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The Neptune Theatre: A Case Study

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Cultural Infrastructure and Facilities

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Abstract

The Neptune Theatre, formerly known as the U-Neptune Theatre, was one of five neighborhood theaters constructed in the University District during the silent film era (1919 - 1921). This period, the 1920s, was “Seattle’s most active decade” of theater construction (Flom, 2001). Today, the Neptune remains as the last standing survivor of those venues still in operation a hundred years later. Still owned by descendants of the original family and now leased and operated by the Seattle Theatre Group (STG), this venue hosts artists and events ranging from David Crosby concerts to a *Welcome to Nightvale* live podcast performance; from a Macklemore guest appearance (Matson, 2012) to the annual *Nights at the Neptune* and *Youth Speaks* series. It remains one of Seattle’s premiere hot spots for concerts, film screenings, spoken word and dance showcases, and performances by touring musical legends and community youth alike. In our current environment of constrained resources, fiscal scrutiny, monotonous modern construction, and a movement towards historical stewardship and adaptive reuse, it is vital to develop a familiarity with exemplary facilities that embody long-term success by exploring and analyzing their leadership, design, operation, maintenance, and capitalization strategies, which have contributed to their ongoing survival and flourishing. By doing so, we can learn ways to extend the functional lifespan of well-maintained, unique, relevant, and community-engaged arts venues.

The Neptune Theatre: A Case Study

The Neptune Theatre Building sits at the corner of what is now 45th St. NE & Brooklyn Avenue NE, on an 11,405 square foot site purchased by North Dakota farmer turned Seattle real-estate investor, Samuel Fried, and his family in 1906 (See Appendix A1 for a copy of the deed). The land had originally been homesteaded by Christian Brownfield as part of “Pioneer Farm” in 1873. It was platted three owners later, by James Moore, and annexed into the City of Seattle with the rest of the Brooklyn Addition in 1890, just sixteen years prior to Fried’s purchase (Dorpat, 2001; Gordon, 2012; U.S. Bureau of Land Management, n.d.). “They happened to pick a really good corner [to invest in] – arguably they picked the best corner,” Craig Thompson, Fried family descendant, summarized (personal communication, March 19, 2019). While a family home initially sat on the land, according to Thompson, it was loaded onto a barge around 1919 and shipped down to the Three Tree Point area to become a beach house, making room for the “masonry-clad... ‘mixed-use’ commercial building” with “minimal architectural styling and... classed vaguely as simplified Renaissance Revival style” that was commissioned from the reputable theater designer, Henderson Ryan (Gordon, 2012, p. 30).

Ryan had established himself as a skilled theater designer, also envisioning the Liberty Theatre in downtown Seattle for film entrepreneurs Claude S. Jensen and John G. von Herzberg (who were attempting to “put films on equal footing with the stage”), the Moore Building, Ballard’s Free Public Carnegie Library, “some of the finest homes in Seattle,” and also the U.S. wireless telegraph station near Nome, Alaska (Flom, 2001). Ryan is noted specifically for patenting a ramp model in 1916 that provided easy stair-free access to balcony areas while maximizing auditorium space (Gordon, 2012, pp. 31-33; Studio TJP, 2012). The Neptune Theatre includes two such ramps.

The theater was embedded in a three-story commercial property consisting of four storefront retail spaces on the ground floor; office spaces (initially offices of physicians, surgeons, a chiropractor, and multiple dentists, including that of Samuel's son, E.R. Fried); and "the only separate sterilizing room west of New York" on the second floor; eight two- and three-bedroom apartments on the third floor; and the Neptune Theatre auditorium (Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, n.d.). It was incredibly insightful, although not uncommon, for theaters such as the Neptune to be included as a major component of mixed-use commercial buildings, with the diversified revenue stream off-setting low admission costs (Gordon, 2012, p. 30). At the time of the Neptune's opening, ticket prices were just 10 cents for children's admission and 25 cents for an adult (Seattle Daily Times, Nov. 1921, p. 9).

The building was the vision of Samuel and Mary Fried and their surviving children, Dr. Earl Roy (E.R.) Fried, Bertha (Fried) Foot, and Nettie (Fried) Fries (wife of Emil B. Fries, the blind pianist who taught blind students to tune pianos and founded a piano tuning company that still exists today, the Emil Fries Piano Hospital and Training Center) (Gordon, 2012). A 25-year lease for the theater was immediately issued to the Puritan Theatre Company, who twelve days later began offering \$250 and \$500 gold bonds to investors through the Seattle Title Trust Company to fund \$55,000 of development in the space (Seattle Daily Times, May 1921, p. 17). The owners and lessees of the originally named Samuel Fried Building lost a foreclosure suit to the Seattle Title Trust Company in 1923 ("Trust Company Wins Suit," 1923), less than two years after its opening, although the land and building somehow managed to remain under family ownership, likely due to E.R. Fried's interest and intervention ("Foreclosure Suit Filed," 1922, p. 17; "Trust Company Wins Suit," 1923, p. 2; King County Assessor's Office, n.d.). Soon after the legal battle, the building's name changed to the Neptune Building. The Frieds' descendants

remain the sole owners today, under the umbrella organization, The Neptune Building, LLC, formed in April of 2012 (King County Department of Assessments, n.d.).

Neptune Niche

The interior design and “undersea” motif signature to the Neptune were credited to interior designers Charles Weisenborn and Carl R. Berg (Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, n.d.) and included an elaborate collection of nautical details: small faces of King Neptune in the plaster on the building’s exterior façade as well as inside the “artistic auditorium” near the proscenium arch; fish patterns in the carpet; a large boat steering wheel above the main entrance (replaced by a smaller replica donated by the nearby Hotel Deca in 2011); stained glass and frescoed panels of undersea scenes; shell, trident, and mermaid details; porthole windows; and as of the 1980s renovation, boat concession areas with overhead shell sconces. The color scheme used throughout recalled the colors of the sea and nature: blues, greens, golds, and tans.

The theater initially utilized a projection machine and restroom furniture formerly of Ye College Playhouse (one of the four U-District movie houses that closed), which had been purchased by the Puritan Theatre Company (“E.L. Blaine is Sued,” 1923, p. 7). In its multi-faceted effort to set itself apart from the competition, the Neptune also boasted a new feature: “the creating of atmosphere in the theater during storm scenes is to be installed. In the two arches on each side nearest the stage, water will be thrown on plate glass in such a way as to give the effect of a driving rain storm” (Gordon, 2012, p. 11).

