

THE HISTORY AND STUDY OF THE RAMSDELL THEATRE,
MANISTEE, MICHIGAN, FROM 1902-1914

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ABSTRACT

THE HISTORY AND STUDY OF THE RAMSDELL THEATRE MANISTEE, MICHIGAN, FROM 1902 - 1914

by Lawrence R. Sexton

This is a historical study which attempts to present a study of the Ramsdell Theatre, its productions and an explanation for the gradual decline of legitimate dramatic events being presented there. It is limited chronologically to the years from 1902 to 1914, only by emphasis, for a brief summary is made of the period from 1914 until 1963.

Chapter I explains the relationship between the owner and founder of the theatre, Thomas J. Ramsdell and Manistee, Michigan, where it was located. It also explains in detail the physical structure of the theatre, which was supposedly of such a caliber that it could accommodate the best in early twentieth century traveling companies.

The use of this structure for such high caliber productions as Shubert and Zimmerman's The Chinese Honeymoon and for amateur productions by the Zouave Boys Club is described in Chapter II. During this fourteen year period, a marked decline was noted from a large number of high caliber

professional productions to a very small number of these and a larger number of amateur productions and miscellaneous events such as motion pictures of boxing matches.

Chapter III summarizes the relationship between the structure and the productions presented there. Using this as a reference point three conclusions are reached as to the reason for the decline of dramatic activity: (1) A theatrical syndicate was exerting pressure on the Ramsdell management. (2) The moving picture industry was attracting more and more of an audience. (3) The two-level economic and sociological status of the town deprived the theatre of an audience which could be depended upon for regular attendance.

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By
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DEDICATION

To my wife and my parents who put up with me while this was being prepared, and gave me the encouragement to complete it.

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I would like to thank those people like Mr. Frank Rutledge who contributed the photographs for this work, and all of the other faculty members and students who not only helped me with the research for this thesis but also the encouragement to complete it. However, special thanks must be extended to Mrs. Virginia Stroemel of the Manistee County Historical Museum who contributed a comprehensive view of the social environment of Manistee, many of the significant facts included in this work and most of all a genuine interest in the historical research necessary for this project. It was her control of the materials at hand and her encouragement which actually made this thesis a possibility.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of the Ramsdell theatre is conceived as both an objective and subjective study of the Ramsdell Theatre's early history. It is an objective study first, in that the resource material used for portions of it are objective material, i.e., newspaper articles telling of coming shows, measurements of the building and other statistical reports pertaining to the theatre. The study is, secondly, subjective in nature, in that the material must be interpreted to complete the picture of the Ramsdell Theatre's importance in the world of theatre. The reviews of the productions would be termed "subjective information," which the author has accepted as such and attempted to interpret. The purpose of this study is not only to record what the Ramsdell Theatre looked like and what productions appeared, but also to determine the impact of the Ramsdell Theatre upon the population of Manistee and the theatre world.

Definitions: The study of the Ramsdell Theatre is not only the study of a theatre, but of a building which housed a theatre and a social center, consisting of a banquet hall, dance hall, and lounges. The theatre was only a segment of a larger entertainment center. Generally speaking, when one refers to the Ramsdell Theatre, one is referring not only to the theatre, but to the Assembly Hall as well; for

both are housed under the same roof. Although the section of the building next to the theatre is often called the dance hall, this term tends to become confusing. For purposes of this study, this section of the building housing the dance hall will be termed the Assembly Hall.

The study of the Ramsdell Theatre is in the light of this fact, a study of a complete entertainment center with special emphasis upon the theatre.

Justification: The fact that the Assembly Hall was included in the building illustrates the fact that Mr. Ramsdell intended the Ramsdell Theatre to be a true social center, which would not only enhance the culture of the citizens of Manistee, but act as a prestige factor when visiting troupes were presented.

A broader scope of the Ramsdell Theatre would include the Assembly Hall. One must realize that this was not the only theatre operating in Manistee during the early 1900's; there was also the Gem, the Bijou, and the Royal operating at the same time. However, the Ramsdell was the only theatre which featured touring companies presenting popular plays as a regular attraction. The other theatres advertised in the Manistee Daily News only a limited number of dramatic events, but presented vaudeville shows, movies,

and events of this nature.

Thus the Ramsdell Theatre was conceived primarily as a social center, designed to enhance the cultural activity of Manistee through dramatic performances and group socialization in the Assembly Hall. It included more facilities, presented higher class entertainment, and included better theatrical and social facilities than the other theatres in Manistee.

Further justification for this study may be found in the simple fact that it is still in operation in 1963 with very few changes in the physical structure.

Other than the fact that the Ramsdell was a very important building to the city of Manistee, it entered into the realm of national theatrical interest when it first opened, for at this time a theatrical syndicate attempted to gain possession of the theatre.¹

Although no information has ever been compiled which attempts to analyze the Ramsdell theatre and its relationship to Manistee, articles about the Ramsdell have appeared in the Detroit Free Press in the past two years,² and

¹Manistee Daily News, Jan. 10, 1907.

²Detroit Free Press, August 11, 1962, and July 20, 1963.

other periodicals such as the Peninsular Magazine of Grand Rapids. Many of the residents of Manistee do, of course, have a firm grasp of what has happened at the Ramsdell since its construction; however, nothing has ever been compiled in any comprehensive form for the student of theatre history.

Limitations: The most intensive era of study of the Ramsdell will be of the times between 1903 and 1914, for this marks the beginning and the end of the Ramsdell Theatre's first attempt at presenting legitimate theatre. To say that the end of this venture came in 1914, is somewhat facitious, for it actually continued to present dramatic productions sporadically until 1920; however, 1914, as will be noted in Chapter II, saw few dramatic events presented at the Ramsdell. Of course, to determine the purpose of the building, the period from 1902 until the opening of the theatre on September 4, 1903, must be studied.

Much of the information of the theatre was obtained by studying the building as it stands in 1963. Because of this, the changes which have been made in the theatre are included in this study. The reason for this is twofold. It should be acknowledged that (1) various groups using the theatre have changed the facilities to suit their needs; (2) For the observer who may wish to know what the theatre

was like originally, a list of changes must be included so that he may easily note what the theatre was originally.

Although this study deals mainly with the theatre, it is meaningless unless it is related to the town in which it was operating. In order to develop a better understanding of the relationship of the Ramsdell Theatre to the town and to the theatre world in general, the author submits some statistical analysis of the population figures, businesses and financial status of Manistee.

This study is planned to give a chronological explanation of the happenings which brought about the conception of the Ramsdell Theatre and explanation of the equipment of the theatre plus theatrical and social events taking place there. From this evidence, conclusions will be drawn which will be emphasized upon the first thirteen years of the theatrical events, attempting to place the Ramsdell Theatre in the picture of early Twentieth Century Theatre.

The first chapter is designed to cover five main points:

- (1) the physical and cultural aspects of Manistee before the construction of the Ramsdell Theatre; (2) Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell's relationship to the community; (3) the planning of the Ramsdell Theatre; (4) the physical structure of the building; (5) the changes which have been

made in the structure.

The second chapter discusses two main points: (1) the events which occurred in the Ramsdell from 1903 to 1914, and (2) the uses of the building from 1914 to 1963. This is included to determine when the theatre was prospering most and to illustrate what type of entertainment was offered at the Ramsdell. Also included is an attempt to locate a theatrical circuit which involved the western coast of Michigan.

The third chapter is designed to draw the subjective conclusions pertaining to the reasons for the decline of theatrical activity at the Ramsdell.

CHAPTER I

MANISTEE BEFORE AND DURING THE CONSTRUCTION
OF THE RAMSDELL THEATRE

Manistee Before 1903

Manistee, Michigan, during the first part of the twentieth century was a lumbering town which was just feeling the first of the decline of the forest products. However, during the same time Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell attempted to establish a theatre in the town, which was conceived with the idea of it becoming a cultural and social center.

Manistee was not considered, at the time, to be favorably located for a theatre of the sort Mr. Ramsdell envisioned. He wanted a theatre which would feature first class touring companies. It was the geographical insignificance of Manistee which presented problems in obtaining these companies. It was not only far from the theatrical hub of New York, but it was almost an unknown name to the theatrical managers. Eventually, however, Manistee was known to many theatrical managers and producers. This did not happen overnight however. Manistee's historical background figured in prominently with the eventual success and failure of the Ramsdell Theatre.

No theatre simply becomes successful, or unsuccessful without having been affected by preceding events. In order that the background of the Ramsdell Theatre may be more

clearly defined to the reader a general background of Manistee, its commercial, and cultural lines and Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell will be reviewed in this first chapter.

Manistee is located on the east coast of Lake Michigan, twenty miles north of Ludington, ninety miles south of Traverse City and fifty miles east of Cadillac. Manistee was connected to Chicago, Milwaukee, Grand Rapids and Detroit by boat and by train.

Three transportation lines made this possible. They were: The Manistee and Milwaukee Transportation Company, The Pere Marquette Passenger Boats, and the Northern Michigan Transportation Company. With the facilities offered by these companies a traveler could journey from Manistee to Chicago in one day or night, Milwaukee in eight hours, Grand Rapids in five and Detroit in nine.³ Considering the fact that this was 1902, Manistee was easily accessible to travelers. This may have been necessitated by the need of the lumber companies for transportation, for this was, up until the early 1900's, the largest business of which Manistee could boast.

As would be expected in a lumbering town all classes of people thrived. Such men as Louis Sands, the lumberman who

³Manistee Daily News, September 15, 1902, p. 3.

could afford to erect and operate, free of charge for a period, the only electric plant in Manistee; Jon Smejkal, one of the Polish immigrants employed by the lumbermen, and Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell, who was considered one of Northern Michigan's foremost lawyers and also the president of the Manistee Bank, and donor of the Ramsdell Hall and Theatre.⁴

These people were to be found among the 22,000 people living in Manistee and the district around Lake Manistee.

This population was divided economically into a two level community, with low incomes on one hand and great wealth on the other. The difference manifested itself in many ways. Economically, the seventeen millionaires⁵ who lived in and around Manistee could afford such eccentricities as operating a power plant for the city free of charge, or establishing a theatre and patronizing it. The greater part of the population, however, were bound by an income of approximately thirty-four dollars a month,⁶

⁴The Lumberman's Legacy, Curran N. Russell and Donna Degen Baer, Manistee, County Historical Society, December, 1954, pp. 31, 32, 40.

⁵Correspondence, Mrs. Virginia Stroemel, September 5, 1963.

⁶Legacy, p. 40.

granted by the Louis Sands Lumber Company. Of course this is not meant to include all of the lower income people of Manistee, but to illustrate the vast difference between the very wealthy and the rather poor. The phrase "rather poor" is employed here because these people, although not enjoying the vast wealth of the upper classes, were just about average for the early 1900's anywhere. The fact that Manistee has always had a good tax collection rate⁷ serves to further illustrate that although this was a two-level Community economically, it was not a dying town.

The layout of the city of Manistee places the two economic groups into two levels also. The city originated out of the lumber camps which were situated along side the Manistee River between Manistee Lake and Lake Michigan. In the beginning the activity of the town was centered around the river and most of the citizens lived near the river because of this. However, as wealth began to gather in one man's hand he would move away from the center of the city. This almost invariably meant that he must move south, or up the hill. Finally, as more and more citizens accumulated their wealth, the higher income people were to be found living on the hill with the lower income people living

⁷Ibid.

down closer to the river. Thus, Manistee became economically and geographically a two-level community.

This was the town in which the Ramsdell Theatre was to be erected. It was a town dependent upon the lumbering industry for its welfare. Mr. Thomas J. Ramsdell, himself not a lumberman, was to erect the theatre, which was to serve the lumbermen and other citizens of Manistee, on the "Hill," which may be one clue as to its short life.

Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell and the Conception
of Ramsdell Theatre and Hall

Thomas Ramsdell first appeared in Manistee during the winter of 1859, fresh from law school. His arrival is described by his youngest daughter Mrs. Ruth Ramsdell Campbell of Nashville, Tennessee.

My parents arrived in Manistee in the winter of 1859, driving all the way from Grand Rapids in a cutter, with Father's law books, ten pounds of flour, and ten pounds of dried apples. They were on their honeymoon.

Outside of Manistee the sleigh turned over, spilling the library into a snowdrift, and Father narrowly escaped being roughed up by lumberjacks, who claimed they didn't need any law in this town.⁸

Soon after this Mr. Ramsdell entered into a partnership with Mr. Benedict and a new law firm, Ramsdell and Benedict, was formed.⁹

⁸Detroit Free Press, August 11, 1962, p. 10-A.

⁹Legacy, p. 32.

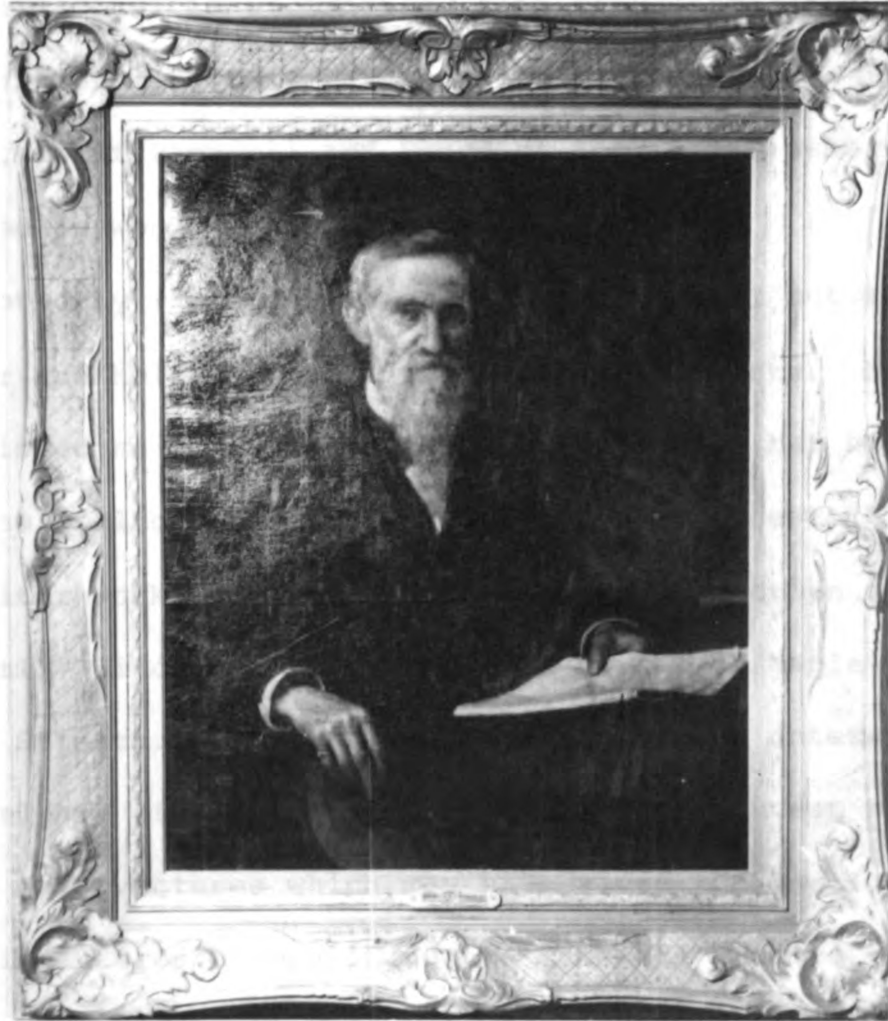


Plate I. Portrait of Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell

It may be noted that before his arrival, "The processes of law were a mystery here [in Manistee] and often might rather than right prevailed."¹⁰ Mr. Ramsdell's leadership, aided by a few other pioneer lawyers, succeeded in correcting this condition. "The law firm of Ramsdell and Benedict was very prominent in this section of the state. It was said that if Ramsdell and Benedict took a law case it was as good as won."¹¹

Not only was Mr. Ramsdell a noted lawyer, but also a banker and holder of vast real estate interests. He was not listed as one of Manistee's millionaires but he did much for the public good. He was instrumental in establishing the water works system, and financed the erection of the Ramsdell Building at the southeast corner of Maple and River Streets.¹² Mr. Ramsdell was genuinely interested in the welfare of Manistee and was willing to invest his own money into ventures which may have aided the town.

His interest in building the Ramsdell Theatre was simply a manifestation of this interest. It was not as if there were no other theatres in Manistee. Ten years before

¹⁰Legacy, p. 31.

¹¹Legacy, p. 31.

¹²Peninsular Club Magazine of Grand Rapids, August 1951.

the Ramsdell was built the Union Hall served the community as a theatre, but even during the time the Ramsdell was being built and operated other theatres were in operation. There were the Olympian Hall, the Scandinavian Opera House, the Liederkrantz Hall and the German Hall, which all produced some type of theatrical entertainment. However, these theatres were not of the same type as the Ramsdell. The Ramsdell was to become a bright spot in Manistee, which could boast of few bright spots at the turn of the century. This is attested to by an article appearing in the Manistee Daily News in 1907.

It will be remembered that when the old excuse for a theatre burned down there was a general wail of discontent. For a time this was justified. Remember that the Manistee of five years ago was not the Manistee of today. There was a feeling of uneasiness bordering on panic, due to the fact that Manistee was rapidly losing her manufacturing industries because of the failure of the timber supply. The prospects of building up and improving the city, making it a pleasanter place in which to live were not considered bright. One man possessed the means to brighten this picture. One man was also confident of Manistee's future. He knew what the city most needed at that time. Other investments were offered in plenty--investments which would have been gilt edged. But they might have contributed nothing to the social life of Manistee. They were passed by in order that the money that Thomas J. Ramsdell had to invest in his home city might do the most possible for the pleasure, instruction, recreation, and the general social betterment of his neighbors and fellow townsmen.

So, Mr. Ramsdell built the theatre and added to it the fine assembly hall, perfect in every detail. No

effort was made to skimp. Nothing was too good for the people of Manistee. The theatre was made a work of art. It was equipped lavishly so that it might stand as an exponent of the latest and best in matters theatrical. It was indeed a temple erected to a noble art.¹³

Thus, the Ramsdell Theatre was conceived in a town badly in need of cultural improvement by a man dedicated enough to withstand the pressures of the theatrical syndicate who wanted to gain control of the theatre and operate it for profit as they were doing about the country. Mr. Ramsdell withstood this, however, and attempted to present what he thought was best for the betterment, instruction, and pleasure of the Manistee audience. Naturally, this is not the complete story of the Ramsdell Theatre. Other tangents appeared in the thinking of the management through the years, and the syndicate proved to be a bigger threat than had been noted in the previous article. Basically, however, this was the Ramsdell Theatre which opened in 1903.¹⁴

The Ramsdell Theatre and Hall

Although the Ramsdell Theatre opened in September of 1903, it did not simply appear overnight. A great deal of planning and physical labor was to precede the opening.

