## Douglass Theatre before the Royal

From 1925 until she fell to the wrecker's ball in 1971, the Royal was the acknowledged queen of entertainment along the Avenue.

She was often referred to as "The Grand Old Lady," a well earned title. Standing serenely and regally, she surveyed her domain in stoic majesty. Her extra large, well-lit marquee, emblazoned the area, proudly proclaiming her latest stage show or film

The theater did not begin life as the Royal, but rather as the Douglass Theater, the project of the Douglass Amusement Corporation.

The corporation offered shares of \$10, anticipating

had not yet been attempted in any other black community. The 1300 block of Penn-

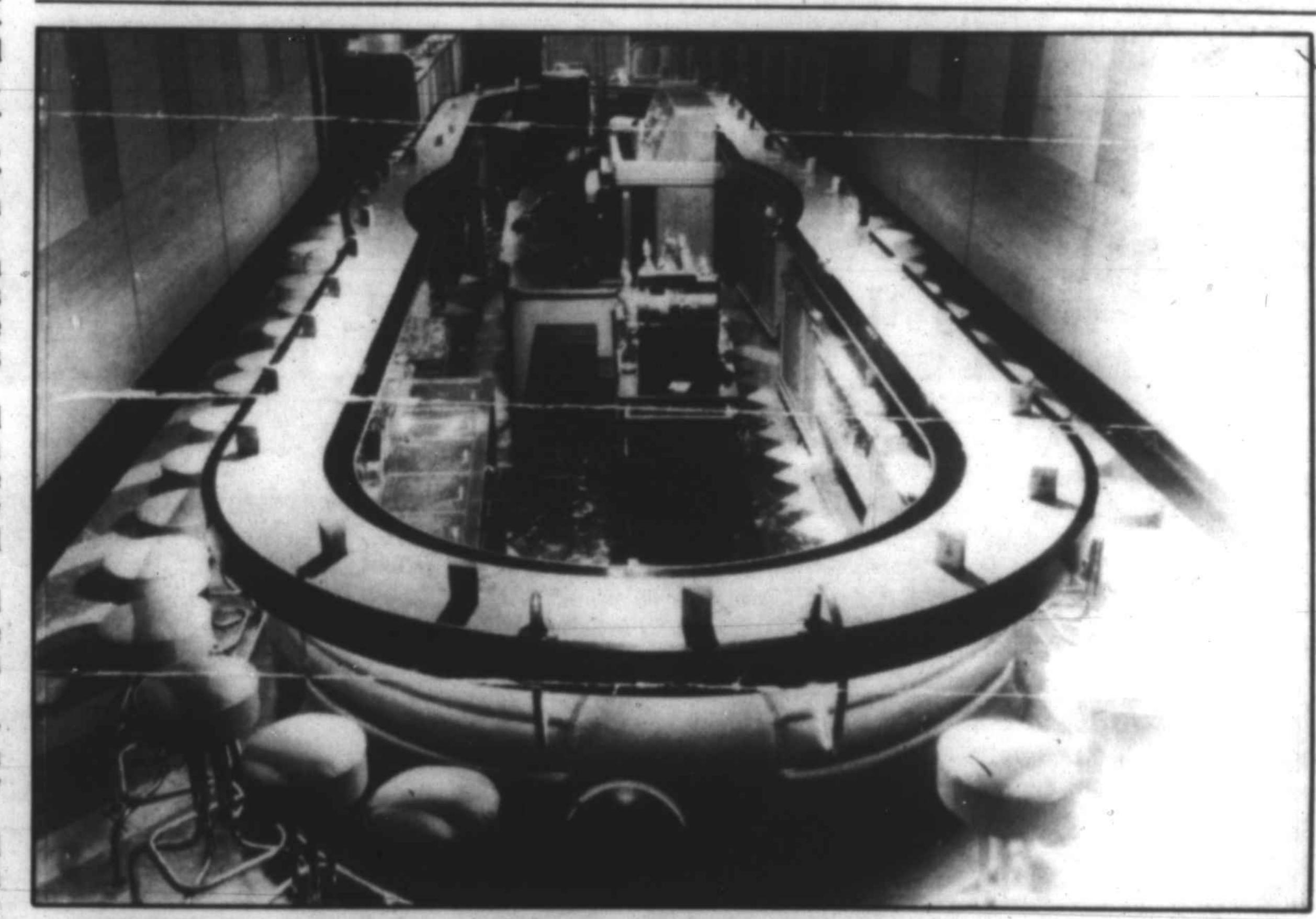
sylvania Avenue, had been selected as the site for the new

building.
One such project had recently come to fruition with opened in May, 1921.

