

This article discusses the story of the end of Harlem's Savoy Ballroom in 1958. It is part of my upcoming study about jazz dance and Harlem: *The Recognition of Harlem Jazz Dance - How Harlem-Based African-American Jazz Dance Was Perceived Between 1944 and 1959*.

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The End of Harlem's Savoy Ballroom – Observations and Explanations for Reasons

Background and Theories of the Closing of the Ballroom

Sixty years ago one of the most famous ballrooms in the world closed its doors forever.¹ The Savoy Ballroom in Harlem was known particularly about the Lindy Hop, the revolutionary partnered dance which Savoy Lindy Hoppers developed and sustained at the ballroom. The Lindy Hop was part of the Savoy's program in which interracial dancing and socializing between African Americans and whites were allowed. The Savoy Ballroom became an important part of the Harlem community, which was visited also by white celebrities, politicians, and other people outside Harlem during the existence of the ballroom between 1926 and 1958.²

Initially, the ballroom closed for the public in July 1958. Permanently, the Savoy Ballroom closed its doors in September 1958 when fixtures of the ballroom were auctioned off.³ The latter turned out to be the final blow for the survival of the ballroom building. The building was demolished somewhere between March and April 1959⁴.

¹ See Terry Monaghan, " 'Stompin' at the Savoy': Remembering, Researching and Re-enacting the Lindy Hop's Relationship to Harlem's Savoy Ballroom" (paper presented at "Dancing at the Crossroads: African Diasporic Dances in Britain," Royal Festival Hall, London, August 1-2, 2002), p. 35.

² See Monaghan 2002. See also chapter 'The Savoy Ballroom Between 1926 and 1943' in Harri Heinilä, *An Endeavor by Harlem Dancers to Achieve Equality – The Recognition of the Harlem-Based African-American Jazz Dance Between 1921 and 1943* (Helsinki, Finland: Unigrafia, 2015).

³ See pages 12-14.

⁴ Masco Young, 'The Grapevine', *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 21, 1959, p. 15. Masco Young reported that the Savoy was "now being torn down". Later, in April, Harold Hebrank reported that he "was standing among the

I will discuss the complex story of the closing of Harlem's ballroom by presenting how the closure was explained in both the African American press and the mainly white mainstream press. The African American press means the press that was mainly for African Americans, although also whites might be part of it to some extent. The mainly white mainstream press means the press which was mainly for whites, although also African Americans might be part of it to some degree. I will compare theories of the closing of the Savoy Ballroom that were made by either those who have researched the ballroom or were part of the Savoy Ballroom organization to the evidence presented in the press and studies on the subject.

The late Terry Monaghan, jazz dance historian, who researched the Savoy Ballroom by doing a thesis and articles about it, explained in 2002 that the closure was part of "property schemes" in which the Savoy Ballroom owners participated when they negotiated with the New York City authorities who planned a housing development on the site of the Savoy Ballroom. According to Monaghan, the owners were willing to sacrifice the ballroom and leaving the Harlem community without "equivalent cultural facility" for getting "the best possible financial deal" out of the demise of the Savoy Ballroom. He also hints that the post war "major decline in African-American creativity" in jazz overall was a reason for the owners' willingness to sell the ballroom.⁵

Lon A. Gault, historian, who did a study of ballrooms in the U.S., states that the Savoy Ballroom did not succeed in the 1950s, and particularly in the middle of the 1950s when there were nights only with "fifty to sixty people". Similarly to Monaghan, he also brings out the deal with the New York City authorities. According to Gault, it was promised that the old Savoy could operate for at least three years starting from 1953 when the deal was done. After that there should have been a new Savoy Ballroom in a new, unspecified location. Gault seems to suggest that because the business did not "pick up" in the middle of the 1950s, the story of the ballroom was over by 1958.⁶

ruins of the Savoy Ballroom". See Harold Hebrank, 'Stand for Your Culture', *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 18, 1959, p. B7.

⁵ Monaghan 2002, p. 44.

⁶ Lon A. Gault, *Ballroom Echoes* (the United States of America: Andrew Corbet Press, 1989), p. 243.

Charles Buchanan, the Savoy Ballroom manager and a co-owner of the ballroom, stated in the interview with him that the reason for the closing of the ballroom was the lack of money because they could not anymore afford to the expensive artists, and in 1958 there started the trend of disorder in Harlem, which harmed the Savoy Ballroom when unwanted customers broke the ballroom windows⁷. Moe Gale, the main owner of the Savoy, referred similarly to a decline in profits, which was caused by the “arrival of television” as people rather danced at home.⁸

Did the Savoy Ballroom Succeed in the 1950s?

All the theories bring out both economic and social reasons for the closure. Particularly the weak economic situation was emphasized. Therefore, how did the Savoy Ballroom succeed in Harlem in the 1950s?

While Harlem’s economic and social conditions were deteriorating after World War II particularly because of losing manufacturing jobs and crime like hard drugs, as Harlem historian Jonathan Gill suggests, and its economy was still weak as it was before World War II, it seems that the Savoy Ballroom flourished against all odds by having various club events like the Beaux Arts Ball every year.⁹ The ballroom still attracted customers of African descent around the New York metropolitan area, and thus it did not depend only on Harlem customers. According to Terry Monaghan, also whites still entered the Savoy, although they largely used their personal connections for gaining the admission to the ballroom¹⁰.

⁷ Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem – A Cultural Portrait, 1900-1950* (New York, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1982), p. 314.

⁸ ‘End of an Era: Savoy Ballroom Closing; Gale Agency Sold to Four Employees’, *The Daily Defender*, November 29, 1958, p. 18. As to Charles Buchanan’s role in the Savoy Ballroom organization, he told an interviewer that he was the manager of the ballroom from its opening in 1926 until it was closed in 1958, but he also had a 35 percent interest in the Savoy. Thus, he also co-owned the ballroom. See Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, *to Be, or not...to BOP* (New York, New York: Da Capo Press, 1979), p. 63.

⁹ For the Harlem economic and social history see Jonathan Gill, *Harlem – The Four Hundred Year History from Dutch Village to Capital of Black America* (New York, New York: Grove Press, 2011), pp. 354-356. For the Harlem economy before WW II see the chapter ‘Harlem Background: Infrastructure and Its Population from the 1870s Until 1943’ in Heinilä 2015. For the Savoy entertainment in general see Hubbard and Monaghan 2009, p. 139. For the Beaux Arts Ball at the Savoy after WW II see Terry Monaghan, ‘*The Beaux Arts Ball*’, unknown publishing date, published originally in www.savoyballroom.com. The site is not working anymore. I have a copy of the article.

¹⁰ Karen Hubbard and Terry Monaghan, ‘Negotiating Compromise on a Burnished Wood Floor – Social Dancing at the Savoy’ in edited by Julie Malnig, *Ballroom Boogie, Shimmy, Sham, Shake – A Social and Popular Dance Reader* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. 128 and 139. See also Monaghan ‘*The Beaux Arts Ball*’.

