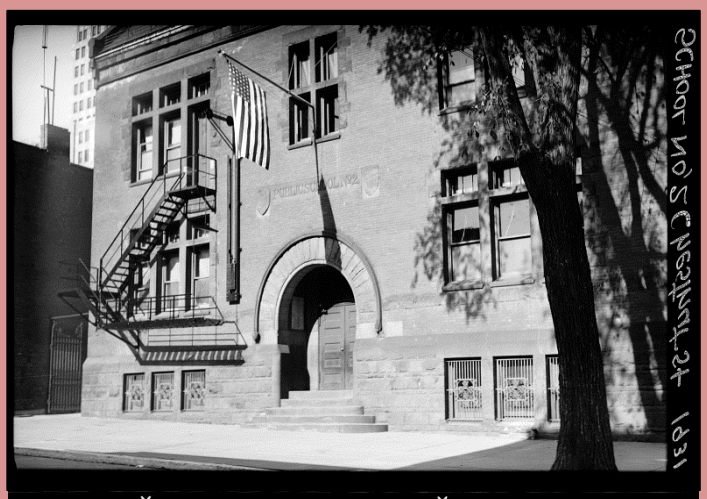
Then & Now:

Albany, the South Mall and a Neighborhood Lost



City Engineer, Public Works Negatives, 1930-1949. From the Archival Collection of the Albany County Hall of Records.

The Princess and "The Gut"

89-01830. Private Donor. Netherlands Royal Family Visit to Albany Photo Collection. Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands, Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Mayor Erastus Corning, September, 1959.

"The South Mall will be the greatest single governmental office complex history has ever known." – Mayor Erastus Corning 2nd

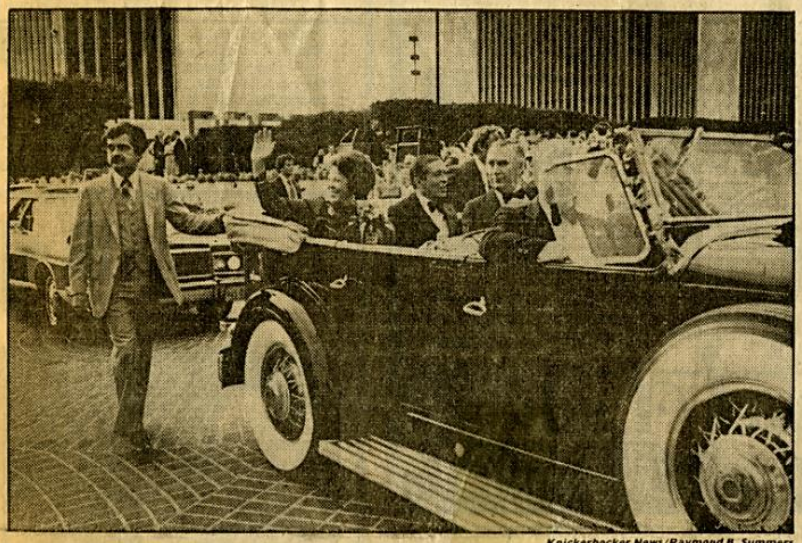
In September of 1959, Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands came to Albany, New York to commemorate the 350th anniversary of Henry Hudson's exploratory voyage on the Hudson River at the Hudson-Champlain Celebration. While giving the young royal a tour of downtown Albany, Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller felt embarrassed by the deteriorating South End neighborhood referred to by some as "The Gut," an area of many dilapidated buildings and vacant structures. Albany Mayor Erastus Corning 2nd told the *Knickerbocker News* in 1979 that: "Rockefeller thought [the] buildings the Princess and those with her saw were not as good-looking or appropriate for a capital city as he thought they should be."

In an attempt to revitalize Albany and transform it into a city outsiders would deem worthy of being New York's capital, Rockefeller proposed the construction of a large, modern governmental complex. In order to create this lavish site he envisioned, Rockefeller seized 98.5 acres of land in Albany's South End through eminent domain in 1962 and demolition soon began. As a result, thousands of families and business owners lost their properties and were forced to relocate. Construction on the South Mall began in 1965. Though initially and still informally referred to as the South Mall, it was officially christened the Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza in 1978 and production was completed that same year. Grandiose structures like the Corning Tower, the Cultural Education Center and The Egg replaced historic homes and schools, theatres, grocery stores and more. In 1982

Beatrix, now Queen of the Netherlands, returned to Albany and paid homage to the complex she is often credited for partly inspiring Rockefeller to want built: "After so many years it is exciting to see what tremendous changes have taken place here, in the state capital of New York. Many impressive buildings have sprung up since then, such as the monumental new mall, of which you are so rightfully proud."

Albany rolls out Orange carpet

6/28/82



Knickerbocker News/Raymond B. Summers

ROYAL VISIT — Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, at top, waves to crowd as she tours the Empire State Plaza on Sunday in a car once owned by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Beside her are her husband, Prince Claus, and Gov. Hugh Carey. Below, she is greeted by Carey after arriving at Albany County Airport earlier in the day. Later, below right, the queen responds to her warm welcoming before a private dinner at the Governor's Mansion.

Small crowd greets queen

By DAVID SCHRIEBERG
Knickerbocker News Reporter

The skies may have been gray, but Albany was dominated by bright orange as Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands — for whom official Albany produced its most royal welcome — began her much-heralded visit.

The queen, who had earlier thrilled a crowd of enthusiastic spectators — many of Dutch heritage — at the Empire State Plaza was guest of honor Sunday evening at a dinner given by Gov. and Mrs. Hugh Carey at the Governor's Mansion.

The queen, dressed in a deep-blue full-length gown and accompanied by her husband, Prince Claus, and Carey, toured the Plaza before retiring to the Governor's Mansion for dinner.

After a day-trip to New Brunswick, N.J., today, the queen will return to Albany for a dinner in her honor at the Empire State Plaza Convention Center.

But on Sunday she and Prince Claus gave the Capital District a taste of royalty as they drove around the Plaza that local legend says she inspired during her first visit to the Capital District in 1959.

It was during that visit that Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, embarrassed by dilapidated buildings in the South End, reportedly decided Albany deserved a modern government complex that would make the city proud. Thus was the Empire State Plaza born.

Sunday, she was chauffeured in the magnificent 1932 Packard used by Gov. Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Before the tour, the queen dispatched an envoy to Albany Medical Center Hospital with a message for ailing Mayor Erastus Corning II, who had been scheduled to escort the queen on the tour before he was taken ill two weeks ago.

"She wished him speedy recovery," said Andreas J. Te Boekhorst, Netherlands consul in New York City, who accompanied the queen to Albany.

