

Audubon Theatre and Ballroom

Demolished 1989

3940 Broadway



The former Audubon Ballroom: In the foreground is the Shabazz Center, in the background, rising above the original building, is Columbia University Medical Center's Mary Woodard Lasker Biomedical Research Building, the location of the Audubon Business and Technology Center. Photo: Wikipedia

The Audubon Ballroom was built in 1912 by William Fox, who founded the Fox Film Corporation. Fox hired Thomas W. Lamb, one of the foremost American theater architects, and designer of many buildings in Harlem, to design the building. The building had a 2500-seat theater on the first and a 200-seat ballroom on the second floor.

In the 1930s, German Jewish Congregation Emes Wozedek, used the basement for religious services. Congregation Emes Wozedek bought the building in 1950. Over the years various groups held meetings at the Audubon Ballroom, including the Municipal Transit Workers, the IRT Brotherhood Union, the Transport Workers' Union, and various civil and political organizations.

In 1964, Malcolm X founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU), holding meetings at the Audubon Ballroom. Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21, 1965, while speaking at the Audubon Ballroom.

New York City took possession of the building in 1967 due to the owner's non-payment of property taxes. The Ballroom continued to operate as the San Juan Theater until 1980.

In 1989, Columbia University, with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey as a partner, reached an agreement with New York City, and in 1992, began the process of

demolishing the Audubon Ballroom, to replace it with a medical research facility. Community activists lobbied the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission to hold a hearing to designate the building a landmark but were unsuccessful.

Through the intervention of Malcolm X's widow, Dr. Betty Shabazz, Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger, Landmarks Conservancy, and the Municipal Arts Society, two-thirds of the Audubon Ballroom's original facade, on Broadway and West 165th Street, was preserved and restored. In addition, a portion of the interior ballroom where Malcolm X was killed was restored and protected and is now the Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz Memorial Educational Center.