

A HISTORY OF THE CHEBOYGAN OPERA HOUSE
CHEBOYGAN, MICHIGAN FROM 1891 TO 1920

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
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ABSTRACT

HISTORY OF THE CHEBOYGAN OPERA HOUSE CHEBOYGAN, MICHIGAN FROM 1891 TO 1920

by Patricia Lin Ridge

During the latter part of the nineteenth century a small city in Northern Michigan became engaged in a most unusual enterprise. The City of Cheboygan built Michigan's first municipal-owned theatre, The Cheboygan Opera House.

Cheboygan's first theatre, built in 1877, was located in the Town Hall but in 1886 a fire destroyed the entire building.

The citizens of Cheboygan felt that a new building should be constructed to serve the entertainment needs of the community. Since a City Hall and fire station for Ward Four were also needed the plans were drawn up to incorporate all three needs into one multipurpose building.

The new brick building was begun in 1887 and finished in 1888.

The people of Cheboygan were always extremely proud of their Opera House and attempted to induce the most popular theatrical productions of the day to provide constant entertainment for the city.

Patricia Lin Ridge

This study concerns itself with the theatrical activity found in Cheboygan from 1891 to 1920.

To present this history factually it was necessary to turn to several sources and collect data that pertained to the theatrical activities of The Cheboygan Opera House.

The major source of material was located in two newspaper collections, The Cheboygan Democrat and The Cheboygan News. These publications aided considerably in helping to reconstruct the theatrical atmosphere in Cheboygan during the latter decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. Both publications are now non-existent.

Additional materials which provided insight into the history of the Cheboygan Opera House were located in "The Golden Jubilee Edition" of The Cheboygan Daily Tribune, pamphlets concerning the past history of Cheboygan from The Chamber of Commerce, and several interviews with citizens still residing in Cheboygan who worked for and loved The Opera House.

This study will terminate with the definite recession of interest in legitimate theatrical activity in Cheboygan due to the decline of the lumbering industry and the advent and popularity of the motion pictures.

Patricia Lin Ridge

Although the Opera House has not been actively used for many years it is still regarded with pride by the citizens of Cheboygan.

Today the Cheboygan Chamber of Commerce is enlisting the aid of the community to re-establish legitimate theatrical activity at the City Opera House.

It is because of this pride and concern that a history of The Cheboygan Opera House during the years it was most active theatrically is necessary.

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By

Patricia Lin Ridge

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The immeasurable assistance these people gave me has made it possible for the history of The Cheboygan Opera House to be presented.

For my family who became research assistants and sat on upturned coke cases for hours, reading dusty copies of The Cheboygan Democrat to help me provide the necessary data pertaining to the Opera House.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study concerns itself with the history of The Cheboygan Opera House, in Cheboygan, Michigan from the years 1891 to 1920.

In the 1890's the lumbering boom in Cheboygan was in full swing, the economy of the city was substantially sound and the Opera House flourished. By 1920 both the lumbering industry and the Opera House were in a period of decline.

This thesis will trace the history of the Cheboygan Opera House from its relatively active years in the 1890's to its gradual decline a few years after the turn of the century when the lumbering industry was in a period of economic recession and the motion pictures began to interest the community of Cheboygan.

Through newspaper articles, reviews, and advertisements from The Cheboygan Democrat and The Cheboygan News, it is hoped that the theatrical tastes of the time will be shown, as well as the changing mood of the people who once preferred the legitimate theatre but were now seeking entertainment of a different kind.

It is impossible to include every important item pertaining to the Opera House due to a lack of information concerning eight different years in the period of time between 1891 to 1920.

My chief source of information, The Cheboygan Democrat, proved to be an invaluable aid in obtaining data applicable to the Opera House and, with the exception of the eight missing years, issues of The Cheboygan Democrat were found to be intact and in good condition.

In order to obtain additional information about the City of Cheboygan, its people, and Opera House I turned to Mrs. John Minsky, Executive Secretary of the Cheboygan Chamber of Commerce. With her aid I was able to contact residents of the community who had at one time been intimate with the Opera House.

Mrs. Minsky also put at my disposal articles from The Northern Light and Historic Cheboygan to add to my research of The Cheboygan Opera House.

After completing my research for this study several aspects concerning the Opera House emerged: (1) the background and atmosphere of the lumbering community of Cheboygan; (2) theatrical activity at the Opera House from 1891

to 1905; (3) theatrical activity at the Opera House from 1906 to 1920; (4) a summary and conclusion of the entire study.

This history has been so arranged as to provide a separate chapter for each of the four major divisions in order to explore the history of The Cheboygan Opera House in depth.

CHAPTER II

CHEBOYGAN, MICHIGAN

Community Background

During the 1890's America found herself in a period of rapid growth and transition. Throughout its early history the wide expanse of land on the American continent had stood as a symbol for the rugged independence of her people. Now, in the 1890's civilization began to close the moving frontier and an epoch in American life was gradually ending. Americans were establishing permanent communities and working hard to maintain them.

In the Midwest the lumbering industry was in full swing. People were settling in the wooded areas to establish themselves in businesses supporting this industry.¹

The Great Lakes region in Northern Michigan was no exception in experiencing this lumbering boom. Men and women were looking forward to success and prosperity through lumber and settled in this region to obtain it.²

¹The assumption that men and women were settling in the Great Lakes area to obtain success from the lumbering industry is based on material from "Historic Cheboygan," a brochure printed by the Cheboygan Chamber of Commerce (no date given).

²Ibid.

These people, working as hard as they did, also wanted and needed entertainment for relaxation.

In the 1890's, of course, there was no such thing as mass media to fulfill entertainment needs. However, people could find a satisfactory outlet for these needs through the touring theatrical companies.

The 1890's were considered to be the Golden Age of the road. Theatrical road companies would tour the country from town to town, Opera House to Opera House, to unfold their two hours of magic before an appreciative audience.¹

One of the communities that welcomed the theatrical road companies was Cheboygan, Michigan.

Cheboygan in the 1890's was an expanding lumbering community in Michigan's northern woods. Then a town with a population of 7,000, bordering on Lake Huron, Cheboygan had visions of becoming a very important and vital port on the Great Lakes.²

The lumbering industry had begun in Cheboygan in 1845 when a Mackinaw Island cooper, Jacob Sammons, became

¹Lloyd Morris, Curtain Time: The Story of the American Theatre (New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 239-245.

²Betty Jane Minsky, "Cheboygan at the Turn of the Century," The Northern Light (May, 1963), p. 16.

the first settler in what had been Indian Territory.¹

Mr. Sammons settled down with his family and began to make barrels. In 1846 two other settlers built a sawmill along the Cheboygan River.²

The lumbering industry began to attract more and more people to Cheboygan and the small town began to flourish. "Cheboygan . . . [became] a . . . lumbering mecca with the industry reaching its peak in 1895. Like all lumbering areas, saloons too flourished and lumberjacks kept 42 in operation in Cheboygan during that period."³

Lumbering in fact was the industry in Cheboygan at the turn of the century.

Business . . . was centered around the lumbering activity. People either were in the manufacture of lumber or they provided services for those who were. A glimpse at Cheboygan's lumbering industry shows that during that period [1890 to 1895] there were 9 saw mills plus two shingle mills in operation with the total annual production exceeding 100,000,000 board feet of sawed lumber, in addition to the millions of laths and shingles.⁴

¹"Historic Cheboygan," a brochure printed by The Chamber of Commerce in Cheboygan (no date given), p. 1.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Betty Jane Minsky, "Cheboygan at the Turn of the Century Century," The Northern Light (May, 1963), p. 16.

The Cheboygan River which flows through the heart of the city was extremely important to the city and its industry because it was the port for the many tug boats which pulled the steam ships in and out of the harbor. The tugs also hauled logs to the various sawmills.¹

"White pine lumber had made Cheboygan. Millions of board feet were moved out each year with as many as 20 schooners at one time loading at the mile-long docks. Lumber was piled 25 feet high on both sides of the river and one man described sailing into the harbor 'like travelling through a canyon.'"²

Cheboygan, in the 1890's, became linked with the rest of Michigan by the Michigan Central railroad. "In fact the Michigan Central ran 4 or 5 passenger lines daily through town."³ The community could also boast that, at this time, they had telephone and telegraph lines.⁴

The downtown area of Cheboygan contained ". . . 18 grocery stores, 2 fish dealers, 5 meat markets, 2 general

¹"Historic Cheboygan," a brochure printed by The Chamber of Commerce in Cheboygan (no date given), p. 2.

²Betty Jane Minsky, Cheboygan at the Turn of the Century," The Northern Light (May, 1963), p. 16.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 17.

stores, 13 hotels and 3 restaurants, . . . a dozen lawyers and as many physicians served the community. Two banks handled the financial needs."¹

City officials with an eye to the future had two-thirds of the main street paved with cedar blocks so that citizens could travel through town with greater convenience. The street itself was lighted with carbon arc lamps.²

The city of Cheboygan also had a coal dock, a ticket agency that sold tickets for the eleven steamship lines that stoped at Cheboygan, and a large department store.³

The seat of government in Cheboygan was the City Hall. The unusual thing about this City Hall was that it housed an Opera House on its second floor.

"The first theatre in Cheboygan was the Old Town Hall, built in 1877. It was destroyed by fire on December 22, 1886. A new brick building, costing \$35,000 with a theatre and accommodations for the several municipal departments was begun in 1887 and completed in 1888."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 16.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴The Cheboygan Daily Tribune, March 10, 1939. Progress Section, Part nine, p. 1.

