THE OXFORD OPERA HOUSE, OXFORD, MICHIGAN, IN ITS "HOUR": 1891--1914

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ABSTRACT

THE OXFORD OPERA HOUSE, OXFORD, MICHIGAN,
IN ITS "HOUR": 1891-1914

by Karen Elizabeth Bush

By focusing on one small, midwestern opera house, this thesis is an attempt to shed one shaft of light on the entire phenomenon of American opera house construction in the years between the War Between the States and the first World War. Those years most important to the Oxford Opera House, that is: 1891-1914, are stressed, but background material and subsequent events are summarized in appropriate chapters.

In an introduction, the reader is oriented to the approach used in the entire thesis, which then consists of six chapters and an epilogue.

Chapter one is concerned with the "golden age of the road," and with all American opera house construction and the touring companies which served the opera house. Chapter two moves away from the general to the particular, and talks of Oxford, Michigan before the coming of the opera house. Chapter three, with two subdivisions, actually builds the opera house -- first via a discussion of the process of construction, and then through an examination of the physical characteristics of the Oxford Opera House.

Chapter four is a chronology, an account of production data from 1891 to 1914. It is a long chapter, subdivided into four sections according to time. Chapter five is precisely what its title suggests. "Medicine, Minstrels, and Travelogues" were what brought the greatest degree of pleasure to Oxford audiences, and, as such, deserve individual attention. Chapter six has a dual purpose: it must, regretfully, admit to the close of an era, but it also introduces a new phenomenon, the motion picture, which came to occupy almost precisely the position in the world of American theatre which had once been held by the opera house.

And, in an epilogue, the Oxford Opera House is carried down to the present day. Hopefully, it is seen not merely as it stands there now, but as it stands in tangible evidence of three fourths of a century of theatrical tradition.

Further, to illuminate the discussion, spread throughout the text there are a frontspiece and thirteen illustration plates, the majority of the latter of which are reproductions of photographs taken of the Oxford Opera House during the varied years of its "career."

OXFORD OPERA HOUSE

Oxford, Mich.

THE OXFORD OPERA HOUSE, OXFORD, MICHIGAN, IN ITS "HOUR": 1891--1914

By

Karen Elizabeth Bush

A THESIS

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DEDICATION

To those many wonderful people on two sides of the Atlantic Ocean who have been generous enough to be my friends -- who may have been worlds away from direct contribution to this thesis, but who have done much to make the world a bearable place in which to live and work.

-- and an especial dedication to

Devon's Streak.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the extraordinary interest and co-operation of Editor James Sherman and the staff of The Oxford Leader, or without the equally willing aid of the residents of the village of Oxford, Michigan, the compilation of this thesis would in no way have been possible. I have grown to love the whole village as if it were my own, and to the village itself I extend deepest gratitude.

And, in a longer view of things, neither would this thesis have been possible, had not my parents preserved and maintained for me the kind of home that made my childhood much more closely related to the nineteenth then to the twentieth century. Without the uncanny sensation that the standards, the mores which Oxford audiences brought to their Opera House were my own, I should have had considerable more difficulty in analysis and evaluation of materials.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATION

INTRODUCTION

There is in Oxford, Michigan, a small, "onion-top" turreted building that once was an opera house. Its days of relative glory have been forgotten in the course of time. It is the intent of this thesis to remember the Oxford Opera House as it was in its prime--to recall the players that once trod its boards, to rebuild it on paper as it once appeared. This will be an account of its conception, birth, life, and a regretful admission of its demise.

The Oxford Opera House exists today and functions, as it has since 1934, exclusively as a theatre for the exhibition of motion pictures. The actual life-span of the building encompasses, to date, seventy-five years. Yet, to accomplish the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen to limit discussion to those years when "opera house" correctly referred to a large percentage of the American theatre, using dates significant in the history of this particular opera house to further define this limitation. Thus the basic temporal framework covers that time from 1891, when the theatre was built, to 1914, when it had seen the installation of its first permanent motion picture screen.

The Oxford Opera House hosted dances, political meetings, school exhibitions, and graduation ceremonies.

Mention of all of these is important to a personal portrait of the opera house, but greater emphasis will be placed on its more theatrical functions.

Finally, it is most emphatically true that the entire question of the opera house phenomenon in Victorian America deserves far more serious and extensive examination than it has received to date. But for the purposes of this thesis, the Oxford Opera House is asked to sit for an individual portrait, not as part of the study of a family group. It is hoped that this focus on one opera house will serve to shed a measure of light on all theatres of its genre.

In an attempt to justify the selection of the Oxford Opera House as the central topic for study in a Master's Thesis, it is well to be aware that, in the past six or eight years, there has been a certain revival of interest in nineteenth-century theatre. Here at Michigan State University, this has been well illustrated by a small flurry of opera house research projects, most notably Larry Sexton's study of the Ramsdell Theatre at Manistee (M. A., 1963). Yet, each playhouse studied supplies information toward but a facet of the whole. An examination of the Oxford Opera House, done from a scholar's perspective, serves to further the completion of an overall portrait of Michigan and American theatre as it was in late Victorian and Edwardian days.

Opera houses, as will be indicated, could and can be found in cities of 50,000 and villages of 500 inhabitants. The Oxford Opera House, in its prime, from the student's standpoint enjoyed the enviable position of having both the necessary provinciality to be more opera house than theatre, and being endowed with enough local wealth to possess more than just a touch of the elegance which the term "opera house" implies. The fact that the village was a railroad center[1] brought in many traveling companies "on the cars" that would have bypassed the average small community.

One of the greater present-day charms of the Oxford Opera House is its obscurity. Oxford is a pleasantly sleepy community, with a goodly allotment of lovely, old houses. Oxford has the Michigan Pioneer Horse Show, and American Aggregates Corporation, and a lovly new high school--and a good deal of peace.

Its opera house, the local cinema, rests in comparative oblivion. Preliminary investigation showed that the Detroit News' last acknowledgment of its existence was in a squib on the comic page, March 1, 1934. A (disputedly) frozen fire hydrant had allowed a fire to do $3,000 worth of damage to what was still being called "the Oxford Opera House"--much to the chagrin of someone, for the adjoining building was and is the fire hall.

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[1]The Oxford Leader, Feburary 27, 1957.

An examination of Franklin Knower's "Graduate Theses: An Index of Graduate Work in Speech" proved that the nearest a thesis-writing theatre historian had gotten to Oxford was an examination of the Bonstelle Theatre in Detroit. The Michigan Historical Association produced a researcher guaranteed to have some answer to my opera-house-query. Dr. May's "answer" was the rather subdued acknowledgment that he really didn't know they had one there. It could be that a major function of this thesis will be to put "my" opera house on the map.

In the course of my search for source material, the Oxford Leader (the local weekly newspaper) proved to be a gold mine of playbills and reviews. Since 1898, they have kept everything, and my only problems lay in coping with the accumulation of dust and the cold in the unheated second story of the Leader office.

Ray Forman, the present owner of the opera house building, supplied me with blueprints and the abstract of title for the property. Interviews with a dozen of Oxford's octogenarians and nonogenarians were as enjoyable as they were elucidating, and Mrs. Clark Stoddard, acknowledged local historian, was extremely helpful.

The building, as it stands today, gives testimony to its appearance in earlier years.

This is a primarily historical attempt, translating primary sources into an historian's profile of the life

span of an opera house. Yet, because there is something so very human about an old theatre, this will not be a highly clinical survey. The more humanity I can interpolate into the picture of the Oxford Opera House, the happier I will be. The organization and orientation of chapters necessarily echoes this sentiment.

In brief, this thesis consists of an introduction, six chapters, and an epilogue. Chapter I is concerned with what has been termed "the golden age of the road,"[1] and with discussion of all American opera house construction. Chapter II moves away from the general to the particular, and talks of Oxford, Michigan before the coming of the opera house. Chapter III builds the Oxford Opera House, via a discussion of (a) its actual construction; (b) its physical characteristics. Chapter IV is a chronology of production data from 1891 to 1914. It is a long chapter, subdivided according to year. Since medicine shows, minstrel shows, and travelogues (slide shows and motion pictures) were what elicited the greatest comment in Oxford, Chapter V gives these a measure of individual attention. Chapter VI has a dual purpose: it must admit to the close of an era, but it also introduces a new phenomenon, the motion picture, which came to occupy

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[1]Lloyd Morris, Curtain Time: The Story of the American Theater (New York: Random House, 1953), pp. 239-271.

almost precisely the position in the world of American theatre which had once been held by the opera house.

And, in an epilogue, the Oxford Opera House is traced to the present day. Hopefully, it is seen not merely as it stands there now, but as it stands in tangible evidence of three-fourths of a century of theatrical tradition.

CHAPTER I

ROGUES AND VAGABONDS AND GILT-EDGED STAGES ON WHICH TO PLAY

That period in the history of the American stage between the years 1870 and 1914 (that is to say, between post-Civil War Reconstruction and the onset of World War I) is a tale of two separate but complementary and interdependent phenomena. Suddenly, as spontaneously as Topsy, there grew in the towns and villages of America's hinterland, an astounding number of tiny theatres.[1] Simultaneously, the traveling companies, whose members played out their lives on the infinitesimal stages, grew in like proportion.

That the development of the opera house tradition waited for the close of the War Between the States is fairly easily explained. New towns, growing communities on the moving line of the frontier, were by nature impoverished. Only in rare cases was there any kind of financial endowment to back the construction of their first public buildings. With both labor and capital at a premium, it was natural to devote first effort to those

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[1]Frederick Dunbar Willis, "The Opera House as a Social Institution in Michigan," Michigan History Magazine, XXVI (October--December, 1943), p. 662.

structures deemed absolutely necessary to the life of the community. They built town halls, schools, churches. They did not waste effort on theatres[1]--which were morally suspect anyway.

Righteous opposition to the stage had made it extremely difficult for theatre to establish itself in the new world. After nearly two centuries of colonization, gentle folk still were more willing to attend an "opera house" (with the dignity and prestige inherent in the name), than they were willing to patronize a "theatre"--an institution which remained at best questionable.[2] And, for the duration of the opera house era, this kind of barrier was never completely eradicated. Recalling a childhood that saw Michigan in the years just prior to World War I--and for opera houses this is late in the day--Frederick Dunbar Willis writes with remembered awe:

> I regarded the local Opera House and the things that went on there as slightly devilish. To observe one of the local ministers enter the hall with his wife on his arm and to behold another introducing a lecturer on the lyceum course from the stage, produced a distinct shock.[3]

A combination of factors spread the vogue of opera house construction rapidly in the final thirty years of the nineteenth century. The tremendous growth of railroading, the subsequent development of new commercial

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid., p. 663. [3] Ibid., p. 662.

centers,[1] improvements in communication, all aided the feasibility of a theatrical network, fed by the talents of touring companies. As Great Britain had exported its talent to the provinces, New York sent companies into the West.

Dazzled by the image of theatre in the big town, smaller communities vied with each other in the construction of lesser shrines to the dramatic muse.[2] The standard set by urban wealth was impossibly high. Niblo's Theatre, as rebuilt in New York in 1872, boasted the following dimensions:

> [The stage was] 75 feet in width, 62 feet in depth, 103 feet in height, from gridiron to sub-cellar . . . . There [were], properly speaking, seven grooves or entrances, all of which [were] utilized, though the scenery itself [was] only set to the fifth groove. . . . It [was] particularly rich in traps. Of these contrivances, the ordinary theatrical average [was] five, but Niblo's boast [ed] fifteen. There [were] also five working "bridges" connected with the stage. . . . The machinery of the stage floor [was] technically divided into thirty-two sections--'cuts,' as they are called.[3]

And, in 1883, Walter Emden suggested certain requisite minimum proportions for the stage house.

> The height of the proscenium from the stage should be more than the width of the opening, which I have taken at thirty feet, say about thirty-five in height. . . . With regard to the stage, the width

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[1]Morris, op. cit., p. 240.

[2]Willis, op. cit., p. 663.

[3]A. Nicholas Vardac, Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 2.

> of the site being sixty-three feet, and the opening of the proscenium thirty feet, there would be on either side, exclusive of walls, a space of about fifteen feet . . . where the space is less, it will be found that the difficulty of working scenery is proportionately increased.[1]

The tendency in the opera house was to compromise a bit. As a point of fact, in smaller towns the opera house generally occupied the second floor of a store building. Housed therein would be a stage, of at least twelve feet in width, and the very minimum essential equipment for presenting plays.[2] Because of the limitations presented by these provincial stages, road shows often travelled only with their drops, using them in outlandish combination with whatever wings and borders were available at hand.[3] At that, such a problem was minor by comparison to some. The revered Edwin Booth was once booked into an extremely new opera house, to find it was literally being built over his head. He wrote home to his daughter, and thus provided documentation of one aspect of the "charm" of provincial theatre.

(Kansas City, October 27, 1887)

> I told you in my last that the theatre was roofless, and otherwise unfit for use. It was little better Tuesday night. At nine o'clock at night there were fifty workmen removing lumber, driving nails, and doing all sorts of work, amid a perfect whirlwind of noise, and freezing blasts of wind. At ten o'clock a half-scene and a red sheet were drawn aside, and

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[1] Ibid., p. 3.

[2] F. Clever Bald, Michigan in Four Centuries (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1954), p. 311.

[3] Vardac, op. cit., p. 5.

> the play (Othello) began, to about seventy-five people in hats, overcoats, and heavy fur wraps, most of whom left as the play progressed, unable to endure the cold. Not a door was in its place, and the sky was in full view above the auditorium and part of the stage. We could use but one scene, an interior, and that we used throughout the entire play, out doors and in. It was a freezing performance.
>
> Next day (yesterday) we tried "Caesar" for a matinee. This was given to make up for the loss of Monday night. One scene (a street) served for the Capitol, Brutus' tent, the Forum, and the fields of Philippi--about sixteen cold boys and girls in front. Last night we had some stoves, a tarpaulin cover for a roof, several scenes, and played Hamlet to about two hundred people.
>
> The house should not have been opened for three months, but the wealthy _____ had vowed it should open this week with Booth and Barrett, and having paid us a large certainty, and sold a great many tickets at five dollars per head, the promise was kept with only the delay of one night.[1]

It is small wonder that better theatres could command better actors to appear, and the remotest of hamlets, had it a good stage house and a railroad to provide access, stood a chance to sometime "open with Booth and Barrett"--and that very factor is part of the magic conjured up by the mention of "an opera house."

Booth's tale of woe could have had a Michigan setting as easily as one in Kansas and Missouri. French and English domination in its early days added a measure of color and variety to Detroit's early theatrical development. There were traveling plays in the city as

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[1]Edwina Booth Grossmann, Edwin Booth: Recollections by his Daughter and Letters to Her and to His Friends (New York: The Century Co., 1894), pp. 83-84.

early as 1812, and in 1816 a theatre of sorts was fitted up in the second story of a large brick warehouse at the foot of what is now Wayne Street.[1] By the 1830's, the Free Press reported that a theatre-going public could be assured of "sterling comedy, showy melodrama, gorgeous spectacle, broad farce, and delightful vaudeville and drama" in rapid succession.[2]

The larger cities, in Michigan as elsewhere, formed the avant garde of opera house construction. The Detroit Opera House was built in 1869; Grand Rapids had an opera house in 1859--though the famous Powers Opera House, seating 1600 and unquestionably the best equipped theatre in western Michigan, was not completed until 1873. Lansing had its Bucks Opera House in 1872. Beginning in the seventies, nearly every community in Michigan had or planned to have a building or a hall in which plays could be held.[3,4] Those who remained opposed to the theatrical element were hardly excluded from patronizing the growing institution. If the opera house was situated above a shop or bank, proximity was difficult to avoid, and, in any case, opera houses hosted educational and religious lectures, concerts, school exhibitions and commencements,

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[1]Frederick Dunbar Willis, Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 296.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid., pp. 727-728.

[4]Bald, op. cit., p. 311.

and numerous other social activities of quite suitable dignity.[1]

The years from 1890 to 1914 were the heyday of touring companies in Michigan.[2] Detroit was large enough and important enough to attract the famous actors and actresses of the day: there were names as illustrious as Helena Modjeska, Mary Anderson, E. H. Sothern, Joe Jefferson, and Edwin Booth.[3] The remainder of the state hoped Booth might be persuaded to "drop in," as it were, and contented itself with what New York chose to export. In the meantime, this provincial dependency on New York led managers to realize that there could be more profit made on the road than in New York itself.[4] The enterprise of Messrs. Nixon, Zimmerman, Frohman, Hayman, Klaw, and Erlanger resulted in a Syndicate that owned or effectively controlled theatres in all parts of the United States, and with equal efficacy moderated the activity of booking agencies which supplied attractions to these and many other houses.[5] By 1900, over five hundred "combination companies" were on the road,[6] and this wealth

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Willis, "The Opera House . . . ," op. cit., p. 671.

[3] Bald, op. cit., pp. 311-312.

[4] Morris, op. cit., p. 240.

[5] Barnard Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A.: 1668-1957 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959), pp. 256-257.

[6] Ibid., p. 278.

of traveling talent brought theatre with a magic identification with "New York" to opera houses readied from Atlantic to Pacific coast.

Structurally and organizationally tailored to fit community needs, exploited by New York, enjoyed by both rural and urban patronage, the opera house worked itself into the fabric of America's past as inextricably (according to one author) as the horse-hair sofa.[1]

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[1]Willis, "The Opera House . . . ," loc. cit.

CHAPTER II

OXFORD, MICHIGAN--NÉE OXFORD CORNERS

The bulk of Michigan's land was wilderness, swamp and "oak openings" and pine forest, when Elbridge G. Deming looked about him at the lands north of Detroit. With a little clearing, it looked to be good farm land--at least as good as he'd left behind him in the East, if not quite equal to the black river-bottom land already claimed by French Huguenots on the Canadian side. It was new land, too. No one had yet put down roots. For twenty miles to the south, there was nothing more permanent than an occasional trapper. To the east and west and north, his neighbors were Indians, Huron and Pottawatami and Chippewa, respectively. In 1823, just eleven years after the War of 1812, Mr. Deming made a formal entry of Public Land.[1]

It was another nine years, 1832, before Elbridge could induce his family to share his enthusiasm for a raw, unsettled land. The tract was perilously close to Canadian shores, in days when the British presented an

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[1] The Oxford Leader (Oxford, Michigan), Seventy-fifth Anniversary Issue, February 27, 1957 [Hereafter referred to as Leader].

active military threat and Indians were easily bought and influenced. But, by 1830, surrounding settlement took on a more distinctly American character. In the two decades after the War of 1812, the French dissolved into the Canadian wilderness where furs were still plentiful and the Indians unspoiled by contact with unscrupulous white men. The English withdrew to their side of the river and offered no more than a titillating presence to the romantically apprehensive. Homesteaders moved perilously or pleasantly, depending on the point of view, close to the Deming land. So suddenly that he had not time to prepare a cabin for them, Elbridge's family consented to come. In 1832, Elbridge Deming, family, household goods, lock, stock, and barrel, settled in what was to become Oxford Township. Elbridge built a log house, and began to clear his land.[1]

In 1824, just a year after Elbridge had first given the land his approbation, John Rossman, Fite Rossman, John Rossman, Fite Rossman, John Williams, John Shippey, and Samuel Axford arrived at the same opinion.[2] And, like their predecessor, these men, for varying reasons, found it advisable to allow several years' grace before actually settling on their chosen ground. The Rossman brothers' land lay flat, just north of a range of gently rolling hills, and encircled by a handful of small lakes. It was the property that would eventually become the village

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid.

center, but for the time being it offered a different economic promise. John tarried in the east until 1835, but in 1833 brother Fite brought civilization to Oxford Township--and opened his log cabin as a saloon.[1] Perhaps the prospect of lucrative business loomed brighter than mere farming. In any case, on his arrival John lost no time in following suit;[2] nor did William Powell, when he arrived at "Oxford Corners" in 1837. With two taverns there before him, and the village already named for one of its early settlers (Sam Axford would have preferred "Axford Corners," but he allowed the compromise--perhaps because he anticipated founding a dynasty that would dominate most of northeastern Oakland County for a hundred and fifty years),[3] Mr. Powell felt constrained to do something special, and so he built a frame saloon.[4]

Powell's saloon, in time, became known as the Stanton House[5] and gave way only to the very posh Oakland Hotel, but he is better remembered here for fathering two sons and leaving them heir to sufficient fortune that Joseph Powell, in his turn, could finance the construction of--not a tavern--an opera house. However, more of that is to follow later.

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[1]Oxford Library MSS, Alice Cadogan's Scrapbook.

[2]Leader, loc. cit. [3]Ibid. [4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

Oxford Corners was one of a dozen villages that sprung up within and around that handful of lakes that had arrested the attention of the earliest settlers. Thomas, Oakwood, Orion, Dryden, Goodison, Stony Creek, Rochester, stretched in an irregular line of mid-Victorian charm. At Goodison, a dam and a mill-race supplied Orion with an extra lake, and Lake Orion began to attract cottagers, in the tradition of White Springs and Michigan's own Bay View. Too far from the lakes to function as a resort, Oxford Corners turned mildly to industry. In 1838, it had a blacksmith. By 1868 it had acquired a wagonmaker, a foundry, a planing mill, a gristmill, a carriage factory, and a furniture and cabinet shop.[1] In 1873, Oxford Corners found itself the midpoint on the thoroughfare of the Detroit and Bay City railroad.[2] On January 13, 1876 Oxford was incorporated as a village, the original charter including just one square mile.[3] There was now, too, the Oxford Agricultural Works, the Oxford Marble Works, still another carriage manufactory, the Oxford Vinegar Factory (which was followed immediately by the Oxford Brewery, William Finden, proprietor), the Oxford Steam Planing Mill, and assorted individual new settlers.[4] Many of these early industries were quickly

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[1]Thaddeus D. Seeley, History of Oakland County, Michigan: A Narrative Account of its Historical Progress, its People, and its Principal Interests (2 vols.: New York: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1912), Vol. I, pp. 425-426.

[2]Leader, loc. cit. [3]Seeley, op. cit., II, 426.

[4]Ibid.

lost to fire, but enough remained to insure that Oxford would remain highly conscious of itself as a community, in a way that restricting the settlement to farmers on the outlying land would have effectively prevented.

With considerable civic pride, in 1895, Oxford opened its Municipal Electric Plant in conjunction with the Waterworks.[1] Once the night became dark enough that the whole village switched its lights on, the Electric Plant could not cope with the resulting load. There were times hardly a glimmer could be coaxed from the lights; yet at twilight they burned brightly enough,[2] and Oxford had the distinction of having gone almost directly from kerosene and oil lamps to electricity, without the intervening hazards imposed by gasoline.[3]

By 1891, Oxford had all the appurtenances of a thriving community, or nearly all. There was a school. There was a full complement of protestant churches (though the Methodists and the Baptists wielded by far the lion's share of power). There were several papers, of which the

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[1]Interview with Mrs. Clark Stoddard, lifelong Oxford resident and daughter of local baseball hero, Burdette Hagerman, March 24, 1966.

[2]Interviews with "Stub" Robinson, barber, local historian, and lifelong Oxford resident, March 19 and 21, 1966.

[3]Interview with Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols, lifelong Oxford residents, March 19, 1966.

PLATE I

OLD OXFORD

Figure 1.--The oldest house in Oxford, now the Christian Slayton Public Library.

Figure 2.--The Tunstead Hardware, "Since 1862."

Figure 3.--The Oakland House, abandoned, now being renovated.

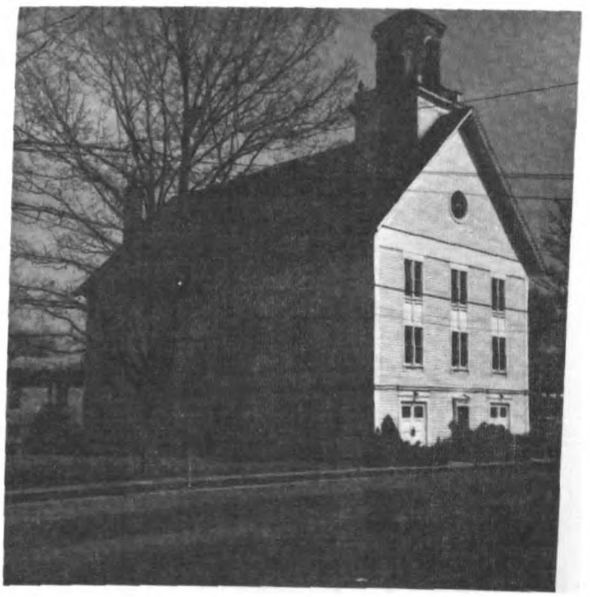

Figure 4.--The Oxford M. E. Church (Methodist).

Oxford Globe was the most prosperous.[1] The three rather nice hotels (the Commercial House, the Oakland House, and the Oxford Exchange) had, for a time, been rivaled by a fourth, the extremely elaborate Commercial Hotel (on whose porch, one fateful evening, a pot-bellied stove set out for cleaning was shot full of holes by a near-sighted night watchman).[2]

The Commercial Hotel lot had stood empty since the 'eighties. Lots on Washington Street were disturbingly good business property to be left vacant, but there lay an empty lot, smugly aloof from its neighbors. On the south, the fire hall reached northward in vain toward a ramshackle frame store occupied by a "shyster lawyer with his office on the ground floor and two women upstairs."[3] The space between was both irritating and ingratiating, like a gap-toothed smile. In 1891, Joseph Powell, elder son of a tavern-keeper and now risen to a seat in Probate Court, made arrangements to fill the gap with the one necessary public building which Oxford did not yet possess:[4] an Opera House.

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[1]Interviews with Lew Haddrill, aged 91, retired haberdasher and Oxford resident since 1888, January 30, and March 18, 1966.

[2]Mrs. Clark Stoddard, Idem.

[3]Interview with Herbert Rahm, aged 78, electrician and manager of Oxford Opera House 1913-1927, February 13, 1966.

[4]Leader, loc. cit.

CHAPTER III

CURTAIN UP! THE CONSTRUCTION AND PHYSICAL PARTICULARS OF THE OXFORD OPERA HOUSE

Like another Cadogan girl a hundred years before her, Alice Cadogan owed her station in life to the kindness of a gentleman benefactor. Alice was never formally adopted by Henry Vinton, but from the day she came to the Vinton home in 1876, until old Mr. Vinton died in 1923, she was as much a part of the household as if she'd been born there.[1]

The pert, seventeen-year-old miss was hardly acquainted with the grosser talents that carried Emma to fame, but she and Emma did have a common enthusiasm. Emma Cadogan horrified Greville and amused "Sir 'arry" Featherstonaugh with her penchant for performing in Vauxhall Gardens. Alice, too, liked the gaity of the theatre. The modern Miss Cadogan was no exhibitionist, but she was a doer, a manager, a wildly enthusiastic worker. Fourteen years didn't lessen her zest for living. Nothing could have been more logical that, when Judge Joseph Powell offered to finance the construction of an opera house,

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[1]Oxford Library MSS, op. cit.