¹³Manistee Daily News, January 10, 1907, p. 1.

¹⁴Ibid.

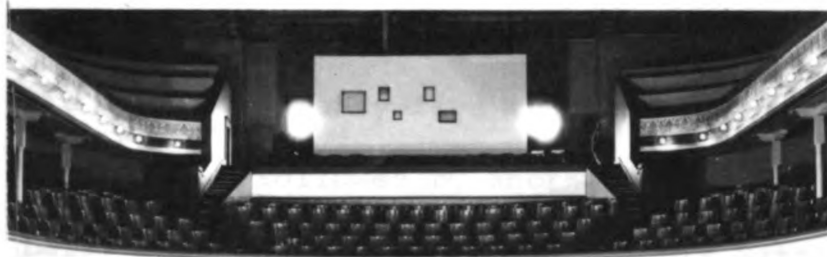


Plate II. Exterior (above) and Interior (below)
Views of Ramsdell Theatre

An article appearing in the Manistee Daily News on December 3, 1901, gave the first hint that the Ramsdell Theatre would be constructed. It stated that a thoroughly modern opera house was being planned, and that since the Scandinavian opera house burned there had been no first rate theatre in town. The new theatre was proposed to have a seating capacity of one thousand, with a dance hall downstairs. The building was to be done in Crevecoeur architecture, measuring 75 by 116 feet, with a stage measuring 40 by 70 feet. The article continued, stating that Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell was to meet with an engineer in Chicago to discuss the drawing up of the plans for the construction, which was to begin in the spring. The proposed investment in the structure at this time was twenty-five thousand dollars.¹⁵

This article was followed by another appearing in the Manistee Daily News on January 7, 1902. This article stated that plans had been confirmed to begin work on the theatre in the spring. The engineer had been consulted and the plans had been revised, giving the building a 120 by 110 foot frontage, a dance hall beside the theatre which would include a social hall with a twenty-five foot ceiling

¹⁵ Manistee Daily News, December 3, 1901, p. 1.

The loft of the theatre, at this time, was to be seventy-five feet high.¹⁶

The next recorded mention of the proposed theatre was in March, informing the readers that the architect, Mr. S. Beman, from Chicago, was in town to discuss the plans with Mr. Ramsdell. Mr. Beman was noted as having designed several buildings among them were the Illinois Central Station, the Pabst Building in Milwaukee, the Government Building in Baltimore, and a large group of buildings built in Pullman by George Pullman.

The article continued, stating that a definite style had not been decided on, but a dignified and simple colonial style for the exterior was favored.¹⁷

Obviously, the social hall next door to the theatre was finished before the theatre, for on November 17, 1902, an article appeared describing the Assembly Hall, which was near completion and to be used by the Retail Clerk's Union that would sponsor the opening dance on December 27, 1902.¹⁸

A general description of this hall was given by the

¹⁶Ibid., December 7, 1901, p. 1.

¹⁷Ibid., March 12, 1902, p. 3.

¹⁸Ibid., November 17, 1902, p. 4.

Manistee Daily Advocate on October 30, 1905. It was described thus:

The assembly hall is part of the same building as that of the theatre and is likewise of colonial design. The entrance opens into the lobby and from the lobby doors open into the ladies' and gentlemen's cloak rooms, reception parlor and banquet hall. The cloak rooms are fitted with all the accessories. The reception parlor is very handsomely furnished with elegant furniture, as chairs, tables and settees and the floor is covered with a beautiful art square. This room is separated from the banquet hall by a half partition. The banquet hall may be reached by doors from the lobby or reception parlor. The dining hall is furnished with many small tables, snowy linen, beautiful silverware and dainty china. The room has a seating capacity of sixty couples. Upstairs is the assembly hall proper, which is used for balls, parties and receptions. The floor is always kept in the best of condition by wax so that it presents a surface that is the delight of every lover of the dance. Around the sides and on raised platforms are the seats which are upholstered in leather. At the end of the hall is a mammoth fireplace of brick, built after colonial design. The walls of the room are paneled with quarter-sawed oak, wax finish. At the other end of the hall is the gallery for the music and is provided with a piano and chairs.¹⁹

From this statement the reader may realize the grandeur of the building. By keeping in mind that the dance hall was, at first, only to be an addition downstairs from the theatre, and then noting that the dance hall came to acquire its section of the building, one may comprehend that the Ramsdell Theatre was definitely meant to be a social center.

¹⁹Ibid., October 30, 1902, p. 4.

One may realize that this study must not only deal with the theatre, it must, out of the magnitude of the building, deal with the complete building, for the building was proposed as a structure which might be used for the betterment of the community. The theatre was only a part of this building, although it occupied the larger share of it. The assembly hall was just as important for bringing the members of the community together after the shows. For example, a social function was held after the opening show of The Chinese Honeymoon, involving a reception in the hall for the patrons which featured Will Church's orchestra that played the waltzes and two-steps until two o'clock in the morning. During this time the patrons ate food, which was decorated with ice sculpture imported by boat from Chicago.²⁰

The theatre, however, as would be expected, took longer to complete.

The men involved in the construction of the theatre were both from Manistee and Chicago.

All masonry and cement work was done by Nelson and Hanson Contractors. This included not only the interior of the theatre, but the large portico and four cement columns

²⁰Ibid., September 5, 1903, p. 1.

which formed the entrance to the Ramsdell theatre. All carpentry work on the interior was done by Charles Raby and Son, while the electrical lighting and fixtures were installed by Messrs. Lloyd and Smith, as was the plumbing in the dressing rooms.²¹

Mr. George Gilhooley executed the general decoration of the interior of the theatre. The upholstery, draperies, and carpeting were installed by F. W. Croh.²²

Mr. Frederick Winthrop Ramsdell, son of the owner, painted all of the murals which were displayed in the lobby and also painted the one which covers the dome over the parquet.²³

L. B. Savage was hired as the stage carpenter, by arranging a loan from the Illinois Theatre in Chicago.²⁴

Probably the most noted man who participated in the building of the theatre proper was Walter Burr ridge who was an artist who paints curtains and scenes, rather than a scenepainter, in ordinary acceptance of the term. His reputation is such that the theatre or company that possesses scenery painted by him, never loses an opportunity to herald the fact. When a new

²¹Program, Chinese Honeymoon, September 9, 1903.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.



Plate III. Main Curtain Painted by Walter Burridge
(above) and View of Stage (below)

play is presented art lovers attend to see Mr. Burridge's settings.²⁵

Working with Mr. Burridge, who painted the main curtain and foliage and landscape scenes, were George Willims and Kopher and Curtiss from Chicago.²⁶

Although he was not directly connected with the construction of the theatre, or the decoration of it, Charles Southwell was one of the most important men connected with the early days of the Ramsdell, for it was he who managed the theatre before Robert Ramsdell in 1905. Mr. Southwell was formerly with the Castle Square Opera Company and the McCaul Opera Company.²⁷ It was he who arranged for the Chinese Honeymoon cast to travel from Pittsburgh, non-stop, to play a one-night stand in Manistee.²⁸

Much has been said about the background of the theatre, including the necessity for the theatre, and the men who were directly involved in the construction and operating of the theatre. More will be said later of these men and their importance as the theatre itself is described in more detail.

²⁵Manistee Daily Advocate, March 19, 1903.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Manistee Daily News, May 5, p. 4.

The Ramsdell Theatre Structure

Looking at the Ramsdell theatre is akin to looking at a mirror of an era. As one notices in all theatrical endeavors, the theatre is the mirror of society. The Ramsdell Theatre was no exception. Its Greek Revival architecture is reminiscent of the wealth that one time was to be found in Manistee.

The Ramsdell Theatre and Hall was built on the corner of Maple and First Streets, with the theatre facing on Maple Street, and the assembly hall actually on the corner.

Since the Ramsdell Theatre has been essentially untouched insofar as remodeling is concerned an article describing the theatre which appeared in the Manistee Daily Advocate on October 30, 1905, will suffice as a general description.

The theater part of the building is on Maple Street and is of colonial design. The entrance is covered by a handsome portico upheld by magnificent pillars. On entering the theatre the lobby is the first room. This room is finely tinted and on the walls are hung beautiful paintings which were executed by the son of the owner, Frederick Winthrop Ramsdell. On the right of the lobby is the box office, on the left the stairway to the gallery and family circle. To the front is the entrance to the parquet and balcony. The parquet is divided into three sections--center, right and left respectively. The seats are of quarter-sawed oak and upholstered with leather cushions. The floor coverings are of the most expensive carpets and very thick and soft. On the right and left of the parquet entrance.

The balcony extends around the whole house and is furnished in the same manner as the parquet. Above and back of the balcony is the family circle, which is reached by special stairs to avoid crowded stairways after the evenings performance. Above the family circle and balcony, and extending along the sides of the building is the gallery. This is reached by the same stairs leading to the family circle. The entire house has a seating capacity of twelve hundred. From every seat in the house a good view of the stage may be had. In the dome is another piece of art. This was likewise executed by F. W. Ramsdell. The stage is one of the largest in the state and permits of the staging of any play. The theater owns many valuable pieces of scenery which were painted by the great scenic painter, Walter W. Burridge. All the scenery is let down from the fly gallery, which permits of changing scenery much quicker than otherwise. The theater also has eleven large dressing rooms heated by steam, well ventilated, furnished with gas and electric lights and hot and cold water, also supplied with toilet rooms. There is an asbestos curtain which is absolutely fire-proof.²⁹

The reader may have noted some interesting facts pertaining to the theatre such as the paintings which were executed by Frederick Ramsdell, the scenery done by Walter Burridge, the seating capacity, and the stage house. These will be described briefly with special attention paid to the stage house.

Frederick Winthrop Ramsdell, as previously mentioned was the son of the owner, Thomas Jefferson Ramsdell. The story behind his paintings is told by many of the old timers of Manistee. He may be noted, in this study, for his

²⁹Advocate, October 30, 1905, p. 1.

paintings which hang in the lobby, and for the mural painted on the dome.

Manistee's old-timers love to tell you that the murals in the lobby and dome, as well as many of the stage drops, were the work of Fred Ramsdell, the builder's son and an artist of considerable renown here and abroad. They will tell you how Fred's lovely Cornish wife climbed up on the scaffolding in the theatre's chilly emptiness and posed as Venus for hours on end, clad scantily in a couple of yards of sheer mull. And they will point out many a pretty Manistee belle of the day in a likeness in the pastoral Grecian murals adorning the lobby walls.³⁰

The dome depicts Venus in flowing draperies riding through clouds in a golden, flower-bedecked chariot drawn by doves and surrounded by cherubs.

In the lobby may be seen the two Grecian scenes which depict semi-nude damsels intently listening to a young boy playing a musical instrument, and the portrait of Frederick Winthrop Ramsdell.

The Manistee Daily News also noted in 1903 that Frederick Ramsdell was to do the mural decorations which were to be placed in the spaces to both the left and right of the proscenium arch. These murals are not there now, and there is no indication that any murals had ever been there; however, the murals in both the lobby and dome are still intact.³¹

³⁰Peninsular Club Magazine, 1951.

³¹Manistee Daily News, March 19, 1903, p. 2.

The same article which appeared in the previously quoted article illustrates the pride which the citizens of Manistee took in the fact that Walter Burridge had painted the main curtain and some of the scenery. "They (Manistee's old timers) will point with pride to the immense stage curtain showing 'A Grove in Athens' the work of Walter W. Burridge of Chicago, for Manisteeans a masterpiece that brings a lump to the throat every time it is seen."³²

Mr. Burridge's fame is further attested to by articles which appeared in the Manistee Daily Advocate, telling of Mr. Burridge's work. It mentions that he designed scenes for operas and George Ades play, The Circuit Judge, and Blossom's musical comedy, The Lieutenant Commander. "The scenery for these two plans cost \$200,000.00 and was of sufficient quantity to fill eleven cars."³⁷

Not only did Mr. Burridge make a considerable profit on his scene painting, but, as mentioned before, his work was of such high quality that art lovers attended new plays just to see his settings. He also occasionally took part in plays, for he had an established reputation as a

³²Peninsular, 1951.

³³Advocate, May 26, 1903, p. 2.

comedian.³⁴ There is no mention, however, of his taking part in any plays which appeared at the Ramsdell Theatre.

Mr. Burrridge and his assistants, George Williams, Joseph Kopfer, and Truman Curtis, finished the scene painting in a little over six months' time.³⁵ During this time there was much talk of using the Ramsdell Theatre not only for touring shows, but as a scenic artist's studio which would provide scenery for other acting companies. Mr. Burrridge's reasoning for this was that the facilities were more than adequate as the theatre was equipped with a painting gallery which enabled the artist to stand far above the stage floor and let the canvasses be lowered past him as he walked to and fro on the walk-way and painted, and the summers were cool, while the theatre was well ventilated.³⁶ Obviously nothing ever came of this idea for there was never any more mention of it. Nor can any mention be found of Walter Burrridge, the only work of his that the author knows of is the main curtain which hangs in the Ramsdell Theatre.

The stage house of the Ramsdell Theatre, which is thirty-four feet deep and sixty feet wide, contains many

³⁴ Ibid., March 19, 1903, p. 3.

³⁵ Ibid., September 5, 1903, p. 3.

³⁶ Ibid., September 5, 1903, p. 4.

interesting structures in itself. Among these are: the gridiron, the paint gallery, the fly gallery, the electrical lighting facilities, and the stage traps. These will be explained in as much detail as possible, supplemented with illustrations and plates of the structures under discussion.

The gridiron:

The grid and fly gallery might best be described together, for one complements the other. The grid is sixty-nine feet, four inches above the stage floor, while the fly gallery is twenty-nine feet, four inches from the stage floor, or forty feet below the grid. The fly gallery is connected to the grid by a stairway which runs along the stage left wall, reaching from the fly gallery up to the down stage, or front end of the gridiron. The gridiron floor is a complicated structure, consisting of three 8-inch by 12-inch pieces of oak timber which run from the outside wall of the stage house to the proscenium wall. From stage right to stage left, these beams are spaced sixteen feet, two inches from the stage right wall, the next is twelve feet, eight inches to the right of this, followed by another twelve feet, eight inches to the right of it. On top of these three 8-inch by 12-inch supporting

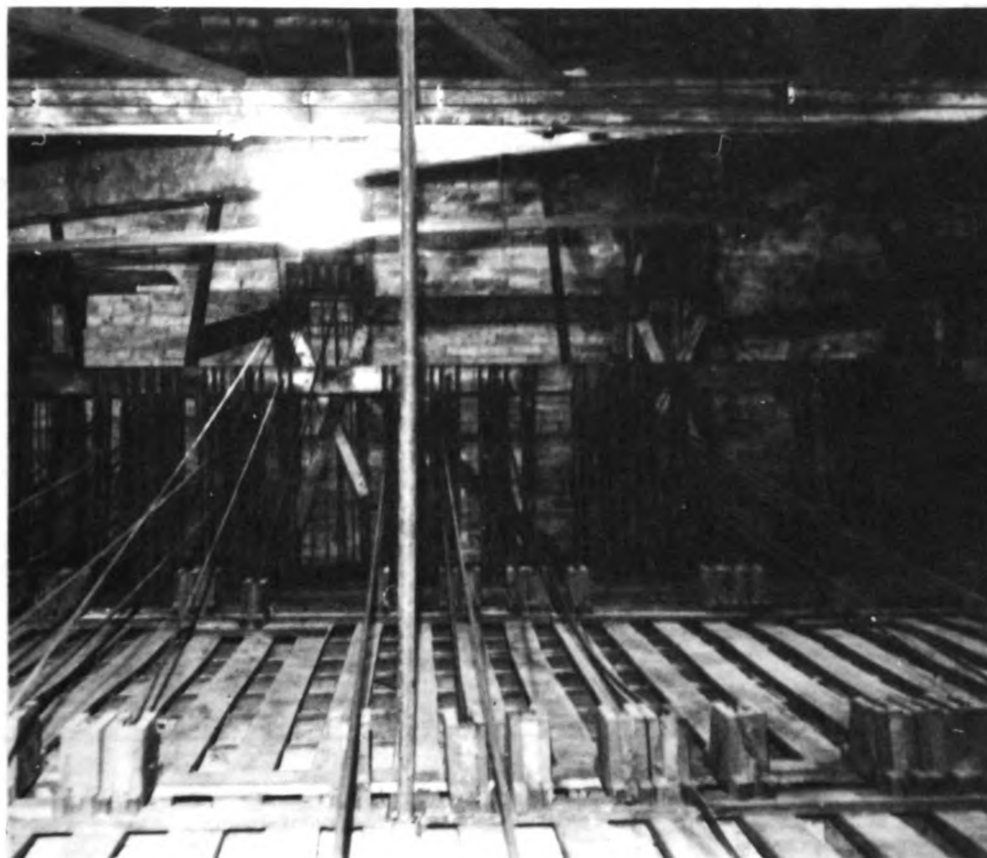


Plate IV. Grid of Ramsdell Theatre, Looking from Stage Right. Note head blocks, lines, counterweight lines and tie-rod from ceiling truss to grid beam.