"The message was the first thing she did when she got here," he said, adding he had also delivered a basket of fruit to the mayor on behalf of the monarch.

Pointing to her busy schedule, Te Boekhorst ruled out a visit or phone call from the queen to Corning.

As the royal couple's car circled the Plaza, flanked on either side by Secret Service agents on foot, curious children trailed on bicycles.

"I haven't seen her for a long time," exclaimed Alice Van Dermoot of Albany, a Dutch woman who left her native country 20 years ago.

"Orange over all," she declared, waving an orange paper flower symbolizing the Dutch royal House of Orange.

And that color predominated on the steps of the State Education Building as the assembled crowd, estimated by state officials at 2,000 to 3,000, released orange balloons on the arrival of the royal party.

Continued on Page 4-A

Plaza legend: A footnote

Local raconteurs like to attribute the birth of the Empire State Plaza to Gov. Nelson Rockefeller's embarrassment over dilapidated downtown Albany while escorting Princess Beatrix around town in 1959.

But Dr. Vivienne Anderson, former associate commissioner of the state Education Department, claims a piece of the conception for herself because she was instrumental in arranging the 1959 visit by the princess.

Earlier in 1959, Dr. Anderson was a member of the Albany County Hudson-Champlain Committee, formed by David Beetle, then editor of *The Knickerbocker News*.

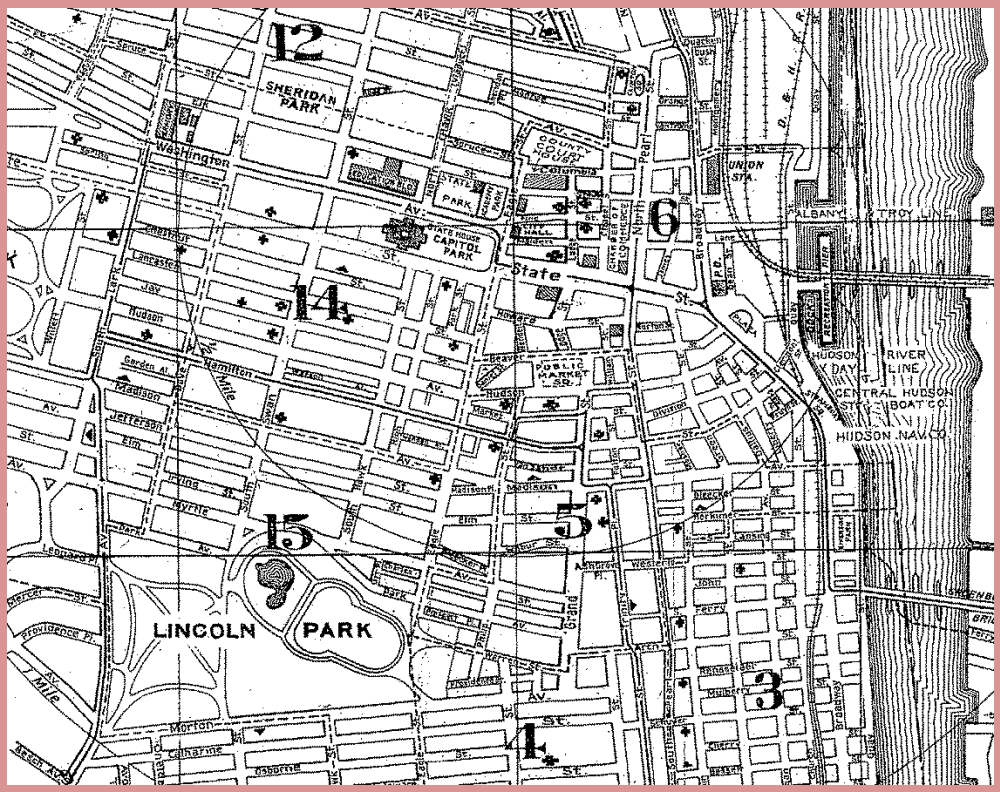
The committee was formed to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the 1609 river trips by

Continued on Page 4-A

89-01834. Private Donor. Netherlands Royal Family Visit to Albany Photo Collection. "Albany Rolls Out Orange Carpet" Times Union article on Queen Beatrix's return to Albany, June 28, 1982.

In ACHOR's exhibit *Then and Now: Albany, the South Mall and a Neighborhood Lost*, see how Albany's South End neighborhood appeared before the construction of the Empire State Plaza and how it changed in the immediate aftermath of its erection.

The South End (Then)