Alice Cadogan's enthusiastic offers to help with the work became the primary reason that Henry Vinton, nearing sixty, was willing to be its first manager.[1]

In 1884, Henry and his wife Ruth had purchased, for $1,000.00, the old Commercial Hotel lot on the east side of Washington Street.[2] The sale was executed in New Hampshire, and the remote nature of Michigan's "Village of Oxford," may have been one reason Henry took seven years to determine what he wanted to do with his property. On August 10, 1891, Henry made up his mind. That day, at a voluntary loss of $500.00, he sold his property to Joseph C. Powell.[3] The following month, Judge Powell completed the transaction by providing in a will (dated September 23, 1891) that the opera house property, as Henry's lot was now officially termed, was willed to two nephews, Frank and C. B. Powell, with the stipulation "that Henry Vinton is to run said Opera House for one year, with the privilege of three years, for the sum of $300.00 annually."[4]

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[1]Lew Haddrill, Idem.

[2]Abstract of Title for the "Opera House Property" located on the East 1/2 and West 1/2 of North-West 1/4 of Section 27, Town 5 North, Range 10 East, the Village of Oxford, Michigan (Presently in the possession of Ray Forman, of that town), entry 16. [Hereafter referred to as "Abstract."]

[3]Ibid., entry 17.

[4]Ibid., entry 19.

It was just about Decoration Day, 1892, before there was sufficient cessation of spring rains for the ground to settle and construction to begin.[1] A work force of five men assembled. There were two brickmasons, Riley Goodwin and Corey VanWagoner, a mortar-mixer named George Torrey, and Charlie Wagget to tote water and an occasional load of bricks. The bulk of the bricks were loaded at one time or another in a hod carried by seventeen-year-old Lew Haddrill, who liked to pick up extra cash working odd-jobs about town.[2] Working from architects' plans drawn up half by Thomas Kane and Company of Chicago, and half by Joseph E. Mills of Detroit,[3] laboring ten hours a day, six days a week (and paid exactly fifteen cents an hour per man, and docked if it rained), in three weeks, five men did the brick work, the walls, and had the roof finished.[4]

It was not much later that the opera house was opened to the admiring public. For a small town, they'd done it up well indeed, right down to filling the cornerstone with photographs, coins, and a copy of the Oxford Globe.[5] The brickwork that had necessitated but three short weeks' work was truly impressive.

Across the upper story, five arched windows gazed somberly at the village street. Below the arches, the

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[1]Lew Haddrill, Idem. [2]Idem.

[3]Blueprints for the Oxford Opera House, original copies now in the possession of Ray Forman, Oxford, Michigan. [Hereafter referred to as "Blueprints."]

[4]Lew Haddrill, Idem. [5]Idem.

masons had angled the bricks into half a dozen rows of close-set teeth, and appropriate recesses and relief work gave the illusion of columns. On street level, below the four outer arches, were set two pairs of casement windows--the new kind, that had four panes. The inner pair were abbreviated to the height of a tall man's head, and where their bottom half perhaps should have been, there was an extra section of brick relief work. Panelled double doors sported two nearly circular leaded-glass windows, and the doors were themselves impressively set beneath a trim portico. But that single thing which set the Oxford Opera House apart from all other buildings in the village was the roof.

And a magnificent roof it was (and is)! The sharp, almost vertical sweep of a mansard roof was grand enough by itself, but in the center, directly over the central arch and the double doors beneath, supreme in oriental splendor, quite incidentally giving the impression of being equal in size to half the remainder of the building, there had been put an obviously Byzantine dome.

The double doors opened to a dimly lit lobby (the only windows opening directly on it were in the doors themselves). To the right and left, twin stairways swept upward, paused for a landing, turned, and reached up to the gallery. The presence of the landing was what caused the inner pair of windows to be short the lower two panes. At the top of the staircase all five upper windows let in

PLATE II

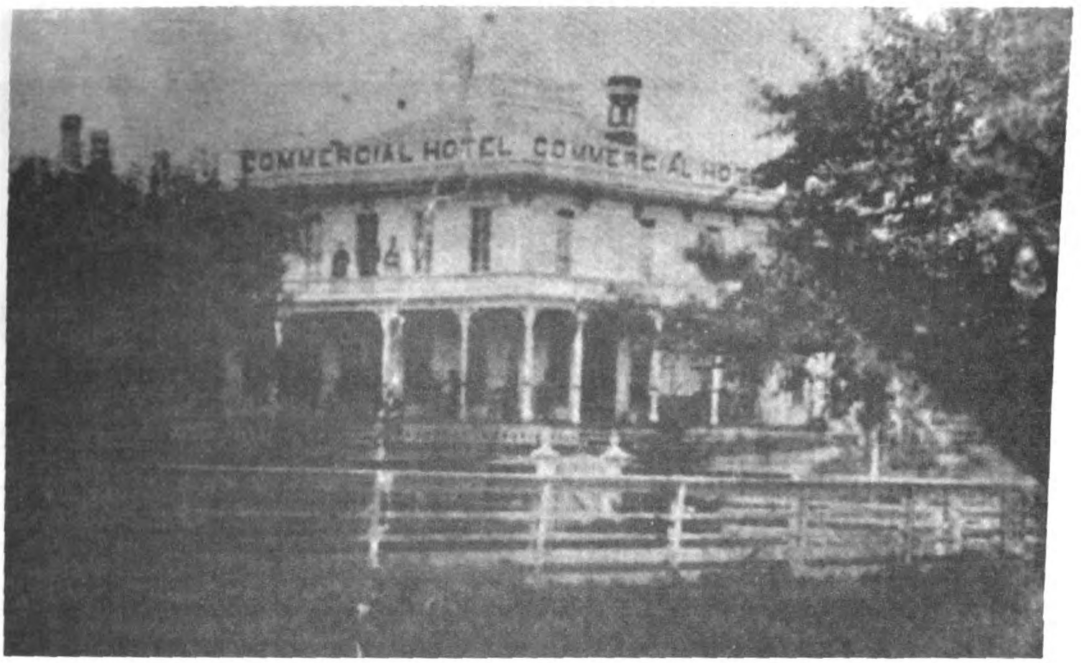

Figure 1.--The Commercial Hotel, which occupied the lot on Washington Street in the mid-nineteenth century.

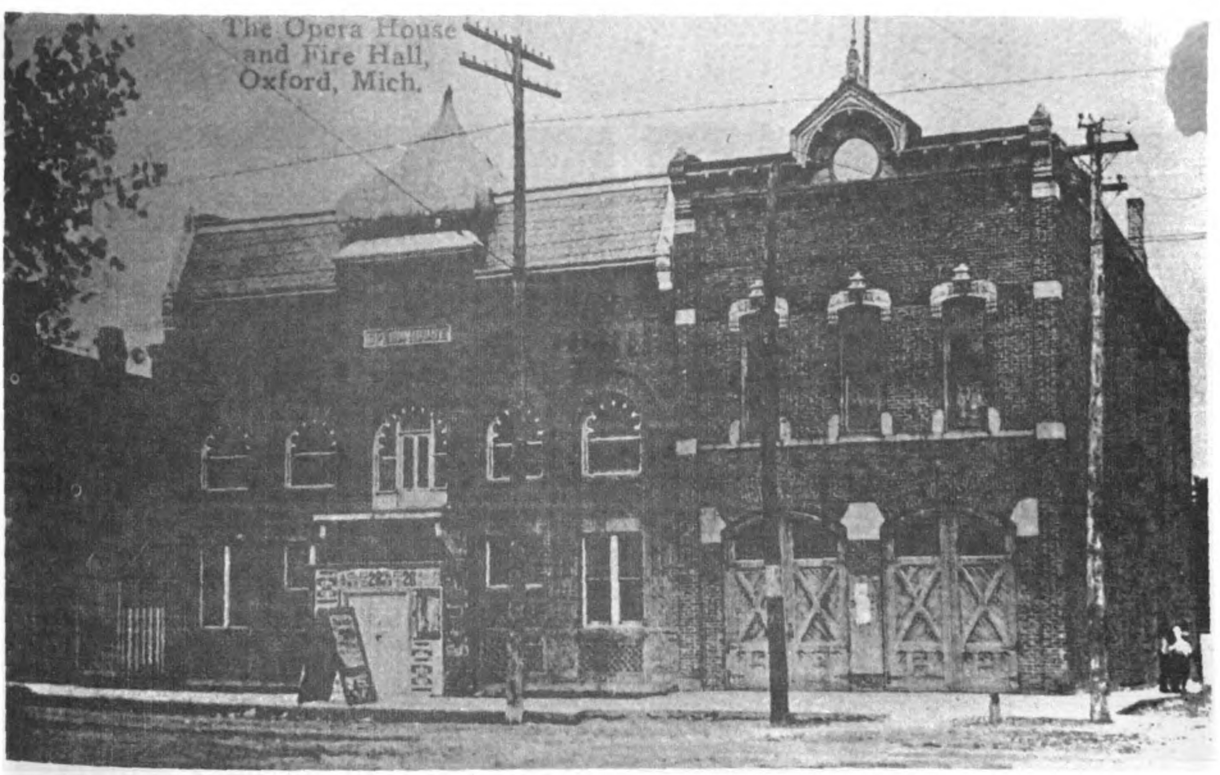

Figure 2.--The Oxford Opera House, as it was about 1911, nineteen years after its construction. The building on the right is the fire hall.

PLATE III

Figure 1.--The Oxford Opera House in 1966.

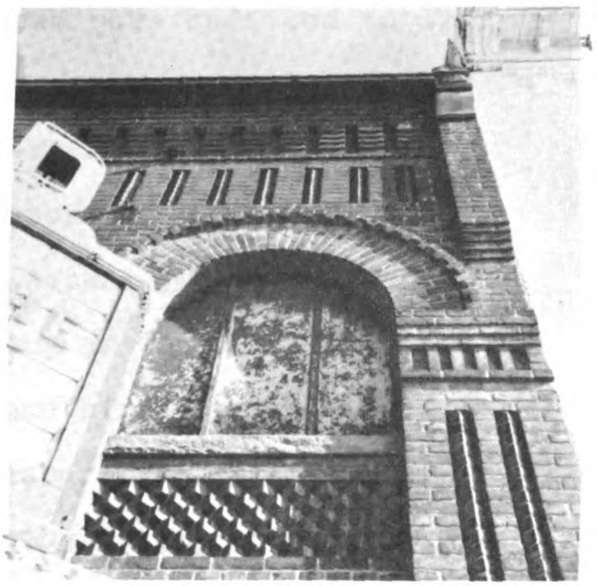

Figure 2.--The brick masonry that took three weeks to complete.

Figure 3.--The original main outside doors of the opera house, now in place in a cement block addition to the original building.

Figure 4.--The brass front door and auditorium door handles, removed after the fire of 1934.

whatever light was available from without to play on the near end of a horse-shoe gallery. Four rows of seats ran across the rear of the house; two rows sufficed to line the sides.[1] The entire gallery was suspended from the ceiling beams with steel rods--rods which unfortunately obscured the view of any spectators unfortunate enough to be positioned behind them. Actually the entire back row of seating was far from being an ideal vantage point if the patron hoped to watch something occurring on the orchestra floor.[2] In modest elaboration of the basic design, varnished oak wainscoating faced the balcony,[3] and four frosted skylights were positioned overhead.[4] Five long beams ran the length of the ceiling, tied across at intervals by crossbeams of equal weight. Where the beams joined, a large, turned wooden knob projected below the beam line. The woodwork was not elaborate, but it still did much to dress the interior, whose basic color could not be called anything but "dirty brindle."[5]

Downstairs on the ground floor, the south side of the lobby served as a cloak room, and a matching room on the north side was the ticket office. Between the lobby and auditorium proper was another set of double doors again

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[1]Blueprints, Idem.

[2]Interview with Mrs. George Dewey (née Lulu Hagerman), aged 90, lifelong resident of Oxford and former pianist at the opera house, March 19, 1966.

[3]Idem. [4]Herbert Rahm, Idem. [5]Idem.

panelled and with leaded glass windows, but here the panes were square, and the glass was raised in a floral pattern.[1]

The auditorium floor was level, and the seats were actually folding chairs which could be stacked against the walls and on the stage whenever the floor space was needed for a banquet or dance. The chairs were not too uncomfortable, though they were narrow. The contoured back and seat were perforated for ventilation, and, on a humid day, the sitter wore a polka-dot badge until someone got busy with an iron.[2] To add to the hazard, ladies with silk hose soon discovered that it was wise to sit with care, for the unfinished wood fairly reached out to grab at delicate materials.[3]

At the far end of the auditorium, the gilt scroll-work around the proscenium described a tall rectangle more like the stages of the eighteenth century than the nineteenth. This was the only place anything as elaborate as foot-wide scrolling had been attempted, but the frame blended well with the browns of wood and varnish.[4] When the act curtain was down, the framed picture was of a street scene, but before a show actually began, the act curtain was covered by an asbestos drop.[5] How much asbestos was

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[1]Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols, Idem.

[2]Interview with Mrs. Daniel Delano (née Mary Stimson) and Mrs. Kenneth Thomas (née Josephine Baldwin), Oxford residents, March 19, 1966.

[3]Idem. [4]Idem. [5]Herbert Rahm, Idem.

actually in it was open to question,[1] but it was gay with blocks of advertising commissioned by local merchants.[2]

On either side of the proscenium, opening on the level of the orchestra floor, a door led backstage. Each opened on a flight of steps rising to the level of the stage. In those first days, both the stage and the house were lighted with gasoline fixtures fed by a common generator near the front of the house.[3] Three years later, in 1895, when the village was wired for electricity, the opera house would be one of the first businesses to take advantage of the situation--a considerable distinction, since business establishments had to pay for wiring, though homes did not.[4]

The footlights extended across a twenty foot stage, about nine feet of wing space on either side--hardly extravagant, but better than anything else between Detroit and Bay City.[5] Even with the apron projecting in a slight arc, the stage floor was too shallow to allow for more than one trap, but one "Hamlet" trap had been included.[6]

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[1]Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols, Idem.

[2]Interview with Edward Unger, florist and long-time Oxford resident, February 12, 1966.

[3]"Stub" Robinson, Idem. [4]Mrs. Clark Stoddard, Idem.

[5]Interviews with Ray Forman, present owner of the Oxford Theatre (the old Opera House Building), Oxford, Michigan, January 28 and February 12, 1966.

[6]Idem.

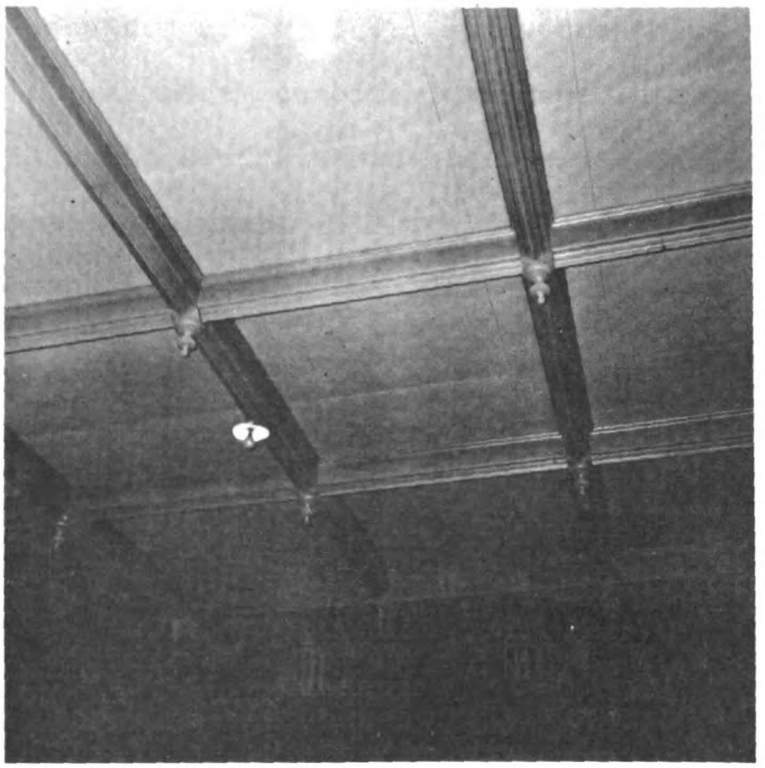

Figure 1.--The auditorium ceiling as it is today, essentially original, though the skylights have been removed.

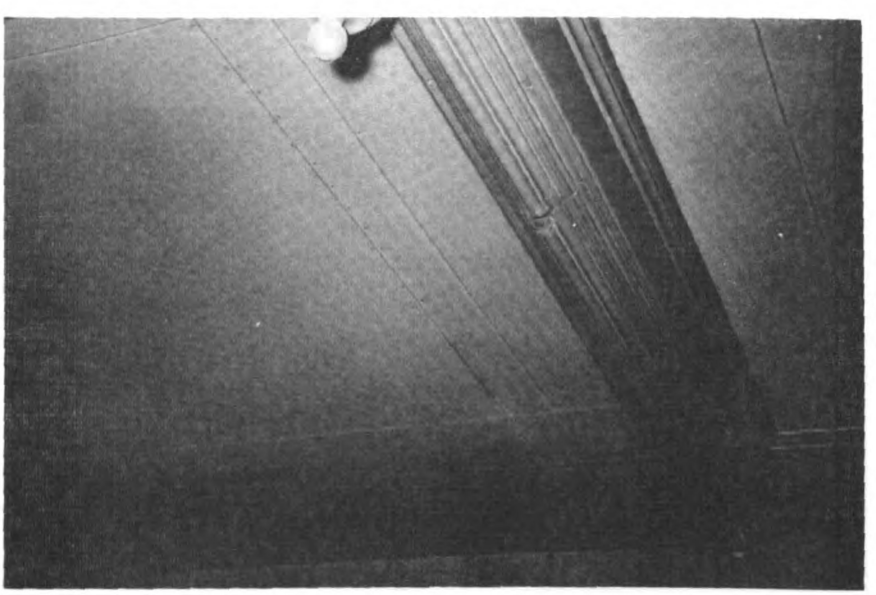

Figure 2.--Closeup of crossbeam, showing the socket for a steel rod, one of a series from which the old gallery was suspended.

The opera house provided no machinery below the trap, largely because it was more economical to hope in the management's ability to secure shows that carried their own special effects with them.[1]

The stage machinery which the little opera house did provide was respectably above the bare minimum supplied in other establishments. The scenery mechanism consisted of an English wing and groove system. A ladder stage right led up to a scaffolding from which four pairs of upper grooves extended. From these, there could be suspended the wings for any one of three sets.[2] There were no lower grooves.[3] With a minimum of effort, the stage could be transformed to represent an interior, an exterior, or a woods, providing the appropriate back-drop was used.[4]

One inconvenience related to the scenery was never overcome by any opera house manager. The upper grooves were in plain view of spectators in the front rows of the orchestra, and if a drop was lowered sufficiently to disguise the machinery, the same drop completely obscured the view of the stage floor for anyone seated in the gallery.[5]

The dressing rooms were located below the stage floor.[6] The same steps that led up to the level of the

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[1]Herbert Rahm, Idem. [2]Idem. [3]Ray Forman, Idem.
[4]Herbert Rahm, Idem. [5]Idem. [6]Ray Forman, Idem.

stage from the auditorium floor, having thus risen, descended to a common corridor which bisected the area beneath the platform. One door opened off each side of the hallway. To the north, partitions formed the gentlemen's dressing room, to the south the ladies'.[1] The two rooms were identically equipped, sparsely furnished with a sofa and two or three chairs, each room having a small toilet partitioned off to insure a degree of privacy. Large, galvanized washbowls were new and practical, if not glamorous. A small window in either room led out to the alley.[2]

An anthracite furnace (as opposed to one designed for the consumption of bituminous coal) also occupied the basement area. It fed but one register, well down toward the front of the house. To heat the ticket office, there was a sturdy, pot-bellied stove, and the latter machine often produced by far more heat than the former.[3]

The people of Oxford and the present managers (Henry Vinton and Alice Cadogan) were proud and pleased with the opera house as it stood there on Washington Street.

The Pontiac, Oxford and Northern Railway, affectionately known as the "Polly Ann," brought a good many companies to the Oxford Opera House, and many of them were almost as pleased with the establishment as was the

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[1]Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols, Idem.

[2]Mrs. George Dewey, Idem.

[3]Herbert Rahm, Idem.

PLATE V

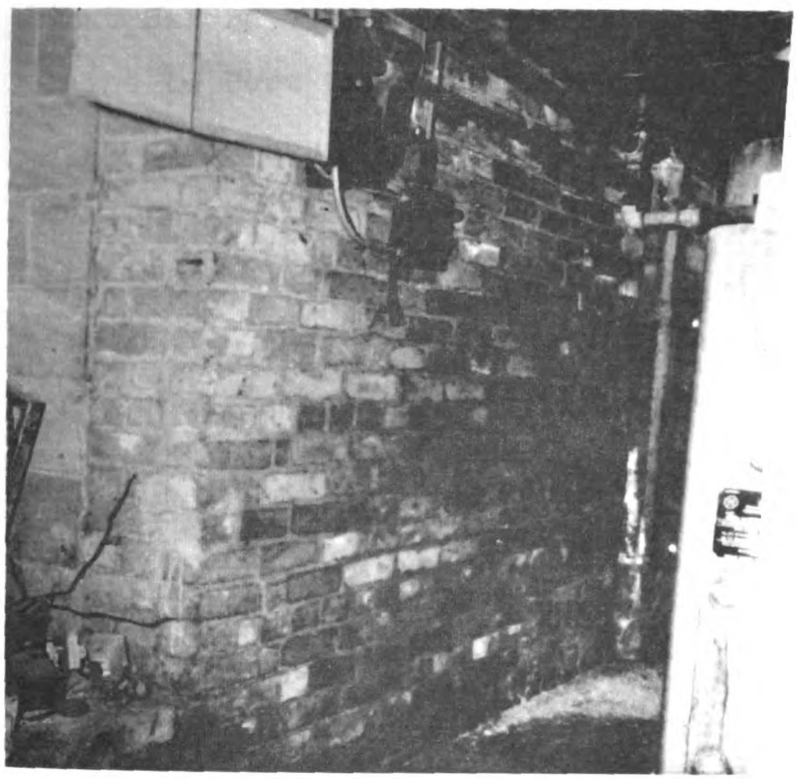

Figure 1.--Rear of old dressing-room area, *now* serving as the furnace room

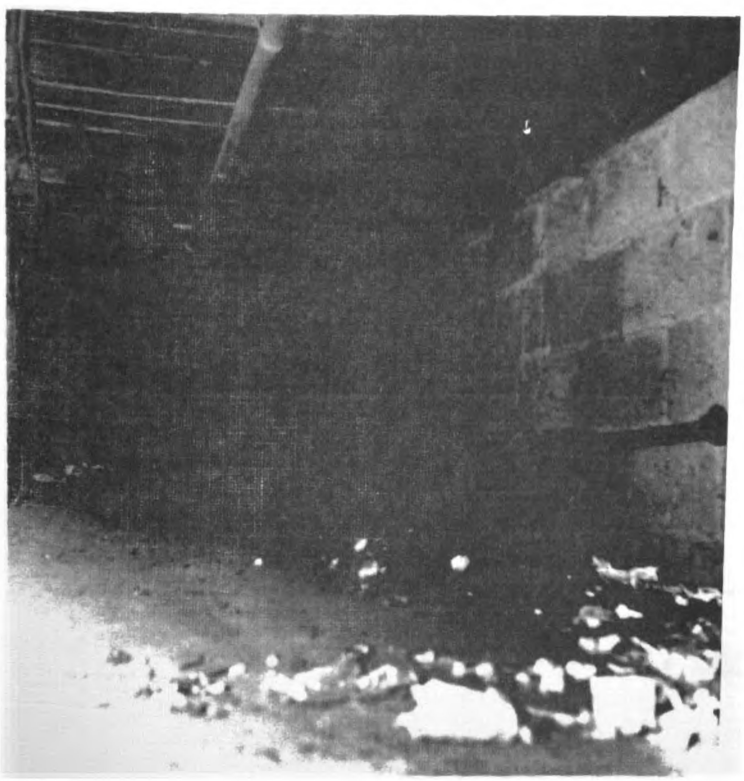

Figure 2.--A tunnel, which proved to have been added in 1934 to improve the heating system.

village itself. Being on several railroad lines meant that Oxford was known to troupes making the run from Flint to Port Huron, from Detroit to Bay City, and the word got around that Oxford had the only really legitimate stage for fifteen or twenty miles around. Many a manager preferred playing in Oxford, even if he lost money doing so, when the alternative was giving his players an off-day, and perhaps losing one of them in the shuffle.[1]

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[1]Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols, Idem.

CHAPTER IV

ROGUES AND VAGABONDS: THE PARADE OF PERFORMERS

On the eve of World War I, the Oxford Opera House, like the remainder of the United States, was on the brink of major transition, a gross change in the actual pattern of existence. The preceding two decades had brought considerable activity to the Oxford stage, most of which was to be duly catalogued in the Oxford Leader. But the Oxford Opera House could remember things of which even the Oxford Leader had no recall, for the Leader, née the Oxford Intruder, had not appeared on the village scene until 1898. The Leader had bought out Cannon's Oxford Globe at the turn of the century. The Globe was a much older paper, and the transaction enabled the Leader to date itself back to 1872. But, since the deal involved no exchange of records or back issues, the Leader had made no connection with those first, exciting years at the opera house.

Those first years were at the height of the "golden age of the road," and the little playhouse was rarely dark. New companies, new plays, soon became old favorites to be asked back again. The period from 1892 to 1898 saw

Oxford form a "Lecture Course," frankly patterened after the Lyceum program that so enthralled Lake Orion. It was not an era noted for the presence of women in business, but Alice Cadogan took initiative in theatre management, while Henry Vinton was content to serve as executor and managerial assistant. In 1895 electricity came, and W. D. Robinson's carfully installed gasoline chandeliers (the very best, H. and H., all the way from Cleveland)[1] were suddenly obsolete. The wiring crew laced the interior of the opera house with tacked-on wiring,[2] unsightly, but symbolic of progress.

Though the problem remained a present one, the Grand Arrival of electricity was worth a chuckle. The obsolete gasoline lamps were obsolete only so long as the better part of the village of Oxford was assembled in the opera house. If more than a few dozen families stayed at home to live and work in the glow of electricity, the most earnest light bulb in town could muster up no more than a faintly orange filament.[3]

1898-1901

Sun.,	May	22, 1898:	R. R. Bane (Anti-Saloon League)
Tues.,	May	31, 1898:	Drs. Blodgett, Dawe, and Haller (Lake Orion Chatauqua)

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[1]"Stub" Robinson, Idem., in reference to an old brand name.

[2]Ray Forman, Idem.

[3]"Stub" Robinson, Idem.