New attendance records in the beginning of the 1950s also suggest that the Savoy was still thriving. First, saxophonist Illinois Jacquet established an all-time attendance record during his two-day stand in February 1950 by gathering almost 10,000 paid admissions. It was estimated that more than 5,000 was turned away.¹¹ In October 1950, Buddy Johnson's orchestra drew "more than 14,000 paying customers" during one week, and they also established a new Saturday night record with more than 4,000 paid admissions.¹²

Harlem's reputation changed through the 1950s. *The Philadelphia Tribune* described in 1950 how Midtown Manhattan residents considered Harlem as a "trouble spot" and drove through it¹³. *The New York Times* reported positively in 1955 that Harlem had been "on the upswing" particularly for the last five years. The Harlem economic and social situation had improved remarkably in employment and infrastructure. According to the paper, Harlemites were enjoying "a growing political power", in particular, because Harlemite Hulan E. Jack was elected Manhattan Borough President in 1953, and increasingly Harlemites were selected to "high appointive posts" in the New York City government. Harlem was inclined "almost solidly" to the Democratic Party.¹⁴ Therefore, it was not surprising that Democrat Adlai Stevenson chose Harlem as a spot to visit for his campaign for the President of the United States in October 1956¹⁵.

The Savoy Ballroom became a scene of politics when Stevenson went to the ballroom as part of the Harlem visit. It gained a moderate press coverage, and brief mentions in the mainstream press like *Newsday*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, and *The New York Times*. African American newspapers like the *Philadelphia Tribune*, *The Afro-American*, and the *Atlanta Daily World* emphasized the fact that Harlem politician and congressman Adam Clayton Powell was not invited to the Savoy Ballroom visit. With the exception of *The New*

¹¹ 'Jacquet Rocks Savoy In Two-Day Stand', *The Philadelphia Tribune*, February 7, 1950, p. 12. 'Theatre In Brief', *New Journal and Guide*, February 11, 1950, p. 13. 'Jacquet Sets Savoy Record', *Cleveland Call and Post*, February 11, 1950, p. 9B.

¹² 'Buddy And Crew Pull A New High', *The Chicago Defender*, October 21, 1950, p. 20. 'Buddy Johnson Sets Savoy Mark', *The Philadelphia Tribune*, October 21, 1950, p. 12. 'Johnson Sets New Record At Savoy', *New Journal and Guide*, October 28, 1950, p. 17.

¹³ Alvin Moses, 'Nitelife In New York', *The Philadelphia Tribune*, August 29, 1950.

¹⁴ Laymond Robinson Jr., 'Our Changing City: Harlem Now on the UpSwing', *The New York Times*, July 8, 1955, p. 25.

¹⁵ See note 16.

York Times, which also emphasized the fact, *Newsday* and *The New York Herald Tribune* did not mention Powell's exclusion.¹⁶ The exclusion affected Powell's decision to support Republican presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower instead of Democrat Stevenson¹⁷. Thus, in effect, the Savoy became part of the U.S. domestic politics, and the visit showed that the Savoy Ballroom was still recognized as a significant community center which could not be bypassed when visited in Harlem.

The success of the Savoy Ballroom was underlined in newspaper articles throughout the 1950s. For example, the ballroom celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1951 which was noted in the African American press, in particular, in *The New York Amsterdam News*.¹⁸ Buddy Johnson still succeeded very well at the Savoy between 1952 and 1953¹⁹. Nat King Cole succeeded tremendously with his "farewell and birthday party" in 1954. Even 5,000 customers participated in the event.²⁰ Similarly to Cole, Sammy Davis Jr. succeeded when he was celebrated at the Savoy in 1955²¹. The Metrolaires Dance in February 1956 was labeled as "a huge success" by *The New York Amsterdam News* when the event attracted over 600

¹⁶ 'Harlem Cheers Adlai's Stand on Bias', *Newsday*, October 5, 1956, pp. 3 and 37. 'Adlai Reporters Lose Track of Candidate in Bus Snafu', *Newsday*, October 5, 1956, p. 37. 'Stevenson Here, Holds 3 Rallies', *The New York Herald Tribune*, October 5, 1956, p. 1. 'Powell, Switching, Backs Eisenhower', *The New York Times*, October 12, 1956, p. 26. Also *The Austin Statesman* mentioned briefly the visit in the Savoy Ballroom. See 'Stevenson Taking In Second Series Game', *The Austin Statesman*, October 5, 1956, p. 13. As to the African American press, see 'Powell Backing 'Ike'', *The Philadelphia Tribune*, October 13, 1956, p. 3. 'Were Income Tax Troubles Behind Powell's Switch?', *The Afro-American*, October 20, 1956. 'Congressman Powell Announces His Decision to Support Ike for Re-Election', *Atlanta Daily World*, October 12, 1956, p. 1. *The Daily Defender* published a picture of Stevenson with the president of Manhattan borough, Hulan Jack; Mayor Robert Wagner, and state assemblywoman Bessie Buchanan at the Savoy Ballroom. See 'Stumping At Savoy', *The Daily Defender*, October 8, 1956, p. 12.

¹⁷ Powell announced the fact as part of his decision to support Eisenhower when he was in the White House office of Presidential Press Secretary J. C. Hagerty. See 'Congressman Powell Announces His Decision to Support Ike for Re-Election', the *Atlanta Daily World*, October 12, 1956, p. 1 and 'Powell, Switching, Backs Eisenhower', *The New York Times*, October 12, 1956, p. 26.

¹⁸ 'Savoy Ballroom Celebrates 25th Year', *The New York Amsterdam News*, March 10, 1951, pp. 26 and 28. Earl Brown, 'Salute To The Savoy', *The New York Amsterdam News*, March 17, 1951, p. 8. Edward G. Perry, 'Town Topics', *The New York Amsterdam News*, March 24, 1951, p. 16. See also 'Savoy's Birthday', *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 8, 1951, B2.

¹⁹ 'Buddy Johnson to Rock Sewickley Legion July 4', the *Courier*, July 5, 1952, p. 22. 'Buddy Johnson, Clovers At City Auditorium, April 30', *Atlanta Daily World*, April 17, 1953, p. 2. 'Buddy Johnson, Clovers Play Here Tonight', *Atlanta Daily World*, April 20, 1953, p. 3.

²⁰ '5,000 Jam Savoy in Tribute to Nat 'King' Cole', the *Courier*, March 27, 1954, p. 18. See also 'To Honor Nat Cole At Savoy March 18', *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 16, 1954, p. 23. An article without a title, *The Chicago Defender*, January 30, 1954, p. 3. 'Stars Plan Birthday Party For King Cole', *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 18, 1954, p. A11. 'Izzy Rowe's Notebook', the *Courier*, March 13, 1954, p. 18.