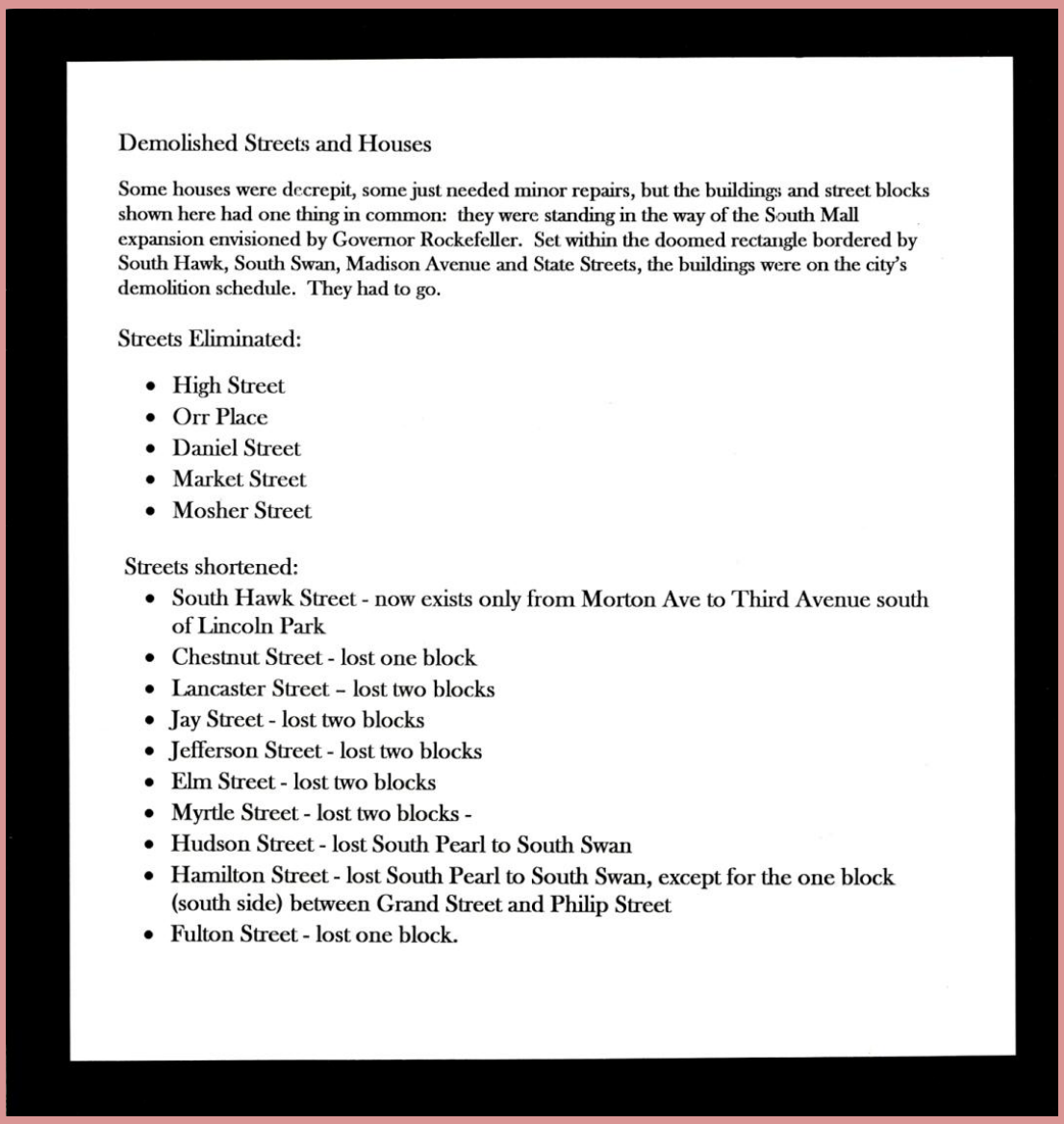


City of Albany, Ward Map, 1930. ACHOR. A copy of an original 1930 ward map of the city of Albany.

The South End (Now)

Capital District Street Atlas: Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga and Schenectady Counties, 2002.

To learn more about the streets and blocks that were demolished to make way for the South Mall read below...



Demolished Streets and Houses

Some houses were decrepit, some just needed minor repairs, but the buildings and street blocks shown here had one thing in common: they were standing in the way of the South Mall expansion envisioned by Governor Rockefeller. Set within the doomed rectangle bordered by South Hawk, South Swan, Madison Avenue and State Streets, the buildings were on the city's demolition schedule. They had to go.

Streets Eliminated:

- High Street
- Orr Place
- Daniel Street
- Market Street
- Mosher Street

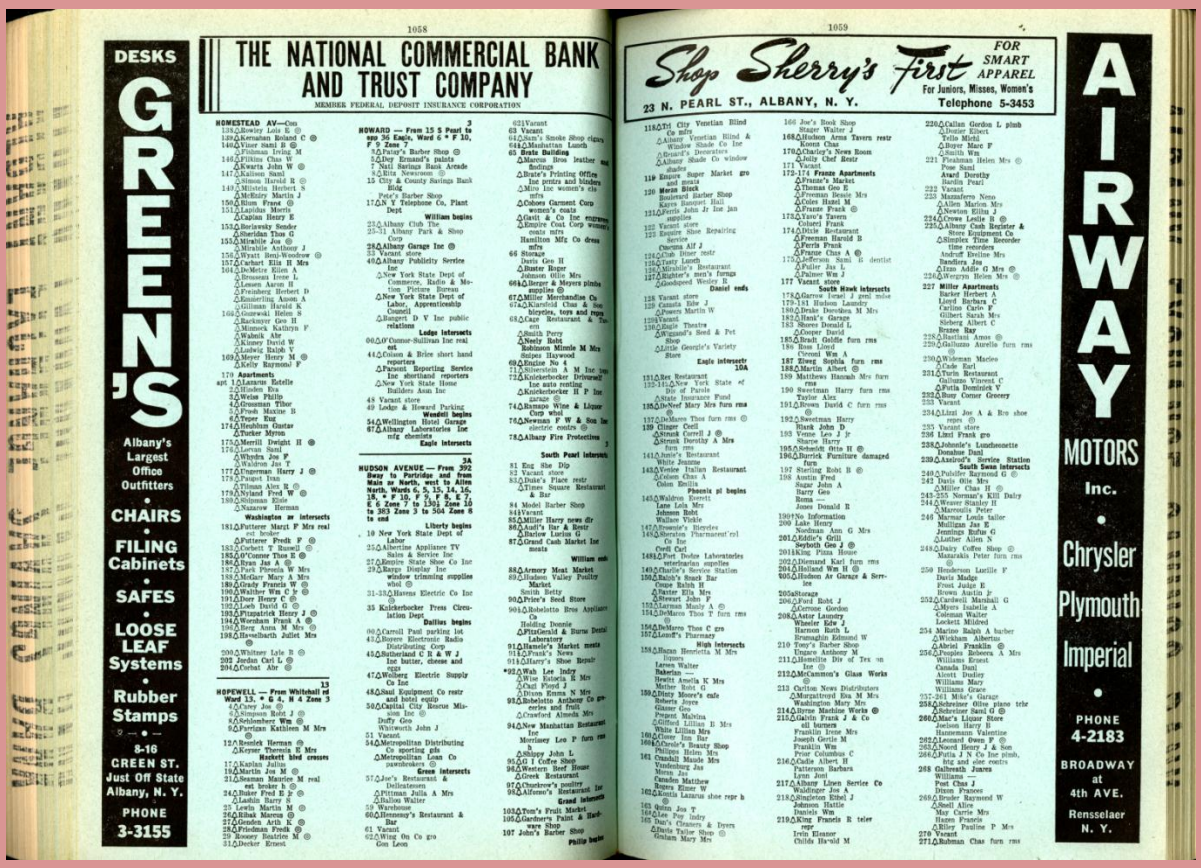
Streets shortened:

- South Hawk Street - now exists only from Morton Ave to Third Avenue south of Lincoln Park
- Chestnut Street - lost one block
- Lancaster Street – lost two blocks
- Jay Street - lost two blocks
- Jefferson Street - lost two blocks
- Elm Street - lost two blocks
- Myrtle Street - lost two blocks -
- Hudson Street - lost South Pearl to South Swan
- Hamilton Street - lost South Pearl to South Swan, except for the one block (south side) between Grand Street and Philip Street
- Fulton Street - lost one block.

