Moses' most controversial designs was the Cross-Bronx Expressway, which indiscriminately cut across the neighborhoods of the South Bronx. The construction of Moses' design forced the clearing of pre-existing communities that had been vibrant for generations. Raymond Mohl argues that the expressway accelerated urban blight and isolated the South Bronx.[30]

Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses represented the extremes of a planning spectrum from which Philadelphia sought a model. Philadelphia planners identified more readily with Moses than with Jacobs. In 1945, Robert Mitchell, who was the executive director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, proposed the Crosstown Expressway. The Crosstown Expressway was to be part of a larger loop intended to encircle the entire central business district of Philadelphia. By 1959, construction of three-fourths of the loop had begun and all three expressways are currently still in use. The three roads are the Delaware Expressway, which travels north-south along the western shore of the Delaware River; its parallel, the Schuylkill Expressway which travels north-south along the western side of the Schuylkill River; and the Vine Street Expressway, which travels east-west just north of downtown and connects the Schuylkill and Delaware Expressways. The belief was that further development of the city's expressway system would match future economic development.[31]

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[29] Jacobs, *Death*, pp. 131, 367

[30] Mohl, "The Interstates," p. 196.

[31] See Janet Reiner, "The Cross-town Expressway Case," June 16, 1967, Housing Association of Delaware Valley Collection, Box 54, Crosstown Expressway Folder, Philadelphia, Temple University, Urban Archives. See Image 2, p. 61, for a map of the proposed Crosstown Expressway route and other expressways.

The goal of the proposed loop around the city was to promote economic growth within Center City Philadelphia. Mitchell and his planners believed that high-speed access into Philadelphia would serve as a catalyst in reversing the city's declining economic base. The expressways were not, however, the only hopes for growth. The *Evening Bulletin* reported in 1968 that the city invested approximately twenty-four million dollars into the Philadelphia International Airport to support the anticipated increase in traffic. The hope was to form a symbiotic relationship between the city and the airport.[32]

Mitchell originally planned for the Crosstown Expressway to traverse the city at Lombard Street, but the city planning commission feared that expressway construction would interfere with revitalization efforts happening along Lombard Street.[33] City planners officially moved the route of the Crosstown Expressway to South Street in 1959, which set in motion a process of disinvestment. The announcement of the new South Street route all but halted any plans for capital investment in the area. Speculators purchased many properties along the street and allowed them to stand vacant. By 1969, almost one-quarter of all the stores along South Street were vacant.[34]

All the while, the 1963 mayoral election campaign of James H. J. Tate made Crosstown Expressway planning a major public issue. Tate took office in 1962 after Richardson Dilworth resigned his post in a failed gubernatorial election. During the 1963 election, Tate pledged to increase economic growth within the city. Doing that, however, meant winning the support of

[32] Burton A. Chardack, "Dream Highway Went Nowhere for 23 years, Ending in Detour of Civil Rights and Politics," *Evening Bulletin*, August 25 1968. Evening Bulletin Newspaper Clipping Collection, Philadelphia, Temple University, Urban Archives.
[33] "South Street Area Threatened by Expressway," *The Evening Bulletin*, October 8, 1959, *The Evening Bulletin* Clipping Collection, Philadelphia, Temple University, Urban Archives.
[34] Peter H. Binzen "The Shadow Crosstown" *The Evening Bulletin,* June 3, 1969, p. 1. The Evening Bulletin Clipping Collection, "misc prior to 1970" folder, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia.

the Philadelphia business community. Business interests within the city believed that the Crosstown Expressway would be successful in promoting economic development. John Bracken, who was President of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce and supporter of the Expressway, said:

> In terms of general economic need, the Crosstown Expressway…would be a major factor in rejuvenating the Center City business and retail district, industrial activity in appropriate Center City and South Philadelphia areas and the port and port-connected industry. It would also support the major planned expansion of the Philadelphia International Airport.[35]

Edwin Folk, the director of Philadelphia's Citizens Committee on City Planning, echoed Bracken's thoughts: "The only solution [to growing Philadelphia's economy] possible is a highway because that is the only thing there is money for."[36] The convergence of economic, political, and commercial interests moved the Crosstown Expressway from a proposed line on a map to a probable public works project.

It was arguable whether a new expressway in the middle of Philadelphia would encourage economic development. It was clear, however, that the highway would displace a large population of residents, businesses, and neighborhoods. The expressway would have run straight through the predominately white neighborhoods of Grays Ferry, Queen Village, and Bella Vista. But, even greater damage would be done to black communities. By 1950, Philadelphia had the third largest black population in the United States.[37] According to the 1960 U.S. Census, 5,730 people, of all races, lived along the South-Bainbridge corridor, all of whom

[35] Lenora Berson, "The South Street Insurrection," *Philadelphia Magazine*, September 1969, p. 88. Housing Association of Delaware Valley Collection, Acc. 107-239, Box 54, "Technical Argument Against Crosstown Expressway" folder, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia.
[36] Ibid, p. 90.
[37] Bauman, *Public Housing*, p. 84.

would need to be relocated because of the expressway. Of the 2,069 housing units in the corridor only 17% were owner occupied and what was more startling was 85% of the total households were occupied by non-white families. The majority of residents were renters who did not possess the same rights as owners, which created an obvious inequity in those who were to be displaced.[38] For these reasons, the construction of the Crosstown Expressway would have been devastating to the South Street community.

Construction began on three of the four expressways by 1959, but not the Crosstown. This was due to the highly politicized climate surrounding it. Environmentalism and the Civil Rights Movement had shifted the paradigm for new planning projects. These factors, which city planners typically neglected in earlier projects, could suddenly stop construction before it even started. As Robert Fisher and Eric Shragee argue, in the 1940s and 1950s, Americans willingly complied with the demands of the federal government. The United States had emerged from World War II a superpower and most Americans felt that the government must know what is best for its citizens.[39] But, by the 1960s, activists believed that the human cost of urban expressways was too high. Americans throughout the 1960s also feared the potential for urban race riots. A 1965 memo written by R.W. Tucker, a white member of the Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting and a political activist, warned that:

> East of Broad Street there is a black community increasingly embittered and radicalized – already partly destroyed by redevelopment, it sees the Crosstown as the other half of a white man's pincers movement whose purpose is to get rid of what is possibly the oldest and most stable urban black community in America. I

[38] The Census statistics were quoted in the Citizens Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community initial public statement after the group formed in the spring of 1967.
[39] Robert Fisher and Eric Shragee, "Contextualizing Community Organizing: Lessons from the Past, Tension in the Present, Opportunities for the Future," in *Transforming the City: Community Organizing and the Challenge of Political Change*, ed. Marion Orr (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007), p. 199.

> am convinced that actual building of the Crosstown would have one of two likely results (or both): (1) violence either sporadically or possibly amounting to a year-long urban insurrection river-to-river, or (2) apathy and despair, which in the long run does even more to create the potential for violence.[40]

Because the threat of a racial uprising was a reality, city officials were more receptive to the concerns of the black community.

Despite concerns, the election of Mayor Tate and the unveiling of the Center City Comprehensive Plan in 1960, which included the Crosstown Expressway, had built momentum for the impending construction. In the spring of 1964, the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (PRA) established an office at 2801 Wharton Street, in Grays Ferry, to educate residents within the path of the expressway about construction dates, streets closures, and which houses were going to be razed. It encouraged residents to maintain the value of their homes so they would receive fair-market value for them. The PRA wanted to ensure that residents who found themselves within the path of the Crosstown Expressway were duly compensated for their property.[41] They also hoped to reduce blight because, until the ground is actually broken, any major project has the possibility of being derailed. One reality associated with the proposal of a major public work project is the depreciation of the land. My conclusion is that if the city government can convince residents to maintain property values, they can stave-off blight if the project does not come to fruition. In this manner the city covered all its bases regardless of what happened to the project.

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[40] Memo. to Citywide Coalition Against the Crosstown Expressway, 1965, Housing Association of Delaware Valley collection, Acc. 107-239, Box 54, "Proposed Study of the Impact of Expressway" folder, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia. The sentiments in Tucker's note are significant because they followed the three-day Columbia Avenue Riots in North Philadelphia that stemmed from simmering racial tension.

[41] Rowland T. Moriarty, "Redevelopment Office in Grays Ferry Prepares Residents for Changeover," *The Evening Bulletin*, April 28, 1964, p. 50, *The Evening Bulletin* Clipping Collection, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia.

Despite these efforts, localized activism started to take hold. At least seven neighborhood associations voiced their concerns and fears about the Crosstown Expressway.[42] Though each group agreed that they did not want the Crosstown Expressway to be built through its neighborhood, conflicting priorities such as housing, noise pollution, and racial ostracizing prevented the concerns of localized institutions from gaining traction. If the neighborhood associations wanted to be successful in bringing the construction of the Crosstown Expressway to a halt, they were going to need to find a way to be more cooperative. The Crosstown Expressway needed to be framed as an issue which would negatively affect all Philadelphians. Though the expressway's route cut a multi-racial swath across the city, the bulk of the displacement was going to impact the black communities and this would not garner the wide-reaching outrage necessary for a successful city-wide protest. White Center City residents needed to be included for the protest to be successful.