Additionally, at its November 16, 1921 opening and for the first 22 years of its life, the Neptune proclaimed its possession of the largest Kimball Unit Orchestral Theater Pipe Organ (opus 6622) on the Pacific Coast (which cost a reported \$26,000); as well as “the most modern film projection equipment, heating, ventilation, and lighting” (Thrasher, n.d.; Puget Sound

Theatre Organ Society, n.d.-b). “It was state-of-the-art from the beginning,” co-owner and owner representative, Craig Thompson declared with pride (personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Thompson added that a significant part of the Neptune’s legacy and a certain contributor to its longevity is that it is a really well-constructed, “stout” little building. The King County Assessor’s Real Property Record Card on the Neptune Building notes, “Good building apparently well built” (King County Assessor’s Office, n.d.). During the Nisqually earthquake of 2001, the only damage to the theater was a single 10-inch hairline fracture (C. Thompson, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

This rich legacy supported the Neptune’s bid for historic landmark status in 2012. “The Neptune Cinema Building is significant,” the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (n.d.) noted on its website, “because of its innovative interior architectural design and as a theater within a multi-[generational] family and commercial building.” In 2014, four years after the initial research was conducted and the application was submitted, the Neptune Theatre was designated a Seattle landmark. The recognition was granted because the Neptune “has significant character...value...the ability to convey its significance, and...embodies...distinctive visible characteristics” (Office of the City Clerk, 2014). Seattle Theatre Group’s Executive Director, Josh La Belle added:

There’s juju in these places! I don’t know how else to put it. The architecture, the history they have in the community, the connections people have. It’s intangible, it’s hard to put a value on it. But their beauty and splendor...they don’t build ‘em like this anymore. (De Barros, 2011)

“It may seem strange to claim that a venue has a distinct personality after only its second show, but the Neptune certainly does, even with the silver screen replaced by lights and music,”

community members and journalists elaborated (Gospe, 2011). “Whereas most rock clubs are empty boxes, the Neptune has personality. Its high-arching ceiling and lighted stained glass installations dazzle the eye” (Matson & De Barros, 2011, p. H1).

Leadership: the Owners and Lessees

A common area of confusion in theater documentation over the years has been the leadership of the Neptune Theatre. The building has actually been consistently owned by descendants of one family: the children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren of Samuel and Mary Fried, who purchased the land in 1906 (a copy of the original, relevant Warrantee and Quit Claim deeds are included as Appendices A1 and A2) and commissioned the building around 1919. As a measure of protection and an act of wise business practice, the family founded and transferred all of their ownership interests in the theater to a limited-liability corporation, The Neptune Building, LLC in 2012. There are no entities or individuals outside of the family involved in that arrangement.

Craig Thompson, grandson of Bertha (Fried) Foot, stated that being a vested stakeholder in an organization like the Neptune provides unity and purpose, helps hold the family together, and provides some stability. “[It’s] not been a liability at all...half of my life, I’ve taken care of it.” He added, “to think that it could last...outlive you...nothing would make my relatives happier than to have it carry on and be successful” (personal communication, March 19, 2019).

The leadership force that has changed over the years has been the lessees of the Neptune Theatre. The first organization to lease the venue was the Puritan Theatre Company, led by its owners, E. L. Blaine (who was also the first manager of the theater and a Seattle City Councilman) and A. B. L. Gellerman (who also invested in the building). Next came the (Claude) Jensen - (John G.) Von Herberg chain, that also operated the Liberty Theatre in

downtown Seattle and other movie houses throughout the Northwest. They were “big proponents of the theater organ” as a way to promote business (Puget Sound Theatre Organ Society, n.d.-a). The Neptune Theatre was the only neighborhood theater the Jensen-Von Herberg team ever operated. In August of 1926, North American Theatres, Inc. bought the entire Jensen-Von Herberg chain of movie theaters and assumed its leases, valued at \$5 million (America’s News, 1926).

In the decades following, Evergreen State Amusement Corp. (1935 – 1961), Sterling Theatres, Inc. (1964 – 1969), Harold Greenland (1970 – 1974), Sterling Recreation Organization (1975 – 1980), and Seven Gables Theatres (1980 – 1981) all operated and invested in the Neptune Theatre with varying levels of rigor and success (Gordon, 2012). The Neptune was always a movie house and found a niche of success with screenings of and regular programming (by multiple lessees) related to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Hartl, 1991; Macdonald, 2011; “Neptune Live”, 2010). Defined also by the regular events produced by its lessees, the Neptune acquired additional repute over the years as a “porn theater, midnight hangout, [and] movie geek haven” (Ho, 2012). In 1981, Landmark Theatres Corporation merged with Seven Gables Theatres and gained control of the Neptune, which they operated until February 2011 when their year-to-year lease was not renewed (Scigliano, 2010).

Seattle Theatre Group Stewardship

In a game-changing development, the same day Landmark Theatres announced they would no longer be operating the Neptune, Seattle Theatre Group (STG) announced that it had signed a long-term lease (ten years with a five-year option) for the operation of the Neptune Theatre (Gordon, 2014; Macdonald, 2011; C. Thompson, personal communication, March 19, 2019). As part of the November 29, 2010 announcement that they would be taking over the lease

of the Neptune, STG revealed their plans to renovate and adapt the space from a movie venue to a live performing arts facility capable of cinema, concerts, comedians, speakers, community events, and educational presentations.

A well-documented \$730,000, seven-month renovation of the space commenced in February 2011 and included a soft reopening in late spring. This period of more limited programming was integrated with responsive modifications and adjustments (De Barros, 2011; Bedell, n.d.). It proved to be a wise approach, as one of the first events in the new space, screenings for the Seattle International Film Festival (SIFF) in May 2011, resulted in complaints about the audio and an under-performing air conditioner (Cross, May 2011; Cross, June 2011). The concerns were addressed in time for the official reopening on September 25, 2011.

Adding the Neptune to its collection of historic theaters was a celebrated and strategic fit for a number of reasons. “One of STG’s primary missions is to be stewards of historic theaters, to save the piece of our history that these grand movie palaces were, and to keep them alive and vibrant. They were exquisitely built, with unique architecture and [acoustics], because they were built before amplification,” STG’s Director of Marketing and Communication, Vivian Phillips stated. “We have the ability to maintain the life of a historic venue, but also to infuse new life into it” (Griffin, n.d.).

STG’s Executive Director and self-proclaimed theater nerd, Josh LaBelle, provided some of the additional reasoning behind their significant investment of time and money: “We’re trying to develop a platform that could help us build in numerous directions so that in 10 or 20 years from now, the historic theaters are thriving even more than we are today” (Heffter, 2011).

Acquisition and use modification of the Neptune from motion picture theater to performing arts theater also expanded “the organization’s impact beyond the downtown core”

(King County Department of Assessments n.d.; Griffin, n.d.), provided the opportunity to produce additional educational programming and live all-ages performances for the community, and resulted in a more complete scale of diversely-sized venues to be utilized by the organization, each more or less appropriate for different stages of artists' careers. "I think the value for us is going to be around involving our company in artist development...working with artists earlier [and later] in their career trajectory than perhaps the Paramount and the Moore would allow" LaBelle said (De Barros, 2011).