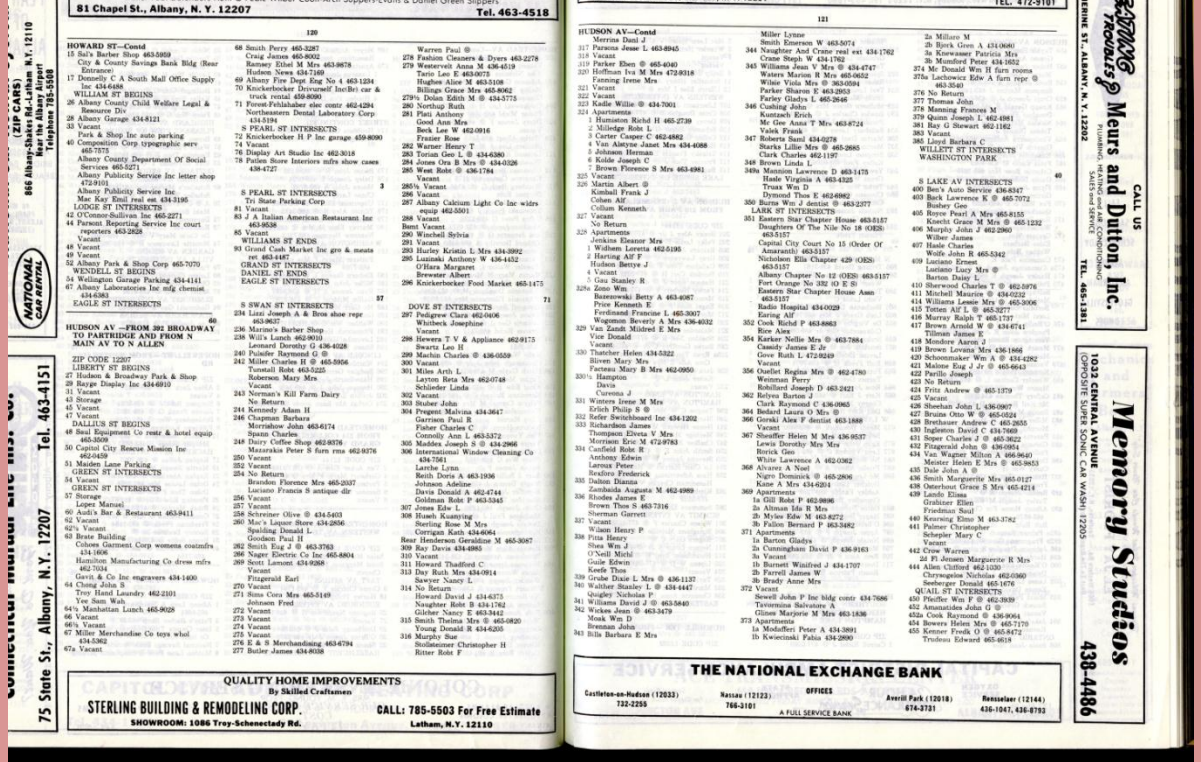
Hudson Avenue

Hudson Avenue, originally called Hudson Street, is one of the oldest streets in the city of Albany still in existence. It was a long road that once ran from Broadway to Partridge Street, intersected only by Washington Park between South Lake Avenue and Willett Street. Demolition for the South Mall significantly shortened Hudson Avenue; the blocks between South Swan Street and Eagle Street were lost due to razing. Today, Hudson Avenue exists only from Broadway to South Pearl Street and South Swan Street to Partridge Street.

The street guides (below) for Hudson Avenue in the1958 and 1971 Albany City Directories show how drastically the street was affected by the demolition for the state governmental complex. Several addresses for residences, businesses and institutions that are displayed in the 1958 directory did not exist in the directory for 1971.



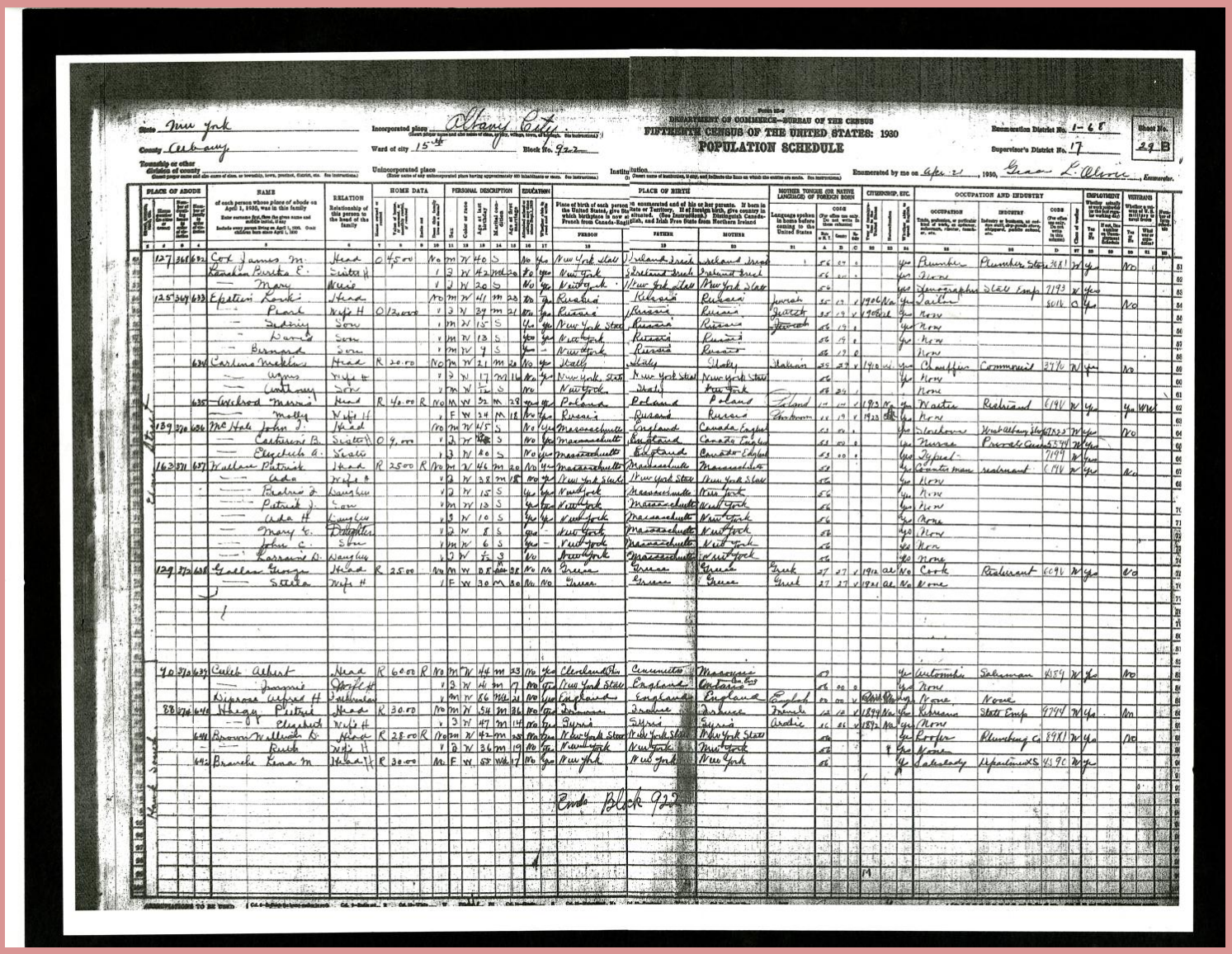
86-00481. Albany City Directory 1958. Street guide for Hudson Avenue.