In this way, localized protest could only be taken so far. More organized protest began in April 1967 with the establishment of the Citizens Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community (CCPDCC). This inter-neighborhood coalition sought to stop construction of the Crosstown Expressway. Originally headed by George Dukes, the CCPDCC attempted to make the Crosstown Expressway a wider reaching issue.[43] As a group, it was able

[42] A few of the neighborhood organizations were: Society Hill Civic Association, Grays Ferry Community Council, Queens Village Civic Association, Hawthorne Community Council, Area I Community Action Council, Southwest Central Community Council, and Schuylkill-Grays Ferry Neighbors Association. Compilation of community group names was found in memo, Housing Association of Delaware Valley Collection, Box 54, "Crosstown Expressway" Folder, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia.

[43] George Dukes was civil rights and political figure in Philadelphia. He served as co-chair of the Citizens Committee to Preserve and Develop the Crosstown Community, as well as president of the Southwest Center City Community Council. He unsuccessfully ran for State Senate in 1970 but all of his activism for civil rights led to his appointment as head of the civil rights division of the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection in 1974. Information on George T. Dukes from various articles in: *The Evening Bulletin*, *The Evening Bulletin* Clipping Collection, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia.

to incorporate the interests of disparate organizations into one cohesive message. The CCPDCC also had legal support by way of member Robert Sugarman. Sugarman, a Center City attorney, served as the legal intermediary between CCPDCC and the state and local government. He was able to vocalize the concerns of residents within a legal framework.[44] Even though the CCPDCC had a number of prominent members who were able to increase the visibility of the organization, most of its membership consisted of concerned residents of the South Street corridor.

During the time of the CCPDCC, the shift in urban planning ideology had significant ramifications on how planners sought to shape the city. The Philadelphia Planning Commission had grown to recognize during the previous two decades the social impact of its projects. During the 1940s, planners did not weigh the social costs of their ideas. Robert Mitchell recalled how, "I picked up a pencil and drew a line across a map. That line became the Crosstown Expressway. It was based on nothing more than a belief that the highway loop around the central business district should be closed. We thought in terms of projects, not people."[45] But by 1967, even Mitchell, who was originally an avid supporter of the Crosstown Expressway, had become a vocal opponent. He warned that, "if we build on South Street we further alienate the black community and put another barrier between it and City Hall. We cannot afford to do that. The social cost is too great."[46] Mitchell's statement illustrates a local example of the paradigmatic shift in planning which was happening nationwide. The *human scale* and the impact planning had on citizens had become relevant to planning projects.

[44] Housing Association of Delaware Valley Collection, Box 54, "South Philadelphia Community Development Corporation for Citizen's Committee Involvement – 1967" folder, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia.
[45] Robert Mitchell cited in, Berson, "The South Street Insurrection," p. 91.
[46] Ibid.

In November 1967, Mayor Tate announced that the Crosstown Expressway was losing steam. He cited a short-fall in access to housing for all the residents who would need to be relocated. He also believed that the Crosstown Expressway would have deleterious effects upon the city. By the spring of 1968, Tate deemed the Crosstown Expressway dead and ordered the South Street corridor to be redeveloped.[47] Within a few weeks of Mayor Tate's announcement, the CCPDCC hired the architectural and planning firm of Venturi & Rauch on a pro-bono contract, to plan the Crosstown Community in a manner the CCPDCC believed would benefit the residents and encourage growth. Venturi & Rauch proposed their development plan to the City Planning Commission as a viable alternative to the blight and decay South Street had suffered.[48] Finally, in June, the City Planning Commission officially deleted the Crosstown Expressway from the city's comprehensive plan, which outlined all possible future projects. The battle over the Crosstown Expressway was not over, however, and would reignite within the year.

In 1968, at the urging of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, Mayor Tate reopened the question of the Crosstown Expressway and appointed Fred Corleto, the City Managing Director, to head-up a fact-finding commission, which would consider the pros and cons of construction. The CCPDCC became even more active as a local coalition. Executive members made themselves a constant presence at Corleto Commission meetings. They consistently pushed the commission to present them with definitive information which would prove the necessity for the Crosstown Expressway. They attended local and state hearings and even

[47] Dates from "Chronology of Significant Events in Relation to the Crosstown Expressway, 1947 to 1970" as produced by the CCPDCC. Chronology located at the Urban Archives of Temple University in the "Crosstown Expressway" box.
[48] *The Philadelphia Crosstown Community*, Venturi, Scott Brown, Associates, Inc., Neighborhood revitalization plan and report VSBA submitted to the City Planning Commission, 1970, http://www.vsba.com/pdfs/PhiladelphiaCrosstownCommunity01.pdf, accessed April 10 2009.

submitted an official petition with approximately 200 signatures of local residents. The CCPDCC wanted its flyer campaign to be the most wide-reaching of its efforts and it arguably was. Its message no longer emphasized race. Success for the CCPDCC could only be achieved if the concerns raised were applicable to citizens north of the construction who were overwhelmingly white. If one lived four blocks north of the proposed construction, the threat of relocation would not resonate with that individual; especially if the overwhelming majority of people to be relocated were black.[49]

The CCPDCC designed multiple flyers, which it handed-out, placed on car windshields, and stuffed in mailboxes. The central message was the same in each of the flyers: the quality of life would be negatively impacted if the Crosstown Expressway was built. Some flyers focused on increased traffic congestion and some placed an emphasis on reduced air quality. Others stressed an increase in noise pollution. The flyers highlighted quality of life issues rather than displacement. The CCPDCC was critiqued for the absence of displacement as an issue, but it was a likely necessity given with whom the issue most needed to resonate.[50]

In response to the awareness raised by the CCPDCC to fight the Crosstown Expressway, Corleto commissioned an outside planning firm, Alan M. Voorhees & Associates, to compile a comprehensive study on the necessity of the Crosstown Expressway.[51] Voorhees and his staff worked tirelessly over the next nine months to produce a thorough examination of the expressway for the Corleto Commission. Given the cost-benefit analysis of the expressway, Voorhees deemed the Crosstown Expressway unnecessary and he concluded that the expressway

[49] Housing Association of Delaware Valley Collection, Box 54, "Crosstown Expressway Coalition" folder, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia.
[50] Ibid., See images 4-5, pp. 63-4, for examples of the flyers.
[51] Housing Association of Delaware Valley Collection, Box 54, "Voorhees – Transportation Study for South Central Philadelphia" folder, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia.

would not serve the regional demand for through traffic. Also, the Crosstown Expressway would have a negative impact on the functionality of the neighborhoods of upper South Philadelphia. Voorhees presented the Corleto Commission with nine options for how to proceed within three categories: full-expressway, partial-expressway, or no-expressway.

The Voorhees report essentially put an end to the proposal of the Crosstown Expressway. The controversy ignited by the Crosstown Expressway spanned three-decades but the final version of the debate marked a change in how planners viewed the city and how future projects would proceed. The challenge, as a researcher, is that there is no way to quantify the role community organizations played in preventing the construction of urban highways. That said, community members felt empowered to protect their homes and lives. Citizens not only voiced their discontent, but they were able to see the results of their activism. Neighborhood coalitions refused to acquiesce to the government as had been done in previous decades. Their resistance to the expressway slowed the construction process, which forced the government to look deeper into their plans, and understand all the ramifications of construction before they could proceed.

Without the CCPDCC, perhaps the Corleto Commission might never have been formed and South Street and the Royal Theater would be nothing more than a highway. Lou Rosenberg, who was a board member of the CCPDCC, summed-up the fight against the Crosstown Expressway this way:

> The Crosstown Expressway will either be the first of the highways in Philadelphia not to be built or the last that is built. They will never build the 52nd Street Bypass, the Cobbs Creek Expressway or the freeway on Girard Avenue. The fight is being made here. We may win the Crosstown battle or we may lose it, but the war against expressways inside cities has begun.[52]

[52] Berson, "The South Street Insurrection," p. 182.

By the end of the 1970s, the Federal Government recognized the importance of the neighborhood within urban revitalization when it created a National Commission on Neighborhoods. The Commission was charged with influencing public policy with the goal of preserving neighborhoods.[53] The battle over the Crosstown Expressway marked a point in history when changing beliefs about the role of neighborhoods in cities and community activism converged to impact policy planning nationwide.

[53] Meredith Savery, "Instability and Uniformity: Residential Patterns in Two Philadelphia Neighborhoods, 1880-1970," in *The Divided Metropolis: Social and Spatial Dimensions of Philadelphia, 1800-1975*, eds. William W. Cutler, III and Howard Gillette, Jr., (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), p.192.

IV. URBAN PLANNING AND THE DECLINE OF SOUTH STREET

The proposed Crosstown Expressway planning affected much of the neighborhood in the vicinity of the route but South Street was the most directly affected part of the community. What had been a thriving commercial strip transformed into a thoroughfare where citizens were distrustful of business owners and people feared for their safety after dusk. Disinvestment in South Street was undeniable and much can be attributed to the possible construction of the Crosstown Expressway. Even though the Crosstown was never built, there still were real estate transactions and transformative activities, and South Street's state is a testament to how even unsuccessful planning projects can adversely impact communities.