When the Town Hall burned the people of Cheboygan decided to build a City Hall. Since they had enjoyed theatrical activities, plans to rebuild a bigger and better theatre were included.

The new theatre was located on the second floor of the City Hall and has since been referred to as the Cheboygan Opera House.

In the period of the 1890's as the lumbering industry flourished so did theatrical activity at the Opera House. The air Cheboygan breathed was filled with sawdust and excitement.

The lumbering industry provided the people with fairly good incomes which enabled Cheboygan to support a theatre actively. The Opera House now became the center of the people's popular entertainment.

However, Cheboygan's prosperity, dependent upon lumber, could not last for long.

Like most natural resources, the seemingly endless forest finally gave out. For awhile logs were rafted from Canada but shortly Canada put an embargo on logs. There was nothing to do but to go where the lumber was and the lumbermen answered the call by moving West . . . as the lumbermen moved westward, Cheboygan's economy changed as the people looked to resort,

The Original Opera House



Built in 1887-88 and opened to the public July 30, 1888. Building was gutted by fire October 1, 1903.

Fig. 1--The Cheboygan Opera House, 1888 to 1903

agriculture, and commerce, . . . as a means for survival.¹

Gradually the citizens of Cheboygan turned to other enterprises and another form of entertainment.

This study is devoted to that period of time in Cheboygan when the Opera House mirrored the successful economic growth of the city. This study also deals, in part, with the subsequent decline of the Opera House when the lumbering industry became inactive.

¹"Historic Cheboygan," a brochure printed by the Chamber of Commerce of Cheboygan (no date given), p. 3.

CHAPTER III

THEATRICAL ACTIVITIES AT THE CHEBOYGAN OPERA HOUSE FROM 1891 to 1905

The Years from 1891 to 1893

The Cheboygan Opera House in 1891 was unique among the Opera Houses in Michigan in that it was the only municipal-owned and operated theatre in the state.

The Opera House provided an extra source of income for the city. The custom was to rent it for the season to some responsible local person who would take full responsibility in booking shows that would draw large audiences. This local person, called the manager, would make sure that only successful bookings were made in order to assure himself of a profit from his investment.¹

The auditorium of the Opera House contained a level floor with removable seats for dancing and a horseshoe

¹This information was obtained from a scrapbook found by Mr. George Nimmo of Cheboygan. Mr. Nimmo allowed the Chamber of Commerce to thermofax this material for my use. No date of publication appears on the article but it is assumed from data mentioned that it was published sometime in the 1930's.

balcony which ran around three sides of the theatre. There were no side boxes.¹ The prospective customers would read the advance publicity concerning what was playing that particular week and then decide if they would care to spend their time and money for the theatrical offering.

In the years between 1891 to 1893 someone picking up The Cheboygan Democrat might read the following:

The J. H. Brown Theatre Co. is meeting with a success on this tour that completely eclipses any previous season. Nightly the company plays to "standing room only" and it is not too much to say that every atom of their success is deserved . . . People need only be told that J. Knox Gavin, Miss Alice Marble, or Mr. Brown himself are on the bill for the evening, and they will crowd into the theatre night after night. . . . Last Thursday night the engagement was opened with the 5 act comedy drama entitled "The Girl I Love." Last night "That Wonderful Girl" was the attraction. The engagement will terminate tonight with the "Hoop of Gold."²

The admission charged to see this company perform was 25 cents, 35 cents, and 50 cents.³

¹This information was also obtained through the courtesy of Mr. George Nimmo and the thermofaxed scrapbook material.

²The Cheboygan Democrat, March 12, 1891. It should be noted here that pages within issues of The Cheboygan Democrat between the years 1891 to 1920 contained no page numbers.

³Ibid.

Another theatrical troupe followed the J. H. Brown Company the next week. This was the Jas. H. Browne Theatre Company which performed the plays Mugg's Landing, and A Brave Woman.¹ These two plays were presented the week of March 19, 1891.

Apparently the Jas. H. Browne Theatre Company was not as popular with the people of Cheboygan as was the J. H. Brown Theatre Company. In the March 26, 1891 issue of The Cheboygan Democrat there was a short article which stated that "Browne's Theatre Company had only a fair audience here last week, but those who attended them were pleased."²

The month of April, 1891, found the Opera House continually busy. An advertisement in The Cheboygan Democrat announced the arrival of "Ida Van Cortland who will play in 'Lucretia Borgia' and 'The Lady of Lyons' the week of April 10th."³

Following Miss Van Cortland into the Opera House came the Crazy Lot Company. The company experienced a rather

¹Cheboygan Democrat, March 19, 1891.

²Cheboygan Democrat, March 26, 1891.

³Cheboygan Democrat, April 9, 1891.

small crowd apparently due to bad weather. "Only a small audience greeted the 'Crazy Lot' Company at the Opera House Monday night owing to nasty weather. Those who ventured out enjoyed a rare treat; every member of the company is an artist, and buttons had to be well sewed on to stand the strain."¹

The citizens in Cheboygan not only enjoyed legitimate drama but turned to other theatrical forms of entertainment as well. "Next Wednesday evening Fisk's Jubilee singers will be at the Opera House. All lovers of Negro melody will have an opportunity to hear something fine, this is the best company of its kind on the road, and they have with them many of the old time favorites and we know that all who go to the concert will not be disappointed."²

The end of April found theatrical companies arriving quite frequently to give Cheboyganites a variety of plays to choose from. Two plays that represent the kinds of plays appearing at the end of April were:

"'The Jones Family' at the Opera House Thursday evening [April 28, 1891] called out a good audience."³

¹Cheboygan Democrat, April 16, 1891.

²Cheboygan Democrat, April 16, 1891.

³Cheboygan Democrat, April 30, 1891.

"The Deshon Opera Company presented 'La Mascot' in a most acceptable manner at the Opera House last evening [April 29, 1891] before a good sized audience."¹

An interesting article appeared the following month concerning attendance at the Opera House.

"The recent large attendance at the burlesque and comic opera entertainments at the Opera House has demonstrated the fact that the number of bald headed bald-heads in Cheboygan is very few, but we have plenty of citizens with lots of hair, but exceedingly bald-headed proclivities."²

Since there is no mention of another Opera Company from the time the Deshon Opera Company appeared in Cheboygan in the latter part of April to when this article appeared in May, it is presumed that this attack was directed at the Deshon Opera Company.

The theatrical season continued in 1891 with the appearance of Ray L. Royace, for one night only in Tom's Vacation.³ The whole company was billed as being: "Pure, Chaste, Artistic, and Refined."

¹Cheboygan Democrat, April 30, 1891.

²Cheboygan Democrat, May 7, 1891.

³Cheboygan Democrat, September 24, 1891.

⁴Cheboygan Democrat, September 24, 1891.

From the November 12, 1891 issue of The Cheboygan Democrat appeared an account of still another company. "Frank Tucker's Metropolitans have been at the Opera House all this week playing to small, but delighted houses."¹

The final article concerning activity at the Opera House during 1891 was found in the December 12, 1891 edition of The Cheboygan Democrat. "Ole Olson at the Opera Thursday evening [December 10, 1891] with his company took the audience amidships and some of them are laughing yet."²

Apparently the "Ole Olson" company closed the 1891 Opera House theatrical season. The remaining December issues of The Cheboygan Democrat carry no other articles pertaining to the Opera House.

The people of Cheboygan, in 1891, had received a season of what was then the popular drama of the time.

The year 1892 found the citizens frequenting the Opera House in fairly large numbers hoping to be royally entertained. In March of 1892 the Crazy Lot company appeared in Cheboygan. The Cheboygan Democrat reported:

¹Cheboygan Democrat, November 12, 1891

²Cheboygan Democrat, December 12, 1891.

"A Crazy Lot" the pantomimical comedy which has met with a great amount of success in this section of the country will be at the Opera House on Thursday next. The company is headed by the well known clown and comedian, James R. Adams. He is this season in conjunction with the wonderful Lenton Bros., Chinese Acrobats who are considered at the head of their profession. Do not fail to take this one in; it is one of the best on the road.¹

Other shows to appear in 1892 were:

April 10, 1892: Uncle Tom's Cabin, Sutton Company

April 19, 1892: Gorton's Minstrels

April 26, 1892: The Confederate Spy

May 12, 1892: The True Irish Girl

May 29, 1892: The Cold Day²

Special mention should be made of an extremely popular show which toured Cheboygan in June, 1892.

Lincoln J. Carter's superb scenic production, "Fast Mail" [presented June 8, 1892] is one of the most successful plays put upon the stage in recent years. The story is thrilling and justice is done in the startling and realistic scenes by a perfection of mechanical effects. Among other reproductions is a representation of an engine room on a Mississippi river steamboat, with the furnace under the boilers fired up; a train of cars shoots across the stage in one

¹Cheboygan Democrat, March 5, 1892.

²Advertisements for these plays were found in issues of The Cheboygan Democrat, April through May, 1892.

scene, and in another there is a vivid, beautiful, and awe inspiring representation of Niagara Falls by moonlight, with the singing waters and graceful mist that rises above and about it. The company is said to be excellent throughout.¹

The Cheboygan audience evidently enjoyed Carter's Fast Mail. The Cheboygan Democrat reported "Carter's 'Fast Mail' . . . drew out a good house. The play was good and the scenery was a great deal better."²

The citizens of Cheboygan must have become rather weary of one particular play which had a habit of returning for repeated engagements throughout the season.