85-00834. Albany City Directory 1971. Street guide for Hudson Avenue.

Elm Street and South Hawk Street Revisited

For the reconstruction of the South End, Elm street lost two blocks and South Hawk exists only from Morton Avenue to Third Avenue South of Lincoln Park. The 1930 Census show families living on Elm Street in that area, as well as establishments. By 1965, these addresses no longer appear; residents had relocated to new neighborhoods and businesses and institutions either relocated or closed.



02-05439. Hall of Records. United States Census 1930. Albany Wards 14-19. Enumeration District 1-68.
This page shows Block No. 29-B, Elm Street and Hawk South, two of the blocks that were demolished for the South Mall.

Here are some photographs of negatives from ACHOR's City Engineer collection featuring negative images of streets, residences, businesses and institutions (as seen in the 1930's and 1940's) that were razed to erect the South Mall:

South End Neighborhood

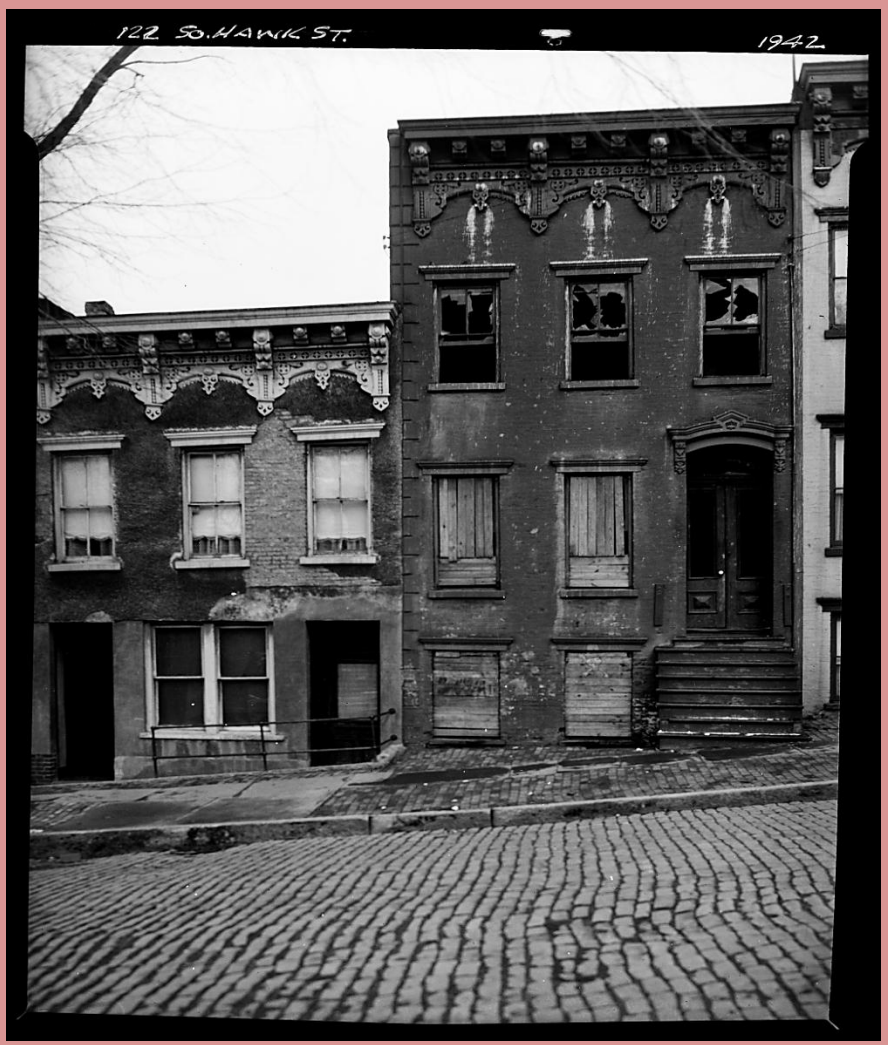
05-04809_700. City Engineer. Hudson Avenue and South Swan Street, ca. 1940.

05-04809_599. City Engineer. 121 Hudson Avenue, 1941.

05-04810_117. City Engineer. 103 Lancaster Street, 1939.

05-04812_483. City Engineer. *55* South Hawk Street between Hamilton Street and Watson's Alley, 1940.

05-04809_683. City Engineer. Hudson Avenue and High Street, 1936.



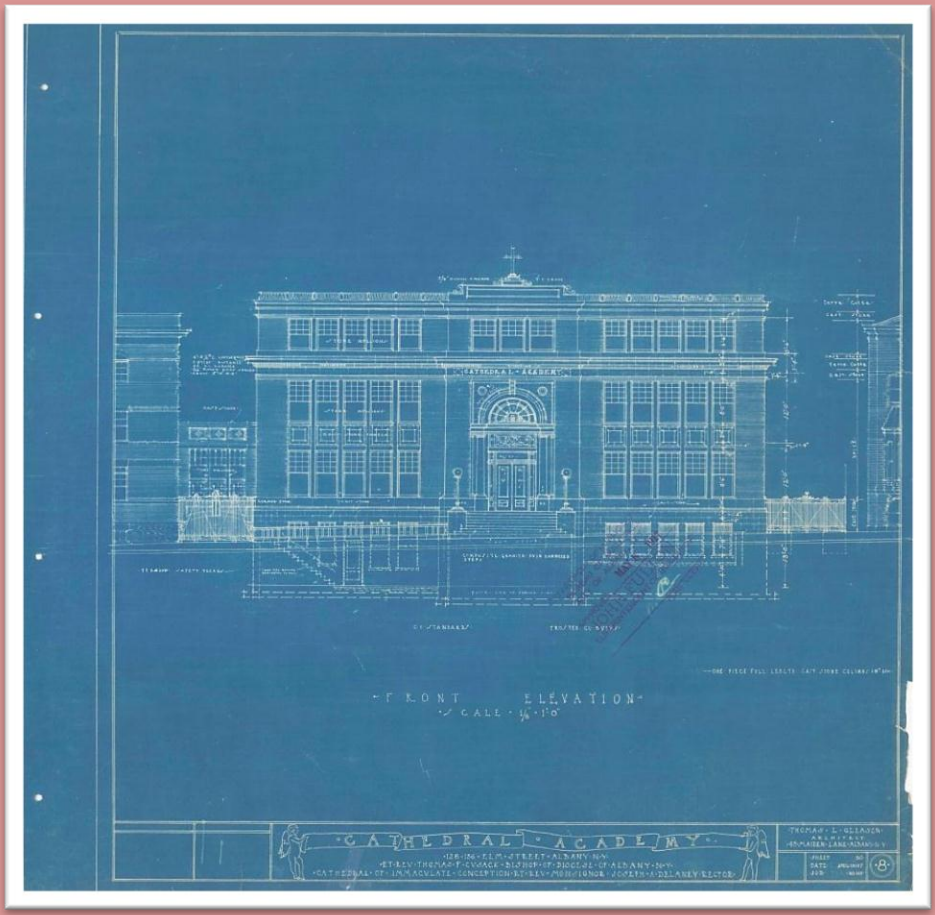
05-04807_279. City Engineer. 122 South Hawk Street, 1942.