The decline of South Street was inextricably linked to the changing ethos of urban planning which occurred after World War II. Many downtown areas experienced a marked decline in their daytime populations. According to Robert Fogelson, "decentralization was a 'disease' afflicting the central business district of all American cities."[54] Fogelson shows how planners believed that people who left the city for the suburbs wanted to utilize the city for shopping but they were limited because of limited access.[55] "You could get anything you wanted on South Street," according to Dr. I. Henry Grant. Grant, who had a dental practice at 1506 South Street for forty-years, discussed how the street changed over the years. He recalled "two different eras," and he attributed the decline to the Crosstown Expressway and simmering racial tensions which eventually caused a full-blown riot.[56]

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[54] Fogelson, *Downtown* pp. 222-28.
[55] Ibid, p. 249.
[56] Ruth Roland, "Reflections and Predictions: Dr. Grant Views South St., Home of His Business for 40 Years." *Philadelphia Tribune* , March 30, 1979, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (June 9, 2010).

As South Street declined and blight began to take hold, racial tensions bubbled over. The Crosstown Expressway created an environment in which members of the community who could not leave were forced to endure deteriorating neighborhood conditions. Residents felt that they were being marginalized by the city and taken advantage of by white business owners. These factors created a powder-keg.

The largest and most destructive case of racial violence happened in 1967 when a major riot broke-out. Jay Weisman, of Weisman Hardware on the 1500 block of South Street, was working for his elderly father when he had an altercation with an older African American man. The altercation started when Weisman, who was white, accused the man of attempting to steal a linoleum rug from outside of the store. The encounter escalated and it was reported that Weisman hit the man in the face as this small fight steadily intensified. Within three hours of the initial incident, Police Commissioner Frank Rizzo dispatched over 500 police officers to the scene where they encountered enraged residents who were throwing rocks, bottles, or anything they could get their hands on. The riot dispersed by nightfall, but not without significant property damage and a number of officers and civilians sent to the hospital.[57]

The aftermath of the riot exposed many of the factors that created the circumstances that precipitated it in the first place. Community members believed South Street, and the surrounding neighborhood, had been on a steady decline since the 1940s. African American residents felt that they were being pushed out of their homes to make way for urban renewal projects. But, those who remained in the neighborhood believed they were being overcharged by white merchants for some of the most basic necessities.

[57] ""Bloody" Race War Averted by Police." *Philadelphia Tribune,* June 13, 1967, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (June 28, 2010).

Residents claimed that simple services from the city had been inexplicably withheld. They believed that the Police Department reduced its presence in the neighborhood, that the Streets Department never replaced the street lights, and that the Sanitation Department had not collected garbage or cleaned the streets in almost two-years. These concerns were valid. Throughout the 1960s, for instance, the city converted its incandescent bulbs to brighter Mercury bulbs. In every annual report from 1960 to 1969, the Streets Department listed the streets that received the new bulbs. Though a number of streets north of the Royal Theater received these new, brighter lights, neither South Street nor the streets directly to the south received them.[58]

The absence of a major police presence, also, left many of the businesses susceptible to robberies and violence. In fact, the *Tribune* published an article in 1969 highlighting how one South Street hotel had been robbed three times within a ten-day period. The repeated robbery of The Sahara Hotel was indicative of the level of crime occurring on South Street. South Street, west of Broad Street, fell under the jurisdiction of the 17th Police District. In its 1960 annual report, out of twenty-two districts, the 17th had the fifth highest number of homicides, the third highest of rapes, the fourth highest of robberies, and the third highest of assaults. This lack of basic services fostered a feeling of resentment towards the city and the white merchants, which erupted into violence.[59]

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[58] The Philadelphia Streets Department, which is the city agency that manages street-lights, does not break down their annual report into neighborhoods so it was a challenge to find tangible data regarding the city's absence in changing street-light bulbs. The only information I was able to find that would support community members' complaints was the lack of street-light conversions in the community. Information located in, Streets Department Annual Reports 1960-1990, 88.1, Box A-2780, Philadelphia City Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

[59] "Businessmen Call on Police to Clean Up South Street: Sahara Hotel Owner Held Up 3 Times In Period of 10 Days." *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 19, 1969, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (June 9, 2010); "Claim Exploit of Negroes Caused Riot: Responsible Citizens Criticize South St. Conditions Warn of Future Rioting If Changes Aren't Made." *Philadelphia Tribune*, June 13, 1967, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (June 28, 2010); Clay Dillon, "Royal Theatre Closed After 50 Yrs.; Now 'Gravestone' in a 'Dying Era'." *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 7, 1968, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 12, 2010); In my research, I was unable to find data that would support the anecdotal claims that there was a reduced police presence in the South Street area. I did find

Even as the 1960s drew to a close and Philadelphia attempted to revitalize neighborhoods that had been ravaged by blight, there was not enough financial backing to go around. In 1967, the city allocated $15 million for urban renewal, but that amount pales in comparison to the funds allocated for other projects: $21 million for Penn's Landing, $23 million for the Community College of Philadelphia campus, $41 million for the Vine Street Expressway and $61 million for the Crosstown Expressway.[60] Essentially the city was not committed to urban renewal as much as it was committed to major public works projects that would potentially bring more money into the city. This was evident along the length of South Street. In 1969, there were 821 properties on South Street with an approximate value of $7.6 million. They included 38 bars, 22 storefront churches, 27 barber and beauty shops, 39 second-hand stores, 71 building shells, and 189 vacant stores. The presence of so many vacant properties highlighted how reluctant the business community was to invest in South Street after the damage caused by the expressway.[61]

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the Philadelphia Police Department's annual reports in the Philadelphia City Archives which provided crime figures for the entire city, broken down by district. I looked through the annual reports for the entire decade and the figures for major crimes remain about the same for the decade. The 17th district remained one of the most violent districts in the city. Information located in, Police Annual Reports 1948-1990, Box A-997, Philadelphia City Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

[60]Len Lear, "Anti-Slum Budget Too Low, More Funds Needed fo Fight Blight, Says Councilon City Planning." *Philadelphia Tribune* , October 14, 1967, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 13, 2010).

[61] Peter H. Binzen "The Shadow Crosstown" *The Evening Bulletin*, June 3, 1969, p. 1, Housing Association of Delaware Valley collection, Acc. 107-239, Box 54, "misc prior to 1970" folder, Urban Archives, Temple University, Philadelphia; See images 10-12, pp. 69-70, for examples of the conditions on South Street during the 1960s.

V. THE ROYAL THEATER

It would be wrong to attribute the decline of South Street to the Crosstown Expressway alone. As I have shown, however, it is evident that just the possibility of the Crosstown traversing South Street set in motion a level of disinvestment which led to blight and contributed to racial violence. The Crosstown debate coincided with much of the active lifespan of the Royal Theater. From 1920 to 1970, The Royal Theater played a significant role in shaping the African American community of the western South Street district of Philadelphia. Before television, the theater was a community fixture where African American culture was celebrated alongside examples of American citizenship. The theater could not withstand, however, the disinvestment caused by the Crosstown Expressway debate. Even though the Crosstown Expressway was never constructed, preparations for it destroyed the theater and its community. The shell that remains is a visible memory of a rapidly changing neighborhood.[62]

The Royal Theater opened for business in 1920. It was significant because it was built to be a high-class theater venue and to "provide first-class theater to Negroes."[63] Before television, neighborhood theaters offered a wide-range of entertainment. The Royal was known for premiering newly released movies, staging theatrical performances, and even televising championship boxing matches during its later years. The Royal, like other African American theaters of the era, made available a space in which the African American community could be entertained by African American productions.

In this way, the Royal Theater resembled the Regal Theater that Clovis Semmes describes. According to Semmes, "the Regal Theater contributed to the maintenance of an

[62] See image 3, p. 62, for a timeline that highlights significant events in the history of the Royal Theater.
[63] Clay Dillon, "Royal Theatre Closed After 50 Yrs.; Now 'Gravestone' in a 'Dying Era'." *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 7, 1968, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 12, 2010);

authentic Black culture because performers, Black or non-Black, had to meet the aesthetic demands and norms of Black audiences." "At the Regal," he continues, " Black audiences effectively reinforced Black aesthetic norms through attendance and spending patterns and audience-based expressions of approval or disapproval."[64] The Royal Theater laid-down a similar groundwork in the empowerment of African American culture.

During World War II, for example, the Royal Theater used the power of the motion picture to show African Americans in a way they had not been previously portrayed. In 1942, the Royal Theater premiered *In This Our Life*, which was regarded by the *Philadelphia Tribune* as the first major motion picture to depict an African American in a "decent" way. Up to this point, the African American community had been fighting against the buffoon archetype which had become pervasive in the motion picture industry.[65] In 1944, the Royal Theater was the first theater in Philadelphia to show Frank Capra's *The Negro Soldier*. The film chronicles the contributions of African American soldiers during World War II.[66] In both cases, the Royal Theater was at the forefront of visual representations of the African American community. It was a physical location that created and celebrated a connective thread of shared culture.

