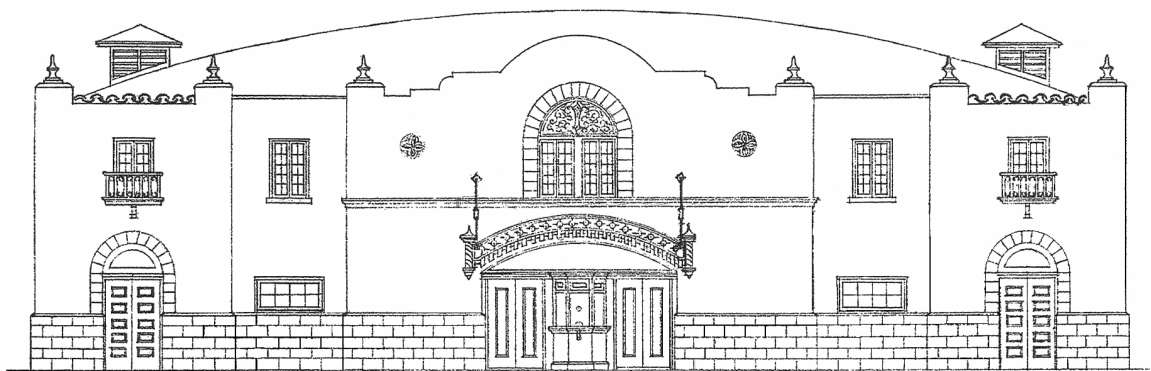


Phoenix Madison Square Garden Historic Property Documentation

Prepared for National Government Properties



Vince Murray and Scott Solliday

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Introduction

Project Description

Phoenix Madison Square Garden (the Garden) is located at 120 North Seventh Avenue, to the north of the northwest corner of Seventh Avenue and Adams Street in south central Phoenix. At the time of this report, the building is slated for demolition to prepare the property for a new development. A stipulation in zoning modifications required that a historic study be created in accordance to the City Historic Preservation Office's historic property documentation standards. This report fulfills this requirement.

Methodology

This report documents Phoenix Madison Square Garden from several viewpoints. The cultural history section is a narrative of the collective history of the arena, including the conditions that led to its construction, the types of events held in the building, and the changes in the use of the building over time. This section amalgamates information from several sources including books, magazines, newspaper articles, public records, oral histories, and architectural drawings. The architectural and land use history details the noteworthy characteristics of the building and how the building was modified and has copies of photographs and original architectural plans. The oral history and telephone interview section contains the summary of interviews conducted with some of the people associated with the venue.

Report Summary

Cultural History

The cultural history of Phoenix Madison Square Garden is closely tied to the history of wrestling and boxing, music, revivals, and to the City, generally during the period of its use as a sports and entertainment venue. For many sports and music enthusiasts, the Garden represented a new beginning and a way of life. For boxers and wrestlers, it was a workplace for a major part of their lives. For those starting a music career, the Garden was a jumping off spot; a place they might be heard for the first time or meet people that could help them in future endeavors.

Architectural and Land Use History

Phoenix Madison Square Garden was built as an arena for boxing and wrestling in 1929. Though a few changes were made during its first fifty years, in 1979 the Garden was converted to an auto parts warehouse and the structure was drastically altered to serve this purpose.

Oral History and Telephone Interviews

Historians Scott Solliday and Vince Murray summarize and provide detailed logs from interviews that were conducted with persons associated with Phoenix Madison Square Garden, including promoters, wrestlers, and musicians. Each individual provides a distinctive viewpoint of the Garden's use and of the human interaction that occurred there during its life as an entertainment venue. Those interviewed describe Phoenix Madison Square Garden as a unique place to frequent between 1950 and 1980. The oral history tapes will be offered for deposit at Arizona State University, Hayden Library.

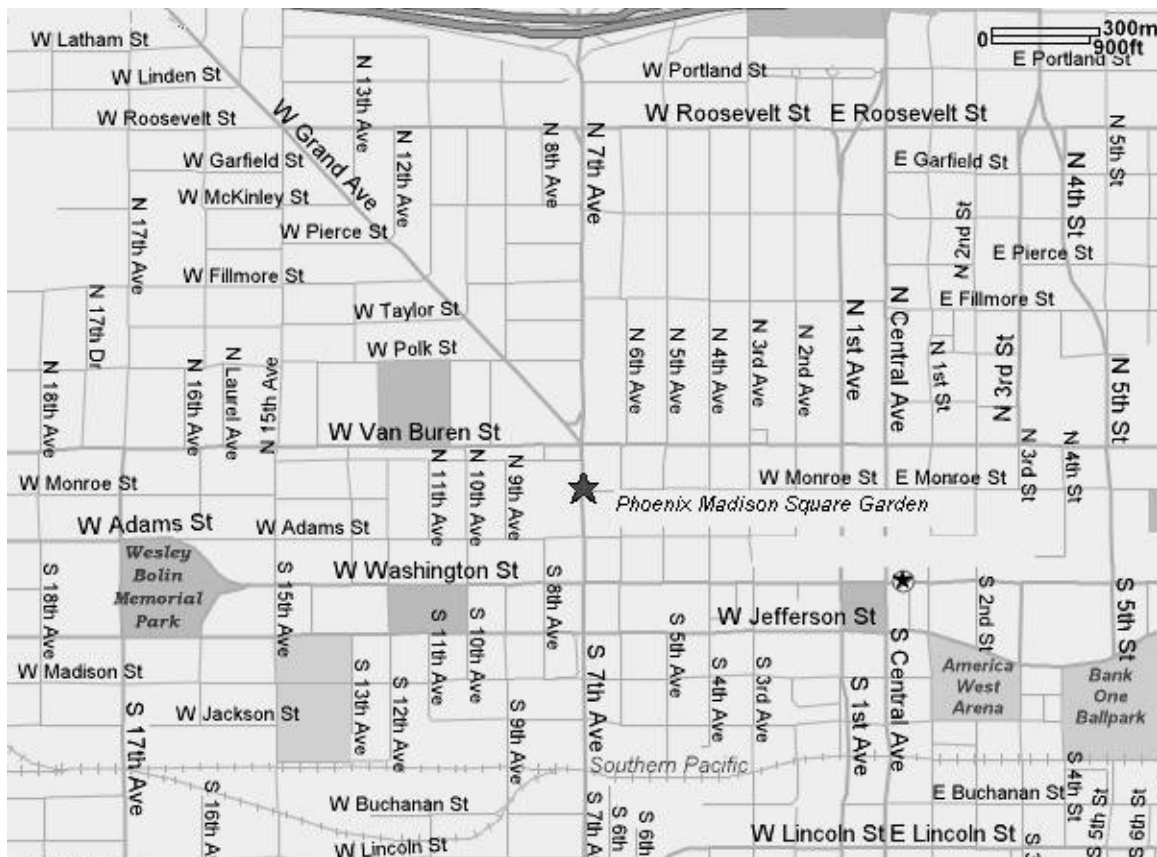


Figure 1. Phoenix Madison Square Garden Location, MapQuest 2005.

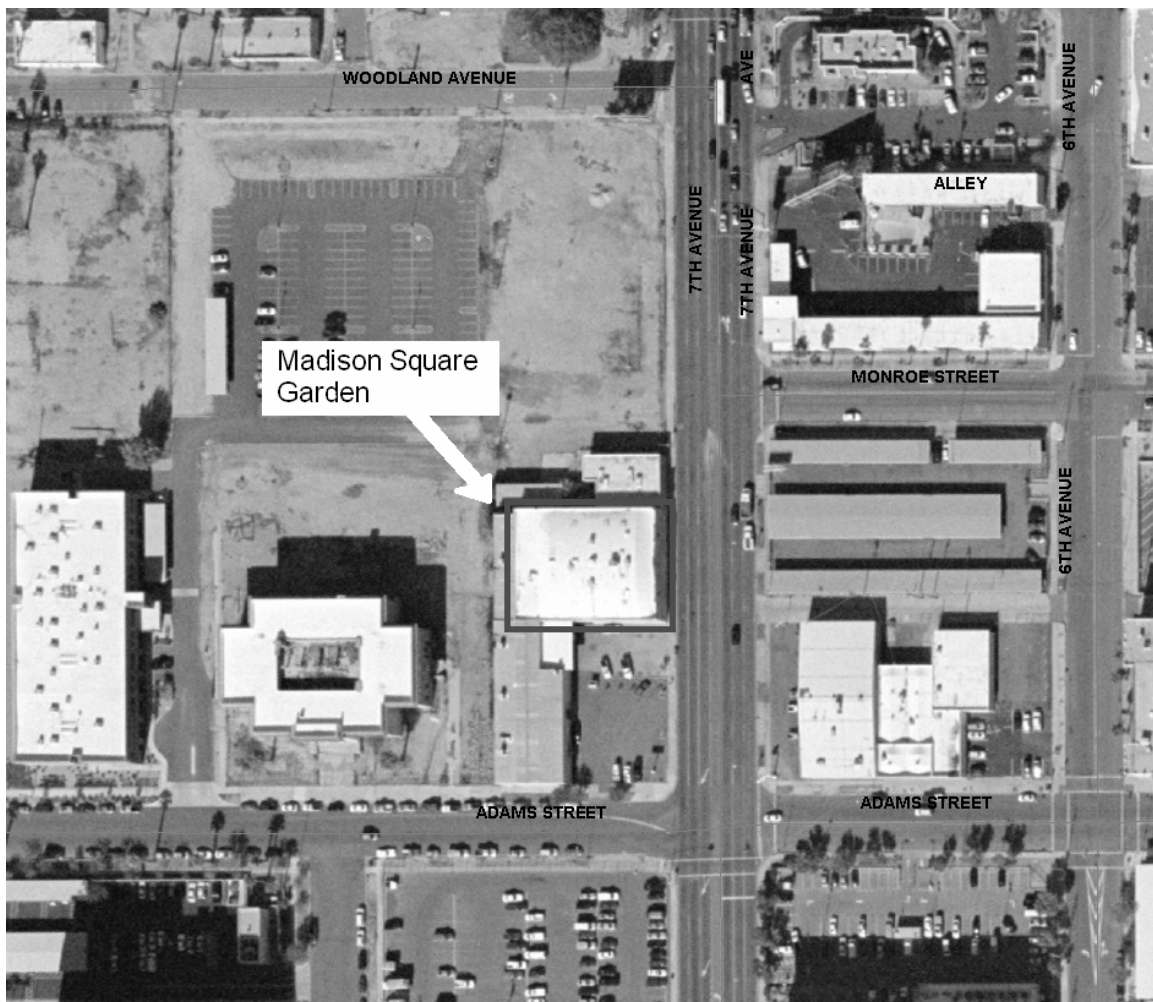


Figure 2. Aerial Photograph of Phoenix Madison Square Garden, Maricopa County Assessors Office, 2005. ed. V. Murray 2 July 2005.

