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AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE THEATRE IN CHARLOTTE,
NORTH CAROLINA, FROM 1873-1902

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Speech

by

Rupert T. Barber, Jr.
B.S., Louisiana State University, 1954
M.A., Columbia University, 1958
August, 1970

(Daily Charlotte Observer, Thursday, January 13, 1876.)
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ABSTRACT

Theatrical history in Charlotte, North Carolina, one of the largest cities in the Southeast, has been ignored for many years. Professional theatre, except for small traveling entertainments, did not appear until J. H. Carson and Lewis W. Sanders built the Charlotte Opera House which opened September 16, 1874, and closed in December, 1902, with the opening of the larger Academy of Music. Although the Opera House was not open during the entire twenty-eight year period, it formed a basis for Charlotte's theatre history and spanned a period of change in the American theatre from the local stock company to the touring company of the Theatrical Syndicate.

The study is divided into five periods: The Opening Season, 1874-1875; The Opera House--Center of Theatrical Activity, 1875-1886; The Opera House and Gray's Academy of Music, 1886-1890; The Charlotte Auditorium and City Hall Auditorium, 1890-1896; and The Opera House Era Ends, 1896-1902. The major sources of material were contemporary daily newspapers. Books of theatrical history, as well as county records, and interviews were used to augment the study.

Between 1874-1886, the Opera House was managed by Lewis Sanders, one of the builders and a business man of
high artistic tastes. Many of the top performers of the day appeared there including Edwin Booth, Fanny Davenport, Madame Janauschek, Lawrence Barrett, Emma Juch and others. The Opera House was the center of cultural life and by the end of the period a strong, dependable audience had developed.

In September, 1886, Nat Gray's Academy of Music opened and followed a policy of popular-priced entertainment. Although the Opera House met this with some like attractions, its policy continued to be first-class entertainment at first-class prices. With increasing financial problems, Gray lost the Academy in 1890 with a mortgage foreclosure.

The period between 1890 and 1896 was an erratic one for the theatre-goer in Charlotte. The Opera House closed in the spring of 1892, not to open again for professional theatre until 1896. Although Nat Gray opened make-shift theatres in the Charlotte Auditorium, built as a large meeting hall, and the City Hall auditorium, the facilities were extremely inadequate and neither was successful. Amateur theatre flourished.

In 1896 the Opera House reopened and from then until it closed there was increasing theatrical activity. The stage was too small for the large New York shows, so the Opera House was filled by small touring stock companies usually playing a week's engagement. Among the popular
companies were the Baldwin-Melville Company, the Mable Paige Company, the Rentfrow Company and the Harder-Myrkie Company. Many of these appeared year after year. The audience supported these companies with full houses, until the new Academy of Music opened in 1902. With better facilities and a connection with the Theatrical Syndicate, it could offer top New York touring productions. Within two and a half months, the Opera House closed.

Theatre in Charlotte from 1874 to 1902 centered around the Opera House and three men—J. H. Carson and Lewis W. Sanders, original builders and the latter manager for approximately fifteen years, and Mr. Nat Gray, general theatrical entrepreneur who began as the town-appointed bill poster early in the period and ended as manager of the Opera House from 1890 to 1902. Because of these men theatre flourished in Charlotte from 1874 to 1902.

Realizing that many studies in 19th century American theatrical history have overlooked the small, rather remote, interior communities of the nation, this study helps to fill the gap in the overall theatrical history by taking a detailed look at the active theatrical picture in such a community, Charlotte, North Carolina.
INTRODUCTION

Mecklenburg County was first settled in 1750 by large numbers of Scotch-Irish from Pennsylvania and Virginia and shortly followed by English, Scots, German and Huguenot settlers from the Charleston area. In 1768, Charlotte, a small settlement built at a cross roads in the wilderness of Piedmont North Carolina, was named the temporary county seat. Six years later it became the permanent seat.

Charles R. Brockmann in "The Story of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County," found in Hornets' Nest by LeGette Blythe and Brockmann, wrote this of the first settlers:

So great was the numerical superiority of the Scotch-Irish, coupled with their traditional religious fervor, that they were instrumental in organizing the first seven churches to be established in Mecklenburg. The spirit of the people who built them is, perhaps, the most significant feature to be found in the historical records of Charlotte and Mecklenburg, and has greatly influenced the lives of each succeeding generation.¹

This influence on the "lives of each succeeding generation" manifested itself throughout the years in a Declaration of Independence on May 20, 1775, a "hornets' nest" of opposition to Cornwallis' troops in 1780, the discovery of gold

in the early 1800's which made Mecklenburg County the center of the nation's mining activities until the California strike, the ability to recover from the Civil War quickly and become one of the leading industrial centers of the Southeast, and probably accounts for the fact that, until 1958, there was little mention of theatre in any published historical studies or promotional materials about the county or city. But as newspaper research reveals, Charlotte not only had theatre, it was considered one of the better theatre-going communities in the state. J. B. Alexander in his History of Mecklenburg County from 1740 to 1900, D. A. Tomkins in his History of Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte, Wade H. Harris in his numerous promotional booklets about Charlotte and others, all writing at the beginning of the new century, simply ignored the facts, for by that time the Opera House had been open for over twenty-five years and the new Academy of Music was imminent.

It is understandable that professional theatre would


3J. B. Alexander, The History of Mecklenburg County from 1740 to 1900 (Charlotte: Observer Printing House, 1902).

4D. A. Tompkins, History of Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte (Charlotte: Observer Printing House, 1903).
come relatively late in Charlotte's development. The community was small, remote, and religious. It was not until after the Civil War that Charlotte began its steady growth. A look at census figures will testify to this. In the census of 1790 there was a county population of only 11,395 and by the beginning of the Civil War, seventy-years later, the population, after almost doubling in 1830 during the mining excitement, had tapered off to about 17,000. By 1880 the county had 34,175 people. In 1860 the population of Charlotte was 2,265, but by 1870 it had practically doubled, and by 1880 it had practically doubled again. The city has grown at a rapid rate of increase ever since to a population of 272,000 as of January, 1970. Railroads, industry, and the fact that Charlotte survived the Civil War unscarred were all factors in its growth.

Prior to the building of the Opera House, circuses, medicine shows, tent shows, and a few lectures and concerts made up the entertainment fare for the people. Between 1850 and 1874, when the Opera House opened, the Court House was used at various times for very simple entertainments and the Assembly Room at the Charlotte Female Institute was available for concerts and lectures. Treloar Hall, a large

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5 Blythe and Brockmann, p. 449.

6 Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, July 1, 1970.
storeroom in Treloar's Store, was used for local entertainments during the Civil War and up to 1868. Oates Hall was used after 1869 and Miller's Hall after 1873, but both of these were simply storage rooms converted into public halls with makeshift stages.

The largest of these halls was Miller's which held approximately 450 to 500 persons. It was here that early amateur theatricals got started in Charlotte. On August 28 and 29, 1873, "ladies and gentlemen connected with the various Temperance organizations of the city" presented C. W. Taylor's The Drunkard's Warning with great success (Observer, August 29, and August 30, 1873). Out of this presentation grew the first Charlotte Dramatic Association which presented a repeat of The Drunkard's Warning on October 17, 1873 (Observer, Saturday, October 18, 1873), and a series of plays during the annual Fair of the Carolinas Week which included among others: Still Water Runs Deep (Observer, Wednesday, November 26, 1873); The Limerick

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[7] Western Democrat, February 25, 1868. (Referred to as the Democrat from this point on.)

[8] Ibid., April 27, 1869.

[9] Daily Charlotte Observer, April 11, 1873. (Referred to as the Observer from this point on.)

[10] Ibid.

Boy (Observer, Wednesday, November 26, 1873); Rough Diamond (Observer, Saturday, November 29, 1873). In January, 1874, they presented Ten Nights in a Bar Room (Observer, Wednesday, February 4, 1874). All of these were presented in Miller's Hall.

Other small troupes visited Charlotte and played in Miller's during the 1873-1874 season. Among them were Ford's Combination in New Magdalen by Wilkie Collins (Observer, Friday, November 7, 1873); the Berger Family with Sol Smith Russell (Observer, Thursday, December 25, 1873); and Callender's Original Georgia Minstrels (Observer, Thursday, January 8, 1874).

These only whetted Charlotte's appetite for things theatrical and the townspeople were more and more impatient for the Opera House, which was under construction by then, to be completed.

The purpose of this study is to present a detailed history and analysis of the theatre in Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, between 1874 and 1902. The study will include the theatrical life of the Charlotte Opera House, the first structure built in Charlotte specifically as a theatre, and a brief history and analysis of other places of theatrical activity during that time. The period spans twenty-eight years during which there was a major transition in American theatre history, from the local stock company to the touring companies or "combinations"
of the Theatrical Syndicate. The study reflects how Charlotte, one of the most rapidly growing communities in the Southeast, with its population of a little over 4,500 in 1874 and a little under 20,000 in 1902, fits into the overall pattern of the American theatre.

The study is intended to examine and determine the following factors: the productions given; the nature of the entertainments; the physical characteristics of the buildings involved in theatre presentation; the actors and actresses who performed and their relative importance to the theatre and to Charlotte audiences; prices charged for admission; the merit and acceptability of the productions; the development of the Charlotte audience including cultural and moral attitudes and behavioral patterns; analysis of the newspaper coverage, including the nature of the reviews, the significance of theatre-oriented editorials and the biases and prejudices of reviewers; the trends of the times as reflected by the traveling companies or lack of them; the effects or lack of effects of the changing national theatre patterns; presentation of day by day entertainment, with emphasis upon the professional companies, but also considering the amateur contributions to the theatre scene; the different periods through which the opera house passed; the managerial leadership of L. W. Sanders and Nat Gray and their peculiar contributions, and finally, the place of Charlotte and the Charlotte Opera
House in the overall history of the American stage. Throughout the study there has been an earnest attempt to capture the feeling and the flavor of the period by the extensive use of quotations.

The study is divided into the following sections: Chapter I--The Opening Season: 1874-1875, including the building of the theatre, its physical characteristics, and a detailed study of the first season; Chapter II--The First Period: a study of eleven seasons, between 1875 and 1886, when the Opera House was the one and only center of theatrical activity for the community; Chapter III--The Second Period: the study of the Opera House with its competitor, the first Academy of Music, between 1886 and 1890; Chapter IV--The Third Period: one of openings and closings for the Opera House when theatrical performances had to be presented in the first Charlotte Auditorium and the City Hall Auditorium between 1890 and 1896; and Chapter V--The Fourth Period: the six seasons between 1896 and 1902 when the Opera House had a final spurt of theatrical activity, reached a peak in the number of productions presented, if not in quality, and then suffered its ignoble demise in the shadow of the new Academy of Music.

The major sources of material were the daily newspapers of the period. In addition, personal interviews with several former patrons of the Charlotte Opera House, including the daughter of one of the builders, proved
helpful. Books of theatrical history, of regional and national history, as well as brochures and pamphlets and other periodicals of the times and related unpublished theses were consulted to amplify and provide an understanding of existing conditions. A thorough search turned up no programs, playbills, floorplans, seating charts, etc. The only picture of the Opera House, which is included in the Appendix, was found in a promotional booklet and was labeled "A scene on South Tryon." The building was reasonably identified by Mrs. S. O. Brooke, daughter of one of the original builders, and verified by checking the picture against buildings and building heights, etc., found on Sanborn Insurance maps. Old maps in the North Carolina State Department of Archives were useful in verifying the locations of the various buildings. The Mecklenburg County Clerk of Court's office turned up some transactions concerning the Opera House and Gray's Academy, but the records were not complete. Minutes of the Board of Aldermen's meetings for the period revealed some tax matters and pertinent city ordinances. City Directories proved helpful.

Three daily newspapers, the Daily Charlotte Observer, the Chronicle, and the Daily Observer, were the principal newspaper references. The three form an almost complete and continuous coverage of the period with the

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12See Appendix B, Interview 1.
Daily Charlotte Observer covering the beginning of the period up to the end of 1883, when it merged with the Charlotte Journal to become the Journal-Observer from 1883 to 1886 (soon after the merger the word, Journal, was dropped from the title and the paper was again called the Observer); the Chronicle, covering from the fall of 1886 to the spring of 1893 when its name was changed to the Daily Observer; and then the Daily Observer from 1893 to the end of the period. There was only one period when more than one daily was published at the same time as another. The Charlotte News, referred to in this study as the News, was published from December 1888 to 1894. Existing files are relatively incomplete. With this situation existing it seemed unrealistic to think in terms of a study of comparative reviews, although a few are included to give some idea of the different approaches of the papers. The files of daily newspapers are not complete, but there is only one gap of any length. No daily papers are available from July through mid-October, 1886. Unfortunately some time during that gap Gray's Academy of Music opened, so a definite date and a list of the first engagements are not available.

Weekly newspapers were consulted to try to complete the picture, but there was very little coverage of the theatre in them. Those searched were numerous, but the ones of the most value were the Western Democrat, which became the Charlotte Democrat, and the Southern Home, which
ultimately merged with the Charlotte Democrat to become the Charlotte Home and Democrat in 1881.

The reviewers of all the newspapers throughout the twenty-eight year period remained anonymous, and, although the reviews vary widely in degree of proficiency, the overall goals of these writers remained amazingly the same. There was a genuine desire for theatre to succeed in Charlotte and there was much emphasis placed, particularly at first, upon the training of the uninitiated audience. There was also a strongly felt obligation to advise the public about the merits or demerits of an upcoming attraction. Realizing that southern and northern tastes, and large city and small town tastes vary, whenever possible, the papers printed reviews from the wire service from other North Carolina cities or, if that was impossible, from nearby southern cities of comparable size, prior to the attraction. Sometimes this took the form of editorial comment, but often the reviews were simply quoted so that the public could make up its own mind about the suitability and quality, moral and otherwise, of the upcoming entertainment.

In the October 29, 1900, Daily Observer, an anonymous critic wrote of the problems of reviewing in Charlotte and towns of comparable size and location. The article, although written late in the years covered by this study, easily sums up the problems faced by all the reviewers during the period.
Usually it is the purpose of the newspapers to encourage the coming of as many shows as possible. To do this it is necessary to be considerate in criticism. Because this place is so far removed from the centres of the "talent," the wise policy would seem to be to make the best of what is good and view failures leniently, hoping that the demand for good acting may result in cleverer and more wholesome plays.

Make the matter personal and local and take Nat Gray, the leasee of the Charlotte theatre, for illustration. Long before the beginning of the season he has made every effort to bill good shows, and good shows only. Then they come--some creditable, some fair and others worse than indifferent, because the geographical position of the leasee's town can't prevent his being picked up occasionally. But he is doing his best to please the people and if a newspaper turns on him and his shows whenever an opportunity presents itself it can easily succeed in running him out of business, in addition to scaring decent shows from the place.

The dramatic critic, if you will, must consider the point of view. What is the use of being hypercritical and looking at the local theatre through the eyes of a New York theatre-goer? Why not be charitable and consider the town and its size, the unavoidable limitations of amusements and the price?

The public is not forgotten, nor is it argued that it is right to bestow even faint praise on a bum show.

The critic has trouble with his criterion; and there seems to be but one general rule that applies. That is to commend the shows that have merit or cleverness, or that give evidences of study and work and to criticise, unsparingly plays that depend on cheap wit or vulgarity for attraction, that fail to show evidence of careful preparation, or, in fine, any staged-thing that tries to do the audience. The middle-ground--the mediocre shows--is for the critic's varied point of views and he may be kind for the reasons given. (Daily Observer, Monday, October 29, 1900.)

A second valuable and interesting aspect of the study was that of interviewing Charlotteans who attended the Opera House. Six prominent and well-known citizens of
Charlotte, all in their nineties, were contacted. Three proved of particular assistance by helping piece together enough information concerning the physical details of the house, that, when added to the information gleaned from newspaper research, enabled the writer to reconstruct a floor plan of the house. The most helpful informant was Mrs. Bessie Sanders Brooke, the daughter of L. W. Sanders, one of the original builders and managers of the Opera House. Mr. W. J. Edwards and Mrs. M. G. Hunter were invaluable in helping to verify facts. All information contributed by the informants was checked for accuracy whenever possible and checked against the other informants. For a group of people all in their ninety-fourth year, they were alert, active, and in agreement on most details. The interviews, were tape recorded individually and appear in edited form in the Appendix.

Two previous studies include information about the opera house. The first, a segment of a paper entitled, "The Era of the Opera House in Piedmont North Carolina," by Donald J. Rulfs appeared in the July, 1958 volume of the North Carolina Historical Review. The article contains brief historical notes of the opera houses of Salisbury, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, and Charlotte. The portion devoted to the Charlotte Opera House is, of necessity for an article of this length, sketchy. Some physical aspects of the theatre and the opening performance are discussed along
with highlights from the 1880-1881 season, the closing and re-opening of the 1890's, and highlights of the final season. Gray's Academy of Music is not mentioned, although the second Academy which opened in 1902 is, nor is the first Charlotte Auditorium. The second study which includes the Opera House is a brief section of a laymen's history of Charlotte, Hornets' Nest, by LeGette Blythe and John Brockmann. The account appears to be simply an extract of the Rulfs' study.

The present study covers in depth the period of the Opera House covered by Rulfs and includes other theatres or makeshift theatres used during the period for theatrical presentations.

It seems appropriate now to make some comments concerning the ownership of the Charlotte Opera House. J. H. Carson and L. W. Sanders built the house in 1873 and Carson, seemingly, owned the house when it closed in 1902, although the last newspaper reference to his owning it dates back to October, 1901. Between these dates, the ownership of the Opera House is very difficult to trace with any degree of accuracy. It is a confusing tangle of deeds, mortgages, incomplete county records, sales, leasees, newspapers

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13 *Observer*, August 16, 1873.

14 *Daily Observer*, October 4, 1901.
accounts, etc. One of the major entanglements stems from an announcement in an Observer of 1882.

The opera house in this city yesterday passed under the control of a new management. Mr. James Carson, who owned the house in co-partnership with Mr. L. W. Sanders, having sold out his interest to Mr. John W. Wadsworth, and the opera house will hereafter be under the control of Sanders & Wadsworth. (Observer, Sunday, December 3, 1882.)

During 1883, there are several references in the Journal-Observer about "Sanders and Wadsworth, owners of the opera house" (Journal-Observer, Saturday, September 15, 1883, and Tuesday, June 19, 1883), but by the printing of the Charlotte, North Carolina, City Directory of 1884-1885, Sanders is listed as proprietor of the Opera House and Sanders and Wadsworth as the managers. It is very possible and highly probable that the labeling of Sanders and Wadsworth as "owners" was a mistake on the part of the newspapers. In the Clerk of Court's office in Mecklenburg County there is a transaction recorded in which Mr. Sanders deeds a half interest in the Opera House to Mr. James H. Carson on December 28, 1889. This would bring Mr. Carson back into the picture, except he may not have really been out of the picture, for prior to this transaction, on November 11, 1889, Sanders deeds a half interest in the Opera House to Mr. James H. Carson on December 28, 1889. This would bring Mr. Carson back into the picture, except he may not have really been out of the picture, for prior to this transaction, on November 11, 1889,


16 Record of Deed, December 28, 1889, recorded in Book 19, Page 415 of the Records of the Clerk of Court, Mecklenburg County, State of North Carolina.
Mr. Carson was credited as "the owner of the opera house" by the Chronicle when it announced that he had "declined to receive a lease of the theatre for next year" (Chronicle, Tuesday, November 11, 1890). When questioned about the ownership of the Opera House, Mrs. Brooke only remembered that her father and "Cousin Jimmy" were partners and great friends. She had no recollection of Mr. Wadsworth being in partnership with her father or connected with him in any way other than as a friend. She vaguely remembers her father as not being connected with the Opera House at the end, but she is not sure.17

For the last quarter of the 19th century and into the 20th century, the Opera House played an important part in the life of Charlotte. A study of its contributions and the contributions of the men connected with it is important to an understanding of the cultural history of the community.

17 Appendix B, Interview 1.
CHAPTER I

THE OPERA HOUSE AND ITS OPENING SEASON

In mid-August, 1873, the work began on the new building and soon there were frequent accounts of its progress in the Observer. Mr. George Welch, the architect, originally from England but most recently from New York where he had worked with Arthur Gilman, a well known and leading architect there, came to Charlotte and personally supervised the construction. By early August, 1874, the building was completed and ready for occupancy.

In the May issue, 1874, of The American Builder, the following item, dated April 20, 1874, Charlotte, and signed C. C., appeared:

A theatre is erected here from designs by Mr. G. Welch, of New York, and the finishing touches are nearly completed. It is a very substantial brick building, 50 feet wide and 100 feet deep; the lower part, or ground story, is made into two large stores. The theatre is approached by two wide staircases of easy ascent, one being used for entering with a ticket office at head of stairs; but both to be thrown open for exit. The auditorium is 70 feet deep, and the stage is 30 ft. A large balcony of a graceful line is formed and returns against the side walls before reaching the proscenium. This arrangement is different from the course usually adopted; but the effect is pleasing and every seat commands a full view of the stage, and

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1Observer, August 16, 1873. 2Ibid., August 7, 1874.
3Ibid., March 8, 1874. 4Ibid., August 6, 1874.
gives two private boxes on each side that have almost the best seats in the house, whereas the usual side-seats and boxes are in the worst position for a view of the performance.

The stage, and the arrangements for scenery and dressing rooms, etc., will be complete, all the work in this department being executed under the personal direction of the architect. The balcony-front is of cast iron, of a rich design. The seats are all upholstered in crimson plush. The proscenium is 25 feet wide and 22 feet high, and the decorations will be of a bright and cheerful character, designed by the architect. The auditorium will comfortably seat about 900 persons. (American Builder, X [May, 1874], 119.)

Since no architectural drawings or interior pictures of the house can be located, the two paragraphs cited above plus information pieced from various newspaper reviews, with additional information from interviews with persons who attended the house and a late description of the stage and its equipment found in the 1897 Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide are the basis for the description of the building. From these sources a reconstructed floorplan of the house has been drawn as accurately as possible and included in Appendix A of this study.

The building was constructed with brick and wood with a plaster finish interior and stucco on the front of the exterior.

The main auditorium was on the second floor above two stores on the street level. Staircases from the street led straight up to the auditorium and flanked the stores. The left stair was used for entering, while both stairs were used for egress. At first the box office was located at the
head of the entrance stairs, but this proved too cumbersome and in 1880 it was moved to the street level landing of the right stairway.\footnote{Observer, January 28, 1880.}

At the head of the stairs was an aisle crossing the width of the auditorium and dividing the hall into two parts. The section nearest the stage, the orchestra, or parquet, section, had permanent chairs on a level floor with a center aisle and narrow aisles on each side. The area to the rear of the cross aisle, under the balcony, had permanent seats on a raked floor. There were side aisles flanking this area, but whether there was a center aisle in the area or not is unclear.

There was only one access to the balcony and it was directly above the entrance stairway. At the top of the balcony stairs was a cross aisle dividing the balcony into two parts. The section below the aisle, the dress circle, contained two rows of choice seats on two different levels each of which terminated on the sides in private boxes. The area above the aisle was raked and filled with seats with aisles on either side.

Right in front of the stage was a clear space for a small orchestra. It was shallow and not sunken nor separated from the audience in any way.
Access to the stage was through two doors in the proscenium wall at the foot of each side aisle. Immediately inside the doors several steps turned toward the playing area of the stage and led to the stage floor level, four feet above the floor of the orchestra. Dressing rooms, small and cramped, flanked both sides of the stage, probably four on each side. At the beginning and until late in the life of the house there was no outside door to the stage except through the auditorium.

Concerning the decoration of the house nothing specific can be determined. Mr. J. Ritchie Lawrence, of Charlotte, is commended for his painting and fresco work. Mrs. S. O. Brooke, daughter of one of the builders, remembers that there was something painted on the ceiling, but cannot remember what. She also remembers the interior color as cream or a very light natural color. She recalls there being gas lights along the side walls, but no chandelier from the ceiling.

By the time Charlotte got an Opera House, resident stock companies with visiting stars were virtually a thing of the past and had been replaced almost completely by the combination system, a star traveling with his own complete

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6Ibid., May 28, 1874. 7Appendix B, Interview 1.
company. This was quite fortunate for Charlotte, for with a population of between 4,473 and 7,094, figures reported on the 1870 and 1880 census, respectively,\(^9\) it would not have been large enough to support a full time local company. The proprietors of the Opera House, Sanders and Carson, acting as managers, would book the house with available companies. During the first years most of this booking was done by mail or by a company's advance man contacting the managers in Charlotte. According to the custom of the day, it seems logical to assume that the bookings were on a lease basis, although later we read of guarantees by the managers and percentages of the take.

It is impossible to determine for what fee the Opera House could be leased, but from several sources one can get some idea of the cost of presenting a performance there. On December 11, 1874, in the Observer, there is a reference to a company's paying "$75 per night" (Observer, Friday, December 11, 1874). This price, rather high for the time, probably included the known $20 city tax placed on theatricals, $10 for minstrels and other shows,\(^10\) and the $5 state tax.\(^11\)

Ticket prices during the year generally ran from 50¢ for Gallery seats to $1.00 for Dress Circle and Orchestra

\(^9\)Blythe and Brockmann, p. 449.
\(^10\)Democrat, March 30, 1869.
\(^11\)Ibid., April 12, 1870.
Chairs, presumably the first six or eight rows of the parquet, and 75¢ for General Admission. Although many times reserved seats could be had with no additional charge, it was not infrequent that an additional fee of 25¢ for a reserved seat would be charged. The lowest prices for the season were for the opening engagement, Silvano, with a charge of 50¢ for adults and 25¢ for children with 10¢ extra for reserved seats (Observer, Sunday, September 13, 1874). The highest priced tickets during the season were for John E. Owens in Everybody's Friend, when a reserved seat sold for $1.50, but not without protest. A letter to the editor of the Observer questioned it.

... Why should opera-goers in Charlotte be asked a higher price of admission than of New Orleans and other cities? Besides, reserved seats are taken mainly by gentlemen escorting ladies, and this charge makes a difference of $1.00 for reserved seats. (Observer, Saturday, May 1, 1875.)

In the next issue, the agent for the company, responded:

... The fact that a higher charge for reserved seats is made here, than in New Orleans, will, after a little reflection, I think, surprise no one. The Opera House, in this city, is comparatively of limited capacity, and expenses attending the tour of Mr. Owens, supported as he is by the whole company from the variety theatre [sic] of New Orleans, are unusually large. The prices are the same as were charged at Chattanooga, a city of about the same population as Charlotte. (Observer, Sunday, May 2, 1875.)

During the season several objectives of the Observer became obvious. One was to give the public some type of advance information about an upcoming attraction by quoting reviews from other newspapers on the wire service. Second
was a concern for the type of production that would come to Charlotte, and third was to educate the audience to the ways of the theatre.

The first goal has been discussed in the Introduction. The second is made clear by an editorial in the December 11, 1874, issue after the poor house for Mrs. Lander, nee Jean Davenport, and the Holman Opera Company, both of whom had excellent reputations on the road.

There is just one thing certain. If the people of Charlotte want good troupes to come here, they must patronize them when they do come. There is nothing easier for a place, than to establish the reputation of a "poor show town," and just as soon as a place does establish this reputation, just then will good companies give it the go-by. They will not pay $75 per night for a theatre, and lose their time to boot, for the privilege of playing to empty seats; and nobody blames them. Refined people don't want a mob of minstrels, or sleight-of-hand or magic lantern, — performers to come here, but soon we will have nothing else, unless meritorious companies are patronized, for they will not stop over here and lose money for the edification of a few people who are appreciative, when by going elsewhere they can get crowds.

We are speaking now to the cultivated, the refined people of the community; of course none others are expected to appreciate a fine opera or theatre so much as they. Good operas and theatres, particularly the former, are refining in their influences, and if we have more of them, we would be better people. We can have more of them if we will sustain them better, and why they have not been more encouraged here, we cannot understand. Certainly it is not because there is any lack of taste here, for Charlotte is justly famed for the cultivation of its people.

We hope our citizens will retrieve the reputation which our city is fast gaining, by lending their countenance in future to entertainments which have merit, and telling all others to pass. (Observer, Friday, December 11, 1875.)
The third objective of training the audience was manifested in two editorials, both written in December, also. The first was entitled, "Talking in the Theatres."

If some of the wise and learned people would not attempt to make a display of talent, by delineating every character as it enters the stage it would be gratifying indeed to the play-going public.

Some seem to think it a duty encumbent upon them to raise their voices, even above the actors, to tell at what particular time each one must enter, what he must do, and how to make his exit. Most people do not need any voluntary aid to keep them posted. And if such people as we have mentioned will continue this habit, they should take a private box, where their talent will be confined to their own hearing, and where they can not disturb the audience. (Observer, Tuesday, December 8, 1874.)

The second appeared soon after the Ada Gray appearance in Article 47 and Camille. This time the newspaper hit more than just talking during the performance, but the behavior, in general, of the audience.

Charlotte has now an elegant Opera House and one which is the admiration of every stranger who visits the city and sees it. Now that this is the case, we can have the assurance of visits from the very best companies traveling, if we will only show a little appreciation, not only by attending but by behaving like civilized people after we get there. Now, we submit that the conduct of a part of the audience at the theatre last Wednesday night, during Miss Gray's acting of the mad scene in Article 47, was absolutely shameful.

It is astonishing that anyone, even the most savage barabian [sic] of the wildwoods, should laugh at that. Miss Gray was sorely stung by it, too, and asked afterwards for an explanation of the levity of a portion of the audience. It was an insult to the actress and a trampling under foot of the most pitiful emotions of the human heart.
The mob cannot appreciate fine acting and the mob cannot be excluded from the theatre; but there were those in the Opera House who are supposed to be people of refinement who set the mob the bad example. We do not know how to explain away the conduct of some of the audience from whom we had a right to expect better things. True, people have to be educated to the theatre, as to everything else, but it does seem that common sense ought to teach them some things.

In conclusion, a little advice: If you don't know when to laugh and when to be serious, acknowledge it to yourself, and keep your eyes on someone who does know; govern yourself by that person, and thus you will frequently avoid making a great fool of yourself. It may be said that all this is none of our business but it is our business to see to it, that people in all public assemblages pay a decent regard to the occasion and to those who furnish the entertainment, provided it be respectable. We know that we are rapping a good many people across the knuckles; we will rap them again when occasion and our duty demand it. (Observer, Tuesday, December 22, 1874.

In spite of the fact that the opening season had its problems, and it took the community time to get used to having a real opera house, the season was amazingly successful with some good companies appearing. A detailed picture of the season will reveal this and help establish patterns that will be continued throughout the study.

1874-1875

Prior to the opening of the season, the Opera House was opened to the public for inspection on two consecutive Wednesday nights, July 15 and July 22. The Observer gave the following report on Friday, July 16.

The Charlotte Opera House was lighted up and thrown open last night. . . . The lights are well arranged, and the house presented a really beautiful appearance.
The work is of the most tasteful character and the building is a credit to the city. The seats are nice and comfortable. The painting and frescoing is excellent, and the general appearance is unexceptionable. Some of scenery has been put up and only a few finishing touches remain to be put on the interior to complete the work. (Observer, Friday, July 16, 1874.)

A week later it reported, that the house was visited by a large number of ladies and gentlemen and that "all unite in the opinion that the opera house is a perfect gem of its kind," and that nothing was needed to make it all it should be (Observer, Thursday, July 23, 1874).

By August 6, the Observer announced that the final work had been completed and the Opera House stood awaiting the arrival of a troupe.

On Sunday, September 13, 1874, an advertisement in the Observer announced that:

Signor Silvano
8th Annual American Tour
Italian Illusionist, Humorist, Champion Ventriloquist aided by Professor Maurice and the Royal Marrionettes [sic]

would be at the Opera House soon, offering prizes of "gold and silver watches, rocking chairs, tables, hat racks, groceries, hardware, etc." The admission fee was 50¢ for adults and 25¢ for children with reserved chairs 10¢ extra (Observer, Sunday, September 13, 1874). It was not until the next issue that the dates were announced: Wednesday, September 16, through Saturday, September 19. The Observer stated frankly that it knew "nothing of the entertainment, further than what we learn from the papers of this and other
States, and all of these speak in commendatory terms of it" (Observer, Saturday, September 12, 1874). Later in the week, prior to the opening, a quote from the Raleigh News concerning the entertainment appeared in the paper.

Silvano, the wonderful Illusionist, gave his last performance in this city, at Tucker Hall, last night. He had a good audience, and his performance fully sustained the reputation he had already won in our midst. . . . He is the most successful Illusionist that has ever been in this country. (Observer, Tuesday, September 15, 1874.)

On opening night a large crowd of Charlotteans gathered at the Opera House. The Observer reported the following morning that:

It was the first opening for an entertainment of any kind of the new opera house, and many went last night, no doubt, almost as much for the sake of seeing the house as for the purpose of witnessing the performance. No matter for what purpose they went, all must have been amply repaid, for the performance was acknowledged on all sides to be the best of its kind ever witnessed in this section. His sleight-of-hand performances are by all odds the best we ever saw, marvelous and inexplicable. His ventriloquial powers are excellent, and, indeed, there was nothing inferior about the entertainment. . . . (Observer, Thursday, September 17, 1874.)

Large crowds attended the performances on Thursday and Friday nights with the Friday night audience characterized by the Observer as being "large and respectable." There was a change of the bill on Friday which "brought loud and prolonged applause from an evidently delighted audience" (Observer, Saturday, September 19, 1874).

Because of the inclement weather and the conditions of the streets which would prohibit the ladies from
attending, Silvano thought it advisable not to perform on Saturday evening as announced, but postponed the closing entertainment until the following Monday (Observer, Sunday, September 20, 1874).

Although not off to a very artistic beginning, the Opera House was officially open. Large crowds had attended and had been satisfied. Now there was the wait for a more serious testing of the house and the audience.

During the wait the house was open on three different occasions. First, there was a lecture given by Governor Zebulon Baird Vance, who had been North Carolina's war governor and who would be elected to serve again as governor in the 1880 election. The lecture, a famous one of his, entitled, "The Scattered Nation," was on the night of Friday, October 2. Sponsored by the Charlotte Masonic Temple Association for the benefit of the Temple and the Oxford Orphan Asylum, the lecture was well attended and a large audience greeted Vance when the curtain rose (Observer, Saturday, October 3, 1874). Next, on Friday, October 30, the ladies from the Charlotte Institute of Young Ladies presented a "Grand Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music" to aid the school in purchasing "chemical and philosophical apparatus." A dress rehearsal was held at the Opera House on the preceding night, and, although not opened to the public, there was an audience consisting of special friends and the reviewer from the Observer. His report of the final...
rehearsal announced that the performers were "in full train­ing and everything was completed for the concert" (Observer, Friday, October 30, 1874). Conducted by Professor and Madame De Castra of the Institute staff, the program was a great success.

The following night Mrs. James Maas and her Bur­lesque Opera and British Quartette Troupe performed with a portion of the proceeds going to benefit the Oxford Asylum. Although the troupe started Saturday morning off with a brass band parade through the streets generating excitement among the townspeople, only a "tolerable fair crowd" came to see the performance.

Those who were there, however, had fun enough for a houseful . . . some parts of the performance were really laughable. James Maas' banjo solo was good, so was the Romeo and Juliet scene, and several others. We enjoyed it. Mrs. Maas sings well, and is quite graceful in her acting. All in all, we thought it worth the money, and wish for the sake of the orphans, if for nothing else, that the house had been fuller. (Observer, Sunday, November 1, 1874.)

On October 20, the Observer announced that finally a legitimate drama troupe had applied for a lease on the Opera House. The Rose and Harry Watkins troupe would play during the entire week of November 2 through November 7.

Although the Watkins had never appeared in Char­lotte, their reputation was "one of the very best theatri­cal companies traveling" and, as the Observer, pointed out,

Rose and Harry Watkins are both well known as theatrical stars, and we understand from the press and from individuals who witnessed some of their plays in Raleigh last week, that they are sustained this
season by a corps of excellent actors. (Observer, Tuesday, October 20, 1874.)

Harry Watkins had been active in the theatre since before 1850 as actor-manager-playwright. He had made his New York debut with the New York Company at the National Theatre in 1850 and had been Director of Amusement along with being a starring member of the stock company at Barnum's American Museum in New York. It had been there, in 1857, that he first played opposite Mrs. Charles Howard, nee Rosina Shaw, later his wife. By 1874, the Watkins Troupe was playing short engagements during the summers in and around New York, while touring the season.

With the bills posted all over town heralding the Watkins Troupe with Little Amy Lee, their daughter, at least one minister, the Rev. Dr. Miller of the First Presbyterian Church of the city, warned his congregation of the sin of indulging in worldly amusements.

Regardless of the warning, Rose and Harry Watkins played a successful week in the Opera House. The review of

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13 Odell, VII, 58. 14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., IX, 218, 349, 549.