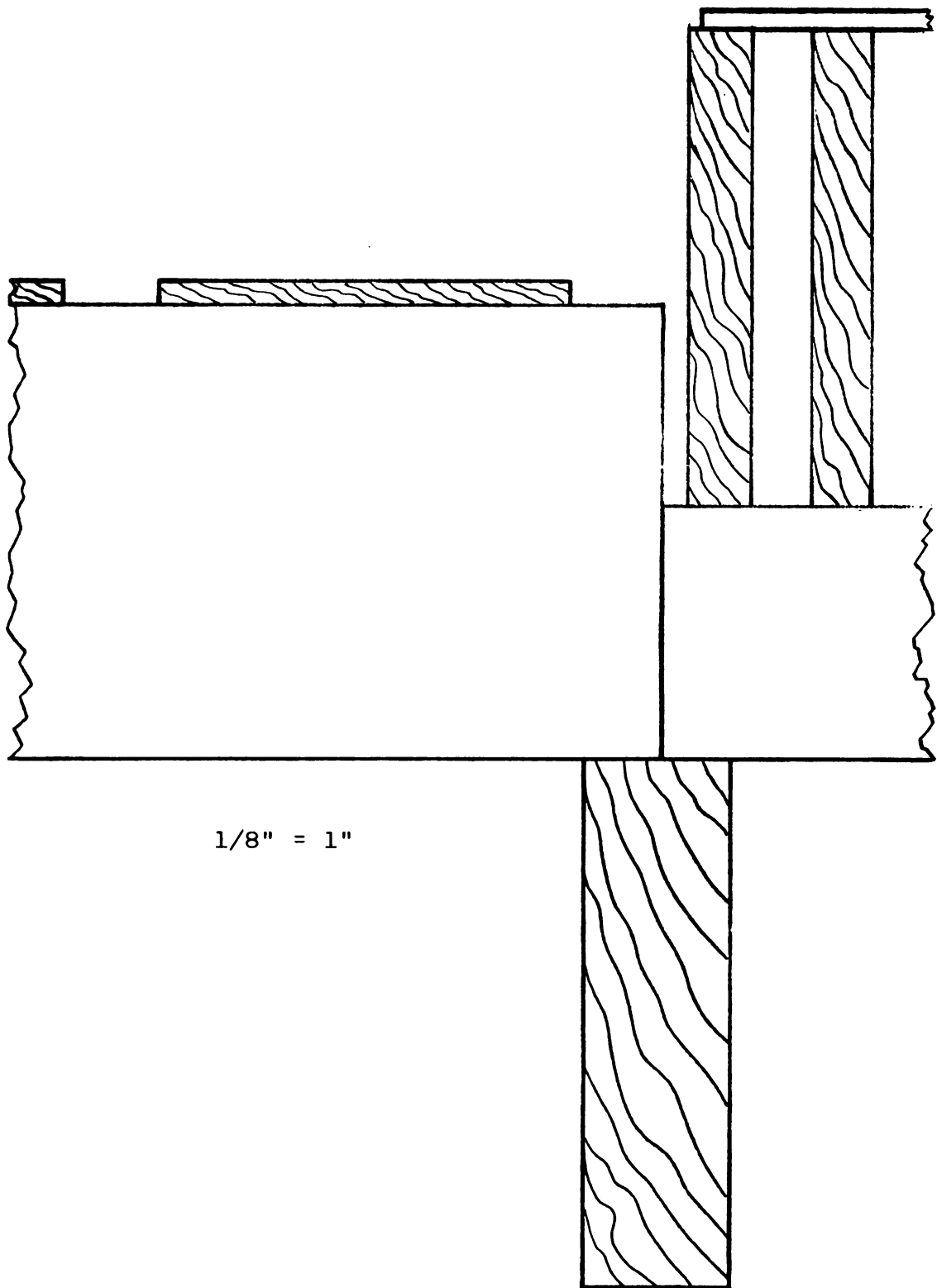


Plate V. Detail of Grid Structure
(Looking from proscenium to upstage wall)

beams are two more beams measuring 8 inches by 8 inches. These are run the width of the stage, excluding the last sixteen feet, two inches on stage right, and the eighteen feet, eight inches on stage left which are left open at this point in construction. The 8-inch by 8-inch beams, which are run the width of the stage, are spaced eleven feet, three inches apart, leaving a space of eleven feet, three inches from the upstage wall and the proscenium wall. These 8-inch by 8-inch timbers are then covered by evenly spaced pieces measuring three inches by twelve inches. These are set on the 3-inch edge on top of the 8-inch by 8-inch lumber, one foot, seven inches apart running, as the lowest beams, from the outside wall to the proscenium wall. Finally this is covered over by pieces of 1-inch by 4-inch lumber set on the broad side. These timbers are not placed so as to completely cover the gridiron. These are placed so as to leave openings between each one, thus lines can be easily run from the fly gallery, up through the perforations in the gridiron and down toward the stage floor. The sections on both right and left stage which have only so far been mentioned, are also covered, although not so elaborately as the flooring which is directly over the stage. This flooring, as the other section, is left open although it is

covered by timbers three inches by twelve inches, which rest on the 3-inch side of the 8-inch by 12-inch main beams and are then rested on pilasters which run up to the inside wall. These 3-inch by 12-inch beams are then covered by 1-inch by 4-inch open work.

This detail is given so that the reader may appreciate the strength of the structure, which could easily handle the weight of any scenery that may have been employed in any show of the 1900's.

Fly gallery:

The fly galleries, as mentioned before, are twenty-nine feet, four inches above the stage floor. Above both galleries, both right and left stage, are the pin rails. On each side there are two pin rails, one three feet above the level of the fly gallery floor, holding thirty-eight pins, and one four feet, eight inches above the gallery floor, holding thirty-six pins. There is also a special counter weight fly pin gallery which is at the extreme upstage end of the fly gallery. This gallery is three feet six inches above the fly gallery. On this system are five counterweight units, although only three of them are in use, one for the asbestos curtain, one for the act curtain, and one for the paint frame.

Paint gallery:

The paint gallery is probably one of the most interesting mechanisms of the stage house. With this equipment an artist could paint any flat scenery while it was standing straight up, rather than laying it flat on the floor, without the need to climb a ladder. With the paint gallery, the canvas could be attached to a frame, which was counterweighted, and then as the artist finished the area he could comfortably reach from the paint bridge, the frame could be lowered past him, leaving a fresh area of canvas to be painted.

This gallery is thirty-three feet, ten inches above the stage floor; thus he could paint any flat piece of scenery which was approximately forty feet tall, or shorter, without the aid of a ladder. This platform consisted of a floor, which ran from right to left stage, a length of forty-seven feet, and was hinged in half, leaving two sections two feet, five inches wide. This floor, or deck as it is better termed, the painter had behind him on the downstage side of the deck, a pipe railing which was four feet tall. In front of him was the actual paint frame. This frame was forty-six feet wide and raised or lowered in grooved supports at either side of the frame. The

weight of this frame is counterbalanced by iron weights.

Traps:

The traps in the stage floor may very well be one of the most complex mechanisms in the building. Undoubtedly they make for a very versatile stage. The trap structures are housed in the basement, which is, naturally, directly under the stage. The basement is nine feet, seven inches tall, surely deep enough to mask any activity which may take place under the stage. While the lids are off the traps and preparations are being made to raise an actor, or piece of equipment on stage. For sake of clarity these traps should be labeled. There are six traps which rise from the level of the stage floor, but do not lower below the level of the stage. These are opera bridges, useful for raising one actor or piece of equipment above the rest of the stage floor. There are also three appearance traps, which are employed when an actor or piece of equipment is to be raised from the basement into view of the audience. This makes a total of nine traps, three of which are used for appearances from below and exits from stage level, and six which may be elevated above the rest of the stage proper.

The opera bridges may be raised four feet above the stage floor, making a level eight feet, seven inches wide and four feet, six inches deep, with the exception of the bridge in the center stage area which is nine feet, nine inches wide and four feet deep.

The appearance traps, or star traps as they are often called, are smaller, being two feet, ten and one-half inches deep and three feet wide. These traps are raised from the floor of the basement. However, the floor of the trap's carriage is not resting on the basement floor. It is three feet above the basement floor because it rests on a frame, which is the actual carriage, which rides in grooves in the supports. To raise the trap the operators must first pull loose the vertical support, which is shaped in the form of a T, which holds the lid in place. When this is pulled to the side the lid opens. Next the carriage is put in position, with its legs resting on the basement floor. Then, with the actor in position on the carriage, the two operators, one on either side of the trap, pull down on the haul lines which are attached to the bottom of the carriage--then passed up through blocks which are near the ceiling of the basement, or the floor of the stage, and down to the operator who is standing on the basement floor. Also attached

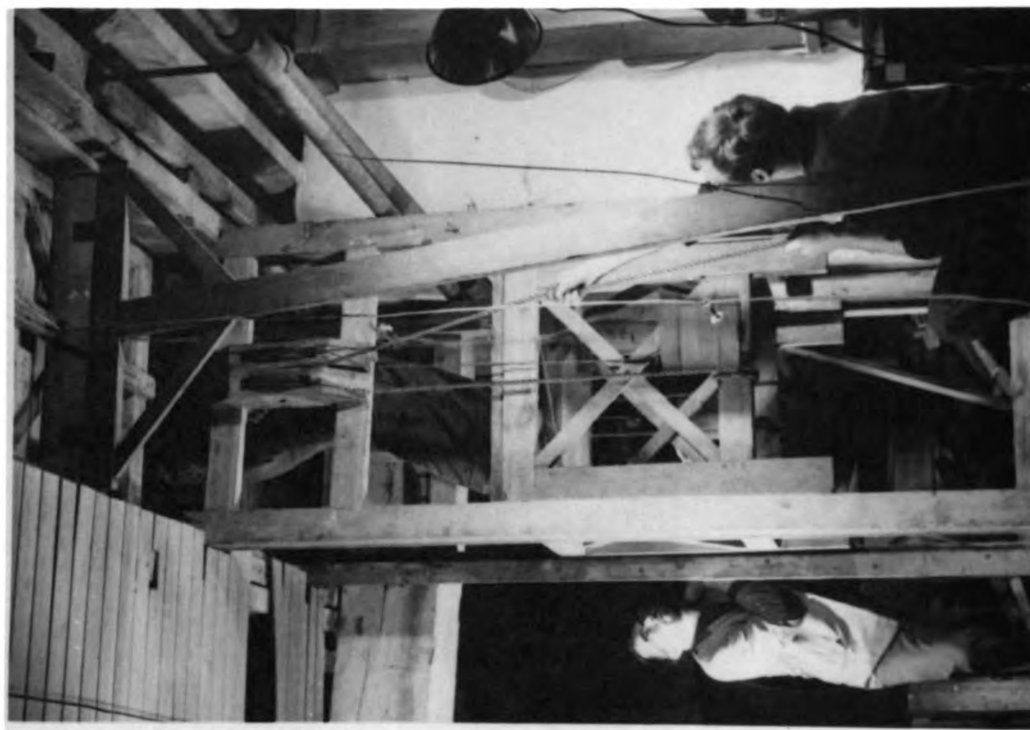
to the bottom of the carriage and passed through the blocks near the ceiling are cables which hold iron weights. These weights help counterbalance the weight of the carriage and actor, thus making the lifting operation somewhat easier for the operators. With the actors pulling down, with the help of the counterweights, the carriage rises from the basement floor, and rising in its grooves, fits into the opening left when the lid was opened. The appearance trap which is center stage serves another function as a Hamlet trap, or trap which is secured approximately two feet below the level of the stage floor.

The opera bridges work in much the same manner as the star traps except with these there is no lid. The platform itself is--when it is in its lowered position--a part of the stage floor. Like the appearance traps, the opera bridges run up in grooves when the operators, with the assistance of the counterweights, pull the line which is attached to the bottom of the carriage. When the carriage is in position at some level above the stage floor pegs are inserted in holes in the supports. This peg, then, holds the carriage above its natural level.

Unlike some of the original lighting equipment, all of the traps are in working order.



Down left star trap in position

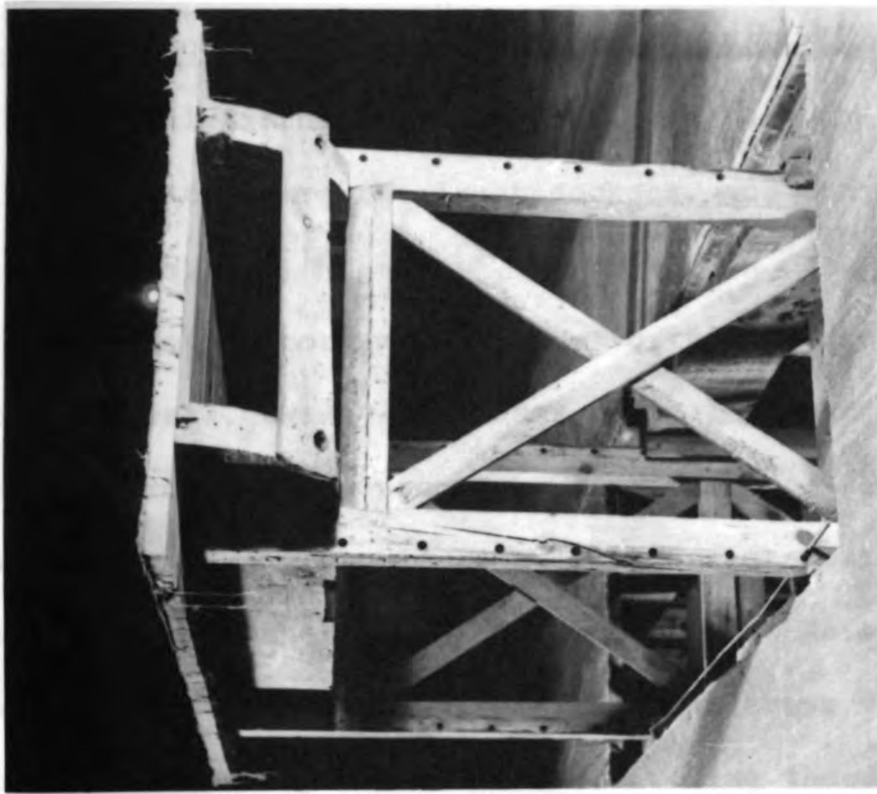


Star trap in operation, actor half-way ascended

Plate VI. Sequence of Trap in Operation



Star trap in raised position



Opera bridge in up position (note heavy timbers, mortise - tenon joining, and single bolt between upright and horizontal allowing bridge to angle)

Lighting equipment:

The only information available pertaining to the lighting facilities are the light sockets, and stage pockets themselves.

In the auditorium there are forty light sockets on the balcony rail, twenty-six under the balcony, twenty lights on the front of the second balcony, four on the ceiling, above the family circle, one light socket fixture in each of the four orchestra boxes, and seven sockets on both the west and south walls. Within the dome above the auditorium there are seventy-two sockets encircling the dome, three in each corner of the dome, and thirty-two more light sockets surround the inner circle of the dome.

On the stage there are five stage pockets on both stage right and stage left, giving a total of ten stage pockets. There is also one other type of stage plug receptacle on each side of the stage, which cannot be identified by the author. The lighting on the stage is completed by thirty-four sockets in the footlight box. Whatever lighting board which may have existed is no longer in existence at the theatre.

So far the theatre structure has been generally described by a quote from the Manistee Daily News, while the

stage has been described in fairly accurate detail. For those readers who may have an interest in a more accurate description of the rest of the theatre structure for study of theatrical management purposes, such as the size of the proscenium, placement, and number of boxes and seating arrangements, the following is submitted by the author.

Proscenium arch:

The inside edge of the proscenium arch is twenty-six feet wide and twenty-four feet, six inches tall. The apron, which forms a segment of an arc, extends six feet, two inches past the inside edge of the proscenium at center stage, sweeping back into an arc until it reaches the edge of the proscenium. The footlights are placed three feet, nine inches from the inside of the center of the proscenium. These follow the arc of the forestage.

This proscenium seems to have been in keeping with the latest modes in theatrical design. On either side of the stage stairways come down to the orchestra floor. Between these two stairways is the orchestra pit, which is four feet below the level of the stage floor and one foot below the level of the auditorium floor. Two doors, one on either side, lead from the basement up into the pit which is four feet wide, following the same contour as the apron.

Seating arrangement:

The main floor seats three hundred fifty-three persons in an area which is roughly fifty-six feet from the front to back row and thirty-nine feet across. Every seat offers a good view of the stage, for the orchestra floor is raked four feet in every thirty-two feet. This would mean, in rough terms, that if a person were sitting approximately ten rows behind the front row, he would be four feet above the first row, or on a level with the stage. This rake continues from the front edge of the first row to the last row.

The first balcony is horseshoe shaped, as is the second. From the apron to the front of the first balcony is forty-six feet, eight inches. This horseshoe extends in an arc around the theatre from one side of the proscenium arch, or stage house, to the other. This arc ends on either side of the proscenium in the same manner as the main floor boxes, which are directly below the ends of the horseshoe. Above the section directly facing the stage was a section of seats extending back approximately five additional rows, this being the last row of seats in the first balcony. This was the family circle, but has been removed and replaced by the projection booth since the earliest years of the theatre.

Above the first balcony is a second balcony, or gallery, which also forms a horseshoe, but this does not extend completely around the auditorium. The section directly facing the stage is taken by the upper section of the first balcony, or family circle, leaving a gap of thirty-five feet, six inches. This second balcony is furnished with three benches which run the entire length of both sections of the second balcony, ending over the last seats of the first balcony before it flairs out into a box seating area.

The two balconies are connected with the main floor by stairways on both the right and left sides of the auditorium which also connect the main floor to the basement level which houses the lavatory facilities.

Within this space is an estimated seating capacity of eleven hundred people. The variance of the seating capacity was very well explained in an article which appeared in the *Manistee Daily Advocate* on May 15, 1903.

Manager Charles Southwell estimates the seating capacity of the Ramsdell Theatre to be twelve hundred. It is common to exaggerate such figures. The large theatres of Chicago, for instance, range from fourteen hundred to eighteen hundred seats, excepting the Auditorium, and possibly one other, though they are often credited with much greater capacity. So, Ramsdell Theatre with its twelve hundred seats, will be amply large.³⁷

³⁷ Advocate, May 15, 1903, p. 2.

Plate VII. Simplified Cross Section
of Ramsdell Theatre

83'

75'

45'

35'

44'

38' 2"

24' 6"

9' 7"

41'

4' 5"

23' 6"

117'

Thus, the seating capacity remains unanswered, for not only have a number of the seats been removed, but the benches in the second balcony are not numbered to give any indication of how many patrons could be seated on them.

Fire protection:

The patrons were protected as well as possible in 1903 by a number of safeguards which were included in the Ramsdell. Theatre fires had always been a great dread to all people concerned with the theatre. Theatres have always been susceptible to fires because of the quantity of inflammable material used on stage, and the chance of fire created by the lighting needed for the performances. To prevent disasters, the boiler room of the theatre was separated from the theatre, so that in case the heating works might explode, or in any other way endanger the theatre, it would not spread directly to the theatre building. However, in case of fire, the theatre was supplied with a direct water supply, a counterbalanced sixhundred pound asbestos curtain, which was supplemented by "the semicircular top of the proscenium arch which has been filled with sheet metal lined with asbestos, so that it affords as much protection from a fire in the scene loft as the solid brick wall itself."³⁸

³⁸News, January 4, 1904.

Other factors contributing to the audience's safety were that the theatre was on street level with doors opening outward, and a fire alarm system was wired directly to the fire house. The Manistee Daily News estimated, on January 4, 1904, that three hundred people could leave the theatre in three minutes.

Changes of the Structure

Although the Ramsdell Theatre and Hall remain almost completely unchanged, and have been termed a museum, for here the gilt and plush past of Manistee can be seen in the second half of the twentieth century, changes have been made in the building. The changes which have been made in the building are included for the reader who may wish to know what the theatre was and is now.

Probably the first change to be made in the theatre was in the paint gallery. On close inspection one will note notches in the south wall below the paint gallery. This appears to indicate that at one time another gallery existed below the paint gallery which still exists. Unfortunately no trace of a gallery remains, nor is any information available which affirms the fact that there ever was a gallery.