Cultural History

Introduction

In 1929, Phoenix was a booming, bustling city, second in size only to El Paso in the American Southwest. Surrounded by a quarter of a million acres of irrigated farmland, on four main highways and four railroad lines, as well as owning a new airport, Phoenix was a transportation hub for the State of Arizona. The city had all of the accoutrements of a twentieth century city: skyscrapers, new hotels, and first-class resorts. There was a new hospital,

miles of newly paved streets, theaters, ballparks, and a new state-of-the-art sports arena: Phoenix Madison Square Garden.¹

The Rise of the Pugnacious Sports - Boxing And Wrestling

Fighting is an ancient sport. Throughout the world there have been various types of organized competitions between two men that involved holding, punching, or impaling one's opponent. The English version of a contest based on the manly art of self-defense was brought to America over two hundred years ago. Boxing was an informal match between two men, a test of skill and strength that provided exciting entertainment for the spectators. The victor was recognized as a champion and often collected a modest sum from those who had bet against him. Over time, boxing became prizefighting, a more highly organized and profitable form of the sport. By the 1880s, thousands of people were paying admission to see challengers beaten down by John L. Sullivan, the indisputable heavyweight champion. As boxing grew in popularity, there was a public outcry against this brutal blood sport. Around the country, city officials began prosecuting fighters on assault and other charges, and passing ordinances banning prizefighting. Big title fights were confined largely to New York, New Orleans, and San Francisco, but small local matches were common throughout the West.²

The perception of boxing started changing around the turn of the century. Promoters formed athletic associations and adopted reforms such as the Marquis of Queensberry Rules, which required fighters to stand on their own and quit when they were beaten. Limited rounds, the use of padded gloves, and weight classifications for boxers, helped improve the public image of the sport. What had been an illegal activity started gaining widespread acceptance as a legitimate sport. Despite the new rules, boxing remained inherently violent in nature, but it also reflected American values with its egalitarian philosophy that any man, regardless of race or personal circumstance, could step into the ring and fight his way to the top.³

¹ Bradford Luckingham, *Phoenix: The History of a Southwest Metropolis*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989, 74, 76, 82-84; *Arizona Republic*, 2 September 1929.

² Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 12-23; Steven A. Riess, "In the Ring and Out: Professional Boxing in New York, 1896-1920," in *Sport in America: New Historical Perspectives*, Donald Spivey, ed. (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1985), 95-97.

³ Sammons, *Beyond the Ring*, 2-6, 13-19.

Since territorial years, boxing had been a favorite pastime in Arizona's rough-and-tumble mining camps. By the 1920s, Phoenix promoter Bill Hunefeld brought boxers in from copper mining towns to fight local favorites such as Owen Phelps, Red Williams, Buster Grant, Rusty Ling, and Battling Siki. Hunefeld staged fights at Arcadia Hall, 333 West Washington Street, and at his own outdoor arena at 1128 East Washington Street. Bouts were usually on Friday nights and were sponsored by the Phoenix chapter of the Disabled American Veterans.⁴

These two venues offered adequate but not ideal arrangements for hosting large matches. Arcadia Hall was a large commercial building, approximately 90'x150', with several businesses on the ground floor and a ballroom on the second floor with a third floor mezzanine balcony. According to one newspaper account, when it was used as an arena it could hold more than 2,000 people; however, if it were filled to such capacity, even an elevated ring would probably not have been clearly visible from all seats. The open-air arena at the Hunefeld Athletic Club at 1128 East Washington Street was considerably smaller, with one thousand bleacher seats and a limited number of ringside seats. The larger sporting events were held at Riverside Park on South Central Avenue. This outdoor stadium, though primarily used for baseball games, could accommodate up to several thousand spectators.⁵

By 1928, wrestling matches were also being held at Arcadia Hall. This was not a contest in the classic Greco-Roman style, but a much faster and rougher match based on the English form of Catch-As-Catch-Can, which made for a more interesting spectator sport. A distinctly American style of wrestling was emerging at this time. Wrestlers traveled around the country, appearing in circuses and county fairs, ready to take on any challengers from the audience. In cities, matches tended to be more organized contests between experienced wrestlers. But in both rural and urban settings, the action was fast and violent. There were few rules and any hold could be used to take down an opponent. There might be referees to intercede on occasion, but matches often took the appearance of a bloody barroom brawl. Enterprising promoters recognized the potential draw of this new sport and

⁴ "Arcadia Hall," *Capitol Times*, 18 July 1984; *Arizona Gazette*, 5, 23, September, 1 October 1924; *Arizona Republican*, 3, 8, 10, 11 September 1926, 1, 7 September 1927.

⁵ Phoenix, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1893, 1901, 1911, Arizona State University Library; *Arizona Republic*, 11 September 1929, 20 May, 4, 6 June, 1 November 1931.

encouraged their wrestlers to add more excitement. In 1926, a former University of Nebraska football player named Wayne Munn challenged Ed "Strangler" Lewis, the national champion. Munn picked his opponent up and threw him out of the ring. The crowd was startled but responded enthusiastically and Munn was named World Champion. Wrestlers tried all kinds of new moves - tackles, flying leaps, and head butts - and even started taking the fight outside of the ring. Tattoos and shaved heads contributed to the garish appearance of the spectacles. By combining sport with elements of vaudeville and burlesque, promoters were cultivating a new art form. Wrestlers in the 1920s were professional entertainers who were paid for a good performance.⁶

Wrestling and boxing quickly became an established part of the social life of Phoenix. Dr. William G. Lentz, a long-time Phoenix dentist, formed the Arizona Athletic Association in 1929 to promote the two sports. Lentz hired a local architect, Edward A. Nolan, to design a new 3,000-seat sporting facility. It is not known who Lentz' partners were in this venture, but they must have been reasonably assured that ticket sales would generate enough income to pay the wrestlers and promoters, as well as the investors. The \$75,000 arena was built at 120 North 7th Avenue.⁷

No record was located as to why the building was named Phoenix Madison Square Garden. The original design identifies it only as "stadium" and "Home to the Arizona Athletic Association." However, the moniker was not unusual at the time. As early as 1893, there was a Chicago Madison Square Garden, which hosted musical acts. Boston Garden was originally named Boston Madison Square Garden by its builder, Tex Rickard, who was president of Madison Square Garden in New York. Shortly after it opened in 1928, the "Madison Square" reference was removed leaving the name Boston Garden. Phoenix Madison Square Garden was probably named after New York's famous boxing and wrestling venue, which was originally built in 1879.⁸

⁶ Arizona Republican, 8 Sept 1928; Michael R. Ball, Professional Wrestling as Ritual Drama in American Popular Culture, Mellen Studies in Sociology, volume 8 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 40-46, 52; Nicholas Sammond, ed., Steel Chair to the Head: The Pleasure and Pain of Professional Wrestling (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1.

⁷ Arizona Republican, 1, 3, 4, 11 September 1929; Edward A. Nolan, Home of the Arizona Athletic Association, Blueprints, 1929 located at the Phoenix Historic Preservation Office (CHPO); Phoenix Directory Company, Phoenix City Directory, 1899-1900; Arizona Directory Company, Phoenix City Directory 1929, 1930.

⁸ "Boston Garden History: How the Boston Garden Got Its Name."

<www.fleetcenter.com/arena_history_garden.htm> (30 June 2005); Barbara Zakrzewska-Nikiporczyk, "100 Years

By the late summer of 1929, anticipation was mounting for the opening of the new arena. A key championship match was scheduled at Riverside Park, an outdoor venue on Central Avenue south of Phoenix, for September 4, 1929, to establish the lineup for the big opening wrestling event. Pete Sauer, a Phoenix dairyman and the local wrestling champion, was matched against Pete Visser of Ogden, Utah. The winner would face Jim Londos, a rising star of the national circuit, at Phoenix Madison Square Garden on Monday, September 9, 1929. The card that day also featured Saint Louis heavyweight champion Jack Carter going against Casey Birger. Charles L. McPherson was the promoter for the match, working under the auspices of the John C. Greenway American Legion Post, which had taken on the sponsorship of wrestling. This relatively new sport of professional wrestling was an immediate success all across Arizona. Sections were reserved at the Riverside Park ring for fans from Prescott, Flagstaff, Tucson, Globe, Miami, and Casa Grande.⁹

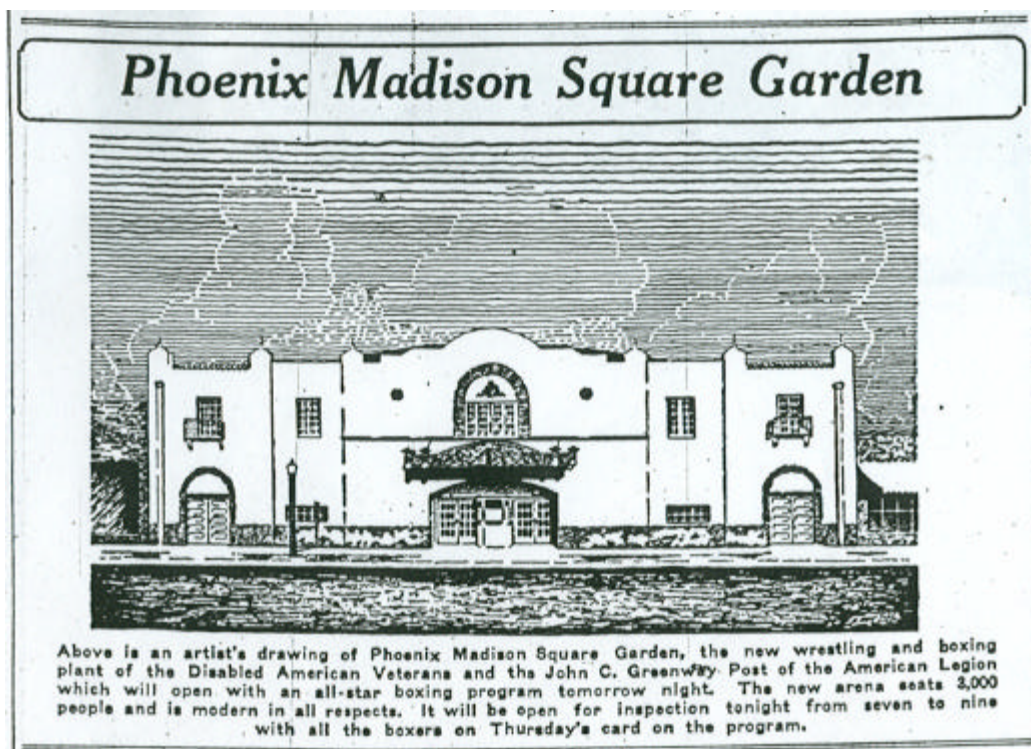


Figure 3. Phoenix Madison Square Garden, Arizona Republican, 04 September 1929.

Ago: Polish Musicians in the U.S., Part III," Polish Music Reference Center Newsletter, Volume 5 (February 1999), 2; Riess, 96-97.