16 Observer, November 3, 1874.
their opening night performance of *Trodden Down*, or *Under Two Flags* by Watkins read:

The Rose and Harry Watkins troupe presented a play on the boards of the Charlotte Opera House last evening, for the first time. Though they had never before played here, their reputation had preceded them, and it was an intelligent audience, which assembled . . .

Of the two bright particular stars, Mr. Watkins is an admirable comedian of original stamp, blending his comedy with pathos and a terrible energy seldom found united on the stage, though seldom found apart in nature . . . he fills the three acts with life and vigor. Rose Watkins too is a fine actress, her action and reading excellent, and she rises at critical moments to true tragic powers. . . . (*Observer*, Tuesday, November 3, 1874.)

Playing a repertoire of old, popular successes from their past, the Watkins played to an uninitiated audience in Charlotte that found them fresh and exciting. The crowds grew with each performance and "they achieved an unmistakable triumph." The *Observer* also made a point of the fact that, although the audiences were large, they were also fashionable. After opening with *Trodden Down* on Monday, November 2 (*Observer*, Tuesday, November 3, 1874), they played *Kathleen Mavourneen*, November 3 (*Observer*, Wednesday, November 4, 1874); *Hidden Hand*, November 4 (*Observer*, Thursday, November 5, 1874); *Don Caesar De Bazan*, November 5 (*Observer*, Friday, November 6, 1874); *Led Astray*, November 6 (*Observer*, Saturday, November 7, 1874); and finally on Saturday night, November 7, *Rip Van Winkle*, which was played before a large and "fashionable audience" (*Observer*, Sunday, November 8, 1874). The week had been a success. Charlotte
had proven it could and would support a touring company presenting legitimate drama on consecutive nights.

On November 24 another star, Mrs. F. W. Lander, the former Jean Davenport, and the first to play in *Camille* in America, appeared in her presentation of *Elizabeth, Queen of England*. The production had created quite a stir in New York in 1867 when Mrs. Lander had dared to play one of the great roles of the Italian, Ristori, in translation and had succeeded. By 1874 the production was wearing thin, but, again, it was new to Charlotte and Mrs. F. W. Lander was a star. The paper the next morning said: "The theatre-goers of Charlotte were entertained last night ... in a manner which seldom falls to their lot. Mrs. Lander, in her role as Elizabeth, if possible excelled herself ...." (Observer, Tuesday, November 24, 1874). The name was big, but the audience disappointing in size. The review hinted at this with "we congratulate the audience who were fortunate enough to secure seats, and express our sorrow for those who did not" (Observer, Tuesday, November 24, 1874), but not until later in the Observer do we learn that Mrs. Lander played to less than half a house (Observer, Friday, December 11, 1874).

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18Odell, VIII, 294-295.

19Ibid., IX, 621.
The Holman English Opera Troupe featuring the Holman Sisters appeared next. On November 28, the city was posted with the bills announcing their presentation, on December 2, of Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl*, with *Caught in the Act*, a farce afterpiece. Prices for the presentation were 50¢ and $1.00 with 25¢ extra for a reserved seat. Again the audience was slight (*Observer*, Friday, December 11, 1874). Those present enjoyed the performance. "The people of Charlotte never had the opportunity of attending just such an entertainment as was presented last evening . . . the applause was never anything else than enthusiastic and general." In talking about the afterpiece, *Caught in the Act*, the *Observer* said it "brought roars of laughter from the audience. . . . The opera house rang with the repeated peals of laughter, and everybody left in a high good humor" (*Observer*, Thursday, December 3, 1874).

The Holman company wanted to extend their engagement, but the Opera House was booked the next three nights by Professor William Hare, advertised as "Necromancer and Ventriloquist in his Laughable Entertainment, called *Begone Dull Care*." On December 3, the morning of his opening performance, the *Observer* printed that it was "slow to recommend the show" for it could learn nothing about it. And the next morning, the *Observer* reported that

... the sleight-of-hand showed miserably little sleight for a man who follows that as a business; the ventriloquism was poor, and the attempts at wit were
excrable. We laughed at the idea of anybody trying to palm off such stuff on a civilized community, for wit. The show is, we believe, the poorest we ever saw. (Observer, Friday, December 4, 1874.)

Professor Hare left town and did not fill the next two nights of his engagement.

On December 7 and 8, Monday and Tuesday nights, the Berger Family held the boards. The company was a favorite in the days before the Opera House had been built in Charlotte, so the Observer, on the Sunday morning prior to their opening safely could state,

. . . we think this company will draw a larger crowd of Charlotte people han [sic] any one which has appeared here since our new and elegant opera house has been opened. The Bergers are great favorites here. . . . (Observer, Sunday, December 6, 1874.)

The Bergers did not disappoint. "Quite a large, and certainly a refined audience" attended the performance opening night.

The entertainment was of the elegant, refined character, which all expected--of that kind which has given the Bergers much of the popularity which they possess with Southern ladies and gentlemen. . . . It is a chaste, pleasing entertainment. . . . (Observer, Tuesday, December 8, 1874.)

The second night of the Berger Family engagement was even more successful than the first. The Observer was pleased to note that "the encouragement extended the Bergers in Charlotte was quite as great as they expected, and that they will certainly take us in on their next tour" (Observer, Wednesday, December 9, 1874).

Ada Gray was next and, after one of the pleas for
stronger support of the better companies from the Observer, it remained to be seen whether Charlotteans would support the new star. Miss Gray had made her debut in New York only three years before and she was to perform a new play for Charlotte, Augustin Daly's Article 47, a big hit in New York five years earlier. She reportedly had an excellent support company including W. C. Pope, Edwin Brown and Sallie Partington. The engagement began on December 16. Concerning the play and the performance, the Observer said,

The play is a good one and free from moral taint; no noxious odors cloud the picture, and nothing in action or dialogue offends the taste of the most fastidious. . . . Miss Gray conceives and executes the author's meaning with life-like fidelity." (Observer, Thursday, December 17, 1874.)

But her major triumph in Charlotte was her portrayal of Marguerite Gautier in Camille on Thursday, December 17, 1874. It was the first artistic success of the new Charlotte Opera House.

Miss Gray won new laurels in the role. Her conception was clear, and her work full of spirit and feeling. . . . Miss Gray exhibited subtlety and power. She loved, and the look in her eyes, the tremor in her voice, and the smile of joy that wreathed her face, told the whole story. The scene with Armand's father, was full of the delicate lights and shades of the best school of emotional acting. So earnest was the actress in her work, that tears ran down her cheeks like rain, and the voice, broken with sobs, spoke the agony of the

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20 Ibid., p. 163.

soul. Such a picture of tender girlhood struggling with sorrow and sacrifice, we have never seen. . . .

The fourth act called for a display of poetry and pathos, a mingling of fire and tears. Her inward struggles, the fear of danger to Armand, his reproaches and her disgrace, were painfully real,—and when she fell at his feet a writhing mass, convulsed with grief and buried in shame, we forgot it was mere acting, and felt as though we stood in the presence of a dread reality. . . . Almost the very perfection of art was reached in the simulation of death, the voice growing gradually weaker, the eyes set, the feeble, tremulous whispers, the deceiving of self as regards her condition, the look in the glass, and the wail that issued from her lips, together with the sudden joy that filled her as she heard Armand's voice and sank quietly to rest, were, as a work of art, complete in finish and warm in color. Miss Gray is a splendid actress,—gifted by nature with commanding talents, and moulded in lovely form. Her work is inspiration and study combined, the maturity of art gleaming with the fire of genius.

After the certain [sic] fell in the last scene, round followed round of applause until the charming actress appeared before the curtain; she smiled and bowed her thanks, but this would not do, and the enthusiastic audience would not be satisfied until she appeared a second time. (Observer, Friday, December 18, 1874.)

The first minstrel presented in the Opera House was Haverly's Minstrels on New Year's Night, 1875. It was the first of many more to come. The minstrel had been popular in Charlotte prior to the opening of the Opera House and would continue to be.

The Observer was not particularly enthusiastic over the presentation. Its coverage was quite brief.

It was a fine entertainment—as minstrel shows go. The rounds of applause showed how deeply the crowd appreciated the performance. . . . As a burnt cork crowd, the Haverlys are certainly a success. To those who fancy what kind of amusement, we cordially commend them. (Observer, Saturday, January 2, 1875.)
Concerning the Observer's condescending attitude toward the performance, this note appeared in the Sunday, January 3, issue.

We were asked repeatedly yesterday why we rather "let up" on the minstrel performance of Friday night. The reason becomes apparent to any one who will think about it for a moment and remember the Observer's course in reference to shows in general, we do not propose to notice a minstrel troupe as we would a presentation of the legitimate drama; it is not entitled to as much consideration. We would be glad to have cultivated in Charlotte, a taste for refined amusements; if we can do anything for the cultivation of this taste we shall do it. Minstrels do not conduce to it. While we give them always the credit which is due them, we will not give undue time and space to a thing which, however good it may be of its kind, is not entirely the popular thing with the cultivated portion of our community. (Observer, Sunday, January 3, 1874.)

Beginning Thursday, January 7, the New York Comedy Company with Clara and F. J. Wildman opened a three evening engagement. It was highly recommended by the editor of the Observer, who had seen the company perform at the Wilmington Fair earlier that season. East Lynne, first presented in New York in 1863,²² but given its initial performance in Charlotte at this time, opened with an excellent review and an excellent crowd, even though the weather was extremely bad. The Observer wrote of the play and the performance, that

It is no more than just to say that the play was received with marked acceptability. It is one full of pathos, and appeals to the finest emotions of our

natures. Mrs. Wildman's conception is fine, and this is all of acting. An actor or actress who goes through his or her part, as a school boy repeats his lesson, merely mechanical and without entering into the spirit of what is said, is no performer at all; and, unfortunately, the stage is filled with these. It is refreshing to see a dramatist who is gifted with conception, and Miss Wildman is. As Lady Isabela, she "acted well her part."

... In each different scene the actress was transformed as it were into the real actor in the scene. (Observer, Friday, January 8, 1875.)

The entire company seemed to make a hit, and other members of the company to get good notices were: F. J. Wildman, who played Sir Francis Levison; R. F. Stanley, Earl Mount Severn; F. McLaughlin, Richard Hare; Mr. Nolan, Richard Caryle; Louisa Watson, Corney; and Bijou Mamie, William. Friday night the bill was Rip Van Winkle in which Mr. Wildman's portrayal of Rip was pronounced "very fine," with the afterpiece, "Immage [sic] Song, written for and sung only by Clara Wildman" (Observer, Saturday, January 9, 1875). The review of Saturday's performance of Dora was again very glowing and Cuba, the popular farce afterpiece, evoked "round after round of applause" (Observer, Sunday, January 10, 1875).

The next attraction was Katie Putnam's Troupe. The company opened on Thursday, January 21, with Fanchon, the Cricket, and played through Saturday night, changing the bill each performance. On Friday morning the Observer was able to report that "a very large crowd" had attended the performance. "It was indeed the elite of the city
which gathered there—an assemblage which could appreciate a presentation of the legitimate drama" (Observer, Friday, January 22, 1875). In speaking of the actress, the report went on to say:

Her acting throughout, was that of the real artists, and to attempt to point out in what particular scene she surpassed, would be to attempt an impossibility, and would only do her injustice. She is simply charming, and there was, last night, no lack of evidence that her audience was delighted and captivated by her winning ways. . . . (Observer, Friday, January 22, 1875.)

From the notices of the supporting company, it was excellent, too. Summing up the performance of the company the newspaper account ends with, "It is the best company that has ever appeared in Charlotte. . . . No one can afford to miss this treat" (Observer, Friday, January 22, 1875). The Friday night performance of The Old Curiosity Shop was an even greater success.

Charlotte witnessed, last evening, a real, genuine theatre. The opera house was crowded, for the first time, and many persons were forced to stand up. The crowd was composed largely of the very best people of the city, and their enthusiasm was boundless. . . . Miss Putnam, playing the dual characters of the Machioness and Little Nell, acquitted herself with the greatest credit . . . her versatility was here put to a severe test, and was not found wanting. (Observer, Saturday, January 23, 1875.)

The matinee on Saturday was The Child of the Regiment, which was "simply charming," and the evening performance was Little Barefoot, given to a full house of delighted spectators (Observer, Sunday, January 24, 1875).

On Thursday, February 4, 1875, there was a concert given by the Amateur Musical Society of Charlotte for the
benefit of St. Peter's Episcopal Church. After the concert
the ladies of the church used the large rooms under the
Opera House, not yet rented, for a supper, the proceeds of
which were also devoted to the same purpose (Observer,
Friday, February 5, 1875).

This was followed by the Great De Castro Troupe on
February 12 and 13. Although no stranger to Charlotte and
a performer who had been received favorably in the past,
the entertainments were poorly attended (Observer, Saturday,
February 13, and Sunday, February 14, 1875).

Edwin Adams appeared the next week in his outstand­
ing role of Enoch Arden in the adaption of Tennyson's poem.
Since it had first announced his coming on January 24, the
Observer had often heralded the approaching performance of
Adams. Referring to him as "star tragedian" and "a splen­
did actor," the Observer had printed numerous articles
about the actor who was very much in favor with the public
at that time. He had been a member of Edwin Booth's origi­
nal company in Booth's Theatre in New York where he had
played Mercutio to Booth's Romeo at the opening night of
the new theatre in 1869. Later he played Iago to Booth's
Othello, switching parts during the latter part of the run.
In the summer of 1869 he had opened in Enoch Arden, which
had a long run in New York and established him in popular

Of his role Jefferson said, "so far as the character is related to the stage, [it] was a creation entirely his own, and one too that touched the sympathy of his audience." The engagement originally scheduled for February 12 was changed early in February to the 16th.

The Observer summed up the feeling of the people.

. . . We are sorry that Adams' visit is postponed, even for four days. We are eager to see him, and have, for two weeks past, been counting the days which must elapse before he would appear. Charlotte has never looked upon his like. He is a rare genius, and we know that the appreciate [sic] people of our city will crowd the Opera House on the single evening on which he plays here. (Observer, Tuesday, February 2, 1875.)

The day before the performance the advance sale for reserved seats was large. During the day over 250 seats were sold. "The largest number ever sold before for one evening's entertainment, was 197, and this was during Fair week, when Harry Watkins was here" (Observer, Tuesday, February 16, 1875). Along with having the attraction of a popular star, the company carried its own scenery and machinery, so it was no surprise that the house was filled.

A splendid house greeted Mr. Edwin Adams. . . . The audience was composed mainly of the elite of our society, and shows what may be expected when the legitimate drama is presented, or any really first-class entertainment is given. We are glad to observe the growing taste among our people for the drama. . . .

Adams is a great tragedian, and fell not a whit below our expectations of him. At times the majesty

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25 Ibid., p. 427. 
26 Hartnoll, p. 12.
of his bearing was grand. As a look of deadly anguish would over-spread his countenance, and his bosom would heave with emotion, we could almost imagine that we sat in the presence of the veritable Enoch Arden. (Observer, Wednesday, February 17, 1875.)

The Observer found the support indifferent, but managed to sluff it off by surmising that "the star was so much a star, that we perhaps allowed the others to suffer too much in our estimation, by comparison with him" (Observer, Wednesday, February 17, 1875).

The Wildman troupe having played a successful engagement in early January, returned for a three nights' stand in March. The Hunchback was their opening play on Thursday, March 4. It was not well attended and not well performed. The Observer, who had recommended the troupe highly on their first appearance in Charlotte, was compelled to say that

Candor compels us to say that it was poorly played. Clara Wildman's impersonation of Julia, was quite good, but in this character she does not excel; there are other parts in which she acquits herself with more credit. Wildman is a good actor and his Master Walter was almost fine. . . . (Observer, Friday, March 4, 1875.)

The second night's presentation of The Lady of Lyons fared better in all respects.

The company fairly outdid itself last night. . . . Everyone spoke of its rendition in terms of the most complimentary and whatever of popular favor the troupe may have lost the night before, they fully regained last night.

Our remarks about last evening's performance came conscientiously, just as did our strictures on Thursday night's performance. We did not think Hunchback
well played, and said so; we did think Lady of Lyons splendidly played, and say so. (Observer, Saturday, March 5, 1875.)

This straight-forward condemnation of what the Observer thought bad was to be carried out in its reviews for many years. Lost in London and Solon Shingle closed the second engagement of the Wildman troupe during the opening season of the Opera House.

Again in the March 9 issue, the Observer held back no punches. It had been announced that Mr. W. T. Powell of Richmond had contracted with the proprietors of the house for the use of the building during the upcoming big Mecklenburg Declaration Centennial Week. M'lle Zoe was to make her first appearance in Charlotte under his management.

The Observer issued this ultimatum.

Mr. Powell has sent two stars to Charlotte without any support. We refer to Ada Gray and Edwin Adams. Their support was such that we blushed for the drama. We will say to Mr. Powell, that, if Zoe comes here with a company, all the remaining members of which play as if they had been picked upon the streets that day, and had only learned the words they have to say; we repeat, that if the troupe is to be of this character, we will make it pretty lively for them. We do not propose to "puff" into popularity a performance which has no merit in it, and to secure any good words from us, Mr. Powell will find it necessary to send a good company. (Observer, Tuesday, March 9, 1875.)

Whether this had anything to do with it or not, is unknown, but M'lle Zoe did not appear in Charlotte.

The next attraction to appear before the Charlotteans created such an uproar that the Observer review must be read in full. The performance date was March 29, 1875.
Never has been witnessed on the Charlotte boards, such a scene as transpired at the Opera House last night. The occasion was the appearance of Ida Cerito's Lady Minstrels, and the character of the performance to be given, having been pretty well understood in advance, a crowd, in which was represented every class and condition of people, save one, assembled there. There were old men, gray-haired heads of families, young men, and boys—almost children, whose minds are now susceptible to every passing influence, and who are unquestionably worse this morning for having seen last night's orgies. There was not a lady in the opera house, and, with this bare exception, a representative of every other class known to so-called civilization, was there.

We cannot and would not describe the scenes and incidents which went to make up the entertainment (?). Some of the minstrelsy was very good, but take part of the show as a whole, and it was no more than ordinary. The singing was simply execrable, particularly that part done by the females. The musical feature, throughout, was a glorious failure.

As to the remaining part. It was disgusting, and nothing wise. The indecent exposures of person, the base, vulgar allusions, the very triumphant looks of the females at the moment when they rendered themselves most infamous, shocked every refined sensibility, and made us blush that we are of such a creation. All sort of immorality in man can find in us a simple, passing contempt, but in woman, such brazen degradation, is disgusting beyond compare.

We hope never to see again such a sight in our opera house as was witnessed there last night. It contained every inducement to lasciviousness, and not one moral or elevating feature. We pray that Charlotte may, in future, be delivered from such companies. (Observer, Tuesday, March 30, 1875.)

This was followed by the Tim Morris' Minstrel company, which the Observer reported, on the authority of the New York Mercury, was "strictly moral." The company played two nights, March 31 and April 1. The Observer reported that "as a minstrel show it was simply splendid... There is nothing like immorality about the show" (Observer, Thursday,
April 1, 1875). The Opera House was next opened on April 12 when Miss Anna Dickinson presented her lecture on "Joan of Arc" to a small but appreciative audience. On April 20, a fair audience assembled at the Opera House for the performance of Messrs. Baker and Farron and their troupe in Chris and Lena, or German Life on the Mississippi. Although the audience seemed to enjoy the show, the Observer reported that the play was not a good one, but that the troupe could be considered first class of its kind (Observer, Wednesday, April 21, 1875).

Charlotte was approaching the Centennial Celebration of its signing of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence and a week of activities was being planned. A special entertainment for the purpose of defraying necessary expenses of the celebration was planned for April 30 and Mr. James M. Brown of Wilmington was brought in to direct it. For weeks, the musical talent of the town had been practicing and preparing for the presentation. Messrs. Carson and Sanders donated the use of the Opera House and final rehearsals began there on Saturday, April 24. The program was a tremendous success when presented on Friday, April 30, to "an immense and brilliant audience" and it was repeated with additional numbers introduced on Tuesday, May 4 (Observer, Saturday, May 1, 1875).

Two nights later, on May 6, one of the big name comedians of the day appeared in the Opera House. John
E. Owens, ranked with Joe Jefferson and John S. Clarke as top American comedians by George Odell in his *Annuals of the New York Stage*, appeared in two of his most popular plays, *Everybody's Friend* and *Solon Shingle*. Owens was one of the earliest actors to surround himself with "a first class dramatic organization expressly engaged to accompany him in his tour in the United States."  

The price of tickets for this production were the highest ever asked for a production to date and there was a reaction against it as noted earlier, but the price did not keep the audience away. The opening play *Everybody's Friend* was very well received. The *Observer* reported that "every expectation was more than satisfied by the performance . . . which is worthy of the good acting with which it was rendered," but the *Observer* continued,

> The rendition of *Solon Shingle* was a disappointment to most of the audience. It may have been that everyone expected too much of Mr. Owens, as this was his "specialty," but at any rate he did not so far surpass Wildman and others who had appeared in that character as it was supposed he would. (*Observer*, Friday, May 7, 1875.)

This, along with the high price of tickets, gave the two weekly more conservative, papers the opportunity they needed. In the Monday, May 10, *Democrat*, Charlotteans read:

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27 Odell, IX, 144.  
28 Ibid., p. 411.
A very large crowd of the elite of the city assembled at the Opera House on Thursday evening last to see and hear the great comedian, John E. Owens, in his great play of Solon Shingle. The DEMOCRAT feels at liberty to say just what it thinks of such things, because the hands in the office always pay their own way, and we say of Mr. Owens that we were very disappointed and think that he is very much overrated as a comedian. And another imposition is the charge of $1.50 for reserved seats. Our citizens should not hereafter submit to such extortion. (Democrat, Monday May 10, 1875.)

And the same day the Southern Home wrote under its weekly local column, "Home Notes," that "after paying the unusual price for tickets nearly everybody was disappointed with John E. Owens' performance" (Southern Home, Monday, May 10, 1875).

Whatever the reason John E. Owens did not appear again in Charlotte until 1881.

The season was obviously coming to an end, but the big Centennial Celebration was still to come and since M'lle Zoe had reneged, there was some speculation as to whom the managers, at this late time in the season, would find to fill the week. On May 13 the Observer announced that they had received a telegram from the agent of Rose and Harry Watkins, stating that the company was free and could play every night of the Centennial Week--opening on Monday, May 17. The company repeated some of the plays they had presented earlier in the season, but Don Caesar De Bazan and Led Astray were dropped and Pioneers of America, a play well suited to the celebration with its depicting of the struggles for independence, coupled with It Takes Two to Quarrel
and Molly Bawn or True to Herself were added. Because of the news coverage of the Centennial Celebration, little space was allowed for theatrical events, but one may gather that, although beginning with a slow week, the Watkins Troupe played to bigger and better houses as the week progressed. After opening with Trodden Down on Monday, May 17, the troupe played Kathleen Marvourneen on Tuesday (Observer, Wednesday, May 19, 1875); Hidden Hand, Wednesday (Observer, Thursday, May 20, 1875); Pioneers of America and It Takes Two to Quarrel, Thursday (Observer, Thursday, May 20, 1875); Rip Van Winkle, Friday (Observer, Saturday, May 22, 1875); and Molly Bawn, Saturday (Observer, Saturday, May 22, 1875).

During Rip Van Winkle on Friday night, there was an incident that should be recorded. In the Observer the following week there was this report.

There was a little civil rights at the Charlotte Opera House on Friday night last. Shortly after the play began, six Negroes came in and took seats in the parquette. No attention was paid to them by the audience, but the news was not long in extending to the street and a crowd of young gentlemen immediately got together and repaired to the theatre. It was soon guessed what the object was, and cries of "put him out," began and became general. Two or three of the Negroes were at once collared and kicked down the steps, while the others, more fortunate, escaped from the building without having violent hands laid upon them.

Just as the intruders disappeared down the steps, Watkins brought down the house by exclaiming from the stage, in the language of Old Rip, "dot ish all right; give him a cold potato and let him go." (Observer, Tuesday, May 25, 1875.)
Thus the Rose and Harry Watkins Troupe, which had played the first legitimate drama in the new house, closed the first season.

Opening officially with Silvano on September 16, 1874, the season closed on May 22, 1875. During the first season, the Opera House had been opened for forty-nine performances which ranged from legitimate drama to musical entertainments, minstrels, and lectures. Eleven touring companies presented twenty-eight dramas. There had been eleven entertainments (variety shows, magicians, etc.), four minstrels, four amateur musical concerts, and two lectures.

Three plays performed during the opening season, *Trodden Down*, *East Lynne*, and *Camille*, would also appear on the Opera House stage during its final season, some thirty years later. *East Lynne* would play a total of fifteen performances during the time the house was open—the largest number of performances of any drama played in Charlotte.

Most of the performers and the productions during the opening season were past their peaks and were waning. Most of the productions were at least ten years old, with the exceptions of Miss Ada Gray's *Article 47* and Mr. Edwin Adams' *Enoch Arden*. Theatre was so new to the growing town of Charlotte that this did not matter during the first season of the house.
CHAPTER II

THE FIRST PERIOD--1875-1886

THE OPERA HOUSE:

CENTER OF THEATRICAL ACTIVITY

During the period covered in this chapter, the American theatre was moving toward centralization and, ultimately, the Theatrical Syndicate. This period covers the phase of initial theatrical circuits and early booking agencies.¹ There is no indication that Charlotte was on an organized circuit, and although Manager Sanders traveled to New York for advance booking, there is again no evidence to support belief that a booking office was employed. It is highly probable that the latter was used by the end of the period though.

While during the opening season Carson and Sanders, the builders of the Opera House, are mentioned together as managers, in this second period, 1875-1886, Carson is seldom mentioned and Sanders is more and more frequently referred to as manager by the press. Although the Opera House was not his major source of business, his cotton brokerage business required annual trips to New York where he was able to

¹Bernheim, 34-45.
contact companies and make advance bookings for the Charlotte Opera House (Observer, Friday, August 20, 1880, and Saturday, August 13, 1881). His daughter, Mrs. S. O. Brooke, remembers his making many trips to New York to take care of both ventures. In the fall of 1881, Harvey Orr, stepson of Mr. Sanders, became manager for the season (Observer, Wednesday, October 19, 1881), but by January 21, 1882, the Observer announced that Mr. H. McSmith of the McSmith Music House had "secured by lease a half-interest in the Charlotte Opera House" and would be the manager (Observer, Saturday, January 21, 1882). Within a year, McSmith was no longer mentioned by the papers and by the fall of 1882 advertisements for the Opera House carried the line, "L. W. Sanders—Sole Manager" (Observer, October 29, 1882). In December of that year there was the reported sale by Carson of his interest to John W. Wadsworth discussed in the Introduction. Whatever the actual legal situation was, Wadsworth became co-manager with Sanders and the two seemingly remained in that capacity throughout the rest of the period.

At the opening of the 1880-1881 season Nat Gray became officially connected with the Opera House for the first time. He was hired as "boss stage carpenter" (Observer, Saturday, September 18, 1880).

2Appendix B, Interview 1.
When the Opera House was first built, the doors to the outside opened into the building. Because of the fire hazard the various newspapers in the town began agitating for the doors to open out in the late spring of 1875. This was a sporadic issue until January, 1880, when a petition from several of the local fire companies was sent to the City Council recommending the change. Action was taken immediately to change the doors (Observer, Wednesday, January 28, 1880). Another improvement was repainting the interior of the house in the late summer of 1883 (Journal-Observer, Wednesday, August 15, 1883).

A growing problem which threatened eventually to close the Opera House was first mentioned in the Observer of September 30, 1881.

The seats in the opera house are getting too bad. Several ladies complained that their dresses were very seriously damaged night before last by the red paint, or whatever it is, on the chairs. It sticks to the clothing after a few minutes sitting, as close as molasses candy. (Observer, Friday, September 30, 1881.)

In October, 1883, after Manager Sanders had taken care of the matter supposedly, the problem became more acute.

Something must be done to the seats in the opera house or the sad spectacle will soon be presented of the curtain rolling up before an entirely empty house. . . . More than one dress was torn as the wearers [sic] attempted to rise from the seats last night, and the

3Record Book of the Board of Aldermen of the City of Charlotte, North Carolina, V (January 27, 1880), 115.
sight of a young man going down stairs holding his hat suspiciously behind indicated that the seats are no respecter of sexes. One might almost as well sit down in a pot of glue.... The matter must be remedied at once, or the opera may as well be closed. (Journal-Observer, Wednesday, October 3, 1883.)

Although steps were taken at once to solve the problem, it obviously continued until September, 1885, when it was announced that the seats were being covered with "opera leather" (Observer, Sunday, September 6, 1885).

In the spring of 1884, a Mr. Monroe, a local painter, painted a new drop curtain.

The curtain has a white background, with handsome gilt borders and folds, and on its face are the cards of Charlotte's various mercantile and business enterprises, in neat gilt letters, artistically arranged. Headed them all in a gilded shield, are the words: "Erected by the Merchants of Charlotte, May 20, 1884." (Observer, Friday, April 25, 1884.)

Heating was a problem that plagued the house almost from the beginning. By 1881 it had become a major problem. In February of that year the Observer asked, "Is there no way to render the heating of the opera house uniform?" (Observer, Wednesday, February 9, 1881). By January 6, 1882, the Observer was reporting that "it was so cold as to be extremely uncomfortable ...." (Observer, Friday, January 6, 1882). In March, 1884, the building was so cold that Brignoli and his operatic company refused to play their engagement (Observer, Tuesday, March 4, 1884). An entirely new set of pipes were laid from the furnace to the registers in early 1885 (Observer, Friday, February 13, 1885), and a
year later a new furnace was put in the building which took care of the hearing problems for the time being at any rate (Observer, Tuesday, February 9, 1886).

At the beginning of the 1876-1877 season the prospects looked bad for the Charlotte Opera House because of a general depression in business and lack of money throughout the southern part of the country (Observer, Thursday, August 9, 1877), and also because of a change in the railroad scheduling. There was only one train a day over the road from the north, and this arrived at 9 o'clock at night (Observer, Thursday, August 9, 1877). A company traveling from north to south was therefore compelled to lose two whole days in Charlotte and give only one performance. The size of the town, still under 7,000, did not justify that, so they passed on to larger cities further south. This was changed by the time of the opening of the 1877-1878 season (Observer, Thursday, August 9, 1877).

There were high taxes to be paid to be put on a theatrical production in Charlotte, North Carolina. Although on June 10, 1875, some of the pressure was lightened when a new City Revenue bill was passed lowering the city tax on theatricals from $20 to $10 per performance, the $5 state and county tax was changed in the fall of 1876 to a 5% tax on the gross receipts (Observer, Friday, October 27, 1876).

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4Observer, June 20, 1875.
1876). In September of 1877 it cost $60 to lease the Opera House, but this was lowered to $50 or $40 to induce companies to come (Observer, Saturday, September 15, 1877). In 1879 the Board of Aldermen voted to lower the city tax on theatricals again to $5, but in 1880 they raised it back to $10. This move brought a protest from the managers of the Opera House.

The managers of the Charlotte opera house presented a petition asking the board to restore the tax of $5 charged on each theatrical performance, stating that they now had to pay of state, county and city tax $15.75 which was a larger tax than was paid in Norfolk, Columbia, or Raleigh, and out of all sort of proportion to the taxation of any other business. (Observer, Tuesday, June 22, 1880.)

The bill was amended to change the tax from $10 to $5. By the end of the period tax matters were looking up, for the state legislature passed a new tax law in which cities of 10,000 population and upwards paid a tax of $100 per year, with an appropriate scale for less population. The payment of the tax entitled the opera house management to give from one to one hundred performances a year.

Two city ordinances were passed during the period covered in this chapter that affected the theatre. In November of 1877 with the appearance of M'lle Marie D'Est's

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5 Record Book, Board of Aldermen, V. 89.
6 Ibid., p. 177. 7 Ibid., pp. 182-183.
8 Observer, March 15, 1885.
Parisian Blondes a group from the YMCA along with several ministers tried in vain to get the mayor to refuse license for the performance. He did not and the matter was not dropped by the enraged group of citizens. In mid-January of the next year,

A petition was presented [to the Board of Aldermen] signed by committees composed of members of the First and Second Presbyterian, Tryon Street Methodist, Calvary Mission and Lutheran churches, praying for the passage of an ordinance prohibiting such theatrical performances in the city as were usually given by what are called "red stocking minstrels," "model artists," etc., setting forth, that from the reports of the press, such performances were indecent and immoral in their tendencies, and if allowed unrestrained license would corrupt society. The petition was accompanied by a bill or programme of the last performance of this nature given in the city to enable the board to form an idea of what it really was. (Observer, Tuesday, January 15, 1878.)

At the board meeting, Alderman Scott moved to refer the petition to Alderman Dowd, who was requested to frame an ordinance as requested and report back to the board. The motion was adopted and aldermen J. H. Wilson and R. Barringer were appointed to assist. On June 11, 1878, Alderman Scott presented the following resolution and urged its adoption.

Resolved, First. That no person shall make or cause to be made, or participate or have any part or share in any show, exhibition, or theatrical or other performance within the city of Charlotte which requires or allows an indecent exposure of the human person or body, or which is otherwise indecent or tending to corrupt public morals. And any person violating this ordinance shall forfeit and pay fifty dollars for each offense, to be

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9Record Book, Board of Aldermen, IV, 531.
recovered as other fines and penalties, one-half to go to the informer.

Resolved, Second. That it shall be the duty of the Mayor of the City, and also of the City Constable to use all lawful means, by withholding or cancelling license, or otherwise, to prevent any company or party from exhibiting, within the corporate limits of the city, any show or performance that in their judgment may tend to violate the spirit of the ordinance. 10

The ordinance failed by a vote of five to four. 11 Evidently the issue in question was the second resolution in which the Mayor and the City Constable were given the duty of carrying out the ordinance, for in the minutes for the board meeting of July 15, 1878, the ordinance was presented again with the "Mayor and the City Council" given the duty. This time the ordinance passed unanimously. 12

Behavior in the Charlotte audience had been the subject for various newspaper editorials at numerous times. On April 15, 1877, the Observer wrote, prior to Rignold's appearance,

We want our people to show by their silence and attention that they can appreciate good acting. Charlotte is noted for having more boisterous and rudely behaved persons in her theatre than any other city probably in the South, and it is only about half a dozen or so, that make all the disturbance. (Observer, Sunday, April 15, 1877.)

This problem had gotten out of hand, for the second ordinance passed by the City Council concerned the behavior of the

10 Ibid., p. 553. 11 Ibid. 12 Ibid., V. 5.
audience. It read:

Section 1 That any person who shall wilfully obstruct the entrances or passage-ways of any place of Public Amusement in the city of Charlotte, when the same is open to the public; or who shall create a disturbance in any place of public amusement in said city, by loud talking, whistling, using indecent language, or interrupting in any way the performance or the good order of the audience shall be arrested. . . .

Section 2 That whenever any of said places of public amusement are open to the public, the chief of Police shall require the attendance thereat of a sufficient number of policemen to enforce good order. . . .

The ordinance was used the following Thursday after it was passed on September 10, 1883. A Negro boy was arrested for expressing his "appreciation of the play" by whistling. It was observed that "notwithstanding the crowded back seats, very good order was maintained after the first offender was hauled out" (Observer, Thursday, September 13, 1883). The boy was dismissed with a warning not to repeat the offense (Observer, Thursday, September 13, 1883).

Ticket prices remained about the same during the period as they had during the opening season except, instead of a high of $1.50, the top rose to $2.00. Adelaide Phillipps in The Barber of Seville, November, 1875; George Rignold in Henry V, April, 1877; and, of course, Edwin Booth in Hamlet, January, 1876, commanded top prices and played to full houses, but most productions stayed at the 50¢ to $1.00 scale. Toward the end of the period in March, 1885, a

13 Ibid., VI, 49.
company came and presented **Lynwood** at the Opera House at popular prices, 25¢ to 75¢. This was the first time drama by a professional company was presented at popular prices (Observer, Tuesday, March 10, 1885).

From the beginning, the newspapers, particularly the weeklies, came out against the high price of tickets. Before the second season began, the **Democrat** had made its thinking clear along these lines.

We think that our citizens, this Fall and Winter should refuse to pay more than 50¢ for one person and 75¢ for two. . . . The extortion of theatrical companies last winter should not be submitted to this season. If the prices of admission are not put at a moderate figure we hope our citizens will not patronize the Opera House for any sort of amusement. (Democrat, Monday, September 6, 1875.)

This was the first of numerous articles, sometimes direct and sometimes oblique, from the **Democrat** concerning the high price of tickets. Four years later it was still concerned with prices, as well as other aspects of the theatre.

Some collectors think that the reason they cannot get some men to pay their little bills is because they spend about all the money they have going to the Opera House to see women and men of questionable character perform. People had better be honest and just before they become liberal. (Democrat, Friday, October 24, 1879.)

The box sheet for reserved seats was found at Phifer's Book Shop at the beginning of the period, but during the 1878-1879 season it was moved to the Central Hotel Newsstand and during the next season a second stand opened at McSmith's Music House. Usually gallery seats were reserved at the Central, while parquet seats were reserved at McSmith's.
By the end of the period covered in this chapter, a census, ordered by the Board of Aldermen, showed the population of Charlotte to be 9,096 (Observer, Sunday, May 2, 1886).

