



Welcome to the Historic Hudson Theatre

This theatre opened on October 19, 1903 with a production of *Cousin Kate* starring Ethel Barrymore. The *New York Dramatic Mirror* in an article later that month said, “The Hudson Theatre is to be numbered among the handsomest of the country.”

Built by Henry B. Harris, a famous Broadway producer of that period who later died aboard the Titanic as it went down in 1912, the Hudson Theatre is one of New York City’s oldest Broadway showplaces. Older than all but the Lyceum which stands across from the Hudson’s stage door on 45th Street. Harris and his partner George Heye commissioned J.B. McElpatrick and Co. to design their theatre and halfway through brought in Israels and Harder to complete the project. The theatre was the first to have patrons enter into the lobby on one street (44th) while the actors, technical staff, and sets entered another (45th). The 100-foot long lobby was the largest ever seen on Broadway at that time. Electricity was in New York City for only 20 years when the theatre was built so the designers took every opportunity to incorporate electric light into the architecture. The most spectacular of these electric features are the backlit stained glass ceilings in the lobby designed and manufactured by Tiffany.

Architectural critics of the time were more impressed by the Hudson’s safety features than by its actual design. The *New York Tribune* noted that the theatre boasted 28 exits that not only guaranteed the safety of the patrons but also made for speedy egress after performances. One magazine wrote of the “nearly perfect” ventilation system that provided cooling and heating to meet the conditions of the weather and noted, “The building itself is fireproofed throughout...and a complete sprinkler system is an added precaution.” Harris bought out his partner in 1908 for \$700,000.

Four months after the Titanic tragedy, Irene Harris, who was pulled from her husband’s arms on the deck of the sinking ship and saved, decided she would make a go of running the theatre and became its first female theatrical producer in New York. She gave Barbara Stanwyck and Judith Anderson their first roles on Broadway in the late 1920’s. Other stars who headlined at the

Hudson during her tenure included: Douglas Fairbanks, William Holden, Helen Hayes, Edward G. Robinson and Dorothy Gish. At the time the Hudson Theatre was considered one of New York's most successful. In 1929 Mrs. Harris was offered \$1,000,000 for the theatre and turned it down. She lost the theatre in 1933 in foreclosure. It was sold at auction for \$100,000.

The theatre has changed ownership 18 times to date and each new owner has added to its colorful history. Most notable the theatre had a life as a CBS radio studio in 1934. It was home to the CBS Radio Playhouse, which was broadcast to the 80 stations of the CBS radio network. It was New York's most high tech studio of the time. Each broadcast played to a live audience of 1,100. It returned to legitimate theatre for awhile and then was purchased by NBC to become a television studio in 1950.

On September 27, 1956 the first nationwide broadcast of The Tonight Show starring Steve Allen came from the Hudson Theatre. On that first show he gave the television audience a tour of the sets, auditorium and the new technology NBC had installed. Allen said on that first broadcast "we especially selected the Hudson Theatre because I think it sleeps about 800 people" which was met by a roar of laughter by the audience. On this stage Allen hosted Ernie Kovacs, Milton Berle and Elvis Presely along with many other notables. It is also where Steve Allen developed the talk show format, which became the standard the rest would follow. Another performer also got her start on the stage at the Hudson Theatre: Barbara Streisand appeared on television for the first time on the Jack Paar Show, which was broadcast from the Hudson Theatre.

NBC almost sold the theatre to a parking developer who wanted to demolish the structure but a public outcry and demonstration by the Actor's Equity saved the theatre.

Burlesque took over the Hudson Theatre in 1965 just 10 years after a New York court lifted the ban on the bawdy entertainment. The new owners assured the public that their show was one that "no one will be ashamed to bring his wife, his girl, or his mother to see." The Hudson again briefly returned to legitimate theatre before it became a movie house in 1968. Films of all types were presented here. Admission was only \$1.00.

In 1975 another developer tried to buy the theatre for yet another parking garage but the plan fell through. The theatre was vacant for 5 years and then purchased by rock promoter Ron Delsner to become the Savoy Rock Club. Delsner and his partner could not make a go of their club so Delsner sold out to his partner who in turn sold the theatre to developer Harry Macklowe. Macklowe purchased the theatre for its valuable air rights that would give him the ability to build the 52 story Macklowe Hotel and Conference Center, which opened next to the Hudson Theatre in 1989. The theatre became an elegant special events space for the hotel and has hosted many galas, productions, product launches and weddings for hotel patrons.

The Hudson Theatre is now operated as the Millennium Broadway Hotel, Millennium Conference Center, Restaurant Charlotte, and Hudson Theater. It was granted landmark status for both its internal and external features in 1987.

We are pleased that you have joined us on this special occasion and will now become a part of the rich history of the Hudson Theatre.