⁹ Arizona Republican, 1, 3, 4, 11 September 1929.

There were two opening events for Phoenix Madison Square Garden in early September. On Thursday, September 5, 1929, big-hall boxing debuted with Owen Phelps and Bobby McIndoo of Phoenix and Allan Whitlow from Superior competing against three fighters from California. The local favorites all beat their West Coast opponents before a full house of approximately 2,000 fans. Admission ranged from one to three dollars, and fifty cents for women. The inaugural wrestling match was held on Monday, September 9, 1929. Once again, the arena was packed for a full evening of action. Carter and Birger continued their feud with a rematch to settle the previous week's draw match. Then Pete Sauer, still the Southwestern champion, met Jim Londos in the main event of the evening. This was actually their second match, as Sauer and Londos had wrestled in Philadelphia earlier that year.¹⁰

The construction of the largest indoor arena in Phoenix brought a measure of legitimacy to boxing and wrestling. In the process, it also overturned the established local organizational structure of the two sports. Bill Hunefeld, who had previously run the only program in town, was suddenly out of favor. His backers had agreed to also sponsor shows in Lentz' new indoor stadium; Disabled American Veterans oversaw the boxing program there while the American Legion held the wrestling franchise. However, Hunefeld was apparently prepared to compete head-on against the new venue. He opened Hunefeld Athletic Club and immediately scheduled his own big-name events. Buster Grant and Joel Edward Lewis, two undefeated African American fighters, fought at Hunefeld's Arena for the Southwestern Lightweight boxing championship. He also brought in wrestlers from Boston and Chicago. Hunefeld offered boxing and wrestling on various nights and tried combined events with both wrestling and boxing on the same card. In spite of his efforts, his arena did have some limitations, evident when a heavily promoted bout in mid-September had to be rescheduled due to rain. Arcadia Hall closed in 1930, reopened in 1931 with a new ventilation system, and closed again after a short period. As an indoor venue designed for dancing, Arcadia Hall could not compete with a then-state-of-the art facility such as Phoenix Madison Square Garden.¹¹

¹⁰ Arizona Republican, 1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 20 September 1929.

¹¹ Arizona Republican, 2 August, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 20, 22 September 1929; Arizona Directory Company, Phoenix City Directory, 1929, 1930, 1931.

The opening of Phoenix Madison Square Garden marked an auspicious beginning for prizefighting and professional wrestling in Phoenix. Adding to the arena's importance is that those who attended those first events had the opportunity to see sports history in the making. Two of the main draws there, John Henry Lewis and Jim Londos, both went on to become prominent national stars in their respective fields. John Henry Lewis first stepped into a ring in Phoenix to fight Buster Grant in 1928. Though the young African American was only 14 years old, he won the four-round bout by decision. He went undefeated in his next 21 fights, most of which were in Phoenix. At a fight in Prescott, his powerful knockout punch inflicted a fatal injury to his opponent, Sam Terrain. Lewis won the titles for Arizona middleweight and Pacific Coast light heavyweight. He moved to Los Angeles in 1932 and started working his way up in the national ranks to hold the World light heavyweight champion for four years, 1935-1938. Jim Londos, a popular wrestler with a strikingly handsome face and muscular build, became one of the most famous American athletes of the Depression era. After his match at Phoenix Madison Square Garden, he returned to Philadelphia where he won his first national title in 1930. The "Golden Greek" was the star attraction for more than 2,500 matches in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. The long-reigning World heavyweight champion would eventually return to Phoenix Madison Square Garden as a promoter.¹²

Wrestling in Phoenix

Despite the Depression, the 1930s were busy years at the Garden with weekly wrestling on Monday and boxing on Friday nights; the promoters were responsible for this success. They were the matchmakers, the publicists, and they managed the business of running Phoenix Madison Square Garden. Charles McPherson continued promoting wrestling for the American Legion. Jack Sullivan started running the boxing program for the Disabled American Veterans. For both, their programs were built around a popular format,

¹² Arizona Republican, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 20, 27 September 1929, 31 January 1931; Tracy Callis, "John Henry Lewis," in The Cyber Boxing Zone. <<http://www.cyberboxingzone.com/boxing/lewis-jh.htm>> (24 June 2005); James B. Roberts and Alexander G. Skutt, "John Henry Lewis," in The Boxing Register (1999), cited in International Boxing Hall of Fame. <<http://www.ibhof.com/jhlewis.htm>> (25 June 2005); "Jim Londos," San Diego Hall of Champions Sports Museum <<http://www.sdhoc.com/main/awards/athletes/wrestling/jimlondos>> (30 June 2005); "Jim Londos, The Golden Greek - Part 2," Greekworks.com <http://www.greekworks.com/content/index.php/weblog/extended/jim_londos_the_golden_greek> (26 June 2005).

bringing in contenders from all over Arizona and occasional matches with touring regional and national champions.¹³

Nationally, professional wrestling suffered a blow to its image when renegade promoters began talking about the profession's big secret: matches were not really true contests of the wrestlers' skills, but rather staged events. The public reaction was muted outrage. The revelation that matches were largely choreographed and scripted offended many who saw this as a betrayal of the fans' trust, yet most of the followers of the sport intrinsically knew that they were getting exactly what they wanted. The theatrical boasts of the contestants, the thrill of seeing pain inflicted, even if the brutality was more exaggerated than real, was exciting entertainment. Wrestling continued to grow in popularity because it provided action-packed entertainment and because the audiences came to understand and appreciate that they could play a role in determining the outcome of a match.¹⁴

In the late 1930s, Dr. Joseph S. Lentz, son of the arena's builder, became the leading promoter at Phoenix Madison Square Garden. The younger Lentz was a physician. He served in the U.S. Army during the Second World War and, when he returned, began focusing more on his medical practice in Phoenix. Other promoters took over management of the sports venue. John Contos became one of the leading promoters and arena manager in 1945. The legendary Jim Londos, who had retired as a wrestler in 1946, returned to Phoenix and began promoting matches at the Garden where he had been billed as the main event back in 1929. Londos considered buying the arena, and may have had an ownership stake in it, but the title remained in the name of the Arizona Athletic Association. By the late 1940s, wrestling grew to be wildly popular as family entertainment in Phoenix. National stars were brought in from across the country and around the world. Phoenix matches included the likes of Ted Christy and Wild Red Berry of California, Maurice Shapiro from New York, Alberto Corral Gorilla Ramos, El Diablo, and Miguel Torres from Mexico, and an international cast including Paavo Ketonen (Finland), Mike Nazarian (Syria), and Murzak Muratt and Ali Pasha (Turkey).¹⁵

¹³ Arizona Republican, 27 September, 1 November 1929, 13 April 1931, 14 April 1932; Arizona Republic, 1 March 1940.

¹⁴ Ball, 40-46.

¹⁵ Arizona Republic, 21 May, 20, 25, 27 Nov, 4, 9, 11, 18 Dec 1945, 18 June 1946; Arizona Directory Company, Phoenix City Directory, 1930, 1942, 1945; Mullin-Kille, Phoenix City Directory, 1960; Dale Pierce, Riot at the

Around this time, national and regional wrestling syndicates were being formed to bring more consistency to the sport. Two organizations, the Western Wheel in Chicago and the Eastern Wheel in New York, dominated the national wrestling hierarchy. There were also numerous independent promoters that took their wrestlers from town to town throughout the South and the West. In the late 1940s, thirty-nine promoters from the United States, Canada, and Mexico formed the National Wrestling Alliance (NWA) to promote wrestling and set standardized rules. National titles were established, but there were also state and regional titles. There were always lots of "World champions," and almost every match could be billed as a contest for the "title."¹⁶

Professional wrestling started gaining more widespread popularity after World War II, due in part to audiences growing more familiar with the underlying stories of the drama in the sport. Every match became a contest between a hero and a villain. The hero (a "face" or "babyface") was often portrayed by a member of an ethnic minority. Popular heroes included Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Italians, and Polynesians. They represented a particular underclass (not always their own actual ethnic group), and their angry speeches of outrage over injustices they or their people had endured gave them the motivation to defeat their opponents. Other stereotypical heroes were the cowboy or the farm boy, who were honest and patriotic, and sometimes a little naïve. Faces fought fair, at least until their devious opponent provoked them to do otherwise. They were matched against a villain, or "heel," the wrestler who would always be booed by the crowd. Some heels adopted the characters of our country's real-life enemies, Germans, Japanese, and Russians. They also included snobs and intellectuals who loudly boasted their superiority, and nature-boys or sissies, who usually had long blonde hair and acted as cowards and cheats. The main events always emphasized aggressive masculinity, but for opening acts, promoters started offering more diverse styles of matches. Tag team wrestling made its debut in Phoenix in 1945. In these matches, there were two men on each team, but only one-on-one in the ring. Around 1951, John

Garden (by the author, 1979), 1; Dale Pierce, "The Garden is Dead," *Wrestling Review*, August 1980; Jim Scofield, "Jeemy Was The Greatest," *Boxing & Wrestling Magazine*, June 1953, cited in *Pro-Wrestling Title Histories* <http://www.wrestling-titles.com/personalities/londos_jim/greatest.html> (27 June 2005).

¹⁶ Ball, 49, 55.

Contos began promoting woman wrestling. One match in 1958 featured midget tag team wrestling, with Lord Littlebrook and Tiny Tim vs. Ivan the Terrible and Irish Jackie.¹⁷

Professional wrestling was a spectacle. This wild and crazy card was entertaining and it played well on television. Televised wrestling matches from the Garden were a sensation in the 1950s. The showmanship and violence attracted both audiences and sponsors alike. In 1954, both KOOL-TV Channel 10 and KTYL-TV Channel 12 featured wrestling, and KPHO-TV Channel 5 showed "Texas 'Rasslin.'" Nationally, wrestling helped sell TV sets. Well-known wrestling star Gorgeous George traveled to appliance stores around the country to promote television. Wrestling was popular family entertainment. The shows looked brutal, but people knew that the violence was exaggerated, and the ritual drama of the sport appealed to working-class families. In St. Louis, it was estimated that 40 percent of the audience at matches were women and another 10 percent were children. Television played a significant role in wrestling's growing popularity and the rising attendance at matches.¹⁸