1875-1876

Monday, September 27, was set as the "Grand Opening of the Dramatic Season" with Kit Carson in The Gringo (Observer, Friday, September 23, 1875). Kit Carson never made it to Charlotte, so the theatrical season did not open on the 27th as announced. Governor Zeb Vance spoke in the Opera House on Thursday night, September 30. His topic was "The Demagogue," but, although "an audience unexpectedly large and cultivated, assembled" and "laughter and applause . . . frequently interrupted its delivery (Observer, Friday, October 1, 1875), the theatrical season could not be considered officially opened until a professional troupe appeared.

The Fay Templeton Star Alliance troupe was the next theatrical attraction on the books. It was scheduled for Thursday, October 7, 1875. It did not show either. Without advance notice Duprez and Benedict's Gigantic Famous Minstrels came to town on October 21 and opened for a two nights' run with their "tip-top" minstrel show (Observer, Friday, October 22, 1875).

Although the season was now officially opened, there
were no prospects of anything appearing soon, until on Saturday, October 30, the Observer printed a letter received by the Charlotte Opera House, that excited the entire community. It read:

Dear Sirs:—Is your place disengaged for Tuesday, 25th of January? If so, can I have it for Edwin Booth, at your usual rate? I will, if your answer is favorable, endeavor so to arrange it. I may want it for the 24th, can answer definitely soon after I hear from you. Very Respectfully, J. T. FORD. (Observer, Saturday, October 30, 1875.)

The Observer called it "Glorious News" and the next week talked about Booth as "the greatest artist living." In all the notices there was a sense of caution though, for too many companies had booked the house, even billed the town, and then not shown. After a second letter confirming the affirmative response made by the proprietors, everyone waited to see if the event would really take place in Charlotte.

The J. F. Sheridan and J. Mack Combination, popular variety performers who had been favorites on the New York stage for many years, played their The Miniques on Wednesday, November 3. The next company to appear at the Opera House was the Hall Combination. The Observer, although, at
first, not able to learn much about the company, had re­
mained cautious about it, until on November 6 when the
paper wrote that the company had played in Richmond recently
and that, according to a gentleman who had seen performances
there, it was one of the best companies to ever come South
(Observer, Saturday, November 6, 1875). With a good advance,
The Two Orphans, the New York hit of 1874-75, opened the
engagement on Wednesday, November 10. Although there is no
paper available containing the review of the first perform­
ance in Charlotte of The Two Orphans, a play which would be
popular in the community for many years, the review of Led
Astray, the Dion Boucicault drama which played on November
11, gives some information about both plays.

There was a thinner house than on the occasion of
the company's first appearance, but this was certainly
no fault of its, as no troupe has ever played here
which gave such general satisfaction. . . .

Hall's Combination is a combination of artists--
artists by birth and by education. It has carried our
people by storm, and its praises are in all mouths. . . .
(Observer, Friday, November 12, 1875.)

A return engagement of the Rose and Harry Watkins
troupe for a three nights' stand opened on Wednesday, Novem­
ber 17. The Watkins had played two successful engagements
during the first season in the house and were well known by
the public. They played Bulwer-Lytton's 1838 drama, The
Lady of Lyons, on Wednesday night, and a burlesque on the

17Morris, p. 222.
old-fashioned, *Pocahontas*, on Friday. Due to the unavailability of newspapers, the name of the Thursday production is unknown. The *Observer* commenting on the Friday production said: "As a burlesque, it was a success, and was well acted by the company, but the miserable doggerel in which the play is written, and the facetious characters introduced at the wrong time, spoiled the effect" (*Observer*, Saturday, November 20, 1875). Evidently the Charlotte audience did not turn out for the Watkins as they had previously, for later the *Observer* commented "we have heard that Watkins was disgusted with his luck here . . ." (*Observer*, Wednesday, November 24, 1875).

The Wildman Troupe, who had also appeared for two engagements during the inaugural season, was the next company to play in Charlotte. This time they played in *Married and Divorced* on November 26 and *Husband and Wives* with the afterpiece, *Cuba*, on November 27. Of the latter, the *Observer* reported, "no rendition would make the play passably good" (*Observer*, Sunday, November 28, 1875).

On December 3, Adelaide Phillipps' Grand Italian Opera Company sang *The Barber of Seville* to an audience that was "infinitely smaller than the talent of the company called for; we do not remember to have seen a more cultivated audience though" (*Observer*, Saturday, December 4, 1875). Miss Phillipps had come to Charlotte with a fine reputation as a concert singer and opera performer in
New York and throughout the nation, and she had recently scored with the highly critical Richmond press. Although her production of *The Barber* had not been well received in New York earlier in the season, the road liked it. In Charlotte there was a good advance ticket sale, especially considering the top price of $2.00 for a reserved seat, the highest scale charged in Charlotte up to that time. The *Observer* reviewing the performance said: "The music was simply grand, far surpassing anything that our people have ever before had the privilege of hearing. It was entirely above criticism" (*Observer*, Saturday, December 4, 1875).

Sol Smith Russell, who was fast becoming a popular variety performer in New York, appeared next with the Berger Family, who had given a very satisfactory entertainment the season before. Their performance was on December 4 (*Observer*, Saturday, December 4, 1875). Another evening of variety entertainment was available to Charlotteans on Friday, December 10, when the Royal Yeddo Japanese Troupe performed (*Observer*, Saturday, December 11, 1875). Haverly's Minstrels was booked for the next evening. They had, according to the *Observer*, "a first-rate crowd . . . and gave it unbounded satisfaction . . ." (*Observer*, Sunday, December 12, 1875). The Royal Yeddo Japanese Troupe, still in Charlotte, had received a good review after their first performance

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18 *Observer*, November 28, 1875. 19 Odell, X, 69.
and, even though there had been a small audience, scheduled a second performance for Monday night. Again a "slim crowd" turned out to see "a wonderful and interesting performance" (Observer, Tuesday, December 14, 1875). On December 20, the Holman Opera Troupe returned and performed Lecog's Girofle-Girofla! (Observer, Sunday, December 19, 1875). Kate Fisher and her horse Wonder, who had thrilled the New York audiences for a decade in Mazeppa, brought the equestrian drama to the Charlotte stage for two nights, Monday and Tuesday, December 27 and 28 (Observer, Saturday, December 25, 1875).

To close the year at the house, Katie Putnam returned with her popular hit, The Old Curiosity Shop, in which she played the double role of the Marchioness and Little Nell, to a full house (Observer, Saturday, January 1, 1876). The next day, she played Little Barefoot at a special matinee, and Jane Eyre at the evening performance. Of the matinee, the reviewer wrote,

There was an excellent crowd, mostly ladies and children. . . . The character of Amry is one of the sweetest imaginable, and Miss Putnam's conception, and her extraordinary histrionic ability, made it quite as irresistible as its creator intended it should be (Observer, Sunday, January 2, 1876).

Jane Eyre, the evening performance, was also well received (Observer, Sunday, January 2, 1876).

20 Ibid., VII, 540; VIII, 41, 174, 308, 468, 607; IX, 166, 288, 430; X, 35.
In 1874 in the California Theatre, San Francisco, John T. Raymond first played Col. Mulberry Sellers in *The Gilded Age*, a play based on the story by Mark Train, and a performance which soon ranked him among the most popular American stars. On Monday night, January 3, he presented a play advertised as *There's Millions In It* at the Opera House. Whether or not this was Twain's *Gilded Age* is not clear, but its main character was Twain's Col. Mulberry Sellers of that play. The show was a big hit. From the *Observer* we read:

We have seen Col. Mulberry Sellers. It is something to be able to say this. And we do not believe that our Opera House has ever held a more delighted crowd than assembled in it last night. Sellers is one of Mark Twain's happiest imaginations, and Raymond makes a very Sellers of himself. . . . The crowd, last night, roared and laughed until they were red in the face and their eyes were filled with tears (*Observer*, Tuesday, January 4, 1876).

On Thursday, that week, the Wildman Troupe appeared in Charlotte for the second time in the season. The play was *Violet, the Actress*. The audience was poor and the play poorer. "The actors went through their parts mechanically. We could not tell whether the play had any merit in it or not, so indifferently was it acted" (*Observer*, Friday,

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22 Morris, p. 225.
January 7, 1876).

On the next Saturday, the Observer ran the following editorial reaffirming its policy concerning reviews.

A gentleman who is a partisan of the Wildman Comedy Company, spoke to the senior editor of this paper on yesterday, in condemnation of the strictures which were made in it upon the performance at the Opera House on Thursday night. The gentleman acknowledged that it was very inferior, but said it was wrong to criticise them; that Wildman was a good fellow, and always pays his bills; that to speak ill of a company kept them and perhaps others away from the place, etc.

Now, these remarks afford us an opportunity to make a few. We grant all that is said of Mr. Wildman; we have always found him personally, a gentleman; and to say that he pays his bills is but a plain fact. To say, however, that these things should purchase for him immunity from criticism, when he appears with a company upon the boards, and essays to entertain an audience, is to lay down a proposition which is preposterous, yet no more so than to ask exemption from criticism for every company that comes along, because, forsooth, this may drive it or some other from the town, at some future time.

We trust that we have some appreciation of at least the fundamental principles of journalism; and if we have, we realize that there is a duty which we owe our readers' which is higher than that we owe any strolling company. It is due our readers that we tell the truth about these things, and it is a duty which cannot be disregarded. If everything is praised, our praise soon becomes worthless, and public confidence in the reliability of the journal is gone. Thus it will be seen that any other than the honest course in this matter, would be bad business policy, even if there were no higher considerations to prompt us.

It may be said that all our prejudices are in favor of the Wildman Company. It gives us pleasure to say a good word for it whenever we can; but to have said anything contrary to what we did say of Thursday night's performance, would be to perjure, and not only so, but to stultify our self. A combination or an individual going before the public, may expect criticism if, it, he or she deserve it; they have no right to expect anything else. The right to criticise any person or any
company, going before our people and asking their support, is one which we shall always reserve, and exercise as our judgment dictates.

We may say further that it is one of the golden rules of this paper, never to admit into its editorial or local columns, any matter for which a price is asked or paid. We could not preserve the independence and character to which we aspire, as a fearless and independent journal, upon whose opinions the public may rely, did we in any manner fetter those opinions, by allowing others to make them. And we have as carefully avoided, even the semblance of pandering to prejudices, either for or against any one. Persons and things are viewed and discussed upon their merits or demerits, and our inferences are drawn accordingly. (Observer, Saturday, January 8, 1876.)

The question of whether Edwin Booth would really come or not was still in the minds of everyone, but on January 6, the Observer cited that he would open a week's engagement in Richmond on the 17th, so "there now is no doubt that he will come here from there . . ." (Observer, Thursday, January 6, 1876). There was still a question in the minds of the people though, until on Wednesday, January 12, large posters of Edwin Booth appeared throughout the town (Observer, Thursday, January 13, 1876).

Katie Putnam's popular, Fanchon, the Cricket, played on the night of January 13. A small number of citizens, who "in their admiration for Kate Putnam, breasted the nipping air, last night, and attended the theatre." The entire company was good, but

. . . a drawback to the pleasure of the evening was the excessive uncomfortable condition of the Opera House. Although the weather was very severe there was not a spark of fire, and the complaint was very general and very just in consequence. (Observer, Friday, January 14, 1876.)
On the morning of January 13, the Observer ran its first advertisement for Booth's Hamlet supported by F. B. Warde. On the same page, the paper stated that Booth "towers high above any one else on the American stage, and his coming will be a great event in Charlotte." The article continued,

We are requested by the agent of the Opera House to say that persons in neighboring towns who desire seats for Booth's performance, can have them reserved by writing to him in advance of the time and enclosing the price of seats, $2.00. (Observer, Thursday, January 13, 1876.)

A week before the performance, the managers of the Opera House took steps to prevent any speculation on tickets for the performance. No more than five seats could be purchased by any one person, unless he had a letter from out of town requesting that seats be reserved (Observer, Tuesday, January 18, 1876).

The account of the opening of the advanced ticket sale gives some indication of the Booth-ferver that had infected the town.

Such a rush for reserved seats for a theatrical performance as occurred at Phifer's book store, yesterday morning, was never before known in Charlotte. It had been advertised that the box sheet for next Tuesday night, would be opened at 7 o'clock, and before daylight the crowd began to assemble. Several persons sat up through all of Wednesday night, and we are told that at 6 o'clock yesterday morning, there were no less than twenty-five people standing on the pavement in front of the book store, eager to gain admission. When the store was finally opened, the crowd had increased to at least forty, and it rushed in pell mell, each anxious to be the first at the diagram. This was before 7 o'clock and the crowd was twice put back into the street, each retiring slowly with the hope of being the last out and hence having the best showing to be first in again. At 7:10 the sheet was opened, and there was a scene of
great confusion. As fast as they could be marked off and tickets given, seats were disposed of, and the stream of people continued until at 9 o'clock every one of the balcony chairs and the orchestra chairs were taken, as well as many of the seats under the gallery.

At 10 o'clock the box sheet was closed, and at 2 it was re-opened and the sale recommenced. At dark last evening 650 seats had been sold, leaving 150 in the parquette yet untaken. In addition to this 150, the gallery will be reserved, if it is found necessary to do so. . . . (Observer, Friday, January 21, 1876.)

On Saturday, following two days of advance ticket sale, the paper reported that there were only 106 seats downstairs not taken (Observer, Saturday, January 22, 1876).

The town was bursting with visitors for the performance. Since Charlotte was the only North Carolina city on the tour, trains from all directions brought people to see the great actor. The Observer announced that for the benefit of those who had not yet secured seats an additional eighty seats had been provided for by placing chairs in the side aisles and in the vacant space immediately behind the orchestra chairs (Observer, Tuesday, January 25, 1876).

The review of Booth's Hamlet, a highlight in the history of the Charlotte Opera House, is given here in full:

When we come to consider the light in which Mr. Edwin Booth is regarded by the people all over this vast country; that he stands pre-eminently at the head of the Shakespearian drama; that his mighty genius has carried whole cities by storm, and that his praises

have been sounded by press and people for years, it is no wonder that, when a visit from him was vouchsafed the people here [sic] the Opera House was packed and standing room was barely obtainable. Such was the case last night; and it is worthy to be remarked that the audience was never equalled here on a similar occasion, for brilliancy and intelligence, and never, in the state, in point of numbers.

It had been predicted by some that many would go away disappointed; we are proud to say that this was not the case; the people who would have been disappointed, stayed away; and it is better on all accounts that they did. As great as is Mr. Booth's reputation, and as much as was expected of him, very few who attended the theatre last night had any idea that they would witness such a piece of acting as was presented. It was not thought that the play afforded that scope which was necessary to bring the great actor fully out, yet who will say now that Hamlet has not its strong points? Who did not, at times, forget the time and the place, and live and move in the presence of the very Dane himself? In contemplation of the part, one naturally exclaims: "How perfect! How real! How entirely grand and artistic!" Truly, in looking upon Mr. Booth, one can join with spirit in Hamlet's soliloquy: "What a glorious piece of work is man . . . In form and moving [sic] how express and admirable!" He looks a very prince; his carriage, expression, his every gesture, is that of the melancholy Prince of Denmark. So entirely perfect and complete was the work in every detail, that is it impossible to point out any particular scene which was acted more artistically than any other. True, in this, as in every other drama, some of the situations are more striking than others; but in none was the rendition in anywise short of absolute perfection. In part, and in whole, there was that charming completeness, which inspired the auditor with the belief that nothing whatever was lacking. How entire was the absorption and delight of the assemblage, was demonstrated by the death-like stillness which pervaded the crowded house; only once or twice was the actor interrupted by applause, so fearful was the audience that one single word would be lost.

The play was admirably cast. The Laertes of Mr. Warde deserves a more extended notice than can be given it here. It was hardly less powerful than Mr. Booth's Hamlet. The others acted well up to their parts, and when this is said, it obviates the necessity for further individualizing.
Mr. Booth's appearance here last night, was a grand dramatic success. The audience which was assembled to greet him, was a becoming tribute to his genius, and in the welcome which was extended Mr. Booth, the people of Charlotte and neighboring towns did themselves as much honor as they did him. Twice was he called before the curtain--at the conclusion of the second act and at the end--and on the first occasion, several floral offerings were thrown at his feet. (Observer, Wednesday, January 26, 1876.)

The Southern Home reported that the audience packed the "spacious Opera House--about 1200 persons being present" (Southern Home, Monday, January 31, 1876). The Observer reported that the sale of tickets had been in the neighborhood of $1,500--nearly, if not quite, twice as much as any other company had taken in (Observer, Thursday, January 27, 1876).

On Thursday morning at 10:00, Mr. Booth and his party left on a special train for Columbia, South Carolina. Upon his departure from the Central Hotel, the entrance was crowded with a group of people eager to get a glimpse of the great actor. As he left the hotel and entered the hack waiting for him, the rush was second only to that experienced a week before when the box sheet was opened (Observer, Thursday, January 27, 1876).

At the end of the week, Signor Blitz, veteran magician and ventriloquist with his "trained canary birds" played to a large and boisterous crowd. "The performing birds did very well" (Observer, Saturday, January 29, 1876).

Tuesday, February 1, found Augustin Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre Company at the Opera House playing one of its
big hits from the previous year in New York, The Big Bonanza. Many of the original cast was still in the group including John Drew and Sarah Jewett. The company came with a good reputation, but the attendance was poor (Observer, Wednesday, February 2, 1876). February 9 saw the first appearance in Charlotte of the Negro "musical prodigy," Blind Tom, in concert. The audience was described as "tolerably fair;" the entertainment, "excellent" (Observer, Thursday, February 10, 1876). Josh Billings, the American humorist, appeared next. His performance was Monday, February 14, and although he seemed to satisfy the audience with his "melange, made up of extracts from various writings of the speaker; there was no connected train of ideas." The reviewer was not satisfied. "It cannot be said that we were delighted to the bounds of enthusiasm, by the reading. . . . Unfortunately for us we cannot appreciate him" (Observer, Tuesday, February 15, 1876).

Although it looked as though the season were over, on March 25, Rodger's Georgia Minstrels came in with no advance notice and played to a very small house (Observer, Sunday, March 26, 1876). J. Randal Brown, Mind Reader, "delighted, astonished and convinced" everyone on Friday, April 7 (Observer, Saturday, April 8, 1876). The season

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24 Quinn, I, 27.  25 Observer, February 15, 1876.
closed on May 16, with a matinee and evening performance of General Tom Thumb and his wife and their troupe of "little people." Although quite a bit of interest was stirred up when the troupe's miniature carriage was driven through the streets, the audiences were small for both performances (Observer, Wednesday, May 17, 1876).

After the official season ended, an amateur production of Paradise and the Peri was presented with such success on Thursday night, May 18, that the performance was repeated on Saturday, May 20, at a matinee (Observer, Friday, May 19, 1876). On June 8, a Miss Sedgwick offered a program of dramatic readings and recitations (Observer, Friday, June 9, 1876).

During the season there had been thirty-seven performances in the Opera House—a drop of twelve below the inaugural year. Ten touring dramatic or opera companies had presented seventeen legitimate dramas and two operas. There had been eleven variety entertainments including two amateur performances, and there had been four minstrels, two readers, and one lecturer.

In looking back at the season as a whole, the biggest event of the year was, of course, the appearance of Edwin Booth in Hamlet. This was to remain one of the major highlights in the history of the Charlotte Opera House and in the theatrical history of Mecklenburg County.
Like the previous year the season did not get under­way until mid-October, when on the 18th the popular Madame Rentz' Female Minstrels played to a large, entirely male, audience. The performance was "varied and spirited ... and decidedly more moral than we had been led to expect" (Observer, Thursday, October 19, 1876).

The Boyd's Star Company with Florence Richmond, an actress who during the 1874-1875 season had appeared in support of several important New York stars, announced an engagement for October 27 and 28. Because of a railroad delay, the company did not arrive in time to open on Friday, so the manager announced that they would extend and give a performance on Monday evening. The company presented Hugo's Lucretia Borgia and Buckstone's The Rough Diamond the first night. The plays were favorably received and the Observer "unhesitatingly" recommended the company to the public (Observer, Sunday, October 29, 1876). Sheridan Knowles' play of 1831, The Hunchback, an old and popular stand-by, made up the bill on Monday. It was so well received that the company extended their run and on Tuesday night presented Black-Eyed Susan and Toodles, but excitement over the upcoming presidential election between Hayes and Tilden was

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26Odell, IX, 531.
growing and this, or so the Observer felt, kept the crowd relatively small (Observer, Wednesday, November 1, 1876).

November 8 and 9 brought two consecutive nights of opera to Charlotte for the first time. The Carolina Richings-Bernard Grand English Opera Troupe appeared. Miss Richings, who had made her professional debut in New York in 1852, was famous as a "wandering star of considerable magnitude." Martha, by von Flotow, was the first presented and was "most favorably received by the audience. . . . It is not often that our people have an opportunity of hearing an opera of this class (Observer, Thursday, November 9, 1876)." Verdi's Il Trovatore, Charlotte's first opportunity to see the work, was presented on Thursday night and "notwithstanding the undiminished excitement in the city, over the result of the elections, there was a much larger audience than greeted them on their first appearance." The presentation was excellently performed, to such an extent, in fact, that after the close of the final curtain, "the applause continued for at least five minutes (Observer, Friday, November 10, 1876)."

Members of the now-disbanded Boyd Star Company which had recently played Charlotte with critical success arrived on their way back North on Friday, December 1. Several

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27 Ibid., VI, 200. 28 Ibid.
members were persuaded to give a benefit at the Opera House for the Hornets Nest Riflemen. The play announced was Ingomar, "the classical and charming play," and several members of the Riflemen, who had had some experience as amateur actors "would assist" (Observer, Saturday, December 2, 1876). The performance on Tuesday, December 5, met with such success that a second performance of the play was presented on the next Friday.

It was the acting of the amateurs which attracted the attention and absorbed the interest of the audience. Their appearance on the stage was but the signal for the most enthusiastic manifestations of enjoyment . . . there was no hesitating and no "stage accidents." (Observer, Saturday, December 9, 1876.)

Due to the delay of the train from Atlanta, the New York Pantomine and Specialty Troupe scheduled to appear on Wednesday, December 20, did not appear until Thursday night. It was a treat and the company stayed to perform on Friday, too (Observer, Friday, December 22, 1876).

During the next two and a half months the Opera House was only open twice, both times to individuals of little significance. George Everett, medium, gave an entertainment on January 11 (Observer, Friday, January 12, 1877), and Prof. J. W. Hartley, elocutionist, read on March 6 and 7 for the benefit of the new Baptist Church building fund (Observer, Wednesday, March 7, 1877). Both entertainers had good audiences.

The Gurber Family scheduled a musical entertainment for Friday, March 9, but the weather was still extremely cold
and the audience was so small that the money was refunded and the performance cancelled (Observer, Saturday, March 10, 1877). The Payson English Opera Company played the second Martha of the season on Friday, March 23. This broke the long stretch of dark nights at the Opera House and the audience was ready for a show, even one they had seen only a few months before.

One of the largest audiences we have seen at the Opera House this season, gathered here last evening to hear the Payson's Opera Troupe in Martha . . . and we venture to say that no one went away disappointed. . . . The singing itself was most faultless [sic]. . . . The auditors showed their appreciation by unbounded applause, and frequent demands for a repetition. (Observer, Saturday, March 24, 1877.)

A Professor and Madame Gonzalez presented an oratorio at the Catholic Church on March 27 with such success that it was scheduled to be repeated in the Opera House on the following Thursday. There were only thirty persons present, so they declined to perform (Observer, Friday, March 30, 1877).

Signor Gomez, "Emporer [sic] of Magician and Purmer [sic] Ventriloquist of the Age," appeared next on Friday, April 6 (Observer, Friday, April 6, 1877), and on the next night, a Miss Manly and Mr. Haywood, from Raleigh, gave a dramatic recitation in costume (Observer, Sunday, April 8, 1877).

The last dramatic presentation of the season and one that was the highlight of the season was George Rignold in his famous production of Shakespeare's Henry V. An English actor, who had played Henry for over a hundred performances
in New York in mid-season 1874-75. Rignold's performance was announced by the Observer on April 10. On the 11th, it carried a feature article about the upcoming production.

There hasn't been such an excitement among the theatre-goers since Booth was among us, as there has been during the last few days over the coming of Rignold. It was not generally known that the sale of reserved seats would begin yesterday, but notwithstanding this most of the choice seats in the dress circle have been taken already.

We are informed that the company embraces forty-eight people. In addition to this number they will secure the services of a number of young men in this city to act as soldiers, all of whom will be arrayed in full armor. (Observer, Wednesday, April 11, 1877.)

On the morning of the 16th, Rignold rode through the streets of Charlotte on his white steed, but that was unnecessary, for:

By far the largest and most fashionable audience which has assembled at the Opera House this season, greeted the Henry V combination last night. The great spectacular play of Henry V was presented for the first time in this city, and with a scenery and other appointments which has never been surpassed on any other occasion. The only drawback to the whole performance, was the small size of the stage, which allowed standing room for only a limited number of persons, and thereby diminished, in a measure, the effect of some of the scenes.

Of Mr. George Rignold as Henry V nothing could be said, which would add to the reputation of an actor who has already gained such pre-eminence both in this country and England. His splendid physique, well modulated voice, and commanding manner, admirably suited the lofty position which he assumed, and won for him the plaudits of this intelligent and appreciative audience. One of the chief attractions which Mr. Rignold possesses as an actor is his natural bearing and the avoidance of anything like "ranting" and "sawing of the air," and in fact of all the performances which

29Odell, IX, 528-529.
are classified as "stagey." His support can, without particularizing, be pronounced good. (Observer, Tuesday, April 17, 1877.)

This was obviously a bright ending to a very dreary season.

The Opera House was open three more times during the late spring and early summer. Once, May 16, for an address by Col. Ed. S. Gregory of Virginia, in connection with the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence annual celebration; once during the visit of the United States Postmaster General, on May 25, when he was officially greeted, and finally on Friday morning, June 15, for the commencement exercises of the Carolina Military Institute.

In summary, the season in Charlotte had been a very poor one. The season opened with Madame Rentz on October 18 and closed with Henry Rignold on April 16. The highlight of the season was Rignold's performance and production of Henry V. The Opera House had been open only twenty times. Two theatrical companies had presented six performances of five plays; and two opera companies had presented three performances of two operas. There had been three variety shows, one minstrel and seven other events from readers to welcoming receptions.

1877-1878

This season was scheduled to open on Saturday 11, 1877, with Burr's Oceanicon, a panorama depicting the trials and dangers of running the blockade during the Civil War,
but because of the "excessively inclement weather" it was postponed until the following evening (Observer, Wednesday, September 12, 1877).

Callender's Famous Georgia Minstrels appeared on October 1 and 2 to large audiences (Observer, Wednesday, October 3, 1877). A week later on October 8 and 9, Madame Rentz's Female Minstrels presented Forbidden Pleasures. The Observer wrote: "It was by no means the most refined we ever saw, but there was none of that coarse vulgarity which many went to see and hear" (Observer, Tuesday, October 9, 1877). Following close behind was M'lle Ninon Duclo's Sensational Blondes who held the stage on Saturday, October 20. Although the weather was quite rainy, the male population turned out and filled the house. As the Observer reported the next day,

There is no sense in a man coming away from a show of that kind and abusing it for its immorality. The people who went to the opera house last night saw girls without any clothes on; they didn't expect to see any clothes; they didn't want to see any clothes. (Observer, Sunday, October 21, 1877.)

After several announced dates followed by postponements, Professor Cooks, "the Exposer of Spiritualism" (Observer, Friday, October 19, 1877), appeared on October 24 and 25. He did not live up to his advertising and on Friday morning after dwindling audiences, the Observer wrote, "his entire failure to do so [expose spiritualism], induces us to write him down a clever performer of sleight-o-hand tricks, and nothing more" (Observer, Friday, October 26, 1877). Next
a group of young Charlotte people presented an entertainment of charades and musical numbers in a benefit performance for the Lutheran Church Manse on Tuesday, October 30, 1877 (Observer, Wednesday, October 31, 1877).

The following evening Sol Smith Russell, a popular entertainer in Charlotte, having appeared previously with the Berger Family, and his "company of Musical Stars" presented his impersonations before a "splendid house both as to number and character" (Observer, Thursday, November 1, 1877), but, as the article pointed out,

It is a lamentable fact that with one or two exceptions all of his sketches are old; the public has seen him in them since he first took the road, and the public stomach will weaken on the best thing in the world if it gets too much of it. (Observer, Thursday, November 1, 1877.)

M'lle Marie D'Est's Parisian Blondes in a "Red Stocking Minstrel" on November 12, 1877, was next. There was a "pretty good house" and it was "enjoyed immensely" (Observer, Tuesday, November 13, 1877), but it created the sensation of the season. On the morning of the performance, a group from the YMCA along with several ministers of the city tried to get the mayor to refuse to issue the company a license.

He was at first disposed to do so, but having failed, after several efforts, to obtain positive information that the show was an indecent one, finally concluded that he had no legal right to refuse to grant the license, and late in the afternoon ordered it to be issued.

The discussions which were had at the mayor's office between the managers of the troupe and those who were attempting to suppress the show, extended to the streets,
and the blondes, their performance, and the legal and moral questions connected with the issuing of the license, became the leading topics of the day. So anxious were some to have the question of the character of the show settled, and to relieve their minds of all doubt on the subject, that they went to see it themselves, and D'Est had a good house. . . . (Observer, Tuesday, November 13, 1877.)

In reviewing the performance, the Observer wrote:

From first to last nothing vulgar was said, and barring the last scene, which was evil in its suggestiveness, the show was a hundred percent more moral than any circus. . . . This will not be palatable reading for ladies and church members who take the children to see the animals, but it is true, just the same (Observer, Tuesday, November 13, 1877).

Henrietta Chanfrau with Tayleure's New York Company appeared for two nights in mid-January. Mrs. Chanfrau, an outstanding star of the sixties, but one fading in the late seventies, was a success in Charlotte in Parted, on January 16, and Jealously, in a ladies matinee on January 17.

After the first play, the Observer said of the actress,

Mrs. Chanfrau brought the character of Grace Shirley before the audience as a living reality. There is a naturalness in her acting which is as rare as it is attractive, and the listener was compelled to forget that it was acting in the quiet, unstage-like manner in which the part was taken. (Observer, Thursday, January 17, 1878.)

The matinee on Thursday was not as well attended, but the performance was lauded by the Observer (Observer, Friday, January 18, 1878). The Berger Family was next on

30 Odell, X, 316.
January 22. The Observer summed up their entertainment with "while there is not much to commend, there is little to condemn" (Observer, Wednesday, January 25, 1878).

In early February two Shakespearean productions were presented. The first on Saturday, February 2, starred Fanny Davenport supported by Daly's Fifth Avenue Company in As You Like It. Miss Davenport, daughter of the famous tragedian, E. L. Davenport, had joined Daly's company in 1869 and had risen quickly to stardom. The company, including Maurice Barrymore, Mrs. G. H. Gilbert, John Drew and Mr. Charles Fisher was excellent. Not since Edwin Booth's Hamlet had there been such theatrical excitement in the city. The advance ticket sale was quite large, and during the first half hour over two hundred seats were sold (Observer, Wednesday, January 30, 1878). Several of the railroad companies offered excursion fares for the weekend (Observer, Saturday, February 2, 1878). The large audience was not disappointed.

Miss Davenport, in the part of Rosalind, was irresistibly charming. So perfect and so graceful a woman has never walked the Charlotte boards. Beautiful of face and perfect as to anatomy, she has these strong points to reinforce her genius.

Miss Davenport's acting is marked by many distinctive features. . . . Everything is perfectly smooth and natural, and if so small a thing may be adverted to, we mention that she is that rare individual, a good stage listener. She seems to drink in every word that is said.

31 Hartnoll, p. 233.
and from the sentiment just uttered to speak her own sentiments, with impromptu words which force themselves to her lips. This with the rare grace which marks her every gesture and every movement, helps make up an actress who is richly endowed by nature and who had evidently done much for herself.

The play was, in short, an unqualified success in the manner in which it was cast and put upon the stage. (Observer, Sunday, February 3, 1878.)

Romeo and Juliet with Louise Pomeroy, who had made a successful New York debut in the role the season before, and Theo Hamilton, presented on Wednesday, February 6, was not as successful. According to the Observer, the performance dragged painfully during the first act, but picked up as the evening progressed. "Miss Pomeroy improved steadily as the play progressed, and toward the last did herself great credit" (Observer, Thursday, February 7, 1878). Both the Observer and the Southern Home commented upon the bad behavior of a small portion of the audience in the balcony. The Brignoli Opera Combination was next with Donizetti's Don Pasquale on February 15. The weather was bad, the audience poor, and the manager disappointed, so it is no surprise that the performance was unsuccessful.


33 Observer, February 7, 1878.

34 Southern Home, February 11, 1878.
The voices were excellent, but,

... the play was cut all to pieces and the indignation of the audience found full vent when the opera was ended. ... The singers jumped whole pages at a time, and no regard whatever was paid to continuity or connection. ... We enter public protest against this thing, and in so doing only give voice to the indignation of the respectable and enlightened audience present last night. (Observer, Saturday, February 16, 1878.)

The Charlotte Amateur Dramatic Club, recently organized, presented its first production, Lady Audley's Secret along with Toodles, on February 22. It was a success, as the Observer said, "no performance has been more heartily enjoyed" (Observer, Saturday, February 23, 1878).

This production turned out to be the last dramatic production of the season, although there was a local musical program for the benefit of the YMCA on March 15 (Observer, Saturday, March 16, 1878), and in August a concert by the Concordia Glee Club and church choirs (Observer, Tuesday, August 20, 1878).

In spite of the railroad schedule changes, the season had been even worse than the previous one. Although there were the same number of performances at the Opera House, there had been only five theatrical productions as compared to eight of the previous season and eight minstrel/variety shows as compared with only four. This was to be the poorest season the Opera House would have during its active years.

The only high point had been the Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre production of As You Like It with Fanny Davenport,
Maurice Barrymore, John Drew, Charles Fisher and Mrs. G. H. Gilbert.

1878-1879

The new season opened with the Fay Templeton Alliance presenting *The Lost Love*, or *Goodbye Sweetheart* on Monday, September 9, and a new *East Lynne*, or *Miss Multon, the Governess*, on Tuesday, September 10. This was the first appearance of the Templeton Company in the city and it was well received (*Observer*, Tuesday, September 10, and Wednesday, September 11, 1878).

The Buffalo Bill Combination made its first appearance in the city for two performances, October 2 and 3, with *May Cody*, or *Lost and Won*. Although the opening night was greeted by a first rate house and the performance exceeded "the most sanguine expectations" (*Observer*, Thursday, October 3, 1878), there was a very small turnout for the second performance, possibly due to the fact that the first minstrel of the season was to be at the Opera House the next evening (*Observer*, Friday, October 4, 1878). An unusually full house of ladies and gentlemen greeted the Emerson California Minstrels and the Original Big Four—Smith, Waldron, Morton, and Martin, on Friday night, October 4. "All in all it was an excellent effort of the burnt cork artists and they received burst after burst of applause from their appreciative auditors" (*Observer*, Saturday, October 5, 1878).
On November 27, after almost two full months of dark nights, the Opera House opened again with the Coleman Sisters' presenting their *Musical Parlor Entertainments*. The weather was stormy and threatening, reducing the size of the audience, but those present were "kept in continuous laughter from the beginning to the end . . ." (*Observer*, Thursday, November 28, 1878).

Nick Roberts' Humpty-Dumpty--Grimaldi Pantomine Troupe, one of the many copies of the G. K. Fox's Humpty-Dumpty which had run for 483 performances in New York years before,\(^{35}\) played December 5 (*Observer*, Friday, December 6, 1878). This was closely followed by the Barlow, Wilson, Primrose and West Minstrels on Saturday, December 7 (*Observer*, Sunday, December 8, 1878).

Monday and Tuesday of the next week featured Charlotte Thompson in *Jane Eyre*, a role she played often with success in New York\(^ {36} \) (*Observer*, Tuesday, December 10, 1878), and in *The Hunchback* by Knowles (*Observer*, Wednesday, December 11, 1878). There was a large advance sale for *Jane Eyre* (*Observer*, Saturday, December 7, 1878), but the play "did not take well" and there was a small audience for the second night (*Observer*, Wednesday, December 11, 1878). Bartley

\(^{35}\) *Odell*, VIII, 282, 433.

Campbell's Risks, or Insure Your Life was next with John T. Raymond, who had been so popular in Charlotte three seasons before as Col. Sellers, playing Pemberton Pembroke. The performance on Friday, December 13, was well attended and well received (Observer, Saturday, December 14, 1878).