Structurally, this is the only change which has been

made to the stage, although scenery and lighting boards have been changed. The auditorium, however, has had more changes. The lights, although not a structural element of the auditorium have either been replaced, or have simply burned out. These lights, due to their age, are irreplaceable so many of them are now burned out and are not replaced.

Perhaps the most noticeable structural change in the auditorium is the addition of a projection booth. This booth covers the area which would have originally been the family circle, or the top section of the first balcony directly facing the stage. There are no facts as to when this was added to the theatre, but since the Ramsdell was used as a movie house quite often in the 1920's, this may have been added at this time. This is, however, simply a speculation since there is no proof.

With the addition of the projection booth, naturally the seats which had at one time comprised the upper half of the first balcony were removed. The seats were also removed from all of the boxes, both on the main floor and balcony. Presently the boxes on the balconies are used as elevations for lighting instruments. The boxes on the main level now have only spare chairs which did not fit any place else. These boxes are not in use today; from 1951

until 1962 the members of the Ramsdell family had been given the box seats for opening night performances.³⁹

Many other improvements were made by the Civic Betterments Projects Committee in 1951 and 1952. They had new floor tile in the lobby, repaired and renewed the plumbing, purchased fifty dollars worth of light bulbs, redecorated the interior walls, dried and floored the cellars, rebuilt the basement dressing rooms, improved the main curtain, added three hundred fifty spring seats to the main floor, added new flats, and furnished new variac dimmers and a bank of cyclorama lights.⁴⁰

The Manistee Civic Players added to these improvements a red carpet for the aisles from money earned in a production of Life with Father in 1952.⁴¹

The City of Manistee covered all of these improvements by renewing the roof in the early 1950's.⁴²

The reader will note that none of these improvements were designed to change the appearance of the theatre to a more modern motif. The changes made were for either

³⁹News, July 3, 1952, p. 1.

⁴⁰Peninsular, 1951.

⁴¹News, January 18, 1952, p. 6.

⁴²Peninsular, 1951.

sanitary or safety reasons, or to benefit the performances of plays produced in the Ramsdell, but not to change the interior design from what it had been in 1903. Even though the interior walls were redecorated; the same green, gray and gold color scheme which was the original motif, was followed throughout the building in 1951.

The most profound changes are to be found in the assembly hall next door to the theatre. Probably the first change to be made in this building occurred sometime between 1902 and 1905, for an article appearing on October 30, 1905 states that:

The Local company of the Michigan National Guard has its home in this building. The rooms occupied by the company are a parlor, company room, which is furnished with two pool and billiard tables, owned by the company, gun racks, etc., locker room, kitchen and bathroom.⁴³

The National Guard no longer has its headquarters in the building and there are no traces of any changes which they may have made.

The most significant change in the Assembly building was made in the Banquet hall, which is at the back of the building if one were to enter from the Maple Street entrance. This is now a cafeteria serving the Manistee

⁴³ Advocate, October 30, 1905.

Recreation Association.

These seem to be the only significant changes in the Assembly building and exactly when they were made is not known. However, these changes make so little difference in the appearance of the structure that they are important only insofar as they indicate that the building is not now being used for what it had been originally planned.

CHAPTER II

THE PERFORMANCES AND PERFORMERS

This study deals in part with not only those performances which appeared upon the Ramsdell Theatre stage, but also with the significance of the staging of the performance as it reflects theatrical trends of the United States, and the correlations found in the circuits made by the touring companies. In clarification of the following statement one must understand that the companies which appeared in the Ramsdell Theatre only did so as a money making proposition. This meant that if they were to travel any great distance they had to be assured that they would make at least as much money by coming to Manistee as by going some place else. This is simple business sense. Usually this meant that if a troupe was to come from New York they would also demand booking in other theatres in the area in order to make the trip financially wise. Through some intensive searching and many chance discoveries the author has uncovered some patterns which may have been a part of a larger circuit. It has been observed that companies which performed in Manistee also performed in Cheboygan and Calumet, Michigan, within a short time after their appearance in Manistee. For example, The Chinese Honeymoon appeared at the Ramsdell Theatre September 4, 1903, as the first show to appear at the theatre. The complexity of

moving a show such as this from New York to Michigan is noted in the Manistee Daily News on July 28, 1903.

This engagement is in many respects the most remarkable in the history of the American stage. Never before has so large a company ever made so long a jump for a single nights engagement. . . . Chinese Honeymoon ran a year in New York. Chinese Honeymoon Special, consisting of six coaches and an engine leaves Pittsburgh September 3. . . .⁴⁴

Although the Manistee Daily News states that the show was being moved for a single night's engagement this is somewhat misleading although true. The Chinese Honeymoon did only play once at the Ramsdell, but it did not make the complete trip to Manistee from Philadelphia without further reservations. Before they would move, they first made arrangements to play in Milwaukee, and then on September 19, 1903, they appeared again in the Calumet Theatre in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Charles N. Southwell, the manager of the Ramsdell Theatre in 1903 explained how he made the engagement for Manistee.

I have been burning up telegraph wires for over six weeks trying to get the New York managers into my way of thinking, but it was hard work, as Manistee did not appear on their map, and there was a feeling of "can we get out if we ever git in! although they were kind enough not to say so in those words, but after I gave them a full list of railroads, and boat lines whereby they could leave most any time except

⁴⁴News, July 28, 1903, p. 1.

Sunday, they felt a little more like listening to my tales, and after many many letters and telegrams they finally arranged to come, provided they could make a deal with the Milwaukee managers to play an engagement following ours, and to that end they worked until the date was fixed, and they will go from here direct by boat and open in Milwaukee the Sunday after our opening, so you see everything come to him who doesn't wait but keeps plugging at it and won't take no for an answer. To be sure we must pay for the best, as this is the best, we will politely hand over a check for the picturesque sum of twenty-five hundred dollars, and we hope to make the night of September 4, 1903, one of the greatest events in the history of Manistee.⁴⁵

This event makes an interesting starting point for the study of theatrical activity at the Ramsdell Theatre, not only because it was the first performance there and one of the most publicized, but because through this one begins to have an understanding of the Michigan area theatrical circuits and how they fit in with tours out of New York and how the Ramsdell became known to the New York managers. It has already been noted that The Chinese Honeymoon not only played at the Ramsdell Theatre, but in Milwaukee the following Sunday and in Calumet, Michigan within the same month, with undoubtedly other stops between Milwaukee and Calumet and other stops after Calumet. Another interesting note here is that the cast which toured to Michigan was not the same cast which appeared in the New York showing

⁴⁵Ibid.

showing of the play.

The Chinese Honeymoon, produced by Sam S. Shubert, Nixon and Zimmerman, appeared at the Casino Theatre, New York, June second, 1902, and ran for three hundred seventy-six performances. The Chinese Honeymoon toured to the Ramsdell Theatre on September 4, 1903. While the dates sound as if they may add up to the summary that the same cast which appeared in New York appeared in Manistee, they are misleading. The company which appeared at the Ramsdell Theatre came from Pittsburgh as stated in the Manistee Daily News. The showings on Broadway were produced by Messrs. Sam S. Shubert, Nixon and Zimmerman as were the showings in Pittsburgh, Manistee, Milwaukee and Calumet. They were also staged by the same man, Gerald Coventry and designed by D. Frank Dodge, but the cast was completely different. The New York cast included:

Thomas Q. Seabrooke, Edwin Stevens, William Burress, William Pruette, Van Rensselaer Wheeler, Adele Richie, Aline Redmond, Pauline Elliott, Genevieve Whitlock, Aline Potter, Helen Dixey, Mae Fellon, Sylvia Lisle, Nonie Dore, Adelaide Phillips, Mabel Gribbon, Amelia F. Stone, Nella Webb, Edith Barr, Aime Angeles, Mrs. Annie Yeamans and Katie Barry.⁴⁶

The touring cast included:

⁴⁶ Burns Mantle, p. 326.

John E. Henshaw, Edmund Lawrence, Chas. Prince, W. H. Clarke, Edward Clarke, Stella Tracy, Claudea Hubbard, Anna Elliot, Claire Lane, Maybell Zell, Uria Rottger, Blanche Burnham, Frances H. King, Margaret Johnson, Frances Knight, Blanche Powell Todd, Georgia Bryton Cabill, Frances Golden, May Ten Brook, and Toby Clark.⁴⁷

These were then not the same casts.

This serves as illustration of what the Ramsdell Theatre offered. The author intends no judgment here as to the quality of the productions at the Ramsdell Theatre, but wishes to point out that some of the casts which appeared at the Ramsdell Theatre were not necessarily the same casts which played in New York, although the Ramsdell did sometimes offer productions which toured out of New York with the same companies. By way of example it may be noted that the original cast of The Maid and the Mummy appeared at the Ramsdell Theatre January 15, 1906.⁴⁸ After investigation, involving a comparison of cast members listed in the Manistee Daily News, as appearing in Manistee and cast members listed in the Burns Mantle 1899-1909 volume of The Best Plays as appearing in the New York productions, The Maid and the Mummy appears to be the only production

⁴⁷Program, Chinese Honeymoon, p. 3.

⁴⁸News, January 14, 1906, p. 2.



Plate VIII. Photograph of First Night Audience

at the Ramsdell which employed actors who had worked with the show on Broadway. It may also be noted that this play was seen at the Calumet Theatre on August 31, 1906, with the same cast, indicating a long tour through the states.

To afford a more comprehensive grasp of what the Ramsdell Theatre offered in the way of entertainment, the author has chronologically listed the events which took place in the Ramsdell Theatre and Hall, noting wherever possible any important aspect of the event, such as: (1) where it appeared before or after it appeared at the Ramsdell Theatre; (2) description of staging, which is somewhat limited--for the only information pertaining to this is found in the Manistee newspaper, that is understandably more interested in general description than accurate technical recording of theatrical events and the companies which performed the shows. This is done in hopes that it may illustrate how closely the Ramsdell Theatre followed theatrical and financial trends.

Following A Chinese Honeymoon, which appeared on September 4, 1903, was Walker Whiteside's We Are King, on September 8, 1903.⁴⁹ In this play Walker Whiteside appeared as Gustavus Venner (King Hector of Kahnburg). The prices

⁴⁹Ibid., September 8, 1903, p. 3.

for this show were not as high as for A Chinese Honeymoon. While tickets for A Chinese Honeymoon started at \$1.00,⁵⁰ prices for We Are King were \$.25, \$.35, \$.50, \$.75, \$1.00 and \$1.50.⁵¹ These second prices seem to be more representative of the prices charged after the opening.

In Louisiana, by Oliver Labadie, played for one night on September 13, 1903 (9/12/1903, M.D.N. p. 2). This was followed by A Royal Slave September 19, A Husband on a Salary September 20, and The Two Orphans (9/26/1903, M.D.N. p. 2). This was followed by A Little Outcast with Polly Theobald, on September 16 (9/24/1903, M.D.N. p. 2), Man to Man by Whitman and Davis on September 28 (9/26/1903, M.D.N. p. 2), The Denver Express on September 30 (9/28/1903, M.D.N. p. 2), Caught in the Web October 1 (9/30/1903, M.D.N. p. 2) and Richard Carvel starring Andrew Robson on October 3 (10/1/1903, M.D.N. p. 4). On October 5, 1903 a dance was held in the Ramsdell Hall (10/5/1903, M.D.N. p.1).

The month of November saw only three productions at the Ramsdell Theatre. November 5, the Alabama Minstrels with Quimbo Jackson appeared (10/29/1903, M.D.N. p. 3), followed on November 25 by Slaves of the Mine (M.D.N., 11/20/1903, p. 2). International Bioscope's The Great Moving

⁵⁰Ibid., September 8, 1903, p. 3.

⁵¹Ibid.

Pictures proved to be the first moving picture to be viewed at the Ramsdell. They appeared on November 28, 1903 (11/27/1903, M.D.N. p. 1). December, 1903, saw seven different companies using the facilities of the Ramsdell Theatre. December 15, A Romance of Coon Hollow (12/13/1903, M.D.N. p. 2), Too Rich To Marry (12/19/1903, M.D.N. p. 3). Other People's Money appeared in succession (12/19/1903, M.D.N. p. 3). Christmas day saw Knute Erickson as The Man from Sweden appear at the Ramsdell (12/26/1903, M.D.N., p. 1). The First Grand Masquerade sponsored by the Humanist Lodge No. 509 was held December 26 (12/26/1903, M.D.N. p. 2). Dare Devil Dorothy, December 28, and As You Like It, starring Camilia Reynolds, closed the year at the Ramsdell (12/18/1903, M.D.N. p. 1).

1904

The 1903-1904 theatrical year continued on January 4, 1904, with Foxy Grandpa featuring E. J. Groh in the lead as Grandpa coming to the Ramsdell straight from Atlantic City and Broadway (2/29/1903, M.D.N. p. 3). This was followed on January 8th by In the Palace of the King with Isabella Ivesson and Company (1/8/1904, M.D.N. p. 1). The following night, January 9th, a Masquerade Ball was given in the Ramsdell Hall (1/10/1904, M.D.N. p. 4).

Walker Whiteside returned to Manistee on January 14 with a return engagement of We Are King (1/11/1904, M.D.N. p. 1).

The Old Plantation appeared on January 16, followed by When the Bell Tolls, which made use of full-blooded St. Bernard dogs on stage in a setting of Swiss countryside (1/18/1904, M.D.N. p. 3).

The Rose Alia Shey Company presented Carmen on January 19, which was described by the Manistee Daily News as "convincing" (1/20/1904, M.D.N. p. 4).

Wever and Fields presented the original New York cast in Hoity Toity in the Ramsdell Theatre on February 2. This same "extravaganza" as it is described by the Manistee Daily News, played 225 performances at the Weber and Fields Music Hall beginning September 5, 1901 (2/3/1904, M.D.N. p. 1).

A number of local people were employed in the showing of Santiago February 18. The people were not named, however, nor was the show mentioned again in any form such as a review after the advertisements were finished in the Manistee newspapers (2/19/1904, M.D.N. p. 3). The McCabe and Mack Company featuring Hortense Neilson presented The Irish Pawnbrokers, February 24 (2/23/1904, M.D.N. p. 4)

and Hedda Gabler February 25, with Hortense Neilson portraying Hedda Gabler (2/24/1904, M.D.N. p. 3).

The Head Waiters, as produced by the B. C. Whitney Company, was presented at the Ramsdell Theatre on March 15 (3/6/1904, M.D.N. p. 3), followed by Uncle Tom's Cabin on the 16th of March, by George P. Stelson's Company. It is described by the Manistee Daily News on March 17, 1904, as the "best ever seen in Manistee . . . both white and colored artists on stage . . . genuine prize bloodhounds used on stage." Gorton's Minstrel show closed the month of March at the Ramsdell Theatre with a performance on March 24 (3/23/1904, M.D.N. p. 3).

Lincoln J Carter produced Coon Hollow April 8 with a "great fire scene," as described on page 2 of the Manistee Daily News March 9, 1904. This was followed by still another play dealing with Southern life entitled Down Mobile, produced on April 15 (4/12/1904, M.D.N. p. 3).

The Lyman twins supported by Miss Patte Rosa appeared in an elaborate musical comedy, At the Races, on April 18 (4/17/1904, M.D.N., p. 3).

The Manistee Daily News made special mention of April 30 of the large opening night crowds which had turned out for Way Down East and Happy Hooligan, which were presented

April 27 and 29, although the paper said they were "simply hackneyed productions" (4/30/1904, M.D.N. p. 2).

A human interest story of New England life, The Little Homestead, was produced May 10 at the Ramsdell Theatre (5/9/1904, M.D.N. p. 2). The other shows produced that month at the Ramsdell were, Old Allansaw (5/12/1904, M.D.N. p. 3), Joshua Simpkins, which boasted "a new climax in realism" with a real sawmill scene, on May 24 (5/24/1904, M.D.N. p. 3) and the A. G. Fields Minstrels on May 28 (5/28/1904, M.D.N. p. 2).

From the month of May until August there were no shows produced, or at least there is no record of their production in the Manistee Daily News. Beginning again in August, however, the Ramsdell once again became active producing eight shows to begin the new theatrical season.

August 1 A Texas Steer was produced, featuring Will H. Bray, May Sockton, and John Weber. This play was proclaimed to be the "greatest show in history" (8/2/1904, M.D.N. p. 3). Gordon and Bennet's A Royal Slave, featuring an erupting volcano on stage, appeared August 2 (8/2/1904, M.D.N. p. 1). The musical farce, Two Ornerly Champs was presented Tuesday, August 9 (8/8/1904, M.D.N. p. 4). On August 13 another show featuring realistic scenery, which was in vogue at the

time, appeared at the Ramsdell Theatre and presented Uncle Josh Spruceby, featuring a realistic sawmill scene (8/14/1904, M.D.N. p. 3). The Lady of Lyons, a France revolution play, was staged August 18, featuring William Owen, J. W. McConnel, Camilla Reynolds and Jeanette Loudon. Jeanette Loudon was to be seen many times on the Ramsdell stage, and although she is not listed in Who's Who in the Theatre the Manistee Daily News on page 3 of the October 8 edition termed her "one of America's leading actresses."

Spectacular electrical effects were employed in the four act comedy, The Banker's Child, featuring the Shannons in a one night stand on August 25 (8/26/1904, M.D.N. p. 3). It may be well to mention here that quite often it is difficult to determine if a show played more than one night at the Ramsdell for the Manistee Daily News often gave only advance publicity of the shows, telling a little about the cast, or spectacular effects, but as often did not give any more than an opening date for the shows. It is assumed that many of these plays ran more than one night, however, for many times it was noted in the advertising that a show would play only one night, such as The Banker's Child.

An all Negro cast was featured in Lottie Parker's Under Southern Skies which appeared August 28 (8/28/1904, M.D.N. p. 2).

Lincoln J. Carter presented Her Only Sin, starring Delia Morrey and the Richardsons, August 30 (8/29/1904, M.D.N. p. 3). Carter had previously presented two shows, Coon Hollow and Down Mobile during April, 1904. Her Only Sin, as Carter's previous shows, was acclaimed by the Manistee Daily News as having magnificent scenery throughout (9/2/1904, M.D.N. p. 1).

During September, 1904, nine more shows were produced at the Ramsdell Theatre. They were: Si Plunkard September 2 (9/2/1904, M.D.N. p. 3), featuring J. C. Lewis and Company, The Hoosier Girl, September 3, with Kate Watson (9/2/1904, M.D.N. p. 3), The Moon Shiners Daughter by Mannard Buhler and Company (9/8/1904, M.D.N. p. 3), A Breezytime September 10 (9/10/1904, M.D.N. p. 4), Hello Bill September 14 (9/14/1904, M.D.N. p. 4), A Devil's Lane, featuring the famous Elmore Sisters, September 16 (9/16/1904, M.D.N. p. 4), Hamlet, by the W. J. Hanley Company, starring Edward N. Hoyt September 30 (9/20/1904, M.D.N. p. 3), Michael Stogoft, with a carload of special scenery September 23 (9/24/1904, M.D.N. p. 3) and A Doll's House, starring Clara Throp on September 27th, which also included a ten minute showing of The Truant Spouse, before the main feature (9/28/1904, M.D.N. p. 1).