The Royal Theater did not only serve as a place for the concretizing of African American culture but also as a place where African Americans could demonstrate their patriotism as American citizens. In her book, *A Consumer's Republic*, Lizabeth Cohen argues how during World War II, women were at the forefront of policing ration programs that were implemented at home. While women could not fight in the war, they were still able to express their support for

[64] For reading on cultural creation within the theater, see *The Regal Theater and Black Culture* by Clovis Semmes.
[65] E Rhodes. "Movie Shows Negro in New Kind of Role" *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 1 1942, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu (January 19, 2010).
[66] "The Negro Soldier" Opens At Royal Friday." *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 13, 1944, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 12, 2010).

their soldiers and their country. This allowed women a sense of equity of belonging in the eyes of American citizenship.[67] Cohen's argument can be applied to the Royal Theater during the period of World War II. Segregation still had a stronghold on much of the country and African Americans, even those who fought in the war, were still seen as being less than citizens. During the late summer and early fall of 1942, the patrons of the Royal Theater used their purchasing power to buy into the notion of American patriotism. September 1942 was dubbed "Salute to Our Heroes" month by the motion picture industry. Theaters across the country sold war bonds which helped in financing the American war effort. The Royal actually printed the names of patrons who purchased bonds in their weekly program and distributed the programs all throughout Philadelphia. Supporting the war effort was not only an individual's patriotic decision but was one which would be seen by the greater public. By the end of September, the Royal sold over $10,000 in war bonds. Not only were the bonds sold to patrons but the theater presented theater staff with bonds, purchased in their names by the theater.[68]

By the 1950s, the Royal Theater broadened its lineup as patrons became interested in other forms of entertainment. In September 1951, for example, the Royal Theater showed the boxing rematch between Sugar Ray Robinson and Roy Turpin. Just three months prior, Turpin, an Englishman, defeated the African American Robinson and won the world Middle-weight Championship. Robinson was the favorite and his defeat at the hands of an underdog produced one of the biggest stories of the year. The stipulation attached to Turpin's victory was that his

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[67] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, (New York: Vintage Press, 2003), p. 66. Also see Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, pp. 374-6

[68] For readings about War Bond selling and the Royal Theater see: "Royal Theatre To Help Whip Axis By Selling War Bonds To Patrons." *Philadelphia Tribune*, August 29, 1942, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 12, 2010); "Royal Theatre Opens Dive With War Bond Gifts To Aides; Standard To Follow Suit." *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 5, 1942, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 12, 2010); "Royal Theatre Sells $10,000 In War Bonds So Far In Sept." *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 19, 1942, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 12, 2010).

first title defense needed to be against Robinson three months later. With the highly-anticipated rematch scheduled, the stage was set for the Royal to make money by broadcasting the fight. The Royal quickly sold out leaving hundreds of people unable to gain access. As a consolation, management set-up loud speakers outside of the theater so the people on South Street could listen to the fight live. Robinson defeated Turpin as throngs of fans assembled outside and blocked traffic on South Street. Sixty police officers from various South Philadelphia districts prevented any violence.[69] Here, in 1951, African Americans were able to watch an African American boxer defeat a white man and share in his victory. The use of the theater, as a venue to broadcast a historic fight, underscores the theater's significance to the African American community of South Street.

Because of the significant role that the Royal Theater served in the community, the Crosstown Expressway proposal had a significantly negative impact on the physical structure. One of the most useful ways to judge the impact that the Crosstown had on the Royal is to examine property and land values, which were established by the local tax assessors during the period of the expressway. In 1942, the overall assessment of the Royal, which took into account the land value and building value, was $88,600. $21,350 was the value of the land and $67,250 was the value of the building. By this point in 1942, the expressway was slated to be built along Lombard Street so the theater would not have been directly affected. By 1966, after the Crosstown Expressway had been rerouted through South Philadelphia, it was obvious how the shift affected the theater's value. According to the tax ledger, the overall assessment was

[69] "Eager Throng In Vain Attempt To Enter Royal." *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 15 1951, pp. 1-2, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 12, 2010).

$43,700. The land was valued at $21,600 but the building value fell to $22,100.[70] This observation brings to light the level of disinvestment which occurred in the wake of the expressway. While this is not an absolute way to gauge what happened to the community, nor can the Crosstown Expressway be solely attributed in the decline in values, it does allow one to draw a very strong correlation.

Not only did the dollar value decline, but so did community value as shown by vandalism and neglect. In 1968, the *Philadelphia Tribune* reported that of the 1,000 seats in the theater, approximately half needed to be replaced on a monthly basis because patrons regularly slashed them. Cigarette burns and knife slashes were found on the movie screen. The cost of repairing the vandalism made it nearly impossible to sustain the theater. It closed that year.[71]

The Royal Theater, which was arguably one of the grandest African American theaters, had become a tattered image of its younger self. The Young Afro Americans, a "community-minded coalition" of South Philadelphia street gangs, purchased the Royal Theater in 1969 and staged variety shows there to fund a renovation and use the theater for community activities. Despite these efforts, the Royal finally closed for good in 1970.[72]

By the end of the 1960s, the Royal Theater was nothing more than a shadow of the elegance it once exemplified. The theater fell victim to circumstances larger than itself. The three decades of insecurity that came with the possibility of the Crosstown Expressway ravaged the South Street corridor and much of what existed there. It was not until the 1990s and early-2000s that the neighborhood began to rebound from its blight. Throughout the theater's life, it

[70] The Thirtieth Ward Tax Assessors Ledger is housed in a non-cataloged collection of the Philadelphia City Archives.
[71] Clay Dillon, "Royal Theatre Closed After 50 Yrs.; Now 'Gravestone' in a 'Dying Era'." *Philadelphia Tribune*, 7 December 1968, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 12, 2010).
[72] "Gangs Staging Show at Royal Honoring Fallen Dark Heroes." *Philadelphia Tribune* (1912-2001), February 8, 1969, http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.temple.edu/ (January 12, 2010).

contributed to the definition of a community. Without the theater, which was undermined by the Crosstown Expressway planning, the community lost a key pillar in its defense against the ravages of urban planning.

VI. PUBLIC HISTORY

Analyzing the Crosstown Expressway within the context of the Royal Theater allows us to think critically about the role of place in urban life. In her book, *The Power of Place*, Dolores Hayden discusses how place can be utilized by public historians to enrich shared memories within a community. Central to her discussion is a 1975 debate between Herbert Gans and Ada Louise Huxtable. Huxtable, who was an architecture critic, believed that monumental buildings should be preserved. The people who commissioned these buildings were people of significance, she argued, and their buildings tell the story of a community. In Huxtable's eyes, monumental structures were an extension of a larger power structure that defined whose stories should be told.[73] On the other hand, Herbert Gans believed in a bottom-up approach to thinking about architectural significance. Gans argued that vernacular buildings and the spaces where everyday citizens congregated deserve just as much attention as Huxtable's monumental buildings. Gans believed that public funds should not only be used to preserve high-architecture but also common spaces. He wrote that "private citizens are of course entitled to save their own past, but when preservation becomes a public act, supported with public funds, it must attend to everyone's past."[74] Gans fought for an inclusive history because history is not exclusively created by the elite class.

Hayden follows Gans' lead by exploring how place can be utilized by public historians as a tool of empowerment for marginalized groups, specifically women and racial minorities.

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[73] Ada Louise Huxtable and Herbert Gans debate as summarized by Dolores Hayden. Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 3-5.

[74] Herbert J. Gans, "Elite Architecture and the Landmarks Preservation Commision: A Response to Ada Louis Huxtable" *New York Times*, February 25, 1975, editorial page, letters column as it appears in *The Power of Place*, p. 3.

Hayden sees the power of place as "the power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizens' public memory, to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory." Public space can "help to nurture this more profound, subtle, and inclusive sense of what it means to be an American."[75] Herein lies the strength of *place.* It has the ability to foster a feeling of inclusion and connects people to a collective sense of a shared past. It is this collective sense of place that creates cohesion and a more complete picture of memory.

Hayden believes that place and memory cultivate identity for members of a community. By using Hayden's concept of place, public historians have the ability to be a driving force in a new vision for urban planning. The Royal Theater presents a perfect opportunity in Philadelphia. Most significantly, Hayden's concept of place allows us to revisit old definitions of historical significance. When the Royal Theater was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, its significance was based primarily on its architecture. Its Register nomination explains that:

> The Royal Theater is of significance as the work of an important Philadelphia architect, Frank E. Hahn, as a sign of the increasing commercial activity of east European immigrants, as an early and important movie house designed to cater to the black community, and as the site of performances of many of the most important early 20th century black artists.[76]

While the nominations' opening paragraph mentions the theater's significance to the African American community, it is only a secondary reason. In this way, the Royal Theater was

[75] Ibid. p. 9.
[76] U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Nomination Form for the National Register of Historic Places.* Harrisburg, PA: Bureau for Historic Preservation, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1979.

nominated within the Huxtable paradigm. Preservationists wanted to protect the theater because of Frank Hahn. The theater was seen as a significant piece of Philadelphia architecture, not as a community place. But, what if the nomination focused on the theater's integral role in Philadelphia's African American community? Through the Gansian lens, the theater becomes a place of shared memory within the community. By utilizing Hayden's framework, we can see how the Royal might be another present place for creating a greater sense of inclusion and belonging for a marginalized group.[77]

Currently, the Royal Theater stands as a vacant shell on a re-emerging western South Street. On any given night, Philadelphians dine in restaurants, bar-hop, sip lattes, and listen to live music along the strip which people feared after dark just three decades prior. Much has changed along western South Street since the days of the Crosstown Expressway. What once was an African American community threatened by the Crosstown Expressway is now a racially diverse neighborhood which, in real estate terms, is considered to be "up-and-coming." While city life has continued to move forward around the Royal, the theater might still become an active part of the western South Street community. In fact, Chicago's Regal Theater suggests that historic theaters can play a vital role in modern urban planning. Similar to the Royal, the Regal was an iconic theater in Chicago's African American community. According to Clovis Semmes' analysis, the Regal reinforced African American culture during segregation. Its present state shows how its legacy can still serve community and provides a model for its contemporary on South Street.