Madame Janauschek, one of the last of the great international actresses in the grand tragic style, was announced for Tuesday, December 17, in Schiller's Mary Stuart. The advance sale rivaled Davenport's. In an hour after opening the ticket office, one hundred of the best seats in the house had been reserved (Observer, Sunday, December 15, 1878). Seats sold at $1.50 top for reserved seats in the first two rows of the balcony; $1.25 for the orchestra chairs; $1.00 for general admission and 50¢ for the upper balcony. The morning following the performance, the Observer wrote:

To say that it was an intellectual audience is to say that its appreciation and enjoyment of the play was of the keenest character. . . . Throughout the play the auditors sat spell bound; they did not even applaud lest they should lose a word, yet the intent faces and the breathless silence gave evidence of the absorbing interest. . . . If there was imperfection in it [Janauschek's performance] the imperfection was not to be detected by the novice. . . . In every tone, in every gesture, in every look and word there was the ideal Stuart. . . . (Observer, Wednesday, December 18, 1878.)

J. H. Huntley and Florence Kennedy with their company arrived for the Christmas season and presented plays on

37 Page 65.  
38 Hartnoll, p. 502.
December 23, 24, and 25. *Rip Van Winkle* was the opening performance (*Observer*, Tuesday, December 24, 1878), with *The Streets of New York* following on Tuesday, December 24 (*Observer*, Wednesday, December 25, 1878), and *The Gilded Age*, matinee, and *Enoch Arden*, evening, on the 25th (*Observer*, Wednesday, December 25, 1878). Coming with no previous reputation and immediately after Janauschek's triumph, the troupe was poorly received at first. With good reviews from the *Observer*, the audience gradually built up, but the company "never during their stay, received the patronage they deserved" (*Observer*, Sunday, December 29, 1878).

On January 20, Blind Tom made his second appearance in the city (*Observer*, Tuesday, January 21, 1879). Mrs. Jarley's *Wax Works*, was presented on the Charlotte stage for the first time on January 30 (*Observer*, Wednesday, January 29, 1879). Mrs. Jarley with a small company joined with local ladies and gentlemen to give the entertainment. Between the scenes the newly organized Gounod Club, a local music organization, entertained (*Observer*, Friday, January 31, 1879). The evening was presented as a benefit for the poor and netted $50 which was distributed among the needy (*Observer*, Wednesday, February 5, 1879).

Wednesday, February 5, brought F. C. Bangs, Thomas W. Keene, Robert L. Downing and George Hoey in John T. Ford's production of *Julius Caesar*. The role of Marc Anthony was a specialty of Bangs, who had played it for over
100 performances in New York in the 1875-76 season.\footnote{Odell, X, 9.}\footnote{Arthur Hornblow, \textit{A History of the Theatre in America} (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1965 [first published in Philadelphia and London: Lippincott and Co., 1919]), II, 470.} Keene, Downing, and Hoey were all known as fine actors and far above the usual support level. By noon of the day the advance sale opened over two hundred seats were sold. Of the performance, the \textit{Observer} wrote:

\begin{quote}
It is not too much to say that the satisfaction of the audience was well nigh complete, nor is it too much to say that since Booth was here there has been seen on the Charlotte stage no acting which can be compared with that of Mr. Bangs. . . . In every part the man's soul was in his work and the man was sunk in the character which he represented. The muscles of his limbs and neck swelled with his breast; the perspiration rolled from his forehead and when he pronounces the invective upon the conspirators it seems that his eyes flash living fire. Thrice was he called before the curtain. . . .
\textit{(Observer, Thursday, February 6, 1879.)}
\end{quote}

On Thursday, February 6, the Gounod Club of Charlotte sponsored the Mendelssohn Quintette Club of Boston in a program of classical music (\textit{Observer, Friday, February 7, 1879}), Kate Claxton, of \textit{The Two Orphans} fame,\footnote{Odell, IX, 13.} appeared next with her company in \textit{The Double Marriage} by Charles Reade. Already a leading American actress,\footnote{Odell, IX, 13.} she "rather disappointed expectations at first, but improved greatly as the play progressed" (\textit{Observer, Sunday, February 9, 1879}). Another musical program constituted the bill for Monday, February
10. The Mishler's Swedish Lady Quartette performed excellently to an average sized audience (Observer, Tuesday, February 11, 1879).

On Tuesday, February 11, the C. W. Tayleure Company with Mrs. Henrietta Chanfrau began a two day engagement, with Marie, A Woman of the People, a new drama adapted from the French by Mr. Tayleure (Observer, Wednesday, February 12, 1879). This was followed on Wednesday with Parted, at the matinee, and Was She Right?, a new play written especially for Mrs. Chanfrau, in the evening (Observer, Thursday, February 13, 1879).

August Wilhelmj, who had been heralded as the "greatest violinist... who has ever visited this country" in New York earlier in the season, appeared next in concert on March 5. Wilhelmj was late in arriving, the audience, consisting mostly of the musicians of the area, was small, and together with his temperament, this caused a greatly curtailed program. His playing was excellent. "At the end of each piece he was called back, but did not respond to any of the encores" (Observer, Thursday, March 6, 1879). Commenting about the concert in one of its few reviews, the Southern Home wrote:

The audience that greeted him was rather small. This renowned fiddler had a conscious look about him as though he had played before crowned heads and was

Odell, X, 710.
condescending only to perform before an ignorant set of backwoodsmen. But when he laid the instrument on its back, hugged it close to his neck and drew the bow across its frontispiece, he worried out of it some as fine music as we ever heard. If he had not appeared as surly as a bull, we would have felt sorry for him, but as he got mad about it we are glad that he had such a thin house, for we like to see the conceit occasionally taken out of a man; and the Charlotte people are the ones to do it. (Southern Home, Friday, March 14, 1879.)

The Holman English Opera Troupe, having performed previously during the first two seasons, returned for a two night engagement on April 1 and 2. The Chimes of Normandy was presented on the first night (Observer, Wednesday, April 2, 1879), and Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S. Pinafore on the second. This was the first production of Pinafore, destined to be one of the most frequently presented shows during the years covered in this study. The Observer gave it a very favorable review (Observer, Thursday, April 3, 1879). The Southern Home commented, calling it "humbug" and added:

... the papers have been loud in its praise, but we hope our small boys will have the good sense to refrain from indulging in the idiotic slang of "never, well hardly ever," etc., that so many people indulge in and think smart and fashionable. (Southern Home, Friday, April 4, 1879.)

The local Gounod Club presented a concert on May 9 (Observer, Saturday, May 10, 1879), and there was a return engagement of the Mendelssohn Quintette Club of Boston on

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43 Pages 32 and 64.
May 19 (Observer, Tuesday, May 20, 1879).

The Templeton Company, which had opened the season early in September, closed it with a production of Puck! A Day Dream! on May 20 (Observer, Friday, May 23, 1879), and Magdalen on the following night (Observer, Friday, May 23, 1879).

On May 30, there was a concert given by the children from the various Sunday schools (Observer, Saturday, May 31, 1879), which was so successful that it was repeated on June 20 (Observer, Saturday, June 21, 1879). On July 16 a group of local young men calling themselves the Red Rose Quintette Minstrel Company performed in the Opera House prior to touring the North Carolina railroad stops (Observer, Thursday, July 17, 1879).

In summary, the theatrical scene in Charlotte was beginning to look up after two very poor years. The season had opened on September 9 and closed on May 21 with productions by the Fay Templeton Company. The Opera House had been open for thirty-five performances. Eleven companies had presented twenty-one theatrical productions. There had been five professional concerts with three amateur musical programs, two professional minstrels plus one local one, and three variety entertainments. There had been no lecturers or readers.

Highlights of the season had been the performances of Janauschek in Mary Stuart, Bangs in Julius Caesar, and
the violinist, August Wilhelmj.

1879-1880

Before the actual season got underway, another group of local Charlotte young men formed the Southern Variety Minstrels and prior to touring played the Opera House on Friday, September 5 (Observer, Saturday, September 6, 1879).

The popular Fay Templeton, whose company had opened and closed the previous season, was on hand Monday, September 15, to open the new season. She sang Josephine in a very successful presentation of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, "the little opera . . . that loses nothing, but on the contrary rather increases in interest from having been once seen" (Observer, Tuesday, September 16, 1879). Two minstrels followed—The Big 4 Minstrels on Saturday, September 27 (Observer, Sunday, September 28, 1879), and Haverly's Genuine Colored Minstrels on Wednesday, October 1 (Observer, Thursday, October 2, 1879).

On Friday, October 10, the Adah Richmond Opera Company presented von Suppé's *Fatinitza* (Observer, Saturday, October 11, 1879), and another production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* for a matinee on Saturday, October 11, 1879. This production, according to the Observer, "was so far superior to any previous rendition of *Pinafore* that we have ever had here, as to be entirely out of the range of comparison" (Observer, Sunday, October 12, 1879). On Saturday night, the Templeton Company returned and presented *Prince Napoleon, or the Fatal
Field in Zululand, advertised as a "new Operatic and Grand Military Pageant in three acts" (Observer, Thursday, October 9, 1879). A "Grand Sacred Concert" was announced by the Richmond Company for Sunday evening, but, as later reported by the daily paper:

Mayor Osborne told the manager of the company that things of that sort were not allowed in the State and advised him to abandon the idea, which he did. The matter created a good deal of talk; it was the first time that any one had endeavored to give any entertainment in Charlotte on Sunday. Several of the ministers denounced it from the pulpits on Sunday as a violation of the Sabbath day—the entering wedge to other and more flagrant violations. (Observer, Tuesday, October 14, 1879.)

The Democrat in reporting the incident added: "Charlotte has not yet got as low in civilization as Chicago, Cincinnati, Boston and New York" (Democrat, Friday, October 14, 1879). On Monday, October 13, Leonard Grover appeared with his entire New York cast in Our Boarding House. Of the play, written by Mr. Grover, the Observer said:

It is to be regretted that in any part of the country there should be a demand for anything quite so "broad" as some portions of this story.... Mr. Grover will find it to his advantage to tone down the objectionable features before he enters other southern cities. (Observer, Tuesday, October 14, 1879.)

Oliver Dowd Byron brought J. J. McCloskey's Across the Continent, a play he had performed for ten years and would perform for twenty more, to Charlotte for the first

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time on Thursday, October 30 (Observer, Friday, October 31, 1879).

Professor Agostini's local dance school presented *Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp* on Friday night, October 31, and repeated it on Tuesday, November 4 (Observer, Saturday, November 1, and Sunday, November 2, 1879). Another company with *H.M.S. Pinafore* was next, but this time augmented with *Trial by Jury*. With tickets selling for 75¢ and 50¢, the Fifth Avenue Opera Company played four performances, including a matinee, of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas to good houses (Observer, Thursday--Saturday, November 6--8, 1879). John A. Stevens, author and star of *Unknown*, appeared next on Wednesday, November 19.

Mr. Stevens' part, the "unknown," crazed by a pistol shot at the hands of villains who would rob him of his birthright, and finally restored to reason by the sight of his mother's picture, was a difficult one indeed, but was filled in a manner which at once places him far above the average. (Observer, Thursday, November 20, 1879.)

Bessie Darling and Alice Oates were next, playing back to back on December 4 and 5. Darling appeared first as Julia in Knowles' *The Hunchback* (Observer, Friday, December 5, 1879), with Oates appearing in *The Little Duke* the next night (Observer, Saturday, December 6, 1879). Both came with excellent reputations and played to large and receptive audiences. Miss Agnes Herndon, the distinguished southern actress, gave two performances of Bartley

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Campbell's Fate, or a True Woman! on Friday, December 26, and on Saturday afternoon, the 27th, with Lady Challoner, or Maud's Peril on Saturday night (Observer, Tuesday, December 30, 1879). Louise Pomeroy, who had won favor as a fledgling actress during the 1878-79 season as Juliet, returned as a full star on December 31 in Adirondacks and "took the audience quite by storm" (Observer, Thursday, January 1, 1880). After playing in Lady of Lyons for the matinee (Observer, Tuesday, December 30, 1879), she presented Lady Macbeth for the Thursday evening performance (Observer, Friday, January 2, 1880).

About mid-season the Observer and the Southern Home commented about the increasing quantity and quality of the troupes visiting Charlotte. The Democrat, not to be outdone, wrote:

The Opera House is now open once or twice every week, and it is said the audiences are large—no matter how scarce money is. The actors and actresses who come South are generally a broken-down played-out set who have lost caste in the big Yankee cities. (Democrat, Friday, January 23, 1880.)

On Thursday, January 8, Barney Macaulay played Uncle Dan'l in A Messenger from Jarvis Section before a "first rate audience" and "wild applause" (Observer, Friday, January 9, 1880). Charlotte Thompson and Mrs. D. P. Bowers, both of whom had been around professional circles for quite a time, 46

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46Brown, I, 65, 489.
played January 13 in *Lady Jane Gray*. They took the audience "by storm" ([Observer], Wednesday, January 14, 1880). On January 15, Dr. Lightfoot, the Indian Doctor, gave a free lecture on "The Practice of Medicine among the Indians" ([Observer], Thursday, January 15, 1880).

Louise Pomeroy returned for *Oliver Twist* on January 19. The Observer reported that the dramatization was poor and that "the company did fairly, but not as well as when they appeared in other plays here ([Observer], Tuesday, January 20, 1880)." On January 22, Tony Denier and George H. Adams (Grimaldi) with a Humpty Dumpty played to a $750 house, which, as the Observer pointed out, was probably the largest since Booth ([Observer], Saturday, January 24, 1880). On January 28 Frederick Paulding, an unknown, young actor from the West,47 played Hamlet in a manner "which surprised and electrified his auditors . . ." ([Observer], Thursday, January 29, 1880). Friday, January 30, brought a second production by the Charlotte amateurs to the stage. This time *A Scrap of Paper* was the play.

The success of the whole play is unquestioned, and the amateurs who have labored so zealously to deserve the approbation of the Charlotte public have already received it. . . . The mystic drill by the picked squad of the Hornets' Nest Riflemen, with which the performance was introduced was also a novel and highly interesting spectacle, and showed a remarkable degree of efficiency. ([Observer], Saturday, January 31, 1880.)

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47 *Observer*, January 23, 1880.
Duprez and Benedict Minstrels played the house on Tuesday, February 3 (Observer, Wednesday, February 3 [sic] 1880), followed the next night by A Panorama of St. John's Vision of the Revelations, painted by Arthur Butt, a local artist, who later toured with it (Observer, Friday, February 6, 1880).

John T. Ford's Company played a two night engagement beginning on Wednesday, February 18, with The Galley Slave, a new play by Bartley Campbell. The evening went off very well except for problems with the gas meter which "caused the gas to get very low just at the climax of the plot," which "was very unfortunate and awkward" (Observer, Thursday, February 19, 1880). A musical entertainment, Fun on the Pacific, was presented the next night (Observer, Friday, February 20, 1880).

Prof. Hartley, elocutionist, and Prof. Denck, pianist, both well known in Charlotte, presented a joint recital to a small audience on February 20 (Observer, Saturday, February 21, 1880).

Joseph Murphy with Loduski Young played his New York production of Kerry Gow on March 1. "The shoeing of a live horse on the stage and the introduction of carrier pigeons gave a realistic charm to the whole which the audience were

48 Observer, February 15, 1880."
not slow to recognize" (Observer, Tuesday, March 2, 1880). On March 2 he played Shaun Rhue (Observer, Wednesday March 3, 1880). On Thursday, March 3, Barney Macaulay was greeted by "round after round of applause" when he presented a Messenger from Jarvis Section for the second time in the season (Observer, Thursday, March 4, 1880). The Ford Company returned on March 16 and presented the New York success, Dr. Clyde (Observer, Wednesday, March 17, 1880).

Summing up the season, the Observer wrote on March 18:

The performance of "Dr. Clyde" by Ford's Comedy Company at the Opera House, Tuesday night, probably closes . . . the theatrical season, which has been the finest by long odds with which Charlotte has ever been favored. Mr. John T. Ford said, when here Tuesday, that Charlotte was decidedly the best show town in the state, and that in spite of the distance by which it was removed from other eligible stopping points, it paid him very well to come here. From this source this is quite a compliment. Although there have not been a great many "bright particular stars" of the first magnitude, the most marked improvement in the constellations is observable, and this indicates a permanent reputation as a good show town. . . .

Since the 15th of September Charlotte has been favored with no less than twenty first rate dramatic companies. Four of these gave from two to five performances to houses ranging from $150 to $500. One of the twenty, Tony Denier's Humpty Dumpty company had a house worth $750. Barney Macaulay, on January 8 played to a $300 house and returned March 3, just after Joseph Murphy had played a two days engagement to fair houses, was greeted with a $350 audience. The average house of the season for a legitimate dramatic performance has been worth as nearly as can be calculated, slightly over $300. Four of the twenty troupes have shown their appreciation by returning. The management of the Opera House have leased it both on percentage and stated sums, and the receipts since the first day of December, 1879, have been over $1,000. They calculate that the whole
season has been worth double as much to them as any pre­vious one. This, for a city of 10,000 inhabitants is, we think, a first rate showing. (Observer, Thursday, March 18, 1880.)

On Monday, March 22, Arthur Butt again exhibited his Panor­ama of Revelations. The house was filled and, according to the Observer the next day,

They were there of all ages, from swaddling clothes to ancient shakers... The Tryon Street Methodist Sunday School at the last scene but two, where the angels were all gathered around the great white throne, burst out into the Sunday School hymn "Worthy is the Lamp," and at the last scene, "The Golden City," with the clear water of the river of life flowing through its stately street, "Shall We Gather at the River," seemed to come spont­aneously. (Observer, Tuesday, March 23, 1880.)

The Everett Family, spiritualists, performed on April 12 and 13 to small and uninterested audiences (Obser­ver, Wednesday, April 14, 1880). A highly successful en­gagement of the Hayes Juvenile Opera Company played the evening of April 19 and two performances of April 20. The production was Pinafore, bringing the number of performances of that operetta to nine for the season (Observer, Tuesday, April 20, and Wednesday, April 21, 1880).

Closing the season was the Agnes Herndon Company on May 19 and 20. She appeared in Lady Challoner on Wednesday and in Fate, or a True Woman, matinee, and Saved! or a Sis­ter's Devotion, with To Oblige Benson, on Thursday (Obser­ver, Thursday, May 20, 1880).

The Greenville Amateurs visited Charlotte with their production of the cantata, Esther, the Beautiful Queen, on June 10 (Observer, Friday, June 11, 1880).
The season had been the best Charlotte had had in overall quality of production and in quantity. A total of fifty events had taken place in the Opera House. Sixteen different companies had presented thirty-six theatre productions including one amateur. There had been only one musical program and it had been an amateur one, a drop from the previous year. There had been one professional variety show and two local ones; three professional minstrels, one local one; plus six miscellaneous events from an Indian medicine lecture to a presentation of paintings illustrating Revelations.

The season had been, in general, an artistic, and, for the first time, a financial success.

1880-1881

The season began on a rainy and threatening September 8, but, in spite of it, a large audience gathered at the Opera House for the opening performance—the popular Big 4 Minstrels (Observer, Thursday, September 9, 1880). The Fay Templeton Company returned for its fifth engagement in three seasons with the double bill, Maritana and Chou-Fleuri, on Monday, September 13 (Observer, Tuesday, September 14, 1880). Ina McCall, a young North Carolina elocutionist, read on September 16 (Observer, Friday, September 17, 1880), while on Friday, September 24, General J. M. Leach delivered a "stirring, ringing Democratic speech"

49Observer, September 11, 1880.
to a full opera house (Observer, Saturday, September 25, 1880).

Ford's dramatic Company brought back *Fun on the Pacific*, modified for a new season and "greatly improved," on Thursday, September 30 (Observer, Friday, October 1, 1880). Another elocutionist, Louise Clarke, gave one of her "charming monologue entertainments" on October 5 (Observer, Thursday, October 7, 1880). While at the Opera House, Miss Clarke was taken ill suddenly and was forced to extend her stay in Charlotte. Ford's Company returned for a special matinee and evening performance on Friday, October 8, the day set aside as the centennial celebration of the Battle of King's Mountain, an important victory during the Revolutionary War near Charlotte. *Fun on the Pacific* was repeated for the matinee, while a new play for Charlotte, *Sam'l of Posen, or the Commercial Drummer*, was a "decided success, abounding in humor" at the evening performance (Observer, Saturday, October 9, 1880).

Miss Adele Belgarde and Company, managed by H. J. Sargent, appeared next in *Twelfth Night*, October 21 (Observer, Friday, October 22, 1880); *Ingomar*, October 22 (Observer, Saturday, October 23, 1880); *As You Like It*, October 23, matinee, and *Hamlet*, October 23, evening (Observer, Sunday, October 24, 1880). Miss Belgard had earlier in the month played *Hamlet* for a week in New York with this company to
poor reviews. The Observer wrote:

It was her misfortune that in making what was really her debut in New York . . . she should have essayed a male character and the most difficult of all of Shakespeare's creations, for all criticism of the presentation of "Hamlet" must be more or less measured by the standards of Booth, Barrett and other masters. . . . Miss Belgarde unquestionably has talent. . . . (Observer, Friday, October 22, 1880.)

She won favor in all her roles in Charlotte, and of her Hamlet, the Observer commented:

One is hardly prepared to witness without surprise the force and spirit with which she assumes this, the greatest role of the stage. In some passages, notably the scene of Hamlet with his mother, she exhibited bursts of eloquent passion which bespoke powers akin to genius. She was repeatedly encored by the audience. (Observer, Sunday, October 24, 1880.)

Two well received variety shows appeared next--The Rentz-Santley Novelty Company, on Tuesday, October 26 (Observer, Wednesday, October 27, 1880), and Nick Roberts' Humpty Dumpty, on the 27th (Observer, Thursday, October 28, 1880).

Once again the John Ford Company came to town. This time the presentation was The Two Orphans on Friday, November 5, and it played to an audience "fully up to the average of the season, but not so good--or rather not so large--as those which greeted 'Humpty Dumpty' and the 'Dizzy Blondes'." (Observer, Saturday, November 6, 1880). Three more theatrical productions appeared before the middle of

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50 Odell, XI, 270.

51 The Observer is referring to the Rentz-Santley Novelty Company of October 26.
November. Junius Brutus Booth appeared in the Bartley Campbell Company production of Campbell's *The Galley Slave*, November 8, 1880 (*Observer*, Tuesday, November 9, 1880); Gus Williams, one time variety star, played *Our German Senator* on November 12 (*Observer*, Saturday, November 13, 1880), supported by Dora Steward and H. Liston, both of whom had appeared with him in the New York presentation earlier that year; and Ella Chapman with George W. Dehham appeared in *Pranks, "a burlesque on the sickly sentimentalism of the age,"* on November 16 (*Observer*, Wednesday, November 17, 1880).

A concert by the pianist Madame Julie Rive-King with a company of vocalist and instrumentalist was next on November 18. "The audience which greeted them at the opera house last night in number and culture was highly complimentary for Charlotte" (*Observer*, Friday, November 19, 1880). On November 26, Ella Markey, a local young woman just returned from studying elocution in Philadelphia, read a program which pleased the few attending. (*Southern Home*, Monday, December 3, 1880.)

In December there were two major dramatic events in the Opera House. Thomas W. Keene supported by Miss Henrietta

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52 Ibid., p. 170.  
53 Ibid.  
54 *Observer*, October 26, 1880.
Vaders presented one of his greatest roles, Richard III, on December 7.

The character called for the expression of the deepest emotions—direful revenge, inhuman thirst for blood, deceit, indeed the worst phases of human character—and for this he is by nature especially adapted, his strong features enabling him to reveal the horrors of his deeply laid plots with a vividness which was startling. If he lacks that magnetism which thrills an audience, his individuality was so completely lost, his portrayal so consistent and intense throughout that the horrible malignity of the royal cut-throat was made a frightful realization. . . . We hazard little in saying that Keene will hereafter be associated with the finest portrayals of this extraordinary character. (Observer, Wednesday, December 8, 1880.)

Ada Gray, who had created the first artistic success in her Camille during the opening season of the house, returned for a two day engagement, December 29 and 30, and presented her famous interpretation of East Lynne and Lucretia Borgia, respectively (Observer, Thursday and Friday, December 30 and 31, 1880). Other productions in December of lesser importance were the Widow Bedott on December 2, presented by the Haverly Company (Observer, Friday, December 3, 1880), and Abbey's Mammoth Humpty Dumpty and Tyrolean Warblers on December 9 (Observers, Friday, December 10, 1880).

Barney Macaulay brought A Messenger from Jarvis Section back to Charlotte for the third time on January 4. The Observer reported that "the play has been much improved since it was last presented here" (Observer, Wednesday,

55 Hartnoll, p. 532. 56 Odell, X, 224.
January 5, 1881). The next night, January 5, Annie Pixley appeared in *M'liss*, to the delight of the audience, recreating the role in which she had recently made her New York debut\(^{57}\) (Observer, Thursday, January 6, 1881). On the following night, Pat Rooney was featured in the Harry Miner Combination. A "first rate audience" attended, but the Observer felt that Rooney "was good enough as far as he went; but he didn't go very far" (Observer, Friday, January 7, 1881). The next week, two theatrical productions were scheduled. Oliver Doud Byron returned with his *Across the Continent*, which brought one of the "best houses of the season, not excepting Keene or Madame Rentz . . . an assurance of the appreciation with which it met last season" on Monday, January 10 (Observer, Tuesday, January 11, 1881). Of the next attraction, *Scraps and Perfection*, the Observer was forced to say, "the Pathfinders last night were just a little too bad to even be damned with faint praise. They were about the poorest set of actors and had about the poorest stuff to work on that has even been seen here" (Observer, Wednesday, January 12, 1881). The Company immediately set up another performance for the next night "with the avowed intention of showing Charlotte people what they could do." On Thursday, the Observer noted, "The manner in which the company presented [the double bill] has already been spoken of" (Observer, Thursday, January 13, 1881). Frederick

\(^{57}\) Brown, III, 243.
Paulding, the young actor whose Hamlet had received such enthusiasm the previous spring, played Salviati, or the Silent Man. The play, a failure in New York, met the same fate in Charlotte, but the Observer raved about Paulding's performance (Observer, Wednesday, January 26, 1881). On January 31, Eleanor Calhoun and J. T. Malone enacted Romeo and Juliet. The Observer had announced the approaching performance with excerpts from reviews of Miss Calhoun's recent brilliant achievements in Washington and Baltimore (Observer, Sunday, January 30, 1881). The large audience was not disappointed.

A fraction of the talent she possesses would have made her single appearance here a success as far as appreciation goes. . . . In this scene [the balcony scene] the accomplishments and promises of the debutante are strikingly contrasted. Her genius is established in the exquisite manner in which she executes the telling points of the scene. (Observer, Tuesday, February 1, 1881.)

The Phoenix, with Milton Nobles, who had played the role "over twelve hundred times," appeared on February 2 (Observer, Thursday, February 3, 1881). The next evening Philip Phillips and Son presented Evenings of Song, a variety entertainment, religious in nature, consisting of hymns, sermonettes, musical interludes, and readings (Observer, Friday, February 4, 1881). The Bergers, old timers to Charlotte and favorites in the past, returned on February 9 after

58 Odell, XI, 250. 59 Ibid., p. 60.
several seasons absence. The audience was small, but the
entertainment, "first-class" (Observer, Thursday, February
10, 1881). Among the Breakers, presented by the Charlotte
Amateurs was given on February 8. "The parquette and front
balcony were both full. . . . The most prominent comment
among the audience was surprise that so much could be ac­
complished with so little training or experience" (Observer,
Wednesday, February 9, 1881). On February 10 the long
awaited Pirates of Penzance received its first performance
in Charlotte and by none other than the famous D'Oyly
Carte's Opera Company of London. The Observer, in comparing
it with Pinafore, said:

The humor is unquestionably finer and more abundant.
It partakes of that delicate, subtle character which is
not less enjoyed but rather enhanced by the fact that it
comes by degrees, stealing over the audience rather than
striking it broadside, appearing more by inference than
by bold illustration, and often at times when least ex­
pected. . . . The play was remarkably well rendered.
(Observer, Friday, February 11, 1881.)

Of Fun on the Bristol, or a Night on the Sound which appeared
on February 18, the Observer reported said, "One with ordi­
nary delicacy would hardly go with a sister to see it a
second time." The show as a whole was "decidedly the best
performance which has been witnessed in Charlotte," but,
"some of it was decidedly too funny--too funny at least for
the average Southern audience, and this too funny part could
have been most easily left out or modified" (Observer, Satur­
day, February 19, 1881). Kate Putnam, a favorite in Char­
lotte who had not appeared since January, 1876, played Lena,
the Madcap, on February 19, 1881 (Observer, Sunday, Febru­ary 20, 1881), and The Old Curiosity Shop, always popular in Charlotte, on February 21, to adoring audiences (Observer, Tuesday, February 22, 1881). One of the largest audiences of the season greeted the rise of the curtain on Tony Denier's Humpty Dumpty on Tuesday, February 22 (Observer, Wednesday, February 23, 1881). Charlotte always turned out for the variety shows. On February 28, a group of amateurs from Wilmington presented an "Old Folks" Concert with Trial by Jury closing the program (Observer, Tuesday, March 1, 1881).

On March 1, the Carreno's Grand Operatic and Concert Company presented a program of serious music, concluding with the last act of Il Trovatore--"a delightful treat" (Observer, Wednesday, March 2, 1881).

Although the Observer thought the season was over early in March a new spurt of activity began with the Billy Arlington's Minstrels on March 10 (Observer, Friday, March 11, 1881). This was followed on March 17 with Rice and Goodwin's long-running burlesque-extravaganza, Evangeline, which still featured George K. Fortesque of the original 1874 cast. 60 "It was decidedly one of the most entertain­ing and amusing plays presented during the season. . . . We

60 Morris, p. 233.
do not remember to have seen during the year a more enthusiastic crowd" (Observer, Friday, March 18, 1881). Originally announced for three nights, the Powell Brothers, Magicians, played only two nights, March 21 and 22, and moved on (Observer, Wednesday, March 23, 1881). While Steele Mackaye's Hazel Kirke was still in its initial run at the Madison Square Theatre in New York, a Richmond and McElreth Dramatic Company came to Charlotte on March 28 and presented the first of numerous productions of it. "They are not up to their work in any respect . . ." (Observer, Tuesday, March 29, 1881).

The R. E. J. Miles' Juvenile Opera Company presented The Chimes of Normandy on March 31 (Observer, Friday, April 1, 1881); Pinafore, on April 1, matinee; and the Little Duke, April 1, evening (Observer, Saturday, April 2, 1881). The productions were "highly satisfactory and, of course, given additional interest by the youth of the performers" (Observer, Saturday, April 2, 1881).

Appearing for her third time in two season, Agnes Herndon, supported by Charles Abbott, opened a two day engagement on April 4 with Led Astray and Five O'Clock in the Morning (Observer, Tuesday, April 5, 1881), and closed with Saved, or Won at Last on the 5th (Observer, Wednesday, April 6, 1881). On Thursday, April 7, there was a large Prohibition Mass Meeting at the Opera House (Observer, Wednesday, April 6, 1881).

61 Brown, II, 415-417.
April 6, 1881). The following night, April 8, Miss Ella Markey, elocutionist, appeared again with a program of readings (Observer, Saturday, April 9, 1881). The Alice Oates Comic Opera Company presented Olivette on April 19, but Alice Oates, well liked in Charlotte, was "completely out of voice from a severe cold . . . this, of course, greatly marred the performance" (Observer, Wednesday, April 20, 1881).

Uncle Tom's Cabin, was presented for the first time in Charlotte on May 3, by the Chicago Ideal Uncle Tom's Cabin Company. As the Observer noted:

It will be a long time, in the South, before the prejudice engendered by reading Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's book shall have passed away, and it will be quite as long before most of the individuals described by her, as true representations of Southern characters can be appreciated by a genuine Southern audience, but the play put on the boards of the opera house last night . . . was devoid of many of the objectionable features in the original story, and possesses some real dramatic merit.

One unpleasant reflection about the play is that it neither represents Southern or Northern character, both of which it is intended to delineate. . . . (Observer, Wednesday, May 4, 1881.)

A group of children from the Tryon Street Methodist Church under the direction of Arthur L. Butt presented a musical program on May 6 to an audience that the manager of the opera house estimated at "thirteen hundred . . . the rush at the door was greater than had ever been known before" (Observer, Saturday, May 7, 1881). A second performance was given on Friday, May 13 (Observer, Saturday, May 14,
1881). The Charlotte Gounod Musical Club presented the first amateur production of *The Pirates of Penzance* on Thursday, May 19. Mr. Arthur L. Butt painted special scenery for it (Observer, Saturday, May 7, 1881). The town was in a feverish pitch over the upcoming production; over 100 reserved seats were sold within the first five minutes of the sale (Observer, Thursday, May 19, 1881). The Observer reported that "the success was a complete, absolute, triumphant one. . . . The house was crowded . . . bouquets rained upon the stage as success after success was scored . . . (Observer, Friday, May 20, 1881). It was repeated on May 30 with equal success (Observer, Tuesday, May 31, 1881). After a year's tour with extended showings in Memphis, Nashville, New Orleans, etc., Butt's *Panorama of the Apocalyptic Vision*, as it was now called, returned to the Opera House with new scenes recently finished by the painter. The presentation was on May 24 (Observer, Wednesday, May 25, 1881). The season officially closed on May 31, with a concert by Blind Tom (Observer, Wednesday, June 1, 1881).

The Commencement Exercises of the Carolina Military Institute were held in the Opera House on June 15 (Observer, Wednesday, June 15, 1881).

During the summer the house was opened for speeches:

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62 Observer, May 19, 1881.
on June 9, J. Harry Shannon, the Boy Orator, appeared (Observer, Wednesday, June 10, 1881); and on July 12, there was a prohibition lecture by John Williamson, colored (Observer, Wednesday, July 13, 1881).

In summary, the season had opened on September 8, a few weeks earlier than usual, with the Big 4 minstrels, and had closed on May 31, a little later than usual, with Blind Tom. There had been sixty-eight events in the house—the largest number to date. Twenty-four professional companies had presented thirty-five theatrical productions. There had been eight professional variety shows and two minstrels, along with three musical concerts and thirteen miscellaneous events including everything from prohibition lectures to "Revelations." More amateur productions were presented with Charlotte amateur groups presenting three theatrical performances and three variety/musical entertainments plus an out-of-town group presenting one theatrical production. Highlights of the season had been: the visit of Adele Belgarde, Thomas Keene, Eleanor Calhoun, Oliver Doud Byron, George K. Fortesque, the D'Oyly Carte's Penzance, the Gounod Club's Penzance, and the two companies of Humpty Dumpty shows.

In looking back at the season, the Observer, a bit prematurely, as it turned out, said on March 3:

For variety and general excellence it is perhaps one of the best we have ever had, and the public has shown its appreciation of these by first-rate houses, though
the manager of the opera house states he has frequently lost money on that class which gives a higher order of entertainment. . . . Charlotte however, enjoys the reputation of being what theatrical people call "the best show town in the State." Its situation on the through line between the North and South, and at convenient distances from other larger places, gives it an advantage which it will always enjoy. It is the rarest thing that any company ever jumps Charlotte, and when they once come they rarely fail to return the next season if on the road. (Observer, Thursday, March 3, 1881.)

1881-1882

The Chicago Ideal Jubilee Singers opened the new season on September 6 with an entertaining program, but a small audience (Observer, Wednesday, September 7, 1881). The next night, September 7, the Templeton Opera Company with the popular Fay Templeton presented The Mascotte for the first time in Charlotte to a respectable house, but one again not very large. Of the performance, the Observer wrote that the elimination or, at least the "blunting," of some "keenly pointed violations of decency would render the opera more acceptable to the uneducated provincial taste," for it was "full not only of new and taking airs, but of piquant and pleasing dramatic situations" (Observer, Thursday, September 8, 1881). Another small house saw John E. Owens and Charles Vanderhoff in Tom Taylor's play, The Victims, and Solon Shingle on September 28, "but those who were there were fully appreciative of the rare treat of an evening with the character creator--for Mr. Owens is that pre-eminently" (Observer, Thursday, September 29, 1881).
George Kunkel's Nightingale Minstrels was the October attraction (Observer, Sunday, October 2, 1881). Two other productions in October were Charles E. Verner in the Irish drama, *Eviction*, on the 25th (Observer, Wednesday, October 26, 1881), and *Widow Bedott* brought back by the J. H. Haverly Company in a revised version on the 26th. The latter drew the first large house of the season (Observer, Thursday, October 27, 1881).