²¹ Alvin 'Chick' Webb, 'Footlights and Sidelights', *The New York Amsterdam News*, April 30, 1955, p. 24. James Hicks, 'Big Town', *The Afro-American*, April 30, 1955, p. 9. See also 'Izzy Rowe's Notebook', *The Pittsburgh Courier*, April 9, 1955, p. 18.

participants²². At the same year, according to *The Daily Defender*, whites and celebrities were “once again visiting Harlem” resembling the “days gone by” when Perry Como performed at the Savoy in April²³. *Variety*, which represented the mainstream press, reported briefly on both the 25th Savoy Ballroom anniversary and the Perry Como event.²⁴

Near the end of the ballroom, the Savoy still attracted big crowds. Harry Belafonte had a benefit salute for the YMCA in 1957 which, according to the *Cleveland Call and Post*, attracted “one of the greatest crowds in history”.²⁵ In 1958, the Queen of Clubs event in April was jam-packed when it was witnessed by the “overflow crowd”²⁶. Johnny Mathis drew 3,000 people to the Savoy in June, which turned out to be the last big event in the ballroom before its closing in July.²⁷

Thus, the Savoy Ballroom was not fading away in the 1950s because of low attendances when judged by the aforementioned statistics. Of course, that is only based on newspaper reports which necessarily did not give the exact number of the customers who visited the ballroom regarding the events. However, at the very least, those reports described the attendance positively giving a picture of a successful ballroom in the 1950s.

Given the picture of the successful ballroom, it is unlikely that the economic situation of the Savoy Ballroom was so weak that it had to be closed because of financial problems. Therefore, Lon A. Gault, Charles Buchanan, and Moe Gale’s explanation of the weak economics is not convincing. As historians agree that the interest in “African-American creativity” was in

²² ‘Over 600 Guests Enjoy The Metroilaires Dance’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, February 5, 1956, p. 12.

²³ ‘Just Shades of Yesterday; Broadway Names Rush Harlem For Nightly Fun’, *The Daily Defender*, April 25, 1956, p. 19.

²⁴ ‘Savoy’s 25th Birthday’, *Variety*, February 21, 1951, p. 44 and ‘Vaude, Cafe Dates – New York’, *Variety*, April 18, 1956, p. 79.

²⁵ ‘Harlem Salutes Harry’, *Cleveland Call and Post*, May 4, 1957, p. 1D. See also James L. Hicks, ‘Another Angle: Without Swords’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, April 20, 1957, p. 9.

²⁶ ‘Popular NYC Club Obverses 10th Year’, *The Philadelphia Tribune*, April 22, 1958, p. 8. Betty Granger, ‘Crowd Jams Savoy To See “Queen of Clubs” Crowned’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, April 26, 1958, p. 11.

²⁷ ‘Mathis Benefit Nets “Y” \$10,000’, *New Journal and Guide*, July 12, 1958, p. 18. See also ‘Mathis Salute Raised 10Gs For Harlem YM’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, July 12, 1958, p. 15 and Jesse H. Walker, ‘Theatricals’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, June 28, 1958, p. 16. After the Mathis benefit, there is no sign of similar events before the closing of the Savoy in July 1958.

decline after WW II as Terry Monaghan puts it²⁸, the Savoy Ballroom seemed to be thriving until the end in 1958.

The Savoy Ballroom Prepares for the Future

Whether the Savoy Ballroom representatives, Moe Gale and Charles Buchanan, really believed that the Savoy was fading because of the weak economics in the 1950s or they did not believe it, the Savoy was remodeled with 109,000 dollars in 1948²⁹. That suggests that either they still believed at the end of the 1940s that the Savoy is going to be successful in the future or they were going to sell it to someone who was going to use it as a ballroom. As there is no evidence for the latter, a plausible explanation is that at the time they were still willing to manage the ballroom in the future³⁰. A sign of a long-range plan was also the lease agreement between the owner of the Savoy Ballroom building and the management of the ballroom in 1939. The agreement guaranteed that the building was leased to the ballroom management for fifteen years ending somewhere in 1954.³¹ Although the lease was done in 1939, and the Savoy management could have had a totally different approach to the issue between the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, the fact that the ballroom management took up the fifteen year lease on the building quite surely affected the decisions the management made until the ballroom was sold to the City of New York in 1953³².

²⁸ See Monaghan 2002, p. 44. Monaghan's statement is supported, for example, by jazz dance-related historians, Marshall Stearns and Jacqui Malone. See Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance – The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York, New York: Da Capo Press Inc., 1994), p. 1 and Jacqui Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues – The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), pp. 109-110.

²⁹ Dan Burley, 'New' Savoy Breathtaking', *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 17, 1948, p. 21 and 23. Dan Burley claimed that Charles Buchanan showed the "bills and statements" of the remodeling to him for proving the costs of it.

³⁰ This is reinforced by the fact that in 1953 it was installed a new dance floor in the Savoy, which cost only 5,000 dollars. That occurred in the middle of rumors of tearing down the ballroom for a new housing project. See 'Izzy Rowe's Notebook', the *Courier*, August 1, 1953, p. 18. The rumors are discussed later. As it was used only 5,000 dollars for the dance floor as compared to 109,000 dollars for the remodeling, that strongly suggests that Gale and Buchanan in 1948 were not going to give up the ballroom in the future.

³¹ 'Savoy Ballroom in New Lease', *The New York Herald Tribune*, December 7, 1939, p. 45. The exact end of the lease was not mentioned in the article. The year 1954 is based on the fact that the lease was for fifteen years. The long-range plan is also supported by the fact that in October 1939, before the lease was reported in December, Charles Buchanan referred to a long-range plan regarding the entertainment at the Savoy. See 'Savoy Not To Close', *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 28, 1939, p. 20.

³² 'Gale Gets \$500,000 For Savoy Ballroom', *The Philadelphia Tribune*, April 14, 1953, p. 12. 'Savoy Sold For 500G As Landmark', *The Billboard*, August 8, 1953, p. 13.

The Savoy Will Be Demolished – Rumors Start to Spread in Public

The rumors of the end of the Savoy Ballroom started to spread in public in 1951³³. Indeed, as early as in 1939, it was claimed that the ballroom was going to be closed because of making room for a bus terminal, which was disputed by Charles Buchanan³⁴, and the bus terminal plan is not plausible considering particularly the aforementioned lease which referred to a long-range plan for managing the ballroom. So, at first glance, it might not have been surprising that there were rumors regarding the destiny of the ballroom at the very beginning of the 1950s because there have been them already before.

As to the year 1951, between April and June 1951, newspapers reported the upcoming demolition of the Savoy. According to *The Afro-American* in April, “a deal is going down” regarding “a housing project”, and as a consequence of the deal, the ballroom was going to be demolished.³⁵ The mainstream newspaper *The New York Herald Tribune* claimed in June that the Harlem ballrooms and night clubs, “The Savoy Ballroom, Golden Gate and Club Sudan” were going to be demolished for “the high income housing project”. The paper stated that “[a] new and bigger Savoy Ballroom will be constructed.”³⁶ On the contrary, the *Atlanta Daily News* claimed in June that the reports on the demolition were false, and the Savoy was going to survive on Lenox Avenue.³⁷

The demolition story circulated in newspapers between 1952 and 1956. In June 1952, the demolition in connection with a new housing project was reported briefly by *The Philadelphia Tribune* and *The Afro-American*.³⁸ In 1953, the *Courier* announced that the Savoy 27th birthday in March was the last as the ballroom was going to be torn down soon.³⁹ When the ballroom was reported to be sold to the City of New York in August, *The Billboard* and *The New York Amsterdam News* stated more positively that the old Savoy Ballroom was going to operate at

³³ As far as I have searched the articles regarding the demolition, the first announcement of the upcoming demolition was made by *The Afro-American* in April 1951. See James L. Hicks, ‘Big Town’, *The Afro-American*, April 14, 1951, p. 4.