An advertisement written in Hebrew and English introduced The Holy City which was the first of ten plays to be produced at the Ramsdell Theatre during October of 1904. The Holy City ran October 1 and 2, followed by A City of Splendor on October 5 (10/1/1904, M.D.N. p. 2), (9/5/1904, M.D.N. p. 1). October 8 Rip Van Winkle was presented starring the famous Thomas Jefferson, "son of the Joseph Jefferson who played the title role in the Boucicault play of the same name produced at the Adelphi Theatre, London, on September 4, 1865." This was followed on October 11 by Ben Hendricks' Ole Olson (10/11/1904, M.D.N. p. 1). Ben Hendricks was to appear many more times not only in Manistee, but in the Calumet and Bay City theatres as well. The remainder of the month included, The Poor Mr. Rich October 15 (10/15/1904, M.D.N. p. 3), The Princess Onie, October 17 (10/16/1904, M.D.N. p. 3), Faust, October 24 (10/23/1904, M.D.N. p. 4), The Missouri Girl (10/26/1904, M.D.N. p. 3), A Bunch of Keys, October 26 (10/26/1904, M.D.N. p. 4) and A Loyal Friend, October 27 (10/27/1904, M.D.N. p. 3).

November and December may be noted for five important theatrical events at the Ramsdell. Two Shakespearean plays were performed, Twelfth Night, presented by Jules Murray, and Richard III, starring William Lloyd, appeared November 15

and December 3 respectively (11/13/1904, M.D.N. p. 3; 12/3/1904, M.D.N. p. 2). The Mummy and The Humming Bird, which was to appear many more times during an eleven year period, was presented at the Ramsdell for the first time on November 28, 1904 (11/27/1904, M.D.N. p. 1). Two shows, Human Hearts, and The Span of Life, including the Donzettas, which were noted as scenic masterpieces, appeared on December 5 and 26 respectively (12/3/1904, M.D.N. p. 3; 12/23/1904, M.D.N. p. 3).

The remainder of the plays produced and events which occurred at the Ramsdell Theatre and Hall during 1904 were: The Wimark Sacred Concert, featuring Ward Barker's Orchestra; a local group, on November 6 (11/4/1904, M.D.N. p. 1). The K. of C. Minstrels, which employed all local talent, appeared November 10 (11/9/1904, M.D.N. p. 4). The Real Widow Brown appeared November 20 (11/19/1904, M.D.N. p. 3), Beware of Mein appeared December 19 (12/20/1904, M.D.N., p. 1) and a public dance was held December 29, in the Ramsdell Hall (12/29/1904, M.D.N. p. 1).

1905

An Orphan's Prayer opened the new year of 1905, appearing on January 5 (1/2/1905, M.D.N. p. 1). This was followed

by When Women Love, featuring "many scenes and the most beautiful scenic and electrical effects produced in modern times" (1/11/1904, M.D.N. p. 2). January 14 another minstrel show, Hi Henry's Big Modern Minstrels, appeared (1/22/1905, M.D.N. p. 3), followed by A Hidden Crime on January 24 (1/23/1904, M.D.N. p. 2).

The only two shows performed during February were musicals. They were A Hole in the Ground, February 11 (2/9/1905, M.D.N., p. 3) and The Show Girl, February 24 (2/24/1905, M.D.N. p. 3).

March was a little more productive than February, with five shows being produced. They were, The Game Keeper, an Irish comedy, March 4 (3/3/1905, M.D.N. p. 4), Maloney's Wedding Day, March 9 (3/9/1905, M.D.N. p. 2), Why Girls Leave Home, or A Danger Signal in the Path of Folly, a moral-drama, March 10 (3/10/1905, M.D.N. p. 4), Uncle Josh Perkins, March 18 (3/17/1905, M.D.N. p. 4) and My Friend from Arkansas March 27 (3/28/1905, M.D.N. p. 1).

Three shows were produced at the Ramsdell during April. The Merchant of Venice, starring Joseph DeGrass was presented April 5 (3/29/1905, M.D.N. p. 3), The Wizard of Oz and Buster Brown, both of which were very popular on the New York stage: The Wizard of Oz had played 293 performances at the Majestic

Theatre in New York City, and Buster Brown was still running at the Majestic Theatre when it appeared in Manistee,⁵² appeared April 13 and 27 respectively (4/13/1905, M.D.N. p. 1; 4/28/1905, M.D.N. p. 3).

The BurgoMaster, which had been produced at the Manhattan Theatre in New York in 1900,⁵³ was produced at the Ramsdell on May 2 with the original cast (4/30/1905, M.D.N. p. 2).

The German Eagle vs. Star Spangled Banner was presented by the Milwaukee German Theatre Company on April 14 (4/15/1905, M.D.N. p. 2).

Lee Baker and Edith Evelyn remained in Manistee to do two shows on May 18 and 19. They were: Mrs. Dane's Defense and A Poor Relation (5/19/1905, M.D.N. p. 3).

The Mozard Club presented a Music Festival June 14 (6/14/1905, M.D.N. p. 2) which was followed two nights later by Twelfth Night on June 16, starring Charlotte Burnett (6/16/1905, M.D.N. p. 1).

Treloar, starring Bert Jennings, closed the 1904-1905 theatrical season at the Ramsdell Theatre (6/28/1905, M.D.N. p. 3). Graduation exercises of the Commercial School on

⁵²Burns Mantle, p. 437.

⁵³Ibid., p. 243.

June 29 was the only other recorded activity during June (6/30/1905, M.D.N. p. 1).

The 1905-1906 season opened with Sweet Clover on August 11, starring Otis B. Thayer and Gertrude Bondhill (8/8/1905, M.D.N. p. 2).

The remaining shows in August were: Othello, August 15 (8/13/1905, M.D.N. p. 4), Under Southern Skies, August 26 (8/27/1905, M.D.N. p. 3) and Hoity-Toity on August 31 (8/29 1905, M.D.N. p. 1).

During September, Dora Thorne, Hans and Nix, As Told in the Hills, The Marriage of Kitty, Isle of Spice, Trilby, The Mummy and the Hummingbird and Hamlet were produced at the Ramsdell (9/8/1905, M.D.N. p. 2; 9/14/1905, M.D.N. p. 4; 9/17/1905, M.D.N. p. 1; 9/20/1905, M.D.N. p. 3; 9/21/1905, M.D.N. p. 3; 9/27/1905, M.D.N. p. 3; 9/30/1905, M.D.N. p. 1). These productions, with the exclusion of As Told in the Hills, and Tribley, were also produced at the Calumet Theatre within two weeks of the time they appeared in Manistee.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Oas, Mabel Winnetta, "A History of Legitimate Drama in the Copper Country of Michigan from 1900 to 1910 with Special Study of the Calumet Theatre," Thesis for the Degree of M.A., 1955, Michigan State University. Appendix.

Manistee saw the second production of the Irish Pawn-brokers on October 11, starring Davis and Mack who also starred in My Wife's Family on October 20 (10/10/1905, M.D.N. p. 2; 10/21/1905, M.D.N. p. 1). There are no records stating whether they left Manistee in the interim or whether they produced other shows in or about Manistee. The Triumph of Betty, with Adelaide Thurston, played October 23 at the Ramsdell (10/23/1905, M.D.N. p. 1) and again on October 30 at the Calumet Theatre.⁵⁵

Ben Hendricks made a return engagement at the Ramsdell on October 24 as Ole Oleson (10/23/1905, M.D.N. p. 3). A concert by the Mozart Club concluded theatrical activity at the Ramsdell for the month of October (10/27/1905, M.D.N. p. 4).

During the months of November and December there were a total of four plays performed and one dance held in the Ramsdell building. These were: The Big Jubilee Minstrels, November 21 (11/19/1905, M.D.N. p. 3), The Seminary Girls, with Knute Erickson on November 29 (11/28/1905, M.D.N. p. 1), Reaping the Harvest, December 5 (12/5/1905, M.D.N. p. 3), and the famous London Drury Lane Christmas extravaganza

⁵⁵Ibid.

The Sleeping Beauty and the Beast on December 18 (12/13/1905, M.D.N. p. 3).

1906

Theatrical endeavors continued in 1906 with a return engagement of The Wizard of Oz on January 4 (1/4/1906, M.D.N. p. 1) which also played at Calumet, January 13. This was followed on January 5 by the Senior Prom which was held in the Ramsdell Hall (1/6/1906, M.D.N. p. 1).

Janet Priest, previously a dramatic critic of a Minneapolis newspaper, criticized an actress so badly that the manager told her "try and do any better" -- she did. This was the start of her acting career (1/16/1906, M.D.N. p. 3). She appeared in The Maid and the Mummy on January 15. (This production, consisting of the Richard Carles Company, did the same production on Broadway at the New York theatre, they were termed "fanciful, fanango, of fantastic frivolity" by the Manistee Daily News, January 16, 1905, p. 3.

King Jollity appeared February 6 and 7 (2/6/1906, M.D.N. p. 2), followed by Professor E. K. Crocker's educated horses on February 12 (2/13/1906, M.D.N. p. 1).

The Ramsdell Building was again used by the townspeople for a basketball game and dance on February 17

(2/17/1906, M.D.N. p. 4). This was to become an ever-increasing enjoyment for the Ramsdell Building in the coming years as good entertainment becomes more scarce.

The musical farce, Rudolph and Adolph, was presented February 14 by the Broadhurst and Curry Company (2/24/1906, M.D.N. p. 3).

The Land of Nod, which had just completed a "record breaking run of twenty-one consecutive weeks in Chicago, appeared at the Ramsdell on March 7 (3/8/1906, M.D.N. p. 1).

Buster Brown made its second appearance at the Ramsdell on March 29. This show, as many of the other shows, included a large cast (3/28/1906, M.D.N. p. 3).

When Knighthood Was in Flower appeared at the Ramsdell on April 5 after an appearance at the Calumet Theatre on March 30⁵⁶ (4/5/1906, M.D.N. p. 1). This production was staged by the same company that produced the play at the Criterion Theatre in New York, consisting of, in part, Ernest Hastings and Ogden Stevens.

May saw only two productions at the Ramsdell. The first, on May 1, was a magic act by the Great Nicholi Company (4/29/1906, M.D.N. p. 3). The second production was a motion picture of the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, on April

⁵⁶ Ibid.

8 (4/7/1906, M.D.N. p. 5). This was among the first motion pictures to be shown at the Ramsdell. It also concluded the 1905-1906 theatrical season.

On August 7, 1906 the theatrical season was opened again with William H. West's Minstrel Jubilee (8/6/1906, M.D.N. p. 5), followed by Just Struck Town, a story of Indian life, on August 9 (8/9/1906, M.D.N. p. 4).

The Frozen Deep was presented August 11 (8/11/1906, M.D.N., p. 5), followed by Under the North Star on August 12, featuring Clarence Bennett (8/12/1906, M.D.N. p. 5).

A Millionaire Tramp was produced by the Elmer Walters Amusement Company on August 15. This was advertised as being the original cast from the Casino Theatre Production (8/14/1906, M.D.N. p. 1), but no mention of this play was found in the Burns Mantle Best Plays of 1890-1909. However, this same company was to appear again in Calumet on December 1, 1906.⁵⁷ From this one may deduce that the company was on a long tour of the Western states, or had simply returned to Michigan from the East for the Calumet production.

August 18, Nixon and Company produced Lena Rivers at the Ramsdell (8/18/1906, M.D.N. p. 3), followed by Quincy Adams Sawyer, a love story, on August 23 (8/22/1906, M.D.N. p. 5).

⁵⁷Ibid.

The Clay Baker was presented August 29 by the Rowland and Clifford Company, starring William V. Mong (8/29/1906, M.D.N. p. 6).

The comedy, The Belle of Japan, was presented September 1, starring Bessie Clifton (8/30/1906, M.D.N. p. 4).

On September 5, local talent once again made use of the Ramsdell Theatre facilities for a Mozart Club Concert (9/5/1906, M.D.N. p. 1).

The Mummy and the Humming Bird, as produced by the Jules Murry Company, was seen at the Ramsdell for the third time since 1904 on September 10 (9/9/1906, M.D.N. p. 5). It was also produced at the Calumet Theatre on September 21.⁵⁸

September 11 saw Texas Sweetheart produced at the Ramsdell (9/11/1906, M.D.N. p. 1), followed by Piff Paff Pouf on September 12. Piff Paff Pouf was on tour after a run of 286 productions at the New York Casino in 1904 (9/12/1906, M.D.N. p. 1).

The melodrama, Too Proud To Beg, appeared September 14 (9/13/1906, M.D.N. p. 5), followed by the comedy, The Marriage of Kitty which had been produced at the Ramsdell before in 1905 and was to be seen again in Calumet on September 29, 1906.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

Fazee and Browne presented Hooligan in New York on September 28 (9/28/1906, M.D.N. p. 4) which was followed on September 24 by Hoyt's A Bunch of Keys (9/23/1906, M.D.N. p. 4).

Alberta Gallatin, on October 3 (10/3/1906, M.D.N. p. 5) and Sowing the Wind on October 22, were the only productions at the Ramsdell during October (10/21/1906, M.D.N. p. 5).

An amateur cast sponsored by the entertainment committee of Co. M. 2nd Infantry presented the Filipino war drama, Under Stars and Stripes November 1, 1906 (11/2/1906, M.D.N. p. 1).

Fourteen persons from Stockholm were featured in an evening of Swedish dances on November 20 (11/18/1906, M.D.N. p. 5).

The last dramatic production of 1906 at the Ramsdell was The Honeymoon, starring Charlotte Burnett, on December 11 (11/9/1906, M.D.N. p. 3).

The only other activities in the building during December were the Christmas Hop on December 26 (12/26/1906, M.D.N. p. 1).

1907

Another dance was given in the building at the start of 1907. A Charity Ball was given January 4, 1907 (1/3/1907, M.D.N. p. 3).

On January 10, 1907, the Manistee Daily News explained that Manager Ramsdell of the Ramsdell Theatre had only booked three shows from January through April, the heart of the theatrical season. This was followed by an explanation by the editor of the paper which read as follows:

Affairs in the theatrical world are so unsettled that he (Ramsdell) is unable to say with any certainty whether his constant efforts to engage good attractions will meet with greater success.

During the past few weeks he has had twenty-seven cancellations of dates arranged for the winter months. In December there were hundreds of failures among road companies.

There have been numerous offerings but Manistee audiences are discriminating and Manager Ramsdell will not make a contract unless he firmly believes that the company secured will make good. Of the cancellations three were by repertory companies, which were to have a week each. The case of one of these booked for this month shows how difficult a manager's work is. This company offered to put up a cash guarantee of one thousand dollars conditioned on affording entire satisfaction. The booking was finally made on this basis. The company was to play this week in Cadillac. A crowded house greeted them Monday evening. But so unsatisfactory was the performance, that the manager refused to open Tuesday night although threatened with a lawsuit. Tuesday only four seats were reserved and the total sales up to the time of the raising of the curtain amounted to but eighteen dollars. Naturally this company will not be permitted to play in Manistee.⁶⁰

Manager Ramsdell must have met with more success for in the period of time from January up to and including April, ten productions were staged at the Ramsdell Theatre.

⁶⁰News, January 10, 1907, pp. 2-3.

On January 21, 1907, Human Hearts was presented at the Ramsdell, followed by motion pictures of the Obrien, Barnes boxing match on the 27th of January (1/20/1907, M.D.N. p. 1; 1/27/1907, M.D.N. p. 5).

During the month of February no theatrical activity is recorded at the Ramsdell Theatre. However, Romeo and Juliet, starring William Owen, was presented March 5 (3/3/1907, M.D.N. p. 6). No mention of William Owen can be found in Who's Who in the Theatre or Burns Mantle's Best Plays of 1899-1909, but according to the Manistee Daily News he was one of the leading actors of the day (3/5/1907, M.D.N. p. 1).

A spectacular animal show, which seemed to be so popular in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth, was presented on March 12 and 13, featuring Mr. Weedon as the animal trainer (3/13/1907, M.D.N. p. 1). This show, A Society Circus, was followed by the largest review any show had received since the opening show, The Chinese Honeymoon, in 1903.

Little Dolly Dimples, starring Dainty Grace Cameron, was presented by C. H. Kerr on March 18 (3/16/1907, M.D.N. p. 1), followed by A Woman of Mystery, starring Courtenay Morgan, on March 26 (3/24/1907, M.D.N. p. 3).

The Ladies Glee Club presented a Benefit Concert April

10, 1907 (4/10/1907, M.D.N. p. 1), followed by Myron B. Rice's production of The Gingerbread Man, starring Madge Lawrence on April 13 (4/14/1907, M.D.N. p. 3).

Eugene Moore appeared on May 2, 1907, in the Fred G. Conrad production of Monte Cristo (4/29/1907, M.D.N. p. 1). This was the end of activity at the Ramsdell until The Hidden Hand on May 23. Eugene Moore also played the lead in the May 23 production. The Manistee Daily News mentioned that this was a return engagement for him so he, obviously was on tour through this part of the country (5/13/1907, M.D.N. p. 2).

The Fool's Revenge with Porter J. White finished the month of May theatrical activity at the Ramsdell.

During June two productions appeared on the Ramsdell stage. They were: Wha-Na-Ton, a frontier drama in four acts (6/2/1907, M.D.N. p. 1) and Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire (6/10/1907, M.D.N. p. 3). This was followed by the Manistee High School commencement on June 27 (6/27/1907, M.D.N. p. 1).

July 7, Caroline McLean appeared in Thelma (7/7/1907, M.D.N. p. 3). This was followed by a three night run by the Harvey Dramatic Company who had appeared during January. Between July 16 and 19 they presented: A Soldier of Empire, The Atonement, and Roanoke (7/16/1907, M.D.N. p. 3).

Nothing else occurred at the Ramsdell until the Donnelly Hatfield Minstrels appeared August 8 (8/8/1907, M.D.N. p. 2). Also during August, The Flaming Arrow and Little Johnny Jones appeared (8/22/1907, M.D.N. p. 3).

September opened with Sis, appearing on September 2 (9/2/1907, M.D.N. p. 3), and The Show Girl, starring Grace Wilson, appearing September 5 (9/5/1907, M.D.N. p. 2).