05-04812_198. City Engineer. Public School No. 2, 29 Chestnut Street between South Hawk and South Swan Streets, 1931.

05-04812_368. City Engineer. State Street and High Street, 1946.

Keep reading to learn the history of three specific structures that were lost (Cathedral Academy, Eagle Theatre and Central Market) and three structures that make up part of the Empire State Plaza today.

Cathedral Academy



04-07461. Division of Building and Codes. Building Plans and Permits. Original blueprints for Cathedral Academy.

Cathedral Academy, located at 126 Elm Street, was a parochial school of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. It was built in 1917 by architect Thomas L. Gleason, affiliated with the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (the mother church of the Albany Diocese) and ran by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. For several decades it served as one of several local area high schools along with rivals Phillip Schuyler, Vincentian Institute and Christian Brothers Academy. In the mid 1950's Cathedral Academy merged with St. John's (Albany) to form Cardinal McCloskey High School; Cathedral Academy still continued to exist at the grade school level.

Cathedral Academy was seized by the state through eminent domain for the South Mall. In addition to Cathedral, several other properties of the Albany Diocese located in the South End neighborhood were also taken: Cardinal McCloskey (106 Elm Street), Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception's rectory (225 Madison Avenue), the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, the Church of the Assumption (109 Hamilton Street) and Assumption's rectory (107 Hamilton Street). Though initially threatened in the early planning stages, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (located on the corner of Eagle and Madison), was left untouched

largely due to the efforts of William Scully, Bishop of Albany; “planners purposely skirted the structure in drawing boundaries for the state office complex.” Though the mother church was salvaged, it suffered greatly as a result of the neighborhood razing; after moving to other parts of the city and into Albany’s suburbs, many former parishioners left the parish.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany had to erect new buildings to replace what was ultimately demolished. A new school for Cathedral Academy was built at 75 Park Avenue. Cardinal McCloskey relocated to a new building at 99 Slingerlands Street and a new rectory for Cathedral was erected at 125 Eagle Street. Church of the Assumption, now known as Our Lady of the Assumption, relocated to Latham, New York. Some students went on to attend the new Cathedral Academy while others left to attend schools closer to their new homes. Due to declining enrollment, many of the Catholic Church’s schools closed and merged in the late 1970’s. Cathedral Academy closed, while Cardinal McCloskey and Vincentian Institute merged to create Bishop Maginn High School. Originally located at the Cardinal McCloskey building, in 2015 the school moved to the Cathedral Academy on Park Avenue, into the ancestral neighborhood of the predecessor schools that had once stood in the South End.

Eagle Theatre

05-04808_789. City Engineer. Eagle Theatre, located on the corner of Hudson, Eagle and Daniel, as seen in 1944.

Eagle Theatre, located at 130 Hudson Avenue on the corner of Hudson, Eagle and Daniel, was originally erected as the Hudson Street Arsenal in 1859. The three story high brick building was designed by Adolf von Steinwehr and served as an arsenal for the New York National Guard’s Tenth Regiment, Third Division. This regiment would eventually outgrow this location and move to the newly constructed Washington Avenue Armory in 1891. That same year the property was sold to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany. It became the Catholic Union Building and was utilized as a library and reception hall. The Eagle Theatre, owned by George Roberts, opened in 1927 and occupied the structure’s ground level floor.

In 1937 the Eagle, then owned by Abraham Stone, was renovated. Alterations were done by architect Colin Cobban at an estimated cost of $40,000. The theatre reopened as Stone's New Eagle Theatre on January 5, 1938. On the night of its grand opening, the *Knickerbocker News* referred to it as a "luxurious theatre" designed "solely for talking pictures" and the only theatre in Albany to be "equipped with the latest Western Electric Wide Range Sound System." The Eagle Theatre's inaugural films were the *Prisoner of Zenda,* starring Ronald Colman and Madeleine Carroll, and *Make a Wish* with Bobby Breen. The Eagle Theatre continued operations until 1960.

The 184-year-old building where both the theatre and Catholic Union co-existed with one another for several decades ceases to exist today; it was razed in 1962 along with all of Daniel Street and a large portion of Hudson Avenue and Eagle Street for the South Mall. Standing nearby today is a different sort of theatre, The Egg, a performing arts center that draws thousands of spectators from all over the world.

Central Market

05-04807_867. Albany City Engineer. Central Market, located on the corner of Madison and South Swan, as seen in 1943.

Central Market was a supermarket chain founded in 1932 that was owned and operated by Joseph E. Grosberg, William Golub and Bernard Golub. Headquartered in Schenectady, New York, Central Market stores could be found all throughout cities, towns and villages within the Capital District, including Albany.

A Central Market was located on the corner of Madison Avenue and South Swan Street at 325 Madison Avenue. It opened at 1:00 p.m. on February 6, 1941. *The Knickerbocker News* then described it as a "modern self-service

complete market…centrally located [and] easily reached from all sections of the city" consisting of eight departments: "high U.S. government grade of meats, fresh caught sea food, oven fresh bakery products, dairy, dry goods, fresh fruit and vegetables and a full line of drugs and cosmetics."

For several years many families who lived nearby on Madison, Elm, Jefferson and other adjacent streets ventured to this particular grocery store to buy their household needs. When demolition for the South Mall began, this neighborhood market was knocked down. Despite losing this store, the Central Market brand continued to flourish. In the early 1970s, the next generation of the Golub family continued to expand the corporation and Price Chopper, as it is known today, operates more than 130 stores in New York, Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania.