"'A Crazy Lot' at the Opera House . . . did not draw a very large audience. This is the third time in a little over a year that the company has been here and there was not much of a change in the play."³

Cheboygan theatregoers had been "treated" to this play on April 11, 1891, March 10, 1892 and finally again in June of 1892. Therefore the citizens must have welcomed with

¹ Cheboygan Democrat, June 4, 1892.

² Cheboygan Democrat, June 11, 1892.

³ Cheboygan Democrat, June 18, 1892.

open arms the next attraction which appeared Saturday evening September 17, 1892; The Gaiety Girls.¹

The theatrical season for 1893 is in doubt. Only one fragment of The Cheboygan Democrat for 1893 was found. This fragment contained, luckily, a brief paragraph concerning the Opera House.

"'Ole Olson' at the Opera House last night drew but a small audience but the play and the players were most excellent, much better than ever before presented here."²

Whether or not this brief article represents the climate of theatrical acceptance in Cheboygan in 1893 is not known. It is presumed, however, that the Opera House was as active in 1893 as it was in 1891 and 1892.

The Opera House from 1894 to 1897

Cheboygan, in 1894, found itself in some economic difficulties due in part to the silver depression. This recession is mirrored in audience attendance at the Opera House.

The John Dillon Co. had to come from Mackinaw City by special train the night they played here, February 1, 1894 at the expense of \$25.

¹Cheboygan Democrat, September 17, 1892.

²Cheboygan Democrat, December 30, 1893.

They arrived at Mackinaw at 1:10 and there was no train until 9:30. This made their expenses over \$150 for the night and they played to a \$90 audience. Hard times.¹

Another article appeared in the same February issue of The Cheboygan Democrat.

The "Panjandrum Company" has been playing to the biggest business in every city in which the new opera has been presented. Mr. DeWolf Hopper says, however, that his audiences are not exactly to his liking here in Cheboygan. . . . he [said that] the advanced sales were \$870 and the entire nights receipts about \$900. This tells the story. The audience is made up of those who can go to the theatre during the hard times as well as good times. It shows where the money is these days too.²

The final article to appear in this same February issue concerning the Cheboygan audience attendance was apparently written by a devoted person of the theatre.

I miss the patrons who buy cheap tickets and pack the galleries. They are the fellows who do the shouting, and carry the show along making the entertainment a pleasure and a success. I tell you I miss the gallery gods this winter . . . this winter the parquette and dress circles are filled but the galleries are silent. I tell you I miss the gods . . .³

¹ Cheboygan Democrat, February 3, 1894.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Cheboygan did, however, turn out in large numbers to support a local minstrel presentation.

Cheboygan's amusement seekers are accustomed to nine months winter and three months pretty cold weather, and so they were not deterred by the piercing wind and storm from attending the minstrel . . . entertainment given by the City Band at the Opera House Thursday evening. The boys were greeted by a full house . . . Are you ailing because you can't laugh? You ought to have been there. Are you suffering from nervous prostration caused by the silver depression? A ticket would have made you feel better. . . . Are you depressed and tired of life because your wife was in the W.C.T.U. raid? Attendance would have proven the elixir of life to you . . . the City Band deserves a great credit for presenting a performance that was . . . clean and creditable and we congratulate them on their success.¹

In March of 1894 economic conditions apparently had not changed.

"Browne's Theatre Company have been giving good performances to empty seats this week. The little girl vocalist and dancer [Little Mable Huntington] is a dandy and has a future before her."²

The amateur theatricals were actually the biggest audience drawing productions in 1894. Besides the above mentioned minstrel show sponsored by the City Band, the

¹Cheboygan Democrat, February 17, 1894.

²Cheboygan Democrat, March 24, 1894.

"Benefit Concert of Prof. Jas. McKic, at the Opera House last night [April 6, 1894] called out a large audience and was a great success . . . socially. Most of Cheboygan's amateurs took part . . . and were fully appreciated by a large audience, and all did well."¹

In June of 1894 the Cheboygan City Band sponsored another minstrel program, hoping perhaps, to capitalize on the previous minstrel success in February. Unfortunately, however, according to the review in The Cheboygan Democrat, this entertainment was not well received.

"Gaukel's Minstrels, under the auspices of the Cheboygan band, Monday night were not so good as the first entertainment given by the band. There was too much of the sentimental song business and not enough of the nigger minstrels. They did much better in February."²

Professional theatrical shows appearing at the Opera House in the latter half of 1894 were:

June 9, 1894: Our Country Cousin

June 21-26, 1894: Our Strategists, Finnegan's Alley, Uncle Josh Sprusley, A Wreath of Shamrocks,
Kelly & Angell's Comedy Company

¹Cheboygan Democrat, April 7, 1894.

²Cheboygan Democrat, June 2, 1894.

June 27, 1894: The Turkish Bath

October 2, 1894: Uncle Tom's Cabin (this company brought with them a pack of Siberian bloodhounds, twenty ponies, donkeys, and burros, plus fifty plantation singers and wing and buck dancers)

The final play of the season listed in The Cheboygan Democrat was Aunt Sally, starring Mr. Billy Gray as Milwaukee Behr. This play was presented on November 22, 1894. None of these plays, according to reviews in The Cheboygan Democrat, played to very large audiences.¹

From all accounts it appears that in 1894 the Cheboygan Opera House had quite a lean year. This was apparently caused by a lack of paying audiences who could not afford the luxury of the theatre during the period of the silver depression.

The next two years in the history of the Cheboygan Opera House remain a mystery due to the fact that issues of The Cheboygan Democrat were unobtainable from 1895 to 1896. Whether or not activity increased at the Opera House during this period is undeterminable.

In 1897 theatrical activity at the Opera House was still extremely light. A Soldier's Sweetheart appeared

¹The above plays and companies were advertised in issues of The Cheboygan Democrat, from June through November of 1894.

in Cheboygan in March. Following this production by the F. W. Taylor Company came an exhibition of hypnotism, telepathy, mind reading and kindred sciences by Professor Fontana.¹

Cheboygan was quite fortunate to have appear, in the latter days of March, John Griffith in Faust. The following article appeared in The Cheboygan Democrat, March 27, 1897:

"John Griffith one of the most popular young actors of the present day will come to the Opera House on Saturday, March 27th in his elaborate scenic production of 'Faust'. . . . Mr. Griffith will stage the play with a carload of special scenery, and many new electrical and scenic effects are promised."²

The drama critic for The Cheboygan Democrat had this to say about Mr. Griffith's March 27th performance:

Confidence seemed to be restored to the theatre-goers Saturday night. The fairly large audience showed that Messrs. Clune & Cuency, managers of the Opera House at this time, were believed when they announced a great attraction. . . . the

¹Cheboygan Democrat, March 20, 1897.

²Cheboygan Democrat, March 27, 1897.

scenery and electric effects were excellent; the witches carnival on the Brockens was well worked up, . . . the Apotheosis following on the dismal dungeon scene was so pretty that the audience scarcely realized its beauty and wanted the curtain to raise again for another view. Mr. Griffith, however, announced somewhat sarcastically "ladies and gentlemen that is all."¹

When Mr. Griffith and his company departed, Cheboygan turned its interest, for the next few months, to other forms of theatrical entertainments. Legitimate drama apparently did not re-appear until September of 1897.

The next attraction to be presented at the Opera House was: "Wall & Johnson's Stars of Comedy next week at the Opera House. These well known vaudeville artists will feature the latest improved picture projecting machine, producing the wonderful Edison animated pictures."² Since the Edison animated pictures appeared to be extremely popular in Cheboygan it is not surprising then that the citizens would also welcome the latest European marvel the Feriscope. The Feriscope was booked into the Opera House for the evening of July 17, 1897. The Cheboygan

¹Cheboygan Democrat, April 3, 1897.

²Cheboygan Democrat, June 5, 1897.

Democrat reported that "the Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight is reproduced by counterparts in a most realistic way. The Corbett and Courtney fight in six rounds will also be shown."¹

Although there is no mention or review of the Feriscope in the following edition of The Cheboygan Democrat it is assumed that the Opera House had a large turnout for this novel entertainment.

The only other entertainment in July to appear at the Opera House was the great Santanelli. "On Monday afternoon Santanelli . . . will put a young man asleep in the window of F. A. Kramers clothing store, and he will sleep until Tuesday night when he will be taken to the Opera House and wakened before the audience."²

In September, Cheboygan welcomed back legitimate drama with Mr. Willard Newell and The Moore & Living Theatre Company. This repertory company performed the following plays during the first week in September:

Monday: The Master Mind

Tuesday: The Operator

¹Cheboygan Democrat, July 17, 1897.

²Cheboygan Democrat, July 24, 1897.

Wednesday: The Clemenceau Case

Thursday: The Silver Lining¹

The Cheboygan Democrat announced that this particular company carried its own scenery which was something most repertory companies did not do.²

Presumably the years between 1894 through 1897 were meager ones for the Opera House. However, in 1898 and 1899 the Opera House experienced a gradual upswing in theatrical bookings and attendance. This renewed activity continued, for the most part, until 1906.

The Opera House from 1898 to 1905

February, 1898, found the city of Cheboygan awaiting the arrival of a Shakespearian company.