The Old Clothesman was presented by the Rowland and Clifford Company September 9 (9/10/1907, M.D.N. p. 3), followed by Ma's New Husband, September 10 (9/10/1907, M.D.N. p. 1).

The Jules Murray Company presented W. A. Whitcar in An Old Sweetheart of Mine on September 20 (9/19/1907, M.D.N. p. 3). Nellie Kennedy and her company appeared from September 21 until September 24, presenting a repertory of: The Cow Puncher's Sweetheart, The London Bank Mystery, The Pilot's Daughter, and Washington, D.C. (9/23/1907, M.D.N. p. 4). Under Southern Skies was presented for the third time at the Ramsdell on September 27 (9/27/1907, M.D.N. p.1).

Charles Loder appeared in The Isle of Bong Bong on October 3 (10/1/1907, M.D.N. p. 3) which was followed by the District Leader on October 4 (10/5/1907, M.D.N. p. 5).

Humpty Dumpty, recently closing on Broadway, appeared

October 14, starring George H. Adams (10/14/1907, M.D.N. p. 4) who was not listed as one of the original cast members.⁶¹

Rose Melville starred in Sis Hopkins, which was presented by J. R. Sterling on October 17 (10/16/1907, M.D.N. p. 3).

For the remainder of the year, there were six shows presented at the Ramsdell. These were all presented in November between the 25th and the 30th by the Tom Marks Company. They were: That Irish Boarder, The Jail Bird, Thomas O'Brian, The Wife, A Soldier of France, The Rose of Killearney. These were the first shows presented at the Ramsdell featuring vaudeville acts between the acts of the major production. The Manistee Daily News also noted that there were large crowds and no vacant seats for these shows (10/27/1907, M.D.N. p. 5; 10/29/1907, M.D.N. p. 5).

Of the shows presented in 1907, nine of them were also shared with the Calumet Theatre. They were: A Good Fellow, The Old Clothes Man, A Woman of Mystery, Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire, The Flaming Arrow, Under Southern Skies, Sis Hopkins, and An Old Sweetheart of Mine.

⁶¹Burns Mantle, p. 257.

1908

During 1908, one will note that more and more stock and repertory companies appeared at the Ramsdell, as well as more moving pictures. The auditorium was also used more often for such events as lectures and political rallies.

January 1, 1908, Le Roy Sumner starred in the Charles H. Wuery production of Billy the Kid (12/28/1907, M.D.N. p. 5).

During 1907, The Society Circus, consisting of animal acts, drew large crowds to the Ramsdell and was generally well accepted (1/14/1908, M.D.N. p. 3). The same was true on January 25 and 26 when The Rajah of Bhong was presented featuring a Bhongalese Pony Ballet (1/26/1908, M.D.N. p. 2).

The Lyman Howe travelogue, Lost in the Alps, was presented February 13 (2/13/1908, M.D.N. p. 3). This was to become more and more common in later years. February 14 a Masquerade Ball was given in the Ramsdell Hall (2/15/1908, M.D.N. p. 1), followed by another amateur performance sponsored by the Elks Club in the form of a Minstrel Show presented February 25 (2/24/1908, M.D.N. p. 2).

Jeannette Loudon, who appeared in 1904 at the Ramsdell, returned on March 3, 1908, and presented Sweet Clover, employing both professional and amateur talent. According

to the Manistee Daily News this show was well received by the townspeople. It added that many of the townspeople had attended to see their friends take part in a professional show (3/4/1908, M.D.N. p. 1).

March 16, The Little Prospector appeared, featuring Chic Perkins (3/17/1908, M.D.N. p. 5). The Sunny South Company featured a colored cast on March 31 and 22 in the Kings of Koontown Komedu (3/22/1908, M.D.N. p. 4).

The original cast from Man of the Hour appeared at the Ramsdell on March 27. This same company had recently completed a run of four hundred seventy-nine performances at the Savoy Theatre in New York (3/26/1908, M.D.N. p. 1). There was no review of this show in the Manistee papers although it was supposedly an original cast.

A concert featuring Rudolph Garry and Max Bendix was presented April 5, 1908, at the Ramsdell (4/5/1908, M.D.N. p. 2).

Jeannette Loudon returned on April 25 and 26 to present Home Folks (4/26/1908, M.D.N. p. 6).

During May there were four events at the Ramsdell. On May 8, there was a lecture by Jack Crawford, followed by The Yankee Doodle Boy on May 10 (5/9/1908, M.D.N. pp. 3 and 6). On May 12 and 22 respectively the Richards and

Pringles' famous Minstrels and Panama, starring Margaret Minton, appeared at the Ramsdell (5/11/1908, M.D.N. p. 5; 5/22/1908, M.D.N. p. 1).

During June, seven performances were given at the Ramsdell by the Carl W. Cook Stock Company. They appeared between June 14 and June 20. They performed: Jim the Westerner, The Hour Before Dawn, The Sheriff, A Southern Spy, The Man of Mystery, Paradise Lost, and The Heart of Tennessee. This company received good reviews in the Manistee Daily News which suggests that they had received large audiences (6/15/1908, M.D.N. p. 3; 6/18/1908, M.D.N. p. 5; 6/20/1908, M.D.N. p. 5).

A Texas Ranger was presented July 7, followed by an Octologue on July 13 and 14 (7/8/1908, M.D.N. p. 6). An Octologue, as described by the Manistee Daily News, is a movie employing an acting company who fill in the lines.

The effects were produced by a company of three clever artists behind the screen and so accurately do they time their efforts that the pictures on the screen seem to be alive (7/14/1908, M.D.N. p. 2).

The William Stock Company appeared for eight nights, running from July 19 to July 25. This company, like the Tom Marks Company, which had appeared in 1907, featured vaudeville acts between the acts of the major production.

This company presented: Niobe, The Woman in Black, and The James Boys (7/30/1908, M.D.N. p. 5).

The Herald Square Opera Company presented four productions between August 2 and August 8, 1908. They played a repertory of "Fra Diavolo" Tonight the Mascot, The Moor's Bride, and A Trip to India (8/4/1908, M.D.N. p. 5).

The Donald Robertson Company appeared August 16 and 17, presenting Comus and A Blot in the 'Scutchion (8/17/1908, M.D.N. p. 6).

Coming Thro' the Rye, starring Tom Walter and Leona Thurber, appeared on August 21 after advertising for 18 days in the Manistee Daily News. The review given by the Manistee Daily News pointed out the fact that the attendance was very small (8/22/1908, M.D.N. p. 3).

On August 27, W. S. Derthick presented the original company in Bunco in Arizona (8/28/1908, M.D.N. p. 5).

Between August 31 and September 31 three shows were presented at the Ramsdell. They were: Jane Eyre (8/30/1908, M.D.N. p. 5), Lena Rivers (9/13/1908, M.D.N. p. 3), and Maloney's Wedding Day (9/31/1908, M.D.N. p. 5).

The only dramatic event taking place at the Ramsdell during October was W. A. Whitecar's The Mummy and the Humming Bird (10/14/1908, M.D.N. p. 6). The other events

which took place during this time at the Ramsdell were:

The Republican Rally, October 19 (10/18/1908, M.D.N. p. 1)
and another Lyman Howe travelogue (10/26/1908, M.D.N. p. 5).

November began with another Republican rally on the second of November, followed by Frank J. Sardan's production of The District Leader, on November 9 (11/1/1908, M.D.N. p. 1; 11/8/1908, M.D.N. p. 5).

The West-Henry Company, starring Eugene West and Catherine Henry, played nine nights between November 23 and 29 to large houses. Seats for the eight productions were listed as costing ten, twenty and thirty cents. This is in contrast to the usual price of fifty, seventy-five and a dollar charged by other companies. During their stay they presented: The Idler, Jack of Diamonds, My Partner, The Woman in the Case, The Slave Girl, York State Folks, and The Jewish Detective (11/23/1908, M.D.N. p. 4).

The financial state of Michigan may have had some effect on the theatre business at this time. This is mentioned because on November 30, when James Barton was starring in The Devil at the Ramsdell, the Manistee Daily News announced that the Michigan State Treasury had two hundred eight dollars to its credit (11/30/1908, M.D.N. p. 1).

On December 1, the Ramsdell Theatre was again used for

an amateur performance. The Golden Threshold was presented as a recital for the high school students (11/29/1908, M.D.N. p. 1).

Miss Courtney Morgan and her Stock Company appeared December 7 and presented A Royal Outlaw, which was followed by Little Dolly Dimples on December 14 (12/8/1908, M.D.N. p. 5; 12/14/1908, M.D.N. p. 3). This was presented by the Cameron Opera Company. Because of a cancellation in Cadillac this same company stayed on to present Mille Julia on December 15 (12/15/1908, M.D.N. p. 1).

Of the shows presented at the Ramsdell during 1908, six appeared at Calumet. They were: The Little Prospector, The Man of the Hour, Coming Thro' the Rye, Lena Rivers, The Devil and Under Southern Skies.

1909

During the first part of 1909, the Ramsdell Theatre did not present as many professional acting companies as they had in the past.

The first two events of 1909 at the Ramsdell were amateur performances. On January 9, Professor Horst furnished music for a supper and dance for the Silver Greys (1/9/1909, M.D.N. p. 1). On January 21 and 22, The Chimes of

Normandy was presented by an amateur group for the benefit of Associated Charities. Some interesting comments appeared in the review of the show by the Manistee Daily Advocate on January 22, page one.

Planquetts famous old opera scored greatest success, musically, artistically, and financially of any local production ever attempted in Manistee. It surpassed previous professional companies. . . . Spontaneous ovation at the rise of the curtain. . . . Mrs. Dr. Ramsdell sang "By His Side" in Act III. This is her first appearance on stage. . . . Among those taking male parts was Miss Alice Chapman.

This is inserted here to illustrate the interest the community had in the Ramsdell Theatre at times. For Chimes of Normandy twelve advertisements were run in the Manistee Daily Advocate.

The first professional show in the Ramsdell during January of 1909 was The First Violin, starring Frank Lyman and Ella May Fitch. Two advertisements appeared for this show, which was presented January 16, but no other mention was made of it in any form in either of the Manistee daily newspapers (1/14/1909, M.D.A. p. 1).

Seven hundred people attended the second annual grand Masque Carnival given in the Ramsdell Hall by the Lincoln Club (2/4/1909, M.D.N. p. 1).

The G.A.R. presented the Lincoln Memorial Program in

the afternoon of February 13. This program featured patriotic songs sung by the school children and an address by Mr. Thomas J. Ramsdell (2/16/1909, M.D.A. p. 1).

The Boys Club sponsored a talent show February 19, which netted \$250.00 (2/20/1909, M.D.A. p. 5).

The Ramsdell Theatre was filled for a lecture given by Opie Read, author and writer of popular dialect, who appeared as a part of the high school lecture course on February 23 (2/27/1909, M.D.A. p. 3).

Ben Hendricks made his third appearance in Manistee on March 18 as "Yon Yonson." The auditorium was well filled for this performance. Hendricks appeared next in Big Rapids, after stopping in Calumet before reaching Manistee (3/19/1909, M.D.A. p. 5).

Lyman Howe presented Egypt and Russia on March 31, which was followed by a talent show on April 17, sponsored by the Zouaves Boys Club. The theatre was crowded for both events (3/1/1909, M.D.A. p. 3; 4/18/1909, M.D.A. p. 5).

Martin and Emery's production of Parsifal appeared in the Ramsdell on April 19. The Manistee Daily Advocate noted that it was a good show, but attendance was poor. This, it explained, was due to the fact that three hundred people were at the Masonic Hall and another seventy-five

were at the Elks Club (4/20/1909, M.D.A. p. 2).

The Manistee Daily Advocate printed the following message for the convenience of Ramsdell patrons:

For the convenience of Parsifal patrons the former rule of commencing the evening performances at 5:30 and giving a two-hour dinner intermission has been done away with. During this engagement, the entire performance will be given at one sitting. The curtain will rise at 7:45 sharp at the evening performance. Carriages may be ordered at 11:15. Auditors must be in their seats at the rise of the first curtain, as no one will be seated during the action of the play (4/19/1909, M.D.A. p. 1).

This gives the reader some indication of the habits of the theatre-going public of Manistee during the early part of the twentieth century.

Parsifal was followed on April 22 by motion pictures of the Johnson and Burns heavyweight boxing match (4/22/1909, M.D.A. p. 4).

The Harry Scott Company presented Ma's New Husband, starring Robert Enders April 29 (4/28/1909, M.D.A. p. 6).

May 11 the Manistee Daily Advocate noted that a new fireproof vaudeville theatre was being built by D. H. McCarthy, the proprietor of the Royal Theatre in Manistee. They noted also that, "This theatre will in no way conflict with the Ramsdell Theatre, as Mr. McCarthy will play no road shows" (5/11/1909, M.D.A. p. 1). This left the

Ramsdell, the Electric and the Bijou playing road shows. The Electric and Bijou, however, played mostly vaudeville shows.

The 1909-1910 theatrical season opened at the Ramsdell with real vaudeville and moving pictures being presented beginning June 18 and running until June 25 (5/24/1909, M.D.A. p. 4). The Zouave Boys Club presented a minstrel show, however, on June 8, which was termed a financial success and well attended with no empty seats (6/8/1909, M.D.A. p. 1). Madam Gertrude, "the world's greatest actress," appeared at the Ramsdell from July 12 until July 19 after appearing first in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Her act was described as:

Her demonstrations are similar to those of Anna Foy and her work in mental telepathy throughout the metropolitan theatres has amazed her audiences, as did the audience at the Ramsdell last night (7/13/1909, M.D.A. p. 1).

The Ramsdell Theatre offered moving pictures and vaudeville shows again from July 23 to July 30, featuring a contortionist, a lady violinist, a monologist, and a shadow-graph artist (7/22/1909, M.D.A. p. 3).

The Zouave Boys Club made use of the theatre September 23 for a circus (9/22/1909, M.D.A. p. 4).

Leasing of the Ramsdell:

October 10, 1909, the Manistee Daily Advocate mentioned that:

Manager Ramsdell this afternoon leased the Ramsdell Theatre to the Western Theatre Association of Chicago for a term of three years to its representative, Mr. Challis. Mr. Challis intended to get a number of towns into the association. He already has Cadillac and Traverse City with prospects of several more.

Whether or not this meant the Ramsdells had finally given into the syndicate, is not mentioned. There was never any mention of this transaction again after the article which appeared October 10, 1909, and there was no mention of the theatre ever being leased back by the Ramsdells.

After a long absense of professional stock companies, the National Stock Company appeared at the Ramsdell October 29 and 30, presenting Her Husband's Sin and Her Fatal Shadow (10/30/1909, M.D.A. p. 4).

The next event at the Ramsdell was a meeting of the Northern Michigan Press Club in the Ramsdell Hall on November 6 (11/6/1909, M.D.A. p. 6).

"A carload of massive scenery, highly embellished by gorgeous costumes and brilliant electrical effects" came with Graustark, which starred Gertrude Perry, and William Wagner on November 29 (11/28/1909, M.D.A. p. 4).

December was the most active month of 1909 at the Ramsdell. The Passing Review was presented December 12 (12/11/1909, M.D.A. p. 3), followed on December 13 by The Beham Show, presented by Jack Singer, which came to Manistee by a special train (12/14/1909, M.D.A. p. 3).

Girls Will Be Girls appeared in Manistee on December 19 after first appearing in Jackson, Lansing, Battle Creek and Kalamazoo. This show featured Will C. Mandeville, The Three Rose Buds, Anita Arlis, Dan Marble, The Famous Dancing Dolls, and Hillard Campbell (12/19/1909, M.D.A. p. 3).

Miss Florence Farr appeared in a matinee and evening performance of Miss Petticoats on Christmas Day (12/24/1909, M.D.A. p. 1).

Mable Hawthorne of the National Stock Company starred in Her Husband's Sin and Her Fatal Shadow on December 29 and 30, 1909 (12/30/1909, M.D.A. p. 2).

Of the shows which appeared at the Ramsdell in 1909 Little Johnny Jones, Yon Yonson, and Parsifal were the only shows appearing both at the Ramsdell and Calumet Theatres.⁶²

1910

January 1910 opened with Ten Nights in a Barroom playing at the Ramsdell (12/30/1909, M.D.A. p. 5), followed on the

⁶² Calumet, Appendix.

2nd, 3rd, and 4th of the same month by A Dangerous Double, In Arizona, and East Lynne (1/1/1910, M.D.N. p. 5; 1/3/1910, M.D.N. p. 5).

A Knight for a Day, starring Edward Hume, played January 12 at the Ramsdell after a successful run in Chicago. The Manistee Daily News, in its review of the show, made mention of a huge electrically lighted see-saw used in the play (1/13/1910, M.D.N. p. 1).

Lee Shubert presented The Wolf on January 18 to a small audience (1/19/1910, M.D.N. p. 5).

The Imperial Stock Company visited the Ramsdell from January 24 until January 30, playing The Wall Street Detective, The Great Devereaux Case, Hello Bill, and Lena Rivers, Wormwood, Marching Through Georgia, The Parish Priest (1/24/1910, M.D.N. p. 6).

February 9 Margaret Keene starred in House of a Thousand Candles (2/9/1910, M.D.N. p. 3), followed on February 10 by Sciro and Cook, the hypnotists, who stayed until February 20 (2/12/1910, M.D.N. p. 5).

Grace Lavelle starred in The Toymakers, presented February 26 by Clarence E. Robbins (2/26/1910, M.D.N. p. 3).

"An electric motor boat race" was featured in A Girl at the Helm which was presented March 1 (2/27/1910, M.D.N. p. 3).

The Braunbee and Reed Dramatic Company presented The Texas Cattle King on March 3 (3/3/1910, M.D.N. p. 2) while George Marion presented The Girl Question on March 9 with William Dunlay, Lillian Logan and John Fox in the cast. The spectacular feature of this show was the electrical attachments which made chimes ring all over the theatre under the seats and in the gallery (3/10/1910, M.D.N. p. 5).

Boyd B. Trousdale starred in The Man on the Box which appeared March 10 (3/10/1910, M.D.N. p. 3), followed on March 12 by The Time, The Place and The Girl, starring Fred Mace and Elizabeth Goodall (3/12/1910, M.D.N. p. 6).

The lecture, "The World's Progress Toward Social Justice," by Henry George Jr. on March 18 (3/18/1910, M.D.N. p. 3), followed by another travelogue by Lyman Howe who, at this showing, used sound with his pictures (3/18/1910, M.D.N. p. 5).

Before the Tom Marks Stock Company appeared on April 1, Waltz Me Around Till I'm Dreamy was presented (3/28/1910, M.D.N. p. 6). The Tom Marks Company stayed for three days presenting Casey's Trouble, Buster Brown, and Sergeant O'Rafferty (4/14/1910, M.D.N. p. 4).