A focus on all-ages performances that cater to the surrounding community and provide significant educational outreach and engagement is also a key component of STG's strategy. "That point is important because despite being the home of thousands of young people...the U District hasn't had a dedicated all-ages venue since...2003," STG's Phillips highlighted (McKagan, n.d.).

"My family's theater has been a fixture in the University District since 1921 and expanding the artistic programming beyond film will help keep it a vital part of this community...If not for this partnership, we'd be considering numerous non-arts related property uses," Thompson stated. "The Neptune could have been another casualty in the declining single-screen theater industry if it weren't for our partnership with STG" (Jentsch, 2010).

Both parties seem heavily invested and eager to revitalize the Neptune and also, critically, able to navigate the challenges of providing essential decision making and oversight for the historic property together, as partners. As a prime example, STG stated that they "consulted on the renovations" of 2011 with the ownership (De Barros, 2011) and STG's Historic Facilities Program Director, Bryan Layton, elaborated, "They gave us the freedom to do what we thought was necessary to be successful" (personal communication, March 18, 2019).

Similarly, Craig Thompson couldn't rave enough about his interactions with STG and the efforts both the organization and the individuals have put forth on behalf of their theaters. "STG has a track record of doing well by historic theater buildings. It's a booster to the neighborhood – the life they can bring back to the building" (Tu, 2010). He gave the impression of someone who feels that his family's property, their asset, will be well cared for by its latest stewards. From all angles, the collaboration between STG and the owners seems to be an ideal pairing.

A Close Call

STG's involvement brought yet another venue-preserving asset to the table, and the timing was imperative. What had not been heavily discussed in media coverage between 2009 and 2012 was Sound Transit's lurking interest in the land at the corner of 45th St. NE & Brooklyn Ave. NE. They were eyeing the Neptune property as the ideal site for a forthcoming University District Link light rail station and were willing to invoke eminent domain to get it. "STG's plan for the Neptune was a factor that caused Sound Transit to reconsider demolishing the building to create a light-rail station," Bruce Gray, Sound Transit spokesman, stated (Tu, 2010).

After their plans were derailed by STG's partnership, Sound Transit approached the newly formed Neptune Building, LLC and began negotiating modifications to the light rail station location as well as rights to create a subsurface tunnel and underpinning, tie-back, and construction easements that ultimately allowed them to move forward, designating the land directly to the south of the Neptune Theatre as the future location of the U-District light-rail stop. "We worked closely with STG during the Central Link construction near the Paramount Theatre and...continue to work with STG and the University District neighborhood as we move forward expanding the region's light rail system," said Sound Transit CEO, Joni Earl (STG Presents, 2010). "Sound Transit is excited about the Neptune Theatre's future as a cultural destination on

the light rail system” (White, 2011). Armed with STG’s guidance, knowledge, and support, Thompson ultimately described these dealings as “very amicable” (personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Renovations and Reuse Remodels

From the Neptune Theatre’s early years, there is evidence of consistent efforts to provide routine care and maintenance, a handful of major renovations and technological updates, organ installations and removals, and five marquee replacements over the years. Some of these projects, such as the STG renovation, were more thoroughly documented and publicized than others, but several details that are accessible include these noteworthy modifications:

1928 – Major storefront renovation, marquee installation, and interior remodel including the replacement of the original painted maritime scenes with art deco flourishes and the addition of a concession stand (led by architect P. Marcus Priteca and interior designer Anthony B. Heinsbergen). First marquee likely installed at this time.

1946 – Marquee replacement.

1956 – The original storefronts below the transom level of the four retail spaces and the entrance to the second and third floors were replaced with aluminum storefront units.

1970s – Renovations that occurred during the 1970s are not documented or easily acquired.

1980s – Interior remodel and installation of boat-shaped concession stand, marquee replaced after emergency order issued by City of Seattle (modified slightly in 1981).

1994 – Repainted entire theater interior; added stained-glass inserts; swapped to “ultra-comfy seats with cupholders” and a wide-aspect-ratio screen; and added a state-of-the-art Dolby Digital and Sony Dynamic Digital sound system and a 16 mm film projector.

2011 – Preserved architecture and restored cosmetic detail; installed a motorized movie screen and a fire suppression sprinkler system; revealed the original stage and proscenium and expanded the stage footprint by four feet (to a 16-foot depth); upgraded backstage area; installed state of the art sound and lights; and improved patron amenities, including platformed seating with new seats on the main floor, a bar area, and restroom upgrades.

Summarized in a few short paragraphs, this may seem like a lot of change. However, when spread over a century of hard venue use, these updates illustrate management teams that were interested and invested in keeping the facility modern, profitable, and adaptive to changing times and customer desires. As University of Washington assistant professor and Neptune scholar, Sara Gonzalez (2017) stated, “adaptation is crucial to survival.” (See Appendix B for a more complete list of venue remodels and which lessees did what)

Context and Community

The Neptune Theatre has developed a diverse community base of supporters and advocates despite changes, renovations, and identity shifts over the years. The rooted and historical connection U-District community members and Seattlites feel for the venue emerged in the media as the Neptune’s movie theater identity shifted to one that was more multi-purpose under STG leadership. Controlled sadness about the end of an era and the temporary closing of the Neptune was covered by articles with titles like “The Neptune Theatre Sinks. STG Salvages It” and “Who Sank King Neptune?” (Scigliano, 2010). Numerous media stories appeared, with residents reflecting on their checkered past with the venue, not afraid to criticize venue flaws and difficult periods, but also romanticizing the time spent in the space during their teenage years and first work experiences. “If you have lived any part of your life in the University District, you

probably have a story to tell about the Neptune...” stated Bill White (2011) in his article about the Neptune’s reopening.

STG was eager to share its wide range of vision for actively integrating the theater with its surrounding community. “The Neptune’s programming allows us to present concerts and other performances that are a better fit for the University District...it also presents a great opportunity to focus on developing local artists,” said STG’s Phillips (Black, n.d.). “Community-based programs that engage people from within the University District and surrounding communities, as well as educational and experiential programs and programs presented in partnership with the University of Washington are all a part of what we intend to achieve through operation of the Neptune.”