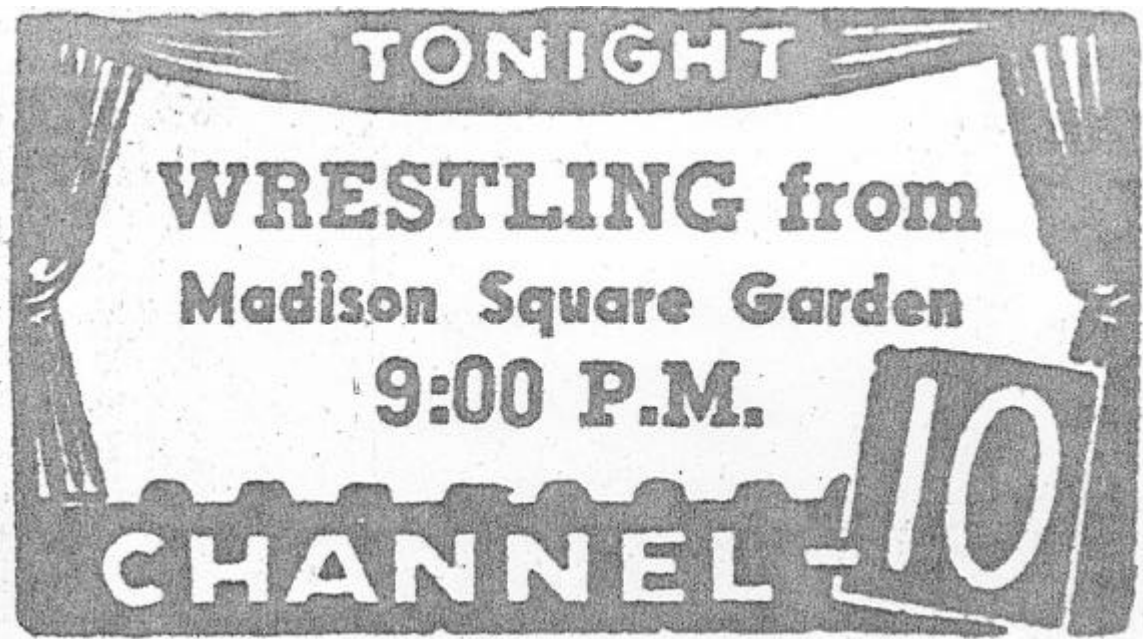


Figure 4. Wrestling on TV Advertisement, Arizona Republic, 11 October 1954.

¹⁷ Ibid., 64-68; Phillip Serrato, "Not Quite Heroes: Race, Masculinity, and Latino Professional Wrestlers," in *Steel Chair to the Head*, 233-238; Al Fenn interview, 5 July 2005; Pierce, *Riot at the Garden*, 1-3; Arizona Republic, 25 Nov 1945, 9 March 1958, 10 July 2004.

¹⁸ Ball, 53-61; Al Fenn interview.

In the 1960s, Wednesday night matches were broadcast on KPHO, which helped draw big crowds for the Friday night shows. As wrestler Cowboy Bob Yuma explained:

If you're sitting at your table eating dinner with the family, you've got the TV set on, like a lot of people do, and all of the sudden here comes Tito Montez saying "Hey, tonight I'm going to take blah blah blah and I'm going to blah blah blah right here at Madison Square Garden at 8:30!" And you look at the clock and it says 6:00. Well, you know what? Let's go.¹⁹

Herman Ray, who had become president of the Arizona Athletic Association, bought Phoenix Madison Square Garden from the organization in 1954. Several new promoters, including some former wrestlers, started running shows at the Garden. Among them were Monte LaDue - the "Mad Frenchman" - and Al Fenn and Ernie Mohammed. The emphasis in matchmaking was now turning to bringing in national stars, like long-time national champion Lou Thesz, Wild Red Berry, Nature Boy Buddy Rogers, and Lord Carlton. Gorgeous George was probably the most notorious wrestling star to visit Phoenix. As George Wagner he had had an uneventful career, but Gorgeous George made a memorable impact on the audience. He started each trip to Phoenix with a visit to a local beauty parlor to have his long golden locks curled. His trademark was throwing gold bobby pins to people on the street or in the arena. Then, dressed in an elaborate purple outfit, made his entrance into the ring while Pomp and Circumstance was played over the arena speakers. Gorgeous George was a heel. He was so outrageous that people wanted to come to the match just to see him beaten.²⁰

The Mexican style of wrestling, known as Lucha Libre, was wildly popular in Mexico City and other large Mexican cities. Many famous luchadores started coming to Phoenix in the 1950s and '60s. They brought a faster acrobatic style of wrestling and the unusual format of three-on-three tag team matches. But perhaps the most striking difference between the

¹⁹ Bob Yuma interview, 30 June 2004; Arizona Republic, 19 June 1954; Pierce, *Riot at the Garden*, 1-2.

²⁰ Maricopa County Records, Deeds, Docket 1286, Page 70; Carol Sowers, "Memories of Madison Square: Cheers, jeers and Gorgeous George," Arizona Republic, 19 Sept 1976; Pierce, *Riot at the Garden*, 1-2; Tito Montez interview, 9 July 2005; Steve Slagle, "Gorgeous George," Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame. <<http://www.wrestlingmuseum.com/pages/bios/halloffame/georgebio.html>> (1 July 2005).

American and Mexican wrestlers was the masks. Many luchadores wore tightly laced hooded masks. For them, the mask was much more than just a character or gimmick: it was an identity. A masked luchador would never take off his mask in public and always fought to keep an opponent from removing it. Many went through their whole career without ever revealing their true identity. The mask was also a tribute to Mexican indigenous cultures and inspired nationalistic pride. Two of the greatest luchadores, El Santo and the Blue Demon (El Demonio Azul in Mexico), appeared at Phoenix Madison Square Garden. They were popular cultural heroes on both sides of the border and both starred in dozens of low-budget Mexican movies from the 1940s through the 1970s. These classic productions included such titles as El Santo and the Vampire Women and Blue Demon vs. The Infernal Brains. Other luchadores that came to Phoenix included Flama Roja, Super Argo, the Satin Medic, the Vulture, and Coyo Castro.²¹

Wallace and Ladmo, the local stars of the longest running children's show in the country, were avid wrestling fans. Both were serious athletes: Bill Thompson (Wallace) was a boxer and Lad Kwiatkowski was a baseball coach. Many Valley residents who had watched Wallace and Ladmo have fond memories of seeing Tito Montez as a frequent guest on the show or zany incidents such as Wallace in a boxing match or on a tag-team with Ladmo wrestling against Don "Bulldog" Kent, Tito Montez, or "The Mad Mongol."²²

Wrestler Bob Yuma remembers those comical matches when they would get into the ring with the wrestlers, "You wouldn't 'shoot on them,' you know, go hard on them ... because they weren't trained to wrestle."²³ Wrestler and writer Dale Pierce saw it differently, "... I think if it had been real, Wallace would have beat the <expletive> out of him."²⁴

Many of the professional wrestlers at Phoenix Madison Square Garden were well-known throughout the state and worked the Arizona circuit for years. Tito Montez was one of the most popular wrestlers for three

²¹ Heather Levi, "The Mask of the Luchador: Wrestling, Politics, and Identity in Mexico," in *Steel Chair to the Head*, 96-105; Pierce, *Riot at the Garden*, 3; Dale Pierce interview, 4 July 2005; "El Santo," Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame. <<http://www.wrestlingmuseum.com/pages/bios/elsanto2.html>> (30 June 2005); "Blue Demon," Arena Lucha Libre. <<http://www.highspots.com/arena/profile.asp?luchador=bluedemon>> (30 June 2005).

²² "Wallace and Ladmo." Westward Ho Computer Users Group. <<http://www.westwardho-phoenix.org/1960s/Wallace&Ladmo.html>> (1 July 2005).

²³ Bob Yuma interview; Dale Pierce interview; Tito Montez interview.

²⁴ Pierce Interview.

decades. Montez began his professional wrestling career in San Antonio, Texas, at age sixteen. He first came to Arizona in 1958, and his style, personality, and commanding performances in the ring won him fans everywhere he appeared. He was the favored contestant in a 1962 State wrestling tournament. The first matches were held in towns across Arizona, but even Phoenix Madison Square Garden did not have the capacity for the final matches. Before a crowd of 14,000 people at Phoenix Municipal Stadium, Montez beat Sputnik Monroe and Mario Galento to win the tournament. His prize was a brand new 1962 Cadillac and \$1,200. Montez was a key participant in the enduring drama of Arizona wrestling, the feuds, or extended battles, between two wrestlers or teams. Tito Montez was matched against Don "Bulldog" Kent for thirteen weeks straight, and the show was sold out every night. During that time he was trying to win the championship belt back from Kent, but never succeeded. He also was frequently pitted against the villainous tag team of Ron Dupree and Chris Colt, known as the Comancheros. Dupree and Colt came to Phoenix from Detroit in the late 1960s. These heels were known to be the "dirtiest wrestlers in the sport," sometimes using chains and razor blades against their opponents. The Comancheros defeated Tito Montez and Armon Hussain, and went on to hold the tag team championship for many years, but Montez and his different partners were always the most popular teams. Tito Montez retired from wrestling in the 1970s after a 31-year career and, decades later, the six-time Arizona heavyweight champion is still fondly remembered as one of the greatest in Arizona wrestling.²⁵

Boxing in Phoenix

Wrestling quickly became the main attraction at Phoenix Madison Square Garden. Two wrestlers could go against each other every week for months and the crowd would expect to see the ongoing rematches. However, boxing was a program; they only scheduled boxing matches when there was a good fight. Billy Hunefeld, Phoenix's long-time matchmaker, scheduled fights at Arcadia Hall and in his own outdoor arena, as well as promoted at the newly opened Phoenix Madison Square Garden. Most of the boxing matches in the 1930s featured local contenders going against California fighters. These bouts included fighters Palmleaf Wright, Bob Richardson, Tony Cadena,

²⁵ Tito Montez interview; "Tito Montez," Arizona Wrestling Legends.

<<http://azwrestlinglegends.com/titomontez.html>> (28 June 2005); Pierce, Riot at the Garden, 7-32; "Pro-Wrestling Title Histories: Arizona," Pro-Wrestling Title Histories. <<http://www.wrestling-titles.com/us/az>> (29 June 2005).

Evans Fortune, Joe Arcienaga, Sam Langford, Rosie Rosales, and Tuffy Dial. The big attractions were the fights with real contenders such as Allan Whitlow, John Henry Lewis, and "Slapsie" Maxie Rosenbloom.²⁶

With so many young men serving in the armed forces during the Second World War, fewer boxing matches were scheduled. Following the war, boxers were brought in from California, Texas, and Mexico to fight in Phoenix. The new crop of young fighters at Phoenix Madison Square Garden included Lauro Salas, Ramon Ruiz, Chu Chu Mendoza, Ramon Yung, Cisco Saenz, Al Bishop, and Bobby Dykes.²⁷

One fighter in particular, a young African American from Chandler named Zora Folley, became the popular favorite at the Garden. Folley served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War and in 1953 won the heavyweight title at the U.S. Army Worldwide Boxing Championship at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. Upon returning home, he signed on with boxing manager Al Fenn. Folley started his professional career with a 17-0 record. He traveled the Southwestern circuit, which included Phoenix Madison Square Garden in Phoenix and various arenas in Los Angeles. In August 1958, Folley beat Pete Rademacher at the Los Angeles Olympic Auditorium, a victory which made him a nationally ranked contender, but heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson refused to fight him. Arizona Congressman Stewart Udall tried to introduce legislation to force Patterson to fight Folley, but the match was never scheduled. Folley went on to fight around the world and continued to maintain his top contender status. Finally, in 1967, he was given his chance for the World heavyweight title. On March 22, 1967, he fought Muhammad Ali at New York's Madison Square Garden but, by this time, Folley was past his youthful prime and Ali knocked him out in the seventh round. Folley finished his career soon after, with a professional record of 79-11-6. Folley is still remembered as the greatest boxer to come out of Arizona.²⁸

In the 1950s there were many opportunities for young men in Phoenix to pursue boxing and the dream of winning a title. Golden Gloves, a national amateur boxing competition, became an important part of the Valley's

²⁶ Al Fenn interview; Arizona Republican, 1 November 1929, 14 April 1932; "John Henry Lewis" and "Maxie Rosenbloom," in The Cyber Boxing Zone; Roberts and Skutt, "John Henry Lewis."