Thomas Keene, who had played Richard III with such success in Charlotte earlier, returned on November 10 in *Richelieu* by Bulwer-Lytton (Observer, Friday, November 11, 1881). *Interviews* with Milton Nobles, author and star, famous for his role of Jim Bludsoe in *The Phoenix*, played on November 15. The Observer said of the new play:

Nobles incorporates in his loosely constructed plays, not the fashionable tone—as fashion is understood to indicate the usage of the *beau monde*, but that other fashion which governs the streets, the saloons, the business houses. By giving it the name and some of the tone of Bohemianism which more properly indicates the poverty and hardship of the artistic world, he introduces into the parlor, without shocking its habitues all that delightful piquant humor which smooths the hard way of the work-a-day and the miserable worlds. Of course there is in the plays much slang, for slang is the literary language of the streets; of course there are in them many antitheatrical and extravagant similes, much lying materialism and sneering at everything but the commercial spirit, but is not all this the language of Mark Twain of Masby and of the great Spoopenkyke? Does it not reflect the world in which nine tenths of us live? Is it not American? And is it not healthy when all the lies are contradicted by the very stories of the plays themselves? (Observer, Wednesday, November 16, 1881.)
Gus Williams played Wanted, A Carpenter to a large audience on Thursday, November 17. The Observer reported that his specialties were "excruciatingly funny, so funny indeed as to render the interruption of them by the resumption of the stereotype play, rather irksome" (Observer, Friday, November 18, 1881). Dreams, or Fun in a Photograph Gallery with the Willie Edouin "Sparks" Company followed next on November 19 (Observer, Sunday, November 20, 1881), then, on November 22, the Armstrong Brothers' Minstrels performed (Observer, Wednesday, November 23, 1881). The following night Sol Smith Russel, starring in his first season of straight plays, played Edgewood Folks to a rather slim audience (Observer, Thursday, November 24, 1881), as the others during the week had done. Unseasonably bad weather was given as the cause for these poor audiences. On November 13, Gilbert and Sullivan's Patience was announced for Thanksgiving Day, and on the 20th the Observer, in light of the poor audiences in general of the season, wrote:

Operas are given at double and sometimes triple the expense of ordinary dramatic entertainments, hence it is highly important that a larger than usual patronage should bestowed [sic] upon them when the prices be [sic] are no larger than usual. (Observer, Sunday, November 20, 1881.)

The audience was "the largest and most fashionable" of the season. The Charles Ford Comic Opera Company presented the

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63 Odell, XI, 258.
new comic opera "in a most happy manner . . . the rapid succession of absurdities in the play is well calculated to please, while at the same time it is an exceedingly chaste production" (Observer, Saturday, November 26, 1881).

December began with Charlotte Thompson, remembered for her role as Lady Jane Gray earlier, in J. K. Tillotson's The Planter's Wife on December 2 (Observer, Saturday, December 3, 1881). Next on December 8, Tony Denier's Humpty Dumpty, as usual, gathered the largest audience to date of the season (Observer, Friday, December 9, 1881). The Comley-Barton Opera Company with Catherine Lewis in Olivette by Audran, one of the great successes of the 1880-1881 New York season, was announced for December 15. The Observer pointed out that

This company is one deserving of unlimited patronage. . . . There are 56 performers, and when the fact is considered that but three performances will be given in the South, namely: Atlanta, Charlotte, and Richmond, it is seen at once that a heavy expense is incurred. (Observer, Saturday, December 10, 1881.)

A large audience came and showed its approval. "It is doubtful if a company was ever before received at our theatre with such uproarious applause . . ." (Observer, Friday, December 16, 1881). Two rather small houses greeted the final engagement in December. Clair Scott and S. K. Coburn played Hugo's Lucretia Borgia on December 19 (Observer, Saturday, December 20, 1881).

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64Page 97. 65Ibid., p. 268.
Tuesday, December 20, 1881), and Denman Thompson appeared in one of his skillful interpretation of a Yankee farmer, the title role in *Joshua Whitcomb* on December 22 (*Observer*, Friday, December 23, 1881).

Two Shakespearean evenings came into Charlotte in early January. Frederich B. Warde, who had claimed attention playing with Booth in *Hamlet*, appeared on January 4 as Shylock in the *Merchant of Venice* and as Petruchio in an abbreviated version of *The Taming of the Shrew* (*Observer*, Thursday, January 5, 1882). Another noted New York actor who had been associated with Booth, Lawrence Barrett, played *Othello* on January 10. "His acting was good, superlatively good, and his reading strikingly fine . . ." (*Observer*, Wednesday, January 11, 1882). Both performances were poorly attended, due to the continued inclement weather which had been extremely severe throughout December and early January.


January 19 drew extremely unfavorable comments from the local paper. "The audience escaped much by the very great abbreviation of the piece" (Observer, Friday, January 20, 1882). The ladies of the Tryon St. Methodist Sunday School presented a musical entertainment on January 27 (Observer, Saturday, January 28, 1882).

Oliver Doud Byron played his specialty Across the Continent, for the third straight year on February 3. The advance sale went well, but rain and mud curtailed the audience (Observer, Saturday, February 4, 1882). On February 7, The Galley Slave, also shown for the third time, was presented by the Bartley Campbell Company with Junius Brutus Booth in the lead again. The Observer wrote:

This, like many other popular plays, has outlived its attractiveness, as every theatre-goer in the country is familiar with the piece, and while it may be presented for several years to come, it may be said to have lost much of its popularity in Charlotte. (Observer, Wednesday, February 8, 1882.)

My Partner, an early play by Campbell, featured Louis Aldrich and Charles T. Parsloe on February 20 (Observer, Tuesday, February 21, 1882). Two Humpty Dumpty troupes followed. The George Adams' troupe first, on February 21 (Observer, Wednesday, February 22, 1882), and the Col. Robinson troupe on February 27 (Observer, Tuesday, February 28, 1882). Neither was well supported.

On March 13, the Madison Square Theatre Company presented Hazel Kirke, which, less than a year before, had
ended a run of 486 consecutive performances in New York. The Observer reminded the public that "it has never been given here but once, and then by a company of no merit whatever . . ." (Observer, Sunday, March 12, 1882). Of the performance the paper later wrote:

The Madison Square Company is a very fair one and certainly redeemed Hazel Kirke in the eyes of the theatre-going public of Charlotte. It contains many spirited and highly dramatic scenes which were worked up with fine effect by the company last night. The scenery, too, was all new, and item of no small moment to those who have been used to see the scenery at the opera house through so many successive seasons with scarcely a change to vary the monotony. (Observer, Tuesday, March 14, 1882.)

The Big 4 Minstrel show made its annual visit on March 21 and was very well attended (Observer, Wednesday, March 22, 1882).

On April 5 and 8, Tourist in the Pullman Palace Car and Charles L. Davis in Alvin Joslin, respectively, drew good crowds (Observer, Thursday, April 6, and Sunday, April 9, 1882).

Beginning on May 3, for four nights plus a Saturday matinee, Professor MacAllister and his Wonders, a magician act, astonished the people of Charlotte who turned out in large groups to see him (Observer, Thursday-Sunday, May 4-May 7, 1882). A Dr. Jones lectured, May 16, on the topic,

67 Brown, II, 417.

"The Boys in Gray" (Observer, Wednesday, May 17, 1882).

The season which had begun on September 6 was over and the number of entertainments at the Opera House had fallen way below the 1880-1881 level. This coupled with the uncommonly severe winter, which kept the audience from responding to many of the shows of first-rate quality, made for a generally unsuccessful season. There had been only thirty-nine times that the house had been open; of these, twenty-four had been theatrical productions, each presented by a different company; six had been variety shows, including one local presentation, and three minstrels; and six miscellaneous entertainments—a magician and a lecturer. The season had closed on May 16.

Among the highlights of the year were the appearances of Thomas Keene in Richelieu, Frederich B. Warde in Merchant of Venice and The Taming of the Shrew, Lawrence Barrett in Othello, John E. Owens and Gus Williams. Outstanding productions of the year were Patience, Olivette, The Madison Square Company in Hazel Kirke, and the Tony Denier's Humpty Dumpty.

1882-1883

A very large crowd marked the opening of the theatrical season at the opera house last night [Saturday, September 16] and were entertained for two hours in real good style by the Barlow, Wilson and Company Minstrels. The excellence of the company was realized from the very opening. . . . (Observer, Sunday, September 17, 1882.)
Charles B. Bishop, who had appeared the season before in the *Widow Bedott*, appeared before a large and delighted crowd in his new play, *Strictly Business* by Archibald C. Gunter, on September 28 (Observer, Friday, September 29, 1882). At this play the local McSmith's Silver Cornet Band made its debut, playing before and between the acts (Observer, Friday, September 29, 1882).

On October 2, Professor Allan Curr, lecturer, spoke on "The Battle of Life," with its "most amusing and entertaining scenes and sketches of society as it is today" (Observer, Tuesday, October 2, 1882). The Alexander Caufman Combination presented *Called to Account* on Tuesday, 10, to a medium size house (Observer, Wednesday, October 11, 1882). Ada Gray with Charles A. Watkin's Fifth Avenue Combination returned and played her popular rendition of *East Lynne* on Monday, October 16, before "quite a large audience."

The Observer said of her portrayal:

> As an emotional actress Miss Gray has few superiors, in the rendition of the dual character "Lady Isabel" and Madame Vine" she was afforded good opportunity to display her powers to their best effect. She was thrice called before the curtain. (Observer, Tuesday, October 17, 1882.)

*Esmeralda*, a new play by Frances H. Burnett and W. H. Gillette, which had its New York premiere in October, 1881, was presented by the Madison Square Theatre Company on October 17, 1882. Since Frances Burnett was a North Carolinian,

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69 Brown, II, 418.
the play had been eagerly awaited and "the better part of Charlotte" attended (*Observer*, Wednesday, October 18, 1882). Finishing up the October engagements were the Armstrong Brother Minstrel and Brass Band on Wednesday, October 18 (*Observer*, Thursday, October 19, 1882), and a new panorama by Arthur L. Butt, the painter of "Revelations," on Monday, October 30, 1882, entitled *Biblical Scenes: Creation to Solomon's Temple*. Reporting the premiere viewing, the *Observer* wrote:

> It was scarcely dark before impatient groups began gathering, waiting for admittance, and by the time the exhibition begun, there were no seats to be had and one was satisfied to find comfortable standing room. . . . (Observer, Tuesday, October 31, 1882.)

Francis S. Chanfrau, one of the great American comic performers, who had not appeared previously in Charlotte, along with his wife, Henrietta Chanfrau, who was well known to the city, and C. W. Taylure, playwright and actor, appeared in a two day engagement, on November 1 and 2. Mrs. Chanfrau and Mr. Taylure acted in *Parted*, their third time in Charlotte. November 1 (*Observer*, Thursday, November 2, 1882), and *East Lynne*, a new version by Mr. Taylure, at the matinee, November 2 (*Observer*, Friday, November 3, 1882). Both plays were well received. F. C. Chanfrau appeared in

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70 Wilson, p. 109.

71 Pages 82 and 91.
his popular characterization of Kit, the Arkansas Traveler, in the play by the same name, the evening of November 2. The *Observer* said of him: "Mr. Chanfrau has made a work of art out of the roughest materials . . ." (*Observer*, Friday, November 3, 1882). James A. Hern's *Hearts of Oak*, featuring the playwright himself, played to a good house on November 9 (*Observer*, Friday, November 10, 1882). Tony Denier's *Humpty Dumpty* followed on November 28 and received a rave review by the *Observer* (*Observer*, Wednesday, November 29, 1882).

On December 8, the famous Madame Janauschek, who had thrilled Charlotte in *Mary Stuart* in 1878,\(^{72}\) appeared in *Mother and Son*. Although commenting that the play was not of a high enough nature for her, the *Observer* wrote of her performance:

Madame Janauschek is eminently a tragedienne, and in her hands the most splendid passages of the dramatists find appropriate and thrilling interpretation. The actress touches the intelligence and the heart, stirs the blood and the soul. There is one thing for which the American stage has to thank Madame Janauschek. She brought it to a heroic strength and a lordly breadth of style which had well nigh departed from our boards, and redeemed the classical drama in the United States from a decadence in which it was becoming the toy of hands incompetent to wield the fan of Frou-Frou, far less the dagger of Lady MacBeth. (*Observer*, Saturday, December 9, 1882.)

The following night Callender's Famous Colored Minstrels held the boards (*Observer*, Sunday, December 10, 1882).

\(^{72}\) Page 88.
On December 18, Marion Elmore in *Chispa* was described by the *Observer* as "the most delightful little play that has been presented here this season" (*Observer*, Tuesday, December 19, 1882), and Mestayer's *Tourist in the Pullman Palace Car*, a hit from last season, was again a hit on Thursday, December 21 (*Observer*, Friday, December 22, 1882).

In October, 1880, M. B. Curtis had scored a big hit as Samuel Plastrick in *Sam'l of Posen* prior to his long run in New York in the summer of 1881.\(^3\) When he returned to Charlotte on January 5, although the weather was quite bad, "one of the largest audiences of the season greeted him" (*Observer*, Saturday, January 6, 1883). Miss Charlotte Thompson played *Jane Eyre* on January 6. The *Observer* approved her acting, but deplored the support (*Observer*, Sunday, January 7, 1883). Baker and Farron, appearing in their old stand-by, *Chris and Lena*, on January 9, 1883, played to a large house that had braved a bad snow storm to see them (*Observer*, Wednesday, January 10, 1883). On January 16, John Thompson, his wife and daughter, presented *Around the World* (*Observer*, Wednesday, January 17, 1883). Tagliapietra, successful concert and opera singer of the day,\(^4\) appeared in *La Moscotte* on January 25 and "carried

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\(^3\) *Odell*, XI, 257.

\(^4\) *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 82, 97, 162, 163, 200, 244, 356, etc.
the audience by storm with his full and magnificent voice" (Observer, Friday, January 26, 1883).

Frederick Warde, popular for his previous appearances in Booth's Hamlet and the year before as Shylock, returned in Knowles' Virginius on January 29. There was a "first rate audience" to see his acting which the Observer called "a great piece of acting, one that entitles him to rank with the best of the legitimate actors of the day" (Observer, Sunday, January 30, 1883). Next, two popular character actors made return engagements to Charlotte in new plays. On Tuesday, January 30, John T. Raymond appeared in In Paradise (Observer, Wednesday, January 31, 1883), and on February 1, Gus Williams appeared in One of the Finest (Observer, Friday, February 2, 1883). Both were popular.

Annie Pixley presented Fred Marsden's new play, Zara, and delighted the large audience on February 13 (Observer, Wednesday, February 14, 1883). Morton's Big 4 Minstrels and Barlow, Wilson and Company's Mammoth Minstrels followed on the 14th and 27th respectively. Although both were well received, the latter was considered by the Observer, the better (Observer, Wednesday, February 28, 1883).

On March 6, the Rev. T. DeWill Talmage delivered his lecture, "Bright Side of Things," to "a large, refined and critical audience" (Observer, Wednesday, March 7, 1883).

April 3 and 4 saw the General Tom Thumb Troupe at the Opera House. The troupe gave a special matinee for
children on April 4 (Daily Journal-Observer, Thursday, April 5, 1883). Another lecture, this time on "How Does Universal Education Pay?" was given by Dr. A. D. Mayo of Boston on April 5 for the pupils of the White Graded School (Daily Journal-Observer, Friday, April 6, 1883). Of the next show in the house, the Observer wrote:

We are of the opinion that this troupe ought to abandon the stage, and we say it in all kindness to the members . . . their show is hardly above an amateur performance. (Daily Journal-Observer, Saturday, April 7, 1883.)

The show, Hewlette's Humpty Dumpty Troupe, on April 6, was so bad that the audience had "hissed and hooted at it" (Daily Journal-Observer, Sunday, April 8, 1883). For two nights, April 19 and 20, John E. Ince with Lissetta Ellani kept audiences laughing with Fun at a Boarding School (Daily Journal-Observer, Friday, April 20, and Saturday, April 21, 1883). Katie Putnam, "one of Charlotte's special favorites" who had "won for herself a most enduring popularity in this city," gave a matinee performance of Little Barefoot and an evening performance of Lena, the Madcap, April 25 (Daily Journal-Observer, Thursday, April 26, 1883).

A second exhibition of Butt's new panorama was given on May 4 (Daily Journal-Observer, Saturday, May 5, 1883). Maj. J. J. Foley, of New Orleans, gave a lecture entitled,  

75Daily Journal-Observer, April 26, 1883.

After the official season, on July 10, the Charlotte Juvenile Pinafore Company, trained by Prof. A. Bidez, presented its production of the operetta. A. L. Butt had painted new scenery especially for it and the children had worked for several months. It was a great success (Daily Journal-Observer, Wednesday, July 11, 1883). A repeat performance was given the next day at 3 o'clock (Daily Journal-Observer, Thursday, July 12, 1883).

A slight increase over the previous season in the number of events at the Opera House was noted this season. There were twenty-five theatrical productions (including one amateur production); five minstrels, five variety shows, five lecturers and two showings of the "Biblical Scenes." The audiences were generally better than the season before, with Ada Gray, C. B. Bishop, F. S. Chanfrau, Madame Janauschek, M. B. Curtis, Baker and Farron, Frederick Warde, John T. Raymond, Annie Pixley, and Katie Putnam, among others, drawing large houses.

1883-1884

The season began very early with the Armstrong Brothers Monster Minstrel Combination on August 31 (Daily
Journal-Observer, Saturday, September 1, 1883), but was followed by only one attraction at the Opera House in September - '49 with Lizzie May Ulmer on the 11th. The play written by Miller was "brisk, its development continuous and its situations effective. It had the advantage of being ably acted . . ." (Daily Journal-Observer, Wednesday, September 12, 1883).

On October 2, The Maurice Grau Opera Co. presented Olivette. Grau, who in 1891 would become manager of the Metropolitan Opera Company, had a reputation for the "extraordinary" in his companies and the performance, although good, did not live up to the expectations of his audience (Daily Journal-Observer, Wednesday, October 3, 1883). C. B. Bishop returned on October 12 with his hit, Strictly Business, and delighted the audience (Daily Journal-Observer, Saturday, October 13, 1883). The following night the Haverly's Comedy Company, a name one could generally depend upon for a good show, presented Our Strategists (Observer, Sunday, October 14, 1883). On October 19, the Wizard Oil Concert Co. no longer a medicine show, but a regular concert company, played (Observer, Saturday, October 20, 1883). The next night John F. Ward and Mary

76 Hornblow, II, 176.

77 Daily Journal-Observer, October 13, 1883.
Davenport appeared in *Top o' the Morning* by Fred Maeder *(Observer, Sunday, October 21, 1883)*. The largest audience of the season to date saw the Barlow, Wilson and Company's Mammoth Minstrels on October 24 *(Observer, Thursday, October 25, 1883)*.

Charles L. Davis, having skipped a season, returned with his specialty, *Alvin Joslin*, on November 3. There was a big brass band and an exhibition of Davis' diamonds in Butler's show window and a crowd to see the performance *(Observer, Sunday, November 4, 1883)*. For two nights, November 14 and 15, Haverly's Silver King Company played before large audiences. The original production had run almost a hundred consecutive nights at Wallack's earlier in the year. 78 This production of *The Silver King*, staged for Haverly's Brooklyn Theatre in August, 79 traveled on a special train with over four carloads of scenery, which "owing to the small proportions of our stage, the company was unable to mount . . ." *(Observer, Thursday, November 15, 1883)*. *The World*, another melodrama heavy with scenery and effects, followed on November 22 with a return engagement on November 26. "The acting is secondary, but for a real first-class spectacular show 'The World' carries off the plum" *(Observer, Tuesday, November 27, 1883)*.

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79 Odell, XII, 5.
The ship sinking in the waves, the party at sea on the raft, the appearance of a ship in the distance, which tacks about and comes to the rescue, were about as realistic, we believe, as is possible to get upon the stage. (Observer, Friday, November 23, 1883.)

John A. Stevens' Her Second Love with the celebrated New York actress, Maude Granger, played on December 4. The play was described as "one of those few dramas that is at once highly sensational at times without abounding in mawkish sentiment or spicy obscenity" (Observer, Wednesday, December 5, 1883). On Thursday following, Dan and Josie Morris Sullivan presented the romantic Irish drama, Shiel Agar (Observer, Friday, December 7, 1883). The next week, on Monday, December 10, Carrie Swain "captivated the entire audience" in Leonard Grover's Cad, the Tom Boy (Observer, Tuesday, December 11, 1883). On Wednesday night, The Black Drawf, a play similar in plot to the Black Crook, played to a full house that had expected too much and was disappointed (Observer, Thursday, December 13, 1883). The next night Dr. W. H. Milburn lectured on the topic, "S. S. Prentiss," to a small group (Observer, Friday, December 14, 1883). To end the week, C. B. Bishop returned and played in Our Boys and Wanted, 1,000 Milliners on Friday. (Observer, Saturday, December 15, 1883.) The last performance of the year was on December 26, when Haverly's Minstrels played to a . . . regular holler [sic] day crowd. . . . Every seat was filled and the majority of the crowd went there to laugh and stamp whether they saw anything to laugh and stamp at or not. The show, taken as a whole, was a disappointment. (Observer, Saturday, December 29, 1883.)
This effected the size of the audience on Tuesday, January 1, when M. B. Leavitt's Colossal Gigantean Minstrels played to a very poor house (Observer, Wednesday, January 2, 1884).

On January 24, the agile Hanlon Brothers, combining their gymnastic and pantomimic skills, appeared in Le Voyage en Suisse, known in Charlotte as A Trip to Switzerland (Observer, Friday, January 25, 1884), while on Saturday, January 26, the new successful A Bunch of Keys by Charles Hoyt made its first appearance in town with Flora Moore and the audience "had a solid three hours' laugh . . ." (Observer, Sunday, January 27, 1884).

On the evening of February 4 and the afternoon of the 5th, Charles M. Caughy presented "Other Lands Than Ours," in lecture and panorama (Observer, Tuesday, February 5, 1884). The Boston Concert Company played on February 11 and 12 (Observer, Tuesday, February 12, and Wednesday, February 13, 1884). Gilbert's Pygmalion and Galatea and Shakespeare's Twelfth Night followed on the next two nights with Frederick Paulding, and Josephine Reiley (Observer, Thursday, February 14, and Friday, February 15, 1884). Mestayer's Tourist in a Pullman Palace Car, returned on February 26 for its third time and was still greatly enjoyed.

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80 Brown, III, 204-206.
by the audience (Observer, Wednesday, February 27, 1884). The Augustin Daly Company brought "7-20-8", or Casting the Boomerang on March 18. The show was not well received (Observer, Wednesday, March 19, 1884). On Thursday, March 20, Rev. William Adams, of Augusta, Georgia, spoke on "The Lake Regions of Scotland" (Observer, Friday, March 21, 1884). Blind Tom, popular in Charlotte, gave a concert on March 28, and another at the matinee on the 29th (Observer, Sunday, March 30, 1884).

During April Major Charles H. Smith, better known as Bill Arp, columnist, gave one of his characteristically humorous lectures on Tuesday, April 1 (Observer, Wednesday, April 2, 1884), and on the 26th, the Skiff and Gaylord Minstrels performed (Observer, Sunday, April 27, 1884). Signor Bosco, magician and humorist, began a three day engagement on April 30 which ran through May 2. He was well received (Observer, Thursday, May 1, 1884), and returned on May 19 and continued his engagement through the 21st (Observer, Sunday, May 18, 1884).

The last dramatic presentation of the season was on May 14, when Louise Rial and James Neill presented A Life's Atonement. Mr. Neill, a former cadet at the Charlotte Military Institute, wrote in a private note to the Observer:

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81 Observer, April 1, 1884.
"It was in Charlotte that I received my first dramatic inspiration and I shall play in the opera house there with feelings of emotion" (Observer, Sunday, May 11, 1884). Unfortunately a heavy rain storm kept many people from attending, "but those who braved the descending flood, were quite well repaid. . . . Mr. Neill was excellent, and for so young a man and actor, showed capacity of a high order in his profession" (Observer, Thursday, May 15, 1884).

An entertainment by the White Graded School was held on May 30 and lasted "until near midnight. . . . The programme was quite lengthy, consisting of recitations, songs, etc. . . . all was excellently done. . . . There was an immense audience" (Observer, Saturday, May 31, 1884).

On June 9, Miss Lula Hurst, "Electrical, Magnetical Girl," and Professor P. M. Atkinson, Elocutionist, astonished the crowds (Observer, Tuesday, June 10, 1884), and on August 7, a cantata, "The Twin Sisters," was presented by local children for the benefit of the building fund of the new Lutheran Church (Observer, Friday, August 8, 1884).

The season which had opened early on the last day of August did not really get underway until October with the Grau Opera presentation of Olivette. The Opera House was open for forty-seven different events: twenty-four theatrical productions presented by twenty companies; five minstrels; five concerts; five lectures and seven magician shows--all professional. There had been only two amateur
presentations, both musical entertainments. The official season ended on May 14 with *A Life's Atonement*.

Theatrical spectacle counted for the major highlights of the season with such productions as the *Silver King*, *The World*, and *A Trip to Switzerland*.

**1884-1885**

Rows of benches were filled with representatives from our male population facing a stage upon which a company of airily dressed females were playing. . . . It was a show that will do for the men to take in provided they are willing to take the consequences on reaching home. (*Observer*, Sunday, September 14, 1884.)

Thus the new season began on Saturday evening, September 13, 1884, with Lilly Clay's Company of Ladies Only in *An Adamless Eden*. This was followed by the Virginia Minstrels, a company composed exclusively of "genuine" Negroes, which appeared on September 19 before a small house (*Observer*, Saturday, September 20, 1884).

A large audience attended the first play of the season, *Dad's Girl* with Lizzie May Ulmer on Monday, September 22, 1884. Miss Ulmer had scored in Charlotte in '49 previously and the new play had already scored in Chicago. Miss Ulmer was once again a success (*Observer*, Tuesday, September 23, 1884). On September 30, the Morton and Bell Comedy Company presented *Our Strategists* to a poor house.

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82 *Observer*, August 29, 1884.
October brought the popular Tony Denier's Humpty Dumpty on October 4 (Observer, Sunday, October 5, 1884). Pattie Rosa appeared on October 21 in Mizpah and "fairly captured the audience" with her vivacity, and her singing (Observer, Wednesday, October 22, 1884). Katie Putnam, an all time favorite in Charlotte, returned for the fifth season with a matinee and evening performance of The Little Sun Flower on October 25. "Miss Putnam is perhaps more of a favorite in Charlotte than ever. . . . She will always be warmly welcomed . . ." (Observer, Sunday, October 26, 1884).

The Ford English Opera Company came during the annual Fair of the Carolinas at the end of October and presented The Bohemian Girl on October 28 (Observer, Wednesday, October 29, 1884); Girola, or the Three Black Cloaks, October 29; and The Orange Girl, October 30 (Observer, Friday, October 31, 1884). The Banker's Daughter by Bronson Howard ended the run on November 1 (Observer, Sunday, November 2, 1884). Barney Macaulay, the popular Uncle Dan'l of A Messenger from Jarvis Section, appeared in a new play, The Jerseyman, on November 5. "The fun of the play centers on Mr. McAuley's impersonation, and as he is on the stage most of the time, the humor is well sustained" (Observer, Thursday, November 6, 1884). Later in November, on the 10th,

[^83]: Brown uses both spellings, Macaulay and McAuley, in his History of the New York Stage.
Flora Moore returned in the popular play from last season, *A Bunch of Keys*. It attracted "the largest audience of the season. . . . The play is without plot, but it is intended merely to produce fun and in this it is successful" (*Observer*, Tuesday, November 11, 1884). On the evening of Friday, November 14, and on the next afternoon, Arthur L. Butt displayed his panorama of Biblical scenes as a special benefit for the Charlotte Fireman (*Observer*, Saturday, November 15, 1884).

The one and only presentation in December was badly effected by the heating problems of the house, discussed earlier. On December 27, the Whitley Company presented *Hidden Hands* to a cold, small audience.

It was so chilly on the stage that the actors' breath was wafted about like a fog. Yet they did not appear to mind it. The play they gave was so well presented and so interesting that everyone in the audience braved the cold until 11:30 o'clock when the curtain fell on the final act. (*Observer*, Tuesday, December 30, 1884.)

On Friday, January 2, the new year at the Opera House began with the Atkinson's Comedy Company presenting a new musical version of *Peck's Bad Boy and his Pa*. The house was full and the *Observer* said of the new musical, "it serves its purpose—to make people laugh" (*Observer*, Saturday, January 3, 1885). Offenbach's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, as played by the Rentz-Santley Burlesque Co., was next on January 21. "There was large gathering of males" who seemed "fully satisfied with the show," but "on returning
home, approached the front door through the back yard" (Observer, Thursday, January 22, 1885). The final show in January, on the 30th, was *Jacquine, or Paste and Diamonds* with Mattie Vickers and Charles Rogers, one time variety stars at Tony Pastor's, which was played to one of the most "fashionable audiences of the season." The Observer ranked Vickers "on the order of Lotta, Ulmer and Pixley . . ." (Observer, Saturday, January 31, 1885).

Dr. A. Bidez, of Charlotte, directed a musical entertainment of local musical talent on February 6 (Observer, Saturday, February 7, 1885). February 11 brought Milton Nobles and his wife, Dollie, in a new drama entitled, *Love and Law* (Observer, Thursday, February 12, 1885), and on February 13, the Dickson's Sketch Club introduced a new idea in theatrical performances to Charlotte—two plays of equal length, a drama, *Editha's Burglar*, and a comedy, *Combustion* (Observer, Saturday, February 14, 1885).

March proved another sparse month for entertainments. On the 4th there was the Lorellas and their own Special Selected Comedy Company in *Mishaps, or Batersby's Baby* (Observer, Thursday, March 5, 1885), and on March 10, Eben Plympton and Rose Keene brought Tillotson's drama of Southern life during the war, *Lynwood*. The play had recently been produced at the New York Union Square Theatre with Mr. Plympton.85

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84Odell, XII, 91, 92, 176.  
85Ibid., 413.
This was the first time a "first-class opera company" had presented a "first-class show" at popular prices, 75¢, 50¢, and 25¢, and a large audience attended (Observer, Wednesday, March 11, 1885).

J. C. Steward and John Hart appeared in the Two John's Comedy Company on April 10 (Observer, Saturday, April 11, 1885). The big artistic and social event of the season was the appearance of the Milan Italian Grand Opera Company in Gounod's *Faust* on April 22. The young people dressed in evening dress, groups came from Shelby, Monroe, Concord and Salisbury, and the audience was "cultured and refined" (Observer, Thursday, April 23, 1885). It was a gala success and brought a rather slow season to glamorous conclusion.

The commencement exercises for the Macon High School took place in the Opera House on May 29 (Observer, Saturday, May 30, 1885), and for the Graded School on June 5 (Observer, Friday, June 5, 1885).

Miss Lula Hurst, the Georgia Wonder, returned for a post season engagement on June 3 and astonished the audience again with her feats (Observer, Thursday, June 4, 1885).

For the first time in Charlotte, a stock company came and presented a summer season. The Standard Dramatic
Company opened a week's engagement with Kathleen Mavourneen on Monday, June 29. Seats were priced at 25¢ for general admission and 35¢ for reserved seats. The company was very popular and extended into the next week for two additional performances. Upon their closing the Observer wrote on July 7 in its review of *Under the Gaslight*, the final production:

The audience was unusually large, showing how well the company has come to be appreciated in Charlotte. It had a very prosperous season in this city. . . . The company has pleased our people well. . . . *(Observer, Wednesday, July 8, 1885.)*

Other productions given by the company during their engagement were: *The Two Orphans*, June 30 *(Observer, Wednesday, July 1, 1885)*; *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*, July 1 *(Observer, Thursday, July 2, 1885)*; *Divorce*, July 2 *(Observer, Friday, July 3, 1885)*; *My Partner*, July 3; *Black Diamonds*, July 4; and *East Lynne*, July 6. No reviews are available for the last three performances.

On July 9 and September 3 Dr. A. Bidez presented local musical entertainments for benefits to various organizations *(Observer, Friday, July 10, and Friday, September 4, 1885)*.

A summary of the season including the summer season shows only thirty-seven professional and three non-professional engagements at the Opera House. Eighteen companies presented twenty-nine theatre presentations. There were two variety performances, three amateur musical entertainments,
one minstrel, and five miscellaneous events. The season opened with Lilly Clay's Company on September 13 and closed with Gounod's *Faust* on April 22. There was a summer season of plays between June 29 and July 7 presented by the Standard Dramatic Company.

Highlights were the *Faust* performance, the return of Lizzie May Ulmer, Katie Putnam, Barney Macaulay, and Flora Moore and the new star, Mattie Vickers.

1885-1886

The season opened with a return engagement of the Standard Dramatic Company, again at popular prices, on Friday, September 11, with *Zingara* (Observer, Saturday, September 12, 1885). *Fanchon, the Cricket*, was presented on September 12 (Observer, Sunday, September 13, 1885); *Divorce*, September 14 (Observer, Tuesday, September 15, 1885); *Josh Whitcombe*, September 15 (Observer, Wednesday, September 16, 1885); *Two Orphans*, September 16 (Observer, Wednesday, September 16, 1885); and *The Colleen Bawn*, September 17 (Observer, Friday, September 18, 1885). All the performances were well supported by the public.

Robert L. Dowhing, beginning his southern tour of *Tally Ho*, presented it on Saturday, September 19 (Observer, Sunday, September 20, 1885). Next, Mr. and Mrs. George S. Knight, frequent New York performers,87 played in their

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87Brown, I, 170; II, 366, 367, 495, 497, 629; III, 44, 82.
popular Over the Garden Wall to an excellent house (Observer, Wednesday, September 23, 1885). On September 30, once again Ada Gray appeared in East Lynne. The Observer wrote: "East Lynne is a play that has become somewhat monotonous on our stage . . . but at the hands of Miss Gray it becomes a new play . . ." (Observer, Thursday, October 1, 1885). Although Burr Oaks failed in New York, 88 when it played in Charlotte on October 14, it was "a good play, by a good company . . ." (Observer, Thursday, October 15, 1885). The Milan Opera Company returned with Il Trovatore on the 19th, but did not repeat the success of Faust (Observer, Tuesday, October 20, 1885). The small, but competent company from the Bijou Opera House in New York starring Adelaide Randall played the Opera House during the annual Fair of the Carolinas. They presented the first Charlotte performance of The Mikado, but because of Fair news the review was slighted (Observer, Wednesday, October 28, 1885). On their closing night a second performance of it was requested and presented to a very large audience which gives some indication of its initial reception (Observer, Saturday, October 31, 1885). Other operas during the stand were: La Mascotte, October 28 (Observer, Thursday, October 29, 1885), and The Chimes of Normandy, October 29 (Observer, Friday, October 30, 1885).

A Hoop of Gold by Mortimer Murdoch followed on

88Odell, XII, 567.
Thursday, November 12, and played to a poor house (Observer, Friday, November 13, 1885). On Monday, November 16, the Standard Dramatic Company once again returned. This time for a three day engagement. They presented The Ticket of Leave Man on November 16 (Observer, Tuesday, November 17, 1885); Hazel Kirke, November 17 (Observer, Wednesday, November 18, 1885); and a repeat of The Ticket of Leave Man, November 18 (Observer, Thursday, November 19, 1885), at popular prices to good audiences. A Brave Woman with Sarah von Leer and James H. Hardie, a production presented at the Union Square Theatre earlier in the season,\(^{89}\) appeared on November 25 (Observer, Thursday, November 26, 1885). The Atkinson's Comedy Company brought back Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa on the night of November 27. The Observer wrote that the audience enjoyed it, but that it "does not increase in interest by repetition . . ." (Observer, Saturday, November 28, 1885). The final attraction in November was the return of Frederick Warde in Virginius on November 30 (Observer, Tuesday, December 1, 1885).

Fred and Walter Lennox, Jr., appeared at the house next in the farcical Skipped by the Light of the Moon on December 2 (Observer, Thursday, December 3, 1885). Following on December 7 was Bella Moore in A Mountain Pink, or Life Among the Moonshiners of North Carolina, which played

\(^{89}\) Brown, III, 175.
to a poor house (Observer, Tuesday, December 8, 1885). Next, the outstanding violinist, Camilla Urso, appeared with her company of pianists, vocalists, and readers, on December 22 and delighted a very "select and critical audience" (Observer, Wednesday, December 23, 1885). A Brave Woman returned on December 23, but bad weather kept the audience small (Observer, Thursday, December 24, 1885). On New Year's Eve "St. Nicholas, a Cantata," directed by Mr. Arthur Butt was presented by the young people (Observer, Friday, January 1, 1886). The venerable Charles W. Couldock appeared for the first time in Charlotte in one of his most successful roles, Luke Fielding in The Willow Copse, a role that he had originated in the 1858 premiere, on January 9, but unfortunately the temperature fell to 11 degrees above and the house was sparse (Observer, Sunday, January 10, 1886). On January 28 the Fay Templeton Company, composed of thirty artists plus an orchestra, presented a full production of The Mikado. The production by the Bijou Opera Company earlier in the season had only whetted the appetite for the new Gilbert and Sullivan. The Observer, said of the January troupe:

It has been many days since the opera house was packed as it was last night, and it has also been many days since such an excellent performance was witnessed . . . with the full chorus and the fine cast of characters it was presented in a manner that must have been

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90 Ibid., II, 131. 
91 Observer, January 27, 1886.
satisfactory to the most exacting critic. (Observer, Friday, January 29, 1886.)