April 17 and 18 the Polmatier Sisters High Class Musical and Concert Company appeared at the Ramsdell (4/18/1910, M.D.N. p. 2).

The Big Billikin Ballet presented Buster Brown April 24 (4/24/1910, M.D.N. p. 1), which was followed on April 26 by the Henry Harris production of The Traveling Salesman (4/27/1910, M.D.N. p. 3).

On May 3, the theatre was once again given over to an amateur group. The Zouave Boy's Club gave a Band Concert, which was followed on May 9 by The Lion and the Mouse (5/2/1910, M.D.N. p. 3; 5/8/1910, M.D.N. p. 6).

St. Bimo, which was presented on May 15 (5/15/1910, M.D.N. p. 6) was followed by a refined vaudeville show offering free admission on May 16 (5/16/1910, M.D.N. p. 1).

May and June continued with Polly at the Circus (5/28/1910, M.D.N. p. 4), The Empress of Ogg (6/7/1910, M.D.N. p. 6), and a speech by Charles S. Osburn, Republican candidate for governor, being the only events taking place at the Ramsdell Theatre (6/12/1910, M.D.N. p. 4).

During August the only event taking place in the Ramsdell was the showing of the motion pictures of the Jefferies-Johnson heavyweight boxing match (8/18/1910, M.D.N. p. 2).

The formal opening of the 1910 theatrical season at the Ramsdell was September 1, 1910, with a production of Rosalind at Redgate (8/30/1910, M.D.N. p. 5). This was followed by The Vultures, starring Miss Alice Ellsmore (9/17/1910, M.D.N. p. 4).

Along the Kennebed was the only other production during September at the Ramsdell (9/23/1910, M.D.N. p. 3), while October had as its only production, Candy Girl, which appeared October 15 (10/15/1910, M.D.N. p. 1). The Manistee Daily News made a plea to the people, telling them that the cheapness in price of tickets at the Ramsdell was no criterion of quality (10/15/1910, M.D.N. p. 1).

The Democratic candidate for governor, Lawton T. Henians, gave a speech at the Ramsdell Theatre November 1 (11/1/1910, p. 1).

James Crowley and J. William Moore starred in The Red Mill, presented on November 3 (11/2/10, M.D.N. p. 6), and on November 7, The Girl in the Taxi was presented (11/7/1910, M.D.N. p. 5).

On Monday, November 14, 1910, The Thief was presented at the Ramsdell (11/15/1910, M.D.N. p. 3).

A seven night run by the Ideal Stock Company, commencing on November 26, ended theatrical activity at the Ramsdell for 1910. They presented: Thorns and Orange Blossoms, The Cowboy's Girl and In the Bishop's Carriage (11/27/1910, M.D.N. p. 5).

Of the plays presented at the Ramsdell during 1900 these plays were also presented at the Calumet Theatre:

A Knight for a Day, The Time, The Place and The Girl, and Polly of the Circus.

1911

There were forty-one events at the Ramsdell Theatre during the ten months of 1911 that it was in operation. This consisted of considerably more such events as moving pictures, basketball games and dances than previous years; a trend that was to continue for a little more than a year and a half.

A New York cast was featured in Paid in Full on January 3 (1/3/1911, M.D.N. p. 4).

January 12, the High School Entertainment course sponsored an amateur talent show (1/10/1911, M.D.N. p. 1). This was followed on January 19 by a Dirigible Balloon Act by Lyman Howe (1/19/1911, M.D.N. p. 6).

From January 20 to 25, the only events occurring at the Ramsdell were two basketball games and three dances.

Another segment of the High School Lecture course was offered January 30 in the form of a lecture by George D. Alden called "The Powder and the Match" (2/1/1911, M.D.N. p. 6).

From February 2 until February 22 there was one high school play (2/2/1911, M.D.N. p. 4), one amateur minstrel

show and one concert (2/14/1911, M.D.N. p. 3), and four basketball games and dances. Following this was The Wolf, presented by the same company who had presented it in 1910 (2/26/1911, M.D.N. p. 2).

Monte Thompson presented a special cast with the complete scenic production of The Final Settlement on March 24 (3/24/1911, M.D.N. p. 1).

Gus Sohlke, who had produced the Broadway production of Isle of Spice, presented the same show at the Ramsdell on March 28 (3/29/1911, M.D.N. p. 6).

John Vogel's Big City Minstrels, featuring excellent singing, was the first dramatic event of April, following the ball which had been given on April 4th in the Ramsdell Hall (4/5/1911, M.D.N. p. 5).

The Cat and the Fiddle appeared April 26, starring Harry B. Watson, Mary Martz and George Wakefield (4/25/1911, M.D.N. p. 6), which was followed by Peck's Bad Boy on April 28 (4/28/1911, M.D.N. p. 3).

A vaudeville show and moving pictures closed the month of April at the Ramsdell (4/29/1911, M.D.N. p. 6).

During June two events, one an amateur concert sponsored by the Knights of Columbus, the other a dance, used the Ramsdell facilities, while no recorded activity took

place in the building during July (6/10/1911, M.D.N., p. 4; 6/18/1911, M.D.N. p. 6).

The Cow and the Moon opened the 1911 theatrical season at the Ramsdell, featuring sixteen scenes, including an approaching locomotive, an aeroplane race and the earth as seen from the moon (8/21/1911, M.D.N. p. 3).

On August 27 the Wolgart and Moran boxing match moving pictures were shown at the Ramsdell (8/28/1911, M.D.N. p. 4).

The Labor Day Dance, on September 4, preceded The Lion and the Mouse which appeared September 19 (9/19/1911, M.D.N. p. 6).

The Zouave Boys Club band played music for the dance held at the Ramsdell Hall October 13 and October 19 (10/13/1911, M.D.N. p. 4; 10/19/1911, M.D.N. p. 6). On October 16 the Lyman H. Howe motion pictures of the London Coronation were shown (10/16/1911, M.D.N. p. 5).

The New York, New Amsterdam production of Madame Sherry was presented by George Lederer October 18 (10/16/1911, M.D.N. p. 6).

George M. Cohan produced Get Rich Quick Wallingford October 24 (10/24/1911, M.D.N. p. 2) which was followed by The Aviator by James Montgomery on October 26 (10/25/1911, M.D.N. p. 3).

A dance was offered at the Ramsdell Hall on October 27 (10/27/1911, M.D.N. p. 2).

Margaret Mayo starred in Baby Mine, which was followed by George Dill, who was termed as "very natural" by the Manistee Daily News in its review of The Squaw Man (11/12/1911, M.D.N. p. 4; 11/25/1911, M.D.N. p. 6). These were followed by two dances, one on December 24 (12/22/1911, M.D.N. p. 1) and the other on December 27 (12/28/1911, M.D.N. p. 1).

The last dramatic event of 1911 which appeared at the Ramsdell was The Girl from Rectors on December 12 (12/12/1911, M.D.N. p. 4).

1912

The first event in the Ramsdell building during January of 1912 was a basketball game and dance on January 12 (1/12/1912, M.D.N. p. 4).

The Traverse City Eagles Minstrel Company presented an evening of minstrelsy on January 19 (1/18/1912, M.D.N. p. 3) which was followed on January 24 by a travel festival produced by Lyman H. Howe (1/24/1912, M.D.N. p. 5).

The Whitney Brothers Quartet, sponsored by the Public School system completed the events at the Ramsdell for the month of January (1/29/1912, M.D.N. p. 5).

During February and March of 1912 there were no dramatic events presented in the Ramsdell Theatre, however, there were ten basketball games and dances given in the Ramsdell Hall.

April 18 the musical comedy, The Cat and the Fiddle, starring Harry B. Watson and Nellie Walters, appeared at the Ramsdell (4/17/1912, M.D.N. p. 6).

Leon W. Washburn's Uncle Tom's Cabin was presented April 11 (4/11/1912, M.D.N. p. 3).

During May two shows were presented. They were: The Spring Maid, a saucy opera featuring Dorothy Maynard and Louis Miller (5/1/1912, M.D.N. p. 3) and The Flirty Princess, including Helen Darling and Eileen Sheridan, appeared May 1 and 22 respectively (5/22/1912, M.D.N. p. 1).

The Manistee Daily News also mentioned that a new theatre, the Gem, was to open in Manistee.

During August two shows were presented. They were: Paid in Full (5/23/1912, M.D.N. p. 5) and The Prince of Tonight (8/17/1912, M.D.N. p. 6).

The Balance (9/2/1912, M.D.N. p. 3), Thelma (9/7/1912, M.D.N. p. 1), The Shepherd of the Hills (9/18/1912, M.D.N. p. 6) and The Third Degree (9/22/1912, M.D.N. p. 3) composed the bill of plays offered in September.

The first dance of the season was held at the Ramsdell Hall on October 10 (10/7/1912, M.D.N. p. 3). This was followed, on October 16, by another of Lyman Howe's travelogue motion pictures (10/25/1912, M.D.N. p. 3).

The Littlest Rebel, starring Marshal Fanum, and Satan Sanderson, including Norman Hackett, Genevieve Cliffe, Otto Kruger, Malcom Blevins, and Blanche Seymore, completed the dramatic activities for October (10/27/1912, M.D.N. p. 3).

November was the last active month of 1912 for the Ramsdell Theatre. During that time there was a Democratic rally (11/6/1912, M.D.N. p. 1) and a minstrel show at the theatre (11/13/1912, M.D.N. p. 4), plus a production of Faust, starring George Wakefield (11/17/1912, M.D.N. p. 2) and The Divorce Question, produced by the Gaskill and McVitt Company (11/20/1912, M.D.N. p. 5).

The Orpheum Club and the Knights of Pythias sponsored a production of Princess Chrysanthemum, employing all local people in the cast which was produced on January 1, 1913 (12/29/1912, M.D.N. p. 6).

1913

The New York cast which had appeared in 245 performances of The Fortune Hunter at the Gaiety Theatre produced the

same play at the Ramsdell on January 11 and 12 (1/10/1913, M.D.N. p. 6). Following this, on January 13, the pictorial excursion through Holland was presented by Lyman H. Howe.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was presented February 7, by the Leon Washburn Stetsons Uncle Tom's Cabin Company. This show made use of many technical effects, floats and tableaux scenes pulled by Shetland ponies and many other such spectacular effects, however, following all of the advertisements that preceded this show the Manistee Daily News printed:

There is an old saying that good self-respecting actors will steal before taking jobs with a "Tom" show, and without a doubt they should not be blamed if the majority of the companies are like the one thrust upon us last night (2/8/1913, M.D.N. p. 1).

Manager Ramsdell booked the religious drama, The Light Eternal for February 26 which was noted for its simplicity and for its effect upon those who have seen it (2/23/1913, M.D.N. p. 1).

The Ben Greet Players were booked to play The Comedy of Errors, starring John Milton, on February 14. This same show, which was presented without scenery except a screen and a bench, had previously played in St. Louis, Missouri (2/14/1913, M.D.N. p. 3).

The month of February was completed at the Ramsdell

with a boxing exhibition given by Company 1, 34th infantry division, United States Army (2/17/1913, M.D.N. p. 6).

On March 15, the New York cast of Freckles appeared at the Ramsdell Theatre (3/15/1913, M.D.N. p. 6). Completing March events at the Ramsdell were three dances and a lecture, given by Lee Francis Lybarber (3/20/1913, M.D.N. p. 1).

A mock court trial and a lecture, by Dr. Shaw, who spoke on woman suffrage, completed the events at the Ramsdell for April (4/14/1913, M.D.N. p. 6; 4/26/1913, M.D.N. p. 3).

The Helen Grayce Company presented The House of One Thousand Candles, Madam X, Three Weeks, The Winter Sister, Beverly, The Man on the Box, and Paid in Full, between May 25 and May 31 (5/20/1913, M.D.N. p. 6).

Moving pictures once again made use of the Ramsdell Theatre; this time they were the only events occurring at the Ramsdell for a month. Lyman H. Howe presented a travelogue, including: The Panama Canal, The Balkan War, The Japanese Army, and Maneuvers of the U.S. Navy from June 19 through June 23 (6/21/1913, M.D.N. p. 3). This was followed by the first talking pictures to appear in Manistee. On June 28 and 29 Edison's talking pictures were featured at the Ramsdell Theatre (6/28/1913, M.D.N. p. 1).

The only event occurring at the Ramsdell during July was the Fourth of July dance held in the Ramsdell Hall (7/3/1913, M.D.N. p. 1).

Three shows were presented during August. They were: The Girl and the Stampede, presented by Norton and Lambert, featuring many scenic attractions (8/13/1913, M.D.N. p. 6), The Thief, with Helen Guilbert (8/15/1913, M.D.N. p. 4), and The Girl from Luxembourg (8/25/1913, M.D.N. p. 5).

The High School Entertainment course sponsored the Ben Greet Players for a second time in Manistee on September 14, this time to present The Merchant of Venice (9/13/1913, M.D.N. p. 2).

Lyman Howe produced another travelogue, featuring a trip through the Grand Canyon, on September 20 (9/19/1913, M.D.N. p. 3).

The Light Eternal, which had appeared in February in Manistee, returned on October 30 for a second showing (10/28/1913, M.D.N. p. 2).

The Elks Club sponsored Smith and Ongby's Brewster's Millions, which appeared November 1 and 2 (11/2/1913, M.D.N. p. 1).

1914

Lyman Howe's motion pictures of the Panama Canal was the first event to take place in the Ramsdell Theatre in January of 1914 (1/1/1914, M.D.N. p. 5). This was followed by a production of Within the Law, presented by the American Play Company, who had performed the same play five hundred forty-one times at the Eltinger Theatre in New York City (1/31/1914, M.D.N. p. 5). This play, which was presented January 31 and February 1, was followed by Excuse Me, featuring a New York cast (2/12/1914, M.D.N. p. 2). No review was to be found in the Manistee papers of either show.

March 7, Byron Pratt appeared as a segment of the High School Entertainment series (3/7/14, M.D.N. p. 3). There was no more activity at the theatre until March 17 when Williams World Famous Colored Singers appeared at the Ramsdell (3/16/1914, M.D.N. p. 6).

The English Opera Company appeared at the Ramsdell from May 19 until May 21, presenting The Bohemian Girl, Il Trovatore, and Martha (5/20/1914, M.D.N. p. 6).

A boxing match and the Royal Welsh Ladies' Choir completed the month of May at the Ramsdell, appearing May 28 and 30 respectively (5/27/1914, M.D.N. p. 1; 5/30/1914,

M.D.N. p. 6).

Perle Dunham presented the morality, Every Woman, doing all twenty-four characters by herself. Perle Dunham was a nationally known actress at this time (6/13/1914, M.D.N. p. 5).

June 17 the theatre was once again used by an amateur group when seventy-five pupils of St. Mary's School presented the operetta, Midsummer Eve, which played to a full house (6/18/1914, M.D.N. p. 1).

The Gaskill and MacVitty Company, starring Mr. Wright and E. W. Reynolds, presented The Shepherd of the Hills on August 11, 1914 (8/11/1914, M.D.N. p. 6).

The C. S. Primrose Company appeared from August 23 until August 30, presenting The Great Divide and The Spendthrift (8/29/1914, M.D.N. p. 5).

Jones and Crane Company, which had spent nine months in New York, appeared on September 5 with The Virginian, the last dramatic event offered at the Ramsdell Theatre for the remainder of 1914 (9/5/1914, M.D.N. p. 2).

The rest of September and October were completed by a Lyman Howe travel festival and an Eastern Star Cabaret Minstrel Show, appearing September 15 and October 7 respectively (9/15/1914, M.D.N. p. 4; 10/8/1914, M.D.N. p. 6).

Present Use

By 1915 the Ramsdell Theatre was no longer presenting as many productions or as high quality casts as they had originally attempted. This may be attributed to a number of causes. This, however, will be discussed in the next chapter which is more concerned with implications such as this. In this chapter the author wishes to generalize somewhat and discuss what happened in the Ramsdell Theatre from 1915 until 1963. This is not meant to be as specific as the discussion of the period from 1903 to 1915.

Theatrical activity in the Ramsdell declined rapidly after 1915. By the 1920's the theatre stood idle. It remained thus until a group of individual Rotarians bought the building from the Ramsdell estate and operated it as a movie house under the name of Rotary Hall. The old silent movies had been shown in the Ramsdell from 1903, but the new movies with their sound projectors were not well suited for the Ramsdell. The acoustics were too good and the low fidelity sound became garbled in the theatre. Soon the theatre was idle again, only to be used for an occasional high school commencement or speaker.

The city of Manistee bought the building from the Rotarians in 1943 and began using it for the Manistee

Recreation Association. They used only the Assembly Hall part of the building, leaving the theatre closed up.

[In 1950], a group of ambitious women, representing the three Federated Women's Clubs and the Junior and Senior Lakeside Club, banded together as the Civic Betterment Projects Committee, led by Mrs. John L. Sweetnam and Mrs. Robert A. Novak as co-chairman, with the avowed purpose not only of restoring the theatre to its former beauty, but of seeing it was used, for at least part of the year, as a legitimate theatre once again. . . . Next, they got two enthusiastic young men, Robert Henderson and Mitchel Polin, who were interested in bringing summer stock to the Ramsdell. In the face of what, at best, was general public skepticism, and quite often active animosity, the Little Red Hens went ahead with their plans and early in the Spring of 1951, the Manistee Drama Festival was incorporated, with Charles Boyer as president, Mrs. Novak, vice-president, Max Hamlin, treasurer, and Mrs. Goden Ekholm, secretary and resident agent. . . . The American Box Board Company gave them a check and a few other individuals and organizations followed suit, or promised their support. Enough money trickled in Suddenly the girls found themselves writing letters of invitation to the gala opening performance on July 10, to governors, senators, and other VIP's. Two of the most important guests, however, were a very little lady, one of the first white children born in Manistee, who celebrated her 87th birthday on July fourth and her younger sister. Both of them had been present at the original opening in 1902, when the offering had been a performance of A Chinese Honeymoon, for their father had built the theatre and their brother decorated it. They were Mrs. Winnogens Ramsdell Scott of Manistee and her sister, Mrs. Helen Ramsdell Dempsey Harley.⁶³

The Ramsdell Theatre re-opened that summer of 1951 featuring a summer stock company with Robert Henderson as

⁶³Peninsular, 1951.

its Production Manager and Mitchel Polin as Business Manager.⁶⁴

During the 1951 season the company played: Papa Is All, Over Twenty-one, George Washington Slept Here, Blithe Spirit, Laura, For Love or Money, Good Housekeeping, and Dracula.