²⁷ Al Fenn interview; Arizona Republic, 9, 11 February 1949, 22 February, 8 September 1950, 30 January, 23 September 1952, 6 Mar 1953, 27 July 1954.

²⁸ Al Fenn interview; Arizona Republic, 20 July, 5, 6 August 1958, 16 June 2004.

athletic life. Chicago Tribune sports editor Arch Ward started the program in 1923 and it eventually spread around the country with regional and national championship tournaments. The Phoenix Optimists and the Phoenix Gazette sponsored the Arizona Golden Gloves organization and the championship tournaments were held at Phoenix Madison Square Garden over several months each winter. For those local boxers who were good enough and willing to work hard, there were trainers, managers and promoters - people with connections to the larger professional circuit - that could keep them fighting. Paavo Ketonen, who had wrestled in Phoenix in the 1940s, returned and opened the Top Level Gym on 16th Street where he trained boxers. There was also Mack's Gymnasium at 2929 North 28th Street and Mitchell's Gymnasium at 4014 South Central Avenue. Al Fenn explained how a manager would "build" a fighter, "The way you build them is give them fights, and if [a fighter] is good enough to win, and wins, he gets 10-0 or 20-0, he becomes a star and he can make good money." A fighter with a good record was then ready to go on the circuit, which was primarily Las Vegas and Los Angeles. The proximity to Las Vegas created many opportunities because the casinos supported boxing every week. Bill Miller and Bill Graham, the leading boxing promoters in Las Vegas, often needed fighters on short notice to fill in for an injured boxer, or one who didn't make his weight or pass his physical. Some of the promising local boxers who started careers at Phoenix Madison Square Garden in the 1950s included Tony Montano, Jimmy Martinez, and Charlie Austin.²⁹

When the Phoenix Gazette stopped sponsoring the Golden Gloves tournaments around 1970, promoter Al Fenn picked up the sponsorship. At one time he had six gyms in South Phoenix, and, to date, still supports a gym and boys' center on Buckeye Road. Fenn was a long-time referee for the Golden Gloves matches at Phoenix Madison Square Garden. He recalls one incident where the State Boxing Commission suspended him because he let a woman fight against a man. Marion Bermudez, a 23-year-old Arizona State University student, had fought in the women's competition. She wanted to fight in the men's 125-pound division and insisted that keeping her out would

²⁹ "Golden Gloves Championships History," HickokSports.com.

<<http://www.hickoksports.com/history/boxgoldg.shtml>> (30 June 2005); Al Fenn interview; Arizona Republic, 15 October 1954, 10 February, 24 March 1959, 24 May, 23 August 1960, 5 December 1962, 17 December 1963, 28 January 1964; "Paavo Ketonen," Arizona Wrestling Legends. <<http://azwrestlinglegends.com/paavoketonen.html>> (29 June 2005); Arizona Directory Company, Phoenix City Directory, 1950; Mullin-Kille, Phoenix City Directory, 1958.

amount to illegal discrimination. Fenn allowed the fight. On March 28, 1975, Bermudez beat Eduardo Porras with a technical knockout, and then lost her next fight to Fernando Granillo. She later went on to become a World featherweight champion in women's boxing. Some of the other notable amateur champions that Fenn remembers include Chuck Walker, who made the U.S. Olympic boxing team, and the Rodriguez brothers - Frank, Richard, and Al - who later opened the Madison Square Garden Boxing Gym at 18th Avenue and Van Buren Street.³⁰

According to former wrestlers and promoters, there was no segregation at the arena in the 1950s, when it was still commonly practiced in Phoenix. Bob Yuma noted that the audience at Phoenix Madison Square Garden was more racially and ethnically mixed than in any other venue he had worked. Al Fenn said that there were African Americans among the wrestlers, boxers, and spectators; everyone sat together and no one cared. However, during this same era, when Fenn tried to take his African American fighters to lunch, restaurants would refuse service.³¹

Another aspect of the building's history that is particularly important to the African American and Latino communities of South Phoenix is its use for Golden Gloves tournaments. The Golden Gloves program was very beneficial for youths from poor neighborhoods because it kept them off the streets and promoted the development of skills, discipline, and a sense of accomplishment.³²

Evangelist Revivals - Brother William Marrion Branham

Phoenix in the 1950s had its fair share of evangelistic revivals. Churches, hotel conference rooms, and various halls served as venues for roaming evangelists. Phoenix Madison Square Garden was also used on occasion for this purpose. The most famous person to use the arena was William Marrion Branham. Brother Branham, as he was called, had lived in Phoenix in the late 1920s working first on a ranch and later as a professional boxer. He returned to Phoenix as early as 1947, at the start of his sermonizing career

³⁰ Al Fenn interview; Barry Graham, "Glove Story: In search of rhyme or reason inside Phoenix's boxing subculture," *Phoenix New Times*, 10 July 1997; "Marion Bermudez," Women Boxing Archive Network. <<http://www.wban.net/marion.htm>> (29 June 2005).

³¹ Yuma interview; Fenn interview; Pierce interview; Montez interview.

³² Graham, Barry Graham, "Glove Story: In search of rhyme or reason inside Phoenix's boxing subculture," *Phoenix New Times*, 10 July 1997.

and at the beginning of what American religious historian David Edwin Harrell, Jr. terms the Era of Healing Revival.³³

Considered one of the giants of healing revivalists - the other being Oral Roberts - by 1954, Branham was rotating between the Shriner Temple, the Assembly of God Church, and Phoenix Madison Square Garden. That year, Branham held four revivals at the Garden, one each day from March 3 through March 6, and two on March 7. His preaching, which included the laying on of hands, brought in large audiences, filling the floors and balconies with attendees. In his final sermon at the Garden in 1954 entitled, "Do You Now Believe?" he acknowledged both the hospitality of the citizenry and the multi-ethnic makeup of those in attendance,

Now, next is for this arena here, I believe called Madison Square Garden. I've been in Madison Square Garden in New York, a little larger, but I wouldn't be any more welcome. That's right ... May God bless you. To the whites, to the Spanish, to the colored, to the Indian, to whoever it is, peace be unto you. God bless you is my prayer. Amen.³⁴

Branham returned twice to Madison Square giving thirteen sermons in 1957 and nine in 1960. By that time, the healing revival had given way to the charismatic revival. The Assemblies of God leadership stressed the importance of local churches and pastors and started playing down the miraculous. Whereas Roberts adapted to the changes and maintained his leadership, Branham was not as successful and his popularity declined. He continued to return to Phoenix to preach, but to crowds that numbered in the hundreds, not the thousands.³⁵

Music at the Garden

Starting September 20, 1947, live country music came to Phoenix with Buster Fite and his Western Playboys, a fourteen-piece, "western" orchestra-like band, playing on Saturday nights at the Riverside Ballroom.

³³ C. Douglas Weaver, *The Healer-Prophet, William Marrion Branham: A Study of the Prophetic in American Pentecostalism* (Macon: Mercer University Press), 25; David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Things Are Possible: The Healing & Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 24, 28.

³⁴ Brother William Marrion Branham, "Do You Now Believe?" March 7, 1954, Timothy Ma, trans. <<http://www.Bible-Way.com>> (24 June 2005).

³⁵ Harrell, 7, 41, 108, 135, 159-160; Weaver, ix-x.

Up to this point, the popular music was Big Band and local nightclubs and radio stations catered to this genre. However, whereas Big Band music was renowned internationally, country or western music was considered an American form. Dancing to Big Band music required many technical steps, but the tempo was slower in country music and, hence, the dancing simple and more accessible to the novice. Riverside Ballroom capitalized this noting that its house band played "... music that everybody can dance to." In post-World War II America, country music quickly gained popularity and, as a typical American city, Phoenix followed the national trends.³⁶

Over the next few years, other nightclubs, big and small, slowly moved away from the orchestra format to smaller, country bands, and radio followed suit. Buster Fite and his retinue came into direct competition with Sheldon Gibbs and his Arizona Boys. The Riverside Ballroom, which by 1951 was attracting national acts and referring to itself as the "Home of the Name Brands," came directly against Sciot's Auditorium, "Phoenix's Best Saturday Night Dance Spot." Phoenix radio stations, though still primarily focused on orchestra music, began interjecting country music shows into their Saturday night schedules. The Grand Ole Opry appeared on Phoenix radio and a local show, Hillbilly Hit Parade, became very popular.³⁷

By 1953, Phoenix Madison Square Garden followed the Riverside and Sciot's lead and added live, country music as its Saturday night program. The Garden partnered with local radio station KRUX to broadcast the Arizona Hayride, a Phoenix version of the Louisiana Hayride. The 8:00PM to 10:00PM stage show brought in national acts and its 10:00PM to 1:00AM - later extended to 3:00AM - dancing venue made the Garden an even more popular local attraction.³⁸

In conjunction with the Arizona Hayride Show was an amateur talent contest. Musicians from around Arizona would come and tryout, playing in front of a live audience. Two Coolidge boys, Duane Eddy and Jimmy Delbridge, were enticed by local disk jockey Lee Hazlewood to play at the Garden. As Eddy recalled,

³⁶ Arizona Republic, 20 September 1947, 6 June 1949.

³⁷ Ibid., 6 March 1948, 21 April 1951, and 7 June 1952.

³⁸ Ibid., 7 March 1953, 1 October 1955.