This was followed on February 1 with another operetta, von Suppe's Boccaccio, presented by the Academy Opera Company, which was according to the Observer, "one of the finest operatic companies that has ever visited Charlotte" (Observer, Tuesday, February 2, 1886). Another opera was next. On February 10, 1886, the Emma Abbott Grand English Opera Company presented Lucia, Bride of Lammermoor. Emma Abbott, an extremely fine opera singer who reached stardom and then toured first-class opera productions on the road, had long been awaited in Charlotte and the advance sale was quite large. The performance

. . . drew together an audience whose brilliancy has not been surpassed in this city. For half an hour previous to the rise of the curtain, last night, nearly every seat in the opera house was filled by an eager and expectant audience, made up of the culture of Charlotte and surrounding towns. All expected a delightful musical treat, and their expectations were realized to the highest degree.

It is a difficult matter, with the time and space at our command, to give a criticism that would be entirely worthy the gifted songstress, whose glorious voice and perfect acting drew forth storm after storm of applause. (Observer, Thursday, February 11, 1886.)

On the next night Tony Denier's New Humpty Dumpty, entitled, The Wild West, Buffalo Bull's Last Miss, was, of course, a rousing success (Observer, Friday, February 12, 1886). May Blossom with Georgia Cayvan, the actress who had played in

92Odell, XI, 51.
the original highly successful run at the Madison Square Theatre, played to a large and delighted house on February 16 (Observer, Wednesday, February 17, 1886). The McIntire and Heath Minstrels appeared on Saturday, February 20 (Observer, Sunday, February 21, 1886). Two popular stars returned the next week. On February 22, Flora Moore of A Bunch of Keys fame appeared in A Toy Pistol, a new comedy, not up to her first hit (Observer, Tuesday, February 23, 1886), and Charles L. Davis appeared in his hit, Alvin Joslin on February 27 (Observer, Sunday, February 28, 1886).

On March 1, Jennie Calef opened a three day engagement with Little Muffets. The Observer said of her that, "from the first moment she appeared, she completely captivated the audience" (Observer, Tuesday, March 2, 1886). On March 2, she played in Fanchon, the Cricket (Observer, Wednesday, March 3, 1886), and on March 3, Little Barefoot (Observer, Thursday, March 4, 1886), The Boston Star Concert Company made its first appearance in the Opera House on Monday, March 15. The high expectations which have been raised were more than fulfilled" (Observer, Tuesday, March 16, 1886). On March 25, Rev. Dr. Charles F. Deems presented his lecture entitled, "Trifles" (Observer, Friday, March 26, 1886).

93Hornblow, II, 271.

94Not to be confused with the Boston Concert Company which appeared on February 11, 1884.
Only a Farmer's Daughter by Elliott Barnes was next on April 7, with Blanche Curtisse. The audience was small (Observer, Thursday, April 8, 1886). It was the last play of the season. On April 16, the Carolina Concert Company "rendered a fine concert before a rather small, but thoroughly appreciative audience" (Observer, Saturday, April 17, 1886).

Beginning May 11, Zera Semon, magician, with Bell's Original Royal Marionettes played a five night stand, Tuesday through Saturday with a matinee on the last day. The audiences were fascinated and got larger and larger as the week progressed (Observer, Wednesday--Sunday, May 12--May 16, 1886). On May 28, the White Graded Schools gave its annual entertainment (Observer, Saturday, May 29, 1886), and on June 4, the commencement exercises for the Macon High School were held there (Observer, Saturday, June 5, 1886).

Statistically, the season had been the best since the 1880-1881 season with fifty-one events in the Opera House. Twelve companies had presented thirty-six theatrical productions. There had been three musical concerts; one minstrel; one variety show and eight miscellaneous events. There had also been two amateur musical entertainments, but again no amateur theatricals.

One of the most interesting phenomena of the season was the appearance in Charlotte for the first time of a stock company for an extended run. The Standard Dramatic
Company, a stock company touring the South, had with success presented fourteen plays in seventeen performances in three engagements. These figures include the summer season in 1885.

Among the most famous personalities who had come to Charlotte during the season were: Robert L. Downing, Ada Gray, Charles W. Couldock, Fay Templeton, Emma Abbott, and Charles L. Davis.
CHAPTER III

THE SECOND PERIOD—1886-1890

THE OPERA HOUSE AND

GRAY'S ACADEMY OF MUSIC

For eleven years the Charlotte Opera House had been the cultural center of the community. The season of 1886-1887 saw the opening of Nat Gray's new Academy of Music, which gave Charlotte a second opera house. Work on the Academy, located on the south side of West Trade Street between Poplar and Mint Streets, had begun in early August, 1885, but in early November Mr. Gray, Builder and manager, realizing that it could not be equipped in time for the current season, 1885-1886, opened it as a skating rink.

In the late spring and summer prior to the opening of the Fall 1886 season, the work of completing the building for use as a theatre began. "The main floor will be filled with opera chairs and a tier of balconies will be constructed giving the house a seating capacity of 700" (Observer, Thursday, May 20, 1886). More details were revealed in a progress report on June 12 in the Observer.

The interior of this building will be arranged very much on the plan of the Charlotte opera house, except

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1Observer, August 11, 1885. 2Ibid., September 4, 1885.
that the balcony does not curve around the sides, but is square from wall to wall, extending well over the auditorium. The stage is large and roomy and is constructed on the latest design, the front being slightly lower than the rear part. The dressing rooms will be downstairs under the stage. (Observer, Saturday, June 12, 1886.)

No definite date can be determined for the opening date of Gray's Academy of Music. It was in operation by Monday, September 20, for there is an account of an entertainment presented there by the ladies of the Lutheran Church (Charlotte-Democrat, Friday, September 24, 1886), but the unavailability of daily newspapers for the month of September and early October, coupled with the disastrous earthquake that struck the Charleston, South Carolina, area on August 31 and usurped all space in the weekly publications, has created a gap of several weeks in the daily newspaper history of Charlotte.

The Opera House underwent repairs and repainting to be prepared for a season with competition (Charlotte-Democrat, Friday, July 16, 1886).

Tickets at the first-class productions at the Opera House stayed generally in the $1.00 to 50¢ price range, but for Fanny Davenport in March, 1887, reserved seats cost $1.25 (Chronicle, Wednesday, March 9, 1887), and for the Emma Juch Operatic Company in March, 1889, the top price was $1.50 (Chronicle, Thursday, March 14, 1889). Advance reservations for Opera House performances were made at Reece's Drug Store until December, 1888, when the advance
sale was moved to M. P. Pegram's, Haberdasher. Popular-priced entertainment appeared more frequently at the Opera House than in the past, but, in general, the bill there was first-class entertainment at first-class prices.

At the Academy of Music the prevailing price for most of the performances was within the popular-price range, 10 to 30 cents or 25 to 75 cents, with a few performances going at $1.00 top. Advance sale and reserved seats were handled at Ross and Adams Book Store.

The problem of accuracy of the ownership and management of the Opera House has been discussed in the Introduction, but throughout this period L. W. Sanders is referred to frequently enough by the newspapers as manager to establish the fact that he was the manager of the house from 1886 to 1890. Cost of running the Opera House is, of course, not available, but in 1889 the fifteen year tax exemption, voted by the Board of Aldermen when the house was built, terrestrial, and so the operating cost of the house went up $75 for the annual city license. This fee was based on the census of 1880 which placed Charlotte with less than 10,000 people, but in the next year, 1890, the fee was increased to $100 annually for the census figures of that year showed a population in Charlotte of 11,557.

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3 Page 53. 4 Chronicle, January 2, 1889.
5 Blythe and Brockmann, p. 449.
Nat Gray was the owner and manager of the Academy of Music. Although nothing is known about the operating cost of his establishment, there are records in the Clerk of Courts Office in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, to show that he went from one mortgage to another. Some of these he was able to pay off, but after a few seasons of struggling he lost the Academy with a mortgage foreclosure. He tried to hold on to it, even converting the Academy back into a skating rink at various times when popular-price companies were unavailable.

During the fall of 1887 a YMCA Building was begun at 206 South Tryon, across the street from the Opera House. It was completed in the spring of 1888. On the second floor there was an assembly hall 24 feet by 35 feet surrounded by a gallery on the third floor (Chronicle, Saturday, September 3, 1887). Called Association Hall, it was used for meetings, lectures, concerts, etc. In October, 1888, the YMCA began a series of programs called the Star Course, which offered a number of outstanding programs, lectures, and concerts on

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7 Blythe and Brockmann, p. 376.
a subscription basis. Mrs. Scott Siddons, reader, opened the series on the evening of October 16,

Mrs. Scott Siddons gave a programme of readings . . . and was greeted by a large audience, the largest indeed, that has ever assembled in that hall[Association Hall of the YMCA]. The first impression one gains of Mrs. Siddons is that she is a beautiful woman and an elegant reader. The programme rendered last night was quite a long one, but the audience was in no way tired. Mrs. Siddons could have been listened to for an hour longer with pleasure. (Chronicle, Wednesday, October 17, 1888.)

The Star Course, or the Star Entertainment Course, as it was sometimes called, was a popular series in Charlotte and continued up into the 20th century. A sampling of the offerings from the first and second seasons gives a clear picture of the type of programs presented. Some were:

C. E. Bolton, Illustrated Lecturer, speaking on "Russia and the Romanoffs"; the Boston Symphony Orchestra Club; Philip Philips' Around the World in a Chariot of Song, Songs Illustrated and Tours Illuminated; and Carlton Hillyer, speaking on "Thrift and Spend-Thrift."

During this period, along with the industrial growth of the city, electricity came to Charlotte, bringing with it potential for greater growth. There is no record when the Opera House converted from gas to electricity. Also in 1887 street car service began in the town and thereafter cars always ran their last trip immediately after the theatre performance (Chronicle, Friday, January 14, 1887).
An earthquake and the opening of the new Gray's Academy of Music made the beginning of the 1886-1887 season eventful. On August 31, the theatrical season opened with *Under the Lash* at the Opera House starring Walter S. Sanford and the original New York cast (*North Carolina Herald*, Thursday, August 26, 1886). The play was never finished, for soon after it began the Charleston, South Carolina, area was struck by one of the worst earthquakes ever to hit the Eastern coast. Severe earth shocks were felt as far inland as Charlotte and farther.

At the Opera House, the play "Under the Lash," was in progress, and the second scene was being enacted, when the building began to crack. The people arose in their seats but all appeared to be calm and collected, and fears that were at first entertained of a stampede were at once allayed. The second shock came, and then there was a hurried but orderly exit from the building. In two minutes the house was cleared, the lights were out, the play was ended. (*The Charlotte Home-Democrat*, Friday, September 3, 1886.)

No daily newspaper are extant for the month of September and part of October, 1886, and the weeklies, which never gave much space to theatre coverage at any time were completely filled with news of the disaster. Gray's Academy of Music opened during this month and a half, for there is a report of a musical entertainment being presented there by the ladies of the Lutheran Church on Monday, September 20 (*Charlotte-Democrat*, Friday, September 24, 1886). There is no indication that this was the opening entertainment. In
the Raleigh, North Carolina, News and Observer of September 30, there is another reference to the use of the Academy in September:

Speaking of the Ogdens . . . the Charlotte Evening Chronicle says, "At the Academy of Music the Ogden combination appeared last evening for the second time in our city. The fun on this occasion was contained in the comedies 'Shakes' and 'Smith and Brown.' 'Bamboozling' was repeated. Though the audience was smaller than the night before, yet the actors lost none of their ability to amuse. . . . Mr. Gray has given us two nights of fun and much laughter." (News and Observer, Thursday, September 30, 1886.)

The next available recorded theatrical engagement was at the Opera House on October 28. Patti Rosa returned with Fred Marsden's comedy-drama, Bob, and was "enthusiastically encored, and re-appeared in some of her songs and dances as many as three times" (Chronicle, Friday, October 29, 1886).

The Fair of the Carolinas was held the first week of November and both theatres were in full operation. The Huntley-Stark Dramatic Company with J. H. Huntley and Florence Kennedy was at the Opera House and the Belle Gilbert Company at Gray's Academy.

At the Opera House, the engagement opened on Monday, November 1, with Van, the Virginian, by Bartley Campbell (Chronicle, Tuesday, November 2, 1886), and was followed by The Lady of Lyons (Chronicle, Wednesday, November 3, 1886); The Streets of New York (Chronicle, Thursday, November 4, 1886); A Celebrated Case (Chronicle, Friday, November 5,
1886); Under The Gas Light (Chronicle, Saturday, November 6, 1886); and a repeat of Van, the Virginian (Chronicle, Sunday, November 7, 1886).

At the Academy, the Gilbert Company opened with Campbell's The Galley Slave (Chronicle, Tuesday, November 2, 1886), followed throughout the week by Young Mrs. Winthrop (Chronicle, Wednesday, November 3, 1886), Esmeralda (Chronicle, Thursday, November 4, 1886); Hazel Kirke (Chronicle, Friday, November 5, 1886); Frou-Frou (Chronicle, Saturday, November 6, 1886); and The Pink Domino (Chronicle, Sunday, November 7, 1886). Both companies played to good houses during the week. Each played at popular prices—25¢, 35¢, and 50¢.

Next the Charles L. Andrews Company presented Michael Strogoff at the Opera House, November 9, to the "largest audience" of the season "so far" (Chronicle, Wednesday, November 10, 1886). Later that week at the Academy of Music, Zera Semon and Bell's Original Royal Marionettes with the Hungarian Juggler played Thursday through Saturday including a matinee on Saturday (Chronicle, Sunday, November 14, 1886).

For eight Sundays during October and November, the Rev. J. T. Bagwell held services to capacity crowds at the Academy (Chronicle, Sunday, November 21, 1886).

Louise Rial returned with Will S. Marion for a two day engagement at the Opera House, on November 30 and December 1. Two plays by Marion were presented, Fortune's Fool
and Called Back (Chronicle, Thursday, December 2, 1886). On Friday night that week W. A. Mestayer appeared in his We, Us, & Co. (Chronicle, Saturday, December 4, 1886).

During the first two weeks of December the Academy remained dark while the Opera House had two engagements. Baird's Mammoth Minstrels appeared on Monday, December 6 (Chronicle, Tuesday, December 7, 1886), and Billy Barry and Hugh Fay in Irish Aristocracy, played Monday, December 13 (Chronicle, Tuesday, December 14, 1886).

On Tuesday, December 21, Blanche Curtisse enacted Zozo in a play by the same name at the Opera House. The Chronicle said that "it was the grandest spectacular scene ever presented to a Charlotte audience. There were many features and characters that took the house by storm and were repeated" (Chronicle, Wednesday, December 22, 1886). Jessica Thomas and Joe Physioc, both of whom had appeared as support with the Gilbert Company during its visit, came back to Charlotte as stars of their own company, the popular Price Comedy Company, and played a week's engagement at Gray's Academy beginning December 20 with Fanchon, the Cricket (Chronicle, Tuesday, December 21, 1886). During the rest of the run the company presented The Hidden Hand (Chronicle, Wednesday, December 22, 1886); Checkmated and The Loan of a Lover (Chronicle, Thursday, December 23, 1886); The Pearl of Savoy (Chronicle, Friday, December 24, 1886);
and three performances of *The Daughter of the Regiment* and *Loan of a Lover*, on Friday and Saturday, December 24 and 25 (*Chronicle*, Saturday, December 25, 1886). To complete the year, the Opera House on December 27 offered Myra Goodwin in *Kidders' Sis* (*Chronicle*, Saturday, December 25, 1886), while at the Academy there was a local musical entertainment on December 30 (*Chronicle*, Friday, December 31, 1886).

Howorth's Double Show, *The 2 Dans*, played the Opera House on January 13 (*Chronicle*, Friday, January 14, 1887). On the 15th, the Mendelssohn Quintette Club of Boston returned to give a concert at the Academy (*Democrat*, Friday, January 14, 1887). The following week on Monday and Tuesday at the Opera House, Louise Balfe and her company presented *Dagmar*, a play which the company had performed the season before in New York (*Chronicle*, Wednesday, January 19, 1887).

Beginning on January 30 for two weeks the Salvation Army held nightly meetings at the Academy of Music.

One of the major theatrical events of the season took place at the Opera House on Wednesday, February 2. Mlle. Rhea, one of the most prominent stars of the day, appeared in *The Widow* adapted from the French of Meilhac and Halevy. The advance sale was large, parties came from all the neighboring towns on trains which gave special rates for

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8 Odell, XIII, 150, 183. 9 Hornblow, II, 278.
the occasion (Chronicle, Wednesday, February 2, 1887). Of the performance, the Chronicle wrote:

The Opera House was last night filled almost to its fullest capacity, an audience representing the culture of the city having assembled to see M’lle Rhea. . . . The character was one that brought out that charming finesse and consummate skill that invariably mark her acting. . . . The play was altogether one of the finest theatrical treats that our people have enjoyed for years past, and it merited the great praise bestowed upon it by the large audience. (Chronicle, Thursday, February 3, 1887.)

Another outstanding foreign actress of the day, Mme. Janish, who had been highly acclaimed in Atlanta just prior to her visit,10 appeared at the Opera House on Friday, February 11, in Sardou’s new play, Princess Andrea.

Madame Janish is a fine actress and possesses powers that place her in the front rank of the greatest actresses of the day. She was frequently called before the curtain last night, and we have seldom seen a Charlotte audience so free in its encores. (Chronicle, Saturday, February 12, 1887.)

Gus Williams, a popular comedian since his first appearance in Charlotte in Our German Senator in 1880,11 presented Oh! What a Night at the Opera House on February 17. The Chronicle felt that the play was "not a very good one" (Chronicle, Friday, February 18, 1887).

The Academy of Music opened its doors again to drama when on Monday, February 21, the Cora Van Tassel Comedy Company began a week’s engagement there with The Danites

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10 Chronicle, February 9, 1887. 11 Page 105.
(Chronicle, Tuesday, February 22, 1887). Although the audience was small, with the prices set at 10¢, 20¢, and 30¢ plus good reviews the audiences increased nightly. The rest of the week their repertoire included: Kathleen Mavourneen and Uncle Joshua Whitcombe (Chronicle, February 23, 1887); M'liss (Chronicle, Wednesday, February 23, 1887); Esmeralda (Chronicle, Friday, February 25, 1887); Hazel Kirke (Chronicle, Saturday, February 26, 1887); a repeat of M'liss for the Saturday matinee, and The Hidden Hand (Chronicle, Sunday, February 27, 1887).

On March 4, Aiden Benedict in Monte Cristo played at the Opera House to a good review (Chronicle, Saturday, March 5, 1887). Fanny Davenport, remembered for her lovely Rosalind in As You Like It in 1878, returned to Charlotte to appear at the Opera House on March 15 in Sardou's Fedora, one of her great successes.¹² A great deal of excitement surrounded her visit and a special train from Statesville brought about seventy passengers to see the star (Chronicle, Wednesday, March 16, 1887). In reviewing the play and Miss Davenport's performance, the Chronicle wrote:

She gave the finest dramatic performance of the season. The play is a strong emotional drama, yet its construction is such that it gives the talented actress the opportunity of striking alike the chords of light gayety [sic] and deep emotion. (Chronicle, Wednesday, March 16, 1887.)

¹²Wilson, p. 135.
The next week the Carrie Stanley Monte Cristo Company appeared at the Academy with The Woman in Red on Wednesday, March 23 (Chronicle, Thursday, March 24, 1887), and in Monte Cristo, the next night (Chronicle, Friday, March 25, 1887).

The last performance of the season at the Opera House was McNish, Johnson, and Slavin's Refined Minstrels on Monday, March 28 (Chronicle, Sunday, March 27). The Academy of Music finished the season with the Charles Guiness Company in Peck's Bad Boy, the first of many productions for Charlotte, on April 1 (Chronicle, Wednesday, March 30, 1887). Several local entertainments were presented at the Academy during the summer and the Salvation Army returned for a time in August.

Theatrical highlights of the season was the opening of a new house offering entertainment at popular prices, and the appearances of Fanny Davenport, Mlle. Rhea, and Mme. Janish.

Statistically the season looked this way: At the Opera House fifteen companies presented twenty-two theatrical productions plus two variety shows and two minstrels, making a total of twenty-six times the Opera House was open. Gray's Academy of Music, offering popular priced entertainment, had only five companies presenting twenty-three theatrical productions plus five variety shows and one
musical program and four amateur musicals, making a total of thirty-three professional and amateur offerings. Together the Opera House and the Academy offered: forty-five theatrical productions, seven variety shows, two minstrels, and five musical entertainments. In addition the Academy was used for twenty-five religious meeting.

1887-1888

Helen Blythe, an original member of the Augustin Daly company at Daly's Theatre in 1879, opened the season at the Opera House in Only a Woman's Heart on Tuesday, September 6, 1887 (Chronicle, Wednesday, September 7, 1887). The Chronicle called it "one of the most moral and elevating of all the plays yet witnessed in this city." The second engagement was Fred Bangs in Russia on September 12 (Chronicle, Sunday, August 21, 1887).

At the Academy the season got off to a slow start with two lectures, one on "Human, Soul and Mind" delivered by Dr. R. L. Abernathy of Rutherford College (Chronicle, Saturday, September 24, 1887), and a temperance lecture by a Mrs. Goodall (Chronicle, Thursday, October 6, 1887). Next the Salvation Army held a wedding there for two of its members, "15¢ a ticket and the hat was passed twice" (Chronicle,

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13 Odell, XI, 13.
Sunday, October 9, 1887). There was a benefit exhibition of Mr. Arthur L. Butt's panorama, now 7,560 square feet of canvas, on October 13 and 14 (Chronicle, Friday, October 14, 1887), and the Ladies Aid Society of the Tryon Street Methodist Church held an entertainment on October 18. Beginning October 27 for three nights, Professor Lowanda's Specialty Company and Mammoth Gift Festival held the boards at the Academy before large audiences each night. Mr. Thomas Black drew the leading gift on the final night—a cow (Chronicle, Sunday, October 30, 1887).

At the Opera House during October things were more legitimate. Mrs. D. P. Bowers, famous tragedienne,\(^{14}\) appeared with an excellent company in Madame Croesus on October 5. Mrs. Bowers, remembered for her performance in Lady Jane Gray with Charlotte Thompson in 1880, "sustained her character remarkably well and showed fine powers as an emotional actress" (Chronicle, Thursday, October 6, 1887). The Baird's Mammoth Minstrels played the following two nights to large audiences (Chronicle, Friday, October 7, 1887, and Saturday, October 8, 1887). On October 24 and 25, Mable Sterling, a minor variety performer at Tony Pastor's in 1885,\(^{15}\) brought Three Corners to the Opera House. A


\(^{15}\)Odell, XIII, 83, 90.
large audience attended the first showing and enjoyed it (Chronicle, Tuesday, October 25, 1887), but a small house greeted the second night (Chronicle, Wednesday, October 26, 1887).

The largest audiences ever to fill the Academy saw the three day engagement of Bell's Original Royal Marionettes and Company with performances on November 3-5 (Chronicle, Sunday, November 6, 1887).

J. B. Polk appeared in the Opera House on November 5 in his specialty, Mixed Pickles (Chronicle, Sunday, November 6, 1887), while Daniel A. Kelly played in The Shadow Detective, or Leonie, The Waif, on November 8. "Mr. Kelly assumed four different characters and won the enthusiastic applause of the audience" (Chronicle, Wednesday, November 9, 1887). The Templeton Opera Company returned to the Opera House on Thursday and Friday nights, November 10 and 11, and presented The Mikado and Herminie. The former was particularly well received by a large audience (Chronicle, Friday, November 11, 1887). The company stayed over and presented Girofla on Saturday, November 12 (Chronicle, Sunday, November 13, 1887). Marie Prescott and R. D. McLean followed on November 14 with the old standard Ingomar (Chronicle, Tuesday, November 15, 1887).

On November 21 Jessica Thomas and Joe Physioc returned to the Academy and opened a two night engagement with The Daughter of the Regiment and The Loan of a Lover.
on the first night. The company was as successful as it had been the season before (Chronicle, Tuesday, November 22, 1887), and presented The Little Devils on Tuesday night (Chronicle, Wednesday, November 23, 1887).

Following on the next night, November 23, at the Opera House were Harry Webber and Carrie Dillon in Nip and Tuck (Chronicle, Thursday, November 24, 1887). On November 28, the MacCollins Opera Comique Company presented Millocker's Beggar Student, "one of the finest operatic treats of the season" (Chronicle, Tuesday, November 29, 1887).

Monday through Wednesday, December 5-7, the Academy was converted back into a skating rink, but on Thursday, December 8, the Meyer-Thorne Comedy Company opened for three nights at popular prices. The company presented Woman's Devotion, or Stricken Blind on December 8 (Chronicle, Friday, December 9, 1887); Rip Van Winkle, December 9 (Chronicle, Saturday, December 10, 1887); and The Rebel Chief, December 10 (Chronicle, Saturday, December 10, 1887).

Bob with Patti Rosa was the bill at the Opera House for December 14 (Chronicle, Friday, December 9, 1887), while Miss Charlotte Thompson, living up to her past successes in Charlotte, was repeatedly called before the curtain for her portrayal in Drifting Clouds on December 16 (Chronicle, Saturday, December 17, 1887).

Opening on December 15 at the Academy in L'Eclair
and Leobena was the Kate Bensberg English Opera Company, a small company of four singers, but a company which according to the review of its second production, L'Ombra on December 16, was excellent (Chronicle, Saturday, December 17, 1887). By special request, the company stayed over and performed The Sleeping Queen on Saturday (Chronicle, Saturday, December 17, 1887).

To close out the year the Opera House offered Rose Osborne on December 26, with Forget-Me-Not, at the matinee, and Fortune's Fool in the evening, and L'Article 47, December 27. Reviewing all three after the Chronicle's Christmas holiday, the paper said that large audiences had attended and the performances had been meritorious (Chronicle, Thursday, December 29, 1887).

During the month of January the Academy of Music had only three nights of entertainments. The most important of these was the Mendelssohn Quintette Club Concert Company of Boston, which was announced for January 6 (Chronicle, Sunday, January 1, 1888). A Chinese Student Company, under the auspices of the Ladies Aid Society of the Tryon Street Methodist Church, presented a Chinese wedding and exhibited Chinese wonders and curiosities on January 10 (Chronicle, Friday, January 6, 1888), and Professor A. A. Hopkins delivered a prohibition lecture on January 24 (Chronicle, Wednesday, January 25, 1888).

The Opera House began the second part of the season with a return of the exciting Mlle. Rhea, one of the artistic
and popular successes of the previous season, in Fairy Fingers on January 24. Once again she played to a

... large and cultured audience. ... The play is cleverly constructed and is presented in an exceedingly entertaining manner by the charming actress. Besides being a remarkably strong play, it gives scope for a most bewildering display of gorgeous dresses. (Chronicle, Wednesday, January 25, 1888.)

Wilson and Rankin's Minstrels on January 28 was the only other presentation at the Opera House that month (Chronicle, Sunday, January 29, 1888).

The Boston Star Concert Company played at the Opera House on February 6 to an excellent house (Chronicle, Tuesday, February 7, 1888). A week later at the Academy, Adelaide G. Smith, Negro prima donna, presented a concert to the "elite of our colored population ... and a large number of white people.... The programme was a lengthy one, including songs and recitations, and on the whole was a very enjoyable affair." (Chronicle, Tuesday, February 14, 1888.) On February 24 at the Opera House another concert created excitement. Jules Levy, the famous cornettist, played. The advance sale was heavy with groups coming from surrounding communities to hear him. (Chronicle, Thursday, February 23, 1888.) McIntyre and Heath's Model Minstrels at the Opera House finished the entertainment for February on the 25th (Chronicle, Sunday, February 26, 1888), while skating continued at intervals at the Academy.

The Opera House presented the Andress' Carnival of Novelties on March 1, 2, and 3 (Chronicle, Friday, March 2,
and Sunday, March 3, 1888). Charles L. Andrews and Company returned with Michael Strogoff on March 9, but it "was not as well done" as the previous year (Chronicle, Saturday, March 10, 1888). On March 15 a large Railroad Meeting was held there (Chronicle, Thursday, March 15, 1888).

The last theatre productions of the season were held in the Academy of Music when the Meyer-Thorne Dramatic Company, which appeared earlier in the season, returned for a three-day engagement beginning on Monday, April 2. They opened with Rip Van Winkle (Chronicle, Tuesday, April 3, 1888), then played Ten Nights in a Barroom (Chronicle, Wednesday, April 4, 1888), and East Lynn (Chronicle, Wednesday, April 4, 1888). On the next evening, April 4, the Till Family and their Rock Band Concert Company, presented a program there. The Chronicle said that it was "a remarkable musical performance before a large and appreciative audience. The ringing stones proved a decided novelty" (Chronicle, Friday, April 6, 1888). On April 10 the Tryon Street Methodist Sunday School young people presented an entertainment at the Academy (Chronicle, Wednesday, April 11, 1888). During the summer months the Academy was open for two events other than skating, on June 29 the Kanya Geza—Hungarian Gypsy Quartette was announced (Chronicle, Friday, June 29, 1888), and on July 11—13, Charles and Martha Steen, mystics, appeared before large and enthusiastic audiences (Chronicle, Thursday, July 12, and Friday, July 13, 1888).
During the season which opened September 6 and closed April 5, there had been sixty-four entertainments. At the Opera House fifteen companies had presented nineteen theatrical productions, while at the Academy of Music four companies had presented eleven productions. There had been four minstrels, three variety shows, two musical entertainments and one miscellaneous affair at the Opera House, while at the Academy there had been ten variety shows including two amateur shows, five musical programs and nine miscellaneous events. There had been no minstrels at the Academy.

Highlights of the season were few, but the return engagements of Mlle. Rhea and Mrs. Bowers must be listed.

1888-1889

Although the Black Diamond Quartette, a Negro group, played at the Opera House on August 27 and 28 before an unusually large audience (Chronicle, Tuesday, August 28, 1888), the official theatrical season did not open until September 8, when Lost in London played there with Newton Beers, who had recently played it in New York theatres,16 (Chronicle, Sunday, September 9, 1888).

On September 21 at the Academy there was a private showing of Arthur Butt's newest panorama, the lessons of "intemperance." It was declared as "thrilling and moral" by the Chronicle (Chronicle, Sunday, September 23, 1888). On September 27, and, by demand, on the 28th, the paintings

16Brown, II, 366, 533.
were shown to overflow audiences (*Chronicle*, Friday, September 28, 1888).

A Wilmington amateur group presented *The Little Tycoon* on September 24 at the Opera House (*Chronicle*, Tuesday, September 23, 1888), and E. P. Kendall in *A Pair of Kids* was next on October 2 (*Chronicle*, Wednesday, October 3, 1888).

The next week at the Academy the Edwards and Rivers Grand Gift Carnival and Musical Comedy Company played on Monday and Tuesday, October 8 and 9 (*Chronicle*, Sunday, October 7, 1888), and Gorton's New Orleans Minstrels appeared on Thursday, October 11. The *Chronicle* could not endorse the show in its review the next day.

The company is entirely too small to be classed among minstrels, and as a minstrel show it is a failure. . . . The *CHRONICLE* will not willingly see its readers imposed upon by a poor show as that given last night. (*Chronicle*, Friday, October 12, 1888.)

Another show that met with disfavor at the Academy gave the *Chronicle* opportunity to print its policy toward coverage of upcoming productions. Concerning the Granville-Warner Company's *The Long Strike*, presented on October 19, the *Chronicle* wrote:

The performance was beneath criticism. . . . The *CHRONICLE* has promised to keep a lookout for the expressions of reputable papers as to shows that come here, and it will give due notice of such performances as it can honestly commend; in other cases, it will be silent, because it will not feel justified in denouncing the performance beforehand, but its silence will be trumpet loud!
The manager of the Academy of Music can scarcely expect public support, after bringing two such shows here consecutively as Gorton's Minstrels and the Granville-Warner Company. It is not sufficient excuse to say he did not know the merits of the shows; for it is his business to find out, and it is not at all difficult for a manager to get "straight tips" about any and every show. (Chronicle, Saturday, October 20, 1888.)

Madame Janauschek appeared at the Opera House on one of her "Farewell Tours" on October 25 and 26 in two of her most renowned roles, Lady Macbeth and Meg Merrilies. Unfortunately there is no review of Macbeth, but of her portrayal as Meg Merrilies the Chronicle wrote:

The audience numbered only some two hundred, but they were rewarded with an exhibition of historical ability such as is rarely seen off the Metropolitan boards. The great actress finds in the weird, uncanny, and picturesque character of the gypsy queen, a part that calls for the display of her strongest powers, and on this occasion, as usual, she lost her identity in the personation created by the Scottish novelist. (Chronicle, Saturday, October 27, 1888.)

Around the World in Eighty Days was next at the Opera House on November 14. The Chronicle, in advance of the show, had called it an "extravagant variety show... well presented by an excellent company." The manager of the company took exception to the use of the term "variety" and blasted the Chronicle from the stage.

17 William J. Yates, editor of the Charlotte Democrat and prominent citizen, died suddenly and the Friday, October 26, Chronicle, was devoted to him.

18 Chronicle, November 13, 1888.
The paper retorted with a major editorial stating its policy toward engagements and asking for public support of its policy. The editorial stated:

The CHRONICLE in its honest effort to tell what it knows, and can learn in advance of plays billed for Charlotte, has the interests of the public at heart; and it will peruse the honest course laid out by it, irrespective of such scenes as that of last night.

Whether in the word variety, the CHRONICLE was not technical, is a small matter. A ballet introduced into a modern life drama, certainly smacks of variety. So far as the Opera House is concerned, it has up to now given worthy performances; and this paper has honestly striven to get it good audiences, not only by local notices but by editorial advocacy of the best plays that have been presented. It is impossible for the managers of the Opera House never to be deceived in a show that he has not seen, as he has confessed to the CHRONICLE. . . .

The Opera House will continue to be praised for all its good shows, and the CHRONICLE only hopes it will be as successful in catering to the elevated tastes of the community in the future, as it has, in the main, up to this time of the season.

Now let the people of Charlotte say, whether or not the CHRONICLE was wrong in its advance notice. (Chronicle, Thursday, November 15, 1888.)

The next day the editor felt reassured enough to write:

The CHRONICLE proposes to go on telling the exact truth about plays to be produced in this city. Calmly and firmly it will do its duty towards its readers. It will have no prejudices and no favoritism. It will harbor no resentment towards the opera house in which it was assailed, or the dramatic company which contains the actor who abused it. It has the confidence of the people of Charlotte and the surrounding country. It will preserve their trust in its integrity, fair-mindedness and truthfulness at all hazards. It is to be NEITHER INTIMIDATED NOR BOUGHT. (Chronicle, Friday, November 16, 1888.)

A local production of the cantata, Esther, was presented at the Opera House on November 19 and 20 (Chronicle,
On November 26 and 27, the daughter of the Confederate General Albert Gallatin Jenkins, who appeared under the name of Miss Alberta Gallatin, played *Ingomar* and *As You Like It* at the Opera House to very poor houses, but to good reviews (*Chronicle*, Tuesday, November 27, and Wednesday, November 28, 1888).

During the nights of her run, Prof. Burke's Equine College held the audiences at the Academy. The Professor played two evening and two matinee performances to full houses on November 26-28 (*Chronicle*, Wednesday, November 28, 1888).

On December 12, the New Thomas' San Francisco Minstrels appeared at the Opera House. The *Chronicle* reported that they were "much below the average standard minstrelsy" (*Chronicle*, Thursday, December 13, 1888). The next night Lavinia Shannon, who had played support to Janauschek in New York earlier in her career, appeared in *The Mystery of Audley Court* at the Opera House (*Chronicle*, Friday, December 14, 1888). Hamilton's New York Church Choir Company presented two nights of comic opera on December 14 and 15. After opening with *The Bohemian Girl*, which was quite familiar to the audience (*Chronicle*, Saturday, December 15, 1888),

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19 Odell, XII, 233.
they played Gilbert and Sullivan's *Ruddygore* on the second night (*Chronicle*, Tuesday, December 18, 1888). *Peck's Bad Boy* was the attraction on December 18 at the Opera House. The Atkinson Company was far superior to the one that had presented the play earlier (*The Daily News*, Wednesday, December 19, 1888). The following evening the domestic drama, *Philip Herne*, was presented by the Union Square Theatre Company with Frederick Paulding (*The Daily News*, Thursday, December 20, 1888). To close the entertainment at the Opera House for the year, Willis, Henshaw, and Ten Broeck, variety stars on Broadway, played *Two Old Cronies* on Friday, December 21, and the *Chronicle* declared it "far cleverer and much funnier than the best minstrel show" (*Chronicle*, Saturday, December 22, 1888).

A local children's Christmas Tree program was presented at the Academy on Christmas Eve (*Daily News*, Wednesday, December 26, 1888). The final attraction there was the Hillyer's Lilliputan Wonders and Grand Gift Carnival show on December 27 and 28 (*Daily News*, Friday, December 28, 1888).