“The Neptune could provide an especially apt rehearsal and performance space for younger, developing artists whose audiences may not yet be large enough for the Paramount or Moore theaters, which have 2,807 and 1,419 seats, respectively,” LaBelle added (Tu, 2011). Since 2011, the Neptune has held events specifically geared at attracting community audiences and engaging in social justice discussions, including the annual *Nights at the Neptune: A Peoples’ Theatre Joint* series and *Seattle Youth Speaks* events (Waterman, 2015). “The U-District is transient, it has lots of families in it, and there’s also a lot of poverty in the area,” Martín Sepulveda, STG’s Special Artistic Programs Manager, commented (personal communication, March 19, 2019). “We could do better and we want to do better,” he added. He wants to represent and speak to the needs of the immediate neighborhood residents. “We need to create better access for the theater...provide some options for people. I’m super excited for it” (M. Sepulveda, personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Results and Implications

There are likely numerous contributing factors in why the Neptune survived and flourished in the same environment that eliminated at least four other theaters, but several key factors stand out: diversified revenue, stable ownership, long term lessees willing to invest resources into the venue, regular care and maintenance, solid community roots and engagement, and leadership that allowed continued agility and adaptability to flourish. From its inception, the Neptune Theatre was designed as, and embedded into, a multi-use entity. It was part of an economic driver (the building as a whole), a commercial team effort consisting of tenant rental revenues supplementing the operational income from the theater itself. That diversified revenue stream was built into the concept from the beginning. In fact, during a conversation with co-owner Craig Thompson, the impression was almost that the driving force for the Neptune Building was the second-floor office space (of use to the owner's son, dentist Dr. E.R. Fried) rather than the theater itself (personal communication, March 19, 2019).

Consistent oversight, a stable guiding vision, and dedicated stewardship and advocacy invested over decades by a single-family owning entity (now represented collectively as The Neptune Building, LLC) likely also deserves significant recognition when discussing the Neptune's secrets of success (See Appendix C for a detailed family tree, Appendix D for a timeline of land, family, and business milestones, and Appendix B for a timeline of Neptune Building owners, lessees, and renovations). The small, focused, and united collective of leadership motivated by lore, longevity, asset-building, income, legacy, and a unifying family project no doubt offered a fast-tracked decision-making process that lent itself to an organization able to be agile and adaptable, which would navigate the Neptune towards success.

Additionally, the relatively steady stream of investments, upgrades, updates, and renovations over the years by dedicated lessees and owners kept the facility out of disrepair, if not continuously attempting to be competitively the best, most cutting-edge (see Appendix B for a compiled timeline of facility updates). Different companies and individuals were infusing money, energy, and time into the theater, maintaining it and attempting to set it apart from the competition and keeping it ahead of the curve. These usually limited resources were coming from multiple sources and were therefore likely more substantial than they might otherwise have been. A deep-rooted connection and regular engagements with the surrounding community, notably including the University of Washington's population, also kept the Neptune active and relevant.

Finally, under the current operational management of STG, the Neptune is not subject to costly labor agreements with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) (which generally means cheaper labor and more options for flexible and adaptive management of events and performances). The 850 (seated) to 1,000 (general admission) audience-capacity venue falls into the mid-sized venue range, which is relatively rare for Seattle – a happy medium between super-intimate yet costly shows and larger audiences where attendees are barely able to see the performers.

At least one telling and quantifiably measurable indicator of the Neptune's ongoing success as a valuable asset is publicly available and updated annually: the initial price Samuel Fried paid in 1906 was \$3,501. By the time the bonds for the Neptune project were initially offered in 1921, the property's total land and building valuation had grown to \$140,000. In tax year 2019, the value of the land is \$3,412,500 and the value of the building was \$337,200 (King County Department of Assessments, n.d.). By 2020, the taxable total value had risen to just

under \$4.3 million. It is also interesting to note that while the land value has skyrocketed since 1998, the value of the building has had great fluctuations, reaching as high as almost \$1.2 M in 2000 but down to a mere \$69,000 in 2016 (King County Department of Assessments, n.d.). Office and apartment rental from the building as a whole, as well as side income from activities like the Sound Transit project have infused additional resources and opportunities.

Each of these varied factors, and likely others yet to be identified and culled from the Neptune's storied history, have thankfully united to keep this unique gem of a venue active in, and contributing to the rich Seattle theater and performing arts scene. The collaborations between STG, Sound Transit, and the Neptune Theatre mean the building could soon be a flagship U-District entertainment hub, located next door to a bustling neighborhood square that is visited by up to 12,000 people a day (Lindblom, 2012; Young, 2015). The programming, community engagement, and reach of STG and its mission could expand and even go digital, as some of its events did during the COVID-19 quarantine in 2020. This could ultimately amplify the performances, images, and stories of the Neptune Theatre within and beyond Seattle. Who knows what the future holds? What is important is that the Neptune Theatre is in solid owner and lessee hands for the foreseeable future and has established a long-term pattern of survival and success.

Method Note:

This case study was developed by Ana N. Rusness-Petersen, MFA 2019 for Seattle University's MFA in Arts Leadership course Cultural Infrastructure and Facilities taught by faculty Katie Oman and Bill Moskin. Interviews were conducted with Bryan Layton, STG's Historic Facilities Program Director; Martín Sepulveda, STG's Special Artistic Programs Manager; and Craig Thompson, co-owner of the Neptune Theatre LLC. Primary research was conducted during Fall Quarter, 2019 and updated in 2020. Susan Kunimatsu provided editing. Citations and references may not conform to APA standards.

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Neptune Image Gallery



Fried family home in 1906 on the current site of Neptune Theatre. Courtesy University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, SEA3510.



The site of the future Neptune Theatre (at the corner of 45th Ave. NE & Brooklyn Ave) being excavated for construction in 1919. Courtesy STG Archive and Gallery.



The Neptune, post-opening but pre-marquee, sometime between 1921-1928. Courtesy University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, SEA0280.

The Marquees Chronologically



Marquee 1: 1924(8) – 1946. Courtesy Washington State Archives, Real Property Record Cards. Parcel 114200-0235.



Marquee 1 – photographed circa 1935. Courtesy University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, SEA0323.



Property of Museum of History & Industry, Seattle

Marquee 2: 1946 – 1951. Courtesy Museum of History & Industry, PEMCO Webster & Stevens Collection, Image 1983.10.16605.



Marquee 3: 1951 -1981. Courtesy Washington State Archives, Real Property Record Cards. Parcel 114200-0235.

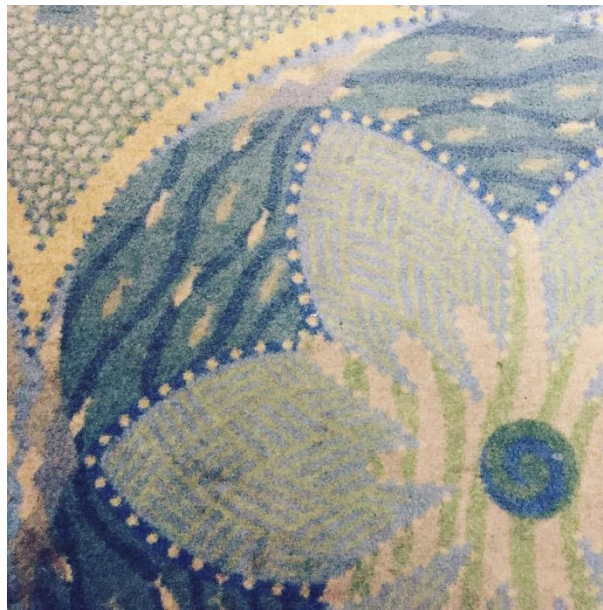


Marquee 4: 1981 – 2018. Photo by Ana Rusness-Petersen.

