

When you pass the Belasco and its USO sign, wish it a merry Christmas, not just for its past but a future. Some folks are pulling hard that the new administration will reverse the decision to tear it down for a Federal court building. Tireless George Frain, of Capitol Hill, is working on this and so is William A. Grant, of the Young Democratic Club. They point out that early in 1960 Senator Kennedy was among those trying to save Lafayette Square's historic buildings and that, as President a year later, he might accomplish this.

It would be an expense to restore and the seating capacity might prove too small for some attractions. But a score of other events could here find a sorely needed home. So a toast in eggnog to this hopeful urge.

There's Loew's Palace, oldest of our film houses and still F Street's flagship. It's big, it's friendly, and for some 47 years it's been the town's favorite location-wise and productwise, even in this day of unpredictable bookings. So, a proud Christmas to the Palace and all its people.

You can't help mentioning the Capitol in the same breath since it is the Capital City's headquarters of Loew's lasting empire. Originally the Fox, it was built by Roxy and has outlasted his mightier Gotham cathedral. It's always a luxurious feeling to wonder into its spacious lobbies and though it's an admitted makeshift for such visitors as international ballets and opera, it never fails to put out the red carpet for our classiest visitors who wouldn't be in town without its big auditorium, compromisable stage. If you're an old Washington hand you've seen a lot of names on its big, yet intimate, stage.

The Capitol's nearly 35-year history now faces an iffy period. With the lease due to expire in 1962 both Loew's, Inc., and the National Press Club which owns the building, are jockeying over new terms inevitable in our economy. But with the National Cultural Center no more than the shadow of a mirage on a distant horizon, it's inconceivable to think that the global-minded press boys would turn this space—the theater has as much cubic footage as the Ring Building—into a parking garage, a bowling alley, or office space. That would leave us with no stage, even a limited one, to be commandeered by a state visitor for a performance honoring the Nation's first family. This will be a worrisome question until it is settled.

There's Keith's the face-lifted dowager of 15th Street. Its past is nothing short of fabulous. Here Mrs. Woodrow Wilson used to lure her harried wartime President-husband for vaudeville, "to give him an atmosphere in which he could laugh." The boxes where the Wilsons used to sit are gone now and the still beautiful Edith Bolling Wilson has no regrets over that disappearance. "The worst seats in the house in any house," she'll recall to you, "but that is where the Secret Service had to put us. Still those performances were wonderful escape valves for him." Now Morris Cafritz owns the building and what his plans are for the theater when the present RKO lease expires next year he is keeping to himself.

There's the Warner, once the Earle, named for a Governor of Pennsylvania, who once was a theater man. (Interesting how theater moguls drift into political life.) There's the Metropolitan, narrow because that's how they made the early ones, specially built for film theaters. Oldtimers still miss the newsreels at the Trans-Lux, named because its projection scheme was from behind the screen. They changed all that a decade ago, but the house still goes by the Latin term for "through the light," though the light's now reversed.

Greetings, too, to that adaptable little building in the heart of our financial 15th Street. Or did you realize that the Playhouse once was a bank, then a restaurant till that gallant pioneer of the art houses, Louise Noonan Miller, shot a wad on yet another conversion?

Spray some holly, please, around the MacArthur. It occupies a rare position in local movie history. Until the K-B chain took it over for first runs, downtown ruled the film roost. It had been allowed to sink into thrice-weekly showings with lazy minded traditional bookings, until Marvin Goldman and Fred Burka decided a lot of potential moviegoers lived out that way and were entitled to something other than stale second runs. Its success revolutionized Washington movie habits and its cannily chosen films gather the faithful even on blizzard nights.

Some red ribbon, too, for the Dupont, which set a pace with the best imports it could find, coffee in the lounge, display space for local painters, and a policy of "no popcorn, please," making it the shiniest theater in town under the guidance of our only female manager, genial Jean Imhoff.