M-F,	June	6-10, 1898:	The France-Rella Company
Thurs.,	June	16, 1898:	Oxford High School Commencement, speaker: Ch. H. Fraser, Chicago
M-F,	Oct.	3-7, 1898:	The Courtenay-Morgan Company
Sat.,	Oct.	15, 1898:	Boxing matches
Sat.,	Oct.	22, 1898:	Congressman S. W. Smith
Thurs.,	Nov.	17, 1898:	Edison's Vitascope
Tues.,	Nov.	22, 1898:	Prof. Ferris of Big Rapids (Oxford Lecture Course)
Thurs.,	Dec.	15, 1898:	J. Wright Giddings (Oxford Lecture Course)
Sat.,	Dec.	17, 1898:	Boxing matches
Mon.,	Dec.	26, 1898:	Christmas party, featuring cakewalkers brought in from Detroit.
Thurs.,	Dec.	29, 1898:	Davis Bros. Uncle Tom's Cabin Co.
Mon.,	Jan.	2, 1899:	Old Folks' Dance
Thurs.,	Jan.	12, 1899:	Francis E. Burns, Great Commander, L. O. T. M.
Mon.,	Jan.	30, 1899:	Original Nashville Students, Fisk University, minstrel show.
Weds.,	Feb.	1, 1899:	DeWitt Miller (Oxford Lecture Course)
Thurs.,	Feb.	9, 1899:	H. R. Pattengill (Oxford Lecture Course)
Weds.,	Feb.	15, 1899:	W. I. Cowlishaw, speaking for the W. C. T. U.

Weds.,	Feb.	22, 1899:	Pontiac Band, masquerade and cakewalk
Fri.,	Mar.	10, 1899:	A. L. Moore and W. F. Sheridan (Pontiac), plus Schubert Glee Club
Tues.,	Mar.	14, 1899:	The Handy Wagon Co., Animatoscope, plus lecture on good roads
Fri.,	Mar.	17, 1899:	St. Patrick's Day party
Tues.,	Mar.	28, 1899:	Hillsdale College Boys' Glee Club
Mon.,	May	1, 1899:	Uncle Jaysen
Thurs.,	June	15, 1899:	Oxford High School commencement
Mon.,	June	26, 1899:	Alumni banquet
Sat.,	July	1, 1899:	Saturday night dancing party
Sat.,	July	8, 1899:	Saturday night dancing party
Sat.,	July	15, 1899:	Saturday night dancing party
Sat.,	July	22, 1899:	Saturday night dancing party
Fri.,	Aug.	18, 1899:	S. Lubin and Co., The Passion Play of Oberammergau
M-S,	Oct.	9-14, 1899:	Henderson Stock Company
Sat.,	Oct.	21, 1899:	Prof. Charles G. Grant, world's champion bicycle trick rider
Weds.,	Nov.	22, 1899:	Boston Stars, Pan-American minstrels (Oxford Lecture Course)

Thurs.,	Nov.	30, 1899:	Thanksgiving Day military concert, Orchard Lake Military Academy orchestra
Fri.,	Dec.	1, 1899:	G. A. Gearhart (Oxford Lecture Course)
Mon.,	Dec.	25, 1899:	K. P. Christmas party
Mon.,	Jan.	1, 1900:	Frisbee Stock Co., The Fatal Check
Tues.,	Jan.	2, 1900:	Frisbee Stock Co., My Musical Friend, and David Garrick
Weds.,	Jan.	3, 1900:	Frisbee Stock Co., The Three Hats
M-S,	Jan.	15-21, 1900:	M. A. Hunt Stock Company, supporting Mr. Frank Tucker
F-S,	Jan.	26-27, 1900:	New York Edison Exhibition and Specialty Company
Mon.,	Jan.	29, 1900:	Rev. Thomas Dixon, Jr. (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Feb.	9, 1900:	Rev. Francis Clement Kelley (for the Catholic Society of Oxford)
Weds.,	Feb.	14, 1900:	Electric Railway entertainment (benefit)
Thurs.	Feb.	15, 1900:	Miss Ida Benfey, American storyteller (Oxford Lecture Course)
Thurs.,	Feb.	22, 1900:	K. P. Masked Ball
Sat.,	Mar.	3, 1900:	Fred. Emerson Brooks, California poet (Oxford Lecture Course)
M-S,	Mar.	5-11, 1900:	Green Comedy Company
Mon.,	Apr.	9, 1900:	Hillsdale Glee Club

Weds.,	June	6, 1900:	Quo Vadis
Tues.,	June	19, 1900:	Junior exercises (Oxford High School)
Weds.,	June	20, 1900:	Oxford High School commencement
Weds.,	July	4, 1900:	Bay View Symphony Orchestra
Fri.,	Sept.	21, 1900:	Concert by the Ladies of the Roman Catholic Faith
Sat.,	Sept.	22, 1900:	Peck's Bad Boy
Sat.,	Sept.	29, 1900:	Congressman S. W. Smith
Mon.,	Oct.	1, 1900:	Simmons, the magician
Fri.,	Oct.	5, 1900:	50¢ dance, Allen's orchestra
Mon.,	Oct.	8, 1900:	Jack's Jolly Jokers, Ranch Ten: or Judge Poe's Court in Cheyenne, Wyoming
Weds.,	Oct.	10, 1900:	Republican Rally, addressed by Wedemeyer, of Ann Arbor
Weds.,	Oct.	24, 1900:	Russo and Swift's Uncle Tom's Cabin Company
Th.-S,	Oct.	25-27, 1900:	"The Mahatmas," the DeGoldaes, hypnotists
Fri.,	Nov.	2, 1900:	Tuxedo, musical comedy
Weds.,	Nov.	7, 1900:	The Giant Colored Quartette
F-S,	Nov.	9-10, 1900:	Mitchell's All-Star Players
Mon.,	Nov.	12, 1900:	Durno-Emmet Combination (Oxford Lecture Course)
Mon.,	Nov.	19, 1900:	Stark's Comedy Co., Just in Time

Tues.,	Nov.	20, 1900:	Stark's Comedy Co., A True Kentuckian
Weds.,	Nov.	21, 1900:	Stark's Comedy Co., Pearl of Society
Weds.,	Nov.	28, 1900:	The Giant Colored Quartette
Tues.,	Dec.	25, 1900:	Christmas party
Mon.,	Dec.	31, 1900:	Merritt and Dixey's Comedians, Muldoon's Picnic
Fri.,	Jan.	18, 1901:	Ladies' Military Band of Waterloo
Weds.,	Feb.	13, 1901:	K. P. Masked Ball
Tues.,	Mar.	5, 1901:	Hon. F. A. Dean, former consul to Italy in Cleveland's administration
Fri.,	Mar.	22, 1901:	School entertainment (Oxford High School)
M-Th.,	Mar.	25-28, 1901:	M. B. Streeter and his Bon Ton Co.
Fri.,	Mar.	29, 1901:	Ottumwas, male quartette (Oxford Lecture Course)
Sat.,	Mar.	30, 1901:	M. B. Streeter and his Bon Ton Co.
Weds.,	June	12, 1901:	Charles Henry Shoeman, negro poet
Sat.,	Oct.	26, 1901:	Ideal Entertainment Company
Thurs.,	Nov.	28, 1901:	Fred. Emerson Brooks (Oxford Lecture Course)
Tues.,	Dec.	17, 1901:	W. J. Clark, "Modern Scientific Wonders," (Oxford Lecture Course)

It was certainly a varied aggregation. So many of the names called up little memories, fragments of a more bucolic Americana. It had been a Sunday afternoon in May when R. R. Bane spoke for the Anti-Saloon League. In view of his subject matter, one wonders if he would have been as mightily pleased with the audience turnout, had he been aware the Oxford Leader had encouraged the village to attend an address "full of sold thuths," in lieu of "solid truths."[1]

Frequent references to "heat" on the part of the Leader suggest that the early summer of 1898 had been a peculiarly hot one. When the France-Rella Company arrived for their June engagement, the enthusiasm with which they were received was due in large part to the fact they made quick appraisal of the situation -- and supplied the audience with free ice water and fans for the duration of the performance![2]

The heat was a major factor, and the number of baseball games and the proximity of "real good fishin'" even more important considerations, and the opera house was generally quiet in the summer. In August of 1898, the important topic of conversation was the concrete path which was to replace the boardwalk on main street.[3] The town sizzled, steamed, swatted mosquitoes, and generally

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[1] Leader, May 27, 1898. [2] Leader, June 10, 1898.

[3] Leader, July 29, 1898.

waited for autumn to bring hard work, harvest, and a good road company to supply entertainment on a weary evening.

September of 1898 opened the fall season with a note of local excitement. Young Miss Myrtie Williams had affixed herself to the Courtenay-Morgan Company when they had last played Oxford, and here she was to return in triumph. She had actually "won for herself the high honors of being one of the specialty artists with the company that are making great hits in the larger cities."[1]

The village had just recovered from the saga of Myrtie Williams, when Manager Vinton announced his intention of hosting a boxing match at the opera house. Such events generally took place on the stage, while bettors and spectators jostled and roared encouragement from the house.[2] That particular October evening was no exception, and the patrons of the sport watched Cal Stroup, welterweight champion of the Upper Peninsula, and Prof. Harry Housler, welterweight champion of Tennessee, square off to do battle. It was soon evident that Stroup was no match for Housler, either in boxing skill or from standpoint of strength. Housler, late of the athletic department at Notre Dame, found his physical prowess

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[1] Leader, Sept. 30, 1898.

[2] Interview with George Tunstead, aged 92, of Oxford's "Tunstead Hardware" dynasty, February 12, 1966.

extremely fortunately displayed, and he promptly organized a gym and athletic club in Oxford.[1]

The local Lecture Course was well under way by the time the washtub-size moon of late October had begun to encourage other evening forms of entertainment. Big Rapids' Prof. W. N. Ferris, as yet unburdened with the Institute, took a moment to discuss matters domestic. In mid-lecture, possibly observing that the balcony seating seemed to be occupied in pairs,[2] he commented forcibly that "every girl should be able to bake a good, wholesome loaf of bread before she is graduated from high school." The remark brought forth a veritable storm of applause.[3] In the meantime, Alice Cadogan and Henry Vinton solemnly shook hands in mutual congratulation--not on the account of Prof. Ferris' success, but because they had just heard that a certain hypnotist, to whom they had disdained to rent the opera house for the evening, had made his way to Metamora and there proven to be the very "Prince of Fakers."[4] It was a stroke of exceedingly good fortune.

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[1] Leader, Oct. 21, 1898.

[2] Mrs. Clark Stoddard, Idem.

[3] Leader, Nov. 25, 1898.

[4] Ibid.

Late fall of 1898 brought a flurry of activity. A group of professional, colored cake-walkers were imported from Detroit for the Christmas party;[1] Prof. Housler ascertained that the time was right to again match his boxing skill against an opponent, and did so with the admission upped to an impressive 20¢, 30¢, and 50¢ a seat.[2] But the event most eagerly anticipated, the production most highly touted in advance, had to be the Davis Brothers' presentation of Uncle Tom's Cabin, brought to the opera house stage four days after Christmas. The playbills promised such grandeur, such scenic glory, that the opera house fairly cringed at the prospect of attempting to accomodate it all.

> . . . like the kiss of a child, it conquers by the very innocence of its breath . . . . The scenery is excellent. In the river scene, one sees the floating cakes of ice slowly moving down stream. One can see, in the splendid perspective of this scene, several miles up the frozen river, and the undulating snow-clad hills on either side lie like drowsy sentinels in the soggy winter day. The plantation scene represents a typical Southern home, with its mansions, its log cabins, and its cotton-field. It is the sunny, sunny South. It is a warm, mellow, beautiful scene. The last scene in this most picturesque drama, has perhaps, taxed the skill of the artist and the mechanic more than any other spectacle of which the stage can boast. Indeed, it is not flattery to say that the 'Beautiful Gates Ajar,' as depicted by this company, is one of the most entrancing spectacles ever seen. The scene opens with a mass of clouds, through a rift of which is seen a passing group of angels bearing Uncle Tom to Heaven. A large 'gloria' of iridescent splendor is brightly twinkling in front. The clouds disperse, revealing Uncle Tom with angel

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[1] Leader, December 16, 1898. [2] Ibid.

> escort before the golden gates, on either side of which, poised upon magnificent pillars inlaid with pearl and gold, stand angel sentinels with expanded wings. Change follows change. Numerous angels appear from out the fleecy clouds which now surround the scene like a halo of glory. In the deep center, a sudden movement of the clouds is seen, and like a morning star, like the central jewel in a crown of diadems, surrounded by whispering angels, little Eva, with beckoning hands smiles down upon Uncle Tom, while the beautiful gates slowly open to the great city that lies beyond. It is a splendid sight to see. During the interval of this exquisite spectacle, the mellow minors of an invisible choir fall faintly upon the ear, and the curtain descends upon a picture of the imagination that one is loath to call ended.[1]

"One hundred men, women, children, horses, ponies, dogs, and donkeys . . . . The Largest Company in the World!"[2] Presumably they were counting the dogs and donkeys along with the children, but it still sounded quite sufficiently impressive to keep the collective mind off the tops of the scenery. And it was all for 25¢, reserved seats a dime extra.[3]

Shows came and went with some regularity during the early months of 1899. A routine had been established, and quantity and quality of performers varied slightly. In March, the opera house was host to a "commercial." That did offer a degree of novelty.

The Farmers' Handy Wagon Company was in the habit of sending out traveling "companies," this time troupes of performers. The delegation which reached Oxford carried

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[1] Leader, December 23, 1898. [2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

an "Animatoscope," and they treated audiences to a program of animated cartoons (musical specialties transformed into "illustrated songs"). Then, the house in rapt attention, they lectured eloquently on the subject of good roads--roads that were stocked with an unusual number of Farmers' Handy Wagons![1]

In April of 1899, the Oxford Leader ran the following letter to the editor. No further comment need be made.

> EDITOR LEADER: Those who did not have reserve seat tickets at the Junior Ex. last Friday evening were treated to a beautiful display of flowers and feathers that was not on the programme. The sight was very pretty but very annoying. When one pays the admission, and wants to see the stage and the actors thereon, he don't care to have a lot of high hats in front of him, worn by ladies who would rather show their new hats or old ones trimed [sic] over, than to remove them that their neighbor, who could not afford to pay for a reserve seat, should have a chance to see the Exercises. Manager Vinton has a display card with the notice, 'Ladies will please remove their hats,' and this should be enough for any well-bred lady. ONE WHO HAD A BACK SEAT.[2]

If there were disadvantages to attending the Junior Exhibition, it cast no permanent shadow on school activities at the opera house. The five graduates composing the class of '99 held commencement exercises there in June, amid a plethora of purple pansies. The class flowers were festooned from the gallery and draped across the stage, and woe be unto him who suffered from hay fever![3]

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[1] Leader, March 10, 1899. [2] Leader, April 28, 1899.

[3] Leader, June 16, 1899.

The week following commencement, the First Annual Alumni Banquet (first of many similar and subsequent events to be so organized) was served on tables set up on the opera house floor. It was a grand summertime feast. For an appetizer, there were little neck clams, on the half shell. Then soup, cold consomme en tasse, with wafers, was brought forth. There were such delectable and unpronouncable frummeries as Zephyrites, Amandes Salees, and Pommes Pansienne. The meat course included fillet of sole, a la Oakland, cold chicken, ham, and ox tongue. If that failed to tempt the appetite, there were the more plebeian club sandwiches, and a chicken salad. To fill in the gaps, there was fruit jelly; and radishes; and mayonnaise. If anybody had room for it, there was ice cream, and there were a half a dozen home-made cakes from which to choose, and, of course, gallons of hot coffee to wash it all down.[1]

The two "firsts," the first commencement, and the first alumni banquet to be held there, were also "lasts" for the opera house, as it closed its doors on the hot summer air. All was relatively quiet through the summer, and then, in mid-August, the little theatre re-opened for the fall season--and re-opened in a blaze of autumnal glory.

It was to be a reproduction of the "Famous Passion Play of Oberammergau." Not a stereoptican representation

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[1]Leader, June 30, 1899.

this; everything was given right on the stage, from the annunciation all the way to the ascension.

> Through the enterprise of Messrs. S. Lubin and Co., of New York, the people of Michigan are enabled to see for themselves an exact reproduction of the play, which has cost multitudes of people thousands of dollars in time and traveling expenses to see. The management has spared neither pains nor expense, and, after an investment of $2,500, are enabled to produce this grand play EXACTLY AS IT IS PRESENTED in Oberammergau.[1]

For those who wished to attend, the price of admission was 15¢, 25¢ if the attender wished to be placed in the row in front of milady's hat.[2]

At the turn of the century, the Oxford Street Fair was preceded by more fanfare and involved more real public excitement than any single event at the opera house. These fairs were held in tents and booths erected on the village's broad main street, and included the opera house only insofar as it was used for dancing until two in the morning.[3] The 1899 fair was a jim-dandy. It ran for four September days, a balloon ascension each day. There was a "great exhibition of stock, farm and manufactured products, and free entertainment. Bands, Shows, Minstrels, Rope Walking, and Boxing Contests."[4] On a stage erected in the center of the street, the renowned Georgia Minstrels, a party of twelve negroes, entertained with plantation songs and dances. The Biograph, which had been on exhibition at "Wonderland" in Detroit, gave a series of

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[1] Leader, August 18, 1899. [2] Ibid.

[3] "Stub" Robinson, Idem. [4] Leader, November 17, 1899.

animated pictures--at a price; it was NOT free. But perhaps the greatest drawing card of all was the doubleheader between "the two well-known colored teams, the Cuban Giants New York, and the Columbia Giants of Chicago."[1]

Anything else must necessarily seem anti-climactic. Perhaps that is why it was necessary that this comment be run in the Leader:

> If there is one thing disgusting in the theatre of today, it is to see the men at the drop of the curtain, go out, presumably, to put down another drop. The man who will invent some patent pocket tank to relieve the theatre dryness of this class of gentry long enough to assist them through an entire theatre performance will earn the unlimited praise of all.[2]

New Years' of 1900, and the Frisbee Stock Company ran into difficulties when a delayed train prevented part of their cast arriving for the play. They opened in any case, and the result was so utterly mediocre that they played to only fair houses all week.[3]

But if the new year did not begin auspiciously for the "Frisbees," there were no evil omens for the opera house. The Frisbee fiasco was promptly followed the appearance of the M. A. Hunt Stock Company, perhaps the single most popular such group in the state of Michigan at the time.

Al Hunt was a native of Bangor, and started his theatrical career as a member of a traveling show band.

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[1] Ibid. [2] Leader, November 17, 1899.

[3] Leader, January 5, 1900.

He graduated to the "rube band" with Frank Tucker's show, and he and that actor struck up what was to prove to be an extremely lucrative friendship. Tucker was a Michigander, a resident of Decatur, and he was already firmly established as one of the state's most colorful show business characters. He was a handsome devil, stockily built, along the general lines of an Edwin Forrest. Perhaps for that reason he wore a generous black mustache, whose glistening ends were waxed and curled with a precision that bespoke its owner's pride in it. In spite of the formal nature of this hirsute splendor, Tucker wore overalls tucked into high boots for every performance he gave.[1]

Hunt's advance agent affixed a message to the playbills:

> WARNING! During the engagement of the Henderson Stock Company, there was a great deal of dissatisfaction among the people, owing to the fact that there were merchants issuing tickets who had no right to do so.
>
> My merchants must and shall be protected, and I will positively prosecute any merchant to the full extent of the law (for FRAUD) if found issuing tickets without a right.[2]

And, if the foregoing did not seem to promise enough confusion, Hunt and Tucker soon found that they were walking into even more.

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[1]Willis, Frederick Dunbar, Michigan: A History . . ., op. cit., p. 730.

[2]Leader, January 12, 1900.

Without wishing to effect any real change in property ownership, Henry Vinton came to the decision he had known for some years was inevitable. Henry was not a young man, and the work at the opera house was strenuous. Alice did much of it, to be sure, but, in a Victorian climate, the arrangement was neither seemly nor entirely convenient. On January 12, 1900, Henry Vinton resigned the management of the Oxford Opera House, and turned the reins over to a company composed of Charles DeShon, J. A. Jossman, and C. E. Stanton, all of whom were popular local merchants.[1] So it was that the M. A. Hunt Stock Company walked in to become part of the Grand Opening Night.

Charlie DeShon, "Screw" Stanton, and company wreaked no drastic alteration in program. The Reverend Thomas Dixon, Jr., came and went, reported by the Dallas (Texas) Daily News to be " a double back action, reversible patent lever, eighteen carat, web-perfecting, self-cocking thoroughbred dispenser of original chin music." The California poet, Fred. Emerson Brooks, evoked a degree of corporate village delight rarely seen by Lecture Course speakers. "Brooks is no name for him,"[2] said the Leader, in glowing tribute.

> He's a regular river, a gentle flowing river--at times rushes through deep canons [sic] and over cataracts, at other times gliding along in peaceful solitude. Unlike other rivers, the source is larger than its mouth.[2]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Leader, January 26, 1900.

[3] Leader, March 9, 1900.

June brought the "Junior Ex," commencement, and the alumni banquet in a pattern that already seemed decades old. Summer fare included a visit from Glasson's Bay View Orchestra,[1] an organization noteworthy if only because the Bay View Orchestra remains the core of a summer music festival to the present day. The Detroit Tigers were currently in dead last, but the Oxford Tigers were doing well, and it was a good summer.[2]

One event of note in that summer of 1900 was the arrival of the D. U. R., on June 22. "CARS ARE HERE! FIRST ONE HERE FRIDAY. GREETED BY A BIG DEMONSTRATION. CANNON'S BOOMED, WHISTLES BLEW, BELLS RANG AND THE MULTITUDE CHEERED!" said the Leader.[3] Detroit was just 50¢ away from Oxford, round trip. There was considerable local concern that it would prove detrimental to Oxford's own mercantile enterprise, but the years were to demonstrate far more advantages than disadvantages to the link with the city.

It was an election year, and that September saw the Republican campaign launched with a spectacular rally at the opera house. Local Congressman S. W. Smith spoke with such fervor that an Oxford Republican Club found itself organized and functioning from that very night.[4]

In late October, the Lecture Course brought to Oxford a pair of hypnotists advertised as "the world's

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[1] Leader, June 29, 1900.

[2] Leader, July 27, 1900.

[3] Leader, June 22, 1900.

[4] Leader, October 5, 1900.

greatest. Not a barn-storming Uncle Tom, but a strictly high grade, moral and up-to-date entertainment."[1] Whether referred to as "The Mahatmas" (company name), or by their surname, the DeGoldaes provoked considerable amusement in the village. The "moral and up-to-date entertainment" consisted of slight-of-hand tricks and experiments in hypnotism, and the latter, especially, was a guarantee that the audience was assured "double their money's worth." Each night, DeGoldae, by one inducement or another, had two or three local subjects under complete control, and the audience went into absolute paroxysms of laughter as their neighbors cavorted about the stage.[2] Of course, there were the skeptics. George Tunstead, who knew as well as anyone what fun was to be found in such public antics, was reasonably sure--well, he "figured it was all put on beforehand."[3]

It didn't really matter. The DeGoldaes were a great success, and to have a following act that would draw, the opera house management offered a $175.00 certainty[4] to Mitchell's All Star Players.[5] Then one group arrived

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[1] Leader, October 27, 1900.

[2] Leader, November 2, 1900. [3] George Tunstead, Idem.

[4] This term, frequently used by Edwin Booth in letters to his daughter, refers to that amount of money guaranteed to a performer prior to a box office sale. Grossman, op. cit.

[5] Leader, November 9, 1900.

that required no certainty, came amid little early ballyhoo, and won over Oxford like none had done previously. Said the Leader:

> The Giant Colored Quartette at the Opera House Wednesday night was a company of good singing coons. . . . [It] was one of the best quartettes seen in Oxford for many a day. They more than pleased those who were fortunate enough to hear them, and were greeted with more applause than has been accorded any entertainers here in the past two years. Should they ever return again, we guarantee them a full house.[1]

The Leader may have been prone to exaggeration, but the rapidity with which the Giant Quartette was returned to perform in the village is ample supporting testimony.

The winter of 1900-1901 was a preface to transition. The Starks Comedy Company brought an excellent show to town, and found themselves unable to command any audience at all.[2] On January 25, the Leader regretfully reported Queen Victoria's death ("6:30 p.m. Tuesday"),[3] and consciously or unconsciously catalogued the end of an era.

When M. B. Streeter's Bon Ton Company arrived, they carried "their own scenery and had so fixed up the Opera House scenery as to cause old theatre-goers to forget that they were in the local playhouse."[4] But there was a quality to living that had not been there before. Suddenly, the paper was too sophisticated to go into quite such ecstasy over each production that came into town. "King Edward's

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[1] Ibid. [2] Leader, November 23, 1900.

[3] Leader, January 25, 1901.

on the throne; it's the age of men!" a modern tune proclaims of those old days. There was a perceptible difference. Things were happening that caused one more aging generation to wonder at the fate of the world.

On September 13, 1901, the news was hopeful, if inherently alarming.

> William McKinley, the third President of the United States who has been made a mark for an assassin's bullet, is fortunately on the road to recovery. President McKinley was shot and seriously wounded by a would-be assassin while holding a reception in the Temple of Music at the Pan-American at four o'clock last Friday. [This would have been, of course, September 8.] One shot took effect in the right breast, the other in the abdomen. The first is not of a serious nature and the bullet has been abstracted. The second pierced the abdominal wall and has not yet been removed. The President is improving and is now out of danger.[1]

Modern readers know the sad consequence, but in 1901 it was a surprise as well as a shock when McKinley lost the battle to infection, and, as Mark Hanna had dolefully predicted, the "one heartbeat" had come and gone and "that damned cowboy was in the White House." In Republican Oxford, the political aspect was not so tragic, but the event of presidential assassination was. The Leader bannered

> THE STRAINS OF 'NEARER MY GOD TO THEE' AROSE IN GRAND, SOLEMN CHORUS YESTERDAY. OXFORD JOINED IN SERVICES OF MOURNING FOR LATE PRESIDENT.[2]

A passage entitled "Resolutions on the Assassination of the President" was printed and signed in mournful gravity by

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[1] Leader, September 13, 1901.

[2] Leader, September 20, 1901.

most of Oxford's merchants. It ended with a prayer to the "Great Father to guide the nation aright, to sustain our new President in his arduous duties and to console the widow of our departed leader."[1]

Smaller changes were in the offing. No longer did the Lecture Course sell family tickets and tickets to individual performances, but offered a series ticket at 75¢, good for the duration of a year's Lecture Course.[2] Science and scientific wonders captured the suddenly non-Victorian eye. December 17, W. J. Clark lectured in the opera house on such topics as acetylene gas, the projection microscope, electric welding under water, x-rays, liquid air, and the Akouphone. The latter was an arrangement of telephones of "such enormous power" that even deaf mutes were purported to "readily hear conversation and sound."[3] It was liquid air that most amazed Oxford. Clark got the Leader's largest banner headlines (about one inch) when he

> FROZE MERCURY! made it into a hammer and drove nails in a board . . . frozen rubber ball broken into fragments . . . . A bunch of grapes dropped in the liquid and when frozen hard as a shot they were passed around the audience . . . . The speaker asserted that liquid air will be used in the future for cooling houses, simply by allowing it to evaporate in the radiators.[4]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Leader, November 8, 1901.

[3] Leader, December 20, 1901.

[4] Ibid.

As if that were not enough, there were also

> experiments in wireless telegraphy . . . he operated a bell and switched on a light without wires . . . predicted that we will soon be able not only to telegraph but also to telephone across the ocean by means of wireless telegraphy.[1]

There were minor disadvantages. Poor Mr. Clark had a miserable cold, which succeeded in making his voice highly unpleasant to hear, and the lecture itself

> . . . to those who understood the subject . . . was very interesting and instructive . . . , but to the common people it was rather dry in parts.[2]

There was no avoiding the fact, however, that this was a program that belonged in a world quite different from that evoked by memories of Uncle Tom and little Eva.