[77] While the nomination form only nominally mentions the cultural significance of the Royal Theater and, instead, focuses on the architectural merit of the structure, it is important to note that any mention of the theater's significance based on its role in the African American community is noteworthy due to the period in which the nomination form was completed, more than thirty years ago in 1980; See images 6-9, pp. 65-8, for pictures of the theater, taken from the National Register nomination form.

The Regal Theater operated between 1928 and 1968. Once a cornerstone of Chicago's African American community, the theater met its demise in 1973 when a devastating fire destroyed it. The site was later converted into a parking lot leaving no trace of the landmark theater.[78] The Regal was just a memory until 1987 when Ed and Bettiann Gardner, founders of the Soft Sheen beauty products company, became interested in the theater. The Gardners made millions of dollars from Soft Sheen, an African American hair care and cosmetic company, based in Chicago and they chose to use their money for philanthropic pursuits. The Gardners had fond memories of the Regal Theater. According to Bettiann, every weekend she and her brothers put on their Sunday clothing and made their way to the Regal to see whatever was playing.[79] An outing to the Regal Theater was a significant event.

In 1987, Dempsey Travis, who was the owner of the building that once housed the Avalon Theater, approached the Gardners about reopening the Regal Theater. The Avalon was another popular African American theater in Chicago forced to close its doors during the 1970s. The theater was eventually converted into a church but Travis had larger plans for the space.[80] Travis propositioned that Ed Gardner buy, rehabilitate, and re-open the building as a performing arts venue. The Gardners provided $3.5 million of the $4.5 million total renovation cost and the city of Chicago funded the remaining $1 million through a grant.[81] They renovated the theater to its original appearance and outfitted it with state-of-the-art equipment. The Gardners changed

[78] Bryan Krefft and Ray Martinez, "Regal Theater," *Cinema Treasures*, http://cinematreasures.org/theater/319/, (November 23, 2010).
[79] "Bettiann Gardner Talks About the Origins of the New Regal Theater," Interview housed on the *History Makers* website, https://www.idvl.org/TheHistoryMakers, (November 25, 2010).
[80] Kreft and Martinez, "The Regal Theater."
[81] Chris Farley, "The Curtain's Going Up Friday on the New Regal Theater," *Chicago Tribune*, August 13, 1987, www.chicagotribune.com, (November 25, 2010).

the name of the theater to the New Regal Theater because they wanted to revive the legacy of the original theater.

The Gardners re-opened the theater as a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization named the New Regal Theater Foundation. Though the Gardners had not set out to make money, Ed Gardner wanted the theater to bring theatrical performance into the inner city. In an interview, he said, "you can measure a part of the success of the society by their ability to appreciate the arts." Bettiann said they [she and Ed] had to travel outside of their neighborhood if they wanted to see a show.[82] Despite their efforts, however, the Gardners closed the theater in June 2003 because they could not afford to keep it running. Specifically, the Gardners struggled to attract feature shows. Many promoters chose to book their acts in theaters that could seat more than the 2,000 person capacity of the New Regal.[83]

The Gardners were not able to sell the theater either because the city placed a clause on their $1 million grant that if the theater was sold to an entity within the first forty-years, and it was not to be kept as an arts space, the Gardners would be forced to re-pay the grant as well as $700,000 in interest.[84] The Regal remained closed until 2007 when it was taken over by a non-profit organization called *We Are Our Brother's Keeper*. *We Are Our Brother's Keeper* opened the space to be used as a venue for concerts and other live performances. The Regal is still in

[82] "Edward Gardner discusses the revival of the Regal Theatre," Interview housed on the *History Makers* website, https://www.idvl.org/TheHistoryMakers, (November 25, 2010); Bettiann Gardner *History Makers* interview.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Patrice Nkrumah, "Chicago to Lose Historical Black Landmark," *The Final Call*, July 17, 2003, http://www.finalcall.com/ (November 25, 2010).

use with a listing of regular and travelling performances but another goal of the space is to continue the theater's legacy.[85]

The owners of the theater did not want the history and significance of the theater to fall by the wayside and so a number of reminders about the Regal's rich past remain. Patrons who visit the theater see a large mural that highlights famous performers who graced the Regal's stage. Also, the theater filmed a short video that can be viewed on its website that discusses some significant elements of the theater.[86] The owners attempt to keep the history of the theater alive while not falling victim to nostalgia. Their approach allows the theater to keep moving forward while keeping one eye on the past. By choosing to rename the theater, the Gardners recognized a history so it would not be lost. The Regal Theater was too significant to Chicago's African American community for its legacy to be lost forever. But was the resurrection of the Regal successful? It could be argued that the Regal was not financially sustainable given the problems faced by the Gardners. Preservation was the first step towards success but the next step needs to be ways in which the Regal, and other historically significant African American sites, can be made financially viable.

The story of the Regal Theater aligns with Hayden's perspective on historical significance. The Regal was so important to the African American community in Chicago that private citizens and city policy-makers financially supported it and even supported the re-establishment of the cultural institution in an entirely new physical structure. While the physical structure of the original Regal Theater held architectural significance, it was the use and celebration of the space by the African American community that cemented the theater's legacy.

[85] Kreft and Martinez, "The Regal Theater."
[86] Information about the mural and short video are contained on the Regal Theater's website, http://www.chicagoregal.com/indexaa.html.

The Regal's significance today lies in its use by a traditionally marginalized population that finds strength in the space's public memory.

The strategy that was used to preserve the legacy of the Regal Theater in Chicago could work in Philadelphia. As racial demographics change, sites of significance to Philadelphia's African American community must be preserved and their legacies must continue. First steps have already been taken. The Royal is owned by Kenny Gamble who is a multi-platinum record producer based out of Philadelphia. His not-for-profit Universal Companies community development corporation wants to redevelop the space. Also, the theater has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1980, so there is precedence for landmark status. While the exterior shell is still in good shape, the interior is barren and this raises a major challenge.[87] The cost to renovate the interior alone would be in the millions of dollars.

Recently, however, Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell signed House Bill 2291 into law. House Bill 2291 allocated over $12 billion for public improvements and development projects throughout the state through its Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program. The State will match up to $31 million to Universal Companies, up from a possible $12 million, for "acquisition, demolition, renovation, infrastructure, construction and other costs related to the development of the Royal Theater and Universal Commercial Complex," if Universal companies can secure funding from another source.[88] By February 2011, Universal Companies had secured $2 million in outside funding from an undisclosed source which will be matched by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. According to Shahied Dawan, Vice-President and Chief

[87] Images about the current state of the theater's interior can be found on the Hidden City-Philadelphia website, http://www.hiddencityphila.org/events/Royal_Theater

[88] RACP of 2010, State House Bill 2291, (2010); House Appropriations Committee, *A Guide to the Capital Budget*, accessed February 4, 2011, http://www.hacd.net/budget/200708/documents/capitalbudgetbrochureNov08.pdf

Financial Officer of Universal Companies, the funds will be used for renovating the façade of the building and a portion of the building will be used as an unspecified communal space.[89] Outside of preserving the façade, it is unclear how the history of the building will be woven into its use. But, a community-driven push to preserve the space highlights the importance of the theater.

Since the closing of the closing of the Royal Theater its future has been one of uncertainty, but with the recent securing of funds from the state RCAP grant the Royal's future appears to be more certain. Figuring out how the theater will become financially sustainable is a question of utmost importance, even though the timeline for reopening the theater has not been disclosed. As was seen through the Regal Theater case study, the Royal must be able generate enough income that allows the theater to meet its operating costs, and even turn a profit. I believe the key for the Royal will be partnerships that increase the visibility and accessibility of the theater. In my model for sustainability of the Royal Theater, I avoid looking to foundations for continued funding through grants. I believe that grant money does not provide long-term financial security for the theater to sustain itself.