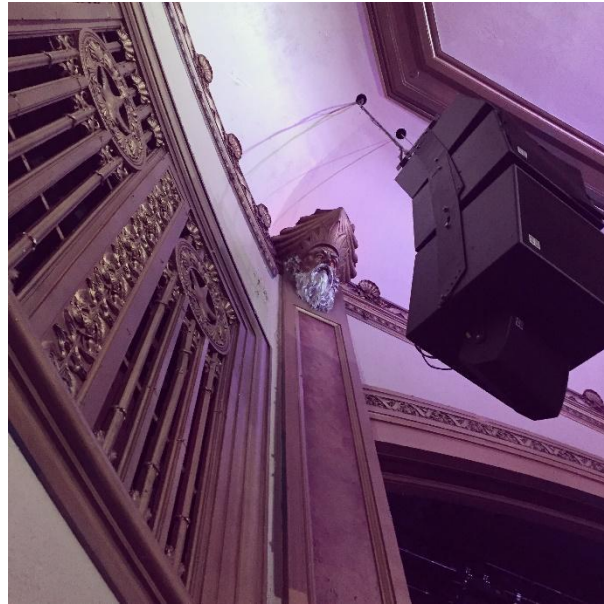


Marquee 5: 2019 – present. Digital marquee recreating 1951 marquee. Daylight photo by Ana Rusness-Petersen. Nighttime photo Courtesy STG website. Photo by Marcus Shriver.

Neptune Nautical Themed Details



Fish in the Neptune carpets. Photo by Ana Rusness-Petersen.



Zeus perches by the proscenium. Photo by Ana Rusness-Petersen.



Zeus on the exterior of the Neptune Building, 2019. Photo by Ana Rusness-Petersen.



Interior Neptune signage near one of the bar concession areas, 2019. Photo by Ana Rusness-Petersen.

STG Renovation Images



Courtesy STG Archive and Gallery. Photos by Christopher Nelson.

Appendix A1

564 No. 321829

Ovelia Quay
To
Samuel Fried

WARRANTY DEED

This Indenture, Made this 12th day of March in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Six 1906

Between Ovelia Quay, a widow, of King County, Washington

the party of the first part, and Samuel Fried the party of the second part:

Witnesseth: That the said party of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of Thirty Five hundred \$3500.00 DOLLARS of the United States of America, to her in hand paid by the said party of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, does, by these presents, Grant, Bargain, Sell, Convey and Confirm unto the said party of the second part, and to his heirs and assigns, all that certain tract, lot, or parcel of land situate, lying and being in the County of King State of Washington, particularly bounded and described as follows, to-wit:

Lots Twenty-two (22) and Twenty-Three (23) and their portions of lot Twenty-four (24) in Block Two (2) of Brooklyn Addition to the City of Seattle lying South of the South Margin of East Fifth Fifth Street, as established by Ordinance # 10566.

Together with, all and singular, the tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances thereto belonging, or in any wise appertaining.

To Have and to Hold, the said premises, with the appurtenances, unto the said party of the second part and to his heirs and assigns forever.

And the said party of the first part does hereby covenant to and with the said party of the second part his heirs and assigns, that she, the said party of the first part, is the owner in fee simple of said premises, and have good right, full power and lawful authority to grant, bargain, sell and convey the same in the manner aforesaid; that the said party of the second part, and his heirs and assigns shall and may at all times hereinafter peaceably and quietly have, hold, use, occupy, possess and enjoy the above granted premises, and every part and parcel thereof, with the appurtenances, without any suit, molestation, eviction or disturbance of the said party of the first part or her assigns, or of any other person or persons lawfully claiming or to claim the same; that said premises are free, clear and discharged of and from all liens and incumbrances of what nature or kind soever, and that she, the said party of the first part will, and his heirs, executors or administrators shall warrant and defend said premises against all lawful claims whatsoever.

In Witness Whereof, the said party of the first part has hereunto set her hand and seal the day and year first above written.

Signed, Sealed and Delivered in Presence of

James R. Pattison } Ovelia Quay (SEAL)
J. N. Thomas } (SEAL)

State of Washington, County of King, ss.

This is to Certify, That on this 12th day of March A. D. 1906 before me, James R. Pattison a Notary Public in and for the State of Washington, duly commissioned and sworn personally came Ovelia Quay to me known to be the individual described in and who executed the within instrument, and acknowledged to me that she signed and sealed the same as her free and voluntary act and deed, for the uses and purposes therein mentioned.

Witness my hand and official seal, the day and year in this certificate first above written.

James R. Pattison
Notary Public in and for the State of Washington, residing at Seattle

Filed for record at the request of Shantee on the 14th day of March A. D. 1906, at 5 o'clock past 1 P. M.

J. J. [Signature]
County Auditor.

Warranty Deed for Brooklyn Addition, Block 2, Lots 22 - 24 with Ovelia Quay

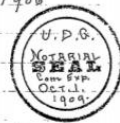
Appendix A2

30

"Bishop, Wm," who, together with Elizabeth Bishop, his wife, deeded to Francis W. James, on Sept. 22nd, 1903, Lots 14 and 15, in Block 5, James Addition to the City of Seattle, King County, Washington, which deed was recorded in Vol. 347 of Deeds, page 568, Records of King County, Washington, and that in the foregoing deed, wherein the name of William Bishop, or William Bishop, Sr., was used, they referred to one and the same person, to-wit: the father of this officer.

William Bishop.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 9th day of March, 1906



W. D. Gray
Notary Public in and for the State of Washington, residing at Post Townsend,

O. K. Roth & Pouch

Filed for record at the request of Lewis N. Roentgen, March 14th 1906, at 2 min past 12 M.

County Auditor

381.828

The Latona Land and Mortgage Co., et al
vs
Samuel Fried
Omit Claim Deed

This Indenture, Made this 12th day of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and six (1906) Between The Latona Land and Mortgage Company, a corporation, organized and existing under laws of Washington, and the Morse Investment and Mortgage Company, a corporation, the parties of the first part and Samuel Fried, the party of the second part:

Witnesseth, That the said parties of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of One ⁰⁰/₁₀₀ Dollars, lawful money of the United States of America, to them in hand paid by the said party of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, do by these presents remise, release and forever quit claim unto the said party of the second part, and to his heirs and assigns, the following described tract, lot, or parcel of land, situated lying and being in the County of King, State of Washington, particularly bounded and described as follows, to-wit:

Lots Twenty-two (22), Twenty-three (23) and Twenty-four (24), in Block Four (2) in Brooklyn Addition to the City of Seattle, as shown by the recorded plat thereof in the Auditor's office of the above named County and State, Together with all and singular the tenements,

hereditaments and appurtenances thereto, belonging or in anywise appertaining, and the reversion and reversions, remainder and remainders, rents, issues and profits thereof.