There were stirrings in the direction of the opera house management. There was a change breeding in that wind, as well.

1902-1905

Sat.,	Jan.	18, 1902:	American Statuesquers Company
Mon.,	Jan.	20, 1902:	Boston Ladies' Symphony Orchestra
Sat.,	Jan.	31, 1902:	Ten Nights in a Bar Room
Fri.,	Feb.	7, 1902:	Mack the Magician, with the John Szatzs Specialty Co.
Fri.,	Feb.	14, 1902:	Pythian Masquerade Ball
Weds.,	Feb.	26, 1902:	Wesleyan Male Quartette (Oxford Lecture Course)

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[1] Leader, December 6, 1901. [2] Ibid.

Thurs.,	Mar.	20, 1902:	Mrs. L. Brooks Vincent, travelogue
Fri.,	Mar.	21, 1902:	Rev. Francis Kelley
Mon.,	Mar.	31, 1902:	Henderson Stock Co., The Slippery Mr. Elm
Tues.,	Apr.	1, 1902:	Henderson Stock Co., Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
Weds.,	Apr.	2, 1902:	Henderson Stock Co., A Cheerful Liar
Thurs.,	Apr.	3, 1902:	Henderson Stock Co., Forgiven
Fri.,	Apr.	4, 1902:	Henderson Stock Co., The Bells
Sat.,	Apr.	5, 1902:	Henderson Stock Co., Finnegan's Alley
Fri.,	Apr.	18, 1902:	First annual Oxford BYPU banquet (Baptist Young People's Union)
Sat.,	Apr.	26, 1902:	DeWitt Miller (Oxford Lecture Course)
Tues.,	Apr.	29, 1902:	Harmony Male Quartet of Flint
Tues.,	June	17, 1902:	Junior Ex., Merchant of Venice
Thurs.,	June	19, 1902:	Oxford High School commencement
Fri.,	June	20, 1902:	Alumni banquet
Fri.,	Aug.	29, 1902:	Harry Shannon Co., Legally Dead
Mon.,	Sept.	15, 1902:	Hartwell's Commedians, Cast Adrift
Tues.,	Sept.	16, 1902:	Hartwell's Comedians, Lady Audley's Secret
Weds.,	Sept.	17, 1902:	Hartwell's Comedians, East Lynne

Thurs.,	Sept.	18, 1902:	Hartwell's Comedians, Euchered or The Man in Black
Fri.,	Sept.	19, 1902:	Hartwell's Comedians in a vaudeville bill
Sat.,	Sept.	20, 1902:	Hartwell's Comedians, Rip Van Winkle
Mon.,	Oct.	27, 1902:	Sterling Opera and Concert Co., the opera Martha, acts I and II
Weds.,	Nov.	5, 1902:	Sammi's Concert Company (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Nov.	7, 1902:	Rev. Francis Clement Kelley
Weds.,	Dec.	24, 1902:	Alice Carey Concert Co. (Oxford Lecture Course)
Tues.,	Feb.	17, 1903:	A. McCallum, "Early Life of Jesus"
Weds.,	Feb.	18, 1903:	Hawthorne Musical Club, Swiss Bell Ringers (Oxford Lecture Course)
Weds.,	Mar.	4, 1903:	Leonard Garver
Mon.,	Mar.	30, 1903:	Giant Male Quartette
F-S.,	Apr.	10-11, 1903:	Eastern Star Fair
Weds.,	Apr.	14, 1903:	Congressman Charles Landis
Fri.,	Apr.	24, 1903:	Myron B. Rice's production of My Friend from India
Mon.,	May	4, 1903:	Col. H. W. Ham, southern orator (Oxford Lecture Course)
Sat.,	May	16, 1903:	The Star Boarder, and performance by the Boston Orchestra
Sat.,	May	30, 1903:	Fitz and Webster in A Breezy Time

Weds.,	June	17, 1903:	Promotional exercises
Thurs.,	June	18, 1903:	Oxford High School commencement
Fri.,	June	19, 1903:	Alumni banquet
Thurs.,	June	25, 1903:	Prof. Toudray (New York) directing "Queen Esther"
Sat.,	July	4, 1903:	Wade and Martin Co., The Beggar Prince
Th-S.,	Oct.	1-3, 1903:	Miss Vane-Calvert and the Rodney Stock Co., A Man of Mystery
Thurs.,	Nov.	5, 1903:	Alvin Joslin
Fri.,	Nov.	20, 1903:	F. and A. M. Banquet
Fri.,	Jan.	1, 1904:	Leap Year party
Weds.,	Jan.	6, 1904:	Walter Robinson and Effie Kamman in When My Wife's Away
Thurs.,	Jan.	21, 1904:	Elmer Buffham as Shylock in The Merchant of Venice
Fri.,	Jan.	28, 1904:	K. P. Character Ball
Mon.,	Feb.	1, 1904:	Metropolitan Motion Picture Co.
Fri.,	Feb.	12, 1904:	Tuxedo Stock Company, In California
Mon.,	Feb.	22, 1904:	K. P. Dancing Party
Thurs.,	Mar.	17, 1904:	St. Patrick's Day Party
M-W,	Mar.	21-23, 1904:	Cornell-McDowell Dramatic Company
Sat.,	Apr.	2, 1904:	A Run on the Bank
Fri.,	May	27, 1904:	BYPU banquet

Mon.,	May	30, 1904:	Memorial Day exercises
Mon.,	June	13, 1904:	Junior Ex., Consort of Heroines
Thurs.,	June	16, 1904:	Oxford High School commencement
Fri.,	June	17, 1904:	Alumni Banquet
Mon.,	July	4, 1904:	Harry C. Barton and Company, A Woman's Revenge
Weds.,	Aug.	31, 1904:	Gordon and Bennett's production of A Royal Slave
Tues.,	Oct.	4, 1904:	Mitchell-Lawman Company, Ten Nights in a Bar Room
Thurs.,	Oct.	6, 1904:	Republican rally
Mon.,	Oct.	10, 1904:	Heber-Edison Kinetoscope Motion Picture Show
Fri.,	Oct.	21, 1904:	Rev. William P. McKenzie (Christian Scientist)
Fri.,	Nov.	11, 1904:	Oxford Band Show
Tues.,	Nov.	15, 1904:	Dixie Jubilee Singers (Oxford Lecture Course)
Thurs.,	Dec.	8, 1904:	Robert Parker Mills (Oxford Lecture Course)
Th-S.,	Dec.	22-24, 1904:	Tomlinson Company, In the Shadow of the Guillotine
Mon.,	Jan.	16, 1905:	Chicago Glee Club (Oxford Lecture Course)
Weds.,	Feb.	1, 1905:	Oxford Cornet Band
Mon.,	Feb.	6, 1905:	Col. George Bain (Oxford Lecture Course)
Weds.,	Feb.	15, 1905:	Rochester (Michigan) Dramatic Club, Twixt Love and Duty

Fri.,	Mar.	10, 1905:	Harvard Musical Club (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Mar.	17, 1905:	St. Patrick's Day dance
Mon.,	Mar.	27, 1905:	Giant Concert Co. (formerly Giant Colored Quartette)
Tues.,	Mar.	28, 1905:	H. W. Sears, humorist (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Apr.	7, 1905:	Beggar Prince Operatic and Comedy Company
Fri.,	Apr.	28, 1905:	Junior Ex., Six to One and The Trouble at Satterlee's
Sat.,	Apr.	29, 1905:	Roller skating
M-T,	May	1-2, 1905:	Lester G. Slocum and musical combination, The Powers of Good and Evil
Fri.,	May	12, 1905:	Miss Rachel Morgan Axford
Weds.,	May	17, 1905:	Dvork-Davidson Stock Co., The Three Musketeers
M-W.,	May	22-24, 1905:	Dvork-Davidson Stock Co.,
Weds.,	June	21, 1905:	Promotional exercises
Thurs.,	June	22, 1905:	Oxford High School commencement
Fri.,	June	23, 1905:	Alumni banquet
Thurs.,	Aug.	24, 1905:	New Orleans Jubilee Singers, The Little Red Schoolhouse
Thurs.,	Sept.	21, 1905:	Edward N. Hoyt, Hamlet
Mon.,	Oct.	2, 1905:	A Romance of Coon Hollow
Fri.,	Oct.	6, 1905:	Dancing party, Finney's orchestra

Mon., Nov. 20, 1905: Ladies' Lyceum Quartette (Oxford Lecture Course)

Mon., Dec. 25, 1905: K. P. Christmas party

It was a difficult thing to attempt to make arbitrary division of a lifetime, but the little opera house marked January 1, 1902 with little trouble. The deed had been executed in November and recorded the following September.[1] Henry Vinton and Alice Cadogan had the Oxford Opera House in their blood. They had left it for a year, with the noblest of intentions to remain away, but the pull was far too strong.

Maria Powell (widow of the judge), in her capacity as executrix of her husband's will, for a consideration of $3,000.00 turned the opera house over to Henry Vinton, lock, stock and barrel.[2] Henry moved in, and, under the guiding hand of Alice Cadogan, the place was "thoroughly brightened up from top to bottom."[3] By Saturday evening, January 18, 1902, the (re-named) Powell Opera House was ready for the third grand opening of its career.[4]

They opened with a troupe called the "American Statuesquers," twenty-five people (one of the largest companies to come to Oxford[5]), carrying their own scenery in magnificent abundance. The Statuesquers were no more than a

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[1] Abstract, entry 21. [2] Ibid.

[3] Leader, December 6, 1901.

[4] Leader, January 10, 1902.

[5] Herbert Rahm, Idem.

vaudeville show, but their role was considerably glamorized by their feature performance--"an accurate reproduction of the most eminent Masters by living models . . . six shapely young ladies and four muscular men."[1] As a final touch, once-again-manager Vinton added a storm door to the front of the opera house ("Manager Vinton is bound to keep his patrons warm and comfortable"[2]) and even purchased a new drop to add to the list of scenes.[3]

The Pythian dances (sponsored by the local Knights of Pythias) were just about as elite as it was possible to get in a village like Oxford.[4] They were all invitational,[5] and the expensively printed invitations went only to those who made up Oxford Society. But the gallery was open to those who only stand and wait, and many an Oxfordite grew up cherishing childhood memories of the hours spent watching the dancers whirling by.[6] In honor of the Vinton-Cadogan return, even the Pythians sought a degree of novelty. The February Masquerade Ball always boasted a fine list of prizes for costumes, but on February 14, 1902 there was an additional prize for the couple best at the waltz, with the stipulation that the winners must catch the LIVE PIG,

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[1] Leader, January 17, 1902.

[2] Ibid. [3] Ibid.

[4] Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols, Idem.

[5] George Tunstead, Idem.

[6] Mrs. Clark Stoddard, Idem.

which was to be let loose on the floor immediately after the contest.[1]

A new or rejuvenated management did not necessarily imply a whole new outlook on programming. Shortly after the greased pig episode, Oxford was treated to the venerable Ten Nights in a Bar Room.[2] As a point of fact, the issue of a "wet" or "dry" Oakland County was being broached with increasing frequency, thus making an old chestnut into an unusually timely play. Not long after that, the opera house again came to grips with present issue, this time utilizing a more modern field weapon.

Oxford's Catholic population was growing rapidly, and to a portion of the Methodist-Baptist settlement, it was cause for real alarm. To dignify their position, the Catholic element on several occasions summoned the young orator-priest Francis Clement Kelley to speak at the opera house. One of these occasions was in March of 1902, and the Leader gave the encouraging report, ". . . he pleased every hearer regardless of religious creed or political affiliations. [He] is doing much to make Protestants and Catholics acquainted with each other."[3]

Oxford was not completely out of the main stream of theatre by any means, and in 1902 less so than ever. The Detroit Urban Railway (D.U.R.) took village residents into

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[1] Leader, February 7, 1902.

[2] Leader, February 7, 1902.

[3] Leader, March 21, 1902.

Detroit to see Modjeska at the Grand Opera House,[1] and many locally advertised productions owed their success to some association with the great names of world drama. When the repertoire of the Henderson Stock Company (apparently they had weathered the storm of fraudulently sold tickets during last season's appearance) included The Bells, it was billed as "Henry Irving's celebrated play,"[2] Too, Oxford was hardly ignorant of the superior merits of the Bard of Stratford-on-Avon, and the 1902 Junior Ex. (no-one said Exhibition) included a valiant attempt at The Merchant of Venice.[3]

In August, the autumnal re-opening of the opera house looked particularly auspicious. The Harry Shannon Company was an undeniable favorite. Half a century, nearly three-quarters of a century later, Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols recalled that Shannon's Stock Company always meant a good show, and in consequence generally meant a sell-out.[4] The August 29 appearance of the Shannon troupe introduced, as an added draw, "the two famous little ones, Hazel and Harry. These children are remarkable in their dramatic abilities, and astonish as well as please."[5]

Just at a glance, it was obvious that the 1902-1903 season would be at least interesting. The plays performed

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[1] Leader, April 4, 1902. [2] Ibid.

[3] Leader, June 13, 1902.

[4] Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols, Idem.

[5] Leader, August 29, 1902.

were established, and some were truly classic. The Hartwell Comedian bill (including Cast Adrift, Lady Audley's Secret, East Lynne, Euchered or The Man in Black, and Rip Van Winkle) looked almost worthy of the following "Weather Bulletin:"

> At 8:15 p.m. there will be a sudden rise in the temperature followed by a hail of storm of fun. It will increase in volume until 10:15 p.m. when there will be a sudden calm lasting 24 hours.
>
> The only place available to witness this grand phenomenal change will be at the Opera House, which will be occupied by Hartwell's Comedians.[1]

Not only that, they devoutly promised there would be "no old puns or trashy songs."

For those who would have preferred slightly more profound works of art, they needed wait only until October brought the Sterling Opera and Concert Company. Sent out by the Mutual Lyceum Bureau, this troupe was made up largely of pupils of the Chicago Musical College, and was possessed of enough youth and ambition to present two acts of the opera Martha.[2] Unfortunately, though it was an excellent attempt, it had been poorly attended, indeed.[3]

The Oxford Lecture Course was operating in full capacity. Already the Sammis Concert Company had come and gone (November), carrying with it the turbulent air of controversy. Witness these two reviews from the Oxford Leader, which,

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[1]Leader, September 12, 1902. [2]Leader, October 18,1902.

[3]Leader, October 31, 1902.

in subsequent weeks, had difficulty making up its editorial mind:

> [In the first instance] Sammis Concert Company, first number on the Oxford Lecture Course, gave an exceptionally fine entertainment at the Opera House Wednesday night. Miss Sybil Sammis easily sang her way into the good graces of an Oxford audience. [The entire program was] high class and pleasing.[1]

> [But, in retrospect] the unsatisfactory appearance of the Sammis Concert Company caused the Oxford Lecture Course Association to book the Alice Carey Company. This really means that the entire course of six numbers is yet to come.[2]

Fortunately, the Alice Carey Company (Miss Alice Carey, violinist; Mrs. Stella West, soprano and pianist; Miss O. Day, reader and banjoist; Miss Edith Hale, solo whistler) was well above average. According to the paper, "the only one of mediocre ability was the soprano, and she did fairly well."[3]

The second half of the winter season brought Swiss bell-ringers,[4] a "brilliant young Congressman [to whom] belongs most of the credit for the fact that liquor is no longer sold under the dome of the National Capitol in Washington"[5] (this was Indiana's Charles Landis), and the welcome return of the Giant Colored Quartette.[6] In April the ladies of the Eastern Star appropriated the opera house and held a fancy-work fair. Crammed to the rafters

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[1]Leader, November 7, 1902.
[2]Leader, December 5, 1902.
[3]Leader, January 2, 1903.
[4]Leader, February 6, 1903.
[5]Leader, March 20, 1903.
[6]Ibid.

with various kinds of needlework, the opera house somehow made room for candy and fruit and the facilities for home-cooked meals the two evenings of the fair. By day, Oxfordites competed in conundrum contests. "Why is a girl who has refused several offers of marriage like Joe Jossman?" "Why is W. J. Tunstead the worst-used man in town?" And, Saturday night, the opera house floor was cleared for a dance.[1]

On Memorial Day, the day's ceremonies dispatched, Oxford was able to end the day on a festive note. Fitz and Webster brought in the farce A Breezy Time for a one-night stand. They also supplied a bevy of pretty girls and a fine concert band, and the latter aggregation gave a free performance in front of the opera house in the May evening. The admission was usual: 15¢ children, 25¢ for adults, and 35¢ if a reserved seat seemed desirable. But how promising was the fare thus purchased, and how awesome the playbill!

> Scientists and electricians cannot agree upon the number of electric volts that are necessary to cause a cessation of life in the human body. Some claim that an excessive shock is more likely to cause incineration rather than instantaneous death; but if they would turn their attention to prolonging and increasing the pleasures of life the public would hail the result with more satisfaction. For instance, the electricity generated in a wave of laughter is, after all, the most pleasant shock, and to see a large assembly moved by a current of uncontrollable mirth while witnessing the performance of Fitz and Webster's newest A Breezy Time places beyond dispute

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[1] Leader, April 3, 1903.

the fact that large volts of laughter are better than volts of electricity any day.[1]

June came and went with the accustomed sequence of school activities, and a little man arrived in town "like a freshly opened bottle of champagne, fizzing his way and bubbling over with praise of his opera company."[2] The advance agent paved the way, and Oxford found in The Beggar Prince a fitting close to a glorious fourth of July, courtesy of company managers Wade and Martin.[3]

During the summer months, the opera house opened its doors to a debate that was promptly and virulently echoed in the local press. The purple prose of the editorial was a violent defense of an essentially British-colonial way of life that had been ebbing, slowly but irrevocably, for the preceding hundred years. That the opera house should have participated in the original clash of wills serves to show how very much it was, in the absolute sense, the center of community life. In early August, the Leader chose to expound.

> The steady stream of immigrants pouring into our beloved country every day, hour and minute begins to loom up as a black cloud upon the peaceful horizon of this republic. Like the continual dumping of the scum, dregs and polluted matter upon a stream of clear and sparkling water, they come. Heretofore, the water has taken up and cleansed the refuse, but the constant flow has become so appallingly large that there is great danger of its poisoning the whole stream of republican liberty, peace, contentment and happiness. No complaint can be made of the honest

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[1] Leader, May 29, 1903. [2] Leader, July 3, 1903.

[3] Ibid.

> Germans [give them ten years], the steady Englishman and the active patriot from the country of bogs, but when we see the bleared, red-eyed criminals, anarchists, paupers of Russia, Italy, Servia crowding in, a cry for protection seems not altogether out of place.
>
> On the stage of the Oxford Opera House recently two Oxford Ministers took issue with a Flint divine [probably Fr. Kelley] on this question, claiming that we had always assimilated the people from all nations, that America was a refuge for the oppressed of all nations and all nations should be brought under the beneficent folds of its protection. All this as an oratorical effort and as a beautiful theory was most excellent, but when considered from the standpoint of the working American citizen, it is not altogether a theory to be indefinitely followed. When we consider that owing to the easy infraction of our naturalization laws, it would have been possible during the last presidential campaign, to have decided the election by the combined foreign vote of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco, we appreciate the gravity of the impending menace. Statistics show that of the criminals in this country, 65% are foreign born and 87% of the suicides can be shown to be at least of foreign parentage. These facts speak for themselves. Last year 863,000 immigrants came into this country. The constant flow is a menace to the American laboring man and to the entire American people. Some restriction must soon come and it will not be long before the people demand it.[1]

All was peaceful and quite ordinary into October, when the Sefton-Garner Stock Company enlivened matters by failing to put in their dates. Manager Vinton promptly cancelled their engagement and began negotiations to secure the Tennessee Colored Jubilee Singers in their place.[2] The dust stirred, then quickly settled. Moderate order prevailed.

Nineteen-ought-four was a leap year, and it was ushered in with proper festivity at the K. P. New Year's

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[1] *Leader*, August 7, 1903. [2] *Leader*, October 16, 1903.

dance.[1] After all, in the days prior to the advent and nativity of Sadie Hawkins, leap year was an important institution. Leap year brought a professional Shakespearian troupe to the opera house, and Elmer Buffham played a passable Shylock.[2] January also brought more controversy, this time not over the question of national origin, or even over a pound of flesh. This was something far closer home, for the youth of Oxford Corners were in dire peril.

The Knights of Pythias arranged a "Character Ball," as opposed to the usual masquerade, because the quaint and (often) ludicrous costuming was far more to the point than actual masking. The night of the ball, the Leader printed this letter:

> EDITOR LEADER.
> Dear Sir:--I notice you give much space, in your otherwise valued paper, to dancing, that device of the devil whereby our youth and maidens are dragged into perdition and sin's hell. Those who defend the practice tell us that there is nothing immoral about the terpsichorean art, but let me ask them this one question, "Why don't the men dance by themselves and the women by themselves as they did in old testament times? Ah, come now, boys, would you enjoy it?" "No," would be your answer. Then dancing for the pure exercise is not the fascination our people find in it. There is something else.
>
> It is announced that the heads of New York society have invented 'sitting out a waltz,' wherein the position is the same, only you sit, instead of dance, during the rendition of the music. Now that is more like it. I have always wondered if it was not a great nuisance to gallop a mile or so in order to get a few hugs from some young maiden or other man's wife. A roomful of people, sitting around on sofas, hugging to music, is more to the popular notion. A man may lose his appetite for dancing, but he has to get pretty old before he loses his appetite to

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[1] Leader, January 1, 1904. [2] Ibid.

> caress a pretty girl. Isn't it enough to make a sane person's stomach rebel to witness such folly--the animal affections of man.
>
> Then, too, just think what would happen should the men dress as indelicately as do the women. The latter would throw up their hands in horror should such indecent exposure occur, yet the women parade around, waiting for the man's caresses, attired with nearly as scant clothing as Mother Eve. The dance hall is one of the most harmful places for the coming generation. It should be placed under the ban by all Christian people. -- Very truly,
> A LEADER READER.[1]

In March of 1904, a human-interest story was circulated which brought a ready smile to Oxford's theatre-going public. Frank Tucker, the flashy favorite of late associated with the Hunt Stock Company, not many years earlier had been involved in a railroad accident. Surgeons amputated his leg, and thus very nearly abscinded his theatrical career along with it. His last Oxford billing had been in the title rôle in A Noble Outcast, and the casting seemed sadly accurate. Then came the word that, in Conan Doyle's latest Holmes adventure, The Sign of the Four, there was a character, Jonathan Small, whose distinguishing characteristic was that he "possessed but one pedal extremity." It was a difficult task to find a one-legged actor to play the rôle, and, happening upon Tucker, Charles P. Rice signed him with great dispatch.[2]

March was a full month. While the populace was still dwelling upon the happy fate of Frank Tucker, the Cornell-McDowell Dramatic Company arrived, carrying such classics

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[1] Leader, January 28, 1904. [2] Leader, March 18, 1904.

as A True Kentuckian, Under Two Flags, and Ten Nights in a Bar Room. They had made their way up from Grand Ledge, where the Independent proclaimed them "much above the average and all the members . . . well up on their parts."[1] (One wonders how often all the members were NOT up on their parts.) The company entered Oxford in the wake of a terrific storm that almost, but not quite, had come between the Knights of Pythias and their St. Patrick's Day dance. Neither did the weather dampen the enthusiasm of students of the drama, and the Cornell-McDowell Company played a blissful week to a full house.[2]

May and June had evolved into established sequence. May had the tag ends of the winter theatrical season, the second annual Baptist Young People's Union (B. Y. P. U.) banquet, and the evening ceremonies attendant on Memorial Day (when the village trooped gladly into surroundings more cheerful than the cemetery).[3, 4] June at the opera house kept the promotional exercises, commencement, the alumni banquet (the ladies of the Baptist Church served over a hundred guests), and acquired the Junior Ex. for good measure.[5]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid. [3] Leader, May 20, 1904.

[4] Leader, June 3, 1904.

[5] Leader, June 10, 1904 and June 24, 1904.

It was July that brought what was perhaps the year's strongest attraction. On the afternoon of the fourth, Harry C. Barton arrived to play in A Woman's Revenge. The play itself was not exceptional, but the company was universally strong, and villagers crowded the theatre for both the matinee and evening performances. The excitement was due largely to the fact that the Leader had carried the advance announcement, lest there be any in the village ignorant of such an important fact, that Barton had actually been leading man for Booth and Barrett, for Fanny Davenport, for John McCullough. The aging actor was a native of Michigan, and he had chosen a tour of his home state to serve as his farewell to the stage. On the outside chance that even the presence of a Noted Actor would not dispel all misgivings, the Leader assured that

> there is no suggestiveness that might be annoying and the most exacting moralist will find nothing in the play but that which is sweet, pure, and romantic. . . . Take your wives, sweethearts, sisters and children.[1]

And, as final assurance that the performance was capable of pleasing even the most discriminating, it was announced that, in lieu of lesser specialty acts, in the course of the evening Signor De Luchi, "formerly leading baritone of the Mascagni Grand Italian Opera Company," would render popular and patriotic vocal selections.[2]

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[1] Leader, July 1, 1904. [2] Ibid.

In August, A Royal Slave played at the opera house. It dealt with life in old Mexico "at the most romantic time in its history, during the reign of the unhappy Maximilian;" it abounded in thrilling situations, "at the same time containing a beautiful love story of interest."[1] On a twenty-four foot stage it was possible to see the "Great Tropical Palm Island by Moonlight," the "Gorgeous Palace of the King," a "Great Volcano in State of Eruption," all in all a most bewildering display of "Scenic Embellishment." There was a full carload of scenery and effects, and "THIRTY! CAST OF THIRTY!" A Royal Slave was a "thrilling story of Love, Hate, Passion, Intrigue, Revenge, Devotion and Heroic Daring."[2]

In Autumn, the opera house hosted a return engagement of Ten Nights in a Bar Room. The billing included the the intriguing notation that the young actor who would portray Frank Slade "was an eye-witness to the assassination of the late President McKinley and one of the first to seize and assist in securing the assassin." For his timely efforts, Charles Conyers had been presented a gold medal, and he was the incidental recipient of the kind of fame which was of infinitely greater value to one of his

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[1] Leader, August 26, 1904.

[2] Ibid.

profession.[1] The second week of advanced billing included the immortal admonition, "If you miss it, you miss it."[2]

In October, the Heber-Edison Kinetoscope Motion Picture Show brought perhaps the most impressive array of kinetoscope film that Oxford had yet seen. Their program included the guarantee that there would be

> railroad bandits and wrecks, Japanese and Russian land and sea battles [it was presently the middle of the Russo-Japanese War], vessels sinking, men falling, Ben Hur, Crescious, Lou Dillon races, balloon ascension and parachute leap. Barnum and Bailey show, elephants stand on their heads, Iroquois fire theatre disaster, Gen. Slocum steamboat excursion fire, 1000 lives lost. Heavy steam roller runs over Mike Casey. Funny. People hold their breath at times. Backed by unlimited capital there are no tedious waits. Everything goes with a rush that delights the people. Standing room often bid for. Be wise--secure seats early. We do not exhibit any still pictures. Everything in motion. Something doing all the time. Good music. Everything vividly described.[3]

It may have been all that frantic activity that caused Manager Vinton to look at his opera house and determine it needed a fresh coat of paint, inside and out, which it got, "adding much to the appearance of that fine edifice," or so heralded the Leader.[4]

The Oxford Lecture Course ran smoothly into 1905. Just what the appeal of traveling lecturers was, is a thing that was more closely related to the soaring sentiment of the nineteenth century, than it was to the gathering bustle

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[1] Ibid. [2] Leader, September 30, 1904.