One Saturday afternoon when I was 15 or 16, I cut a tape of a Chet Atkins song, 'Spinning Wheel' or something, at KCKY in Coolidge. They started playing over the air, and a guy named Jimmy Delbridge heard it, and we started performing together.³⁹

Soon after, the duet known as Jimmy and Duane was playing at Phoenix Madison Square Garden and getting airtime on radio and television programs. A couple of local recording studios opening up in Phoenix and Duane Eddy and Jimmy, who by now had shortened his name to Dell, recorded two hit songs, "Soda Fountain Girl" and "I Want Some Lovin'," with backup provided by the Garden house band, the Sunset Riders.⁴⁰

Al Casey and Sanford Clark, two young musicians from Phoenix, also played at Phoenix Madison Square Garden. According to Casey,

Well, we used to do a TV show and then go play at the Madison Square Garden. The show was called the Hillbilly Hit Parade and they would have a list of the top ten songs and we'd play them and then go to the Garden and play there. Ray Odom had a show, the Hayride, and we'd play. The show (Hayride) was televised from Madison Square Garden, but only for a couple of weeks.⁴¹

As both a music and a dancing venue, the Garden was very popular. Casey recalled, "They'd move the ring to the end of the building (to become a stage) back by the concession stand. There'd be chairs on the floor and at the end of the set they'd take away the chairs and it'd become a dance floor."⁴²

Sanford Clark noted, "It was packed every weekend. Everyone ... all the guys loved it. We had girlfriends there. It was great. Carl Smith, and some of the older (country and western) guys played there. It was a fun place."⁴³

³⁹ Arizona Republic, 7 March 1953; Duane Eddy, Twang Thang: The Duane Eddy Anthology (Los Angeles: Rhino Records, 1993), 7.

⁴⁰ Jimmy Dell interview, 5 July 2005.

⁴¹ Al Casey interview, 7 July 2005.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Sanford Clark interview, 7 July 2005.

Competition was tough. The Garden had the Sunset Riders and the Hayriders, but the Riverside Ballroom had the long standing Western Playboys. Smaller venues such as the Seven Seas Club, House of Jazz, and Scioto's Auditorium also offered national acts. However, the biggest competitor could not challenge the prestige of Phoenix Madison Square Garden. In the same year the Riverside Ballroom brought in Tommy Dorsey and his Orchestra, the Garden was the showcase for the Grand Ole Opry.⁴⁴

Though country music was still very popular, a new amalgamation of country and blues arrived on the scene and, which many of the new talent found appealing. According to Duane, "We were doing uptempo country. It was rockabilly before we heard of rockabilly. We'd just rock it up."⁴⁵ Rockabilly would soon be well-known with the arrival of Elvis Presley. Before he became a national icon, Elvis offered to play at the Garden. On his way to California, Presley called Ray Odom, the KRUX disk jockey who booked the acts for the Arizona Hayride. According to Odom, "Elvis said, 'I know you have a Saturday night stage show there. If we could stop by, just for gasoline money, we'd play for \$30.'" Odom already had an act booked and declined the request. When Elvis returned to Phoenix, in 1956, the fee was \$5,000 and he played at the Arizona State Fairgrounds Grandstand because he was too big for the Garden.⁴⁶

Space would continue to be a problem. As early as the late 1940s, before Phoenix Madison Square Garden offered live music and dancing, when acts came to Phoenix that attracted a large audience, the Garden was not the venue of choice. Though wrestling and boxing allowed for seating around the ring on both levels, stage shows required moving the ring to the west end of the building, reducing the viewing area by over 25 percent. If the audience was greater than 1,500, they would have to be set up at the State Fairgrounds or the Phoenix Union High School Auditorium.⁴⁷

By 1955, Phoenix Madison Square Garden was beginning to wane as a premier music house. It was attracting fewer and smaller national acts. Lee Hazlewood had moved from Coolidge and was working as a disk jockey for

⁴⁴ Arizona Republic, 19 June, 8 October 1954.

⁴⁵ "It was the Big Bang of 'Twang,'" Arizona Republic, 1 July 2005.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Packed House to Hear Eddy," Arizona Republic, 6 March 1948.

KRUX. On the side, he also started writing and producing music. Hazlewood recorded Sanford Clark's "The Fool" which rose through the charts to become the first Top 10 song from Arizona. Al Casey, who played guitar on "The Fool" as well as backing up national bands at the Garden, later joined with Duane Eddy who also became famous with songs such as "Rebel Rouser." Jimmy Dell, Jimmy and Duane's other-half, continued to play locally until his own hit, "Teenie Weenie." As these musicians, and others like them, departed from Phoenix to places elsewhere, so did the music from Madison Square Garden. In May of 1957, the Sunset Riders, too, had moved on to the Mirador Ballroom, formerly Sciott's Auditorium.⁴⁸

Requiem for a Boxing and Wrestling Arena

There was a long procession of different promoters that ran shows at the Garden in the 1960s and '70s, including All Fenn, Ernie Mohammed, Buddy Rose, Pat Malone, Paul Harvey, and Tito Montez. In the early 1970s, the Western States Wrestling Alliance (WSWA) was formed to coordinate wrestling for all of the Arizona circuit, with occasional matches in New Mexico or Utah. Wrestlers worked five or six nights a week, with a schedule that included Friday nights at Phoenix Madison Square Garden, Saturday nights in Casa Grande, Sunday nights in Tucson, and matches at small towns and Indian reservations during the week.⁴⁹

However, professional wrestling at the Garden would soon lose much of its audience. By 1970, there were many new sporting events that were taking a large share of the sports entertainment market in the Valley: expanded Major League Baseball Spring Training, Minor League baseball and hockey, and the new local NBA franchise, the Phoenix Suns. A more direct competition came in the form of out-of-state promoters that started bringing big wrestling shows to the 12,500-seat Veterans' Memorial Coliseum. However, the most serious challenge to wrestling at the Garden arrived around 1973. Matches had been televised on KPHO (Channel 5) until an incident where the Comancheros burned an American flag in a promotional stunt. Tex Earnhart, the show sponsor, immediately cancelled his contract and there were no more televised matches. When television coverage ended,

⁴⁸ Arizona Republic, 18 March, 1 October 1955, 4 May 1957 Sanford Clark interview; Casey interview; Dell interview.

⁴⁹ Pierce, "The Garden is Dead;" Sowers, "Memories of Madison Square;" Pierce, Riot at the Garden, 6; Bob Yuma interview, 30 June 2005; Dale Pierce interview, 4 July 2005; "Pro-Wrestling Title Histories: Arizona," Pro-Wrestling Title Histories. <<http://www.wrestling-titles.com/us/az>> (24 June 2005).

attendance quickly declined. When people no longer saw matches on TV, many started forgetting about the shows that were still being run at Phoenix Madison Square Garden.⁵⁰

Tito Montez became a promoter during this time of declining attendance. He paid owner Herman Ray \$600 a month to lease the arena, but there was not enough income to keep the shows going. In 1979, Herman Ray told him he was selling the property and it would soon become an auto parts store. Bob Yuma wrestled John Macho Man Ringer in the last match in 1979. After Phoenix Madison Square Garden closed, matches were held at St. Mary's Gym, Phoenix Municipal Stadium, and at a private rodeo arena at 35th Avenue and Baseline Road.⁵¹

Once closed, the "Madison Square Garden" moniker lived on. The Rodriguez brothers, all former boxers, started a boxing gym at 18th Avenue and Van Buren Street with the name Madison Square Garden Boxing Gym. In the opposite direction, another facility named alternately Madison Square Garden and Madison Square Gardens had a short run in the 1980s. Both places would leave their own marks on Phoenix's history while adding confusion as to where exactly boxer Mike Tyson trained and the punk rock band the Meat Puppets performed.⁵²

Architectural and Land Use History

The Lot

The property where Phoenix Madison Square Garden resides remained an empty lot until around 1901, when a blacksmith opened shop in a small single story building with a shingle roof and small corral in the back. Within a decade, the lot was subdivided, the blacksmith shop was gone, and an even smaller horse carriage painter resided in its stead. On the new adjacent lot to the north, a bicycle shop opened and to the west, a public school was planned. The school, which was named Adams School and later, Grace Court School, was possibly the last such structure built in Phoenix during Arizona's Territorial Period (1863-1912). By 1915, the lot had been subdivided again. An electrical service and supply store shared space with a dwelling on the

⁵⁰ Arizona Republic, 11 September 1965; Bob Yuma interview; Dale Pierce interview; Luckingham, Phoenix, 206-207.

⁵¹ Bob Yuma interview; Dale Pierce interview; Tito Montez interview.

⁵² Pierce interview; Meat Puppets Live Repository. <<http://www.wohlers.org/puppets/madgardens>> (24 June 2005).

northwest corner of 7th Avenue and Adams Street. On the same lot was an auto painting shop and on the new lot to the west was a store. The lot where Phoenix Madison Square Garden was defined by this time, 100 feet wide along 7th Avenue and 151 feet long, just to the south of the bicycle shop property.⁵³

The bicycle shop remained until 1959, when it moved to 7th Avenue and Indian School Road. When the arena was built in 1929, it replaced a sheet-metal works and, because the building's dimensions are 100'x127', 6", Phoenix Madison Square Garden filled almost the entire lot. The two properties to the south of the lot, most recently occupied by Arizona Jobbers Supply, were owned by a series of businesses, primarily automobile related, until purchased by Garden owner Herman Ray in the 1960s and joined to the Garden property. When National Government Properties purchased the Garden in 2004, they also acquired the two lots to the south of the arena as part of the deal.⁵⁴

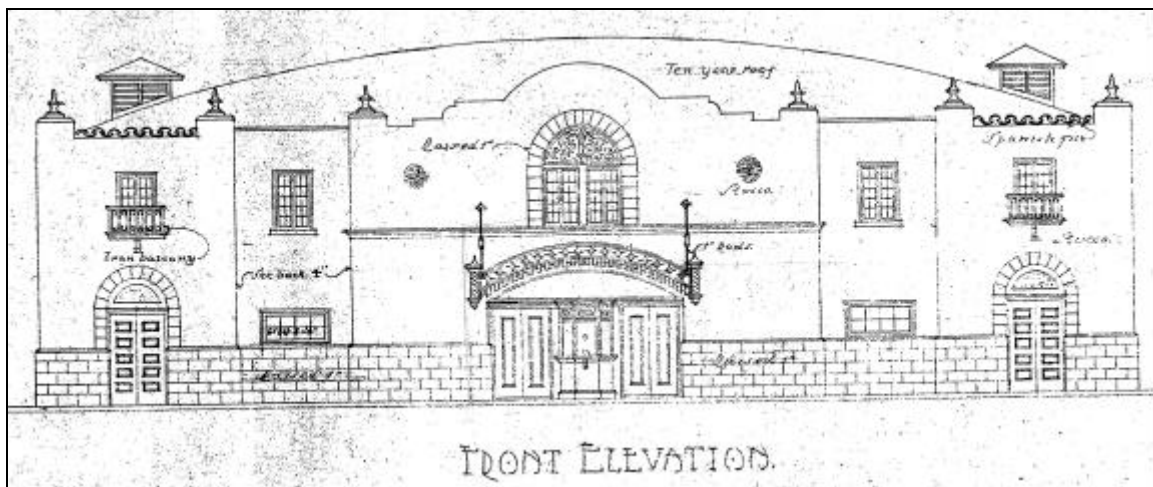


Figure 5 Front Elevation.