³⁴ ‘Savoy Not To Close’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 28, 1939, p. 20.

³⁵ James L. Hicks, ‘Big Town’, *The Afro-American*, April 14, 1951, p. 4.

³⁶ Hy Gardner, ‘Early Bird on Broadway’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, June 5, 1951, p. 19.

³⁷ Al Moses, ‘Nitelife in New York’, *Atlanta Daily World*, June 7, 1951, p. 2.

³⁸ Dolores Calvin, ‘Seein’ Stars’, *The Philadelphia Tribune*, June 3, 1952, p. 14. E. B. Rea, ‘Encores and Echoes’, *The Afro-American*, June 21, 1952, p. 6.

³⁹ ‘Savoy Ballroom Jumps At 27th Birthday Fete’, the *Courier*, March 21, 1953, p. 21.

least three years. *The Billboard* also added that the plan included “a site for a new Savoy Ballroom” which was going to be built by the city with the help of “State and federal aid”. Moe Gale should have been the operator of “the new spot”.⁴⁰ In October 1956, Langston Hughes warned in the *Chicago Defender* article that people “had better visit it soon” because the Savoy block was being torn down for the housing project⁴¹.

The North Harlem – Delano Village Project

Those who studied newspapers learned at the very beginning of April 1951 that there was a plan for the North Harlem slum clearance project which by June 1952 was called the “North Harlem Area - Delano Village” that was “bounded by Lenox and Fifth Avenues and 139th and 143rd Streets”.⁴² Although the *New York Amsterdam News* and *New York Herald Tribune* articles, which reported the plan, did not mention whether the Savoy Ballroom, which was located at the area, was included in the plan, it is quite sure that the ballroom was part of it when considering the boundaries of the Delano Village area. It seems that journalists understood that as well because it was not likely a coincidence that rumors of the Savoy demolition began to spread in public after the plan was reported in April 1951.

According to *The New York Times*, the Axelrod Construction Company, Inc., the constructor of the Delano Village, bought the site for the project from the City of New York in July 1952. The new houses were planned in 1950.⁴³ The Delano Village project was one of the three slum clearance projects in Harlem, which were set by the City of New York by the middle of the 1950s as based on the Housing Act of 1949 and its Title 1 that allowed funds from the Federal Government (federal funds) to be used for redevelopment projects regarding areas

⁴⁰ “Savoy Sold For 500G As Landmark”, *The Billboard*, August 8, 1953, p. 13. Savoy To ‘Go’ In Three Years’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, August 22, 1953, p. 23.

⁴¹ Langston Hughes, ‘Autumn In New York: Nice Season In A Nice City’, *The Chicago Defender*, October 27, 1956, p. 11.

⁴² ‘Harlem Slum Clearance Project Is Okayed’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, April 7, 1951, p. 3. ‘City Gets Proposal for Uptown Slum Clearance Project’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, October 1, 1951, p. 7. Robert A. Poteete, ‘City, U.S. Sign With Builders For 4 Projects’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, June 11, 1952, p. 21.

⁴³ ‘Housing Spurred in North Harlem’, *The New York Times*, October 1, 1956. ‘Harlem Housing Hailed by Moses’, *The New York Times*, September 12, 1957, p. 33.

considered slums. Only two of the projects, the Delano Village and Godfrey Nurse Houses (Lenox Terrace), were carried out.⁴⁴

The Delano Village project encountered serious difficulties pretty soon it was started. *The New York Herald Tribune* stated in October 1955 that the project had been stopped for a few years, and was being to continue⁴⁵. That came after *The New York Times* had explained in September 1955 that the Delano Village project with the aforementioned boundaries would lead to the demolition of “old tenements, garages and parking lots”. The project was to start in a month, and it was going to be completed in “about three and one-half years”.⁴⁶

Terry Monaghan has suggested two reasons for the delay in commencing the construction of the Delano Village buildings: the “planning disagreements” regarding what type of housing should have been built on the site and “[c]omplications” which arose from “the redevelopments plans for the site”⁴⁷. According to the newspaper reports at the time of the project, the reasons were the lack of financing and difficulties to relocate tenants from the old buildings⁴⁸. In May 1956, *The New York Amsterdam News* criticized the government of the City of New York for the setbacks, and said that “hundreds of homeless Harlemites” were walking on the streets of Harlem because new houses were not built on the sites of the destroyed buildings⁴⁹. In 1953, buildings on the area of 200,000 square feet were demolished for the project⁵⁰, which obviously led to the homelessness because the new houses were not built for

⁴⁴ John T. Metzger, who has researched Harlem’s public housing projects, claims erroneously that Lenox Terrace and Delano Village were the only two Harlem-based Title 1 projects which were planned in the 1950s. See John T. Metzger (1994) *Rebuilding Harlem: Public housing and urban renewal, 1920-1960*, Planning Perspectives, 9:3. Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, New York, NY, published online: 08 May 2007, p. 280. The third of the three Title 1 projects for Harlem, the Mid-Harlem development, was shelved because of the lack of funds and problems with relocating tenants from the old buildings. ‘Buchanan Still Eyes Title One Project’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, August 29, 1959, p. 4. ‘Herb Evans Gets \$11,000 City Job’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 16, 1960, p. 1. See also Charles Grutzner, ‘Harlem May Get ‘Little Coliseum’, *The New York Times*, June 9, 1956, p. 19. Godfrey Nurse Houses was later called Lenox Terrace. See ‘Builder to Start Harlem Project’, *The New York Times*, March 25, 1957, p. 27. For the Housing Act of 1949 see John F. Bauman, ‘the Housing Act of 1949’ in David R. Goldfield, editor, *Encyclopedia of American Urban History* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2007), pp. 356-357.

⁴⁵ ‘Loosing Private Capital Against Slums’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, October 1, 1955, p. 8.

⁴⁶ ‘Big Slum Project Insured by F.H.A.’, *The New York Times*, September 30, 1955, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Monaghan 2005, p. 44. Hubbard and Monaghan 2009, p. 141

⁴⁸ ‘Delayed Housing to Get Under Way’, *The New York Times*, June 15, 1956, p. 27. ‘Builder Explains Delay At Delano Village Site’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, June 23, 1956, pp. 9 and 16. Housing Spurred in North Harlem’, *The New York Times*, October 1, 1956, p. 29.

⁴⁹ ‘The Housing Headache’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, May 26, 1956, p. 10.

⁵⁰ ‘Builder Explains Delay At Delano Village Site’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, June 23, 1956, p. 9.

years after that. In June 1956, 422 of 1,200 families were not relocated, and in January 1957, still 250 of the 1,200 families were without new home⁵¹. In October 1957, the construction of the Delano Village had proceeded significantly, and the first tenants had moved in one of the new buildings⁵².