I envision the central partnership being with Avenue of the Arts Incorporated (AAI). AAI is an independent non-profit organization, founded in 1993, to coordinate and oversee the growth and development of the Avenue of the Arts. AAI serves as a community development corporation for the Broad Street corridor from Glenwood Avenue in North Philadelphia to Washington Avenue in South Philadelphia. The mission of AAI is to "reinvigorate Broad Street as the arts and entertainment soul of Philadelphia and the region by providing leadership for

[89] Shahied Dawan, e-mail message to Javier Garcia, February 24, 2011.

growth as a vibrant place to live, shop, play, work, and learn."[90] AAI has made a tangible social and economic impact through strategic planning which has focused on the promotion of arts and culture as a vehicle for development. The Avenue of the Arts has contributed millions of dollars in sales and taxes to the economy of Philadelphia by coupling economic and social development with street beautification initiatives. AAI, internally, creates the marketing campaigns that promote maximum exposure of the Avenue of the Arts. The strength of this type of in-house marketing is that AAI takes the effort to promote all of their venues.

I believe visibility is the key for the Royal to remain a sustainable space that does not suffer the same fate as the Regal Theater in Chicago. If the Royal promoted itself as an arts space, its inclusion would fulfill the mission of the AAI by unifying "a wide range of different neighborhoods, and bridges both the historic and the new."[91] The Royal Theater would fall under the umbrella of Avenue of the Arts marketing and promotion campaign. This would provide the theater with a level of exposure that it might not receive if it were a standalone institution. Essentially, I see inclusion into AAI as a vehicle for the year-round promotion of the Royal as a performance space, thus allowing for consistent patronage. In a 2006 impact study about the Avenue of the Arts, it was discovered that the Avenue of the Arts generated almost $424 million for the region and supported approximately 6,000 jobs.[92] The Royal could also serve as an entertainment venue that can contribute to the economic prosperity that it growing on west South Street.

Kenny Gamble's Universal Companies Corporation has a major interest in the future of the Royal Theater because the group is the current owner of the theater. Universal Companies

[90] Avenue of the Arts Incorporated website, 2010, < http://www.avenueofthearts.org/about_facts.asp>, (April 7, 2011)
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

was founded in 1993 to "build the capacity to challenge and reverse the effects of urban decline."[93] The majority of the work done by Universal has been in the neighborhood around the Royal Theater which was greatly affected by the proposed Crosstown Expressway. Universal Companies has invested time and money into the redevelopment of the neighborhood and their programs encompass multiple facets of community development. Universal Companies provides social services for the community, real estate development, and educational resources. The ultimate goal for Universal Companies is to create "education, culture, and entrepreneurial opportunities that will stimulate the development of wealth."[94]

Universal Companies has made a commitment to the future of this community. With the awarding of funds through the 2010 RCAP grant, Universal Companies will be transforming part of the Royal Theater into an unspecified community space. Universal Companies, in conjunction with the work being done by AAI, can use the theater space for arts appreciation. The Uptown Theater, in North Philadelphia, offers similar arts-based community development programs to what I am suggesting. They offer music classes and workshops which integrate the community into what's happening in the theater, and the goal of having art-based workshops is to find other methods of increasing overall use and visibility of the theater. I believe that limiting the theater to a performance space reduces who the theater can target. I envision one facet to be youth-focused art programming, and the programming could make use of the Royal by being music or theater-based workshops. Youth programming ties into Universal Companies educational mission of a "holistic approach" to learning.[95]

[93] Universal Companies website, 2010, < http://universalcompanies.org/>, (April 7, 2011).
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

I also believe that cooperation with the South of South Neighborhood Association (SOSNA) and South Street West Business Association (SSWBA) will encourage growth for the Royal. SOSNA is a community development corporation which serves the southwestern section of Center City Philadelphia between South and Washington Streets and SSWBA is a long-standing partnership of businesses along west South Street that seeks to encourage economic growth for the corridor. I think the Royal will need to have a presence within the larger community of southwest Center City for their community programming to be successful. These partnerships will bring the presence of the Royal into the focus of two neighborhood organizations whose missions are to create a cohesive and financially viable community. SOSNA periodically sponsors events that promote community interaction and a partnership with the Royal will allow the theater to serve as a potential venue for SOSNA events, thus increasing the visibility of the theater. As a member of SSWBA, the Royal will be part of network that strives to increase the economic viability of the corridor and the potential for business partnerships with other members of the organization can promote the growth of the Royal.

One of the biggest questions through this entire thesis process is how to make the Royal significant to the public as a historic site. The Royal is already on the Pennsylvania State Register Historic Places which provides a blue marker, for the site, which presents the importance of the Royal. But, more needs to be done. The Royal was once owned by the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia before it was sold to Kenny Gamble, and I believe a continued partnership with the Preservation Alliance will be the first step in highlighting the historic significance of the space and why it has been preserved. One of the Preservation Alliance's most successful programs is their thematic architectural walking tours and the Royal should be included. The Royal is an architectural and socially significant building and inclusion

in the tour's programming will highlight the theater's importance and present that to the public. I see this as beginning the process of presenting the Royal Theater as a site of significance to the public.

In a similar vein, the Royal will create a small lobby exhibit that would present the history of the Royal through the decades. The project would be more comprehensive than just highlighting events that happened within the Royal. The exhibit will be an interpretative exhibit which focuses on the importance of African American theaters in America, as well as discussing how the Royal was threatened by the potential construction of the Crosstown Expressway. This exhibit will provide the public with the chance to learn about a place and event that has not been at the forefront of Philadelphia history.

The story of the Royal Theater exemplifies the argument Gans makes in his discussion about preservation. The Royal is the type of everyday space that is significant and needs to be protected. The theater was an important part of South Philadelphia's African American community but it represents a chapter in the city's history that many do not know about. In the late twentieth-century the story of the Royal is not one just of musical and theatrical acts but of community, racial identity and urban renewal. A multi-faceted presentation detailing the history of the Royal and its role in the historiography of community, racial identity and urban renewal would make highly relevant and compelling story that, for years, has gone unrecognized. The history of the Royal is an important addition to the narrative of Philadelphia's reaction to evolving urban development and city planning. The story of the Royal serves as a window into one community's struggles and triumphs during a time when the environment was rapidly changing. The untimely emergence of a new transportation-based planning paradigm had a

deleterious effect on an emerging African American community. The Royal became an unfortunate casualty and its legacy must be shared and protected.

VII. CONCLUSION

I originally chose to study the Royal Theater because of my experience with the *PhilaPlace* oral history project during the summer of 2009. I assisted in interviewing South Philadelphia residents about their childhood neighborhood memories. It became apparent during the analysis of the interviews that local theaters were important cultural institutions and a key component of neighborhood pride and energy. Theaters held magic for many of the interviewees and I was fascinated by the role that theaters played in unifying communities and reflecting diverse cultures. While my interest in theaters grew, so did my interest in the Crosstown Expressway. The impact of the Crosstown Expressway has been studied extensively but I was intrigued by the prospect of analyzing the impact of the Crosstown Expressway through the lens of local community members impacted by the project. Additionally, I felt that the story of the Crosstown Expressway is a story that most Philadelphians do not know and I looked forward to describing the project for an audience that may be unaware of this piece of Philadelphia history. It seemed that the story of the Royal Theater merged seamlessly with the story of the Crosstown Expressway: as the proposed Crosstown Expressway planning gained momentum among policy makers, it garnered stronger opposition among the South Street community residents living around the Royal. I hypothesized that the Royal might have served as a community meeting place or a beacon of community pride during a time of community activism and empowerment.

In order to test my hypothesis, I combed through the Urban Archives at Temple University. I found incredible sources of information including letters, memos, flyers, minutes, newspaper clippings, and planning specifications. It was clear from the primary sources that the South Street community organized effectively despite the adverse effects the proposed Crosstown Expressway had on the community. I planned on interviewing key community

members in hopes of expanding my understanding of the community's response to the Crosstown Expressway. I imagined weaving personal stories of community members' memories of the Royal into my analysis of the community's methods of uniting and responding to planning policy. I hoped to corroborate the anecdotal evidence of the Royal's role in the Crosstown Expressway response by finding mentions of the Royal in letters, newspaper clippings, or memos. Perhaps a mention of a meeting held in the lobby or meet-ups held beneath the marquis. Unfortunately, I found no such evidence. Instead, I found information on the slow decline of the theater that coincided with the slow decline of the neighborhood. Despite the wealth of information on the South Street community's response to the Crosstown Expressway, I found very little information on the role that the Royal played in any of this activism.

In addition to the lack of information on the role that the Royal played in the community's response to the Crosstown Expressway, I had difficulty interviewing community members. I wanted to find community members who, in the 1950s and 60s, were old enough to have attended performances at the Royal. Many of the people I hoped to find, who fit that criterion, were deceased or moved from the neighborhood. There are also a number of African American churches that served the community. I repeatedly tried to contact the clergy of each church to find members of their congregation who remembered the Royal. I never got a response. I even tried to follow leads provided by the occasional newspaper article on community members' efforts in fighting the Crosstown Expressway. Unfortunately, after repeated attempts at reaching these contacts, it became apparent that the interviews would not be possible. One of the conclusions I drew was how my lack of interview contacts was indicative of the changing racial dynamics of the neighborhood. The presence of the African American community has been reduced as a result of redevelopment efforts.