We are to have a big attraction at the Opera House Wednesday and Thursday the 9th and 10th. . . . Elihu Spencer and Miss Isabelle Pengra will perform Othello (underlining mine). . . . The Merchant of Venice will be played the second night. These plays of Shakespeare have not been produced here for a long time and will draw well.³

A further note concerning the Shakespearian Company was a brief paragraph in The Cheboygan Democrat two days

¹Cheboygan Democrat, August 28, 1897.

²Cheboygan Democrat, September 12, 1897.

³Cheboygan Democrat, February 5, 1898.

after the performance of The Merchant of Venice. "It is to be regretted that the stage was not high enough to accommodate the scenery [for the Merchant of Venice] and this deprived the audience of additional pleasure."¹ This brief mention was the only reference to the Shakespearian Company's two performances. Whether or not Cheboygan turned out for these plays is questionable. The Shakespearian company was followed by a series of the more popular plays of the period which apparently played to large and receptive audiences.

During the week of March 12, 1898 the Courtney Morgan Company held the boards with the following plays: La Belle Marie, Niobe, Felicia, The Heart of Cuba, Wanted a Wife, and Fun on the Farm.²

An interesting feature about the Courtney Morgan Company is that they advertised the blowing up of the battleship Maine and the bombardment of the Havana Harbor with the United States and Spanish ships taking part on stage right after the performance of Fun on the Farm.³

¹Cheboygan Democrat, February 12, 1898.

²Cheboygan Democrat, March 6, 1898.

³Ibid.

The next week The Cheboygan Democrat ran an article to give the Cheboygan theatregoers insight into what can happen backstage during a performance.

There was a good crowd at the Opera House to see "Fun on the Farm" Saturday night and most of the audience stayed to [sic] the after performance, but no one knew of the accident behind the scenes. . . . A man with his head and right hand bandaged up was pointed out at the depot Monday noon as one who was injured in the Maine explosion. . . . He was a member of the Courtney Morgan Company who were on their way to play in Alpena. Harry Greenway was assisting in the mimic representation of the blowing up of the Maine, . . . he was lying down with a fuse in his hand when it exploded a little too soon, and as a result Mr. Greenway was burned severely on the right cheek, his eyebrows were singed and his right hand so badly burned he will lose one of his nails. Stage Manager Lyle is an amateur surgeon and bound up his wounds. Although suffering very much the man went with the company.¹

A few of the other popular dramas of the day to appear at the Opera House in 1898 were dramas such as Housier [sic] Heiress, Darkest America, H.M.S. Pinafore, A Celebrated Case, and The Lady of Lyons.²

The Cheboygan theatrical season concluded in 1898 with the St. Ignace Tent No. 20 K.O.T.M. presenting the comedy

¹Cheboygan Democrat, March 19, 1898.

²Advertisements for these plays were found in editions of The Cheboygan Democrat, 1898.

drama A Little Heroine at the Opera House.¹

Audiences at the Opera House during 1899 were treated to much the same bill of fare that had played the year before.

Once again the Edison animated pictures were shown at the Opera House.² Also Cheboygan turned out to see the favorite Mastodon Minstrels and the "Extravagant Extravaganza" Darkest America.³ This particular minstrel show appeared in May and Darkest America " . . . filled the Opera House Thursday evening [May 10, 1899] and there were not enough seats in the house. . . ." ⁴

In the middle of June, Cheboygan theatregoers experienced first class theatrical entertainment when the Metropolitan Opera Company appeared at the Opera House. The Cheboygan Democrat was extremely enthusiastic in announcing the company's arrival.

¹Cheboygan Democrat, November 12, 1898. It is uncertain as to what organization the St. Ignace Tent No. 20 K.O.T.M. represented. The Cheboygan Democrat gave no explanation for its existence, nor was I able to find any data to define this organization.

²Cheboygan Democrat, March 25, 1898.

³Cheboygan Democrat, May 6, 1898.

⁴Ibid.

That which promises to be the society and theatrical event of the season is the coming of the superior organization the Metropolitan Opera Company numbering 30 people. This is the first opportunity our amusement loving people have had to witness opera for some years and it will be a welcome event. . . . The engagement will be for 2 nights, commencing Tuesday, June 27. Prices are 25¢, 50¢ and 75¢.¹

The Opera Company performed The Mikado and Bohemian Girl.²

The Cheboygan Democrat's review of the Metropolitan Opera Company appeared a week later.

The Metropolitan Opera Company gave an artistic rendition Tuesday evening of Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Mikado." The costumes were rich and although the chorus seemed a little uncertain about the business, they did very well. . . . Wednesday evening Balfe's always welcome "Bohemian Girl" was given to a smaller audience who thoroughly enjoyed the beautiful music. . . ."²

After the Metropolitan Opera Company departed the Opera House returned to offering the usual popular comedy drama and minstrel shows. The theatrical season in 1898 concluded with plays such as: Uncle Jed Prouty, The Pixies, A Breezy Time, Under the Dome, The Curse of Gold, Finnigan's Ball, On The Swanee, and When His Wife's Away.³

¹Cheboygan Democrat, June 17, 1899.

²Cheboygan Democrat, July 1, 1899.

³This list is a representative sampling of plays to appear at the Opera House in 1899.

Cheboygan in the 1900's

Cheboygan, in the 1900's welcomed a new century and another season of legitimate drama at the Opera House. The 1900's found Cheboygan's main street filled with horses, buggies, and buckboards as citizens came into the city on business. Electricity was not a common household feature, nor was running water. The ice man was still very much in business.

Women, wearing long skirts that brushed along the streets, attended to their shopping while the men, clothed in suits with high neck collars, a vest, and narrow trousers stood on street corners and discussed politics.

The Opera House at this time was offering what the people of Cheboygan enjoyed the most; comedy drama and minstrel shows.

In April of 1900, The Cheboygan Democrat announced the coming arrival of The Gus Sun Minstrel Company. This particular Minstrel Company was tremendously popular with the Cheboygan public. Apparently Gus Sun's Company was a successful one because, "in equipping the company for the road Mr. Sun has gone to an enormous expense, the special Pullman Car 'Nellie' alone cost \$10,000 -- a small fortune."¹

¹Cheboygan Democrat, April 14, 1900.

The review concerning The Gus Sun Minstrels stated that the Opera House was packed for the Saturday night performance and everyone who attended enjoyed themselves.¹

The theatrical season of 1900-1903 was characterized by the type of response which greeted The Gus Sun Minstrels. A representative sampling of plays that were booked into the Opera House between 1900-1903 are listed below:

April 28, 1900: The Devil's Auction

June 2, 1900: The Sewell Stock Company, Bill unannounced

June 16, 1900: A True Kentuckian, The Maxwell Stock Company

June 25, 1900: Git or True as Steel, Bryan's Comedians

July 2-9, 1900: A Soldier's Daughter, Under Two Flags, Signal of Liberty, All a Mistake, Sapho, Quo Vadis, Across the Trail, Don't Be Deceived, The Jossey Stock Company

August 18, 1900: The Woman in the Case

August 20, 1900: Two Merry Tramps

September 5, 1900: Down Mobile

November 16, 1900: Cowslip Farm

December 15, 1900: What Happened to Jones

In 1901 evidence concerning who and what played at the Opera House is practically non-existent. From fragments

¹Cheboygan Democrat, April 21, 1900.

found in a Cheboygan Democrat bound collection of 1902 editions, partial evidence was found for a few of the shows that performed during 1901. These shows were:

February 16, 1901: The Doctors Warm Reception

September 20, 1901: Ole Olson, Ben Hendricks

September 23, 1901: Uncle Tom's Cabin, Al W. Martin

September 26, 1901: The Minister's Son, Wm. P. Patton

It is presumed that theatrical touring companies appeared at the Opera House as frequently in 1901 as they had in 1900.

To continue:

January 4, 1902: Toll Gate Inn, William Beach

February 27, 1902: The Celebrated Rural Comedy -- Alvin: Joslin (180 laughs in 180 minutes)
[parenthesis mine]

April 1, 1902: Gorton's All White Minstrels.

April 12, 1902: The Kaffir Bay Choir

April 19, 1902: Ten Nights in a Bar Room, Little Verna Marie

May 6, 1902: The Star Boarder, Chas. H. Boyle

May 10, 1902: A Thoroughbred Tramp

May 26, 1902: The Mikado, The Cheboygan Elks

May 30, 1902: Si Perkins

June 23, 1902: Uncle Tom's Cabin, Stowe's Company

June 25, 1902: A Breezy Time

June 28, 1902: Romeo and Juliet, Mr. William Owen and
J. M. McConnell

August 5, 1902: A Millionaire Tramp

August 20, 1902: A Deemaster, Chas. W. Chase

August 23, 1902: East Lynne

September 6, 1902: Side Tracked

September 8, 1902: The Tide of Life

September 10, 1902: Thelma, Aiden Benedict Theatrical
Company

September 22, 1902: Valley Forge

September 25, 1902: A Runaway Match

October 7, 1902: Len Gansett, James H. Morrison, Jr.

October 9, 1902: The Eleventh Hour

October 11, 1902: David Caruth, Porter J. White

October 25, 1902: Romeo and Juliet, Simvelle

October 31, 1902: Martha, The Sterling Opera Company

November 3, 1902: A Sister's Love, Pauline Cook and May
Claxton

November 11, 1902: Human Hearts

November 24, 1902: Me and Mother, Tom Marks

December 27, 1902: The Merry Widows

January 10, 1903: A Texas Steer, Jas. R. McCann

January 17, 1903: La Belle Marie, Lillian Lyons Stock Company

January 24, 1903: Macbeth, John Griffith

March 2, 1903: Faust, Lewis Morrison Theatrical Company

April 28, 1903: Two Merry Tramps, Wood and Ward

May 28, 1903: John W. Vogels Big Minstrels

May 30, 1903: The Colonial Motion Picture Company with moving pictures of an Oriental Evening.