To have and to hold, all and singular the said premises, together with the appurtenances unto the said party of the second part, and to his heirs and assigns forever.

In Witness Whereof, the said party of the first part hereunto set his hand and seal the day and year first above written.

Witness my hand and seal in presence of



The Latawa Land and Mortgage Co.

By J. A. Moore, President.

A. Robinson, Sec. (initials)

Moore Investment & Mortgage Company

By J. A. Moore, President. (initials)

M. R. Wood, Sec.

State of Washington } ss.
County of King

On this 11th day of March A.D. 1906, before me personally appeared James A. Moore to me known to be the President of Latawa Land & Mortgage Co. the corporation that executed the within and foregoing instrument, and acknowledged the said instrument to be the free and voluntary act and deed of said corporation, for the uses and purposes therein mentioned, and on oath stated that he was authorized to execute said instrument and that the seal affixed is the corporate seal of said corporation.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal the day and year first above written.



John F. Main
Notary Public in and for the
State of Washington, residing at
Seattle.

State of Washington } ss.
County of King

On this 12th day of March A.D. 1906, before me personally appeared James A. Moore to me known to be the President of the Moore Investment & Mortgage Co. the corporation that executed the within and foregoing instruments, and acknowledged the said instrument to be the free and voluntary act and deed of said corporation, for the uses and purposes therein mentioned, and on oath stated that he was authorized to execute said instrument and that the seal affixed is the corporate seal of said corporation.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal the day and year first above written.



John F. Main

Notary Public in and for the State
of Washington, residing at Seattle.

Filed for record at the request of the Grantor
March 14th 1906 at 4 min. past 1 P.M.

[Signature]
County Auditor.

381845

Mill Street Improvement Company

Warranty Deed.

Grantor B. Leach.

This Indenture, made this ninth day of March in the
year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Six.

Between Mill Street Improvement Company, a corporation
duly organized and existing under and by virtue of the laws of the
State of Washington and duly authorized to do business in the State
of Washington party of the first part, and Frank B. Leach, party
of the second part.

Witnesseth, That the said party of the first part,
for and in consideration of the sum of Seven Hundred Fifty
(\$750.00) Dollars, lawful money of the United States, to it in
hand paid by the said party of the second part, the receipt
whereof is hereby acknowledged, does by these presents, grant,
convey, sell, assign and confirm unto the said party of the second
part, his heirs and assigns, the following described tract, lot,
or parcel of land, situated, lying and being in the County of King,
State of Washington, and particularly bounded and described as
follows, to-wit:

All of Lot Seven (7), in Block Nine (9), in the
Mill Street Addition to the City of Seattle, Subject to all
special assessments and taxes for local improvements
levied at this date.

Together with the tenements, hereditaments and
appurtenances thereto belonging or in anywise appertaining.

Do have and to hold, the said premises, with the
tenements, hereditaments and appurtenances unto the said party
of the second part, his heirs and assigns forever.

And the said party of the first part, and its
successors, does by these presents covenant, grant and agree to
and with the said party of the second part, his heirs and
assigns, that it, the said party of the first part, and its
successors, all and singular the premises heretofore conveyed,
described and granted, or mentioned, with the tenements, hereditaments
and appurtenances, unto the said party of the second part, his
heirs and assigns, and against all and every person or
persons whomsoever lawfully claiming or to claim the same or any
part thereof, shall and will warrant and forever defend.

Deed for Brooklyn Addition, Block 2, Lots 22-24 with Latona
Land & Mortgage Co. and Moore Investments & Mortgage Co.

Appendix B

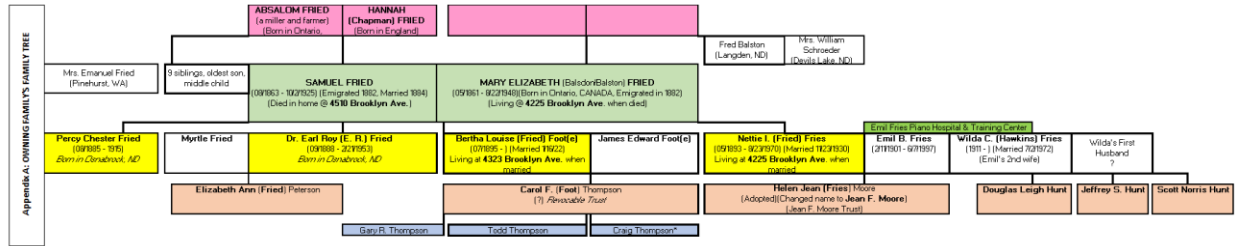
NEPTUNE THEATRE TIMELINE OF RENOVATION PROJECTS, OWNERSHIP, and LESSEES							
TIME FRAME	Official name on d	LESSEE	ACTIVITY (RENOVATION, MARQUEE, & Other)		USE	# of Seats	
1906	Samuel & Mary Fried		BUYS LAND	1 1/2 story ho	Home		
1919			Home relocated to Three Tree Point via barge. Site excavation and construction on the Samuel Fried Building and Neptune				
1921 (APR - DEC)		Puritan Theater Co. (25 year lease issued 4/8/1921) E.L. Blaine (1st MGR)	Twelve days post-lease, \$250 and \$500 Gold Bonds with 7% return sold by Seattle Title Trust Company for a total of \$55,000 (Total Land & Building Valued at \$140,000)				
Nov. 16, 1921			NEPTUNE THEATRE OPENING NIGHT			1000+	
1922 (DEC)		Owners and Lessees sued by Seattle Title Trust Company for foreclosure due to nonpayment of issued mortgage bonds in the		NO MARQUEE	Stage originally 12' deep E.R. & Myrtle Fried and W.F. Jahn & Co. state claim to partial ownership/payment due as well.		
1922 (DEC)		Puritan Theatre Co. sued by G & G Theatre Company for payment of projection machine and rest room "furniture," and W.F. Jahn files claim for \$1,504.76 for plastering bill.				968	
1923 (JAN)		Mr. & Mrs. E.L. Blaine and Mr. & Mrs. A.B.L. Gellerman sued for \$1,000 bond payout by UW Dean Fred Bolton and Bertha Hegman, who allege they were told to expect bond payout upon 30 day					
1923		Foreclosure suit awarded (in the amount of \$57,474.84) to Seattle Title Trust Company. Judge ordered property to be sold by sheriff to satisfy	Property RENAMED the Neptune (Theatre) Building				
1926		Jensen-Von Herberg Motion Picture Chain					
1927		Claude Jensen John G. Von Herberg	RENAMED The Liberty between January and June 1927				
1928			MAJOR RENOV 1	MARQUEE 1		750-866	
1929					Major retail storefront modification, marquee added, replaced, & interior remodel including replacement of original maritime painted scenes with art deco and addition of concession stand. (Overseen by		
1932	Dr. Earl Roy Fried						
1926 (Aug.)		VH chain & Lease Interests of chain for \$5M					
1935 - 1961		Evergreen State Amusement Corp.	1.5		Theatre entry tile replaced (between 1937 & 1952).		
1938 (June - July)			No change to theatre/auditorium space.		Entrance to store room and dry room in store's basement added. No change to A.U.		
1943			1.75		Removal of Kimball three-manual theatre organ (to Seattle Public University's Mokinley Auditorium, later sold to Mark Reed of Portland and broken up for parts).		