[3] Leader, October 7, 1904.

[4] Leader, October 21, 1904.

of the twentieth. When George W. Bain arrived in Oxford, he was preceded by this testimonial from another orator, Cahmp Clark, congressman from Missouri:

> I had the exquisite pleasure of hearing George W. Bain at the Fort Smith Chatauqua in Arkansas . . . he swayed his hearers as the storm king sways the forest. At one moment he excited them to such uproarious laughter that it must have startled the turtles sleeping on the banks of the Arkansas. The next they were dissolved in tears. I am not ashamed to confess that he set my lachrymal glands to working freely and copiously, and I have heard all our great orators from John C. Breckenridge to Joseph W. Bailey. The way that Col. Bain played upon that wierd harp of a thousand strings, the human heart, was a revelation to me. I shall always remember that hour as the most ecstatic of my life.[1]

On March 28, 1905, the Oxford Opera House once again changed hands. Henry Vinton, as co-owner with his wife Ruth, relinquished the opera house and the property on which it stood to Samuel and Elizabeth Axford. For the privilege of ownership, Axford paid Henry Vinton $3,500.00--just $500.00 more than the property had cost Henry, and $4,500.00 less than the original cost of the opera house.[2] For reasons best known to himself, Samuel Axford then deeded the entire property to his wife Elizabeth.[3] That spring of 1905, the opera house no longer had even a tenuous connection with the Powell family--for the first time in its history.

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[1] Leader, February 3, 1905.

[2] Abstract, entry 24.

[3] Ibid., entry 25.

As soon as the Vinton-Axford transaction was complete, Loue M. Lenhoff assumed active management of the little theatre. Loue was the owner of the local electrical supply store, and his innate affinity for gadgetry soon demonstrated itself at the opera house. Lenhoff promptly opened the theatre to roller-skating and ordered rubber-tired skates to protect the varnished floors.[1] However, he resisted the temptation to have roller skating at his grand opening April 7. That day was graced by the appearance of the Beggar Prince Operatic and Comedy Company, a group "high-toned" enough to require a large certainty prior to playing.[2] In consequence, the admission price went up to 25 ¢ for children, 35¢ for adults, and 50¢ for reserved seats. It was a step to be undertaken with some caution, but the quality of the quality of the production merited the hike in price, and Lenhoff made a formal statement to the effect that "50¢ shows will pay here" and that he would "endeavor to secure an engagement here for another high priced company in the near future."[3] In view of the fact that 50¢ was roughly equal to seats in the stalls at the Detroit Grand Opera House, and that the D. U. R. generally ran special excursion trains into the city anytime a production of note was on the Detroit boards, the apparent willingness to invest that much on home ground was

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[1] Leader, March 31, 1905.

[2] Leader, April 14, 1905. [3] Ibid.

more than gratifying, at least to those connected with the local theatrical enterprise.[1]

The skating rink debuted on April 29. The skates, when they arrived, were equipped with composition rollers and ball bearings, and the opera house floor was suddenly a VERY fast infield. To capitalize on the advantages of gallery observation, two admission prices were appointed: 20¢ for skaters, and 10¢ for those who preferred a spectator's enjoyment of the ensuing graceful rhythms--or lack of them.[2]

In May, the opera house had an opportunity to welcome back to Oxford a local young lady who had "made good" in the big city. Miss Rachel Morgan Axford left the village to study for three years at Emerson College in Boston. Her mastery of the "Emerson Method" of elocution not only won her a position as instructor in oratory and elocution at Yankton (South Dakota), but gave her considerable acclaim for her personal skill. The Boston Herald described her readings as "vigorous tests of intellectual grasp, interpretative ability, and elocutionary technique in its highest sense."[3] All this she brought home to Oxford, and, on the evening of May 12, Miss Axford displayed the extent of her training. She read

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[1] Leader, April 7, 1905.

[2] Leader, April 28, 1905.

[3] Leader, May 5, 1905.

from James Whitcomb Riley, from Victor Hugo, and even did a portion of Queen Katherine's defense from Shakespeare's Henry VIII.[1] All in all, it was an occasion for great local pride.

The spring and summer months gave way to the school exercises and baseball games. A letter arrived from an Oxfordite who had been sojourning in the "wild" west, and the epistle read satisfyingly like a Ned Buntline dime novel.[2] The summer sizzled on, and then, in September,

> MANAGER ANNOUNCES A GOOD SHAKESPEAREAN PLAY! Thursday, September 21, Edward N. Hoyt will appear in Hamlet!
>
> Mr. Hoyt is considered to be one of the best portrayers of the "melancholy Dane" now before the public and has received great priase from the critics in every city he has played. Mr. Hoyt has been on the stage for 25 years and received his training in the early days when actors were actors, being associated with Booth, Barrett, Edmund Keene [not only is "Kean" mis-spelled, but this would imply remarkable longevity. More than likely, the author refers to Kean's son, Charles], Warde and James and other well known tragedians and therefore is highly fitted to give an excellent portrayal of this beautiful but difficult character. He has surrounded himself with an excellent company who can be relied upon to give an artistic portrayal of their respective roles. It is to be hoped that the people of Oxford will appreciate this chance to uphold the classical reptation of this city by attending . . . showing their wish to patronize the classic drama for the betterment of the stage.

The Leader went on to extol the virtues of the star. Affirming that it was all too well known that Shakespeare was seldom done outside of truly large cities, the paper went on to assure the public that this Hamlet would be equal to anything the Detroit Grand Opera House could offer.

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[1] Ibid. [2] Leader, August 4, 1905.

> Mr. Hoyt has played 168 different characters during his 26 years of actual work, appearing in 9 Shakespearian plays and interpreting 47 Shakespearian characters in that time. He made his debut as an actor in Brooklyn in 1877. Since that time he has been steadily at work in the Drama, supporting many of the greatest Stars in this country, and playing the best roles. He was leading man with the late Joseph Proctor, played two seasons with Fred Warde, four with Louis James, and has been a strong factor in the support of Charles B. Hanford, Frank Mayo the elder, Robert Mantell, Walker Whiteside and Robert Downing, and has been associated with many of the prominent actors and actresses of the country in a divide [sic] of leading parts. He is especially strong in classic and tragic roles. He is an authority on Shakespeare on and off the stage and is an accomplished stage manager. Mr. Hoyt's experience has given him an excellent stage presence and study, discrimination and natural endowments have well fitted him for a masterly portrayal of Hamlet.[1]

Hoyt represented Oxford's only real exposure to the kind of acting that had been best seen in the resplendent nineteenth-century catalogue--Cooke, Kean, Macready, Booth, Barrett--all of whom carried with them a kind of glory that the theatre permanently lost with the death of Booth in 1893. Too, Edward Hoyt's brand of Shakespearian expertise, "on and off the stage," was a phenomenon of the American frontier, when an actor coming, as it were, from beyond the pale, was expected to live and speak with the same excessive grace and sophistication he displayed before the footlights.[2]

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[1]Leader, September 8, 1905.

[2]Eleanor Ruggles, Prince of Players (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1953), pp. 53-78.

It would have been indeed difficult to follow such a man with an act absolutely comparable, and Loue Lenhoff demonstrated a small amount of real managerial professionality. With Hoyt a recent memory, Lenhoff booked in A Romance of Coon Hollow, whose strength was scenic as opposed to dramatic. The playbills promised true mechanical glory:

> The first act reveals an Autumn view of a typical Southern plantation, with a sunset and moonlight effects, and contains a splendid electrical display. The second act is a facsimile of 'Coon Hollow,' a rugged glen in the Tennessee hills, painted from sketches made on the spot, and is made sensational by a strong and thrilling climax. The third act shows a wood landing on the Mississippi, and a night view of the famous Lee-Natchez steamboat race, the boats being lighted up under a full head of steam. The last act is given to an actual cotton compress in operation, and is thrillingly dramatic. [?] The play will be given here with all the effect used in the original run at the Fourteenth Street Theatre, New York. In the wood landing scene is introduced a rollicking melange of songs and dances by a troupe of colored boys and girls, including a splendid quartette of vocalists. The play is now in its 11th successful season on the road.[1]

One cannot help but ponder the difficulties of cramming "all the effect used in the original run" into the confines of Oxford's twenty-four foot proscenium, but it must have been achieved to some degree.

For some time, the Oxford Leader had been carrying a series of articles on the great actors and actresses of the world. Perhaps it is only fitting that the stormy 1905 theatrical season wound up with this description of

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[1] Leader, September 29, 1905.

Sarah Bernhardt the "unconventional Sarah," and an intimate glimpse into her boudoir:

> Her sleeping room is hung in royal purple, decorated with peacock plumes. Over her Louis XVI bed is a canopy made of unspun silk taken directly from the silkworm cocoon. A great splash of crimson satin, in the form of a shield, adorns the center. The walls are hung in old tapestries, and in the interstices of the hangings are row after row of tiny monkey skulls, the eye sockets of which are illumined with electric lights. The 'divine Sarah' has parted with her pet tiger, and now has for a companion a large and ugly baboon, whose ears have been pierced so that they may carry huge rings of solid gold. Bernhardt is said to look as young as she did twenty years ago. Her face is without wrinkles, and her step is as spry and her manner as vivacious as when she first electrified her native city as an actress.[1]

1906-1909

Weds.,	Jan.	10, 1906:	Oxford Band musicale
Fri.,	Jan	12, 1906:	Indoor baseball
Sat.,	Jan.	20, 1906:	G. Lote Silver's New York Minstrels
Thurs.,	Feb.	15, 1906:	K. P. Grand Mask Ball
Tues.,	Feb.	20, 1906:	Mrs. Conklin
Weds.,	Mar.	14, 1906:	Indoor baseball
Thurs.,	Apr.	5, 1906:	Arthur Middleton Co. (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Apr.	6, 1906:	Amateur Club of Orion, Arabian Night
Sat.,	Apr.	28, 1906:	Father Vaughn (Oxford Lecture Course)
Weds.,	May	23, 1906:	Junior Ex.
Weds.,	May	30, 1906:	Memorial Day exercises
Weds.,	June	20, 1906:	Promotional exercises; The Enchanted Wood
Thurs.,	June	21, 1906:	Oxford High School commencement

Fri.,	June	22, 1906:	Alumni banquet
Sat.,	August	11, 1906:	Frank Beamish in A Stranger in Town
Fri.,	Sept.	14, 1906:	Republican rally, Gov. Fred M. Warner, speaker
Thurs.,	Nov.	22, 1906:	Pontiac Home Talent Company, In Old Virginia
Sat.,	Dec.	1, 1906:	"Pitchfork" Ben Tillman (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Dec.	7, 1906:	Miss Ada Greengage in When Women Love
Tues.,	Jan.	1, 1907:	Cleveland Ladies' Orchestra (Oxford Lecture Course)
Weds.,	Jan.	30, 1907:	Kellogg-Haines Singing Company (Oxford Lecture Course)
Tues.,	Feb.	12, 1907:	Dr. A. K. DeBlois (Oxford Lecture Course)
W-Th,	Feb.	27-28, 1907:	O. E. S. amateur play, Mismated
Weds.,	Mar.	13, 1907:	Rev. Ernest Wray Oneal (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Apr.	5, 1907:	Junior Ex., The Merchant of Venice--modernized
Sat.,	Apr.	20, 1907:	Troubadores Amusement Company (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	May	10, 1907:	Local talent play, Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch
M-F,	May	20-24, 1907:	Brown's Stock Company, East Lynne, or The Elopement
Thurs.,	June	30, 1907:	Oxford High School commencement

Fri.,	July	19, 1907:	Irma Comic Opera Co., supporting Emma Abbot DeBold, The Adorable Fritzie
F-S,	Aug.	30-31, 1907:	Miss Maud Dunn, concert singer
Tues.,	Sept.	10, 1907:	For Mother's Sake
Weds.,	Oct.	16, 1907:	Schunect and Clark's High Class Vaudeville Company
Tues.,	Nov.	12, 1907:	Mattison Wilbur Chase (Oxford Lecture Course)
Tues.,	Dec.	10, 1907:	The Missouri Girl
Mon.,	Dec.	16, 1907:	Rufus Everson King (Oxford Lecture Course)
Thurs.,	Dec.	19, 1907:	J. C. Rockwell's World Famous New Sunny South Company
Thurs.,	Dec.	26, 1907:	Marie DeBeau in Tempest and Sunshine
T-Th,	Jan.	14-16, 1908:	The Great Svingali, telepathist and hypnotist
Tues.,	Jan.	21, 1908:	Durno the Mysterious (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Jan.	31, 1908:	Litchfield Trio (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Feb.	21, 1908:	Hawthorne Musical Club (Oxford Lecture Course)
Thurs.,	Feb.	27, 1908:	K. P. Masked Ball
Thurs.,	Mar.	19, 1908:	Will H. Griffin in Southern Folks
Sat.,	Apr.	4, 1908:	Chic Perkins in The Little Prospector
Weds.,	Apr.	22, 1908:	Powell and Cohan's production, Bud Hicks, The Yankee Doodle Boy

Mon.,	Apr.	27, 1908:	Stove and White Co., Broncho Jim of Idaho
Tues.,	Apr.	28, 1908:	Stove and White Co., The James Boys
Weds.,	Apr.	29, 1908:	Stove and White Co., Greed for Gold
Thurs.,	Apr.	30, 1908:	Stove and White Co., Israel's Trip to the Circus
Fri.,	May	1, 1908:	Stove and White Co., Broken Hearts
Sat.,	May	2, 1908:	Stove and White Co., The Man Behind
Fri.,	May	8, 1908:	Junior Ex., My Uncle from India
Weds.,	May	20, 1908:	J. C. Lewis in Si Plunkard
Sat.,	May	30, 1908:	Memorial Day exercises

JUNE THROUGH AUGUST, 1908: NIGHTLY PERFORMANCES BY THE AMUSE YOU MOTION PICTURE COMPANY--WHENEVER OTHER EVENTS NOT SCHEDULED

Thurs.,	Aug.	27, 1908:	Frank and Myrtle Chamberlain, trick rope artists
Sat.,	Aug.	29, 1908:	Frank and Myrtle Chamberlain, trick rope artists

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1908, AND THEREAFTER: NIGHTLY PERFORMANCES BY THE DRAMATONE MOTION PICTURE COMPANY--WHENEVER OTHER EVENTS NOT SCHEDULED

Mon.,	Sept.	28, 1908:	The Silver Family
M-S,	Oct.	12-17, 1908:	Sharpsteen's Medicine and Concert Company
Mon.,	Nov.	2, 1908:	G. O. P. Rally
Mon.,	Nov.	16, 1908:	Village Singers (Oxford Lecture Course)

Mon., Nov. 23, 1908: Oxford Dramatic Club, Above the Clouds

Sat., Dec. 5, 1908: Shungopavi, mysterious illusionist (Oxford Lecture Course)

Sat., Dec. 12, 1908: Lyall and Gifford's Co., E. Sutherland Ross in The Devil

Fri., Dec. 25, 1908: Young Men's Dancing Club, Dhristmas dance

Fri., Jan. 8, 1909: Lyall and Gifford's Company, At Sunrise

Mon., Jan. 11, 1909: John E. Gunckel (Oxford Lecture Course)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 1909, AND THEREAFTER: NIGHTLY PERFORMANCES BY THE METROPOLITAN AMUSEMENT COMPANY (MOTION PICTURES)--WHENEVER OTHER EVENTS NOT SCHEDULED

S-S, Jan. 23-24, 1909: The Passion Play (life-like reproduction of Oberammergau)

Thurs., Jan. 28, 1909: Y. M. D. C. Masquerade Ball, Finzel's orchestra

Thurs., Feb. 4, 1909: The Maoris

Thurs., Feb. 18, 1909: Detroit Concert Company

Mon., Feb. 22, 1909: Y. M. D. C. party

Tues., Feb. 23, 1909: M. W. Chase (Oxford Lecture Course)

Mon., Mar. 15, 1909: Gilbert A. Eldredge (Oxford Lecture Course)

Fri., Apr. 23, 1909: Junior Ex., Oh Susannah!

Fri., May 14, 1909: Presentation of Kirmess

Weds., June 16, 1909: Promotional exercises, Princess Snow White

Weds., Aug. 18, 1909: Miss Mary Carew in The Moonshiner's Daughter

Tues.,	Sept.	21, 1909:	The Girl That's All the Candy
Sat.,	Oct.	2, 1909:	A Daughter's Devotion Co., supporting Robert A. Mason
Fri.,	Nov.	5, 1909:	New York Ladies' Trio (Oxford Lecture Course)
Mon.,	Nov.	22, 1909:	Local Option Rally
Fri.,	Dec.	3, 1909:	Musical Hoyles
Tues.,	Dec.	7, 1909:	Miss Bertha Rexroth Kurtz (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Jan.	28, 1910:	Masquerade Ball
Tues.,	Feb.	8, 1910:	Lutz Concert Company (Oxford Lecture Course)
Sat.,	Feb.	21, 1910:	Y. M. D. C. dance
Fri.,	Mar.	4, 1910:	Marshall Choate Crouch (Oxford Lecture Course)
Sun.,	Mar.	13, 1910:	Hon. D. D. Aitken, state legislator, speaking on local option
Mon.,	Mar.	14, 1910:	The Morphets (Oxford Lecture Course)
Thurs.,	Mar.	24, 1910:	J. C. Rockwell's New Sunny South Company
Mon.,	Apr.	4, 1910:	Miss Louise Price in A Girl of the Mountains
Fri.,	Apr.	22, 1910:	Junior Ex., Breaking his Bonds
Fri.,	Apr.	29, 1910:	Widow McCarthy
Fri.,	May	6, 1910:	Informal dancing party, Stone's orchestra
Mon.,	May	30, 1910:	Memorial Day exercises
Sat.,	June	4, 1910:	Society reception

Weds.,	June	15, 1910:	Promotional exercises
Thurs.,	June	16, 1910:	Oxford High School commencement

SATURDAY, JUNE 25, 1910, AND THEREAFTER: MOTION PICTURES SHOWN NIGHTLY--WHENEVER OTHER EVENTS NOT SCHEDULED

Tues.,	July	19, 1910:	Mason Brothers' Uncle Tom's Cabin Company
Th-S,	July	21-23, 1910:	Zelda Dawn Stock Company
Sat.,	Aug.	20, 1910:	Kingston's Troupe, The Girl From Home, with Miss Mary Carew
Fri.,	Aug.	26, 1910:	Mysterious Smith and his vaudeville company
Fri.,	Aept.	2, 1910:	Sis Perkins, Funny Girl
Thurs.,	Sept.	8, 1910:	Films of the Jeffries-Johnson fight
Fri.,	Sept.	9, 1910:	Beatrice Kinsey in At Sunrise
Mon.,	Sept.	19, 1910:	Harry C. Bannister in The Cow Puncher
Mon.,	Sept.	26, 1910:	Mann's Fighting Parson
Fri.,	Oct.	28, 1910:	Democratic meeting
Thurs.,	Nov.	3, 1910:	Lena Rivers
Sat.,	Nov.	12, 1910:	Detroit Dramatic Co., Society Girl
Tues.,	Nov.	15, 1910:	Will Carleton, poet, under the auspices of Congregational Ladies' Aid
Mon.,	Dec.,	12, 1910:	J. C. Rockwell's New Colored Company (Sunny South)
Weds.,	Dec.	14, 1910:	Detroit Dramatic Co., Lottie Mavity

In January of 1906, with a temporary dearth of serious drama at the opera house, Burdette Hagerman stepped forward to put into operation a scheme over which he had mused fondly for some time. Burdette (A. B.) Hagerman was--and is--Oxford's baseball hero. For several spring trainings the Detroit Tigers thought him quite a "phenom." Like all real pros, Burdette had baseball in his blood. January was a long, cold, dry month. Therefore, Burdette Hagerman introduced into Oxford the game of indoor baseball, and they played it at the opera house.[1] Though the 1906-model rabbit in the ball was pretty insignificant compared to what half a century would see him become, even the old, dead-ball presented problems in a building with four skylights. The solution was fairly obvious, and Burdette and company played the indoor game with what appears to have been a doctored softball. To further control the trajectory of baseball's beloved missiles, the gentlemen played with sawed-off bats, no more than eighteen inches long.[2] Yet, it <u>was</u> baseball, and only a devotee of the game can know how much that can mean in mid-January. Whenever the opera house was free and the orchestra seats folded and stacked on the stage, the "Regulars" would assemble to meet challengers from neighboring towns. The lineup was worth remembering (though not the line

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[1] <u>Leader</u>, January 12, 1906. [2] <u>Ibid</u>.

score, for scoring was extremely high--one game won by the margin of 17 to 13):[1]

A. B. Hagerman	c
G. Kessell	p
McGaffey	1b
Glaspie	2b
H. Kessell	3b
Lenhoff	rss
F. Sutherland	lss
Howland	rf
Randall	lf

The strange configuration--two shortstops and no center fielder--would have given umpire F. C. Hagerman no problem, for it was no "indoor" phenomenon. It was the way the game was played. The "right short-stop" filled in the hole between first and second, freeing the second baseman to play deeper and take up the slack in the outfield.

Not all the shows that came to Oxford played on the stage at the opera house. In particular, Uncle Tom's Cabin companies were prone to travel as tent shows, setting up for a performance wherever they could find sufficient crowd. Because they thus generally carried but one set, and played but one program, they earned the slightly derogatory name "Tom Shows," and the troupers attached to them became "Tommers."[2] In Oxford, tent shows were commonly held in back of the high school on the field that had been roughly designated "playground." Occasionally a company would set

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[1] Leader, January 19, 1906.

[2] Willis, "The Opera House . . . ," op. cit., p. 667.

Under Strictly Water-Proof Tents

BANKS BAIRD'S

Magnificent [illegible] Production

Uncle Tom's Cabin

Travelling In Our Own Pullman Sleeping & Dining Cars

A Magnificent Transformation Scene

[illegible] minutes duration [illegible] EVA IN HEAVEN [illegible] ing with "The Bower of R[illegible]" "The Bower of Butterflies," "The Recording Angel," "The [illegible]," "The Silver Lined Cloud," "The Bower of Ely[illegible]" Spectators are requested to REMAIN SEATED during the most enrapturing of Tableau representations.

The Most Beautiful Stage Picture of a Plantation Ever Painted

St. Clair's Residence by Moonlight

Realistic Scene [illegible] Mississippi Levee

We Carry Every Particle of Scenery

[illegible] is essential [illegible] this play

5	**SIBERIAN BLOODHOUNDS**	**5**
35	**- PEOPLE -**	**35**

Among many of the [illegible] to the Drama will be

THRILLING, FLOATING ICE SCENE

Showing the escape [illegible] the Ohio River, with the Man-Hunting [illegible] hounds in hot pursuit.

COTTON FIELD and PLANTATION SCENES

Portraying [illegible] Negroes with effect

Baird's Military Band and Orchestra

STREET PARADE AT 4 P. M.

A Card.

I [illegible] to announce that the combination I have organized this season for the presentation of Harriet Beecher Stowe's moral drama, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," is immeasurably superior, in every respect, to any heretofore offered the public. To fully accomplish this I have spared no expense in securing the first choice of Historic Talent, Gorgeous and Appropriate Scenery, Mechanical and Electrical Effects, Etc.

My [illegible] experience as an amusement caterer has taught me that the [illegible] offered is invariably the surest means of attaining a Good [illegible] and by anticipating the requirements and desires of the theatre-going public, I am sure of establishing my own success in a managerial capacity. I therefore assert, without fear of dissent, that I have succeeded in placing before the public the Great Drama "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in a style of equipment that has never before been seen on the American stage. Thanking the public for past favors, I beg to be

Obediently,

BANKS BAIRD

Admission. 25 and 35 Cents

Evening Performances Only RAIN or SHINE

Doors open at 7 p. m., Performance 8 p. m.

WILL EXHIBIT AT

OXFORD,

MONDAY EVENING, **MAY 14**

PLATE VI

These "Tommers" were a tent company. Often an Uncle Tom troupe played at the opera house--with the same promise of spectacle. From a playbill in the Oxford Leader, May 4, 1906.

up on East Burdick street (which bisected the village business district), but for the most part the vacant lots on Burdick were tacitly reserved for Chatauqua.[1]

Baird's Uncle Tom's Cabin Company arrived in mid-May, preceded by the kind of ballyhoo that spelled sure inconvenience for the opera house.[2] The little theatre had not had a very exciting winter season. Father Vaughn had spent one April evening interpreting Shakespeare for the faithful, but since that time it had been all too quiet.[3] The circus atmosphere of the tent show drew the village urchins like so many flies, and the opera house could only watch morosely as bicycle after bicycle hurtled by. May was a good month for the Tom Show, but for the opera house it had even seen the Junior Ex. postponed--on account of an attack of measles "on a member of the class."[4]

Spring bookings were irregular in 1906, and the summer "recess" at the opera house was unusually long. The lack of more professional theatrical activity became so noticable that the Leader suggested that, if one desired to see a side show,

> Go to the side track on M. C. road near Atwater street (Orion) any evening when the Hungarians and Italians are cooking their supper along the track. Sometimes they dine in their cars, sometimes they build little tables and eat outside. The nearby residents have learned to cook macaroni to a T

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[1]Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols, Idem.

[2]Leader, May 4, 1906.

[3]Leader, April 27, 1906.

[4]Leader, May 25, 1906.

> by watching these people cook. After supper, banjos, mouth organs, and tambourines are the order of the evening, and while the music, which is really good at times, is at its liveliest, the jig dancers will get up in their car and give a jolly break down. One couple, mulattoes, keep house very comfortably in a car.[1]

There was a circus, too. And there was baseball--merciful Heavens, was there baseball! The opera house watched in puzzled awe as local manager Gent Kessell collared a slender young man on an Oxford street, and thus acquired a third baseman for the day. Surely it could not be, but it was. Detroit's Tyrus Raymond Cobb strolled onto the diamond to play--and promptly booted two grounders.[2] What would make a man who was earning $3,000.00 a year just for playing ball, a man who had the distinction of, at 21, being the youngest, as well as the best, player in the American League, come to Oxford to play ball on an off-day? Not only that, he had been induced to come in from the outfield and play a position utterly foreign to him. For the remainder of the season and for part of the next, the opera house was as perplexed as Gent Kessell was pleased. Cobb lost as many games with his glove as he won with his bat, but the incredible good fortune of <u>having</u> him there was enough.

It was midsummer of 1907 before the mystery, if that it was, was resolved. On the weekend of July 20-21, there was quite a procession of baseball notables in Oxford.

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[1] <u>Leader</u>, July 6, 1906. [2] <u>Leader</u>, August 17, 1906.