Ultimately, I found myself at a crossroads. The tidy blending of the Royal's story and that of the Crosstown Expressway was no longer so tidy or even verifiable for that matter. While I had found a depth of information on the community's response to the Crosstown Expressway and the impact of the Crosstown Expressway plans on the community, I had found very little about the Royal's role in any of it. Instead, I found information on the Royal's decline and abandonment throughout the time of the Crosstown Expressway upheaval. It was then that I realized what story the Royal truly revealed. The Royal did not serve as a symbol of empowerment against the planned bisection of the community, but, instead, served as a symbol for how such a planning project can deeply impact a community even if that project is not seen to fruition. In sum, the Royal's story is that of the South Street community's story. The upswing in urban transportation-based planning efforts mirrored the growth of urban black cultural institutions. Unfortunately, the Royal was collateral damage when these two movements conflicted.

This thesis is the culmination of winding and sometimes surprising research into the South Street community, the Royal Theater, and the Crosstown Expressway. While my conclusion was not what I expected it to be, I believe strongly that this thesis deepens the body of knowledge on the intersection of city planning efforts and urban black communities' identities and cultural institutions during the 1960s. Yet, the story does not end here. As most Philadelphians know, today the South Street community is once again vibrant and economically sound. Unfortunately, this cannot be said for the Royal. While the Royal is registered as national historic place, currently, the Royal is unused and vacant. With signing of House Bill 2291, and the impending $4 million of funding, the Royal represents an opportunity for community

members, stakeholders, policy makers, and public historians to unite around a piece of Philadelphia history and support efforts to honor an important cultural institution.

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APPENDIX

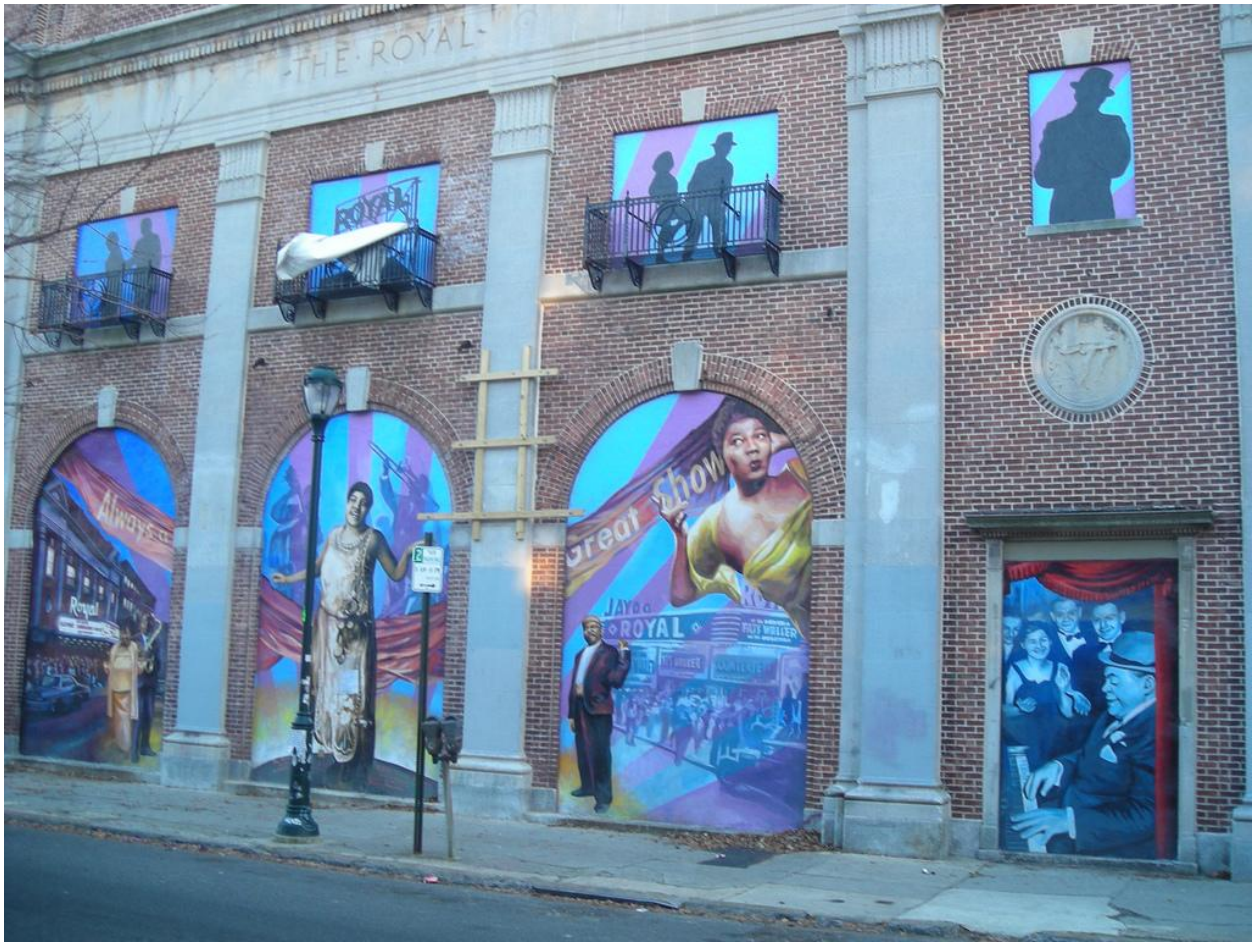


Image 1: The Royal Theater façade in 2008.

APPENDIX

Documents and Photographs

- Map of expressway system
- Theater timeline (Source: Hidden City Philadelphia)
- CCPDCC flyers
- Interior photographs of the Royal Theater from Nomination Form(1979)
- South Street Community Photographs (1964)

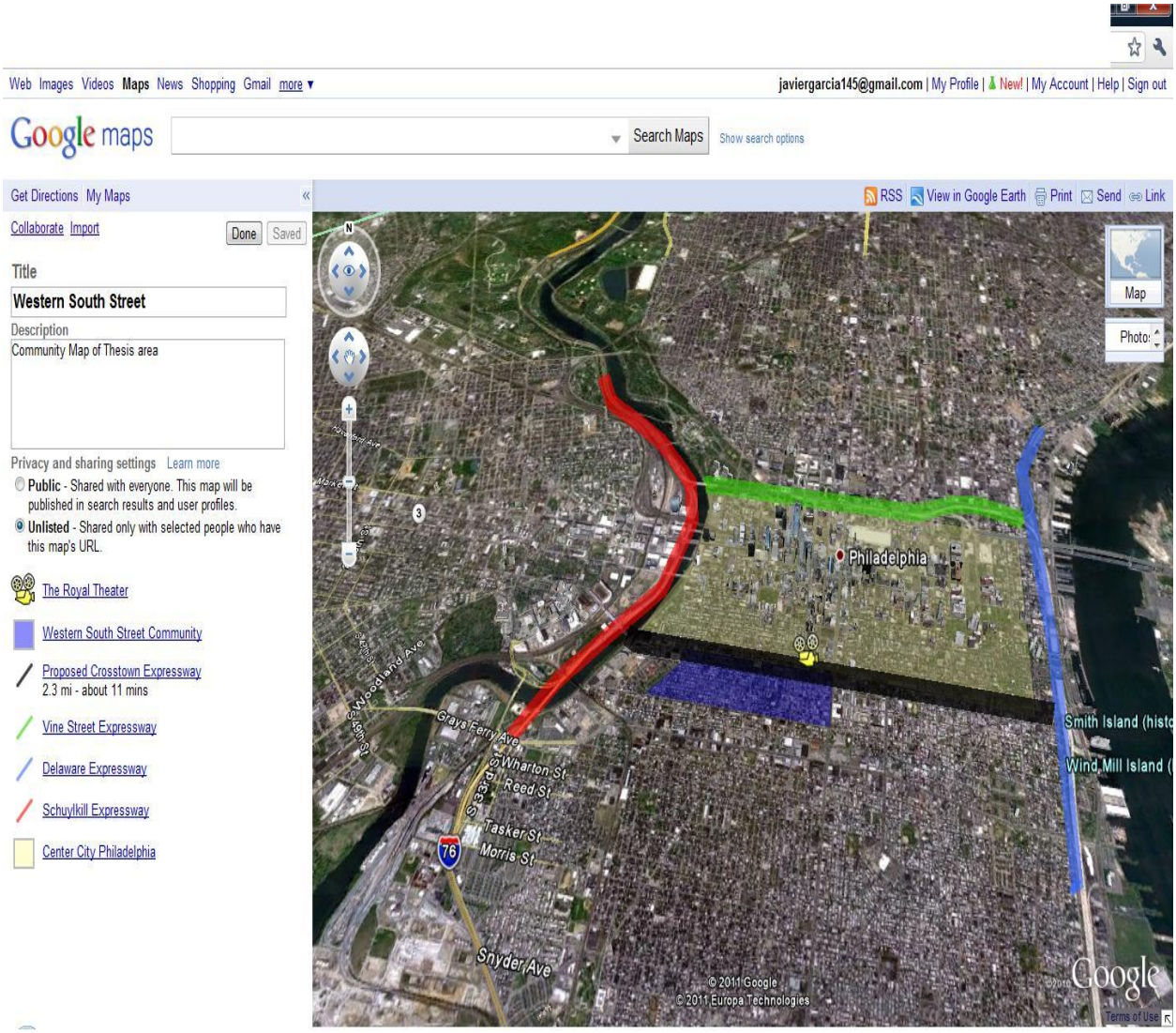
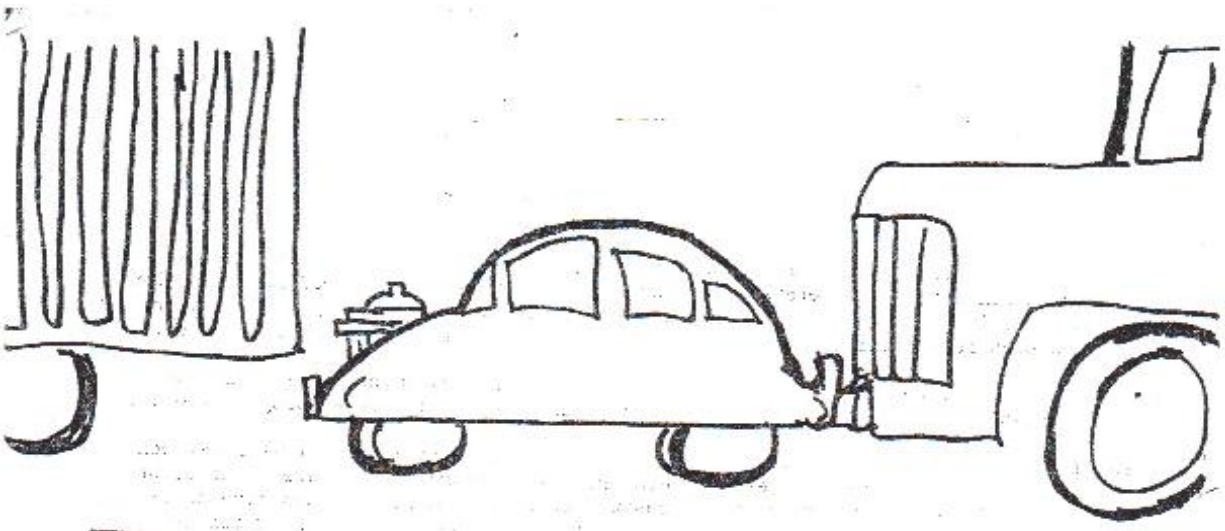