June 22, 1903: A Hero in Rags, The American Stock Company

July 6-12, 1903: The Kennedy Players with a complete Vaudeville Company

July 27, 1903: Froman's Comedy Company

September 5, 1903: A Country Kid

September 15, 1903: A Girl from Sweeden [sic]

September 17, 1903: Side Tracked, Joe Walters

September 21, 1903: Man to Man, Whitman and Davis

September 25, 1903: Si Plunkard, J. G. Lewis

September 28, 1903: The Fatal Wedding

September 29, 1903: A Dream of Mars, The Gus Sun American Minstrels

October 5, 1903: Caught In the Webb, Hattie Bernard

October 17, 1903: The Two Sisters¹

¹These particular listings were chosen to represent the bill of fare playing at the Opera House from 1900-1903.

These then, were a few of the plays that were booked into Cheboygan between 1900 to 1903. Most of these plays were one night stands.

The Opera House Fire
October 18, 1903

On the evening of Sunday October 17, 1903 The Two Sisters Theatrical Company finished their performance, packed their equipment and left for another engagement. The theatregoers in Cheboygan had quietly retired to bed after an enjoyable performance. About 2 A.M. [October 18th] the Opera House was found in flames. The hose companies were notified and proceeded to fight the holocaust throughout the early morning hours.¹

Saturday, October 24, 1903 The Cheboygan Democrat carried an account of the fire on its front page. The headlines read as follows:

"OUR CITY HALL IN RUINS THE PRIDE OF CHEBOYGAN BURNED EARLY LAST MONDAY MORNING. CITY IS LEFT WITHOUT OPERA HOUSE."²

¹Cheboygan Democrat, October 24, 1903.

²Ibid.

The Cheboygan Democrat went into a detailed account of the fire.

The worst fire of the year, so far for Cheboygan, was the burning of the City Hall which was discovered a'bout [sic] 2 O'clock Monday morning, . . . the building was gutted from the celing of the first story up and the loss will be heavy. . . . The origin of the fire is suppose to be from the electric wiring in the building and it was also thought that it had been smouldering for sometime before it made a vent for itself and burst out into flames. This supposition [sic] is founded on the fact that the smell of smoke was detected by some of the audience at the show. . . . Besides the offices of the City Clerk and Treasurer and the meeting chamber for the City Council, there was a huge room on the ground floor for the use of the firemen, together with the city lock-up. The upper portion was the City Opera House . . . [which] included all the necessities for theatrical performances, making in all a beautiful ornament as well as an important part of the city. The building was insured for \$20,500. . . .¹

The Cheboygan Democrat continued its coverage of the Opera House fire by discussing the possibilities of rebuilding the destroyed City Hall.

The matter of rebuilding has been quite extensively discussed during the week, but the authorities could do nothing until after the adjustment at the hands of insurance companies. . . . It is the opinion of many that the best plan will be to rebuild only as a place for the transaction of the City's business and not bother with the Opera House, which will leave open the opportunity

¹Cheboygan Democrat, October 24, 1903.

for a scheme that is talked of to build an Opera House by a stock company.¹

The citizens apparently decided, however, to rebuild the Opera House as part of the City Hall. This structure was completed in December of 1904.

The Opera House from 1904 to 1905

The year 1904 found a new Opera House-City Hall combination under construction in Cheboygan. The structure was completed by December of that year and was rebuilt within the same brick walls, but with extensive improvements.

Municipal headquarters on the first floor were completely remodeled. On the second floor the stage and dressing rooms of the Opera House were kept, substantially the same but the horseshoe shaped balcony had been replaced by a smaller balcony located in the rear of the auditorium.² The main floor of the auditorium had also been changed. The flat floor was replaced by a slightly raked auditorium floor with permanent seats. Several side boxes had also been added.³

¹Ibid.

²Information obtained from an interview with Mr. George Nimmo, owner of the Nimmo Realty, Cheboygan, Michigan, June, 1963.

³Ibid.

The Physical Theatre

The new Cheboygan Opera House had a stage that was 21 feet, 11 inches from the proscenium wall to the back wall in depth, and 58 feet wide from the stage left wall to the stage right wall. The proscenium opening had a width of 33 feet, 3 inches and measured 22 feet, 6-1/2 inches from the stage floor to the top of the proscenium arch. Beyond the curtain line a small 3 foot, 10 inch apron extended into the auditorium. This apron was constructed with a tin footlight trough with electrical outlets.

The floor of the stage contained two traps, one on either side of the stage. The stage left trap, located 26 feet from the stage left wall, and 12 feet, 6-1/2 inches from the back wall is 3 feet, 9 inches by 2 feet, 7 inches. Its cover lifts off. The stage right trap is 10 feet, 4 inches by 4 feet with 3 hinged doors. This particular trap was used to haul large pieces of scenery, props, or animals to the stage for the various productions.¹ The stage right trap opens into the room below which [in 1904]

¹Mr. Frank Riggs, Sports columnist and printer for The Cheboygan Daily Tribune, interview, Cheboygan, Michigan, June, 1963.

contained dressing rooms.¹

The second opening is located below and down stage of the stage floor trap. This second opening goes to the ground floor of the fire station. Located above the second opening is a block and tackle system for hauling the necessary items through the trap.

Once scenery was hauled through the stage right trap it could be flown for storage. The scenery was hung from a gridiron that was 7-1/2 inches in depth and was located 32 feet above the stage floor. The effective floor to the underside of the gridiron dimension measured 31 feet and 3-1/2 inches.

To the left of the stage was a double pin rail that was raised 14 feet, 9-1/2 inches from the floor. This pin rail contained belaying pin positions for 70 pins. Stage right also had a pin rail. However this pin rail was unused. A flat rack was attached to the bottom of the pin rail and could accommodate flats to the height of 15 feet. The flat rack was placed between the back wall and the proscenium wall jog.

¹This section of the Opera House is now the firemen's lounge. The partitions between each dressing room has been removed to make one large room.

The seating arrangement was planned to accommodate 722 seats in the auditorium. This included an approximate number of 44 seats for the side boxes. The operational capacity would be around 668 people.

The auditorium ceiling was constructed with 5 large arches which bridged the entire auditorium and supported the ceiling.

Acoustics of the Opera House were excellent.

The new Opera House also had a lobby adjacent to the auditorium with access to the balcony. The lobby and main auditorium could be reached by a wide stairway that opened to the south and descended to the first floor.

Just above the lobby a large room was constructed for storage. It is assumed that this room could have been used for a reception room or a rehearsal space.

This physical layout of the Opera House still stands today.

Opera House Decore

Another change in the Opera House was the decore of the auditorium. The ceiling had been constructed with multiple arches which were painted with garlands of pink and red roses trimmed in gold. Each arch contained a series of

multicolored light bulbs. The side boxes were painted in green with gold trim¹

Any patron who could afford the price of the newly installed side boxes would sit on gold chairs with plush red velvet seats. Another new addition to the Opera House was the huge crystal chandelier which hung in the auditorium, giving an added touch of elegance to the new Opera House.²

Backstage there were also some improvements. The lighting control panel was placed about eight or nine feet off the ground to give more backstage space. A small platform with a ladder was constructed for the electrician who would sit and control the lights during each performance.³

A small prop room was built onto the back of the theatre. It was constructed out of wood and supported on large timbers. Later this structure was removed because it was considered unsafe.⁴

¹Mrs. Yvonne Sullivan, resident of Cheboygan, Michigan, interview, Cheboygan, Michigan, June, 1963.

²Mrs. Yvonne Sullivan, resident of Cheboygan, Michigan, interview, Cheboygan, Michigan, June, 1963.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.