The End of the Old Savoy Ballroom

By March 1958, the news about the closing of the ballroom circulated again. *The New York Amsterdam News* told vaguely that the Savoy may have to move to a new location in the next two years because the Delano Village project. According to the paper, Charles Buchanan stayed uncertain whether to build a new Savoy or not, particularly, because of difficulties to find a new location⁵³. *The Pittsburgh Courier* stated that it was only a matter of time when the Savoy was closed. It also added pessimistically that “from all appearances there won’t be a new Savoy”⁵⁴. In May 1958, *New Journal and Guide* and *The New York Amsterdam News* reported that “Stomping At [the] Savoy” will end soon. The latter announced that the Savoy Ballroom will close its doors between July 1 and July 4. Charles Buchanan told that the closing of the old ballroom would mean the end of the Savoy Ballroom story because they could not afford to build a new Savoy⁵⁵.

But the story of the Savoy was not over yet. In June, on the one hand *The New York Amsterdam News* explained that the Savoy may be demolished in July; on the other hand it told that behind the scenes there was a drive for saving the old Savoy. According to the paper, a group called the “Friends and Patrons of Local Business” led by Billy Butler, the publisher of the

⁵¹ ‘Delayed Housing to Get Under Way’, *The New York Times*, June 15, 1956, p. 27. ‘Delano Village Invites Tenants’, *The New York Times*, January 14, 1957, p. 22. ‘Applications Out For Delano Village’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 19, 1957, p. 30.

⁵² ‘First 12 Tenants In Delano Village’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 5, 1957. See also ‘Delano Village Tenants Start Moving In’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, September 14, 1957, pp. 1 and 28. ‘Flash News In Brief – The Happiest News Of The Week’, *The Afro-American*, September 21, 1957, p. 1. ‘Garage May Replace Roosevelt Theatre’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, September 28, 1957, p. 6..

⁵³ Jesse H. Walker, ‘Theatricals’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, March 15, 1958, p. 12.

⁵⁴ ‘Izzy Rowe’s Notebook’, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, March 22, 1958, p. A22.

⁵⁵ Thomas J. Sellers, ‘The Sidelights of New York’, *New Journal and Guide*, May 10, 1958, p. 2. ‘Stomping At Savoy’ Will End In July’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, May 31, 1958, pp. 1 and 9.

Travelguide for African American travelers, tried to preserve the ballroom⁵⁶. Achievements of the group, and whether they led to any significant actions for saving the ballroom do not come out in the press reporting⁵⁷.

At the very beginning of July, *The New York Times* claimed that the Savoy Ballroom was going to be closed either in the end of the month or at the latest when summer ends. At the time, Charles Buchanan hoped that he could meet soon with Mayor Robert Wagner for discussing the ballroom.⁵⁸ Did they meet is not clear. By the end of July, the Savoy Ballroom closed its doors for public somewhere between July 10 and 20 depending on the source. According to *The New York Amsterdam News*, it was closed “before a packed audience” on July 20, thus being popular until the end. On the contrary, several studies suggest that the date was July 10.⁵⁹

There still was hope for reopening the ballroom when *The Pittsburgh Courier* cited rumors which said that the Savoy was not torn down as planned because the demolition was too costly⁶⁰. Although *The New York Times* had told at the beginning of July that the owners of the Savoy refused to pay \$250,000 to the “real estate promoters” for saving the ballroom⁶¹, *The New York Amsterdam News* reported at the end of July that Charles Buchanan planned to use \$250,000 for remodeling the Savoy, which was going to be reopened in October. Buchanan told to the press that Charles Axelrod, the president of the housing company, had “tentatively

⁵⁶ Jesse H. Walker, 'Theatricals', *The New York Amsterdam News*, June 14, 1958, p. 15 and Jesse H. Walker, 'Theatricals', *The New York Amsterdam News*, June 28, 1958, p. 16. See also 'Izzy Rowe's Notebook', *The Pittsburgh Courier*, June 14, 1958, p. 15 and 'Jimcrow Made Ex-Musician Go Into Publishing Field', *New Journal and Guide*, August 6, 1955, p. 16.

⁵⁷ By going through ProQuest newspaper archives does not bring out more information about the group's actions in the case.

⁵⁸ Meyer Berger, 'About New York', *The New York Times*, July 4, 1958, p. 41.

⁵⁹ Savoy Ballroom Closes But May Be Reopened', *The New York Amsterdam News*, July 26, 1958, pp. 1 and 9. The paper states that the Savoy “was closed down Sunday night”. The last Sunday before July 26, 1958 was July 20. For Terry Monaghan's statement of the closing date see 'Jazzing To the End: The 50th Anniversary of Harlem's Savoy Ballroom's closure is chronicled by hosts John Clement and dance expert Terry Monaghan'. The program is part of jazz from The Archives series (executive producer: Vincent Pelote). Jazz From the Archives, Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University. I have a copy of this. Otherwise see Van Alexander and Stephen Fratallone, *From Harlem to Hollywood: My Life In Music* (Albany, Georgia: BearManor Media, 2015), Chapter Three, 'Stomp'in' At the Savoy'. Nadine George-Graves, edited by, *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Theater* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 747.

⁶⁰ Masco Young, 'The Grapevine', *The Pittsburgh Courier*, July 19, 1958, p. A16.

⁶¹ Meyer Berger, 'About New York', *The New York Times*, July 4, 1958, p. 41.

agreed” with him that the Savoy is not going to be demolished. He added that approval from the Slum Clearance Committee and the Urban Renewal Administration was also needed.⁶²

In September, *The New York Amsterdam News* stated that Charles Buchanan had negotiated with the housing company, but without success because he could not afford to the lease agreement which the company offered. Buchanan should have paid to the housing company “\$45,000 per year with a deposit on the lease of \$73,000”. He should also have used \$329,000 for renewing the ballroom. Buchanan offered to the company only \$30,000.⁶³ A much diminished figure when compared to the \$250,000 which he should have used for remodeling the Savoy as reported in July. This casts doubt on Buchanan’s financial claims: he seemed to either exaggerate his finances or assume that he gets the money from financiers.

Before the end of the negotiations, the future of the old Savoy had looked promising even so, that the Savoy marquee advertised the reopening on October 15. Buchanan had also informed various clubs that they could have their events at the ballroom in the future. The latter was largely based on the idea that the construction company would at the very least “erect a new place for the ballroom”. Buchanan claimed that he had a letter from the company in which the idea was stated at the time when the project started (Later in 1959, Buchanan claimed that he had “an agreement” with Charles Axelrod, which was “made and okayed” by the Slum Clearance Committee, that the Savoy remained on Lenox Avenue.).⁶⁴

The New York Amsterdam News explained between July and September that “hundreds of Harlem civic and community organizations which used the Savoy for their purposes had protested to city officials” for saving the ballroom⁶⁵, and the clubs that used the Savoy for their events protested the upcoming demolition of the ballroom by writing to Mayor Wagner, Manhattan Borough President Hulan E. Jack, and the chairman of Mayor’s Slum Clearance Committee Robert Moses. As Mayor Wagner only requested both parties to try to make an agreement, Manhattan Borough President Jack, in addition, suggested that “an impartial body”

⁶² Savoy Ballroom Closes But May Be Reopened’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, July 26, 1958, pp. 1 and 9.