The summer of 1952 saw Madge Skelly as Manager Director of the Ramsdell Summer Theatre.⁶⁵

Madge Skelly was retained as Manager Director until the end of the 1961 summer stock season. During this time one hundred full length plays were presented at the Ramsdell Theatre during the summer. Also during this time the theatre managed to pay off its bills, which were formally paid after a performance of Arsenic and Old Lace on August 26, 1953.⁶⁶

The theatre remained under the direction of Miss Skelly during the summer months until 1962 at which time William Gregory replaced Miss Skelly. Dr. Gregory remained at the Ramsdell Theatre only one summer, followed by Lawrence Carrico as General Manager in 1962.

⁶⁴News, June 18, 1951, p. 7.

⁶⁵Ibid., August 27, 1953, p. 4.

⁶⁶Detroit Free Press, August 17, 1963, p. 1D.

While the preceding years had seen professional summer stock companies, supplemented by Central Michigan University students, which were affiliated with the theatre from 1954 until 1961, the 1962 summer stock company is composed partly of hired actors and technicians but mostly with students of Mercy College. Mercy College, during the 1962 season, offered four semester hours of credit to students participating in the program.⁶⁷

While the theatre is operated by these summer stock companies during the summer months, it is managed by the Manistee Drama Association, consisting of Nathan Williams, Mrs. Donna Degen Baer, Mr. Jack Barstow, and Mrs. William Wittig, who operate the Ramsdell in the winter as a community theatre.

The Ramsdell Theatre has been a functioning part of Manistee for nearly sixty years, although from the 1920's until 1951 it was almost entirely unused. The fact remains, however, that the building was never destroyed or in any way altered to modernize it, thus it remains a museum of early twentieth century theatre.

⁶⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE EVIDENCE

In order to better comprehend the subjective conclusions which this chapter is designed to arrive at, one must have a total picture of what the Ramsdell Theatre was and what happened there. Chapters I and II were designed to illustrate these points in detail; however, since details make the general picture obscure, a summary of these points is included now.

The Ramsdell Theatre was built by Thomas J. Ramsdell in Manistee, Michigan in 1903, as a private investment. The theatre was constructed as a social center for the citizens of Manistee and the surrounding area, including in it both a large theatre with a seating capacity of approximately 1,200 people and an assembly hall, equipped with facilities for banquets, dances and general socializing. The theatre was used by both local talent groups and professional touring companies between the years of 1903 and 1914.

During these twelve years, a total of approximately 446 events took place in the building, including both theatre and assembly hall. For analysis of what this meant, these events have been broken down into categories. They are (1) professional productions, such as We Are King, Mummy and the Humming Bird, which were productions done by a

company on tour with only that one show; (2) repertory productions, identified by those companies which produced at Manistee not one show which was their specialty, but a number of shows; (3) amateur productions done by high schools or various organizations; (4) miscellaneous events, consisting of vaudeville shows, moving pictures, lectures, concerts, dances and basketball games.

During the first three years of operation, from 1903 through 1906, the Ramsdell presented 103 professional touring shows and nineteen miscellaneous events. However, in the last eight years, from 1907 to 1914, it presented only 208 professional touring productions and of these sixty-five were presented by repertory companies, leaving a total of 143 productions of the same caliber as they had presented in the first three years of operation. While there were only nineteen miscellaneous events in the first three years of operation, there were 103 in the last eight, indicating a great overall reversal in the use of the building. Whereas, it had originally presented the miscellaneous events only occasionally, it became the rule by 1914--when the theatre was used eighteen times in a ten month period and of these events, eight were not considered legitimate dramatic events.

It is obvious from the statistics, that the theatre was falling into disuse by 1914. One of the primary purposes of this study is to determine why this happened. However, to fully explain this point, one must first determine the primary purpose in the erecting and operating of the theatre.

There appear to be two possible reasons for building the theatre: (1) The theatre may have been conceived as a producing center--where productions could be assembled and produced before beginning a tour headed for New York. (2) It may have been designed as an aid to better community relations, improving the cultural habits of the community and raising the status of the community in the eyes of other communities.

The theatre may very well have been conceived as a producing center, as the first suggestion states, for on September 4, 1903, the date of the first production appearing on the Ramsdell stage, the management announced in the Manistee Daily News that they were considering using the theatre as a producing center,⁶⁹ which would mean that the theatre and assembly hall would be used as a center where

⁶⁹News, September 4, 1903, p. 1.

touring shows would be prepared for the New York stage. Added to this, is the fact that for six months after the opening of the theatre, Walter Burridge and Frederick Ramsdell used the theatre as a scenic artists' studio.⁷⁰ With the facilities offered, the tall stage house, the workable stage floor, the large stage of modern construction and the large assembly hall next door, this could physically have been. However, such factors as the distance of Manistee from other large cities and the comparative isolation of Manistee made this somewhat of a practical impossibility. Although the idea appears impractical, it can not objectively be ruled out, for this could be more accurately done only by those who knew Mr. Ramsdell well.

It appears more plausible that the theatre was built as an aid to the betterment of the community. This conclusion is substantiated by many events and notations.

Included in the original idea which Mr. Ramsdell had planned to present to the architect in their first meeting was a theatre seating 1,000 people with a dance hall downstairs. It will be noted, however, that the finished

⁷⁰Ibid., October 10, 1903, p. 3.

product displays a theatre seating 1,200 with a large assembly hall next door, which includes not only a large dance hall, but banquet facilities as well. Thus, without sacrificing the size or importance of the theatre a more complete social environment was achieved by adding to the original building. It was then not only a theatre, but a center where the townspeople could meet and indulge in social activities.

Additional information for concluding that the building was designed as an aid to community, is the fact that Mr. Ramsdell kept the theatre in operation, even when the theatrical syndicate was attempting to obtain the theatre for their own use.

. . . Mr. Ramsdell built the theatre and added to it the fine assembly hall; perfect in every detail. No effort was made to skimp. Nothing was too good for the people of Manistee. The theatre was made a work of art. It was equipped lavishly so that it might stand as an exponent of the latest and best in matters theatrical. It was indeed a temple erected to a noble art.

Manistee is not favorably situated in a geographic sense, so far as the theatre is concerned. Were it not for the remarkably fine equipment of the Ramsdell in the way of scenery, stage appliances and dressing rooms, Manistee would not have had the opportunity to see so many strong companies.

Today, there is a glimmer of a brighter day in theatrical affairs. Managers of the better sort are resisting the cheapening of the stage. One of the most promising movements is seen in stock and repertory companies, which visit the smaller cities and remain

for a week or longer, playing the best pieces obtainable. By a curtailment of expenses in traveling, in billing and otherwise, it is possible to put on first class shows at low prices.

Such a company is a boon to the theatre goers of such a city as Manistee. The Mack-Leone Company was one of the first examples of this class. Since then Manistee has had the Rita Harlan Company, and now the Harvey Dramatic Company. Whether Manistee shall continue to have such excellent players, or shall have any at all, rests with her own citizens.

In the largest cities in the world, there is a plea for the endowed theatre. Very few cities possess such an advantage. The experiment was tried last winter in Chicago and failed. It will soon be on trial in New York. The best students of acting appreciate so fully the value of society of the mirror held up to life by the stage, that they rank it hardly below the library and college in its influence on character building.

To all intents and purposes the Ramsdell is an endowed theatre. It was built for the people of Manistee without any assistance on their part. It is today one of the city's proudest possessions. But it cannot continue to fulfill the purposes of its virtued donor unless the people of Manistee appreciate the gift that they are asked to receive. Such patronage as was afforded Miss Rita Harlan, a talented and conscientious artist, will soon result in depriving Manistee of its grand advantages offered by its theatre.

But one point remained of which the critic could speak. And the critic said forthwith that such a theatre could never fulfill the hopes of its founder because of the condition of the theatrical business, which was rapidly becoming commercialized and falling into the hands of a gigantic trust. To make the Ramsdell succeed, these critics said, it would have to be leased to an agent of the theatrical syndicate, and then what would become of it? The critic answered his own query. He said that it would be managed so as to make the most money, regardless of all else. Plays would be produced that would reflect no credit on the house. No effort would be made to make it Manistee's playhouse. It would simply become the conscienceless money producer for a trust. And right here Mr. Ramsdell asserted himself. Better failure in a laudable attempt

to treat the drama as an art, than success in pandering to the lowest in human nature.

Mr. Ramsdell retained control. Month after month since the opening night efforts have been made by the theatrical syndicate to secure this house. Failing this threats have been carried out to the best of the syndicates ability. Every possible opposition has been exerted to embarrass the Ramsdell in securing good attractions.

This is not hot air. It is the sober truth, told today publicly for the first time, and told without the knowledge of those most concerned. This article will be a greater surprise to Mr. T. J. Ramsdell, owner, and Mr. Robert Ramsdell, Manager, than to any of its other readers.

In spite of these real difficulties the Ramsdell Theatre has been a great success in every respect except in paying its way. It has been managed most conservatively but with the fixed resolve not to let the interests of its patrons suffer through too great economy⁷¹

Thus, if the Ramsdell Theatre not only offered a space for socializing, but attempted, as the article states, "to play the best pieces obtainable" even if it lost money, it had the cultural interests of the community at heart.

The Ramsdell Theatre may have been conceived with the purpose of using it as a producing center, but, although no recorded mention is made of this happening, it still served the second purpose of cultural enlightenment for the community.

Whatever the basic purpose of the Ramsdell Theatre, it did not fulfill even the basic purpose of presenting

⁷¹Ibid., January 10, 1907, p. 2.

legitimate dramatic events for many years--as noted by the limited number of productions presented in 1914. There are two possible reasons for this decline; one of them is economic and the other concerns both economic and cultural factors.

The first reason offered for this decline is the difficulty the management was having with the theatrical syndicate, beginning in 1903. As noted earlier the syndicate made it very difficult for the Ramsdell management to procure entertainment of high quality. This is probably the most easily substantiated theory, for the second theory deals with the economic and cultural background of Manistee which is explained in some detail in Chapter I.

The Ramsdell was a large theatre, seating 1,200 patrons. In order to make it a profitable venture to secure companies of high caliber, most of these seats had to be filled. As will be noted later, this was often difficult to accomplish. Before this is explained, however, consider the cost of the companies and the prices of the seats in the theatre.

The Chinese Honeymoon was presented at the Ramsdell at a cost of \$2,500.00.⁷² Although rumor has it that seats

⁷²Ibid., September 5, 1903, p. 1.

for this production cost \$100.00, this is a slight exaggeration for the actual ticket prices were: twenty-five dollars for the main floor, fifteen dollars for center section first balcony seats, ten dollars for the second balcony and \$150.00 for a complete box.⁷³ Since the theatre was filled for this production it is safe to say that the theatre probably absorbed no loss. However, the price of seats did not always stay this high. By September 8, 1903, four days after the opening production, ticket prices for We Are King were: twenty-five cents, thirty-five cents, fifty cents, one dollar, one dollar and fifty cents and one dollar and seventy-five cents.⁷⁴ These prices seem to be more representative of ticket prices from that time on; although, at times the most expensive seat was thirty cents in 1906. If, at these prices, all of the seats were sold the management would probably have been able to present fairly high caliber productions; however, the Manistee Daily News made frequent mention, as on January 10, 1907, of the small audiences which were common at the Ramsdell. If the prices were as low as previously mentioned, and the price of The Chinese Honeymoon can be

⁷³Ibid., August 27, 1903, p. 2.

⁷⁴Ibid., August 8, 1903, p. 3.

considered at all representative of high caliber shows during this era, the Ramsdell Theatre could hardly have been expected to continue presenting high caliber entertainment.

This leaves one question unanswered though. Why were the audiences so small at the Ramsdell? To answer this involves a cultural analysis of Manistee.

Although there were reportedly seventeen millionaires in the immediate vicinity of Manistee, there were probably not 1,200 wealthy people in the area. The number 1,200 is employed here because if the theatre was to be filled only one time by wealthy people, this is the number which would have been needed. Why were the middle income and lower income people left out? As mentioned in Chapter I, there were very few middle-income people in Manistee, or anywhere in the United States, for that matter in the early 1900's. Of the middle-income people living in and about Manistee, probably a large majority of them thought of the theatre as being somewhat sinful. Thus, a very small minority of the audience would be composed of middle-income people.

Probably the largest number of people residing in Manistee were from the lower-income bracket. These people were also excluded from the theoretical audience. Why?

After one has excluded those people from this bracket who could not speak English in the early 1900's, very few are left. Of the few remaining, not many of them could be depended upon to spend fifty cents to one dollar on a theatre ticket if they earned only thirty or forty dollars a week, as did the employees of the Louis Sands Mill.⁷⁵

This would leave very few from the lower income bracket who would venture away from the lower class and foreign speaking theatres in town up to the higher class, English speaking theatre on the "Hill" or wealthy section of town.

In effect, there was no audience for the theatre.

There were not enough people from the high income bracket who would attend the theatre frequently enough to make it an economically sound venture; thus, the caliber and number of productions decreased. When the management offered high class entertainment, they had to be assured of enough people of both high and low income brackets attending to make it profitable. When this did not happen, the alternative was to offer miscellaneous events such as vaudeville shows and other such theatrical endeavors. If one accepts the theoretical audience presented, this would not increase patronage either for the wealthy citizens, who could afford

⁷⁵Legacy, p. 32.

better, could travel to Milwaukee or Chicago for high class entertainment, while the lower income patrons would probably feel more at home patronizing the theatres near the river which catered to them. This would have left the Ramsdell with only a casual audience of each instead of a regular audience.

The Ramsdell was a well constructed theatre, offering the best in equipment, but it did not meet the needs of the majority of the theatre-going public in Manistee at the turn of the century.

What of the Ramsdell's relationship to the more general view of early twentieth century theatre?

This question contains within itself three obvious questions: (1) What type of shows were produced, (2) What kind of building and equipment was offered, (3) What was the seeming philosophy of the management?

The answer to the first question first brings to mind such shows as The Mummy and the Humming Bird, The Chinese Honeymoon, and others which would fall into the popular category. On second notice, however, there were actually few of these shows presented in the twelve year span under study. There were, however, a number of such shows as A Hidden Crime, A Loyal Friend, The Jail Bird and other

less popular shows. This does not mean, however, that the Ramsdell did not present these plays in the popular manner, which was at this time in the majority of the United States realistic or spectacular settings. The Manistee Daily News often stressed that a "real sawmill scene" would be portrayed, or a "real earthquake" would occur on stage. This appears to have been in keeping with the general trends of American staging during the early years of the twentieth century.

It will also be noted that in keeping with the general trend of American theatre the Ramsdell presented a number of vaudeville shows, going so far, in fact, as to present vaudeville acts between the scenes of the larger, more serious, production of the evening.

Insofar as modern facilities were concerned, the Ramsdell was often noted for being among the most modern and adaptable theatres. This is proven further by the staging which was described to have been executed on the stage.

From the production standpoint, the Ramsdell was most likely well abreast of other twentieth century theatres. The only great distinction which seems apparent appears in the philosophy of management of the building.

As previously described, the Ramsdell was a social

center, devoted not only to producing excellent productions but to providing a geographical location and atmosphere for better social and cultural education. Presently it is not the concern of this study to determine whether or not that goal was reached; however, it is evident that this goal was there. It was this goal of social and cultural betterment that made the Ramsdell Theatre different when attempting to relate it to the scope of twentieth century theatre. Unlike many of the other theatres which were employed as real estate holdings, or in other words, a geographical location which was worth money because people were willing to pay to be provided with a seat in that location. This is, in essence, what many of the twentieth century theatres were, simply buildings which would present whatever would draw the largest number of paying customers to their box office. This was not what the Ramsdell was. By devoting itself as a social center it by-passed this in favor of quality. This is evidenced in the January 10, 1907, article in the Manistee Daily News which states that Mr. Ramsdell had been holding out against the theatrical syndicates since 1903 in hopes that he could present shows which would benefit the cultural education of the town rather than his pocketbook.

It is in the philosophy of management where the largest discrepancy is found between the trends in early twentieth century theatre and the Ramsdell Theatre.

Taking into consideration the growth of the movie industry by 1914, the money-making philosophy of the large theatrical syndicates, the lack of audience and the resistance of the Ramsdell management to these trends, it is understandable that within twelve years after it opened the Ramsdell Theatre's facilities fell into almost complete disuse as facilities for legitimate dramatic use.

APPENDIX

1903	No.
Professional Productions	18
Repertory Companies Appearing	0
Stock Company Productions	0
Amateur Productions	0
Miscellaneous Events	<u>2</u>
Total	20

1904	
Professional Productions	56
Stock Company Productions	0
Repertory Companies Appearing	0
Amateur Productions	0
Miscellaneous Events	<u>2</u>
Total	58

1905	
Professional Productions	31
Repertory Company Productions	0
Repertory Companies Appearing	0
Amateur Productions	0
Miscellaneous Events	<u>5</u>
Total	36

1906	
Professional Productions	25
Repertory Company Productions	0
Repertory Companies Appearing	0
Amateur Productions	1
Miscellaneous Events	<u>10</u>
Total	36

APPENDIX I (cont.)

1907	No.
Professional Productions	23
Repertory Company Productions	14
Repertory Companies Appearing	0
Amateur Productions	0
Miscellaneous Events	<u>6</u>
Total	44
1908	
Professional Productions	30
Repertory Company Productions	16
Repertory Companies Appearing	5
Amateur Productions	0
Miscellaneous Events	<u>12</u>
Total	48
1909	
Professional Productions	9
Repertory Productions	4
Repertory Companies Appearing	2
Amateur Productions	1
Miscellaneous Events	<u>14</u>
Total	28
1910	
Professional Productions	29
Repertory Productions	18
Repertory Companies Appearing	0
Amateur Plays	0
Miscellaneous Events	<u>10</u>
Total	57

APPENDIX I (cont.)

1911	No.
Professional Productions	13
Repertory Productions	0
Repertory Companies Appearing	0
Amateur Productions	1
Miscellaneous Events	<u>27</u>
Total	41
1912	
Professional Productions	13
Repertory Productions	0
Repertory Companies Appearing	0
Amateur Productions	0
Miscellaneous Events	<u>18</u>
Total	31
1913	
Professional Productions	12
Repertory Productions	8
Repertory Companies Appearing	1
Miscellaneous Events	8
Amateur Productions	<u>1</u>
Total	29
1914	
Professional Productions	4
Repertory Productions	5
Repertory Companies Appearing	2
Amateur Productions	1
Miscellaneous Events	<u>8</u>
Total	18

APPENDIX B

Number of Professional Productions Before 1907 . .	130
Number of Miscellaneous Events Before 1907	<u>19</u>
Total	149
Number of Professional Productions Between 1907-1914	143
Number of Repertory Productions Between 1907- 1914	<u>65</u>
Total	208
Number of Miscellaneous Events Between 1907-1914	103

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