**Fig. 2--The Opera House
built in 1904**



**Fig. 3--The main entrance
to the Opera House**



**Fig. 4--A side view of the
Opera House showing a por-
tion of the multiple-arched
ceiling and side boxes**



**Fig. 5--A close-up view of
the decoration of the side
boxes**



Fig. 6--The stage of the
Opera House

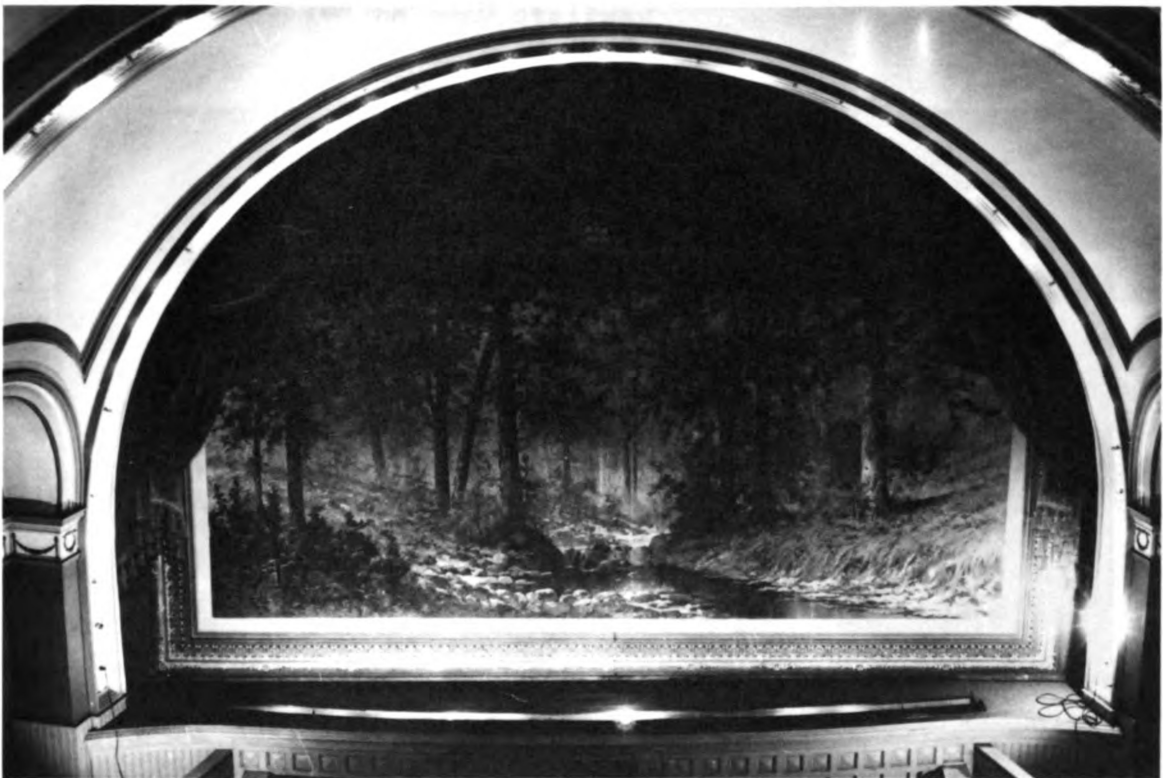


Fig. 7--One of the original drops of the reconstructed Opera House



Fig. 8--A portion of the
woodwork located on the
balcony stairway



Fig. 9--One of the original drops of the reconstructed
Opera House



Fig. 10--The original placement for the lighting control panel

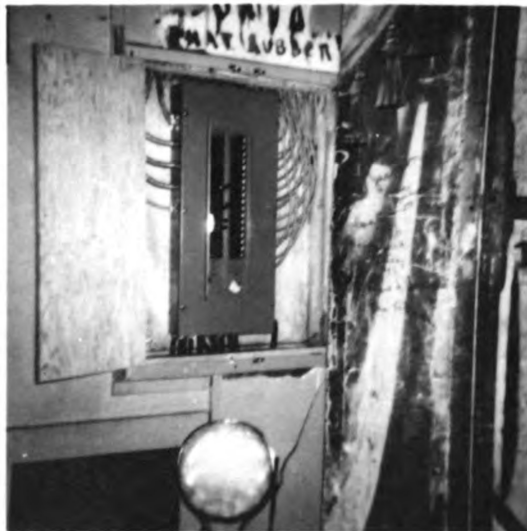


Fig. 11--The new lighting control panel installed in the Opera House in 1961



Fig. 12--The wooden stairway leading to the pin rail



Fig. 13--The pin rail



Fig. 14--One of the traps located on the right side of the stage floor

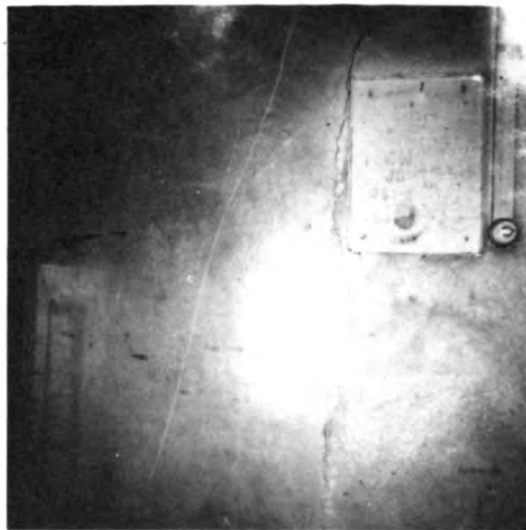


Fig. 15--The crack in the wall indicates the prior location of the original prop room. (The description of this prop room is located on page 44)



Fig. 16--The box office of the Opera House



Fig. 17--A portion of the orchestra pit of the Opera House



Fig. 18--Permanent seats located in the main auditorium. (Prior to the Opera House fire in 1903 the seats were removable for ballroom dancing)



Fig. 19--A view of the balcony

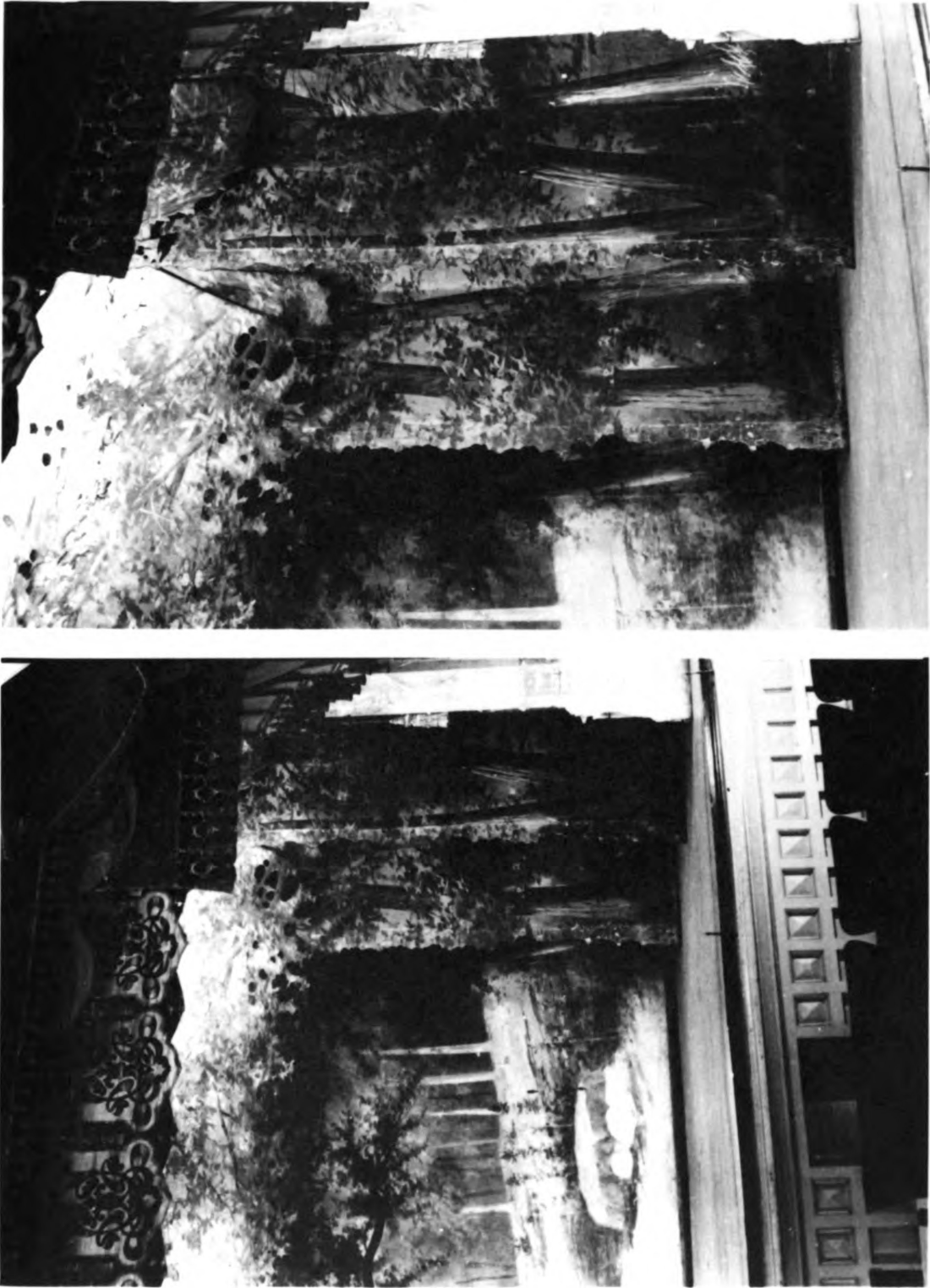


Fig. 20--A portion of the original scenery



Fig. 21--The stage of the Opera House showing the original woodland scene

The new Opera House was formally re-opened, December 18, 1904, with a performance by the Selman, Paige & Foley Lyceum Company in the production Othello.¹

The opening of the new City Opera House was not entirely successful. The Cheboygan Democrat made an attempt to explain the small turnout.

The new City Opera House was opened to the public last Monday evening by the Selman, Paige & Foley Lyceum Company in "Othello." The audience was very small and did not show appreciation. This city would never patronize a Shakespeare play . . . and at this season when everybody is making their Xmas [sic] purchases, . . . everybody was blowing money for Xmas presents. Cheboygan would rather see a leg show than one of intellect, besides these are peculiar days in the Catholic Church to which about one half our people owe allegiance. And then last, but not least many were a little afraid of the Opera House. We feel satisfied that the last objection has no foundation in fact. The new superstructure rests on new brick walls inside the old side walls and is perfectly solid and substantial.²

Cheboygan theatregoers must have soon dispelled any fears about attending the Opera House for in the following year numerous companies met with substantial success in Cheboygan.