When the dust had settled, all of a sudden it was awfully clear why Ty Cobb liked to play ball in Oxford, and it also was apparent that Rube Waddell was no brighter than he was reputed to be. The Leader enjoyed the story as much as its readers:

> We are getting to be some pumpkins when it comes to entertaining the professional sports. Saturday, Connie Mack sent a delegation here to head off the far-famed "Rube" Waddell, who had come out, inspired by Ty Cobb's fish stories, to angle for some of those whoppers in nearby lakes. Mack succeeded in getting the "Rube" back to Detroit to pitch the Philadelphia-Detroit game. Sunday, Ty Cobb, who is getting to be a familiar figure on our streets, came out, accompanied by Football Coach Heston and McGugin, stars of the University of Michigan pig skin chasers, the former the greatest football player in the world, the latter the brother-in-law of Hurry-up Yost.[1]

Nobody said why Cobb came into town that time. Perhaps we wanted to gloat over almost making Waddell miss his pitching assignment. Perhaps he had a game to play for Gent Kessell. Or, maybe, he just went fishing!

Besides Cobb, Oxford could follow the career of their own "Bumpus" Jones, much-traveled pitcher who spent most of his playing years with either Detroit or Indianapolis. But there was little at the opera house similarly to "follow." Manager Lenhoff brought in the highly-touted melodrama When Women Love (featuring a trial scene in which the innocent-young-girl-accused-of-killing-her-uncle would have been convicted "but for the startling evidence given

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[1]Leader, July 26, 1907.

by the Columbia Gramaphone upon which a conversation has been recorded by the villains, which is repeated at the trial in their natural voices!")--and it was as though the summer had established a habit of non-attendance. Lenhoff looked about him at the empty seats and issued the edict: "No more shows this winter."[1] You could buy Ben-Hur flour in Oxford,[2] but it looked like a long time would pass before you could see the play.

Will Drainer ran Oxford's livery stable, and when his own barns were full to overflowing he was wont to utilize an old stable that stood in back of the opera house.[3] As the occasion to "expand" became more and more frequent, Will surveyed likely buildings with a calculating eye. Why could not an opera house that no longer drew in good audiences be sold down the river--to the advantage of none other than Mr. William Drainer?

The floor of the opera house was level, and since it was wooden, drainage would be fairly good. The front door would have to be widened only slightly to accommodate the drays. Tack could be stored on the stage and in the dressing rooms, and it would be a whole lot cheaper to partition off stalls in the opera house than it would be to build an entire barn from scratch.[4]

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[1] Leader, December 7, 1906.

[2] Leader, February 1, 1907. [3] Lew Haddrill, Idem.

[4] Idem.

Consequently, Drainer approached Samuel and Elizabeth Axford. Sam Axford was fed up with what had proven to be an extremely bad investment, and he was quite ready to price the building within range of an hostler's purse.[1] Whereupon the Oxford Leader played Oliver Wendell Holmes to the opera house's U. S. S. Constitution.

> The Oxford Opera House was built at a cost of over $8,000.00 by the late Joseph Powell and is one of the best equipped little theatres in the state. To allow it to be sold and converted into a livery barn will be a disgrace to the citizens of Oxford. It seems as if some plan could be arranged to form a stock company to purchase the building or some method evolved to allow the village or township to own and control it. Oxford needs the opera house for public gatherings of all kinds and to allow it to be sold for the purpose contemplated would be a disgrace that the town would realize in more ways than one in the years to follow. It is a foregone conclusion that a building to replace it will never be built here.[2]

In the meantime, the opera house remained open to amateur productions and to the Lecture Course. The O. E. S. production of Mismated suffered somewhat from the general letdown, but Lew Haddrill's "Ebenezer" was "the fun provoker of the evening."[3] The Junior Ex., loyal to the opera house and dependent upon its stage facilities, labored mightily and brought forth The Merchant of Venice--that is to say A Merchant of Venice. The Leader printed the synopsis, possibly with certain apprehension that otherwise no-one would quite believe it.

> Act I, scene: A Street in Venice.
>
> Antonio, Bassanio and Gratiano (all members of the Junior football team) enter. Bassanio is despondent

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[1]Leader, Feb. 8, 1907. [2]Ibid. [3]Leader, May 8, 1907.

and Antonio and Gratiano soon discover that he is in love. He informs them, however, that only on certain conditions can he win Portia, the lady of his choice. Her father in his will has ordered examinations in Caesar, Cicero, and Virgil to be placed in three caskets and the man who would win his daughter's hand must choose one of the caskets and successfully pass the examination contained in it. Bassanio decides to make the attempt, in case he can get a pony to help him pass the examination. Shylock (a former football player on a rival team) enters. A Caesar pony is obtained from him on the condition that, if the pony is not returned on a certain day, Antonio will forfit one pound of his hair. Bassanio's success now depends on choosing the Caesar casket.

Act II, scene: A Room in Portia's House.

Portia and Nerissa enter and discuss the suitors of Portia. While they are talking, Bassanio and Gratiano are announced. Bassanio has come for the purpose of choosing one of the caskets, and is successful in choosing the Caesar casket. Miss Threedice (a school teacher) enters and gives Bassanio the examination. In the meantime Gratiano and Nerissa have fixed up things to suit themselves.

Act III, scene: Shylock's House and Yard.

Jessica, while wandering in the garden, is followed by her guardian, Shylock, who tells her that he loves her. Upon being refused by Jessica, he drives her into the house and keeps her there to prevent her from seeing her lover, Antonio. Launcelot Gobbo, a former servant of Shylock, then enters and upon encountering his mother, Mrs. Gobbo, sends her with a present to his new master, Antonio. Answering Jessica's cries for help, Launcelot goes for Antonio, who comes immediately and rescues Jessica. Then Shylock and his friend, Tubal, enter; he discovers that Jessica has gone and determines to have revenge on Antonio, his old enemy.

Act IV, scene: A Room in Portia's House.

Miss Threedice announces to Portia and Nerissa that Bassanio has been successful in passing the examination. Launcelot Gobbo then informs them that Jessica and Antonio ran away the night before; but more exciting than this, the month is up, the pony has not been returned; and Shylock is planning to cut Antonio's hair at the Thanksgiving game.

> Act V, scene I: The Football Field.
>
> (Third Down, Four Yards to Gain). Shylock causes Antonio's arrest just as the ball goes over.
>
> --scene II: The Court Room.
>
> Antonio is on trial. Shylock demands his right to cut a pound of Antonio's hair. A young doctor of the law is announced. He defeats Shylock's ends, by telling him that he must cut no more nor less than a pound of the hair, and that it must be cut off nearest the brain. A learned professor is called in. After a close examination with the X-ray, a startling discovery is made. A mouse causes sudden consternation, and it is discovered that the lawyer and his clerks are none other than Portia and Nerissa is disguise. Much rejoicing among Antonio's men. Launcelot Gobbo is the hero of the occasion and by his suggestion all are made happy.[1]

Neither Shakespeare nor his Maker saw fit to strike the opera house with a bolt of lightning during this production.

Which was well, because Loue Lenhoff had made a bold move, doubly inspired by the Leader's intense loyalty to the opera house and by the natural desire to protect his own investment as manager. Before Will Drainer could raise the necessary money and complete his dastardly dealings, Loue Lenhoff slapped down cash-on-the-barrelhead and bought the opera house from Mrs. Axford for $3,800.00.[2] The storm abated, the peril was averted.

With moderate success, Lenhoff re-opened the theatre to commercial shows. He personally booked in the numbers for the Lecture Course, and for a little while it looked as if the situation at the opera house could and would revert to what it had been prior to the turn of the century.

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[1] Leader, March 20, 1907. [2] Abstract, entry 27.

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PRI

Maud Dunn Concert Co.

Oxford Opera House,

MAUD DUNN, Soloist

2 NIGHTS ONLY. FRIDAY AND SATURDAY 2

AUGUST 30th and 31st.

PRICES 25 AND 35c. CHILDREN 15c.

Moving Pictures, Illustrated Songs by Mr. Harrison LeRoy

Reserved Seats now on sale at Blasbill's Jewelry Store.

PLATE VII

Playbill from original in the Oxford Leader, August 19, 1907.

Attendance went down but temporarily when "an electric theatre," also known as a "five-cent moving picture show"--a nickelodeon--came to town. A gentleman from Flint opened one such establishment in the Clark building (one door north of the Oxford Laundry), but his lease and his business lasted only a year.[1]

In an effort to boost his box office take, Lenhoff turned to bigger and splashier shows and larger companies. Relying on their past popularity, he brought in minstrel shows, only now the minstrel shows boasted twenty to twenty-five people in their companies.[2] The melodramas were more melodramatic (for The Little Prospector, a scene that looks suspiciously like "Frankie and Johnny" is captioned, "She shot him, for I saw her!"[3]), the spectacles more spectacular. When William White spent an April week playing an entirely "western" repertoire, Oxford's Mayor Stoll was persuaded to give permission for the company to turn all of main street into a "wild west" each evening prior to curtain time. Real, honest-to-goodness cowboys, Indians, and Mexicans tore up and down the street whooping, yelling, and shooting, until even an experienced "wild western" fan would have been well convinced that the trail herd was in town.[4] Little Margaret Hagerman was terrified by the

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[1] Leader, October 18, 1907.

[2] Leader, December 13, 1907.

[3] Leader, April 3, 1908.

[4] Leader, April 24, 1908.

gunshots,[1] but one Oxford lad chose to emulate the James boys, and Oxford's good doctor found that Michigan medical men could probe for bullets as well as Doc Holliday.[2]

Doc might have been able to get the business, but he would not have been partial to a lengthy stay in Oxford. That summer, Oakland County went dry by "local option," and a good many farmers were looking for more than a healthy downpour to slake dusty throats.[3]

Loue Lenhoff had made a valiant attempt to stave off the inevitable, and he had indeed come between the Oxford Opera House and a fate worse than death, but the tempo of the times was such that one man could no longer profitably manage a small-town opera house. In the summer of 1908, Oxford businessmen banded together to do what the Leader had proposed they do the previous year. On June 2, the Oxford Opera House Company was born, and once again the opera house was purchased by those who hoped to head off another party who planned to subvert its purpose.[4] The Articles of Association, as filed in the Secretary of State's office in Lansing, were:[5]

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[1]Mrs. Clark Stoddard, Idem.

[2]Leader, May 8, 1908.

[3]Leader, May 1, 1908.

[4]Leader, June 5, 1908.

[5]Abstract, entry II-9.

Articles of Association

of

Oxford Opera House Company

Articles of Association
Dated June 2, 1908
Acknowledged June 2, 1908
Book 3 of Articles of Association page 66, Oakland County Clerk's Office

Incorporated under Act 232 Public Act of 1903.

Article I.

Name: The Oxford Opera House Company.

Article II.

Purpose: To erect and own buildings to be occupied or leased for Halls, Opera Houses or Theatres in the State of Michigan.

Article III.

Place of business: Village of Oxford, Oakland County, Michigan.

Article IV.

Capital stock hereby organized is the sum of $3,000.00

Article V.

Number of shares is 30 of the par value of $100.00 each.

Article VI.

Amount of capital stock subscribed is $3,000.00

Article VII.

Amount of stock actually paid in at date hereof is $1,000.00 of which amount $1,000.00 has been paid in cash.

Article VIII.

The Office in the State of Michigan for the transaction of business shall be kept at The Village of Oxford, Oakland County, Michigan.

Article IX.

Term of existence is fixed at 30 years from date hereof.

Article X.

The names of the stockholders, their respective residences and number of shares subscribed for by each are as follows:

Names	Residence	Number of shares
Loue M. Lenhoff	Oxford, Michigan	6
Lee Hagle	Oxford, Michigan	6
Ernest E. Wemp	Oxford, Michigan	6
Andrew E. Glaspie	Oxford, Michigan	6
John G. Kessell	Oxford, Michigan	6

Simultaneously with the Grand Incorporation, the Oxford Opera House was for the first time in its existence placed in a situation where it, for a significant duration

of time, was exhibiting almost exclusively motion pictures. Loue Lenhoff was constant in his capacity as manager, and he had previously secured the Amuse You Company. Not only did the Amuse You Company show films on weekdays, but it argued the churches into sanctioning a Sunday evening running, exhibiting such edifying vehicles as The Passion Play (3,500 feet of film requiring a full hour and a half to run)[1] and Parsifal, the story of the ceremony of the Holy Grail.[2] And so it went for the whole summer, three performances each evening, save on Sunday when the single performance was carefully timed to begin immediately at the close of church services.

From time to time, but by no means regularly, there were still some events more characteristic of an opera house. June had the usual school exercises, and the Opera House Company began planning for the Lecture Course. In August, Frank and Myrtle Chamberlain, late of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, arrived and displayed remarkable skill at trick roping and Myrtle's even more remarkable $2,000.00 dress of bears' claws and eagle talons.[3] In September, the opera house went dark in order that the village could attend the State Fair, and when it re-opened the Amuse You Company had given way to the Dramatone Company, which performed a similar function.[4] The Dramatone Company was

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[1] Leader, June 5, 1908. [2] Leader, June 12, 1908.

[3] Leader, August 28, 1908.

[4] Leader, September 4, 1908.

a little bit special, for it carried with it actors to do the talking and singing and provide sound effects appropriate to what was occurring on the screen.[1]

The Silver family came and went, in the process providing entertainment that the Leader, recalling William Jennings Bryan, resoundingly proclaimed "16 to 1," than which there was no better.[2] Sharpsteen's Concert and Medicine Company was next, and they played a full week to unusually good houses.[3] Unfortunately, the first number on the Lecture Course was not treated so kindly. On a chilly November night, it was quickly discovered that someone had left the skylights open in the opera house roof. Now, closing them entailed considerable climbing, either over the roof from the fire hall, or out on a precarious catwalk from the attic, so they remained open and the Village Singers gave their performance to an overcoat audience.[4] Said the Leader, "the management did their best to heat all out doors through those open skylights, but found it a fruitless task."[5]

The highlight of that winter's theatrical season had to have been The Devil. The advance billing was generous, but oddly less mellifluous than Oxford was wont to expect.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Leader, October 16, 1908.

[4] Leader, November 20, 1908.

[5] Ibid.

The Devil was the Virginia Woolf of its day, and dozens of companies were clamoring to play it for its shock value. The young actor, E. Sutherland Ross had the lead in the troupe that came to Oxford, and his primarily classical experience seemed to presage a sensitive interpretation of the central rôle.[1] The Leader's review of the production, however, was far more honest than companies playing "controversial pieces" would have chosen to have been written:

> Ross [is] a young man whose histrionic ability is of so high a grade that his early advancement to a larger field is a foregone conclusion . . . . Though they may have been filled with conflicting emotions regarding the subject matter of the play, all united in praise to Ross. Frankly, we must say, that the moral lesson of The Devil did not impress us very forcibly, yet the lesson was doubtless there if we desired it. As one man put it, "I went to the Devil, saw the Devil, felt Devilishly interesting, and I know what it was about!"[2]

In January, the Dramatone Company finished its run at the opera house, and the franchise, for that is what it had become, was picked up by the Metropolitan Amusement Company--making Oxford part of a circuit of motion picture theatres in Pontiac, Romeo, Rochester, Royal Oak, and Birmingham.[3] Because of the circuit arrangement, this meant motion pictures only on Wednesday nights, but there were few complaints about a show that offered two and a half hours of entertainment for just 10¢.[4]

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[1] Leader, December 11, 1908.

[2] Leader, December 18, 1908.

[3] Leader, January 8, 1909. [4] Ibid.

In February of 1909, the opera house pulled in an act that had, without question, traveled the furthest to get to Oxford to any one troupe the village had seen--perhaps the furthest anyone had ever come to get to the little town. Indeed, the Maoris' latest published review had been in the Melbourne, Australia Herald.

> The land of the Maori has oftimes been represented in picture, song and story, but never so charmingly as by Rawei and his accomplished wife, Hine Taimos, full blooded natives of those wonderful islands known to the civilized world as New Zealand. They provided an entertainment of a most unique and attractive character and well deserve a considerable share of the public patronage.[1]

They got a share of the public patronage at Oxford, but by no means all, for things were slackening off again at the opera house. There was no real excitement in the village about any kind of exhibition, until June brought the word that Dan Patch would race at the Michigan State Fair the coming fall.[2]

In September, the Oxford Opera House Company brought in a play that was "completely different," "an entirely new concept in theatrical production." Rather than a musical comedy, or even a musical melodrama, this was to be a "musical drama"--a serious play in a musical setting.

The Girl That's All the Candy cost $250.00 a day to run, and boasted that it could rival any $40,000.00 production on Broadway with its ten costume changes and

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[1] Leader, January 29, 1909.

[2] Leader, June 25, 1909.

elaborate scenery and electrical effects.[1] The opera house patrons were more interested in the fact that electrical fans had been installed in the house.[2]

Not long after The Girl That's All the Candy left the village, her eighteen "beautiful young ladies" were replaced by one proven actor, as Robert A. Mason stepped before the footlights to form part of the A Daughter's Devotion Company. He carried with him many years of experience with the Shuberts, Leibler, and David Belasco, and he had been prominent enough in New York for one critic to take the time to write a feature article on "Mr. Mason's wonderful conception of character rôles and close study of stage make-up."[3]

The Oxford Lecture Course once again had its difficulties. The 1909 version saw the New York Ladies' Trio open

> under very trying circumstances . . . . In coming in from Ohio to Oxford, the trio's baggage missed connections in Detroit, failing to arrive in time for the performance, and the young ladies were compelled to give their entertainment in street costume without music and musical instruments. Under such difficult circumstances, the trio did exceedingly well, though it became necessary to cut the program rather short. The reader was good, as was also a female whistler, while the singer had an excellent voice, which under ordinary conditions would have been more fully appreciated.[4]

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[1] Leader, September 17, 1909.

[2] Leader, September 24, 1909.

[3] Leader, October 1, 1909.

[4] Leader, November 12, 1909.

That was the first number on the Lecture Course. The third number was to have been the Lutz Concert Company. They merely failed to arrive at all.

It was actually more forgivable than non-arrival would imply. There was a blockade of trains, and there would have been no way to avoid the situation. Still, they did miss one of the best houses of the season.[1] It wasn't long until the management had an abject apology from the Standard Lyceum Bureau, which had been the original booking agency:

> The Lutz Concert Company had their full itinerary for northwestern Ohio and southern Michigan. Through an exchange of telegrams from western Ohio, and the loss of one, they apparently missed the date. We are simply overwhelmed at this. We know how difficult it is to rectify a blunder of this kind. The best we can do is give you another date. We shall arrange for February 8th. We trust you can explain the mistake to your people.[2]

Once the error had been discovered, the Lutz troupe had made every effort to make it to Oxford in time, but were thwarted by the trains. Oxford, used to the pokey Polly Ann, was understanding.

Spring brought the word of good reviews in New York for The Girl That's All The Candy, and Oxford felt pleasantly proprietary.[3] But their preoccupation with the "musical drama" did not prevent their going on another

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[1] Leader, January 28, 1910.

[2] Leader, February 4, 1910.

[3] Leader, March 4, 1910.

"wild west" tangent. In the vernal months of 1910, Oxfordites went to minstrel shows, or they went to see A Girl of the Mountains, or else Texas Cattle King.[1] The calibre of the performances was up a little, for, through the offices of a Chicago booking agency, the opera house management was able consistently to secure shows enroute from Saginaw to Port Huron, Pontiac, and Flint.[2]

In the summer months, the opera house booked in only a few plays. An Uncle Tom did well, heralded as it was by a free street parade,[3] but the real summer draws were the tent shows,[4] and Manager Lenhoff let well enough alone. He did contract with a motion picture company to provide films throughout the summer,[5] and, in early September, he quietly thanked whatever lucky star had brought him to the decision.

There was never a more sports-minded town than Oxford, and on September 8, 1910, the Oxford Opera House became the first local playhouse anywhere to show the "authentic pictures of the Jeffries-Johnson fight."[6] Gent Kessell, who had literally, if not nominally, taken over the managership in the course of the summer, acquired the rights to the films and had them exhibited in

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[1] Leader, April 1, 1910.

[2] Leader, April 22, 1910.

[3] Leader, July 8, 1910.

[4] Leader, August 19, 1910.

[5] Leader, June 24, 1910.

[6] Leader, September 2, 1910.

conjunction with the motion picture program already under way. A lecturer accompanied the films wherever they went, and his was the guarantee that any pictures of the fight shown previously in Michigan had been forgeries.[1] It was a coup of which both Gent and Loue Lenhoff could well be proud.

One week later, Oxford was back on the western trail. Harry C. Bannister rode in, six-funs blazing (figuratively), to play the title role in The Cow Puncher. The script could have been written for any of a score of western tales, but the village loved every minute of it. They watched as Geraldine Graham, young and romantic, determined to take up medicine as a profession. They wept when her brother died, and frowned with worry when she was called west to take charge of the family ranch, which was complete with unruly cattle and equally unruly cowhands. But the lass proved able to meet the situation with aplomb, and her ultimate alliance with the foreman of the ranch met with Oxford's brand of paternal/maternal approval.[2]

When stage shows were a treat, set against the usual filmed fare, they began to assume an added importance. Gent Kessell figured he had chosen an apt time to assume control.

1910-1914

Mon.,	Jan.	16, 1911:	O. E. Wee's County Sheriff
Tues.,	Jan.	24, 1911:	K. P. Masked Ball

[1] Ibid. [2] Leader, September 16, 1910.

Mon.,	Feb.	20, 1911:	K. P. dance
Tues.,	Apr.	4, 1911:	The Final Settlement
Fri.,	Apr.	28, 1911:	Y. M. D. C. dance, Stone's orchestra
Weds.,	May	3, 1911:	Mr. H. N. Roberts as Uncle Josh Spruceby
Fri.,	May	5, 1911:	Peck's Bad Boy
Tues.,	May	16, 1911:	Just a Woman's Way
Fri.,	June	2, 1911:	Allain Villair and Edna Cordair in Jim and the Singer
Thurs.,	June	15, 1911:	Oxford High School commencement
Weds.,	Aug.	11, 1911:	Browlee and Reed Dramatic Co., Texas Cattle King
Mon.,	Aug.	28, 1911:	A Pair of Country Kids
Weds.,	Sept.	6, 1911:	The Show Girl
W-Th,	Sept.	20-21, 1911:	Hemstreet, the Peerless, mindreader
Sat.,	Sept.	30, 1911:	Tempest and Sunshine
Fri.,	Oct.	6, 1911:	Y. M. D. C. dance, Abel's orchestra
Mon.,	Oct.	9, 1911:	The Little Homestead
Weds.,	Oct.	11, 1911:	Dancing school
Weds.,	Oct.	18, 1911:	Dancing school
Weds.,	Oct.	25, 1911:	Dancing school
Weds.,	Nov.	1, 1911:	Dancing school
Fri.,	Nov.	3, 1911:	K. P. dance
Weds.,	Nov.	8, 1911:	Dancing school
Weds.,	Nov.	15, 1911:	Dancing school
Weds.,	Nov.	22, 1911:	Dancing school

Tues.,	Nov.	28, 1911:	Harry J. Webster Amusement Co., A Millionaire Tramp
Weds.,	Nov.	29, 1911:	Dancing school
Thurs.,	Nov.	30, 1911:	K. P. Thanksgiving Ball
Weds.,	Dec.	6, 1911:	Dancing school
Fri.,	Dec.	8, 1911:	J. Lorenzo Zwickey, art lecture (Oxford Lecture Course)
Weds.,	Dec.	13, 1911:	Dancing school
Mon.,	Dec.	25, 1911:	Truesdel Brothers, Man on the Box
Tues.,	Dec.	26, 1911:	K. P. Christmas Ball
Mon.,	Jan.	15, 1912:	K. P. Masked Ball
Mon.,	Jan.	22, 1912:	Kelley's Colored Carnival
Sat.,	Jan.	27, 1912:	Henry Clark (Oxford Lecture Course)
T-W,	Jan.	30-31, 1912:	O. E. S. local talent play, The Country Fair
Tues.,	Feb.	20, 1912:	Lyceum Concert, Franc Adele Burch Company (Oxford Lecture Course)
Thurs.,	Feb.	22, 1912:	K. P. Washington's Birthday dance
Weds.,	Feb.	28, 1912:	Hadley Home Talent, The Honor of a Cowboy
Tues.,	Mar.	5, 1912:	Pythian sisters' party
Fri.,	Mar.	15, 1912:	K. P. dance
Sat.,	Mar.	16, 1912:	Dell Harris in Hooligan in New York
Fri.,	Mar.	29, 1912:	Leonard Amateurs, Dot, the Miner's Daughter
Fri.,	Apr.	5, 1912:	Oxford High School minstrel show

Fri.,	Apr.	12, 1912:	Junior Ex., The Fifteenth of January
Thurs.,	Apr.	25, 1912:	Y. M. D. C. dancing party
Mon.,	May	20, 1912:	Christian Science lecture
Weds.,	May	22, 1912:	The Romance of the Reaper (film)
Fri.,	June	7, 1912:	Orion High School entertainment
Thurs.,	July	4, 1912:	Fairman and Berg Traveling Festival Co., The White Slave Traffic (film)
Fri.,	July	5, 1912:	Fairman and Berg Traveling Festival Co., The Titanic Disaster (film)
Sat.,	July	6, 1912:	Fairman and Berg Traveling Festival Co., comedy, drama, and western films
Mon.,	Aug.	19, 1912:	Sunbonnet Sue
Thurs.,	Aug.	29, 1912:	Walter Hubble in A Royal Slave
W-F,	Sept.	4-6, 1912:	Homecoming dances
Mon.,	Sept.	23, 1912:	Thelma
Fri.,	Oct.	4, 1912:	Republican rally
Mon.,	Oct.	7, 1912:	Mr. Russell Craner in The Irish Piper
Sat.,	Nov.	9, 1912:	English Opera Singers (Oxford Lecture Course)
Weds.,	Nov.	13, 1912:	Harold Jarvis and Co. (Oxford Lecture Course)
Fri.,	Nov.	15, 1912:	A Girl of the Underworld

Sun.,	Dec.	15, 1912:	Lyric Glee Club (Oxford Lecture Course)
Weds.,	Jan.	1, 1913:	New Year's dance
Mon.,	Jan.	13, 1913:	Mr. Fred Byers in The Girl and the Drummer
Mon.,	Jan.	20, 1913:	Thomas P. Kelley's Colored Carnival and Famous Georgia Minstrels
Tues.,	Feb.	4, 1913:	Virgil O. Stickler, Christian Science lecturer
Mon.,	Feb.	10, 1913:	Paul F. Voelker (Oxford Lecture Course)
Tues.,	Feb.	12, 1913:	Junior Ex., At the End of the Rainbow
Sun.,	Mar.	17, 1913:	Poverty Ball
Fri.,	Apr.	11, 1913:	The Jolly Widow
Mon.,	Apr.	21, 1913:	Sharpsteen's Comedy Co., The Minister's Sweetheart
Tues.,	Apr.	22, 1913:	Sharpsteen's Comedy Co., The Girl and the Gambler
Weds.,	Apr.	23, 1913:	Sharpsteen's Comedy Co., Papa's Baby Boy
Thurs.,	Apr.	24, 1913:	Sharpsteen's Comedy Co., The Girl from the Sunny South
Fri.,	Apr.	25, 1913:	Sharpsteen's Comedy Co., The Shepherd of the Hills
Fri.,	May	2, 1913:	J-Hop
Sun.,	May	18, 1913:	T. T. Ryde, V. D. M., evangelist

M-S, July 7-12, 1913: Henderson Stock Company

FRI., AUGUST 22, 1913 SAW THE INSTALLATION OF A PERMANENT SCREEN FOR THE SHOWING OF MOTION PICTURES

Thurs., Sept. 4, 1913: Jones and Crane's Company, The Wolf

Fri., Sept. 12, 1913: The Sergeant's Daughter (film, four reels)

Sat., Sept. 13, 1913: With Lee in Virginia (film)

Weds., Sept. 24, 1913: The Wizzard of Wise Land

Thurs., Sept. 25, 1913: James K. Hackett, Prisoner of Zenda (film, four reels)

Sat., Sept. 27, 1913: A House Divided (film)

Thurs., Oct. 2, 1913: Sarah Bernhardt, Queen Elizabeth (film)

Mon., Oct. 6, 1913: The Last Roll Call (film)

Tues., Oct. 7, 1913: The Last Days of Pompeii (film)

Thurs., Oct. 9, 1913: Quo Vadis? (film)

Sat., Oct. 11, 1913: Mr. George Snow, xylaphone and castanet player

Weds., Oct. 15, 1913: Edward Waldmann in The Devil

Th-F, Oct. 16-17, 1913: Riggs-Kelly Amusement Company

Sat., Oct. 18, 1913: Golden and Arzeno, international gymnasts, plus The Battle of San Juan Hill (film, three reels)

Mon.,	Oct.	20, 1913:	The Toll of War (film)
Tues.,	Oct.	21, 1913:	The Wizard of the Jungle (film, five reels)
Fri.,	Oct.	24, 1913:	Marion Lallou Fisk (Oxford Lecture Course)
Sat.,	Oct.	25, 1913:	John Ennor, Travelogue film
Tues.,	Nov.	4, 1913:	Peck's Bad Boy
Weds.,	Nov.	5, 1913:	Arthur Tucker and Co., The Doings of Dorothy
Mon.,	Nov.	10, 1913:	Bartolotta Concert Company
Tues.,	Nov.	18, 1913:	F. E. Baker (Oxford Lecture Course)
F-S,	Nov.	21-23, 1913:	John Ennor, travelogue film
Thurs.,	Nov.	27, 1913:	K. P. Thanksgiving party
M-S,	Dec.	1-7, 1913:	Henderson Stock Company, (playlets preceded by three reel films)
Fri.,	Dec.	12 1913:	Henderson Stock Company, East Lynne
Sat.,	Dec.	13, 1913:	Henderson Stock Company, Are You Insured?
Fri.,	Dec.	19, 1913:	Mr. and Mrs. Chamberlain, trick rope artists
Thurs.,	Dec.	25, 1913:	K. P. Christmas party
Fri.,	Dec.	26, 1913:	Danish Musical Club (Oxford Lecture Course)
Mon.,	Dec.	29, 1913:	Harris and Warrens Circus Day

It was the day of Horatio Alger, and, whether or not any of Oxford's youth yearned for the big city, the playbills joyfully took advantage of the popular image of small-town-boy-meets-the-big-city. The industrial revolution had ceased to be a chronology of inventions and had become a way of life. In the spring of 1911, patrons of the Oxford Opera House queued up to see The Final Settlement, playing provincially enroute to stands in larger cities.[1] (Provincial, adj. . . Exhibiting the way or manners of a province countrified, rude. Confined to a province; hence, narrow, limited; as provincial interests.--hence, "Provincially"--they played in ruder fashion, in a provincial environment, their itinerary limited to a lesser world, prior to their engagements in larger cities). According to the advance billing, the play presented "a realistic picture of modern social and business life, each character as true as though translated from real life to the boards of the stage."[2] This desirability for realism was in itself revolutionary, but the conservative element was not yet ready to panic. In The Final Settlement, the

> rise of a brilliant and ambitious young foreman from a position of humble obscureness [sic] to the presidencey of a great iron trust. . .turns his

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[1]Leader, Mar. 31, 1911. [2]Leader, Mar. 10, 1911.