Theo Hamilton opened the new year at the Opera House in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* on the 1st (*Chronicle*, Wednesday, January 2, 1889), followed by Estelle Clayton in *The Quick or the Dead* on January 2 (*Chronicle*, Thursday, January 3, 1889).

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1899). On January 9, Lotta finally came to Charlotte.

Lotta, Charlotte Crabtree, had been a reigning star for over twenty years. Her arrival in Charlotte is recorded by the *Daily News*.

Lotta arrived in the city today on the noon train, in her private Pullman car, and along with her on the same train came a large party of people who will see her in the opera house tonight. Lotta's car is a model of convenience, and a more comfortable home on wheels could not be imagined. . . . The actress reclined in a crimson silk plush chair as the train rolled into the depot, and looked out of the window upon a moving mass of humanity. She saw the street cars, hacks and cabs filled with people going up town, and knew well enough that the majority of them were rushing for tickets for her show. When the reporter saw her, she was enveloped in furs, as if she were in an artic town, but after half an hour of Charlotte sunshine, she laid her handsome wraps aside and stepped out on the car platform to enjoy a sun bath. (*Daily News*, Wednesday, January 9, 1889).

The advance sale was great; people came many miles to see her. The play was *Pawn Ticket—No. 210*. The *Chronicle* records her performance in its review:

One of the largest audiences to witness a play in Charlotte this season. . . . It is neither stretching imagination nor flattery to say the audience was composed for the most part of the most cultured, refined and respected citizens. . . .

From the first, as was to have been expected Lotta captured the house, she never lost her control of the role for a single moment. She is graceful, as cute, and as chic as can be. The only evidence of her age was discovered in her voice. In high notes of song or conversation, she could not control it; but one does not

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21 Wilson, p. 183.
have to hear Lotta, he goes to see her. (Chronicle, Thursday, January 10, 1889.)

McNish, Ramza, and Arno's Refined Minstrels were announced for the Opera House for January 18 (Chronicle, Sunday, January 13, 1889), and beginning on January 29, Bell's Original Marionettes and Grand Gift Carnival played the Opera House at popular prices for four nights plus a matinee. There was a free stereopticon exhibition in front of the theatre every night during the run. It was a popular engagement (Chronicle, Friday, February 1, 1889).

Frank Mayo, popular star, appeared in The Royal Guard, a romantic drama based on the character of D'Artagnan from the Three Musketeers, at the Opera House on Saturday, February 2. The actor was "superb," the support "remarkably good," the audience small (Chronicle, Sunday, February 3, 1889). A large audience attended Skipped By the Light of the Moon on February 14, presented by the Fowler and Warmington Company, but as the Chronicle wrote, "The fun is not refined. . . . There was more buffoonery than wit or simple fun in the performance," and the audience was not satisfied (Chronicle, Friday, February 15, 1889). Later on February 23, Theodora, the Lion Queen, played with Marie Hilforde (Chronicle, Monday, February 25, 1889).

Muggs' Landing was announced for Monday, March 4,

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22 Chronicle, February 3, 1889.
at the Opera House, because of the Harrison Inaugural, no space was given it in the Tuesday, March 5, newspaper (Chronicle, Friday, March 1, 1889). The next engagement was a return of Myra Goodwin in her comedy specialty, *Sis*, on March 6. It was popular and some people thought that "she was the superior of Lotta" (Daily News, Thursday, March 7, 1889). Emma Juch, outstanding opera and concert star from the National Opera Company, with her company presented an operatic concert at the Opera House on March 19. The management of the House had to assume all risk in the engagement, so it is good to note that the audience was large and the event successful. The Chronicle said of Juch's performance that "in her voice and execution the highest expectations were realized. . . . It was perfect singing."

Of another member of the company, Victor Herbert, it said:

He rendered a cello solo, Fantasie, by Servais, that for sweetness and delicacy could hardly have been excelled by Blumenberg. He was gracious enough, too, to respond to an encore, with a catchy piece that demonstrated his wide range of power over the instrument. (Chronicle, Wednesday, March 20, 1889.)

John Wild was next in *Running Wild* on April 11 at the Opera House (Chronicle, Friday, April 12, 1889).

The Academy of Music, having financial difficulties, had been dark since the beginning of the year. On April 26

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24 Chronicle, March 17, 1889.
there was a highly successful Ladies Entertainment for the Home and Hospital there (Chronicle, Saturday, April 27, 1889). The entertainment was repeated on April 30 (Chronicle, Wednesday, May 1, 1889).

Throughout May, home talent was on display at the Opera House. First, there was a concert by the Charlotte Philharmonic Club on May 3 (Daily News, Saturday, May 4, 1889), then on May 20 and 21, in connection with the Mecklenburg Independence Day celebration, the local amateur theatrical group presented The Star of Empire, a military drama, for the benefit of the Hornets' Nest Riflemen (Chronicle, Tuesday, May 21, and Wednesday, May 22, 1889). On May 31 the Ladies Auxiliary of the Young Men's Christian Association presented fifty children in an entertainment entitled, The Interviewer and the Fairies, directed by Arthur L. Butt (Daily News, Saturday, June 1, 1889). It was repeated on June 6 (Daily News, Friday, June 7, 1889).

At the Academy of Music, May saw Henry D. Howeren, evangelist from Charleston, preach to two large groups on Sunday, March 12 (Daily News, Monday, May 13, 1889), and on May 13, 14, and 16, Professor Tripp lecture on various subjects to very poor houses (Chronicle, Wednesday, May 15, and Thursday, May 16, 1889). On August 22, the Academy of Music, which had opened with Gray's bright hopes of bringing popular-priced entertainment to Charlotte, opened for what would be the last time. There was a local musical
entertainment. It was "a pleasant and successful affair" (Chronicle, Friday, August 23, 1889).

The season had not been good statistically, although there had been some outstanding talent. There were only twenty-six theatrical productions, including three amateur productions in the entire season. Twenty professional companies had presented twenty-two shows at the Opera House where there had also been the three amateur productions. One company had presented one play at the Academy and it had been panned. There had been three minstrels, five variety shows and five musical entertainments, including four amateur ones, at the Opera House; while the Academy of Music had one minstrel, eight variety shows, six musical entertainments including four amateur ones, and eight miscellaneous events.

Highlights of the year included the long awaited appearance of Lotta, and the return of Janauschek, Frederick Paulding, and Emma Juch.

1889-1890

The season opened with Richard and Pringle's Famous Georgia Minstrels with Billy Kersands on September 18 (Chronicle, Sunday, September 15, 1889), but it was not until the third week of October that another company appeared in the Opera House. Ezra Kendall returned with A Pair of Kids on October 9, when "the dull moments" were only
"between the acts" (Chronicle, Thursday, October 10, 1889). The next night The Main Line, a modern day drama, by Henry C. DeMille, was presented to a small audience (Chronicle, Friday, October 11, 1889). Before the end of October, on the 28th, the Augustin Daly Company appeared with A Night Off, a play the company had presented successfully in New York and London (Chronicle, Tuesday, October 29, 1889), and on the 29th An Arabian Night, or Haroun Alraschid and his Mother-in-law, a hit from their 1879-1880 season (Chronicle, Wednesday, October 30, 1889).

Goodyear, Cook and Dillon's Refined Minstrels appeared on November 6 at the House. The audience was large and enthusiastic (Chronicle, Thursday, November 7, 1889). A Possible Case with M. A. Kennedy, who had played it during the previous season in New York, followed on November 14. The Chronicle fully endorsed it, there was a large advance sale, and the play was a great success in Charlotte (Chronicle, Friday, November 15, 1889). The next night there was a local concert for the benefit of the Thompson Orphanage (Chronicle, Saturday, November 16, 1889). Next, Prof. Gentry's Canine Paradox appeared for two nights and a matinee on November 27 and 28 (Chronicle, Friday, November 29, 1889).

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27 Ibid., III, 254.
We, *Us and Co.*, which had been popular when first presented in Charlotte in 1886, returned at popular prices and drew a good audience on November 30 (*Chronicle*, Sunday, December 1, 1889).

On December 2 and 3, Newton Beers' production of *Lost in London* played to below average audiences (*Chronicle*, Tuesday, December 3, and Wednesday, December 4, 1889). At 12:00 on December 11 Memorial Services for Jefferson Davis were held at the Opera House to an overflowing audience (*Chronicle*, Thursday, December 12, 1889). On December 12, Charles A. Gardner in *Fatherland* played to a "large and cultivated audience" and was called "before the curtain at the end of the second act . . ." (*Chronicle*, Friday, December 13, 1889). *Only A Farmer's Daughter* played December 16 (*Chronicle*, Tuesday, December 17, 1889). On Thursday, December 19, Signor Bosco, musician and humorist, and Prof. Alfred Deane, ventriloquist, began a three day engagement (*Chronicle*, Sunday, December 22, 1889). Two local musical entertainments finished the month. They were "The Seasons, a Cantata," on December 23 (*Chronicle*, Tuesday, December 23, 1889), and "Santa Claus, a Cantata," on December 26 (*Chronicle*, Friday, December 27, 1889). "The Seasons" was repeated on January 9 (*Chronicle*, Friday, January 10, 1890).

January 16 found Myra Goodwin back in the Opera House for the third time with her specialty, *Sis* (*Chronicle*,...
Friday, January 17, 1890). The Mortimer Comedy Company presented Larking on January 21. The audience was good, but the play was "bum" (Daily News, Wednesday, January 22, 1890).

Al Field and Company's Operatic Minstrels played to two of the largest audiences of the season on February 1 and 3 (Chronicle, Tuesday, February 4, 1890). Adele Frost and Company began a week's engagement at the Opera House on Monday, February 10, with Ingomar and the Chronicle wrote the next day that the company was "not strong," but that it rendered classic drama in an "acceptable manner" (Chronicle, Tuesday, February 11, 1890). Gilbert's Pygmalion and Galatea with Slasher and Crasher were presented on Tuesday night (Chronicle, Wednesday, February 12, 1890); My Uncle's Will and Josh Perkin's Visit, Wednesday (Chronicle, Thursday, February 13, 1890); Maud's Peril, Thursday (Chronicle, Friday, February 14, 1890); a repeat of Pygmalion and Galatea on Friday night along with A Distinguished Arrival (Chronicle, Saturday, February 15, 1890); a repeat of Ingomar, matinee, and Robertson's Caste, Saturday evening (Chronicle, Friday, February 14, 1890). On February 19 and 20, the Hornets' Nest Riflemen brought the Boston Stars back for two benefit concerts. The program were excellent, but the audiences not as large as expected. The Riflemen, having guaranteed $250, lost about $2.50 on the
engagement (Daily News, Friday, February 21, 1890). The last engagement in February was Mattie Vickers and Joseph M. Doner in Jacquine, or Paste and Diamonds on Tuesday, February 25. As in January, 1885, Miss Vickers charmed the audience (Chronicle, Wednesday, February 26, 1890).

Little Lord Fauntleroy came into the Opera House on March 1 for a matinee and evening performance. The matinee attracted many children. One special party was a birthday celebration given by Manager Sanders for his daughter, now Mrs. S. O. Brooke. During an interview with Mrs. Brooke, she indicated the party as one of her earliest recollections of the Opera House.

I remember Lord Fauntleroy was there [the Opera House]. I had a matinee party and Little Lord Fauntleroy came. That was one of my first recollections of the Opera House. . . . I know there was some big to do and I thought it was grand. I had a wonderful time' and all the children had a good time.28

The Daily News records the afternoon:

This has been a rainy, cold and disagreeable day, but despite the weather, there was a scene of great animation about the opera house this afternoon. Children were there in battalions before the hour for the doors to open, and when the doors were finally thrown open there was a steady trampling of feet up the stairways and the ushers were kept busy locating the crowds. It was the most successful matinee that has been given in Charlotte in years. . . . (Daily News, Saturday, March 1, 1890.)

On Monday-Wednesday, March 3-5, Prof. D. M. Bristol's Trained

28 Appendix B, Interview 1.
Horses entertained with three evenings and one matinee (Chronicle, Wednesday, March 5, 1890). Next the grand scenic melodrama, Harbor Lights, were presented on Saturday, March 8. The audience was rather small, "as it was Saturday night" (Chronicle, Sunday, March 9, 1890). Daniel Boone, The Pioneer, by Gayler, was given on March 11. The Daily News said of the play:

The play was a rattler. There were coon skin caps, big bowie knives, pistols, muskets, stage fire and lots of stage killing. There were two horses on the stage and they made a good effect. . . . The show is a good one. (Daily News, Wednesday, March 12, 1890.)

On April 4, the spectacular production of Faust with Lewis Morrison appeared on the Opera House stage. The Chronicle wrote:

The scenery was the best seen here this season and the effects were splendid. . . . The play is fascinating throughout, and the electrical effects and novel mechanism serve to heighten and intensify the interest. . . . The raining down fire and brimstone was awfully realistic.

Lewis Morrison's impression of the devil was almost faultless. His voice, figure, and face, are all wonderfully adapted to his character. (Chronicle, Saturday, April 5, 1890.)

A boxing match took place for the first time, at the Opera House on April 9. The match was between Layton and Brady. "The audience gathered at 8 o'clock and at 9:45 the curtain went up. . . . At 10 the show was over . . . so quickly that the audience didn't know whether to say that it was good or bad" (Charlotte News, Thursday, April 10, 1890).

For one last time Gray's Academy of Music, having
been dark the entire season except for occasionally being used for skating, made the news. On April 26, it was sold at public auction to satisfy a mortgage foreclosure. Mr. W. F. Buchanan bought it for four thousand five hundred and five dollars. It was converted into the Hotel Mecklenburg which formally opened on September 22, 1890 (Mecklenburg Times, Friday, September 26, 1890).

The last company to appear at the Opera House during the 1889-1890 season was the MacCollin Opera Company. They opened a four night engagement on Monday, May 19, with Falka, which proved them worthy of support (Chronicle, Tuesday, May 20, 1890). The following performances were: The Mascotte, May 20 (Chronicle, Wednesday, May 21, 1890); The Mikado, May 21, matinee (Chronicle, Sunday, May 18, 1890); The King's Musketeers, May 21, evening (Chronicle, Thursday, May 22, 1890); and The Bohemian Girl, Thursday, May 22 (Chronicle, Friday, May 23, 1890). The closing exercises for the Colored Graded School took place on Monday, May 26, at the Opera House.

The Opera House was open fifty-three times during the season with seventeen companies presenting thirty theatrical productions. There were four minstrels, ten variety shows, eight musical entertainments including four

29 Record of Sheriff's Sale dated April 26, 1890, and recorded on April 29, 1890, in Book 71, Page 91 of the Records of the Clerk of Court, Mecklenburg County, state of North Carolina.
local presentations and three miscellaneous events including memorial services for Jefferson Davis and a boxing bout.

The season included more horses and dogs than previous seasons, but little of theatrical importance with the exception of the Augustin Daly Company and Lewis Morrison. Minstrels were, of course, very popular with the audience.
CHAPTER IV

THE THIRD PERIOD—1890-1896

THE FIRST CHARLOTTE AUDITORIUM AND

THE CITY HALL AUDITORIUM

Between 1890-1896 two booking agencies, one run by A. L. Erlanger and Marc Klaw and the other by Charles Frohman, controlled a large percentage of the theaters in the country, but Charlotte and the Charlotte Opera House, like many of comparable size, were too small and unimportant in their eyes to be affected. The period covered in this chapter opened with the Academy of Music out of the competition, so bright prospects should have been ahead, but the period between 1890 and 1896 would turn out to be a very erratic one in the life of the Charlotte Opera House. The owner, Mr. J. H. Carson, first threatened to close the house at the end of the 1891 season, but Nat Gray, who had become co-manager with Mr. Sanders after the closing of the Academy of Music, leased it and the house remained open until the end of the 1892 season. At that time Mr. Carson closed

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2Chronicle, November 11, 1890. 3Ibid., May 13, 1891.

4Charlotte News, January 23, 1891.
it,\textsuperscript{5} supposedly because of complications with insurance 
rates concerning Mr. J. N. McCausland, a leasee of one of 
the stores on the ground floor,\textsuperscript{6} but this was also a period 
of economic depression in the nation, which could have af­
fected his decision. In the fall of 1893 the house re­
opened under the management of Richard C. Carson, Mr. 
Carson's son, but for amateur productions of the Charlotte 
Amateur Club only.\textsuperscript{7} It was closed again even to the amateur 
group in December of that year.\textsuperscript{8} A year later, in December, 
1894, the Opera House opened once more for a production of 
the Charlotte Amateur Club,\textsuperscript{9} and before the year was over 
Nat Gray announced that he had rented the opera house "for 
a short engagement" \textit{(Daily Observer, Saturday, December 29, 
1894)}. The Charlotte Opera House would not close again 
until its final closing in December, 1902.

During the summer of 1890 initial steps were taken 
to build a large auditorium for public meetings.\textsuperscript{10} By 
November 12, the \textit{Chronicle} reported:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{5} \textit{Ibid.}, May 26, 1892.
\item \textsuperscript{6} \textit{Daily Observer}, March 7, 1894.
\item \textsuperscript{7} \textit{Ibid.}, September 9, 1893.
\item \textsuperscript{8} \textit{Ibid.}, December 12, 1893.
\item \textsuperscript{9} \textit{Ibid.}, December 13, 1894.
\item \textsuperscript{10} \textit{Chronicle}, June 21, 1890.
\end{itemize}
The articles of incorporation of the Charlotte Auditorium Company will be filed in Clerk Morrow's office today. The capital stock of the corporation is fixed at $15,000—divided into 1,500 shares of the par value of $10 each. The business of the corporation as set forth in the charter is to "erect and maintain in the city of Charlotte, a public auditorium to be let to public assemblies upon such terms as the corporation may prescribe." (Chronicle, Wednesday, November 12, 1890.)

The auditorium was conceived of only in terms of religious and political meetings, conventions and, more specifically, an upcoming statewide choral music festival. There was no thought of its being used for theatrical presentations. On Wednesday, March 11, construction began. It was located behind the Tryon Street Methodist Church, between North Tryon and Church Streets on the south side of Sixth Street. In early February the Chronicle had written about the projected plans for the building.

The building will be provided with a stage which will accommodate 300 people. Underneath the stage, which will be sufficiently high, will be several rooms.

The building will be a permanent structure. It will be provided with a heating apparatus, so as to be useful in the winter as well as summer. (Chronicle, Sunday, February 1, 1891.)

More details followed on February 11.

The building will be 190 x 99 feet in the clear, with a seating capacity of 5,000. It will be built of corrugated iron, with a self-supporting roof. The floor will be flat, until within twelve seats of the wall, when it will be inclined. (Chronicle, Wednesday, February 11, 1891.)

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11 Ibid., March 12, 1891. 12 Ibid., January 31, 1891.
The auditorium was completed in time for the Musical Festival of the North Carolina Choral Association on May 5 and 6, 1891. A year later the Daily Observer summed up the usage of the Auditorium.

The auditorium has been put to many uses since it was built and has served purposes for which no other building in the city would have answered. The musical festival was held in it in May, 1891; Rev. W. P. Fife conducted a series of meetings in it in June the same; the Honorable Jeremiah Simpson, the wailing prophet of Medicine Lodge, held calamity exercises in it in July; Rev. Sam Jones held meetings in it in November; the congregation of Tryon Street M. E. Church worshipped in it while their church was being rebuilt; the Queen City Guards occupy it as an armory and have held one or two fairs there; the colored citizens held a cakewalk there; Gov. St. John Spoke there in April of this year; the graded schools, white and colored, held their closing exercises in it; Senator Hill delivered his 20th May oration there. During last winter Mr. Nat Gray used it as a skating rink. (Daily Observer, Thursday, August 18, 1892.)

In September of that year over 6,000 packed into the building to hear Vice President Adlai E. Stevenson speak. Later in the fall the first professional entertainment troupe, Richards and Pringle's Georgia Minstrels with Billy Kersands, played there (Daily Observer, Wednesday, October 26, 1892). During 1893 a few more traveling companies appeared at the Auditorium, but the facilities were not conducive to theatrical productions. In the late summer of

13 Ibid., May 2, 1891.

14 Daily Observer, September 18, 1892.
1894, Nat Gray remodeled the Auditorium into a more suitable theatre.

A partition has been built way between the entrance and the stage, which will cut off all the open windows and the doors, making the house warm and cozy.

The stage is one of the largest in the South, and has been conveniently arranged. Incandescent footlights have been placed all along the front of the stage, and dressing rooms built on either side. The scenery was painted by Mr. Arthur Butt, and is a very artistic and clever piece of work. The new drop curtain is pretty and so arranged that it will move up and down, avoiding the usual nuisance of getting caught on the sides. . . . Chairs have been placed in the "dress circle" and comfortable seats in the other part of the building. (Daily Observer, Sunday, August 26, 1894.)

This was used frequently until January, 1895, when the Opera House re-opened and the auditorium virtually closed to theatricals. On Wednesday, October 16, 1895, it was completely destroyed by fire (Daily Observer, Thursday, October 17, 1895).

Prior to the remodeling of the Auditorium, Nat Gray held a season of theatrical entertainments on a temporary stage built in the new City Hall (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 8, 1894).

Throughout the period there was talk in the Daily Observer of the need for a new opera house in Charlotte. In early July, 1892, Col. J. M. Neal, owner and manager of the opera house in Danville, Virginia, talked with Mr. Carson about the possibility of buying the old opera house, but nothing came of it (Daily Observer, Saturday, July 9, 1892).
In November of that year the Observer wrote that more and more townspeople were asking about a new opera house and saying,

"It's a shame that as progressive a town as Charlotte should have no opera house. Why, the people are hungry for a show." It's too bad that Charlotte must go hungry, but though "pity 'tis, 'tis true . . ."

(Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 29, 1892.)

During the period covered by this chapter, there was a revival of interest in amateur theatricals. The Charlotte Dramatic and Musical Club was organized February 7, 1893. Over the next three and a half seasons they presented twenty-one performances of sixteen plays. A Negro amateur group presented three productions.

The YMCA Star Entertainment Course was presented all of the seasons covered in the chapter.

As in previous years the regular ticket prices for first-class shows were from 50¢ to $1.00. The Emma Juch Operatic Company commanded the highest prices with a range of $1.00 to $2.00 for its performance. Toward the end of the period, as facilities improved, more and more touring stock companies with a different bill every night began appearing for a week at a time at popular prices, 10¢, 20¢ and 30¢. Reservations and advance sales were handled at Ross and Adams Book Store during the period.

15 Ibid., February 7, 1893.
1890-1891

After two cancellations, the season opened on September 22 rather inauspiciously with Hoyt's *Three Fast Men*. No review of it is available, only a derogatory reference in the *Charlotte News*: "The name of the 'Three Fast Men' show should be changed to 'A Combination of Chestnuts'" *(Charlotte News, Tuesday, September 23, 1890)*.

On October 1, Hattie Bernard Chase appeared in *Uncle's Darling*. The *Chronicle* liked it *(Chronicle, Thursday, October 2, 1890)*; but the *News* did not.

It has been so long since a really good show has visited Charlotte, that theatre-goers hardly expect much when they buy their tickets and take their seats before the footlights. The Hattie Bernard Chase Company that was here last night, was one of the poor ones. It had some good features but not enough to redeem it from that classification. *(Charlotte News, Thursday, October 2, 1890.)*

The William Redmund production of *Herminie*, a familiar and frequent attraction in the New York theatres since the fall of 1888,\(^{16}\) fared better on October 11, being "well rendered by competent actors" *(Chronicle, Sunday, October 12, 1890)*.

Vernona Jarbeau in *Starlight* on October 15 was an ever greater success. The *Chronicle* review read:

> What if she does not sing perfectly? What if her

\(^{16}\) *Odell, XIV, 67, 68, 158, 190, 246, 436, 473, 577, 759.*
words are not heard distinctly? Aren't there those
arch and winsome eyes, that full round mouth with large
perfect, gleaming teeth, those plumb, not fat, alabas-
ter arms that twine and move with serpentine grace,
those long white shapely fingers that beckon you to
"come play" with a fascination that almost draws the
audience to the stage at her invitation.

That's Jarveau . . . not in two years has the writer
heard such general praise from an audience of a per-
formance. (Chronicle, Thursday, October 16, 1890.)

The next day Bell's Original Royal European and Novelty
Company began a three day engagement with a Saturday mati-
nee (Charlotte News, Saturday, October 18, 1890). Fanny
Gillette appeared before a full house with A Fair Rebel on
October 20 (Chronicle, Tuesday, October 21, 1890). Two
minstrels, back to back, October 28 and 29, ended the at-
tractions for October. The all American Vaudevilles on the
28th was liked by the Charlotte News (Charlotte News,
Wednesday, October 29, 1890), but disliked by the Chronicle
(Chronicle, Wednesday, October 29, 1890), as was Hi Henry's
Minstrels on the 29th (Charlotte News, Thursday, October 30,
1890, and Chronicle, Thursday, October 30, 1890).

On November 11, with no previous warning, the Chronicle ran the following article:

Mr. Carson, the owner of the Opera House, has de-
clined to receive a lease of the theatre for next year.
The present contract runs out December 31st, but
leasees have booked shows until the close of the sea-
son. Mr. Carson concluded that it would not be exactly
just to shut 'em out at the end of December, and so he
will allow the leasees to hold possession until their
contacts with companies this season expires. (Chron-
icle, Tuesday, November 11, 1890.)
Nothing more was said at that time and the season continued as scheduled. The M. B. Leavitt company was well received in *The Spider and The Fly* on November 20 (*Charlotte News*, Friday, November 21, 1890). The fading Clara Louise Kellogg presented her company in an operatic concert on November 21. The *Chronicle* said of the performance:

> Miss Kellogg has been a great singer but her every effort last night gave full proof that she has passed her prime. There is no purity of tone, no resonance, no ease, in fact, she has little left in her voice to remind one of her former glory.

The general make-up of the programme was decidedly behind the times. When will visiting singers learn that while we do not wish a programme of severely classic music, we would prefer something fresh, to the time-worn, flimsy songs they give us. Give us the best you have, and if we do fail to appreciate it, ours is to blame. . . . (*Chronicle*, Saturday, November 22, 1890.)

*Life in the Metropolis* with Amy Russell on November 22 was a show "not above the average" (*Chronicle*, Sunday, November 23, 1890).

*Little Lord Fauntleroy* returned with success for the final November attraction on the 24th (*Chronicle*, Tuesday, November 25, 1890).

On December 4, *Crusaders in the Land of Fun* was well received by a small house (*Chronicle*, Friday, December 5, 1890), and on the next night, the Mortimer Comedy Company cancelled its engagement of *Larking*, a show the *Chronicle* would not whole-heartedly endorse, due to the small house (*Chronicle*, Saturday, December 6, 1890). George Wilson's
Minstrels was next on December 6 and played to a large audience (Chronicle, Tuesday, December 9, 1890), as did the Henshaw and Ten Broeck Company with The Nabors on December 15 (Chronicle, Tuesday, December 16, 1890).

The first attraction at the Opera House in the new year was The Gladiator starring Robert Downing with Eugenie Blair on Saturday, January 10. There was a large audience and the Chronicle reviewed it as "one of the best that has been here in some time" (Chronicle, Sunday, January 11, 1891). The next Saturday, Beacon Lights played (Chronicle, Saturday, January 17, 1891), and The Social Session was announced for the next Saturday (Charlotte News, Saturday, January 24, 1891). An amateur production of Mrs. Jerley's Waxworks was presented with success on Friday, January 30 (Chronicle, Saturday, January 31, 1891). Marie Greenwood and Company followed on the next night with The Hermit. The Chronicle reported that the troupe was far above the average. "The costuming was good, the acting first class, the choruses perfect, and the orchestra exceptionally fine" (Chronicle, Sunday, February 1, 1891).

The most exciting theatrical news in January was that Mr. Gray had leased the Opera House for five years (Charlotte News, Friday, January 23, 1891). This assured the public that there would be a season in 1891.

On February 3, Alberta Gallatin returned with Creston Clark as her leading man and presented As You Like It
(Chronicle, Wednesday, February 4, 1891). Al G. Field's Minstrels on February 10, was greeted by a tremendous crowd and "the applause which ran through the house almost continuously, was almost deafening" (Chronicle, Wednesday, February 10, 1891). Katie Putnam, absent from the Charlotte stage for over five years, returned for an engagement of Love Finds a Way on February 11 (Charlotte News, Thursday, February 12, 1891). On Monday, February 16, The New York Theatre Company began a week's run at popular prices, 25¢, 35¢, and 50¢. The company played to audiences which were always good. They opened with Man and Master (Charlotte News, Tuesday, February 17, 1891), and continued throughout the week with The Galleh Slave (Chronicle, Wednesday, February 18, 1891); Hazel Kirke (Chronicle, Thursday, February 19, 1891); Jack's Sweetheart (Chronicle, Friday, February 20, 1891); Hit and Miss and Joshua Whitcomb (Chronicle, Saturday, February 21, 1891).

The Opera House was only open twice during March, once for a performance of the McGibney Family on March 4 (Chronicle, Thursday, March 5, 1891), and once for Adele Frost with Bennett Matlack in Virginius on March 11 (Chronicle, Wednesday, March 11, 1891).

In April there was a local musical entertainment for the benefit of the Thompson Orphanage on the 9th (Chronicle, Friday, April 10, 1891).

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17 Page 67.
On May 1, 1891, the new Charlotte Auditorium was completed in time for the Musical Festival of the North Carolina Choral Association which presented a series of three concerts on May 5 and 6. Large audiences attended and the event was "a success musically, financially, socially" (Chronicle, Friday, May 8, 1891). At the Opera House in May the Sanford Girls Orchestra and Imperial Japanese Company began a three-night engagement on Monday, May 11 (Chronicle, Tuesday, May 12, 1891). The Marie Greenwood Comic Opera Company which had presented The Hermit at the end of January with success, returned for a week's engagement on Monday, May 18. The week was a glorious end for the season. Record crowds attended and there was a festive air about the performances. "The company is not only encored vociferously nightly, but the handing up of bouquets over the footlights has become a regular thing on the programme" (Charlotte News, Wednesday, May 20, 1891. The repertoire for the week included: Boccaccio on Monday (Charlotte News, Tuesday, May 19, 1891); The Mascotte, Tuesday (Chronicle, Wednesday, May 20, 1891); The Hermit, Wednesday (Charlotte News, Thursday, May 21, 1891); and The Chimes of Normandy, Thursday (Chronicle, Friday, May 22, 1891). On Friday The Hermit was repeated (Chronicle, Saturday, May 23, 1891 while on Saturday The Chimes of Normandy and Boccacio

18 Chronicle, May 2, 1891.
repeated (Chronicle, Sunday, May 24, 1891).

During the season, the Auditorium, which would ultimately play a part in Charlotte's theatrical history, opened, but since it was built for large public meetings, there were no theatrical performances there, only three large choral programs. The Opera House, although threatened with closure, for the time being, at least, remained the center of the cultural and entertainment life of the community. Nineteen companies presented thirty professional theatrical productions. There was one amateur theatrical production, one professional musical program, three minstrels, and ten variety shows including one amateur one.

As a whole the companies had not been very outstanding ones, but among the highlights must be included Vernona Jarbeau in Starlight, Robert Downing and Eugenie Blair in The Gladiator, Al Field's Minstrels, and the popular engagements of the New York Theatre Company and the Marie Greenwood Company.

1891-1892

The season opened extremely early with the George Wilson Minstrels scheduled for August 19 (Chronicle, Wednesday, August 19, 1891), followed by Blind Tom with two concerts on August 25 (Chronicle, Sunday, August 23, 1891). The Rose Hill English Folly Company played The Montebank.
with Rice and Barton to a "mass meeting of men" at the Opera House on August 28 (Chronicle, Saturday, August 29, 1891).

William Gillette's popular play, The Private Secretary, was next at the Opera House on September 14 (Chronicle, Tuesday, September 15, 1891). The only other September engagement was on the 25th when Aaron H. Woodhull appeared in Uncle Hiram, a play which combined everything audiences of the day enjoyed—"rural bliss," "a railroad scene" and a "sawmill" (Chronicle, Saturday, September 26, 1891).

On October 5, the Ford English Opera Company presented She Stoops to Conquer plus the farce, Poor Pillo-coddy. In Speaking of Wilfred Clarke, who played Tony Lumpkin, the Chronicle said:

His a whole comedy company within himself. The mobility of face, the rolling, flashing eyes, the graceful gesture, a fair voice and the intensity of action drove the audience before him like leaves before a gust. (Chronicle. Thursday, October 6, 1891.)

Edward E. Rose's Jim, the Westerner, played on October 13 to a "full audience" (Chronicle, Wednesday, October 14, 1891). John Palmer in The Last Days of Pompeii was next on October 29 with all the necessary scenery and mechanical effects. "The scenery and settings were good considering the size of the stage, but the company as a whole seems

19Odell, XV, 248.
not to have a right conception of the acting required in such a play" (Chronicle. Friday, October 30, 1891). The last show booked for October was the Duncan Clark Company of French Highkickers on October 31. After the town was billed, the following article appeared in the Chronicle.

The show bills displayed in the hotels, advertising French Highkickers at the opera house tonight are suggestive of vile and vulgar human instincts. They are an open and gross insult to the morals and decency of the people of Charlotte and the show should be severely tabooed. Will any decent man or woman in Charlotte who has seen these indecent pictures witness that show tonight?

Such a troupe deserves an empty house anywhere, it serves the silent contempt of this community, and it should be so severely ignored that it will not come this way again. Such a class of performance has done so much to destroy the former high character of the theatre and make it one of the most potent agencies of this age for vice. The CHRONICLE hereby gives notice, that when all such shows come here, it will speak out for the community. (Chronicle, Friday, October 30, 1891.)

The performance did not take place, or, if it did, the newspaper ignored it.

During the first ten days in November there were nightly meetings led by the Evangelist Sam Jones at the Auditorium which attracted large crowds (Chronicle, Tuesday, November 10, 1892). At the Opera House during that period the Ford English Comedy Company returned with Paul Pry, or I Hope I Don't Intrude and the farce, Which, or Who Is the Heiress, on November 2 and "drew a good sized audience . . . considering that the Jones meeting is in full blast" (Chronicle, Tuesday, November 3, 1891). The next night, F. B. Fitz
and Kathryn Webster appearing in *A Breezy Time*, "kept the audience laughing" (*Chronicle*, Wednesday, November 4, 1891). On November 6, Tom Thumb and Mrs. Thumb brought their new vehicle, "a pantomimical, musical farce comedy entitled The Rivals and The Mikado's Fete Day" (*Chronicle*, Thursday, November 5, 1891). On the 7th, the paper was so filled with reports of the Jones Meeting that there was no review printed. On the night after the meeting closed, Al G. Field's Minstrels appeared (*Chronicle*, Sunday, November 8, 1891). Vernona Jarbeau returned in *Starlight* on November 13, but upon seeing it for the second consecutive season, the *Chronicle* said that it was "so light that there's nothing in it. Rather a sense of disappointment prevailed the audience" (*Chronicle*, Saturday, November 14, 1891). The Frank W. Sanger Broadway Theatre Company presented *Mr. Barnes of New York* on November 14 (*Chronicle*, Sunday, November 15, 1891). A highlight of the musical season was the appearance of Louis Blumenberg, violoncellist, with a company of artists, on Tuesday, November 17 (*Chronicle*, Tuesday, November 17, 1891). This was followed on November 24 by another concert of note, the New York Symphony Club (*Chronicle*, Wednesday, November 25, 1891). Sun's New Phantasma and Refined Novelty Company appeared on Wednesday, November 25 (*Chronicle*, Tuesday, November 24, 1891), while Anderson's Unique Comedians presented *Two Old Cronies* to a large house on November 28, and "the verdict was unanimous that it was one of the
best shows that have ever been here. The audience was convulsed with laughter from beginning to end" (Chronicle, Sunday, November 29, 1891).

At the Opera House during December, The Fast Mail, presented on the 4th, was pronounced a "first class show" by the Chronicle (Chronicle, Saturday, December 5, 1891).

The next week was a busy one at the Opera House. There was an entertainment by local ladies given for the benefit of the Queen City Guards (Chronicle, Tuesday, December 8, 1891).

Two star attractions appeared back to back on December 9 and 10 when Margaret Mather and Otis Skinner appeared in Joan of Arc and Emma Juch and the Grand English Opera Company presented Gounod's Faust. Mather had made a very successful New York debut as Juliet in 188620 and now was a shining star. The Chronicle said in reviewing her play:

The most brilliant event of the dramatic season. . . . Miss Mather's personality is always a most charming one and from her early appearance last night . . . in the garb of the simple peasant maiden, until her death at the stake in the fifth act, the hearts of all her audience were with the unfortunate heroine.

An enthusiastic encore after the second act, which is perhaps the strongest of the play, brought Miss Mather and Mr. Skinner before the curtain. . . . Altogether the performance was a splendid triumph. (Chronicle, Thursday, December 10, 1891.)