¹Cheboygan Democrat, December 23, 1904.

²Cheboygan Democrat, December 23, 1904.

The Opera House at Its Peak: 1905

Once again Cheboygan theatre patrons enjoyed the popular comedy dramas and minstrel shows of the day. The theatrical season was booked solid with some new shows and many of the old reliable favorites that had played in Cheboygan time and time again.

Officially the 1905 season began with the performance of Dreamland by the Hi Henry Minstrels. "Hi Henry appeared at the Opera House Friday evening [January 26, 1905] with the best company the Old Minstrel has managed in several seasons."¹ "Hi Henry was given a warm reception when he appeared with his full band and gave one or two cornet solos with his old time grace and power. . . . The house was entirely filled and every available foot of standing room was sold."²

On February 24, 1905 Cheboygan was treated to a special matinee, at 2 P.M., by the J. P. Lockney production A Hidden Crime.³ The main attraction of this play was the elaborate scenery. "The scenes are laid in and around San Francisco, showing the beautiful Golden Gate Harbor, Chinatown,

¹Cheboygan Democrat, January 27, 1905.

²Cheboygan Democrat, January 27, 1905.

³Cheboygan Democrat, February 24, 1905.

and its Opium fiends, the magnificent Rose Garden in full bloom; and the sensational breaking of a suspension bridge."¹

This production held additional interest for Cheboygan audiences.

In J. M. Wards production of the new scenic comedy drama, "A Hidden Crime" . . . Mr. Jno. P. Lockney the author, has created several characters heretofore unknown to the stage. Chief among these is an aged millionaire who is a slave to absinthe Dope Fiends as users of opium are designated, and characters addicted to the morphine and cocaine habits have been made use of by the dramatists, but it remained for Mr. Lockney to introduce The Absinthe Drinker. Physicians say that the use of this cordial is far more demoralizing and degrading in its effect than the use of opium.²

The article concluded with the following sentence: For Horse Blankets see J. Nichols.³

It is assumed that A Hidden Crime played to large audiences while appearing at the Opera House due to the unusual subject matter; the absinthe drinker and the spectacular scenery.

The months of March, April, and May, found such attractions as Jules Walters in the Millionaire Tramp, The Fiske

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Stock Company with Capt. Jack Shephard, and the comedy drama, Happy Hooligan and The Burgomaster. The Burgomaster was followed by two evening performances of Old Arkansaw in the latter part of May.¹

In June Cheboygan welcomed back a familiar stock company for a week's engagement. "The good old Hunt Stock Co. are nicely billed for a week's engagement, commencing Monday night [June 5, 1905] on which occasion they will present Mr. Lincoln J. Kibbly's four act romantic comedy drama, 'A Woman's Power' a new play built on new ideas."² The company played to large audiences throughout the entire run, proving that the familiar companies were almost always the favorite companies with the citizens of Cheboygan.

Another favorite to return to Cheboygan was the play The Lady of Lyons, although this particular company had a new feature. "'The Lady of Lyons,' this renowned drama . . . is being used as a vehicle to inaugurate the first American stellar tour of the Celebrated English Actress Miss Margaret Neville."³ Miss Neville was publicized as a

¹The ads for these plays appeared in editions of The Cheboygan Democrat from March, 1905 through May of 1905.

²Cheboygan Democrat, June 2, 1905.

³Cheboygan Democrat, July 14, 1905.

famous English actress who for five years had been a valued member of Henry Irving's superb English Company.¹

The Cheboygan Opera House throughout the years had booked several Shakespearian companies. They had never proven to be entirely successful. 1905 was no exception. The Cheboygan Democrat reflects the attitude of the Cheboygan people towards the plays of William Shakespeare.

"The William Owens Company pleased a small audience at the Opera House Monday evening [September 29, 1905] in a fine production of 'Othello.'" Shakespeare's plays have never drawn well in Cheboygan . . . and it is to be regretted that such high class attractions are a failure here for lack of patronage, but, Cheboygan does not want Shakespeare."²

The Cheboygan Democrat was correct in saying the citizens did not prefer Shakespeare. One of the biggest successes at the Opera House in 1905 was Uncle Josh Spruceby.

"'Uncle Josh Spruceby' drew . . . crowds at the Opera House Saturday afternoon and evening. The play is on the same lines as the dozen 'Hey Rube' shows now on the road and never fails to pack an Opera House."³

¹Cheboygan Democrat, July 14, 1905.

²Cheboygan Democrat, August 4, 1905.

³Cheboygan Democrat, August 25, 1905.

The theatrical season finished out with the Uncle Josh Spruceby type of drama, a few minstrel shows, and the favorite melodramas such as Her Only Sin and The Mummy and the Humming Bird. Cheboygan's Opera House ended a full season in December of 1905. For the most part the plays had been well attended and enjoyed. This was the last year the Opera House was intensively active.

The Motion Picture Industry

On the horizon was a new form of entertainment for the citizens of Cheboygan, the motion pictures.

"In 1903 was produced the first moving picture which told a connected story, The Great Train Robbery. About 1905 the first nickelodeons appeared--crude motion-picture theatres, often improvised in vacant stores. And the movies began their slow march to importance as a vehicle of popular entertainment. . . ." ¹

As the motion pictures became popular, the theatrical road companies found it impossible to make a profit. Gradually the road companies began to disband and with this came the decline of the local opera houses. The Cheboygan

¹Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), p. 106.

Opera House was no exception and after 1905 began to decline in popularity and prosperity.

CHAPTER IV

THEATRICAL ACTIVITY AT THE CHEBOYGAN OPERA HOUSE FROM 1906 TO 1920

Cheboygan by 1906 was in a state of transformation. The lumbering industry was collapsing, in fact only a few small camps remained. The people of the city were beginning to turn to agriculture and resorting as their main industries to support the City's finances.

This collapse of the City's main industry, coupled with the rapid popularity of the motion pictures and the decline of the theatrical road companies caused the Cheboygan Opera House to begin its gradual loss of patronage.

The Opera House from 1906 to 1907

Data were unobtainable for the years 1906 and 1907 due to a loss of those particular editions from the files of The Cheboygan Democrat. It is assumed that the types of plays performed in these years were similar to those that had played Cheboygan in the past. How often these companies frequented the Opera House during 1906 and 1907 is undeterminable.

The Opera House from
1908 to 1914

By 1908 it was evident that the Opera House was in a state of decline. The entire theatrical seasons for the years 1908 through 1914 are listed below. As the years progress it is to be noted the gradual decline of plays appearing at the Opera House.

January 21, 1908: The Rajah of Bhong

February 28, 1908: J. C. Rockwell's New Sunny South Company

March 6, 1908: Devil's Auction, Chas. H. Yale

March 10, 1908: A Ragged Hero

March 21, 1908: Uncle Tom's Cabin, Mason Bros.

March 23, 1908: Wedded and Parted, Earl Burgess Company

April 22, 1908: The Hour Before Dawn, Cook Stock Company

May 16, 1908: My Boy Jack, Eugene Moore

June 15, 1908: Bud Hicks

July 22-25, 1908: Damons Colored Musical Comedy Company

August 25, 1908: The Rivals, The Jeffersons

September 3, 1908: A Dangerous Friend

September 4, 1908: Jane Eyre

February 13, 1909: David Garrick, The Empire Amusement Company

February 18, 1909: Eva Barrlett, Macy Company

March 5, 1909: Yon Yonson

April 27, 1909: Ma's New Husband

May 4, 1909: Montana, Henery [sic] D. Clay

May 28, 1909: Arieta the Singing Girl, The National Stock Company

June 9, 1909: My Boy, Jack, Eugene Moore

August 6, 1909: The Boqus Prince

August 17, 1909: A Royal Slave

October 19, 1909: The Lily and the Prince

November 27, 1909: The Bishop's Carriage

August 17, 1910: Sis Perkins

August 24, 1910: Rosalind at Red Gate

August 27, 1910: Meredith Nicholson in person

August 29, 1 1910: At Sunrise, Claude Melnotte

September 1, 1910: What a Girl Can Do, Roy La Marr and Gertrude Holland

January 11, 1911: Paid in Full

March 17, 1911: The Final Settlement

March 28, 1911: The White Squaw, Miss Della Clarke

April 7, 1911: A Cow Boy Girl

April 15, 1911: John W. Vogel's Big City Minstrels

April 18, 1911: The Wolf

July 4, 1911: The Best Two in Three Falls, Frank Burns vs. Clyde North

August 5, 1911: Lena Rivers, Brandon Amusement Company
 August 31, 1911: The Cat & the Fiddle, The Sailor Boys
 September 15, 1911: The Squaw Man
 September 30, 1911: A Messenger Boy
 October 12, 1911: The Girl from U.S.A.
 October 16, 1911: School Days, Frank Zeerell Comedy Company
 October 19, 1911: The Monte Carlo Girls Big Burlesque Co:
 The Show with a Record
 November 27, 1911: The Traveling Salesman
 November 28, 1911: The Man on the Box, Will H. Dorbin
 February 17, 1912: Oh You Candy Girl, B. W. Garfield
 Company (featuring such songs as
 "Minstrel Boy," "I'll Get Your Sister,"
 and "Ti-Ji")
 March 19, 1912: Daniel Boone
 April 9, 1912: Beverly of Graustark, George Barn McCutchen
 May 14, 1912: The Newlyweds and Their Baby
 June 17, 1912: A Night Out, May Robson
 July 25, 1912: The Girl from U.S.A., Woods & Walker
 July 29-30, 1912: The Arrival of Kitty
 August 22, 1912: The Prince Tonight, Tom Arnold
 August 30, 1912: The House of a Thousand Candles
 September 10, 1912: The Shepherd of the Hills
 September 14, 1912: The ever popular Marie Corellis in
Thelma

September 23, 1912: The Lion and the Mouse, The United Play Company, Inc.