The South Mall (Empire State Plaza)

Photos courtesy of en.wikipedia.org

The Egg

The Empire State Plaza Center for the Performing Arts, known as "The Egg," was established to present quality performances from unique and extraordinary artists around the world and to make these performances available locally. Managed by the not-for-profit Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza Performing Arts Center Corporation, The Egg loans its stage to such performers as violinist Mark O'Connor, the Ellen Sinopoli Dance Company, and many others.

The Corning Tower

The Corning Tower is the tallest building in New York State (aside from New York City) and is dedicated to the memory of Erastus Corning 2nd, Mayor of Albany from January 2, 1942 – May 28, 1983. The Tower's 42nd floor Observation Deck provides spectacular views of the Capital District, including the Hudson River Valley, large portions of the city of Albany and areas of the Adirondack, Catskill and Berkshire Mountains.

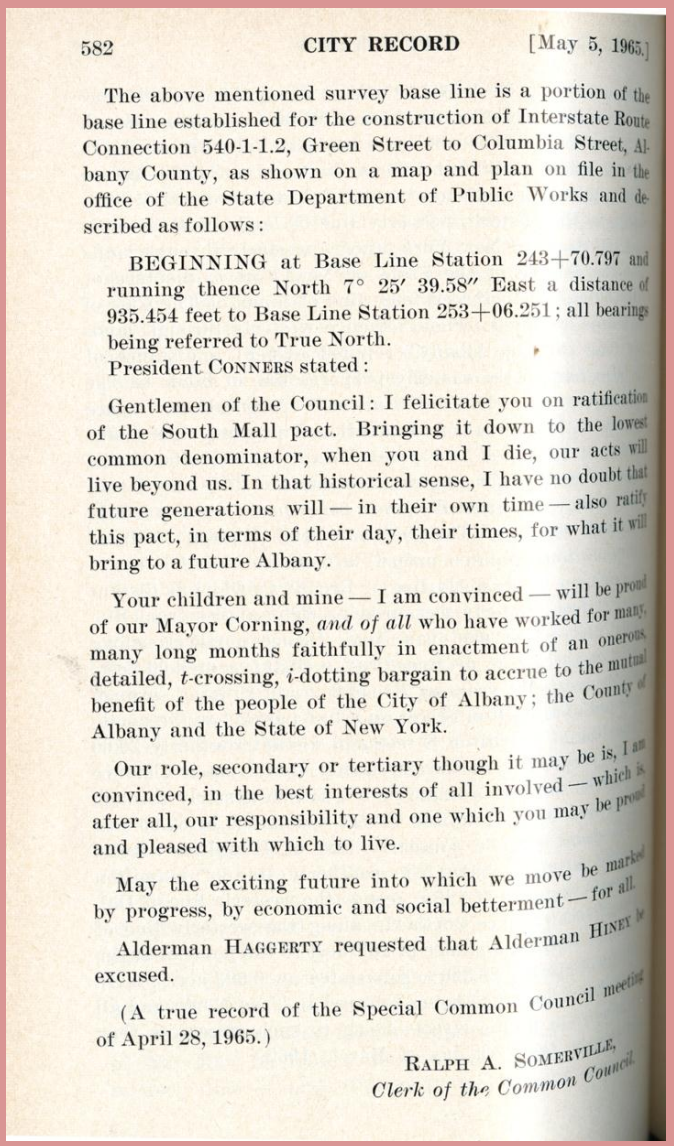
The Cultural Education Center

The Cultural Education Center is located at 222 Madison Avenue, Albany, New York, on the south side of the Empire State Plaza facing northward towards the New York State Capitol building. Built in 1961, the eleven-story, 1.5 million-square-foot building houses the main offices of New York State Office of Cultural Education

The building is home to the New York State Museum, the New York State Archives and the New York State Library. It was built in the "brutalist" style, the word derived from the French word meaning "raw." Brutalism as an architectural style has come to mean large, futuristic, sometimes concrete buildings constructed between World War II and the 1970s.

Records from the Common Council detailing sentiments regarding the South Mall and financial information pertaining to construction...

Proceedings of the Common Council



582 CITY RECORD [May 5, 1965.]

The above mentioned survey base line is a portion of the base line established for the construction of Interstate Route Connection 540-1-1.2, Green Street to Columbia Street, Albany County, as shown on a map and plan on file in the office of the State Department of Public Works and described as follows:

BEGINNING at Base Line Station 243+70.797 and running thence North 7° 25′ 39.58″ East a distance of 935.454 feet to Base Line Station 253+06.251; all bearings being referred to True North.

President CONNERS stated:

Gentlemen of the Council: I felicitate you on ratification of the South Mall pact. Bringing it down to the lowest common denominator, when you and I die, our acts will live beyond us. In that historical sense, I have no doubt that future generations will — in their own time — also ratify this pact, in terms of their day, their times, for what it will bring to a future Albany.

Your children and mine — I am convinced — will be proud of our Mayor Corning, *and of all* who have worked for many, many long months faithfully in enactment of an onerous, detailed, *t*-crossing, *i*-dotting bargain to accrue to the mutual benefit of the people of the City of Albany; the County of Albany and the State of New York.

Our role, secondary or tertiary though it may be is, I am convinced, in the best interests of all involved — which is, after all, our responsibility and one which you may be proud and pleased with which to live.

May the exciting future into which we move be marked by progress, by economic and social betterment — for all.

Alderman HAGGERTY requested that Alderman HINEY be excused.

(A true record of the Special Common Council meeting of April 28, 1965.)