⁶³ Betty Granger, ‘Fight Rages Over Savoy’s Closing’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, September 13, 1958, pp. 1 and 11.

⁶⁴ Betty Granger, ‘Fight Rages Over Savoy’s Closing’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, September 13, 1958, p. 1. See for Buchanan’s 1959 claim ‘Buchanan Glad Mid-Harlem Title Story Came To Light’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, July 18, 1959, p. 18.

⁶⁵ Savoy Ballroom Closes But May Be Reopened’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, July 26, 1958, p. 9.

would consider the factors involved in the case and make an agreement for the parties while the old Savoy Ballroom would have remained on Lenox Avenue.⁶⁶

Also the United African Nationalist Movement, which supported unity between all Africa-oriented groups in the U.S., told about their interest in preserving the Savoy. The movement announced that the Slum Clearance program was “against the best interest of blacks.”⁶⁷ But similar to the aforementioned initiatives also this did not seem to lead to any significant consequences⁶⁸.

Perhaps not so surprisingly, when considering the long history of the Savoy Ballroom as the community center in Harlem, and underlining the importance of the Savoy Ballroom, the Savoy was in the headlines when fixtures of the ballroom were auctioned off at the very end of September 1958. Approximately 300 persons attended the event⁶⁹.

The New York Times published an article about the auction and a dance show which was organized in conjunction with the auction. In one of the pictures, it can be seen two Third Generation Savoy Lindy Hoppers, Lee Moates and Delma Nicholson, dancing with unknown partners on the dance floor of the ballroom. On the background, there are both African Americans and people who look like white watching the dancing. In another picture, it can be seen the dance floor of the ballroom, and the third picture shows workmen loading an electric organ into a van. The article presents briefly the Savoy Ballroom history, bringing out the interracial aspect of the ballroom when referring to European tourists who visited the ballroom. According to the article, Charles Buchanan was uncertain whether there was going to be a new Savoy because of high building costs, and his considerable age made it difficult to manage a new ballroom.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Betty Granger, ‘Fight Rages Over Savoy’s Closing’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, September 13, 1958, p. 1.

⁶⁷ “N. Y. Slum clearance policy is assailed”, *The Afro-American*, September 27, 1958, p. 2 and ‘Savoy Fight Goes On Landlord Keeps Silent’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, September 27, 1958, p. 15. See also ‘Lawson Calls for Unity Among African Nationalists’, *The Atlanta Daily World*, August 21, 1958, p. 7. ‘Seeks Unity For Africa Movement’, *The Chicago Defender*, August 30, 1958, p. 2.

⁶⁸ As far as I have searched newspapers in the ProQuest database, after September 1958, the movement did not discuss in the press in the context of the Slum Clearance program and the Savoy Ballroom.

⁶⁹ ‘Buchanan Voices Hope For New Savoy’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 4, 1958, 17.

⁷⁰ ‘There’ll Be No More Stompin’ at the Savoy; Harlem Ballroom’s Fixtures Sold’, *The New York Times*, October 1, 1958, p. 39.

According to *The New York Amsterdam News*, contrary to the *New York Times* article, Charles Buchanan told at the event that there was a “great effort...being made” for seeing what could be done for building a new Savoy. He explained that the old Savoy ended because they could not agree with “the management and the sponsors of Delano Village” about money which was needed for rental regarding the ballroom. Buchanan, however, emphasized that there were not yet complete plans for the new ballroom.⁷¹

The event received pretty extensive press coverage as it was also reported by the African American newspapers, *The Chicago Defender*, *Cleveland Call and Post*, *The Daily Defender*, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, *The Philadelphia Tribune*, and the mainly white mainstream newspapers, *The Hartford Courant*, *The Irish Times*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, *Toronto Daily Star*, and *Variety*⁷². *Variety* brought out Moe Gale who planned to open a new Savoy if there was a location for it, and he could afford to it. Gale emphasized the fact that the new Savoy was for African Americans in a similar way to the old Savoy.⁷³

The importance of the ballroom came out as well when Bill Leonard on CBS-TV discussed the Savoy Ballroom on October 5. At the program, Cab Calloway, Count Basie and Charlie Buchanan reminisced about the Savoy. They all agreed that a new Savoy was needed in Harlem.⁷⁴

When the auction was over, the old Savoy Ballroom on Lenox Avenue was slated for the demolition which took place between March and April in 1959⁷⁵. Before the demolition, rumors regarding a new Savoy started to spread again when *The New York Amsterdam News*

⁷¹ 'Buchanan Voices Hope For New Savoy', *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 4, 1958, 17. See also 'Death Of A Landmark', *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 4, 1958, p. 1.

⁷² 'Stompin' At Savoy Ends As Ballroom Is Wrecked', *The Chicago Defender*, October 11, 1958, p. 9. 'Famed New York Savoy's Closing Ends Socko Era', *The Chicago Defender*, October 11, 1958, p. 19. Art Sears, Jr., 'Star Dust', *Cleveland Call and Post*, October 11, 1958, p. 4C. 'Stompin' At Savoy Ends As Ballroom Is Wrecked', *Daily Defender*, October 2, 1958, p. A3. 'Famous Harlem Ballroom Closes', *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 23, 1958, p. C2. 'Buchanan Voices Hope For New Savoy', *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 4, 1958, p. 17. 'Harlem's Savoy Ballroom Forced To Close Doors', *The Philadelphia Tribune*, October 11, 1958, p. 5. M. Oakley Stafford, 'Informing You', *The Hartford Courant*, October 10, 1958, p. 10. 'Savoy Special', *The Irish Times*, October 16, 1958, p. 7. 'Stomp No More, My Lady', *The New York Herald Tribune*, October 3, 1958, p. 14. 'The Savoy Blues', *Toronto Daily Star*, October 3, 1958, p. 7. 'Stompin' at the Savoy Now a Memory; Harlem Dancery Auctioned Off', *Variety*, October 8, 1958, pp. 62 and 66.

⁷³ 'Stomping at Savoy', *Variety*, October 8, 1958, p. 66.

⁷⁴ Jesse H. Walker, 'Theatricals', *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 11, 1958, p. 15.