Image 2: Map of the proposed Crosstown Expressway route along with the three other constructed expressway routes.

Image 3: Timeline of significant events in the Royal Theater's history.



3 LANE PARKING ON SPRUCE + PINE?

THAT'S WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE

CROSSTOWN EXPRESSWAY

IS BUILT

The Pennsylvania Department of Highways' transportation consultants predict that 48,000 cars will leave the Crosstown Expressway every day in the section between 11th and 17th Streets. Most of these will be getting on and off during morning and evening rush hours. To get to the proposed expressway's north/south entrance streets many of these cars will have to take the major east/west arteries -- Pine, Spruce, Walnut, and Chestnut. Traffic congestion on these streets is already terrible. With a Crosstown Expressway generating even more cars in Center City, Pine and Spruce will be virtually impassable. Don't wait until these streets are three lane parking lots to complain.

CALL THE MAYOR (MU 6-9700) . . . STOP THE CROSSTOWN

or write Hon. James H. J. Tate
City Hall
Philadelphia, Pa. 19107

Center City Stop the Crosstown Committee -- Central Philadelphia Reform Democrats

Image 4: Flyer created by the Citizens Committee to Protect and Develop the Crosstown Community.

WHEN YOU MOVED TO SOUTHWARK...

DID YOU PLAN TO BREATHE HERE TOO?

Philadelphia already has the third highest air pollution level in the nation. 70% of this can be attributed to automobile traffic. Plans are now being discussed for an eight-lane expressway just south of your house. An estimated 130,000 cars would be using this road daily by 1985 - 16,000 per hour during rush hour.

This increased traffic will bring a substantial increase in your neighborhood of the following pollutants:

Carbon Monoxide blocks delivery of oxygen to the brain, heart, and other vital organs. An industrial maximum of 50 ppm of carbon monoxide has been established to protect workers. A partly covered expressway at rush hour would produce concentrations of 300 ppm in the trench and adjacent streets. This would produce headaches, dim vision, nausea and even physical collapse of people near the expressway: it would also impair the performance of children in schools in the vicinity.

Hydrocarbons from car exhaust have produced cancer in laboratory animals. In Philadelphia, zoo animals have been dying of lung cancer when kept outdoors exposed to airborne hydrocarbons from the Schuylkill Expressway.

Nitrogen Oxides cause changes in lung tissues and increase susceptibility to infection even after brief exposures. Long-term effects are unknown.

Is this what you want for your family?

Image 5: Flyer created by the Citizens Committee to Protect and Develop the Crosstown Community.

Image 6: The Royal Theater. Photograph taken from National Register nomination form.

Image 7: The auditorium of the Royal Theater. Photograph taken from National Register nomination form.

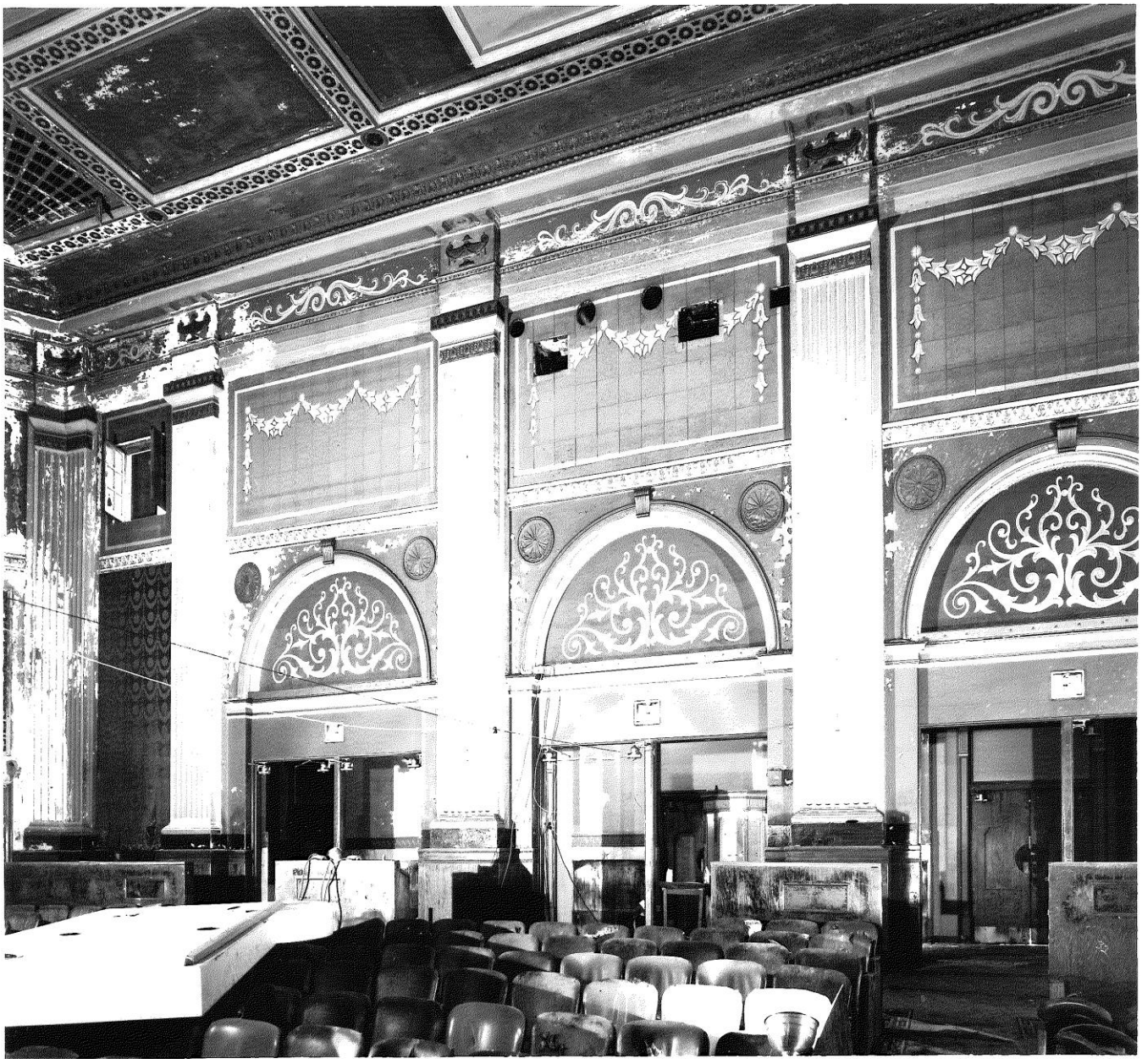


Image 8: The auditorium of the Royal Theater. Photograph taken from National Register nomination form.

Image 9: Waiting Room in the Royal Theater. Photograph taken from National Register nomination form.

Image 10: The intersection of 15th & South Sts, 1962.

Image 11: South Street, 1962.

Image 12: The 1600 Block of Bainbridge street, just one block south of South Street.