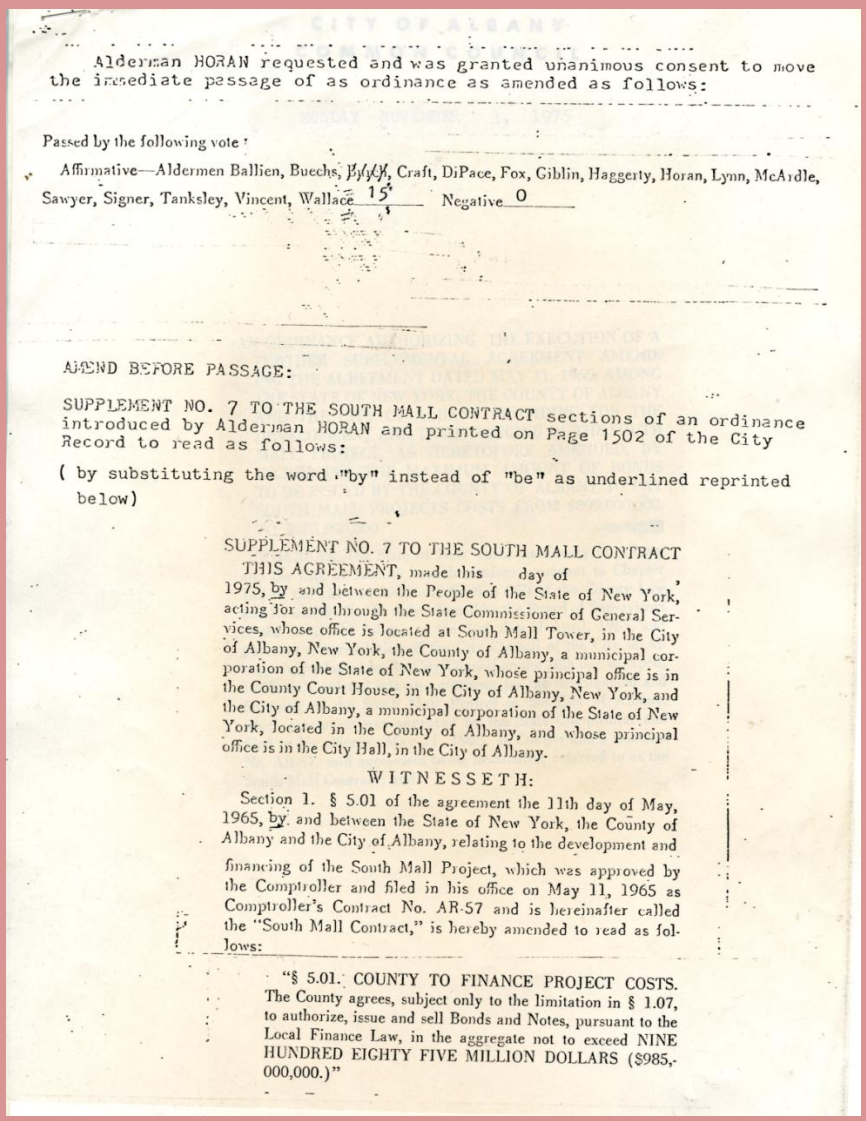
RALPH A. SOMERVILLE,
Clerk of the Common Council.

85-02199. Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Albany 1965 Vol. 1 Minutes.

Special Common Council Meeting Wednesday, April 28, 1965.

Common Council Ordinance

First page of Supplement Number 7 to the original South Mall contract increase the maximum amount of bonds issued by the County of Albany to pay South Mall Project costs from $899,000,000 to $985,000,000.



Alderman HORAN requested and was granted unanimous consent to move the immediate passage of as ordinance as amended as follows:

Passed by the following vote:

Affirmative—Aldermen Ballien, Buechs, Craft, DiPace, Fox, Giblin, Haggerty, Horan, Lynn, McArdle, Sawyer, Signer, Tanksley, Vincent, Wallace 15 Negative 0

AMEND BEFORE PASSAGE:

SUPPLEMENT NO. 7 TO THE SOUTH MALL CONTRACT sections of an ordinance introduced by Alderman HORAN and printed on Page 1502 of the City Record to read as follows:

(by substituting the word "by" instead of "be" as underlined reprinted below)

SUPPLEMENT NO. 7 TO THE SOUTH MALL CONTRACT

THIS AGREEMENT, made this day of 1975, by and between the People of the State of New York, acting for and through the State Commissioner of General Services, whose office is located at South Mall Tower, in the City of Albany, New York, the County of Albany, a municipal corporation of the State of New York, whose principal office is in the County Court House, in the City of Albany, New York, and the City of Albany, a municipal corporation of the State of New York, located in the County of Albany, and whose principal office is in the City Hall, in the City of Albany.

WITNESSETH:

Section 1. § 5.01 of the agreement the 11th day of May, 1965, by and between the State of New York, the County of Albany and the City of Albany, relating to the development and financing of the South Mall Project, which was approved by the Comptroller and filed in his office on May 11, 1965 as Comptroller's Contract No. AR-57 and is hereinafter called the "South Mall Contract," is hereby amended to read as follows:

"§ 5.01. COUNTY TO FINANCE PROJECT COSTS. The County agrees, subject only to the limitation in § 1.07, to authorize, issue and sell Bonds and Notes, pursuant to the Local Finance Law, in the aggregate not to exceed NINE HUNDRED EIGHTY FIVE MILLION DOLLARS ($985,000,000.)"

11-00161. City of Albany Common Council. Ordinance Passed November 3rd 1975.

Opinions on the South Mall varied greatly. Many viewed these "monumental" structures as the ideas of a rich, narcissistic governor who used his political power to create a shrine to himself at the expense of the public. However South Mall supporters saw it as a positive urban renewal project that brought beauty and jobs to Albany. Though individuals' thoughts on the Empire State Plaza differ, one fact that both detractors and supporters would most likely agree upon is that it forever altered Albany's landscape. Albany's South End today is a vastly different place than it was 50 years earlier.

§

Citations

Introduction

Grondahl, Paul. *Mayor Erastus Corning: Albany Icon, Albany Enigma.* (Albany, New York: Washington Park Press, 1997). 459; 474.

Schrieberg, David. "Albany Rolls Out Orange Carpet," *The Knickerbocker News*, June 28, 1982. 4.

Hudson Avenue

Albany City Directories 1958; 1971.

Cathedral Academy

Albany City Directories 1958-1975

"Clergy Ponders Seizure Plan." *The Knickerbocker News,* March 28, 1962.

"Mall Claims hit 21.5 Million." *The Knickerbocker News,* December 5, 1963.

"State Will Delay Demolition of 8 Buildings in Mall Area." *The Knickerbocker News,* September 22, 1964.

"South Mall Clearance: March 26 Deadline Set." *The Knickerbocker News,* February 10, 1965.

"Bishop Scully's Funeral Thursday." *The Knickerbocker News,* January 6, 1969.

Section II Football. "Section II Football Programs History." Accessed September 8, 2015. http://section2football.com/welcome/files/record_book/other/PROGRAMS%20HISTORY%20080411.pdf.

Eagle Theatre

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"Grand Opening Tonight! Stone's New Eagle Theatre." *The Knickerbocker News,* January 5, 1938.

New York State Historical Association. *The Yorker.* (1-3) 1942: 22.

Central Market

Albany City Directories 1958-1965

"Mayor Opens New Albany Market," *The Knickerbocker News,* February 6, 1941.

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The South Mall (Empire State Plaza)

The Egg: Center for the Performing Arts. "About." http://www.theegg.org/about.

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Wikipedia. "Cultural Education Center." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_Education_Center.