Phoenix Madison Square Garden: 1929-1979

Architect Edward A. Nolan designed Phoenix Madison Square Garden in 1929 for the Arizona Athletic Association. It is unknown why Nolan was selected as the architect, or if he lived in the Phoenix area for a prolonged period of time, since he was listed in the Phoenix City Directory only during the year

⁵³ Phoenix, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1893, 1901, 1911, 1915.

⁵⁴ "Survivor: Landis Cyclery is a Phoenix Tradition, Arizona Republic, 10 May 2004; Phoenix, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1915, 1946; City Directory 1929, 1934, 1940, 1950; Deed 04120007, 14 October 2004, Maricopa County Records Office (MCRO), Phoenix.

the arena was built. The following year, in 1930, Nolan was designing buildings in Tyler, Texas where he resided for a few years before moving elsewhere. Other structures that are believed to be associated with Nolan are McKinney House in Tyler, Texas (1931) and the Jewell Apartments in Miami, Florida (1941).⁵⁵

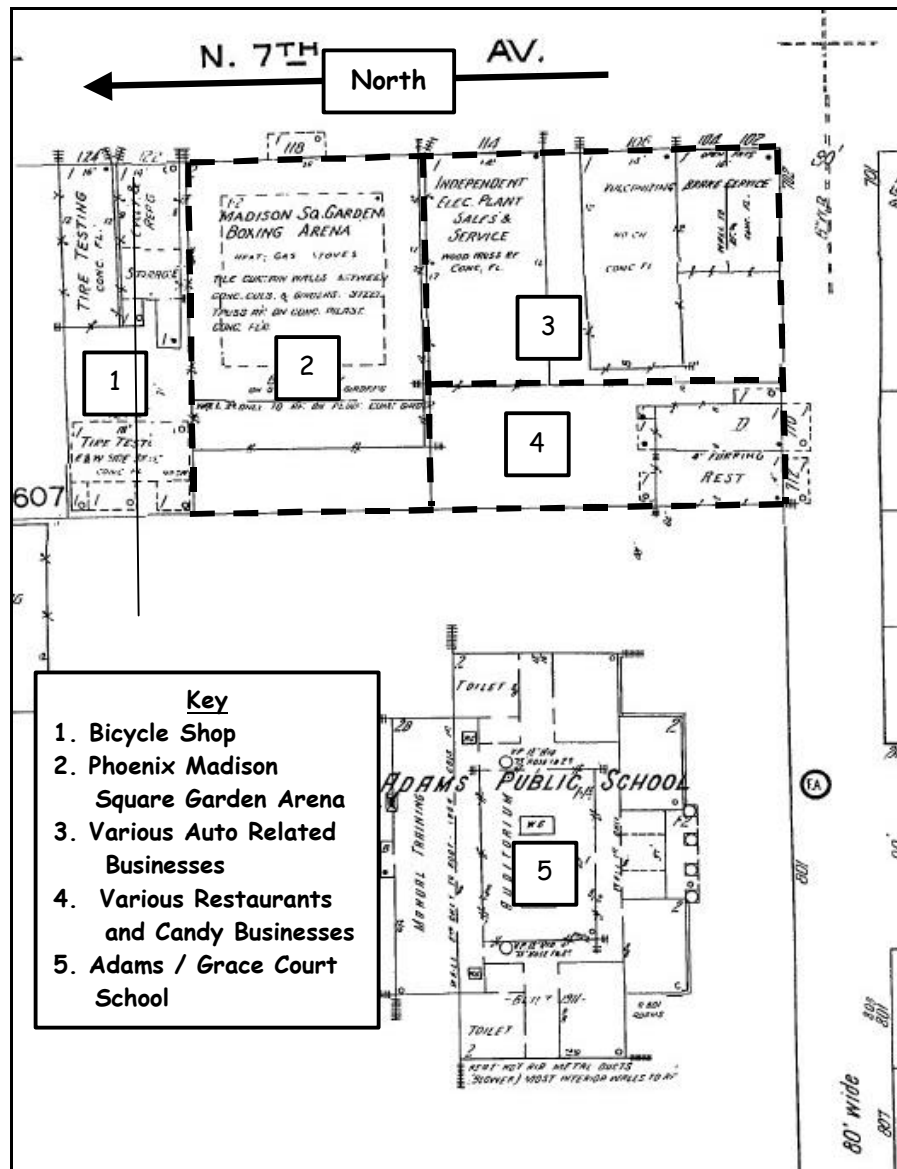


Figure 6. Phoenix Madison Square Garden and Adjacent Lots. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1946.

⁵⁵ Nolan, Sheet 4; Arizona Directory Company, Phoenix City Directory, 1929; "National Register for Historic Places Nomination: Azalea Historic District" from Historic Tyler, Inc.

<http://www.historictyler.org/user_files/pdf/AZALEA_NR.pdf> (13 July 2005), 65, 68, 76; Art on File: Project Detail: Jewell Apartments <<http://artonfile.com/html/projectnotes.lasso?id=398>> (13 July 2005).

Phoenix Madison Square Garden is a Spanish Colonial Revival building with a structure of concrete columns and girders with masonry tile curtain walls. Six rows of steel bowstring trusses mounted to concrete columns support a low-pitched, elliptic barrel roof, which facilitates a large auditorium use with few interior columns. As designed, there was an elongated, central shed-roof dormer in the back, and two protruding structures near the front for ventilation. These structures are approximately 8'x8', with wood louvers on the sides, and extend approximately six feet above the parapet, each topped with a pyramidal hipped roof. The third vent structure is set into the dormer on the rear of the building and has a low-pitched gable roof and wood louvers.⁵⁶

The front of the building has a smooth stuccoed façade with a central Mission shaped parapet. The façade is divided into three separate bays connected by two slightly recessed sections. Cornice molding extends across the middle of the center section. When built, there were four sets of double doors with several multi-light sash and casement windows. Five rows of raised faux brick course along the base of the façade. Decorative arched tympanums are located above the doors and the center window and are surrounded by raised archivolts. The front also contained decorative wrought-iron elements, including the marquee and balcony railings.⁵⁷

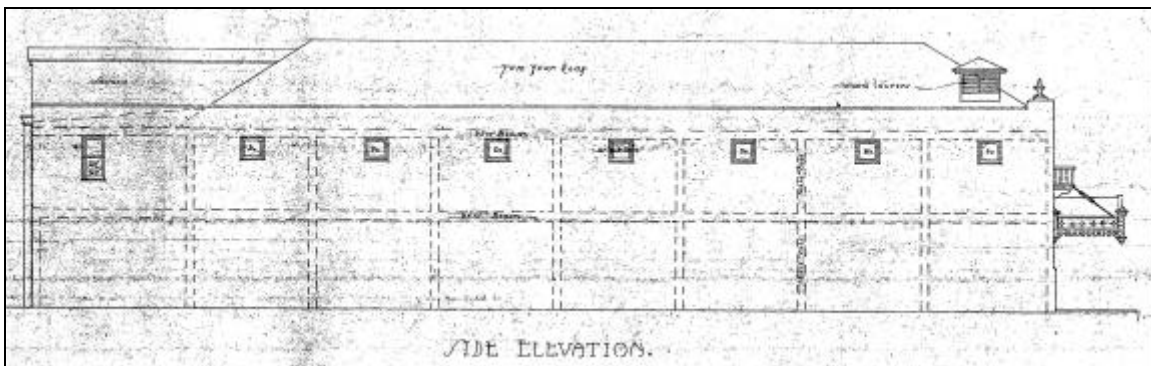


Figure 7. Side Elevation.

Each sidewall contained one double-hung and seven transom windows. The back of the structure contained sixteen double-hung windows, three doors

⁵⁶ Nolan, Sheet 4.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

with transoms, and four downspouts for drainage. The elongated, central shed-roof dormer was flush with the façade and protruded above the parapet.⁵⁸

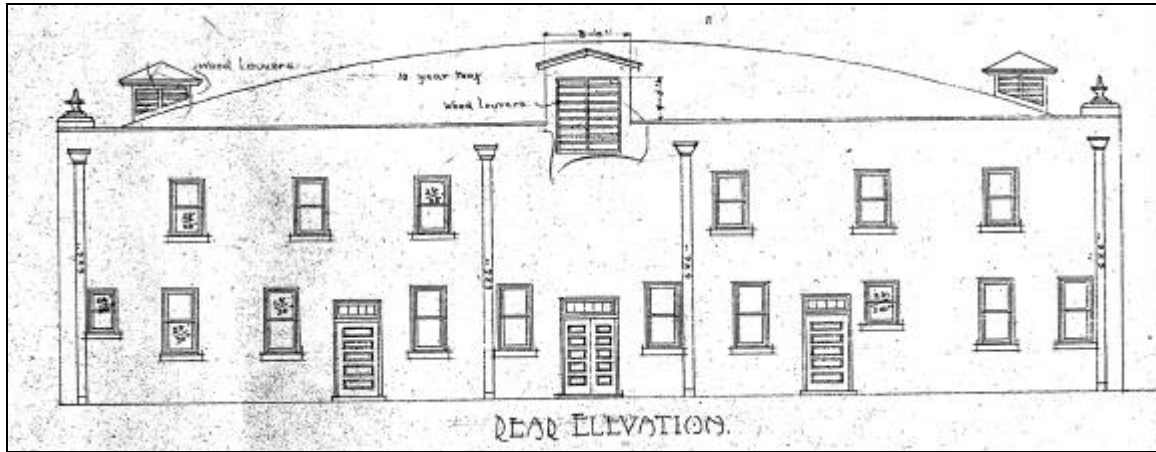


Figure 8. Rear Elevation.

Inside the building, the arena area was approximately 10,000 square feet. A narrow aisle, just a little over five feet wide, encircled the perimeter, running along the interior walls. The foundation was a four-inch thick concrete slab with a one-inch-to-one-foot slope tapering down from the perimeter to the twenty-foot square ring in the center of the arena space. Flanking the front main entrance was a sandwich stand on the north side and a cigar stand on the south. The wall at the back of the building extended from floor to ceiling, delineating the rear rooms from the arena area. To the back of the building, on the lower level, was the gymnasium bordered by dressing rooms and a shower on the north side and restrooms and an office on the south. Upstairs, in the back of the building were the clubrooms for the John C. Greenway Post of the American Legion and the Disabled American Veterans.⁵⁹

Two sets of stairs at the front and back of the buildings lead to the balcony. The balcony extended nineteen feet into the arena space and was supported by twenty-two rolled steel columns, topped by ten-inch steel I-beams and perpendicularly crossed with 2"x8" wood floor joists set twenty-four inches off-center and mounted to the arena wall. Additional support for the balcony was the built-in wood seating constructed on a 2"x10" wood base

⁵⁸ Nolan, Sheet 5.