> head and causes him to renounce his wife, a woman of conservative homely tastes and ideas; . . .through the wily methods of a business associate, he is persuaded to secure a divorce and marry a young and beautiful actress. . . .Through the continued guile of his so-called friend he is led to speculate wildly; his ambition to be a social leader proves fruitless [and he is] ultimately ruined. [His] new wife proves faithless, and the one friend who comes to his rescue is the still faithful wife of his youth, who saves him from prison and enables him to make a fresh start in life, thoroughly repentant.[1]

The formula for pathos remained pretty stable.

The early months of 1911 seemed, indeed, to display returning stability for the little theatre. The plays that came in were primarily "standards," and Oxfordites found that far more reassuring of a good performance than mere reliance on specific companies. The doors closed for the summer, and the village turned its attention to the fishing trips of the likes of Ty Cobb and Wild Bill Donovan.[2] The lights went on again in August, and the autumn bill was both full and varied.[3]

The world in 1911 hurtled forward at a pace that would have alarmed the preceding generation. But speed blurred the image, and "progress" came about virtually unawares.

The newspapers were full of automobile advertisements, and for years Thomas Edison had been proclaiming that no

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[1]Ibid. [2]Leader, July 7, 1911. [3]Leader, Aug. 11, 1911

home should be without a phonograph. Yet the entertainment world in Oxford seemed to have remained on the fringes of all this modernity. George Tunstead could be depended upon to own almost anything with a motor, but for the thrills and excitement of the drama, he and all the village turned to the tales of the old west. The phenomeon of the motion picture was no longer raw and new, but the films which came to Oxford were concerned with the same things that had previously been discussed in lecture, or monologue, or drama.

Then W. B. Patton's The Little Homestead opened, with its promises of hours spent in a "happy little home in an Indiana village."[1] On the surface it could not possibly have seemed more bucolic, more comfortably traditional. But the play did not end in the first act, or even the second, and among the costumes in the third act, in which the scene suddenly became a posh Chicago mansion, was

> THE FIRST WOMAN AVIATION COSTUME EVER IMPORTED TO THIS COUNTRY,. . .PERHAPS THE ONLY ONE IN AMERICA! It is a Parisian garment, beautifully tailored, with divided skirt, adjustable by means of straps, for either aerial or walking apparel. Altogether the costume is a revelation in fashion and is evidence of the advance styles are taking to keep apace with the progress of science.[2]

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[1] Leader, Oct. 6, 1911. [2] Ibid.

More than a revelation in fashion, it was a revelation that even legitimate theatre, as it was distinguished from motion pictures and vaudeville, was being irrevocably drawn in to the main stream of "progress." When the floodtide assumed entire control, the Oxford Opera House would no longer bear much semblance to its nineteenth century image.

Nothing is as inexorable as the passage of time, and the months fairly flew by. In February of 1912, Oxford was blanketed by the heaviest snow Michigan had seen in a quarter of a century. Trains were stalled; farmers dug frantically to reach their outbuildings and stranded cattle. The electricity went out (not that this was by itself at all remarkable), and, the general, Oxford was thrown back upon the kind of isolation and individualization it had known a generation before.[1] Oxford was rapidly becoming utterly dependent on conveniences that would have been absurd to contemplate--twenty years before.

At the opera house, the emphasis was on home talent. In the spring months of 1912, there was far more commotion about the Leonard Amateurs' production of Dot, The Miners Daughter and the Oxford High School attempt at a minstrel show, than there was surrounding the few professional troupes whose itineraries brought them through the village.[2]

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[1] Leader, Feb. 23, 1912. [2] Leader, March 22, 1912.

Of course, home talent productions always provided for more incidental fun. Half the furor about "Dot" was due to the constant rescheduling of the performance -- which was itself due to the idiosyncracies of a home-grown virus.[1] When The Gypsy Rover was done as part of an Oxford High School Junior Ex., the entertainment backstage was far superior to that seen across the footlights. An enterprising lad brought cider from the farm and doled it out to the fellows in the men's dressing room. He might just have well have given each member of the British navy his tot of rum, for like thus-rewarded seamen, the boys trod the narrow line between the sheer exuberance that can increase efficiency, and the myriad other side-effects that could have been produced by the frothy liquid. It was quite a performance. The audience was ecstatic, and the unbelievable joy and abandon with which the play was acted caused more than one person to make unwittingly apt query as to "whatever had gotten into those boys?" The superintendent wondered too, but the resulting investigation never did lead to the culprit (or hero, depending entirely on the point of view). Fifty years later, the secret would still be safe, but safe, too, was the memory of what unutterable fun could be associated with amateur productions.[2]

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[1]Leader, Mar. 8, 1912. [2]Mrs. Clark Stoddard, Idem.

The Handy Wagon commercial had not been resented by the theatre-goers of the village, so, in May of 1912, W. J. Tunstead again sponsored the running of advertising footage on the opera house stage. The tickets, available at the hardware store, were free, and this time the tab was picked up by International Harvester. The production? The Romance of the Reaper, an hour and fifteen minute view of 4,000 years of agricultural history. According to the Leader, the "trip was interesting, the scenery along the way beautiful."[1]

There was some intrinsic factor in the nature of the motion picture that effectively divorced it from an "age of innocence." Perhaps it was the avante garde nature of the medium that succeeded in wedding it to subject matter that, if not actually different, was far more frankly discussed than that which had formed a basis for the romantic dramas of the nineteenth century. The popular fare remained constant, if for no other reason than the fact that a play which stood the test of time had a certain guaranteed marketability, but there was a simultaneous and growing tendency for motion pictures to deal with the bizarre, the tainted, with the horror of real tragedy.

Ten Nights in a Bar Room had just finished playing the area (under canvas).[2] when Fairman and Berg's Traveling

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[1]Leader, May 17, 1912. [2]Leader, June 14, 1912.

PLATE VIII

Not all plays put on the opera house stage were professional. These two local productions (Above: The Magic Wheel; Below: The Belle of Barcelona) illustrate that fact, and also give evidence of the opera house woods set and exterior set, as rendered in painted scenery. Note the influence Valentino has had on the "Barcelona" gentlemen.

Festival Company brought in films which elaborated on "the rake's progress." In the still July evenings, Oxford's more worldly adults mourned the way young girls "from the country to the slave dive . . .step be step . . .are lured away from their homes to be sold into White Slavery." The White Slave Traffic (fully lectured) warned of the fate worse than death, and, lest that horror seem too abstract, it was followed by The Titanic Disaster, recent enough in memory to terrify by mere mention.[1]

Gent Kessell had no particular desire to subvert the opera house entirely to the needs and desires of the motion picture idiom and its patrons, and the summer and fall of 1912 continued with a liberal salting of legitimate plays. Walter Hubble's A Royal Slave, eight p. m. curtain Thursday, August 29, was one of the more exciting offerings. Hubble had been playing larger cities, commanding as much as $1.50 a seat, but the enterprising Mr. Kessell persuaded show manager Bubb to set the price of admission "within the reach of all." The resulting 25, 35, and 50 cent tickets promised to be in great demand, but Gent had a way to handle that, too. "As a personal favor to me," he wrote in the Leader, "if you will phone me at Blashill's [Jewelry Store] the day the seats are placed on sale (which will be Tuesday morning) the number of tickets you can use, I will have them checked off and laid away."[2] It had been better than a year

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[1]Leader, July 5, 1912. [2]Leader, Aug. 23, 1912.

that Leader ads included the possibility of telephoning in ticket orders, but Gent had a way of making it all sound new and especially prepared for the occasion.

A five number Lecture Course was easily booked for the coming winter,[1] and it was just under way when the gentleman who was unquestionably the most noted orator of his time arrived, via whistle-stop, to give it competition. William Jennings Bryan had not the power to sway Oxford's staunch Republicans. He gave his five minute address to assembled villagers and schoolchildren (the latter let out of class for the occasion), upheld democracy, "whacked Roosevelt right and left," saw fit to be a little kinder to Taft. Then, his audience well primed, he called for three cheers for presidential candidate Woodrow Wilson. Oxford wasn't buying. His "cheers" were no more than polite acknowledgement of his request, if that, and William Jennings Bryan let the Polly Ann carry him on to greener pastures.[2]

That same Novemeber fortnight that saw the discomfiture of Bryan, Gent Kessel booked in a play whose content was fashioned to prove that the stage was no more blind to life than was the motion picture screen. The playbill for A Girl of the Underworld proclaimed it "without doubt the greatest show of its kind ever written." Oxfordites could expect

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[1]Leader, Nov. 1, 1912. [2]Leader, Nov. 8, 1912.

> an evening of realistic pleasure . . .laughter and tears but a few seconds apart. As Shakespeare said, "The man who might laugh with sadness is indeed happy." It tells a beautiful story which really happened . . . each incident . . .taken from real life . . .A two dollar show now playing at popular prices, . . .you cannot but praise its morals, its lesson, its amusement . . .[It was] not written by its author Jack Gorman to offend, but for the lesson it teaches to mothers, sisters, and brothers.1

A Girl of the Underworld may have answered The White Slave Traffic, but it was obvious that some kind of campaign was afoot. As far as the opera house was concerned, it was a subversive campaign.

> We are informed from reliable sources that there are more than 10,000 motion picture theatres in this country and that the average daily attendance is over 4,500,000 which is five times that of the other theatres. It has been estimated that of these only one ninth are children (4-16) and that only one quarter belong to what is called the working class. It is a common occurrence now to see at the Photo-play, men and women in evening dress; and Mr. Montgomery, who is perhaps the prince of Southern exhibitors says that many of his picture theatres are attended by "society" who drive up in carriages and automobiles. It is a well known fact that Motion Pictures have come to be an all important and permanent institution -- MORE SO THAN THE DRAMA EVER WAS -- and it has been estimated that, on an average, 15,000,000 persons see the Moving Pictures every day. These attend the Silent Drama, some because they can see two or three plays in an hour, some because they receive the benefits of travel, enlighten-ment, instruction and moral lessons combined with entertainment, and some because it is cheaper.[2]

That was week number one. Week number two, the Leader broke the real news:

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[1]Leader, Nov. 8, 1912. [2]Leader, Jan. 31, 1913.

> OXFORD TO HAVE A REAL UP-TO-DATE MOVING PICTURE THEATRE. The Curry building on north main street is being remodeled into an up-to-date Photo Play theatre, and will be ready for business some time next week. New theatre seats are being installed on an incline floor [which the opera house did not possess] which has been built. The new moving picture machine or cameragraph is the latest up-to-date 1913 model as well as the highest priced and best obtainable, projecting an absolutely steady and flickerless picture. The company that makes this machine have been making the best machines for 15 years. As the operating room in any moving picture theatre is the most important place as far as the picture is concerned, Mr. Roy McMullen, the manager informs us that he will always run all pictures himself. The class of pictures to be used will be the very best and nothing will ever be shown that can possibly offend. Prize fight pictures or vaudeville will NOT be included in the programs of this theatre. The aim is to present the popular photo plays as it should be, making a refined entertainment for ladies, gentlemen, and children. Catering to these at all times. Educational pictures, travel pictures, cowboy and Indian plays as well as dramas and comedies, will be presented. Entire change of program every evening. Doors open at 6:45, first show commences at 7:00. Continuous program.[1]

If the "Pastime Theatre" wasn't exactly a death-blow to the world of the opera house, it was a cruel blow, nonetheless. Never was a poverty ball more in keeping with the prevailing conditions in the little theatre![2]

Sharpsteen's Comedy Company played a return engagement that May, and they headlined Fannie Stone's "Diamond Dress," its 8,000 handsewn rhinestones much more reassuring to those of conservative nature than a lady's aviation costume. Fannie

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[1]Leader, Feb. 7, 1913. [2]Leader, Mar. 8, 1913.

could not have flown in her gown; indeed, she could hardly walk. The dress was made of white satin entirely overlaid with Irish lace. Twenty-four yards of pink silk taffeta were needed in the lining to hold the weight of the rhinestones, and there were one hundred and ten yards of French silk chiffon in the underskirt. Though it was abbreviated to knee length, the dress weighed thirty-four pounds.[1] The admission to see Fannie, her dress, and her play, was just 15 cents, and, a few weeks later, when the Henderson Stock Company played Oxford, their standard admission was reduced to 10 cents? The Leader had printed that some folk attended movies "because it is cheaper."[3]

The Pastime Theatre was not the sole threat to the sovereignty of the opera house. Tent shows and circuses were in peculiar abundance that summer, and many of the tent shows were those which had previously played under the opera house roof. The D. U. R. and the Polly Ann had long since made it an easy thing to journey to Pontiac and Detroit or Flint and Saginaw to see "big time" productions.

On August 1, 1913, there was a small announcement on the front page of the Leader. The Oxford Electric Company was taking up temporary residence in the Opera House block, and would be open for business about the fifteenth of the month. The item was signed "H. V. Rahm and H. W. Roegner."[4]

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[1]Leader, Apr. 18, 1913. [2]Leader, July 11, 1913.

[3]Supra, p. 113. [4]Leader, Aug. 1, 1913.

Once again, the real news did not break until the following week. Within the limitations of its one-inch typeface, the Leader gave the event banner headlines:

> THE OXFORD: NAME OF NEW MOTION PICTURE THEATRE OPENED IN OXFORD OPERA HOUSE. The Oxford Opera House, now under the management of the Oxford Electric Company though still owned by Loue Lenhoff and the Opera House Company, will be opened to the public Friday, August 22, as a motion picture theatre, running every night except Sunday nights, showing the latest things in motion pictures. The company has installed one of the new Mirroroid curtains with one of the latest machines and booths necessary for the production of the latest types of pictures and no expense has been spared to insure the safety of patrons while enjoying the pictures. Special attractions have been booked for the two opening nights, Friday and Saturday, and on the latter night a real Indian Chief, dressed in war regalia, is to be present to explain pictures in which he and his tribe are characters. The new theatre is named the Oxford and managers Rahm and Roegner promise that the pictures shown will be a revelation to Oxford people. The opera house is large commodious, cool, and the arrangement of the pictures such that they may be seen by all with ease and comfort and with room for all, regardless of the size of the crowd. They are looking for seating capacity crowds on the opening nights.[1]

The opening production, ironically enough, had been a stage play, The Wolf, thrilling tale of the Canadian North, complete with "special scenery and scenic effects,"[2] but such adherance to convention had not been maintained for long.

Now, in retrospect, it was not sure which would be the greater trial: to move forward into what seemed to be a war that would eventually involve the whole world, or to move backward into those breathless months at the end of the year

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[1]Leader, Aug. 8, 1913. [2]Leader, Aug. 22, 1913.

1913. Not only had there been a steady stream of motion pictures, but the Oxford Lecture Course still deserved accomodation, not to mention the Knights of Pythias and the Young Men's Dancing Club. Some few plays came in,though their limited number was understandable when the list of motion pictures exhibited was examined. Even from the relative distance of several months' passage, the array was awe-inspiring. There had been James K. Hackett in The Prisoner of Zenda,[1] Madame Sarah Bernhardt in Queen Elizabeth,[2] and A House Divided,[3] and The Last Days of Pompeii (which cost $250,000.00 to film and included a cast of 1,000 supers arrayed against the slopes of Mount Vesuvius),[4] and Quo Vadis?.[5] And, at the end of that year, the opera house changed hands again.

Back in 1907, Loue Lenhoff had mortgaged the opera house property to the amount of $1,600.00.[6] Payment had seemed quite possible at the time, but such optomism presumed the extension of an era that did not extend, and, in November of 1913, the opera house, mortgage with its accrued interest now $1,726.65, was doomed to be disposed of in a sheriff's sale.[7] Andrew Glaspie and John (Gent) Kessell bought it -- for $1.00.[8] That transaction made

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[1] Leader, Sept. 19, 1913.
[2] Leader, Sept. 26, 1913.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Leader, Oct. 3, 1913.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Abstract, entry II-7.
[7] Abstract, entry II-10.
[8] Abstract, entry II-11.

official, the gentlemen mortgaged their building for $1,700.00,[1] and things were back to normal.

And, in 1914, there had begun the period in the history of the Oxford Opera House when it was owned by Gent Kessell and managed by Herb Rahm, and that beginning signalled the end of its existence as part of the nation wide phenomenon known as the Victorian opera house.

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[1]Abstract, entry II-12.

CHAPTER V

MEDICINE, MINSTRELS, AND TRAVELOGUES

Richard Armour once said of the Victorian lady that she was "extremely conscious of her position, which was generally on the edge of her chair."[1]

And so she sat, hands folded primly in her lap, her feet drawn back beneath the edge of her flounced skirt that decorously concealed the slightest suggestion of the presence of her lower limbs. She did not necessarily approve of "the theatre," but this evening's performance was a medicine show, and she truly felt that it modified the situation somewhat. Nevertheless, she was reluctant to show approval and sat quietly, her face as composed as her posture, throughout the wildest of specialty acts, rendering only occasional polite applause.

At length, the act curtain rang down, and Mr. Sharpsteen appeared before it to hawk his wares. Unlike many of his colleagues, Sharpsteen sold no one panacaea. Rather, he had in his case a dozen medicines, each one tailored to a specific ailment. As he reverently elevated each proven liquer, hands clutching folded bills signalled

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[1]Richard Armour, It All Started With Eve (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co. Inc.).

for his ministrations. Hers was a small gesture by comparison, the graceful pose of a gloved hand, but Mr. Sharpsteen's eagle eye caught it easily. Down from the stage he came, in two or three long strides reaching her side. She tood the proferred bottle and tucked it in her reticule, exchanging it for a smooth, crisp bill. Sharpsteen pocketed it. "ANYBODY ELSE GOT WORMS?" he roared.[1]

It was the most horribly funny thing that the opera house had seen in a long, long time. The lady did not faint, perhaps because to do so would have necessitated purchasing smelling salts from Sharpsteen and company.

The medicine shows always promised flamboyance and excitement but none expected to be able to follow that act. The only opera house "yarn" that came close concerned the time that a minstrel show (of dubious reputation) planned a joke on Oxford's local roué. On cue, a female impersonator roared in to catch the gentlemen in question as he sat with "another" lady. Only the impersonator got hold of Mr. Valentine by mistake, and Mr. Valentine was not only a dignified sort, almost an elder statesman, he also chewed tobacco. He sprayed five rows of patrons with tobacco juice in the course of his frenzied denials.[2]

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[1]Mrs. Clark Stoddard, Idem.

[2]Lew Haddrill, Idem.

It was not possible, of course, to go to the opera house expecting that kind of fun, but there were certain acts that promised a full measure of enjoyment. And there was nothing Oxford enjoyed more than a minstrel show -- a real minstrel show. A good buck-and-wing, a really prime cakewalk was Oxford's idea of entertainment.

The American negro minstrel show had a common heritage with the wandering minstrels of the world, the troubadors and trouveres of France, the minnesingers of Germany,[1] but in performance they were completely unique. At the close of the War Between the States, slaves found themselves in a position to earn with talents that had previously been exploited only for their own entertainment or that of their white superiors. From the 1880's until World War I, these were years when being a coon capable of singing coon-songs was a profitable and proud office.[2]

The formula for a minstrel show was fairly well set. For the first half of the evening, a half circle of men sat on the stage. Often even negro performers were made up in "blackface" with burnt cork faces and clown white rings around lips and eyes, for the "minstrel"

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[1]Richard Moody, American Takes the Stage: Romanticism in American Drama and Theatre, 1750-1900 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, no date given), p. 32.

[2]Edith J. R. Isaacs, The Negro in the American Theatre (New York, Theatre Arts, Incorporated, 1947), p. 29.

PLATE IX

Here come the Cake Walkers! Nothing pleased Oxford audiences more. On August 18, 1899, the Oxford Leader proclaimed one such troupe "Real, Big, Black, Southern Coons: No yellow Northern trash, but a company of original Cake Walkers, Jubilee Singers and Dancers who are Bound to Please . . . . These negroes are direct from the South where they have lived nearly their entire life."

was a creation quite apart from the life of a real negro American. In any case, in the center of this arc of blank faces, sat the interlocutor, the master of ceremonies, who served as the straight man, feeding lines to the comedians and generally serving as the goat for much of the humor. To the left and right of the interlocutor were seated an assortment of singers, dancers, monologuists, depending on the complexion of the individual show. No matter what the troupe, the end-men, Mr. Bones and Mr. Tambo, remained constant. Named for the instruments they played (the bones, rattled like castanets, and the tambourine), these two men were the leading comics. In addition, a large minstrel troupe might carry with them a band to supply a musical background, and these found places either in the orchestra pit or in the area backstage of the semi-circle of performers.[1]

White men had organized into the first minstrel shows, but when "real, honest-to-goodness Southern coons" took over, the improvement was amazing. From the moment the interlocutor spoke the ritual "Gentlemen, be seated," an evening spent at a minstrel show was a glorious round of comic songs which chased ballads which chased travestied stump speeches which chased soft-shoe and buck-and-wing dances. The curtain rang down on a "walk-around," and, after a pause during which the audience, if not the per-

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[2]Ibid., pp. 23-24.

formers, could catch its breath, the "olio" began. This was a later addition to an earlier form, the new portion closely akin to the style of vaudeville or burlesque. Now, like the old Italian commedia troupes, each man began to capitalize on his particular skill (the "lazzi" of the Commedia del Arte). All the memebers of a minstrel troupe were male, at least in the show's purest form, and the men who excelled in "wench" rôles were the headliners of the show.[1]

It mattered little whether there were seven or seventeen men in a minstrel company. If the established pattern was more or less obeyed, success was very nearly automatic.