October 25, 1912: The Littlest Rebel, Marshall Farnum

October 30, 1912: Satan Sanderson, Mr. Norman Hackett

December 6, 1912: The World's Champion Comedy Barrel Jumpers, starring Vonder and Belmore

December 12, 1912: A Fountain of Mirth, The Ideal Minstrels

January 4, 1913: John Meehan in the New York Gaiety Success, The Fortune Hunter

January 14, 1913: Graustark

January 17, 1913: The Girl and the Drummer

February 25, 1913: Africans in Kelley's Colored Carnival

March 7, 1913: Freckles

March 28, 1913: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, The Hunt Stock Company

May 10, 1913: Uncle Tom's Cabin, Uncle Tom's Cabin Company

June 2-7, 1913: Madame X, The Man on the Box, Beverly of Graustark, Paid in Full, and Three Weeks, The Helen Grayce Repertory Company

June 28, 1913: Montana, the Cornell Price Players

August 18, 1913: The Girl from Luxemborg

August 27, 1913: The Girl and the Stampede

September 12, 1913: The Rosary

October 3, 1913: The Shepherd of the Hills

October 23, 1913: The Light Eternal

November 7, 1913: The Powers that Be, The Lillian Lyons Stock Company with Miss Gladys George

November 20, 1913: Fine Feathers

December 3, 1913: Uncle Tom's Cabin, Harmount's Stock Company

December 14, 1913: The Light Eternal

January 20, 1914: A Butterfly on the Wheel

February 6, 1914: Within the Law

February 9, 1914: A Country Boy, The Whitney Stock Company

March 4, 1914: Bought and Paid For

April 18, 1914: A Girl of the Underwood

April 24, 1914: Williams Colored Singers

May 25, 1914: Joseph F. Sheehan, the world's highest tenor in Verdi's Il Trovatore

June 23, 1914: The Sculptors Dream

August 17, 1914: The Great Divide

August 24, 1914: The Spendthrift

August 31, 1914: The Virginian¹

The years between 1908 to 1914 were relatively inactive years for the Opera House. The touring stock companies presenting a full week of plays were few. Even the one

¹Listings of plays found in advertisements preceding the performance in issues of The Cheboygan Democrat and The Cheboygan News from 1908 to 1914.

night stands did not come to Cheboygan as often as they had in the past. The explanations for this inactivity can be found in the apparent decline of the touring road companies, the decline of the lumbering industry, and the advancing popularity of the motion pictures.

The Opera House from
1915 to 1917

Research concerning activity in the Opera House for the years of 1915 to 1917 was not possible due to a loss of those particular issues from the files of The Cheboygan Democrat. It can only be assumed that during these years the motion pictures gained in popularity in Cheboygan and the Opera House further declined in bookings and attendance.

The Opera House from
1918 to 1920

In 1918 Cheboygan was devoting its attention to the war in Europe. Editions of The Cheboygan Democrat were primarily concerned with articles of war, Wilson, and American foreign policy.

The entertainment section, located usually in the middle section of the paper, was substantially filled with the coming attractions at the Gem Movie Theatre. For instance

The Cheboygan Democrat carried the following article in its February 8, 1918 issue which was typical of the type of motion picture advertisement.

Some big show at the Gem Theatre [Cheboygan's Movie Theatre] on Saturday. It is going to be that inimitable actor Harold Lockwood. Everyone likes Harold Lockwood. He is one of Cheboygan's screen favorites . . . and in addition there will be a metro comedy, the whole consisting of nine reels for 15 cents.¹

By comparison, articles concerning the Opera House at this time were relatively few. There were rarely advertisements or pictures, just a brief paragraph or two describing what would be playing at the Opera House. The first mention of any such activity for the Opera House appears late in May. "The annual entertainment of the pupils of the St. Lawrence Polish school will be held at the Opera House on next Friday evening June 7, 1918. The principal feature of the evening will be the rendition of a patriotic comedy drama entitled 'Mrs. Tubbs Does Her Bit' . . ."²

In August, 1918 a single ad appeared announcing the one night performance of Gene Stratton Porter's Frekles for the following Monday evening. Also included in the ad, in bold

¹Cheboygan Democrat, February 8, 1918.

²Cheboygan Democrat, May 24, 1918.

black type was this sentence: THIS IS NOT A MOTION PICTURE.¹
The prices for this particular show were twenty-five cents to one dollar.

The last event apparently to take place at the Opera House in 1918 was the local home talent production of Paul Revere. This show was produced by The Knights of Pythias and starred such popular Cheboyganites as Mr. Gilmore, Miss Hagerty, Miss Frances Hall, Mr. John Garrow, Mr. and Mrs. Ted Cunningham, Mr. Bert McClintic, Mr. Willis Clark and finally the most respected and popular local talent in Cheboygan, Mr. George Nimmo. Mr. Nimmo was given star billing for his role as "Sweeney" the humorous Irish Sergeant.² On September 6, 1918 The Cheboygan Democrat drama reviewer pronounced Paul Revere a hit and the home talent good performers.²

While Cheboygan supported her home talent, professional activity did not increase at the Opera House. The month of March, 1919 found only one company booked into the Opera House.

¹Cheboygan Democrat, August 23, 1918.

²Cheboygan Democrat, August 23, 1918.

³Cheboygan Democrat, September 6, 1918.

"Uncle Sammy's Yankee Minstrels composed entirely of Returned U.S. Soldiers and The Original 87th Infantry Band [will appear tonight, March 28, 1919]." The star of the show was Sargeant Richie, the hero of Belleau Woods.¹

Only three other productions appeared on the stage of the Opera House in 1919. They were:

June 4, 1919: The Bird of Paradise

September 6, 1919: My Soldier Girl

November 11, 1919: Madame Hughes-Thomas Royal Welsh Lady Singers²

By 1920 movies definitely dominated Cheboygan's entertainment needs. The Cheboygan Democrat carried full page ads describing the wonders of the latest movies. Movies such as: The Brat, with Mazimova, Madge Kennedy in Leave It to Susan, Robert Warwick in Tree of Knowledge, Fatty Arbuckle in Back Stage, Harry Carey in The Human Cyclone and Sessue Hayakawa in The Beggar Prince.³

The Opera House was rarely patronized by professional legitimate drama in 1920. Once again the musical comedy

¹Cheboygan Democrat, March 28, 1918.

²The advertisements for these plays were found in issues of The Cheboygan Democrat, 1919.

³Advertisements for these motion pictures found in issues of The Cheboygan Democrat, 1920.

My Soldier Girl performed at the Opera House. This time it appeared on August 26, 1920. The only other professional companies to appear at the Opera House in 1920 were Schusters Theatrical Company with The Honey Moon Limited and the Hodges Company with Don Lanning in the musical comedy Pretty Baby.¹

The Opera House by 1920 was in a period of definite decline. Gone now were the days when the Opera House could draw a capacity house three and four nights a week. Gone also were the days when legitimate drama was the big cultural recreation. The Cheboygan Opera House was no longer Cheboygan's only theatre. Hollywood had arrived.

¹Advertisements for these plays were found in issues of The Cheboygan Democrat, 1920.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The lumbering industry had given the city of Cheboygan, Michigan its birth in 1845. This small city in Northern Michigan was important not only because of her lumbering background but also because this city provided its people with a fine source for entertainment; the municipal-owned Cheboygan Opera House.

In order to trace the success and subsequent decline of the Cheboygan Opera House it is necessary to realize that this success and decline was closely tied to the lumbering industry.

The years between 1891 through 1905 were relatively prosperous ones for the community. During these years professional touring companies constantly performed at the Opera House and usually had good sized audiences.

Cheboygan supported the Opera House during 1891 to 1905 for two main reasons:

- 1) The lumbering industry was successful, therefore people had extra money to spend on the luxury of professional legitimate drama.

2) The Opera House at this time provided the only major source of entertainment.

From evidence in The Cheboygan Democrat the Opera House reached its peak of popularity and active support of the community in 1905. From this point on a gradual decline took place in both bookings and attendance. A listing of all shows booked into the Opera House from 1908 to 1920 supports the contention that the Opera House was definitely in a period of decline. This decline was due to several causes:

1) The lumbering industry which had provided economic security for Cheboygan had collapsed.

2) The touring professional road companies were finding themselves in financial difficulties and either disbanded or raised the price of admission.

3) The motion picture industry, after 1905, became exceedingly popular because it was both a novelty and an inexpensive form of entertainment.

These, then, were the three major causes for the decline in popularity and success of the Cheboygan Opera House.

The Opera House, however, did not close its doors in 1920 but remained open to accommodate vaudeville until the

Great Depression of the 1930's.

Today Cheboygan regards her City Opera House as a symbol of a successful past. There are a few people in Cheboygan who would like to see the Opera House re-opened for legitimate drama. Whether or not the Opera House will be renovated is in doubt.

It is hoped that this study will help rekindle the community's interest in the Opera House and illuminate for the citizens of Cheboygan the history of their fine City Opera House.

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