⁷⁵ 'Stompin' At Savoy Ends As Ballroom Is Wrecked', *The Daily Defender*, October 2, 1958, p. 3. 'Stompin' At Savoy Ends As Ballroom Is Wrecked', *The Chicago Defender*, October 11, 1958, p. 9. See also note ?

and *The Pittsburgh Courier* reported in November that the Rockefeller family was seriously interested in financing the new Savoy. As to the claim, Charles Buchanan only commented that “a number of people” had expressed their interest in a new ballroom, although he admitted that he had high hopes for a new ballroom in Harlem “within the next few years”.⁷⁶ This was confused with the news about the Gale Agency directed by Moe Gale’s brother Tim Gale, which was sold to the four employees of the company in November. According to *The Chicago Defender*, that was the end of the era of the Savoy Ballroom because the old Savoy could not be replicated.⁷⁷ The idea of a new Savoy, however, did not disappear as *The New York Amsterdam News* repeated the rumor of the new Savoy in January 1959.⁷⁸

The Mid Harlem Project

As the year 1959 went by, the Savoy Ballroom story came back into the picture, when in July, it was revealed that Louis I. Pokrass, the sponsor of the Mid Harlem project, had been connected to the underworld kingpin Frank Costello and other racketeers.⁷⁹ The plan for the Mid Harlem project, from 125th to 135th Streets between Eight and St. Nicholas Avenues, was known from June 1956 when *The New York Herald Tribune* and *The New York Times* reported that the Mid Harlem project was one of the eight new projects which Robert Moses, the chairman of the Mayor’s Committee on Slum Clearance, proposed.⁸⁰ The project included a “little Coliseum”, “a sports and community center” for various sports events like prize fights and basketball games, in addition to dances, weddings, and community meetings.⁸¹ The “little Coliseum” was probably to be a new Savoy Ballroom because Charles Buchanan claimed that

⁷⁶ ‘Hope For New Savoy Revived’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, November 15, 1958, pp. 1 and 11. ‘Savoy Ballroom May Reopen with Rockefeller Aid’, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, November 22, 1958, p. 19.

⁷⁷ ‘End of an Era: Savoy Ballroom Closing; Gale Agency Sold to Four Employees’, *The Daily Defender*, November 29, 1958, p. 18.

⁷⁸ Jimmy Booker, ‘Uptown Lowdown’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 3, 1959, p. 7. Jimmy Booker, ‘Uptown Lowdown’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 3, 1959, p. 7. Jimmy Booker, ‘Uptown Lowdown’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 10, 1959, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Joel Seldin, ‘Alleged Pal Of Costello In City Deal’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, July 1, 1959, p. 1. Emanuel Perlmutter, ‘Inquiry Ordered on Title 1 Award’, *The New York Times*, July 1, 1959, pp. 1 and 23. See also Charles Grutzner, ‘Harlem May Get ‘Little Coliseum’’, *The New York Times*, June 9, 1956, p. 19. ‘Buchanan Glad Mid-Harlem Title Story Came To Light’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, July 18, 1959, p. 18.

⁸⁰ Joel Seldin, ‘Moses Asks 40 Millions Slum Fund’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, June 8, 1956, p. 17. Charles Grutzner, ‘City Urged to Ask More Slum Funds’, *The New York Times*, June 8, 1956, p. 1.

⁸¹ Charles Grutzner, ‘Harlem May Get ‘Little Coliseum’’, *The New York Times*, June 9, 1956, p. 19. Charles G. Bennett, ‘Planboard Backs New City Housing’, *The New York Times*, June 30, 1956, p. 20.

he originally suggested the Mid Harlem project with the “little Coliseum” to Moses after the negotiations with the construction company concerning the old Savoy Ballroom on Lenox Avenue failed in 1955.⁸²

Particularly because of the lack of federal funds, but probably also for the problems of relocating the tenants, the project was postponed in 1957 and 1958.⁸³ In July 1959, when the Pokrass allegations began, the destiny of the project was still under consideration for the lack of the federal funds.⁸⁴

At the time of the allegations, the role and the members of the group headed by Charles Buchanan also unfolded. According to Buchanan, he was backed by broker William Langley, accountant Samuel Leidesdorf, Moe Gale, and Irving Parker who represented the law firm of Simpson, Thatcher and Bartlett.⁸⁵ As to the backers’ wealth, at least, Leidesdorf was a multi-millionaire⁸⁶. However, the Slum Clearance Committee chose Pokrass with his associates as the sponsor, and rejected Buchanan’s group because, according to Robert Moses, the Pokrass group could show “prima facie” evidence of their financial capacity.⁸⁷ Another reason for rejecting Buchanan’s group was their lack of enthusiasm for the project. William Langsley told that he was no more interested in the project when it seemed that the project was not feasible⁸⁸. As based on Moses’s statement, both William ‘Bill’ Langsley and Samuel Leidesdorf did not show any enthusiasm for the project when he discussed with them, and Bill Langsley even “withdrew from negotiations”.⁸⁹

The reason for the reluctance of Buchanan’s group seemed to be the background of Pokrass. When Moses suggested that the Buchanan group would cooperate with Pokrass, the group

⁸² ‘Buchanan Glad Mid-Harlem Title Story Came To Light’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, July 18, 1959, p. 18. Robert S. Bird, ‘Mayor Bars More Work For Title 1 Architect’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, July 2, 1959, p. 9.

⁸³ Charles Grutzner, ‘Harlem May Get ‘Little Coliseum’’, *The New York Times*, June 9, 1956, p. 19. ‘Mid-Harlem Project Deferred Until ‘58’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, May 11, 1957, p. 4. ‘City Postpones Mid-Harlem Project, Pushes One in Bronx’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, Oct 11, 1958, p. 2. Joel Seldin, ‘Alleged Pal Of Costello In City Deal’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, July 1, 1959, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁴ Joel Seldin, ‘Alleged Pal Of Costello In City Deal’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, July 1, 1959, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁵ Robert S. Bird, ‘Mayor Bars More Work For Title 1 Architect’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, July 2, 1959, p. 9.

⁸⁶ ‘Heiress asks divorce on ground of adultery’, *The Afro-American*, July 13, 1957, p. 17. ‘Buchanan Glad Mid-Harlem Title Story Came To Light’, *The New York Amsterdam News*, July 18, 1959, p. 18.

⁸⁷ ‘Statement and Letter by Moses on Title 1 Slum Clearance’, *The New York Times*, July 4, 1959, p. 30.

⁸⁸ Robert S. Bird, ‘Mayor Bars More Work For Title 1 Architect’, *The New York Herald Tribune*, July 2, 1959, p. 9.

⁸⁹ ‘Statement and Letter by Moses on Title 1 Slum Clearance’, *The New York Times*, July 4, 1959, p. 30.

refused the offer.⁹⁰ According to Buchanan, his group checked the background of Pokrass, and as a result of it they did not want to cooperate with him.⁹¹

Soon after the Pokrass had come under suspicion, Moses announced that they were willing to work with Buchanan's group, but the initiative did not take off. Not even, although Buchanan explained in August 1959 that he was still interested in the project, which at the time still lacked federal funding. Possibly, Moses' comments in public, particularly, on Langsley and Leidesdorf as the type of "top capitalists and investors" who did not care to participate in the business "so filled with mud and pitfalls" affected the case.⁹² In the end of 1959, when Pokrass was barred from city projects by Mayor Wagner's decision, and despite the federal funding had become available, the project was shelved because of the still continuing relocation problems.⁹³

The New Savoy Emerges

In August 1960, *The New York Amsterdam News* reported that Charles Buchanan almost bought a site in "an uptown location" for a new Savoy, but the owners doubled the price after finding out that he was the buyer.⁹⁴ When he was chosen as the new president of the United Mutual Life Insurance Company in October 1960⁹⁵, it looked like he lost interest in the new Savoy Ballroom.

To those who still believed in the new Savoy Ballroom, *The Philadelphia Tribune* gave good news when it boasted in January 1961 that the Savoy Ballroom was soon going to be "rebuilt

⁹⁰ 'Moses Says Title 1 Is a 'Dead Duck'; Decries Charges', *The New York Times*, July 4, 1959, pp. 1 and 30.