1946				MARQUEE 2	Marquee replaced.
1951				MARQUEE 3	Marquee replaced.
1956			2		spaces and the entrance to the 2nd and 3rd floors were replaced with aluminum storefront units. Marquee replaced again.
1964 - 1969		Sterling Theatres, Inc.			
1970 - 1974		Harold Greenland			Declined with lessee's showing of X-rated films.
1970s			3		
1972		Emil B. Fries			
1975 - 1980 <i>(or 1971-74?)</i>		Sterling Recreation Org.			Popular rep program and FHSAT Rocky Horror midnight
1980 - 1981		Seven Gables Theatres (Randy Finley)			
1980s			4	MARQUEE 4	Interior remodel and installation of boat shaped concession stand, a new sound and projection system, and the Marquee was replaced after emergency order issued by City of Seattle to replace it (& modified slightly
1989?					700
1981 - 2010		Landmark Theatres Corp.			
1988			4.25		Hybrid pipe organ installation to accompany silent film revivals. Used from 1988 - 1998. Featured "Robert Morton, Kimball, and Wurlitzer components controlled by a two-
1991					Set a record playing <i>The Rocky Horror Picture Show</i> every week for 14 years - longer than any movie had played in Seattle (Friday and Saturdays at midnight
1994			4.5		Neptune's nautical motif," added "stained-glass" inserts, swapped to "ultra-comfy seats with cupholders" and a wide-aspect ratio screen, and added a state-of -the-art Dolby Digital and Sony Dynamic Digital Sound system and a 16 mm film projector.
1998			4.75 (hybrid organ removed)		
2011 (FEB)		Lease signed 11/2010; operation assumed in 2/2011 (10 year lease + 5 year option)	5 (1/2011 - 09/2012) Total cost \$730,000		Official land use change, adding a live performance venue function. Preserved, uncovered, and restored original architecture and cosmetic detail (including Neptune's eyeballs), installed a motorized movie screen and a fire suppression sprinkler system, revealed the original stage and proscenium and expanded stage footprint by 4', upgraded backstage area, installed state-of-the-art sound and lights, and improved patron
Sept. 25, 2011				NEPTUNE THEATRE OFFICIALLY REOPENS	Grand Reopening programming thru Dec. 31, 2012. First 5 are free and include an open-house each day.
2012 (APR)		The Neptune Building, LLC. Consists only of descendants and trust interests of the original Fried family.		NOMINATED TO BE A CITY LANDMARK	
2012 (JUNE)				Soft opening of STG's Neptune Theatre	New 16' deep stage footprint 800-885
2012 (AUG)		Temporary, non-exclusive Construction Easement granted to Sound Transit (Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority) for the southern 10' of the Neptune property.			Craig T. signs temporary construction easement for 10' of land south of Neptune Theatre up to exterior wall to Sound Transit for construction of Link Station. Sound Transit pays \$10,000 for initial easement period (7/30/2012 - 08/09/2019) and \$583/month for each necessary month of easement after that period.
2013 (MAY)		Sound Transit buys exclusive, permanent subsurface rights (including a Tunnel Easement, Underpinning Easement, and Temporary Tie-Back Easement) to the western 52-80' of Neptune Theatre site ("between the elevations of 85' and 147' - the top plane being approximately 46' below the existing ground surface).			Craig T. signs Possession/Use Agreement granting temporary (and eventually permanent) subsurface rights to Sound Transit (with access beginning 8/13/2013) under threat of alternate eminent domain and condemnation action. Sale price is primary hold up on deal - Sound Transit offered \$81,000 + excise tax and closing costs. If mutually agreed to purchase price not agreed to by 6/15/2013, Sound Transit would file for condemnation which would have price determined judicially.
2014				GRANTED CITY OF SEATTLE LANDMARK STATUS	850 - seated 1,000 - GA
2019				MARQUEE 5	from having to be near/in busy street changing letters, and to remove the obstacle former marquee posed to buses, who occasionally hit it.

CURRENT OWNERS UNDER THE NEPTUNE BUILDING, LLC.: Craig Thompson, Gary Thompson Trust, Todd Thompson Trust, Elizabeth F. Peterson, Helen Jean (Fries) Moore, Jean F. Moore Trust, Jeffrey S. Hunt, Scott Norris Hunt, Douglas Leigh Hunt, Emil Fries Piano Hospital and Training Center.

Timeline of The Neptune Building and its owners, lessees, and renovations.