Oxford imported dozens of these black-face troupes, and the highest compliment of all was when a carload of local negroes would come to Oxford from Pontiac (on the Polly Ann) to see the current minstrel show. Oxford's favorite was the Giant Colored Quartette, which came up from Chicago, but there was a local boy who made good as well. "Stone's Orchestra," which played for so many Pythian and Y. M. D. C. dances, was really "Stone's Colored Orchestra," and Ed Stone kept up with the best of the minstrel characters. He was a popular fellow who spent as much of his musical career on excursion boats on the Detroit River as he did in Oxford, but the belles and

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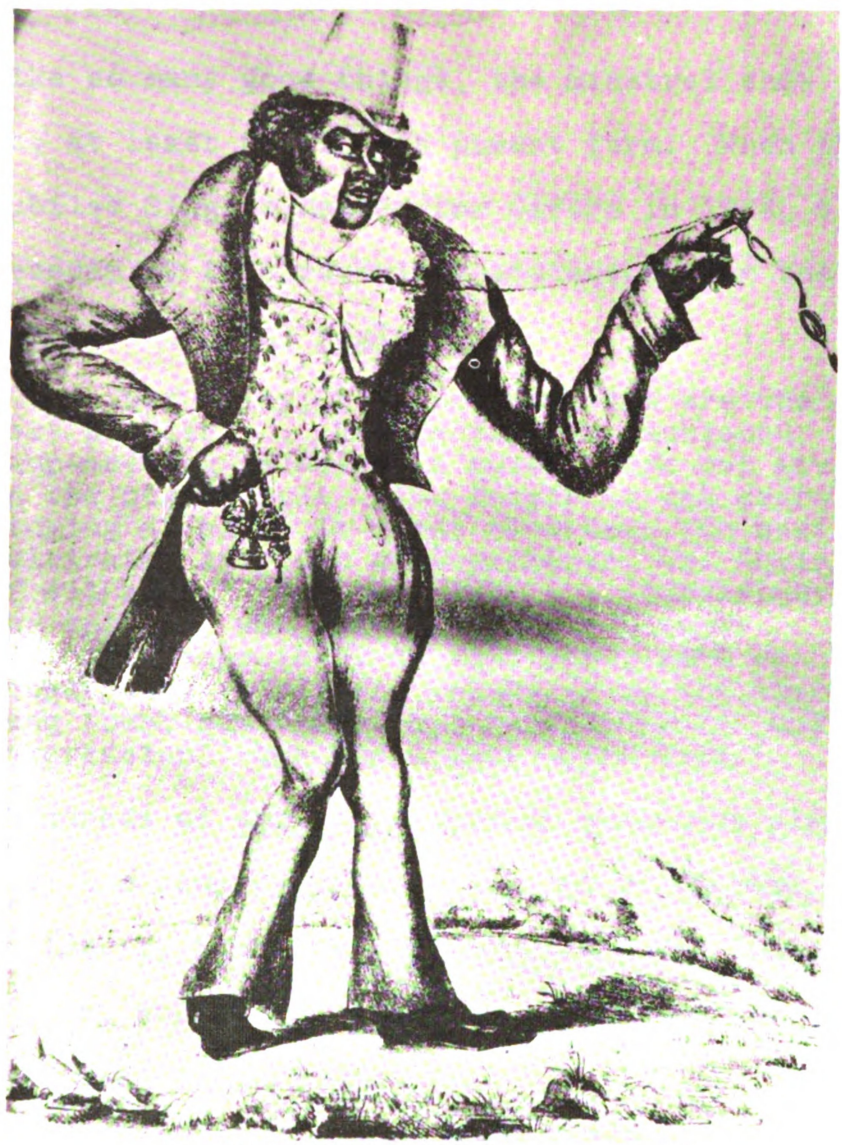
[1]Ibid.

PLATE X

JIMMY CROW.

The original negro caricature. With Zip Coon (Plate XII), Jim Crow was the prototype of all negro or blackface "minstrels."

PLATE XI



ZIP COON

This dapper minstrel-show favorite was made famous by Stephen Foster.

beaux who courted and danced to the sound of his orchestra remember him best for the day Ed's divorce became final. He climbed on a dray and played "I'm Leavin'my Happy Home for You!" on his cornet the full length of Oxford's main street.[1]

Like so many good things, the minstrel show could not last, at least not in its purest form. When the Dixie Jubilee Singers headed for Oxford in 1904, they were preceded by this revealing statement from the Whitewater (Wisconsin) Register:

> . . .Naturally, the comic numbers are the most popular . . .Beside the old fashioned camp-meeting melodies, a number were not given in the negro style. You forgot it was negro singing at all. It might have been the most cultivated American or Englishman, the "heir of all ages." One criticism . . .justified in our opinion, was that the good old negro melodies, especially in solo part, were no longer sung simply and naturally as the slaves sang them, but "improved" with harmonies and "expression" that the slaves never used.[2]

Of the hundreds of strictly minstrel companies playing throughout the country prior to and after the War, by the late 1880's, there were only thirty. In 1896, there were but ten, and in April of 1919, after another great war, there were only three.[3]

Yet there were many, many negro acts that traced their beginnings to the heritage of the minstrel show, and Oxford eagerly welcomed them all. "Gentlemen, be seated," packed the house.

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[1]Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols, Idem. [2]Leader, Nov. 4, 1904.
[3]Moody, Op. Cit., p. 49.

Oxford recalls today, after the passage of nearly half a century, the visits of Lyman Howe with considerable pride. Many a village resident gloats with the "knowledge" that Oxford helped pioneer the "talkies," for Howe showed his films complete with sound effects. He included in his company a number of actors and actresses whom he stationed in back of the screen, and, if he chose to show an Italian street scene, his actors jabbered away in an approximation of Italian.[1] Nor were mechanical sound effects beyond him.[2]

Lyman Howe was a native of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. As early as 1884, he started out upon the lecture circuit. Mechanical things intrigued him, and his first "exhibit" was a miniature coal mine and breaker. This satisfied him for a while, but when Edison's phonograph appeared, it seemed tailor-made for his kind of adaptations.

At that time, the phonograph could be heard only by means of listening tubes, and thus was as individual, and as restricted to the parlor, as the stereoptican. If it was offered as public entertainment, the customers, one at a time, put a nickel in the machine, inserted the tubes in their ears, and took the consequences. Lyman Howe hooked on a tin horn -- and enabled an entire audience to listen.[3]

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[1]Edward Unger, Idem. Herbert Rahm, Idem.

[3]Terry Ramsaye, A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture (2d. ed. rev.; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), p. 312

Edison had of course also considered the amplifying horn, but for a time Lyman had a premium on the convenience, and he proudly sent out his mail beneath the letterhead: "PHONOGRAPH CONCERTS -- No ear tubes used, an audience of 3,000 people entertained at one time!"[1]

In March of 1896, Howe wrote to Edison to open negotiations for the rights to the Vitascope in Pennsylvania. He lost out to a previous bid, but, never at a loss for inventions, he took to the road with his own "Animatoscope," to which he had added the phenomenal convenience of a take-up reel (existing projectors had dropped used film into a basket).[2] His patrons were church societies and Chatauquas, small opera houses and lyceum courses--and thus he came to Oxford.

One time, in the years just before the World War, Clarence (Screw) Stanton, president of the Bank of Oxford, approached Herb Rahm for tickets to Howe's travelogue. Herb had the tickets ready. It was an established fact that Stanton would buy a half-dozen tickets to anything that came to the opera house. He distributed these liberally among his family and servants, but it was an equally established fact that Stanton kept for himself the right aisle seat in the front row.

On this particular occasion, Howe's program put the audience "on a train," riding frist the caboose, then the

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[1]Ibid., p. 313.

[2]Ibid., p. 314.

cowcatcher, as the train hurtled across prairies, through forests, and across ravines. For a grand finale, the camera had been turned around. To the viewer, instead of being a passenger, it seemed as if the situation had been reversed with the camera, and the whole audience was at the mercy of a speeding train.

The first shot was at an extreme distance, but by the time the train was almost on the camera, belching smoke and flame (and, all the time, Howe's assistants were giving vent to realistic whistles, and the slam of pistons and drivers reverberated through the opera house), Mr. Stanton was "getting more and more itchy." Finally, the train exploded, or appeared to, as it charged over the top of the camera. The din from behind the screen was terrific, but by far the greater commotion was below stage level. With much thumping, and some cursing, Stanton fell off his seat.

The patrons seated in the gallery saw what had happened first, and began to giggle. Soon the storm of laughter had spread to every seat in the house, save one. Oxford didn't quit laughing for years, and, if Lyman Howe had anticipated sound movies, Herb Rahm gave the village an equal preview of the automobile seat belt. It was a long time before he quit offering Bank-President Stanton a rope to tie him to his seat -- next time.[1] True though

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[1]Herbert Rahm, Idem.

it was that there were no longer many of the small personal thrills supplied by stage shows and a live cast, there seemed to be some hope for the preservation of humor in a modern world.

CHAPTER VI

THE END OF AN ERA, OR: PAULINE IMPERILS THE OPERA HOUSE

No one factor was absolute in triggering the demise of the opera houses of the midwest, but it is obvious that the major contributor to this decline was the development of the motion picture. Automobiles might lure people to the open road, or radios and phonographs keep whole families at home, but it was the motion picture industry that attacked the theatre most immediately and directly.

In 1896, Bertram C. Whitney brought the first moving picture projector to Michigan and exhibited the Wonderful Machine at the Detroit Grand Opera House.[1] In those years at the turn of the century, there were so many stages on which to display the early efforts of the baby industry, that it was nearly a decade before new construction was needed. Detroit's first movie house built expressly for that purpose was the Casino Theatre, impressively named, though with risky connotations.[2] That was in 1905, and for the next ten years, nickelodeons were built as fast as owners could finance them.[3] In

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[1]Willis, Michigan . . ., Op. Cit., p. 730.

[2]Ibid. [3]Ibid.

five short years, by 1910, the motion picture was firmly manifest as a formidable rival for the theatre all across the United States.[1]

There was much within the opera house phenomenon to contribute to its own downfall. The high degree of mechanical and painterly scenic realism attempted in the larger theatres was automatically limited in the smaller, provincial plants. Not only did this undermine the inherent prestige of ninety per cent of American opera houses, but it reflected and created a propensity for a kind of sensationalism that could be far better met in the idiom of the motion picture.[2] For years, the playwrights had been creating vehicles far more suitable for the yet unborn motion picture industry than they were for the confines of a legitimate theatre. Ben-Hur's chariots posed problems, no matter how many treadmills were installed in the stage floor.[3]

Fortunately for the preservation of the legitimate stage, the ultimate reaction to these impossible spectacles was a kind of introversion, moving from the vast scope of Roman epics to the more intimate surroundings offered by a home, a restaurant, and where scenic effect could be limited to those things which could be reproduced literally.[4]

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[1]Arthur Hornblow, A History of the Theatre in America from its Beginnings to the Present Time (2d. ed. rev.; 2 vols.; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), vol. II, p. 331

[2]Vardac, Op. Cit., p. 59. [3]Ibid., p. 78.

[4]Ibid., pp. 89-134.

But before this could be successful, an appetite for this scaled-down realism had to be created, and the time had not yet come.

In the meantime, other construction was taking place. In the majority of small town, high school gymnasiums and auditoriums were usurping the community service functions of the opera houses.[1] In Oxford, the high school auditorium was built in 1927.[2] Up to that date, every graduating class from Oxford High School had participated in commencement exercises at the opera house, virtually every junior class had been in a Junior Ex. on the opera house stage, and all but a very few alumni banquets had been held on the opera house floor. At least this had been true from the time the opera house was completed in 1892. After 1927, the opera house ceased to be anything but a theatre, and not even a legitimate theatre, at that. It was all one very small symptom of a very large disease.

And then there were the Chatauqus, and the lyceums, and the tent shows.

If the opera house needed a death blow, perhaps it came when the same fire prevention ruling that made Herb Rahm run strips of wood connecting his auditorium seats [3] laid down the ultimatum that, henceforth, no motion pic-

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[1]Willis, Michigan . . . , Op. Cit., p. 730.

[2]Leader, Feb. 27, 1957. Herbert Rahm, Idem.

PLATE XII

COMPETITION

Figure 1.--In this building, the Pastime Theatre, nickelodeon menace to the opera house, was housed.

Figure 2.--The high school Auditorium, Oxford. Its construction in 1927 ended the era of the opera house as a community center.

tures were to be shown on other than the ground floor of a building.[1] One by one, the opera houses that had occupied the second and third floors of store buildings darkened their lights and shut their doors. They were simply no longer needed.

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[1]Willis, "The Opera House . . . ," Op. Cit., p. 671.

EPILOGUE

THE OXFORD OPERA HOUSE BUILDING

1914 - 1966

Herb Rahm had been just twenty-six years old when he assumed managerial duties at the Oxford Opera House.[1] Youth has strong likes and dislikes, and, in those days, one of Herb's stronger dislikes was a fellow by the name of Gent Kessell. When the opera house building became (totally) Kessell's property, Herb looked about at his modern projection booth -- and calmly ripped out all the electrical equipment there. If Gent Kessell wanted modern improvements, he could bloody well install them himself.[2]

That was early in 1919,[3] and, in the six years he had managed the opera house, Herb had accomplished enough that it was fairly understandable that he wanted no other manager to receive credit due more properly to the first man who had attempted to bring the theatre into step with the rest of the world. In 1913, a motion picture show at the Oxford Opera House had run a good bit like "The

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[1]Herbert Rahm, Idem. [2]Ray Forman, Idem.

[3]Abstract, entry II-14.

Little Old Ford."[1] It might have "rambled right along," but it most certainly did so on faith, chewing gum, soap, and wire.

Those first shows were run on one projector only, and the operator, hopefully ambidexterous, sat on a child's high chair cranking the projector with one hand and rewinding the film with his other hand.[2] There were two shows in any given evening, and midway throught the second show, the projectionist was a lonely man indeed. Until then, his ally and co-worker was the pianist, who labored to adapt organ scores to the limitations of eighty-eight black and white keys. But at 10 o'clock in the evening, propriety and her contract excusted the lady in question from further efforts, and home she went. Usually the audience was so wrapped up in the on-screen procedings that they never missed her, but those last reels always seemed awfully long and exceptionaly noisy to the poor projectionist.[3]

The expensive "mirroroid" screen that had been so proudly installed in 1913 had a short tenure. It presided with lordly disdain over the stage itself, and thus posed a small inconvenience for traveling companies

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[1]Title of a contemporary song.

[2]Mrs. Clark Stoddard, Idem. [3]Idem.

who would like to use the stage too, please. Its replacement was not beautiful, but it solved the problem. The next screen was suspended from the top of the proscenium, and if the stage itself was in demand, a pulley, a rope, and a hinge did the trick, and the screen was swung up to nestle against the ceiling.[1]

Because of its long establishment in the village, if for no other reason, the opera house soon shrugged aside all petty competition and became the Oxford motion picture theatre. On Saturdays, farmers for miles around hurried to finish their chores in the morning, and drove to town. The afternoon was sufficient to shop and get in supplies, and every Saturday evening brought another installment of The Perils of Pauline.[2] (One such farmer showed unusual concern about one "Pauline" sequence. He was enough of a character that, when he'd seen the same show three times, somebody asked him why. The answer was simple and extremely logical. There was, it seems, one scene shot through a window, and behind the window a bevy of young ladies were preparing to undress. At the crucial moment, a railroad train came through blocking the camera's view. Now, trains in Oxford, especially the Polly Ann, were late three times out of four, and our enterprising farmer knew that if he waited long enough, Pauline's train would be late, too).[3]

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[1]Herbert Rahm, Idem. [2]Mr. and Mrs. L. B. Nichols Idem.

[3]Herb Rahm, Idem.

There were other changes on main street. In 1917, William Reed bought the property north of the opera house and tore down the old frame building there. Now the opera house was to have two common walls, for Reed built an impressive store-and-office building which abutted directly against the opera house north wall.[1] In 1919, the same year that Gent Kessell bought out Andrew Glaspie's interest in the opera house block, the Oxford Electrical Plant succumbed to the elements one too many times. For years, only civic pride had kept the Detroit Edison Company from contracting with the village. There had been a terriffic fight, echoes of which could still be heard fifty years later, but between 1919 and 1920, the storm abated enough that the Municipal Plant was shut down, and Edison took over.[2]

Gent Kessell ran the opera house until his death in 1926.[3] It was very much a going concern; less its $1,700.00 mortgage, the property was assessed for taxes at $8,500.00.[4] The only real difficulty Gent ever met was the question of Sunday night movies, and Gent could always be trusted to handle a problem like that with ease.

The church objection to Sunday night films was not that they kept parishoners away from the church doors, for

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[1]Abstract, entry II-25. [2]Oxford Fire House vault, MSS, Municipal Power Plant bill of sale.

[3]Abstract, entry II-17. [4]Abstract, entry II-19.

the time schedule was carefully co-ordinated with the local church services. Nor was it righteous opposition to the immorality of the theatre. It was merely that Sunday was the Lord's day, and anything that took place of a community nature on that day should recognize and be oriented around that fact. Gent acquiesced with good grace -- and printed hymns on the back of his show programs. Before and after each Sunday performance, Gent Kessell led his "congregation" in praises of the Lord, and he kept it up several weeks before the churches gave in.[1]

When Gent Kessell died in 1926, that drive and imagination died with him. Jessie Kessell had no desire to assume the burden of managing an opera house, and when young Ray Forman indicated his wish to buy the building and go into business for himself, Jessie responded quickly. Gent died in late fall, and early spring saw Forman the sole owner of the building that was to remain his for the next forty years.

The opera house had suffered the ravages of time. The accumulation of sand and gravel in the alley to the rear of the theatre had resulted in the dressing room windows being a good foot below the level of the grade.[2] From these underground windows, surface water had seeped

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[1]"Stub" Robinson, Idem. [2]Ray Forman, Idem.

in and down the walls, rotting the wood and peeling paint and varnish. One dressing room had been usurped to serve as a coal bin, and it was piled high with bituminous coal, which had been there for use in an anthracite furnace -- to the utter dismay of anyone who proposed cleaning up the mess.[1] In resignation, Ray Forman tore out the whole area, leaving only enough wood to shore up the stage.[2]

Forman made few drastic alterations during the first years of his hegemony. There was no theatre marquee; he built one, later replacing it twice with larger and more expensive models. He cleaned the entire building and gave it a new lease on life, but was forced into no major expenditure until 1934.

The last day of February, 1934, the theatre was closed down in usual fashion. There had been no fire in the building since Tuesday night, but Wednesday evening, about eleven o'clock, someone spotted smoke rising from in back of the marquee. The alarm was quickly relayed to the fire house next door, and within three minutes hoses were playing water on what had become a respectable conflagration.[3] For some inexplicable reason, the March 1 Detroit Free Press reported that a frozen fire hydrant

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[1]Ray Forman, Idem. [2]Idem. [3]Leader, Mar. 2, 1934.

had resulted in incredible damage. But however untrue the accusation, it is difficult to be prompt enough in case of fire, and much of the damage was expensive and permanent.

The gallery was so weakened by the flames that it had to come down though, oddly enough, the end that had been nearest to the fire remained. The projection booth had to be rebuilt, and the skylights had cracked out completely from the heat. Permanent removal seemed the best way to handle the latter problem, and that Forman did, skylights being a bit of a handicap for matinees, anyhow.[1]

The lobby had to be redone; the lobby doors had to be replaced. The sweeping staircases, too, went the way of all flesh.[2] The upper windows in the facade were blacked out, those downstairs rearranged to match the new interior. Spurred by the knowledge that a large investment would ultimately mean a greater return, Forman went on in subsequent years (1936-1937) to install a raked auditorium floor and theatre seats, and in the process he tore out the old stage, used that space for further seating to replace that which was lost when the gallery went out, and added to the east end of the opera house in order to accomodate a shallower stage and permanent screen.[3]

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[1]Ray Forman, Idem. [2]Idem. [3]Idem.

Working on that construction, he saw the chance to replace the furnace and build a heating tunnel to carry heat, pipes, and wiring to the rear of the house.[1]

Yet above it all, unchanged, the opera house kept its magnificent, Byzantine dome.

On the eve of the second World War, the Oxford Theatre, nèe the Oxford Opera House, stood essentially as it is today. In the intervening years, the ownership has remained constant, though in latter years the managerial duties have slipped to the capable hands of Mrs. James Nicholson. To those who pass by, it is still an impressive piece of brickwork. To those who pause in contemplation, it seems to remember--and to speak rather profoundly of the years and the way of life it once knew.

> Not Heaven itself upon the
> past has power;
> But what has been, has been, and
> I have had my hour.[2]

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[1] Idem.

[2] John Dryden, Imitation of Horace, iii, 29, 71.

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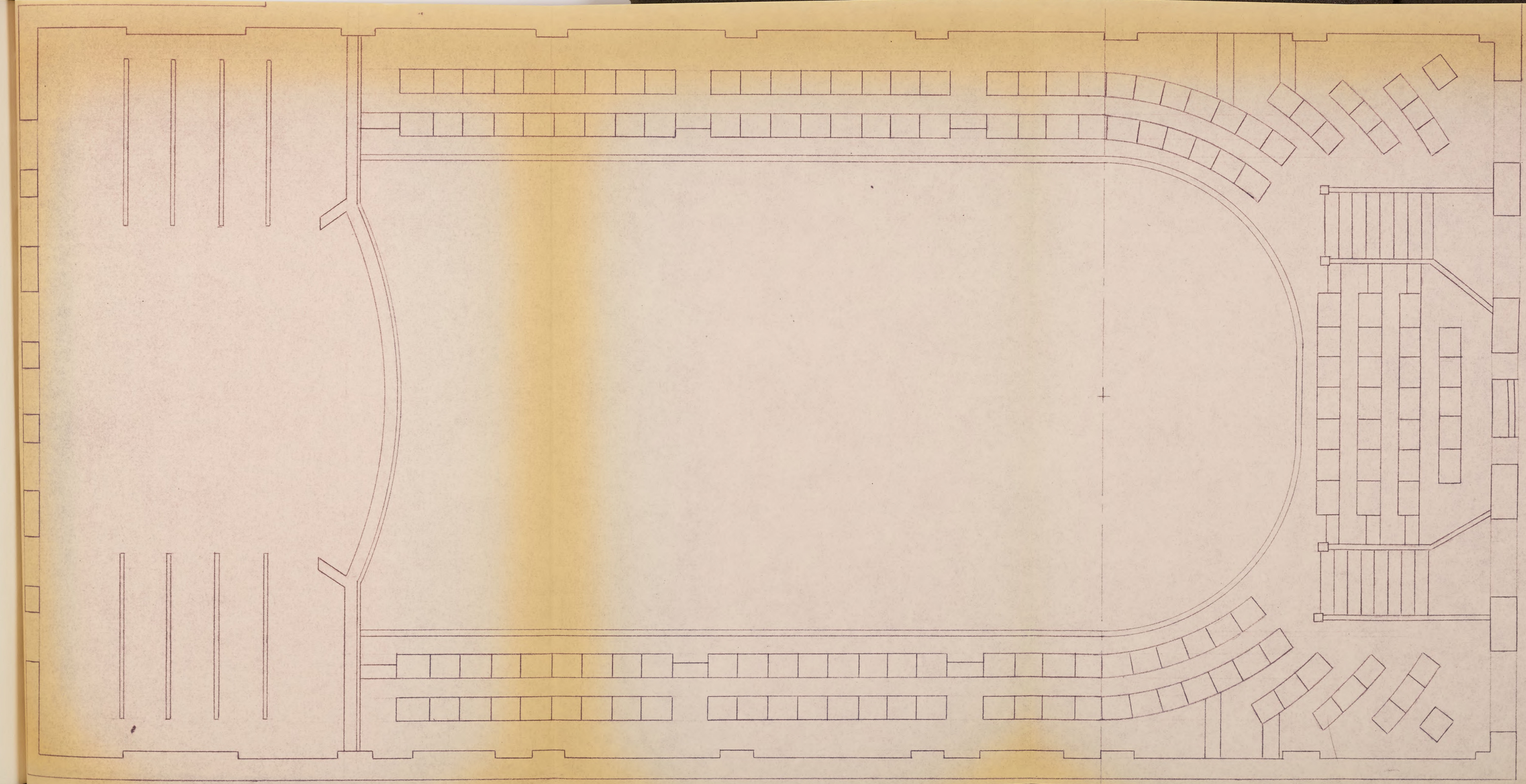
APPENDIX

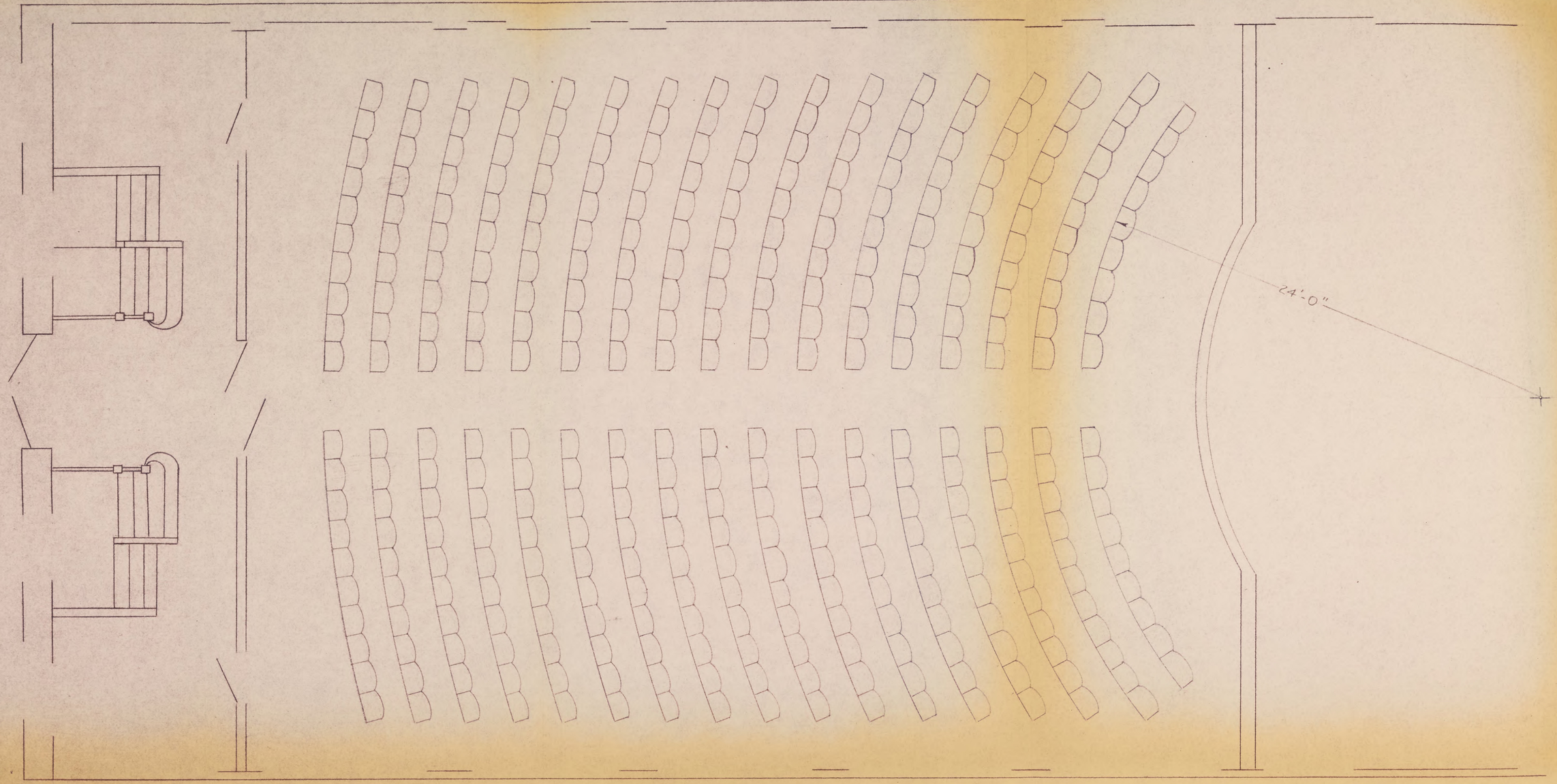
APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS OF THE OXFORD OPERA HOUSE

Overall length	68'
Overall width	40'
Height to peak of roof	40'
Height to tip of dome	50'
Entrance lobby excluding stairwells	8' x 10'
Ticket and cloak rooms	8' x 10'
Auditorium floor	38' x 50'
Distance from auditorium floor to level of gallery	14'
Depth of gallery at rear of auditorium area	11'
Depth of gallery along sides of auditorium area	7'
Stage area including wing space	16' x 38'
Stage floor	16' x 20'
Wings	9' x 16'
Proscenium arch	20' x 20'
Distance from auditorium floor to stage level	5'

SEATING CAPACITY OF THE OXFORD OPERA HOUSE

Auditorium	342
Gallery	156
TOTAL	498

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