⁵⁹ Nolan, Sheets 1-3, 6, 8.

which was also mounted to the wall of the arena, resting on the concrete girders and encircling the balcony. Along the back of the seating was an aisle a little over five feet wide and in front of the seating was another aisle three feet wide. The balcony seats were four rows deep and steps dividing the benches into sections also provided access to the upper seats and the raised doorways at the back of the building.⁶⁰

Though early Phoenix Madison Square Garden advertisements initially stated it could hold 3,000 people, with the ring in the middle of the floor, 2,040 would have been a more realistic number. The floor capacity was approximately 1,150 people comfortably seated and the balcony, approximately 890. This does not mean that the arena did not fill beyond its capacity, since "standing room only" would press the space beyond this number.⁶¹

As early as 1931, changes were being made to Phoenix Madison Square Garden. The cooling system was overhauled in May that year and, to compete against a recent remodel of Arcadia Hall in which seats were improved near on ringside seats and a big fan was installed to improve the hall's ventilation, the Garden was advertising that it was "15 Degrees Cooler Than Outside." Though it is not recorded how the cooling system worked, it was claimed at the time to be "ice refrigerated."⁶²

Prior to the 1950s, the dormer and ventilation structures were removed from the roof and the current ventilation ductwork was installed. In the early 1960s, owner Herman Ray made minor electrical, plumbing, and ventilation improvements. Ray also removed the original wrought-iron marquee in 1971 and replaced it with a 12"x25' electrical sign that was more akin to theater marquees of the time. According to a newspaper article from 1979, the slanting floor was removed and replaced with a flat hardwood floor. "Seating for boxing and wrestling was never satisfactory thereafter." Herman Ray also purchased the two adjacent properties to the south of the Garden and demolished them.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid., Sheet 1, 3, 6.

⁶¹ Ibid., Sheet 1-3.

⁶² Arizona Republic, 26 May, 16 June 1931.

⁶³ Phoenix City Directories, 1929-1980; City of Phoenix Building Permits, 118 N. 7th Avenue, 1963-1965, 1974; "Proud lady in pink lousing bout with progress," Arizona Republic 3 February 1979.

The neighborhood changed during this time. The 700 block on Adams Street listed a service station (1934), a restaurant (1945-1950), a tire service associated with 106 N 7th Avenue (1950), real estate and law offices (1964), and an ice cream company (1976). By 1980 all of these businesses had ceased to exist.⁶⁴

Arizona Jobbers Supply: 1979-2005

In 1979, Phoenix Madison Square Garden closed when Roger Conant purchased the arena for use as an automobile parts warehouse. Conant purchased the property, actually three parcels, from the widow of Herman Ray, and expanded the building to suit his needs. Conant cut openings in the west and south walls and bricked in the front entrance. The double exit doors in the front were narrowed to become single-door fire exits and an addition was constructed to provide more storage and office space. The opening in the west wall connects the western and southern expansion to the arena and the southern openings provide access for a loading dock.



Figure 9. (Left) Exterior East Wall and (Right) Exterior South Wall, 27 June 2005. Photograph by Vince Murray.

Inside the building, Conant removed the seating from the balconies, cutting the wood frames from the walls, and created skylights in the ceiling for natural lighting. Conant also removed the 1971 electrical marquee and iron balcony railings and covered the eastern and northern walls with stucco, adding visible cohesion to the exterior while removing almost any vestige of Phoenix Madison Square Garden's former life. The only evidence of the building's original purpose is the sign painted high on the north wall. The

⁶⁴ Phoenix City Directories, 1929-1980.

former arena and adjacent properties was known as Arizona Jobber's Supply until the property was sold and Conant moved to Grand Avenue and Polk Street.⁶⁵



Figure 10. (Left) Interior West Wall and (Right) Exterior North Wall, 27 June 2005. Photograph by Vince Murray.

The Controversy

A few years had passed after the closing of Phoenix Madison Square Garden and its subsequent transformation into an auto parts distribution warehouse when, in 1983, former wrestler, promoter, and writer Dale Pierce contacted the editor of *Preservation Magazine* regarding the historic significance of the arena. Pierce stated there was a group, the Friends of Madison Square Garden, who wanted to restore the structure and create a museum.⁶⁶

There was apparently some confusion about the history of the building; an Arizona State Inventory form placed the date at 1915 and described the building as "a one story stuccoed building with a curved 'arena' roof." A more detailed description, on a newer inventory form completed by Dale Pierce, placed the building on the corner of 7th Avenue and Van Buren Street and its original construction date at circa 1920. It also stated that the building was made of adobe brick, painted pink. The significance cited for the building noted its relationship to wrestling and "... for the fact that there are no other wrestling oriented museums or closed arenas converted to such in the United States, and the Garden could be the first."⁶⁷

⁶⁵ From observations of the structure during a photographic session, 29 June 2005.

⁶⁶ Letter from Dale Pierce to *Preservation Magazine* Editor, ca 1983, in SHPO Phoenix Madison Square Garden file SHPO/PMSG).

⁶⁷ Arizona State Inventory forms no. 317, July 10, 1983, SHPO/PMSG.

Though meaning well, the paperwork was incomplete, with no geographical data, legal description, or verbal boundary description and sources of information being limited to Pierce's booklet, *Riot at the Garden*, his article in *Wrestling Review*, "The Garden is Dead," and his "research, personal experience as writer, wrestler, promoter." His motivation for filling out the form was contained in the General Comments/Future Plans for Property section of the form, "Rumors were that the Garden would be condemned, but it still evidently is in use as a factory warehouse."⁶⁸

No additional action was taken to determine the historic significance of the building until January 2002, when Lead Historic Preservation Planner for the Phoenix Historic Preservation Office (CHPO) Kevin Weight left a message for State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) Jim Garrison inquiring about the building. Christine Wahlstrom returned Weight's call leaving a message, "Madison Square Garden - not eligible due to integrity according to Jim Garrison."⁶⁹

Almost three years later, in October 2004, National Government Properties (NGP) purchased the Arizona Jobber Supply property as part of a development plan which would encompass all of the properties between Van Buren Street on the north and Adams Street on the south, 7th Avenue on the east and 9th Avenue on the west. Central to this redevelopment project was the Grace Court School, located to the west of Arizona Jobbers Supply.⁷⁰

Years before, David Russell, then owner of the Grace Court School, had a city permit to demolish the school and was in negotiations with Phoenix sports mogul Jerry Colangelo to build what eventually became the Dodge Theater at 4th Avenue and Adams Street. Before Russell could strike up a new bargain, he passed away and the Grace Court School and other adjacent properties eventually became the possession of NGP.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Kevin Weight, *While You Were Out*, phone memo, 1 February 2002, in Phoenix Madison Square Garden file (CHPO).

⁷⁰ Deed 04120007, 14 October 2004, MCRO.

⁷¹ "Grace Court School may be renovated," *Business Journal* (Phoenix), 28 April 2000; Deed 031394988, 3 October 2003; 31534190, 4 November 2003; 031546938, 7 November 2003; 031670849, 9 December 2003; 040795472, 12 July 2004; 041200071, 14 October 2004 (MCRO).

As NGP put together the necessary permits to develop the Arizona Jobbers Supply property, their plans came to the attention of a group of local residents, specifically the Downtown Voices Coalition (DVC). In March 2005, Jim McPherson, Arizona Preservation Foundation (APF) President and Chairman of the DVC Planning Committee, sent a message to the CHPO, asking about the "Madison Square Boxing Gym" and a rumor that it was to be demolished. Weight from the CHPO confirmed the rumor, noting,

The building has never been recommended eligible for historic designation, primarily because of integrity issues. We confirmed again recently with the SHPO, who stated that it was still their opinion that it was not eligible.⁷²

Two months later, on May 5, 2005, DVC member Beatrice Moore issued a message to other members of the coalition with the subject line "Madison Boxing Gym" and providing a schedule for local hearings with the Central Village Planning Committee, Planning Commission, and City Council. She stated in her message, "It looks like an amazing space from the outside and is one of those buildings we should all be working to ensure it becomes some kind of interesting adaptive re-use for commercial activity."⁷³

The subject of the meetings was the developer's desire to change the zoning from C-3 to C-2 with a height waiver to build a four-story building. Though the Central Village Planning Committee made no recommendation, the Planning Commission approved the request. All that was left for the changes to pass was the final approval of the city council.⁷⁴

At the Phoenix City Council meeting on June 15, the DVC and others confronted the council regarding the preservation of Phoenix Madison Square Garden. To the sound of mariachi music playing outside the chambers, various interested individuals made a plea to the Council to preserve the building. Former wrestler Tito Montez traveled from his home in Oregon to plead with the council, as did former promoter Al Fenn and former boxer and State Boxing Commission assistance director Tony

⁷² Kevin Weight to Jim McPherson, 10 March 2005, in the possession of Vince Murray (VM).

⁷³ Beatrice Moore to Susan Copeland, Donovan Walker, et.al, 5 May 2005, VM.

⁷⁴ Action Alert1 (Madison Square Garden), Arizona Preservation Foundation, 25 May 2005.

Montano. The council decided to continue the discussion the following week.⁷⁵

On June 22, 2005, the City Council met again to discuss the zoning changes. Following presentations both for and against the changes, the council approved the zoning change, 4 to 3. However, Vice Mayor Michael Johnson amended stipulations to the motion requiring the NGP to create a museum of at least 100 linear feet of dedicated exhibit space within the new building, cultural and historical interpretation outside of the new building, and to complete historical documentation of the Phoenix Madison Square Garden prior to its demolition. The latter stipulation is the purpose of this document.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Phoenix Madison Square Garden provided a variety of programs to the citizens of Arizona for fifty years until 1979, when the building ceased to be an arena and was converted into a warehouse. For the past twenty-six years, the building, additions, and adjacent property have served as an auto parts distribution center and as the Arizona Jobbers Supply warehouse.

Phoenix Madison Square Garden may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A of the National Register for Historic Places Bulletin #15, How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation for "... its association with a pattern of events that made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history."⁷⁷ The Garden symbolizes the history of boxing and wrestling in Phoenix up to 1980, which parallels the national development of the two sports. The Garden provides a social history of "working class" Phoenix by having offered affordable family entertainment and a large gathering place for people with a common interest. During its brief period as a popular music venue, Phoenix Madison Square Garden presented opportunities for young amateur musicians to play with professionals and develop their careers. The Garden was integrated during a time when segregation was customary in Phoenix and, for decades, its Golden

⁷⁵ "Vote delayed for razing Madison Square Garden," Arizona Republic, 16 June 2005.

⁷⁶ "Council OKs demolition of Madison Square Garden," Arizona Republic, 23 June 2005.

⁷⁷ How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, National Register of Historic Places Bulletin #15 (Washington: U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, 1997), 2.

Gloves program provided an alternative social activity to keep underprivileged -- and mostly minority -- adolescents from wayward behavior.

Phoenix Madison Square Garden is not historically significant under the National Register's Criteria C because the building has been substantially altered and no longer embodies, "the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction" as outlined in the National Register for Historic Places Bulletin #15. Both the exterior and the interior bear little semblance to the original structure.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Ibid.

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