



# The Shuberts of Broadway: A History Drawn from the Collection of the Shubert Archive

*Brooks McNamara*

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With the founding of the Shubert Organization some ninety years ago, the Shubert brothers set the stage for Broadway as we know it today. Indeed, their name has become virtually synonymous with the Great White Way. The heart of Manhattan's theatre district--Forty-fourth and Forty-fifth Streets between Broadway and Eighth Avenue--is lined with monuments to their extraordinary careers, including the Imperial, Majestic, Booth, Plymouth, and Broadhurst theatres and, of course, Shubert Alley itself. Legendary for their eccentric behavior and their uncanny ability to turn a profit even during the industry's toughest times, the Shuberts are part and parcel of Broadway's colorful lore.

In *The Shuberts of Broadway*, Brooks McNamara combs the holdings of the newly created Shubert Archive--a remarkable collection of some four million papers, playbills, architectural plans, photographs, press clips, scripts, costume designs, letters, and other Shubert memorabilia--to re-create the lives of Sam, Lee, and J. J. Shubert. In lively prose and more than 200 fully captioned illustrations, McNamara follows the Shuberts from their early years, when the teen-aged Sam became head of the box office at the Wieting Theatre in downtown Syracuse, through the building of their empire and the Broadway boom of the 1920s (when the Shuberts owned or operated 104 theatres and booked nearly a thousand more), and on to their last days, when their producing careers ended amid controversy.

We see the often-stormy relations among the frail, charismatic Sam (who died in a train crash in 1905), the aloof Lee (dubbed "The Wooden Indian"), and their mercurial brother J.J., and their collective, continual battle against the Syndicate that dominated the theatre scene. Here we learn the real stories behind the popular entertainment that rolled off their theatrical assembly line and earned them fame: *La Belle Paree*, which featured Al Jolson at the Winter Garden; *The Passing Show*, a "girlie" revue that was full of such talents as Ed Wynn, Fred and Adele Astaire, George Jessel, and a chorus girl named Lucille Le Sueur, who later became known as Joan Crawford; *Blossom Time*, one of operetta's greatest hits; and *The Student Prince*, a theatrical bonanza composed by the great Sigmund Romberg.

Filled with real-life plots, intrigues, and characters that capture the imagination, the story of the Shuberts is every bit as entertaining as the Broadway they helped to create.

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