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Marquee Will Make Comeback In the Paramount's Restoration

By **BRUCE WEBER**

As a teen-ager, Vic Damone was an usher there. In his autobiography, former Schools Chancellor Joseph A. Fernandez recalled sneaking into shows with his friends. Erstwhile bobby soxers remember squealing in ecstasy for the young Frank Sinatra, who rose to fame on its stage.

For New Yorkers of a certain age, the Paramount Theater, the Times Square entertainment palace at Broadway and West 43d Street, a fixture of the Great White Way in Damon Runyon-era New York, remains a repository of memories, even though it hasn't been there in more than 20 years.

Now it's coming back, or at least a piece of it. The 3,600-seat theater shut down in 1964, and its vast hall was converted to office space a few years later. What's coming back is the marquee, which disappeared during the conversion.

The city's Landmarks Preservation Commission recently approved a proposal by Newmark & Company, the owners of the Paramount Building, the 33-story ziggurat at 1501 Broadway that once housed the theater, to recreate the ornate, curvy, garishly lighted marquee that announced the presence of stars like Gary Cooper and Claudette Colbert on screen and musicians like Ella Fitzgerald and Harry James on stage.

In addition, said Jeffrey Gural, the president of Newmark, the four-sided clock near the top of the building will be set in motion again, and the globe on top of the clock will be lighted after years of darkness.

"When we're all done, the building will look again like it did in the 40's," Mr. Gural said.

The original marquee, which is the one being reconstructed, was erected with the building in the late 1920's. "Then sometime in the mid- to late 50's, the original was replaced by a more modern-looking one, which was much larger," said Irwin Sheftel, a vice president of Spectacolor Communications, a Times Square signage manufacturer that did the historical research and will do the construction.

"The reason I guess that date," Mr. Sheftel said, "is that I've seen a photograph of the new marquee in which there was a 30- to 40-foot Elvis cutout seen on top of it, and it was the

skinny Elvis."

The purpose of the restoration, as with many of the changes in Times Square, is commercial. Designed by Tobin/Parnes, a SoHo architecture firm, the marquee will not be placed over the current entrance to the building, but in its original location. That will be over an entrance to be created to an entertainment-restaurant-retail establishment planned by Robert Earl.

Mr. Earl is the president of Planet Hollywood International, whose sports-theme All Star Cafe opened to much hoopla on Times Square a year ago. A spokeswoman for Mr. Earl, Wendi Kopsick, said project details are not available.

Mr. Gural said that the restoration of the marquee, which will be paid for by Planet

Hollywood and carry the logo of the new club, was conceived as a way to attract a tenant to the space, which includes a 40,000-square-foot basement. (One or more of the current retailers on the corner will be asked to vacate).

The New York Times now rents the basement to store newsprint for its presses next door. But those presses will be gone by the end of next year, when a Times printing plant is scheduled to open in College Point, Queens.

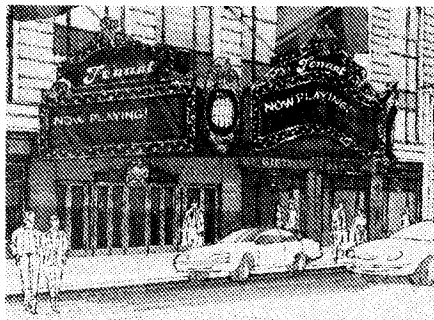
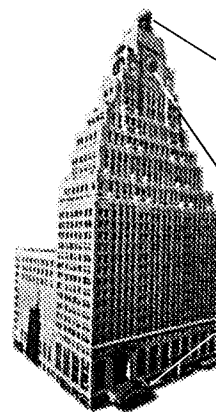
It would have been impossible to attract a big-time tenant without ample space on the building for signs, Mr. Gural said. Because 1501 Broadway is a designated landmark building, all exterior changes must be approved by the Landmarks Commission. The building was designed by the Chicago firm Rapp & Rapp, creators of opulent movie houses, and built

The Changes

THE GLOBE that sits on top of the clock will be lighted after years of darkness.

THE CLOCK near the top of the office building will be set in motion.

A MARQUEE will be added to recreate the original one.



