

## It Happened at the Palace: A History of New York's Iconic Broadway Theater

**Stewart F. Lane**

Broad Book Press

(208pp)

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*A primer on the lived history of the theater through an ever-changing cultural landscape, the historical retrospective It Happened at the Palace is comprehensive and edifying.*

Palace Theatre co-owner Stewart F. Lane's centennial-plus retrospective *It Happened at the Palace* pays homage to the legendary Broadway theater.

Built by vaudeville impresario Martin Beck in 1913, the Palace opened to fanfare and awe. It also prompted rigorous competition from rival promoters and theater owners, including B. F. Keith and E. F. Albee. Still, a slew of popular performers graced its stage, including Harry Houdini and Sophie Tucker. Lauded runs by Judy Garland and Liza Minnelli came in subsequent eras.

The book traces how vaudeville gave way to films, then musicals, and later Disney productions. For years, the theater adapted, changing with the times. Later, the Palace's historical landmark status paved the way for a remarkable engineering feat that lifted it up thirty feet to be housed in the TSX Broadway building.

The story of the Palace is framed through a somewhat biased retrospective lens that spans decades of intimate ups and downs within the legendary venue, with the backdrop of a growing metropolis as a secondary focus. The writing vacillates between shameless pamphleteering and genuine awe at the Palace's coveted history. Replete with a copious smattering of yesteryear ephemera—including images of vintage vaudeville posters, ticket stubs, and performance photography—the book's deep dives into a rich tapestry of ebbs and flows in entertainment preferences are a primer of the lived history of the theater through an ever-changing cultural landscape.

Special attention is given to the long list of performers and productions that graced the Palace's large stage, the last five decades of which are analyzed in granular detail through firsthand experience. The inclusion of media reviews from the many epochs of the theater's existence further the book's investigation of its survival and shape-shifting.

While the book's unfettered enthusiasm for its subject matter can be overwhelming on occasion, it is an up-close biography of both a metamorphosis of Manhattan in population and timbre and the many ways the Palace morphed to accommodate rapid changes in American moods. As the book digs into the plight that Broadway faced during COVID-19 shutdowns, the clarity of the research finds its footing as a plea for continued preservation and a celebration for the unprecedented nature of the theater's place in the arts and theater annals.

*It Happened at the Palace* is a riveting biography of the Palace Theatre's extraordinary rise and evolution.

RYAN PRADO (March 30, 2026)

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