Appendix C



Detailed Fried Family Tree

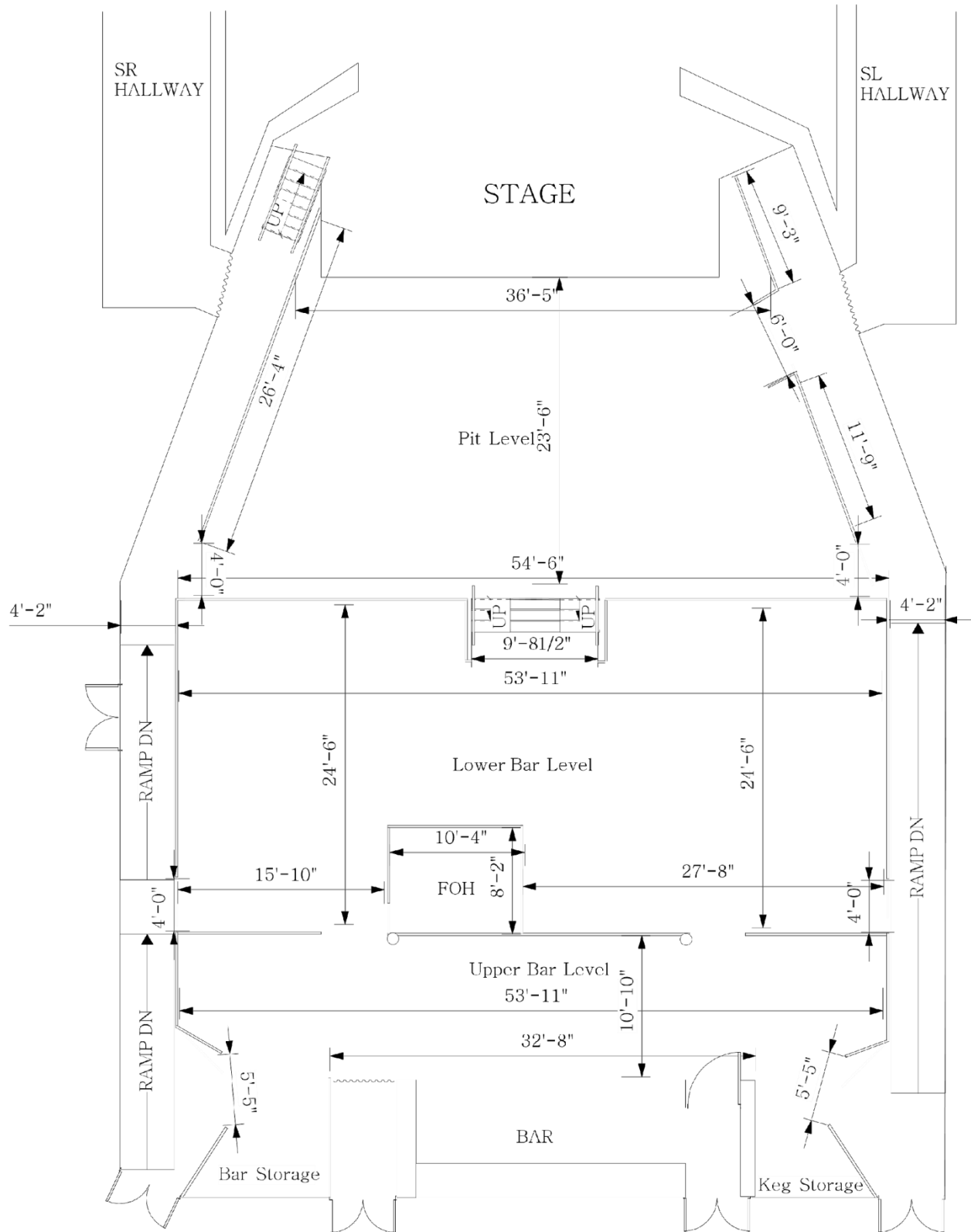
Appendix D

Appendix D: TIMELINE OF NEPTUNE BUILDING LAND, NEIGHBORHOOD, FRIED FAMILY MILESTONES, & OTHER FRIED PE

YEAR	EVENT
1855	Surveyed
1867	First white settlers
7/11873	Christian and Harriet Brownfield received land grants and settled in what is now the U District area to farm in 1867.
1875	The area is officially Homesteaded by Christian Brownfield via Land Patent (BLM Serial #: WADAA 071897), and named "Pioneer Farm."
1875	Christian and Harriet Brownfield divorce on the grounds of "incompatibility of tempers"
1880	Brownfield Homestead subdivided
1882/34	Samuel Fried and Mary Balsdon emigrate to ND (Cavalier County) from Ontario, Canada
1884	Samuel Fried and Mary Balsdon marry in ND
1889	Great Fire of Seattle
1890	EM Carr platted "Kensington" and sold land to James Moore, who began subdividing the property into "building parcels," the
12/101890	"Brooklyn Addition" platted by James Moore & Clise Investment Co.
5/41891	"Brooklyn Addition" annexed into City of Seattle and clear cut/cleared
2/231891	WA Legislature voted to relocate UW from Downtown to Section 16 (part of today's U District)
1892	Electric Trolley tracks laid on Columbus Ave/14th
1893	UW moved to U District from Downtown
1895	The Great Street Renaming UW began building new campus
1898	Henderson Ryan (architect) relocated to Seattle.
1906	Fried family moves to Seattle (from Loam, ND), listed in the 1906 city directory as living at 4217 15th Ave. NE
1909	The Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition was held on the UW campus
1910	Census lists the Fried Family as residing at 4342 Brooklyn Ave. (in a one-and-a-half story house on the current Neptune site)
1910 - 1912	Automobile License Fee Books list Sam Fried at 4342 Brooklyn Ave.
1911 - 1917	Construction of the Lake Washington Ship Canal occurred.
1914	Percy Fried dies.
1919	Two lots and the one house of Parcel 114200-0930 at 4225 Brooklyn Ave. were purchased by Samuel Fried (from Hannah McKeon of LA, CA)
11/201919	ER Fried listed on WSB Dental Examiner's Application for Examination as residing at 4342 Brooklyn Ave. (on current Neptune site)
1919 - 1921	Construction at the corner of E. 45th St. & Brooklyn Ave. ensued, resulting in the Samuel Fried Building (ultimately The Neptune Theatre Building)
1920	Fried family moves to 4323 Brooklyn Ave.
1921	Mortgage Bonds (\$250 & \$500 Gold Bonds at 7%) offered for the Samuel Fried Building for total issuance of \$55,000 (Valuation of land and building =
7/61922	Bertha and James Edward Foot (Foot) married at 4323 Brooklyn Ave. (just south of current Neptune Theatre plot)
12/1922	Foreclosure suit filed by Seattle Title Trust Company
4/1923	Seattle Title Trust Company won foreclosure suit - judge ordered the property "sold by the sheriff to satisfy the mortgage lien.
1925	Interior of 4225 Brooklyn Ave. was renovated, likely rented to tenants.
10/21925	Sam Fried dies at his residence, listed as 4510 Brooklyn Ave. (just north, across 45th St. where the bank currently sits, then listed as the University
1928	Seattle attorney Eugene Bell sold the final third lot of 4225 Brooklyn Ave. to the Estate of Samuel Fried
late 1928 - spring 1929	The " Fried Estate Bungalow Court " (Now, the Lanterbury Court) complex was constructed as a "garden court apartment building" by the Estate of Samuel Fried for an estimated \$35,000 (Permit 281176)
11/231930	Nettie Fried and Emil Fries marry at 4225 Brooklyn Ave. (about a block southwest of Neptune Theatre - in Block 10)
1930	Mary Fried moved into 4225 Brooklyn Ave.
1932	E. R. Fried buys/stowns Neptune Theatre Building
8/221945	Mary Fried dies, still residing at 4225 Brooklyn Ave.
2/211953	E. R. Fried dies of a heart attack en route to hospital. Residing at 3521 46th Ave. NE, but building new home at 8228 Ridge Dr.
8/231970	Nettie Fries dies
4/101972	Emil Fries takes ownership control of Neptune Theatre Building
7/21972	Emil Fries remarries - marrying Wilda C. Hawkins
3/32014	City of Seattle Ordinance 124430 passes, designating the Neptune (Theatre) Building a Historical Landmark

Timeline of Land and Family Milestones/History

Appendix E



Main floor layout of the Neptune Theatre after the 2011 STG renovation. Courtesy STG.