For Release to Newspapers
Sunday, November 21, 1937.

Hopkins To Dedicate Historic Theater Restored by WPA Workers.

Harry L. Hopkins, Works Progress Administrator, will dedicate the historic Dock Street Theater in Charleston, South Carolina, Friday night, November 26, opening a six-day celebration of the restoration of this early American playhouse. Mr. Hopkins, Aubrey Williams, Deputy Administrator, and Mrs. Ellen S. Woodward, Assistant Administrator in charge of women's and professional projects, will be presented by Mayor Barnet R. Maybank of Charleston, who will receive the theater on behalf of the city.

The theater restoration project, carried out over a period of about three years, has provided jobs and utilized skills not only of manual laborers but also of workers on art, theater, research and other professional projects.

Presenting the same play which opened the Dock Street Theater some 200 years ago, the Footlight Players of Charleston will play "The Recruiting Officer" on Friday night and repeat the performance Saturday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

The theater will serve as a civic center for the city of Charleston.

The theater and the Planters' Hotel, which shared space in the same building during pioneer days, were selected as a restoration project in the program of
work relief under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in February, 1935. This project was completed by the Works Progress Administration and, today, the early eighteenth century landmark is restored to usefulness with all the authentic beauty and charm of the original buildings retained as faithfully as architectural research and attention to minute detail can preserve or reproduce them.

The original Dock Street Theater burned in 1740 and at least two other theaters were constructed on the site. The first opened in December, 1763, the second in 1773. Fire destroyed this theater in 1782.

As early as January 23, 1735, the following announcement appeared in the South Carolina Gazette: "On Thursday, February 12, will be opened the new Theater in Dock Street, in which will be performed 'The Recruiting Officer.' Tickets for the Pitt and Boxes will be delivered at Mr. Charles Shepheard's on Thursday, the 5th of February. Boxes 30s, Pitt 20s and tickets for Gallery 15s, which will be delivered at the theater the day of playing." A map of the city of Charleston dated 1739 has been found to indicate the location and size of the then new Dock Street Theater.

The Footlight Players of Charleston, next Saturday, will present "The Recruiting Officer" as nearly as possible like the original performance, given some 200 years ago. This will conclude the dedicatory services of the restored buildings. The invitations, tickets and bills all duplicate those of the eighteenth century.

The bygone splendor of the ballroom, with its delicate "iron-lace" balcony, has been replaced by a foyer a few steps above the level of the loges of the theater. The auditorium opens on a paved courtyard similar to the eighteenth century courtyard.

For the style of the interiors the architect has drawn on London and Dublin theaters. The reconstruction of the theater has recaptured the original
atmosphere by all the methods which architectural research can suggest. There is a pit, a gallery, thirteen boxes and benches built like pews, seating some five hundred persons. The walls are cypress, rubbed soft and mellow without artificial color; the lighting also follows English tradition, consisting of rings of electric candles and similar sconces beneath the loges. The stage lights are modern, however, concealed footlights being placed where, in former years, were rows of candles. A modern revolving stage has been constructed. The entire stage is approximately 56 by 36 feet. There is a three-story fly-loft equipped with necessary rigging.

Stage sets and curtains have been built and painted by members of the Charleston WPA Federal Art project, the main drops made to represent Charles street in the eighteenth century. Stage sets for "The Recruiting Officer" were studied from the formal sets of Convent Garden, Drury Lane, and from Hogarth's engravings. The Planters' Hotel building has been converted into small auditoriums, studios, and a restaurant on the ground floor. The same courtyard entrance serves both buildings.

When the rebuilding began, it was necessary to develop a special technique for reinforcing the buildings without removing existing walls. By digging to a depth of six to eight feet beside these walls, which were solid beneath the ground, excavations were made under the walls in the form of a pocket. Into these pockets steel was locked into a reinforcing system over which concrete was poured, forming a firm support for the buildings without tearing down the existing outer walls.

In the front elevation of the Planters' Hotel, much of the original has been preserved, including the handsome iron balcony, the sandstone columns, the carved mahogany cornices from the Barbadoes, the glass panelled doubled door. When it was impractical to use old materials, exact copies were made. This was done with the stairs in flights on the right and left of the lobby where they unite to form a single flight to the foyer.
In addition to the use of the theater by local dramatic organizations, other Charleston societies will make headquarters in the building and sponsor cultural meetings.

Douglas D. Ellington, Architectural Research Consultant of the Works Progress Administration, supervised the project.