⁹¹ Robert S. Bird, 'Mayor Bars More Work For Title 1 Architect', *The New York Herald Tribune*, July 2, 1959, p. 9. Robert S. Bird, 'Title 1 'Dead Duck,' Says Moses, Because Of 'Mud and Pitfalls' ', *The New York Herald Tribune*. July 4, 1959, pp. 1-4.

⁹² Robert S. Bird, 'Title 1 'Dead Duck,' Says Moses, Because Of 'Mud and Pitfalls' ', *The New York Herald Tribune*, July 4, 1959, Buchanan Still Eyes Title One Project', *The New York Amsterdam News*, August 29, 1959, p. 4. See also 'Mid-Harlem Project IS Near Death', *The New York Amsterdam News*, August 1, 1959, p. 1.

⁹³ 'Moses Credited With Plan For Polo Grounds Housing', *The New York Herald Tribune*, November 6, 1959, p. 26. 'Postpone 2 Slum Clearance Projects', *The New York Amsterdam News*, December 19, 1959, p. 31. 'Herb Evans Gets \$11,000 City Job', *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 16, 1960, p. 1.

⁹⁴ 'Uptown Lowdown', *The New York Amsterdam News*, August 20, 1960, p. 9.

⁹⁵ 'Buchanan President Of United Mutual', *The New York Amsterdam News*, October 15, 1960, p. 6.

by big money interests".⁹⁶ Much to their surprise, who had lost faith in the new Savoy, *The New York Amsterdam News* told in April that in the Bronx, only eight blocks from the old Savoy, there was going to be the Savoy Manor ballroom⁹⁷.

The paper confirmed the news when it reported on the opening of the new ballroom in July. It emphasized that the ballroom was opened "with the full blessings and consent of" Charles Buchanan, and a former Savoy Ballroom assistant manager Morris Speed was one of the operators.⁹⁸ Thus implying that the Savoy Manor was the successor to the old Savoy. In addition, Buchanan asked Louise 'Mama Lou' Parks Duncanson with the help of other Savoy Lindy Hoppers like George and Sugar Sullivan, and Lee Moates to stage the Lindy Hop preliminaries for the Harvest Moon Ball contest at the new ballroom where Savoy Lindy Hoppers from the old Savoy trained new contestants.⁹⁹ Therefore, when combining the facts, the Savoy Manor was de facto the new Savoy Ballroom.

Conclusion

In retrospect, when considering reasons for the closing of Harlem's Savoy Ballroom, it is clear that the closing did not happen because of big financial losses. Based on the evidence of the flagship events mentioned in this article, the Savoy was thriving throughout the 1950s until its end. Although it is possible that there were nights when the Savoy was almost deserted as Lon A. Gault suggests, and there was a decline in profits, and thus the Savoy could not always hire artists which they considered too expensive as Moe Gale and Charles Buchanan stated, the Savoy survived the years until it was closed because of the Delano Village project. There is no sign of the closing stemmed from remarkable financial losses.

⁹⁶ Art Peters, 'Off The Main Stem', *The Philadelphia Tribune*, January 21, 1961, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Thomasina Norford, 'On The Town', *The New York Amsterdam News*, April 8, 1961, p. 12.

⁹⁸ 'Happy Feet to Find New Home At The Savoy Manor Ballroom', *The New York Amsterdam News*, July 8, 1961, p. 12. Thomasina Norford, 'Savoy Manor Opens Doors With Fabulous Reception', *The New York Amsterdam News*, July 15, 1961, p. 13.

⁹⁹ Terry Monaghan, *Crashing Cars & Keeping the Savoy's Memory Alive*, unknown publishing year, originally published in www.savoyballroom.com which is not working anymore. The article is republished at <https://authenticjazzdance.wordpress.com/2015/04/25/mama-lou-parks-by-terry-monaghan/>. See also Monaghan 2002, pp. 45 and 49. Particularly, George and Sugar Sullivan, and Lee Moates were mentioned when I have discussed with the Harvest Moon Ballroom contestants who were trained by Savoy Lindy Hoppers at the Savoy Manor.

Buchanan's broken windows statement regarding the Savoy in 1958 reads like Buchanan wanted to emphasize Harlem as a socially and economically weak community by presenting the story of unwanted customers who broke windows of the Savoy, and, at the same time, he used the story for highlighting the fact that he could not save the old Savoy because the Savoy was a victim of circumstance. As to the authenticity of the story, the windows were not frequently broken by unwanted customers or not at all¹⁰⁰.

Terry Monaghan's claim about the Savoy owners, probably meaning particularly Moe Gale, but also co-owner Charles Buchanan, being fraudulent when they sacrificed the Savoy without replacing the old ballroom with a new ballroom just for getting as much money as possible out of the deal with the City of New York is simply exaggerated. While they might have negotiated the best possible deal for selling the old Savoy to the City of New York, at the very least, particularly Charles Buchanan's actions during the closure seem to show that he was not giving up the Savoy, old or new, easily.

The Savoy management, Charles Buchanan and Moe Gale, had prepared to manage the ballroom in the 1950s when the North Harlem/Delano Village project started in 1951. Practically, they did not have any other chance but to go with the plan because it was part of the Slum Clearance program started by the City of New York. It is very questionable whether they could have stopped the program which was larger than the Savoy Ballroom area in Harlem. When the ballroom was going to be closed, there emerged organizations and people who wanted to preserve the ballroom, but without success. Even various clubs, which used the Savoy for their events and protested the demolition, were not able to affect Mayor Robert Wagner and the City of New York for saving the Savoy. Also Buchanan could not afford to the prohibitive offers made by the construction company for saving the old ballroom.

Lon A. Gault's claims about the promise which guaranteed to save the old Savoy for at least three years since the Savoy was sold to the City of New York in 1953 and the promise of a new Savoy are substantiated by the press reporting at the time. Also Charles Buchanan's claim that he had a letter or a similar agreement from the Axelrod construction company for a new Savoy makes sense. It is very likely that the new ballroom was promised him when the Slum

¹⁰⁰ As I have talked with those who went to the Savoy in the 1950s, no one mentioned anything like that. Also newspapers at the time do not mention anything like that.

Clearance plan started in Harlem, but the promise was broken later when the construction company encountered serious difficulties because of problems in relocating the tenants and getting funds.

When Buchanan and the Savoy Ballroom management realized somewhere in 1955 that they are not going to get a new ballroom from the construction company, Buchanan suggested to Robert Moses, the chairman of Mayor's Slum Clearance Committee, a new Slum Clearance project in Harlem, which also included a new Savoy. The Mid Harlem development project failed initially because it could not get federal funds, and later its sponsor was revealed as a crook, which caused more problems. When the funds finally were available, the sponsor and the old Savoy had gone. The project went nowhere.

As it started to look almost impossible to get a new Savoy, in 1961, surprisingly the Savoy Manor in the Bronx opened its doors with the help of Charles Buchanan's former employee from Harlem's Savoy and became the actual successor of the old Savoy Ballroom.

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