The projected cost was tremendous for that day, in that the figure was expected to exceed \$400,000.

A Philadelphia firm, Lachman & Murphy, was

When Jesse P. Peaker retired from the police force, he had time to start researching material for a book about the early days of the Avenue and the Royal Theatre. Using the AFRO microfiche films as a basis, he has told a fascinating relevation about the early beginnings of the theatre.



COMEDY CLUB—A fixture on the entertainment scene was the Comedy Club, where the musicians and singers performed from inside this oval bar.

investors could also changing the face of the

engineers," as they kept tabs Under the watchful eye of on 'their' building, as it slow- its proprietor, C. H. Jones, a

CHAMPAGNE TOASTS celebrated the occasion as Pearl Bailey, seated, gets ready

to raise her glass. Behind her is her husband, Louis Bellson, and at left is Ike Dixon,

Further up the Avenue,

of name entertainers. The theater was done in a gothic design popular in the decade. The Douglass was one of the largest theaters in the city. 90 x 172 feet, she had a seating capacity of 1,350

boast a cafeteria, private din-ing rooms, and an entertain-

ment area called the Royal

Palace Blue Room, which

would later feature a number

There was a huge balcony to sit in, a main floor subdivided into three sections. and several box seats.

The theater was even integrated in those days, as white patrons were welcome, although a similar policy did not exist for blacks to attend white theaters.

Finally, on February 13, 1922, the Douglass opened with a fanfare. The first show prices set at 35 cents, 50 cents and 75 cents, war tax

The gentry of the black community turned out for this

momentous occasion, in all their finery. The mayor, William Broen-

There were speeches, accolades and a ribbon cutting,

The Law." It was staged l the Lafayette Players, one of the larger and better known touring companies of the day.

The play starred Cleo Desmond and Andrew Bishop, with a fine supporting cast

At the time of the openin the Avenue was home to four other theaters, the American and the Rainbow, offering film, and the Regent and the Lincoln, offering both film and vaudeville shows.

The Douglass had no facilities for film showings, instead they considered themselves as a playhouse, offering the best of the black thespians of the day.

It was the intention of the Douglass Amusement Corporation, to use the theater as means of raising the cultural awareness of the community beyond the usual films and vaudeville shows of

Some of the presentations seen at the Douglass were: 'Bought And Paid For' Lafayette Players.

Lovejoy, with famed pianist James P. Johnson as musical

Black Swan recording artist, Eddie Gray and the Dunbar Players in "The Storm, presented by J. Homer Tutt.

secured its own troupe of players, aptly named, The Nights In A Bar Room," and other stellar productions.

The theater also assembled its own orchestra, The **Douglass Theater Jazz Band** During this decade, the Avenue was very active. Next door to the theater, Perry's Inn opened, the New Albert Hall and the Penn Studios were available for large affairs, and there were any number of clubs offering entertainment of every sort.

The new hotel, the Royal Palace offered a native son Clarence Muse and his Chicago Plantation revue.

(To be continued)

FEBRUARY 11, 1989

## Today's leaders are tomorrow's foundation



is a black radio pioneer who has tackled the odds in a big way — and won.

is the only black woman

ho show, "The Morning Show decades, Olden did just that.
with Cathy Hughes" and He graduated from Knox-

munity activist in the District

For the 48-year-old father of four, these attributes helped him attain his present position

"I was reared on a farm. My family didn't have much

began in high school with a better than our parents.'

s medical school before joining the National Cancer Institute, one of the world's leading research facilities.

difference," he maintained. deputy director of the institution's cancer center.

In 1986, he was made director, and today also wears the of Oncology (the study

He has only began to relax little in the last eight or so years, he said, although he still works punishingly long

"I wanted to be one of the top 10 (cancer specialists) in the world. I wanted to be well

"And even though I can concluded.



relax a little more and spend respected, so I always set my more time with my family.

The black family has made important contributions to America. Men, women and children who have helped build this nation with their minds, their bodies and their souls. They have weathered the storms of prejudice and pain and fought to remain together.

This year as we celebrate Black History Month, HERO is saluting the black family... the life-center of the African-American tradition. While the family has undergone some changes, it remains the key force in shaping our future.

Today, families are being torn apart by the AIDS epidemic. Fathers, mothers, sons and daughters . . . their lives cut short, their dreams deferred because of AIDS. We each have to make a personal investment for a healthier future . . . we have to learn about AIDS, volunteer our time, change our behavior, and show compassion to individuals and families affected by AIDS.

Join with us in reaffirming the black family.



945-AIDS or 1-800-638-6252

A place where families really matter.



Jr., owner of the Comedy Club, where the photo was taken.

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