John Duncan

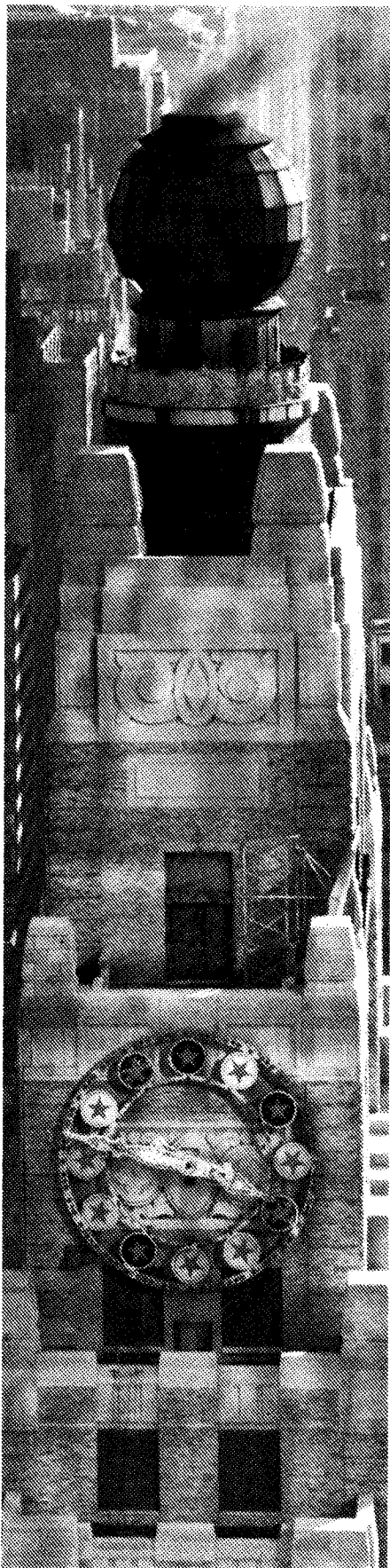
The proposed Paramount marquee.

in 1926 and 1927 for the headquarters of the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation, a forerunner of Paramount Pictures.

"A striking reminder of Times Square's boom in the 1920's, and of a founding force behind the motion picture industry, the Paramount Building stands as an important symbol of New York's architectural and cultural past," the commission wrote in its 1988 designation report. Paramount Pictures no longer has any connection with the building.

The proposal to recreate the marquee was approved by the commission on July 23.

"We think it's fabulous," said Deborah Sack, a commission spokeswoman.

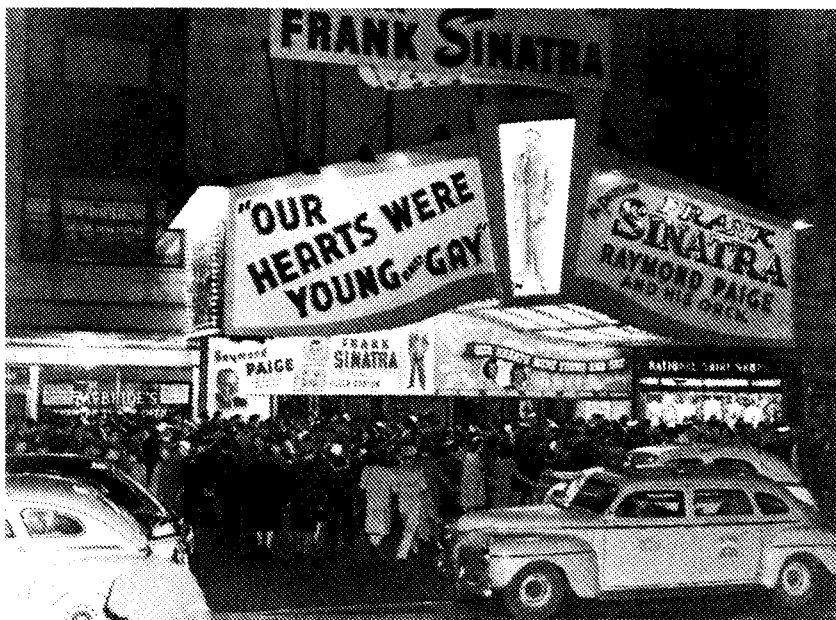


Jack Manning/The New York Times

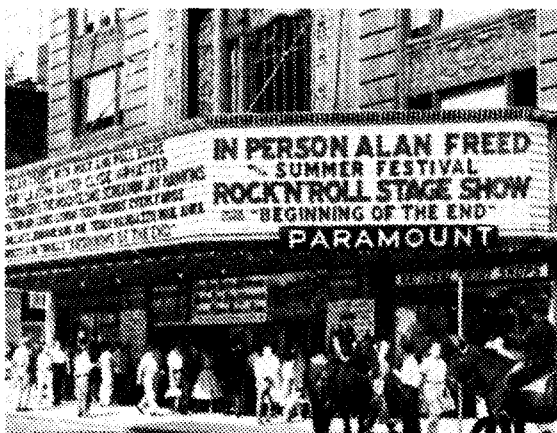
The 33-story Paramount Building, with its globe and ornate clock, is being restored to its 1940's appearance.



"The Golden Age of the Movie Palace" — Clarkson N. Potter



World Wide Photos



The New York Times

The Paramount, top, with its original, garishly lighted marquee, was a fixture of the Great White Way in the Damon Runyon era. In 1944, above, an estimated 25,000 people flocked to Times Square when Frank Sinatra opened there. In 1957, left, the theater's new, modern-looking marquee promoted a rock festival.