Emma Juch and Faust were found disappointing and failing with

20 Brown, III, 175.
age (Chronicle, Friday, December 11, 1891). Concluding the week on December 11 were Bill Nye and A. P. Burbank giving their program of humorous readings and recitations (Chronicle, Saturday, December 12, 1891). J. C. Stewart's The Two Johns played December 19 (Chronicle, Sunday, December 20, 1891). The final production of the year was Madame Janauschek appearing in another Farewell Tour. This time it was in The Harvest Moon on December 31 (Chronicle, Thursday, December 31, 1891).

The Sprague Comedians in A Social Session began the new year at the Opera House on January 6. It drew a good size audience and the Chronicle reported that the music was "catchy, the songs, new, and there were no waits" (Chronicle, Thursday, January 7, 1892). Lillian Lewis in Credit Lorraine completely "captivated the Charlotte public" on the night of January 16. The Chronicle wrote of her performance.

Time and again was she recalled, responding most graciously each time.

An artist of rare culture, beauty, refinement, and histrionic power, together with a magnificent physique, she justly wears the honors being thrust upon her. . . .

The two great scenes are in the second and third acts. One is the Paris Stock Exchange during a panic, and the other the assassination of the minister of police. The first was so exciting and realistic that the audience was completely carried away, and the house rang with applause; the other was a highly wrought dramatic spectacle. As the scorned wife in the final act, Miss Lewis' acting was exceptionally fine, and her pathos true to a painful degree. (Chronicle, Wednesday, January 17, 1892.)
She brought the play back for a second engagement on January 26 (Charlotte News, Wednesday, January 27, 1892). Intervening was J. C. Lewis in Si Plunkard on January 22 in which "the acting was poor, the situation strained and unnatural, and the whole thing a farce" (Chronicle, Saturday, January 23, 1892). On January 28, a good size audience had great fun with Herbert Cawthorn in Little Nugget (Chronicle, Friday, January 29, 1892).

Crandall, Clarke and Hake's Magnificent Minstrels presented a "below average" minstrel on Saturday, February 20 (Chronicle, Sunday, February 21, 1892), while on the 25th, R. E. Graham appeared before the "largest audience of the season" to present The Little Tycoon (Chronicle, Friday, February 26, 1892).

In March there was Ray L. Royce with his musical comedy company in Tom's Vacation on March 4, which "did not come up to expectations" (Chronicle, Saturday, March 5, 1892). Robert Downing and Eugenie Blair, favorites of the serious drama audience, with Fred C. Mosely presented Damon and Pythias which turned out to be the artistic success of the season on March 25. There was a large advance sale and "the largest and most cultured audience of the season" greeted the outstanding actors. The Daily Observer had this to say about it:

Those who expected to see fine acting were not disappointed. Downing, of course, the central figure, was superb. Of magnificent physique and fine voice, he
commands the attention of all at his first appearance, and by his wonderfully fine acting, never loses his power over his audience. In every situation which the play of last night calls for, he was the thorough and accomplished actor. He was called before the curtain at the close of each act, and seldom was more cordial and sincere applause accorded anyone in the Charlotte opera house. (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 26, 1892.)

With the appearance of Mr. Downing the season came to an end.

With no explanation, the Charlotte News ran the following article under the heading, "No Opera Next Season."

The opera companies that travel through the South every fall and winter make their dates during the preceding spring and summer. The Charlotte opera is "closed until sold," and it will be a rather odd experience for Charlotte to pass the coming opera season without an opera or show of any kind. That, however, it appears at the present writing, will be the case. No dates can be booked and the traveling opera companies will find no abiding place here next season. (Charlotte News, Thursday, May 26, 1892.)

Two years later, a statement in the Daily Observer shed additional information concerning this closure. In talking about the Charlotte Dramatic Club, the newspaper said that it had not played in the opera house for some time. "Mr. Carson had to close the house in order to make the proper insurance rates with Mr. McCausland, who occupies a store room therein" (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 7, 1894). Mr. J. N. McCausland had a tin shop in one of the stores under the Opera House. 21

21 Charlotte City Directory: 1891-1892, p. 84. (The title page and first few pages are missing.)
The statistics for the Opera House show that the house had been open thirty-six times during the season. Twenty-four companies had presented twenty-six theatrical productions. There had been two professional variety shows and an amateur one, three minstrels, and four musical concerts.

Highlights of the season had been the appearances of Robert Downing, Wilford Clarke, Louis Blumenberg, Margaret Mather and Otis Skinner, Lillian Lewis, R. E. Graham, and, of course, almost all of the minstrels.

The "closed until sold" announcement by the owner of the Opera House, was, of course, the blow of the season.

1893-1893

With the Opera House not opening the prospects for the upcoming season were very slight. The YMCA continued its subscription series and presented four evenings of attractions: The Lotus Glee Club on November 8; the New York English Ballad Company, December 6; the Schubert Male Quartette, February 17; and Col. L. F. Copeland, lecturer, February 28 (Daily Observer, Friday, September 9, 1892). In addition, several other musical or lecture programs were presented at the YMCA's Association Hall during January.

Nat Gray, builder and manager of the defunct Academy of Music and most recently manager of the Opera House, is referred to as "general custodian of the auditorium" in
the November 20, 1892, issue of the Daily Observer. He was obviously more than a custodian as we know the term today, for he seemingly managed the building. Although restricted by an unwritten law of the Charlotte Auditorium Company's Board of Directors that no company or troupe having a "piece of femininity" in it could appear there, and by the physical plant itself, Gray still managed to bring a meager amount of entertainment to the Charlotte Auditorium. The Richards and Pringle's Georgia Minstrels with Billy Kersands appeared there on October 25 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, October 26, 1892), and Professor Young and his English Royal Marionettes with Professor Andy Showers and his Wonder Dog, Circus, on December 6 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, December 6, 1892).

In January, Gray offered Al G. Field's Famous American Minstrels at the Auditorium on January 3 and the Daily Observer reported the event the next day in its review:

Frank McNish wanted to "tumble into a red hot furnace" last night, and the audience was right with him in the desire. Undertakers Harry and Sloan will no doubt reap a rich harvest for the sit of two hours and a half by a number of reckless individuals in the auditorium last night. The show was fine . . . from start to finish the audience was in a roar. . . . The only thing lacking for the success and enjoyment of all was fire. (Daily Observer, Wednesday, January 4, 1893.)

On February 11, a new Auditorium Committee was appointed by the Board of Directors. Nat Gray met with the

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22 Daily Observer, February 11, 1893. 23 Ibid.
new committee immediately about lifting some of the restrictions concerning the use of the building. After a two hour session his "eloquence prevailed" and "hereafter any first-class troupes, whether there be a female in them or not," would be allowed on the Auditorium stage. The next day, Sunday, February 12, Mexican Chick and his Company of Celebrated Artists was announced for an extended engagement beginning Tuesday, February 14 (Daily Observer, Sunday, February 12, 1893). The Auditorium Committee attended the opening night performance, "to sit," as the Daily Observer said, "in judgment on the show, and see if it were such that they could conscientiously allow on the boards. They endorsed its morals and excellence . . ." (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 16, 1893). The company drew large audiences during a six nights' stand (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 21, 1893).

The only professional drama presented on the Auditorium stage during the season was Frank Mayo in Murdoch's Davy Crockett, in which Mayo had played since 1874. Some problems of presenting drama on the Auditorium stage are clearly brought out in the Daily Observer review of the play.

No one but a hero, such as Frank Mayo proved himself to be as "Davy Crockett," would have undertaken to play under such difficulties and against such odds as he did last evening.

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24 Ibid., February 14, 1893.  
A play at the auditorium is a never failing signal for rain, hail, sleet and snow. Last night was not exception. More disagreeable weather could not have found its way here. But for this the auditorium would have been packed. As it was, there was a good-sized audience present—one which sat, cold, but entranced.

The company's own scenery was, by numerous wires, ropes and pulleys, adapted to the auditorium stage, but as there were no "flys" on or above it, the management of it required considerable ingenuity. (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 28, 1893.)

With the scarcity of legitimate drama, once again a group of people banded together to form a new amateur theatre club, The Charlotte Dramatic and Musical Club. During the spring and summer they presented Esmeralda, April 4 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, April 5, 1893); two performances of Partners for Life, May 25 and 27 (Daily Observer, Friday, May 26, and Sunday, May 28, 1893), and two performances of Our Boys, August 17 and 18 (Daily Observer, Friday, August 18, and Saturday, August 19, 1893). All of the presentations were at the Auditorium and were well received by the audiences. The only other entertainment at the Auditorium during the season was an amateur group of minstrels from Greensboro on May 23 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, May 24, 1893).

When asked about the upcoming season, Nay Gray told a Charlotte News reporter that he thought the "light was about out" and that unless something was done, Charlotte
would have no opera house, and "therefore no shows" (Charlotte News, Saturday, August 12, 1893).

The Auditorium season was almost the same as usual, religious and political meetings, and roller skating interspersed with a few minstrels and a few theatricals. If, in the worst year in Charlotte's theatre history, there can be a highlight, it would have to be the lifting of the restriction against women on the Auditorium stage, which cleared the way for theatrical performances there.

1893-1894

Although from the standpoint of professional touring companies, the season looked as bleak as the one before, from the standpoint of the amateur presentations the future looked bright. The Daily Observer carried the following article on Friday, September 8:

The public will rejoice to know that the dramatic club, through its president, Mr. R. C. Carson, has secured the use of the opera house for its performances this winter. Mr. Carson would not rent it to the club, but turned it over to his son, who will have the right to rent it to the dramatic club and other charitable organizations. This assures the next play of the club's being a brilliant success. (Daily Observer, Friday, September 8, 1893.)

The following day this correction was made to the above:

President Carson, of the Dramatic Club, wishes it stated that the opera house is only for the use of the club, and will not be rented or loaned to any other organization, charitable or otherwise. His father
only yielded to his importunities with reluctance, and as a personal favor. It will be useless for any person or organization to apply for it, as permission to use it would be refused. (Daily Observer, Friday, September 9, 1893.)

The first theatrical event of the new season was on Tuesday, October 3, when the Charlotte Dramatic Club presented Dollars and Cents at the Opera House. It was excellently done; "a stranger would not have surmised that it was a local company" (Charlott News, Wednesday, October 4, 1893).

The Star Course Series at the YMCA began with the Lotus Glee Club on November 7 and ran through the season with F. D. Losey, impersonator, on December 1; George R. Wendling, lecturer, on February 17; the Schubert Quartette on February 22; and ended with the Mozart Symphony Club of New York on April 17 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, August 23, 1893).

The only professional company to appear in the city during the first part of the 1893-1894 season was Fay Templeton and Company in Offenbach's Madame Favart at the Auditorium on December 6. Manager Gray promised to have the Auditorium "well heated and lighted" (Daily Observer, Sunday, December 3, 1893). Of the performance the Daily Observer wrote:

An auditorium, so cold that overcoats and wraps were absolutely necessary, and a stage too small and ill adapted to the needs of her new play, were drawbacks that Miss Templeton had to contend with last night... but she overcame all adverse circumstances. ... (Daily Observer, Thursday, December 7, 1893.)
The next production of the Charlotte Dramatic Club was Miriam's Case which was presented on Tuesday, December 12, at the Opera House. On the morning of the performance, the Daily Observer announced that after the evening's performance the Opera House would again be closed indefinitely. By the evening paper the whole story was out.

Last Sunday afternoon, while a goodly number of church-going people were at the Y.M.C.A. hall, [almost directly across the street from the Opera House] a few—four in number--of the Dramatic Club concluded they would arrange some parts of the stage for the next play. They went up into the opera house and thoughtlessly left the front windows open. When the work was completed, the boys—there were none of the ladies present—concluded that they would rehearse their respective parts. This was also thoughtlessly done.

In the midst of the rehearsal a great commotion was created in the YMCA hall, and a rush, as if a fire had been discovered, poured out, their nerves had been shocked. Chief of Police Dick Mason was found and implored to arrest the Sabbath breakers. By the time the crowd got back to the opera house, the practicing actors had "smelt a rat" and vacated. Their names were not learned.

The attention of Mr. Carson was called to the matter and he determined to close the house. The Dramatic Club has done a great deal for the poverty stricken of the city, their performances being given solely for charitable purposes, and it would be unfortunate for Charlotte if the error of four thoughtless members should destroy it and therefore deprive the city of its work. (Charlotte News, Tuesday, December 12, 1893.)

The play, Miriam's Crime, was a great success, but with its final curtain the Opera House was closed again (Daily Observer, Wednesday, December 13, 1893).

At various times the cry for a new opera house was coupled with the suggestion of converting the auditorium in the new City Hall, built in 1891, into a theatre. As early
as November, 1892, the Daily Observer had quizzed the architect of the building, a Mr. Norman, on the feasibility of this and he had answered that it could be converted at a minimum of expense, but nothing had been done about it. In January and early February, 1894, Nat Gray installed a temporary stage in the City Hall Auditorium and on Monday night, February 12, James K. Hackett in Private Secretary opened as the first theatrical troupe to appear in the newly renovated City Hall Auditorium. Whether it was curiosity in seeing the renovation or eagerness to see Hackett and the play, the house was full. The Daily Observer noted: "There were situations which were weakened, naturally, by the lack of proper settings, surroundings, lights and shadows, but on the whole the play was capital" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 13, 1894). The company stayed over and presented The Pink Mask on the following night, February 13 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 14, 1894). Louise Natali, famous operatic singer of the day, with her company presented Il Trovatore at the new theatre on February 19. "The cast of characters was exceptionally fine, and so fine the acting and singing that one forgot to think of the scenic effect wanting . . ." (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 20, 1894).

27 Ibid., November 1, 1892.

28 Odell, XIV, 576, 700, 712.
On March 17, Heywood's Celebrities with Francis Labodie and Hattie Powell presented a musical program and concluded with the comedy, A Happy Pair (Daily Observer, Sunday, March 18, 1894). Wilfred Clark who had impressed Charlotte with his playing of Tony Lumpkin in She Stoops to Conquer during the 1891-1892 season, appeared in Tit-for-Tat on March 22 at the City Hall (Daily Observer, March 23, 1894). He returned for Little Butterfly on March 30 (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 31, 1894). On the 27th of March, Mrs. George Bason's School of Vocal Music of Charlotte presented a "lovely little operetta," The Merry Milkmaids in the new hall (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 27, 1894).

The Auditorium was used for She Stoops to Conquer presented by the Elite Union, a colored organization of the city, on April 12 (Daily Observer, Saturday, April 13, 1894). For the week of April 23 through 28, Zera Semon, the King of Mystery, and his Vaudeville Company played to large crowds at the City Hall (Daily Observer, Sunday, April 29, 1894).

On May 17 the White Graded School entertainment brought over 1,000 children on the Auditorium stage and over 5,500 people to see them (Daily Observer, Friday, May 18, 1894). The next night the Colored Graded School entertained

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29 Page 201.
to what seemed to be "the entire colored population of Charlotte" (Daily Observer, Saturday, May 19, 1894).

The last performance of the season was on the City Hall stage. It was the Charlotte Dramatic Club presentation of A Box of Monkeys, given as a benefit for the Confederate monument, on May 22 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, May 23, 1894).

At the beginning of the season the Opera House was open for two amateur theatrical productions, then closed again. The Auditorium had one professional theatre production, one amateur, one and two local variety entertainments. In mid-season the availability of the City Hall, made a major change in the overall outlook of the season. It had fifteen of the twenty-one presentations of the season. Three professional companies presented five theatrical productions on its temporary stage, and there was also one amateur play plus eight variety evenings and one amateur musical production. Once more through the perseverance of Nathaniel Gray Charlotte had had an opera season, and it was quite an improvement over the one the previous year.

1894-1895

Realizing the need for a larger auditorium and better stage facilities than the City Hall Auditorium could offer, in August of 1894, Nat Gray began work transforming the Charlotte Auditorium into a more suitable theatre
(Daily Observer, Wednesday, August 8, 1894).

The first attraction to appear in it after it was remodeled was Joe Ott in The Star-Gazer on August 30. Only a small audience attended (Daily Observer, Friday, August 31, 1894). Beginning on the 31st Cyrene, who had just completed a successful engagement at Latta Park, a recreational area on the outskirts of Charlotte, moved into the Auditorium for three performances of her musical entertainment (Daily Observer, Friday, August 31, 1894).

October 1 and 2 the Stanford Sisters' Silver Band and Orchestra and Novelty Company played at the Auditorium and drew good audiences (Daily Observer, Tuesday, October 2, 1894). On Friday, October 5, the Sadia Whiteford Company presented Romeo and Juliet with Miss Whiteford, a young actress of 14. The Daily Observer said of her performance, that "on the rising of the curtain the audience was quick to recognize an artist of ability before them" (Daily Observer, Saturday, October 6, 1894). The engagement continued on Saturday with Ingomar at the matinee, and The Hunchback in the evening. The matinee was "fairly attended" (Daily Observer, Sunday, October 7, 1894). The evening performance had "the elite of the city" out in large numbers and "all were amply repaid, for Miss Whiteford and company appeared to better advantage than in her two previous performances" (Daily Observer, Sunday, October 7, 1894).

Ibid., November 8, 1894.
The YMCA Star Course, subscription series, got under way on October 9 with George R. Wendling, lecturer, and was followed by the Harvard Quartette, November 10; Fred Emerson Brooke, December 10; The Ladies Ariel Sextette, January 29; the Ollie Torbett Concert Company, February 22; and the Rev. A. A. Willets on March 28 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, September 26, 1894). All of these were presented in Association Hall of the YMCA Building.

The Vendetta, on October 12, was advertised as "The Sensation of the Age. Fourth Season. Great Play. Great Company. A carload of Scenery." The Daily Observer agreed in its review the following morning (Daily Observer, Saturday, October 13, 1894).

The Charlotte Dramatic Club's presentation of David Garrick was next at the Auditorium on October 18. It was a gala affair.

Charlotte always turns out en masse when the Dramatic Club has a play on the boards, but former large audiences seemed small when compared with the mass of humanity which packed itself in the seating space at the auditorium last night. . . . Full dress was the order of the evening, and the beautiful gowns of the maidens fair, as well as the handsome effects of the matrons serene, added much to the charm of the scene.

The audience was delighted throughout the entire evening. The play was well put on the boards, the settings were attractive, and the costuming rich and costly. (Daily Observer, Friday, October 19, 1894.)

31 Ibid., October 11, 1894.
On October 30, a production of the favorite, *Peck's Bad Boy*, was well received by a very large house (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, October 31, 1894).

The Baldwin-Melville Company made its first appearance on November 5 in *The Black Flag*. In summing up the evening, the *Daily Observer* wrote:

> When Mr. Baldwin returns, as he intends doing later in the season, with his brilliant company, he can feel assured of such houses as will gladden his heart and add materially to the weight of his purse. (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, November 6, 1894.)

On November 7 and 8, the Sadia Whiteford Company returned at popular prices. Remembering her successful engagement earlier in the season the audiences were "tremendous." She opened in *Ingomar* (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, November 8, 1894), and played *Pygmalion* and *Galatea* the following night (*Daily Observer*, Friday, November 9, 1894). Augustus Thomas' comedy-drama of 1889, *The Burglar*, appeared for the first time in Charlotte on December 6 with Little Lottie Briscoe and W. S. Ogden in the cast. It was "successfully rendered to a good house at the auditorium . . . and Little Lottie Briscoe made the most decided hit of the season" (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, December 7, 1894). Next at the Auditorium was the Fred Marsh Company, which began a week's engagement on Monday, December 10, with *On Southern Soil.*
It was an exciting evening for the large audience. The next morning the Daily Observer published this account of the evening:

Mr. Chas. Wildrick is carrying his neck in a sling as the result of the realistic manipulation of a gun in the hands of the dark-hued villain, Mr. L. Mortimer Martine. Mr. Martine pointed the gun at Mr. Wildrick, and fired, as the play directed he should. He got too close to his man, and took too straight aim. The wad struck him on the neck, knocking him off his feet. Down went the curtain and out ran Nat Gray for a doctor. (Daily Observer, Tuesday, December 11, 1894.)

On December 11, the company presented Muggs' Landing (Daily Observer, Wednesday, December 12, 1894); December 12, Two Orphans (Daily Observer, Thursday, December 13, 1894); December 13, The Cotton King (Daily Observer, Friday, December 14, 1894); December 14, East Lynne (Daily Observer, Friday, December 14, 1894); and on December 15, they played Ten Nights in a Bar Room at the matinee (Daily Observer, Friday, December 14, 1894), and an evening performance, the title of which is unavailable. The prices were at the popular rate with 30¢ for a reserved seat and as an added attraction, every lady received a reserved seat free, if accompanied by a gentleman buying a reserved ticket. Large audiences attended throughout the week (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 8, 1894).

The final production of the year was presented by the Charlotte Dramatic Club in the Opera House on December 27. Once again the Opera House opened for amateur

33Daily Observer, December 13, 1894.
theatricals. The play was Penelope which, as the Daily Observer wrote in a rave review, was

... the chef d'oeuvre of the club. That such a play could be put on an amateur stage and carried out to the smallest detail as it was on the Northern stage last winter ... was a constant surprise to all who saw the performance last evening. There were several in the audience who, like the Observer, had seen Robson and Crane star in this play, and they one and all agreed that these celebrities and their company scarcely surpassed the effort by the Charlotte club. (Daily Observer, Friday, December 28, 1894.)

On Saturday, December 29, the Daily Observer announced that Nat Gray had succeeded in renting the Opera House for a short engagement, so that it would be open for the remainder of the season (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 29, 1894).

On January 1, 1895, the Opera House was opened with the first professional company since Robert Downing had played Damon and Pythias in March, 1892. The Daily Observer commented that it looked like "the days of long ago, so large and enthusiastic was the crowd," but unfortunately, the play, Uncle Tom's Cabin, was not good (Daily Observer, Wednesday, January 2, 1895). A repeat of the Charlotte Dramatic Club's presentation of Penelope was next on January 8 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, January 9, 1895). The standing room only sign was up for Hoyt's A Trip to Chinatown on the night of January 11 presented by a first-class company including Ed Metcalfe of the original 1890 New York
Another packed house greeted Hi Henry's Famous Minstrels on January 14 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, January 15, 1896). Two Old Cronies with Carlotta was the January 30 attraction. It "delighted a splendid house" (Daily Observer, Thursday, January 31, 1895).

She, W. H. Gillette's dramatization of a Haggard novel, with interesting scenes and strange mechanical effects, was presented on February 6. Of the effects, the Daily Observer, wrote in the review the next day: "The stage was too small for the greater part of the scenery... There were no illuminating facilities, and thus the scenic effect which is almost all of the play was lost" (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 7, 1895). The Famous Norris Brothers, Animal Educators, played two performances on Saturday, February 9, at the Opera House. As the reviewer said, "it was as good a horse and dog show as ever came this way" (Daily Observer, Sunday, February 10, 1895). The ever popular A1 G. Field's Minstrels packed the house on Friday, February 22. The Daily Observer described the audience.

There was "breathing-room only." Every one felt in a jolly humor, the feeling being inspired by the belief that a fine show was to be seen—real good old-time minstrels, and it was even so... The men played like they liked it, and they carried the audience along with them in a dream of delight. (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 23, 1895.)

34 Brown, III, 549. 35 Ibid., I, 224.
On the same night, the YMCA Hall featured the Ollie Torbett Concert, part of the Star Course Series. The Daily Observer commented in the paper the next morning that Charlotte had gotten large enough for two shows to go on at "one and the same time," and both be "well patronized" (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 23, 1895). Mlle. Rhea, a star to Charlotte's liking as seen on her previous appearances, returned and made a most successful appearance in Parisians on Tuesday, February 26 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 27, 1895).

The only troupe appearing at the Opera House in March was the Baldwin-Rogers (Melville having been dropped and Rogers added) Comedy Company which began a week's engagement on March 18, with Jack's Sweetheart. Playing, at popular prices, 10¢, 20¢, and 30¢, light weight comedy which appealed to the popular taste, the troupe played to full houses the entire week. During the remainder of the week they presented: A Leap for Life, March 19 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 20, 1895); Kidnapped, March 20 (Daily Observer, Thursday, March 21, 1895); Little Pard, March 21 (Daily Observer, Friday, March 22, 1895); The Adventuress, March 22 (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 23, 1895); and on the 23rd a matinee, title unavailable, and a mixed program

36Page 159.
of specialties and drama, for the evening performance (Daily Observer, Sunday, March 24, 1895).

The only theatrical production in Charlotte in April was the Charlotte Dramatic Club's production of Sweet Marjoram on the 15th. After problems of last minute cast changes, the play was "exceptionally well rendered" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, April 16, 1895).

In May, Manager Gray was able to book the Baldwin-Rogers Company for a third appearance of the season and an extended stay. The Daily Observer reported it on May 18.

Charlotte is to have a treat this summer. The members of the Baldwin-Rogers Comedy Company have made Charlotte their headquarters and will organize a stock company to play here the remainder of this month, June, and possibly longer. Only the metropolitan cities enjoy the privilege of having such companies and Charlotte will not hesitate in showing her appreciation.

The enterprising theatrical manager, Nat Gray, is largely responsible for this new feature, since he went to Atlanta to prevent the company from closing entirely this season. (Daily Observer, Saturday, May 18, 1895.)

On May 20, the company presented Kidnapped (Daily Observer, May 21, 1895), followed by The Adventuress on May 21 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, May 22, 1895), and The Arabian Knights, May 22 (Daily Observer, Thursday, May 23, 1895). The company then relinquished the Opera House for the dress rehearsal and the performance on May 24 of Edlewild, a play presented by the Charlotte Amateurs, a second local theatrical organization in the town. It was declared by the paper, 37 Daily Observer, February 28, 1895.
a "brilliant hit" (Daily Observer, Saturday, May 25, 1895). The Baldwin-Rogers Company returned on Saturday, May 25, for a matinee, title unavailable, and for Leap for Life, the evening performance (Daily Observer, Sunday, May 26, 1895). On June 4, the Salisbury Dramatic Club brought their amateur production of Damon and Pythias to the Opera House. The intense heat kept some away, but the parquet was filled and some seats in the balcony were taken (Daily Observer, Wednesday, June 5, 1895). The Baldwin Company returned from an engagement in Greenville and presented The Arabian Knights on Friday, June 7, and Ten Nights in a Bar Room on June 8 (Daily Observer, Saturday, June 8, 1895). The Brockman Concert Company from Greensboro presented a concert on June 20, but there had been little advertising, and the audience was small (Daily Observer, Friday, June 21, 1895). The final attraction at the Opera House for the season was on June 28 when the Charlotte Dramatic Club presented The Widow. "A large audience greeted it, and from first to last there was a roar of laughter and applause" (Daily Observer, Saturday, June 29, 1895).

On August 19, the Colored Dramatic Club presented its initial performance at the Charlotte Auditorium. It was Jephtha's Daughter, an oratorio. There were about 1,000 present including "a great many white people" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, August 20, 1895). The production was repeated on September 4, again at the Auditorium, and again before a
large audience (Daily Observer, Wednesday, September 4, 1895).

With the conversion of the Auditorium into a more suitable facility and the re-opening at mid-season of the Opera House, the 1894-1895 season climbed above the last few years. There were fifty-six presentations in all. Prior to the re-opening of the Opera House, the Auditorium had seven professional companies presenting seventeen theatrical productions and there were three amateur presentations. There were five variety evenings. After the Opera House opened the Auditorium was only used for two of the amateur presentations. The Opera House had six companies presenting nineteen professional theatrical productions and seven amateur productions. There were two minstrels, two variety programs, and one local musical concert.

Highlights included the appearances of Sadia Whiteford, Lottie Briscoe, A Trip to Chinatown, the Hi Henry Minstrels, Mlle. Rhea, and the Charlotte Dramatic Club's successes in Penelope and The Widow. A popular success was the Baldwin troupe which played fifteen performances of ten different plays.

1895-1896

On September 12, the season opened with James B. Mackey in Grimes' Cellar Door, which proved disappointing to a large Charlotte audience who had wanted a play and got
a "through and through variety show" (Daily Observer, Friday, September 13, 1895). Another show of about the same caliber was presented on September 21 for two performance, Peck's Bad Boy. Usually liked, this production was noted in the following morning's review as a first-class "Saturday night 'nailer'" (Daily Observer, Sunday, September 22, 1895). The White Squadron on September 24 offered an excellent group of actors who "made up in acting for any disappointment the lack of scenic effects might have caused," since the stage was too small to allow the company to use any of its scenery (Daily Observer, Tuesday, September 24, 1895). On September 28, M. B. Leavitt's The Spider and the Fly played to a full house of all males (Daily Observer, Sunday, September 27, 1895). Charles L. Davis, who had appeared in Charlotte off and on in Alvin Joslin since 1882, brought it back on October 8 during his "Farewell Tour." The show was presented at popular prices and drew a fairly good audience (Daily Observer, Wednesday, October 9, 1895). Offering him competition was the opening attraction of the YMCA Star Course, Alf and Bob Taylor. On October 10, the Moreska Operatic Concert Company appeared at the Opera House on its first appearance in the South. The audience was very small. (Daily Observer, Friday, October 11, 1895).

38Page 131. 39Daily Observer, October 2, 1895.

40The performance conflicted with a prominent wedding between two popular young people who had been very active in amateur theatrical productions in Charlotte.
Against still competition with Buffalo Bill and his tent show, Thomas Keene played in Richard III to a full house on October 15. The Daily Observer ended its review with: "The winter of our histrionic discontent would be made glorious summer if we could only have such plays and such players continuously on our stage" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, October 15, 1895).

On Wednesday, October 16, about 2:45 p.m. the Charlotte Auditorium caught fire. Although firemen came immediately, within ten minutes the entire building was in flames. At one time during the blaze seven nearby buildings were on fire. Realizing that the Auditorium was beyond saving, the firemen concentrated their efforts on saving the surrounding buildings and none were severely damaged. The Auditorium was a complete loss. The origin of the fire was not determined (Daily Observer, Thursday, October 17, 1895).

The next night Billy Van's Big Minstrels appeared at the Opera House. The Daily Observer quipped that the "11 o'clock train was a prominent feature of the performance which wasn't down on the bill." Van cut his show short to make the train and left some people waiting in their chairs for the next scene (Daily Observer, Thursday, October 17, 1895).

The vaudeville team, E. B. Fitz and Kathryn Webster, in A Breezy Time appeared again on November 2 (Daily Observer,
Sunday, 1895). **Furnished Apartments**, the first Charlotte Dramatic Club production for the season, was presented on November 8 and was most successful (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, November 9, 1895). On November 15, Billy Kersand's Georgia Minstrels played to a full house which responded with "hearty applause" (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, November 16, 1895).

In December, John Phillip Sousa and his Band presented a matinee concert on the 10th. The *Daily Observer* said of the program that "Charlotte, or a portion of it at any rate, went wild..." There was nothing less than an "ovation" (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, December 11, 1895). The Mabel Paige Company opened a week's engagement at the Opera House on Monday, December 16, at popular prices. The company played the following plays to full houses the entire week: December 16, *The Other Girl* (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, December 17, 1895); December 17, *La Belle Marguerite* (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, December 18, 1895); December 18, *Little Egyptian* (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, December 19, 1895); December 19, title unavailable; December 20, *Milk Punch* (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, December 21, 1895); matinee, December 21, *Diana Dimple* (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, December 21, 1895); and evening, December 21, *The Runaway Girl* (*Daily Observer*, Sunday, December 22, 1895). The final production of the year was the Charlotte Dramatic Club's presentation of *The Boomerang* on December 27 at the Opera House. The house was packed and the play was very well
presented (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 28, 1895).

The January 3 performance of Edwin Barbour's Land of the Midnight Sun, starring the playwright, was poorly attended, but the production was so good that Manager Gray induced the company to stay over and give a second performance on January 4 (Daily Observer, Saturday, January 4, 1896). Friends with Edwin Milton Royle, playwright as the star, made a great impression upon the audience when presented on the Opera House stage, February 7.

That it was the finest thing that has been on the boards here in years, no one who saw it will controvert. Men as well as women said: "Beautiful," "great," "grand," "magnificent acting," etc. through all the vocabulary of descriptive adjectives. . . .

The play was a masterpiece of construction and execution. The acting was unusually fine. . . . Mr. Royle's reception last night was nothing short of an ovation; in fact, the writer remembers never to have seen such enthusiasm over an actor in Charlotte. (Daily Observer, Wednesday, January 8, 1896.)

As expected, Al G. Field's Minstrels packed the house on January 9 and kept the audience laughing the entire time (Daily Observer, Friday, January 10, 1896). The next night Walter Lawrence and Therese Milford appeared in Aiden Benedict's Fabio Romani and did not impress the house (Daily Observer, Saturday, January 11, 1896). The last attraction in January, on the 30 and 31, was The Story of the Reformation told by Mrs. H. E. Moore. The presentation was "illustrated by 85 stereopticon views and assisted by over one hundred persons from the various churches of Charlotte."
The house was filled to overflowing both nights (Daily Observer, Friday, January 31, and Saturday, February 1, 1896).

The third production of the Charlotte Dramatic Club, presented at the Opera House on February 7 was The Congress-man. It met with great success (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 8, 1896), and was repeated on February 13, with success (Daily Observer, Friday, February 14, 1896). Next at the Opera House was The Cotton King on February 11 at popular prices (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 6, 1896). Thirty years after it created a sensation in New York, The Black Crook arrived at the Charlotte Opera House. Even then, the Observer was asked if "ladies were going" to attend. The paper reported that those who had seen the play at Niblo's in New York said that while it was ballet, nothing improper was done or said. The review of the extravaganza, which was presented on February 17, read:

The Black Crook played under disadvantages here last night, but on the whole did better than was expected, considering the size of the stage and scenic effects the play calls for. The first two acts were the best. The ballet in the second act was the best thing in the play. . . . (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 18, 1896.)

The next two nights, February 18 and 19, the Miller Brothers, mediums, drew well at the house (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 19, 1896). February 24 through 26 found the

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K. Fukino's World Renowned Troupe of Japanese Performers at Opera House with four performances at popular prices (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 26, 1896). The last attraction at the Opera House in February was Paradise Alley with Barney Fagan and Sam Ryan on February 29. It played at first-class prices and was not up to the classification (Daily Observer, Sunday, March 1, 1896).

A local group, unidentified by name, presented two performances of H. M. S. Pinafore on March 2 and 3. The second night the prices were reduced and the audience was nearly as large as the first night (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 3, and Wednesday, March 4, 1896). Later that week on March 5, Emily Bancker appeared in Our Flat (Daily Observer, Friday, March 6, 1896). The next company to appear was M. B. Curtis in Sam'l of Posen on March 17. Curtis had first appeared in Charlotte in the role in 1880. The Daily Observer wrote:

"Sam'l" is the same, only improved by modern touches, as when presented to a Charlotte audience on its initial performance 15 years ago. The play is interesting because it is more real than the general run of comedies. (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 18, 1896.)

The last production at the Opera House in March was A Woman of War with Virginia Stuart and George D. Parker on the 26th (Daily Observer, Friday, March 27, 1896).

43 Page 103.
There were only three performances at the Opera House during April and May. The first, on April 10, was Charley's Aunt. Of it the Daily Observer wrote, "there is no story, the merits of the play depending largely on the manner in which it is mounted and played." The audience enjoyed this production (Daily Observer, Saturday, April 11, 1896). The second was The Little Rebel on April 17 and was presented by the University of North Carolina Dramatic Club. A curtain raiser, entitled, Her Only Father, written by a local Charlottean, Chase Adams, local Charlotte group. In May the only theatrical activity at the Opera House was the production by the Charlotte Dramatic Club of a full-length play by Mr. Adams, entitled A Last Resort, on May 22. The Daily Observer after seeing the play predicted a successful career as a playwright for Mr. Adams (Daily Observer, Saturday, May 23, 1896).

During the first half of June amateur theatricals continued to be in order. The Elite Dramatic Club presented Galsworthy's Strife on June 2 and "acquitted themselves very creditably" (Daily Observer, Wednesday, June 3, 1896). On June 13, there was a repeat of the Charlotte Dramatic Club's hit, The Congressman, for a matinee and an evening performance (Daily Observer, Sunday, June 14, 1896). At the end of June, the 29th, the Emma Warren Company began a week's
engagement at the Opera House. Although most of the week's papers are not available to supply a complete list of her plays, on Monday she presented the Silver King and on Tuesday, Michael Strogoff (Daily Observer, Tuesday, June 29, 1896).

In July the Charlotte Dramatic Club presented A Matter of Business and as the Daily Observer pointed out, "to captivate an audience on a summer night is a profession feat." The evening was a complete success (Daily Observer, Saturday, July 11, 1896).

A final summer presentation was the Barlow Brothers' Minstrels on Saturday, August 8, 1896. Despite the heat, it drew well, as most minstrels did (Daily Observer, Sunday, August 9, 1896).

The previous season there had been fifty-six presentations at the Opera House and the Charlotte Auditorium. This season there were fifty-eight presentations in the Opera House alone. Eighteen professional companies had presented thirty-one theatrical productions and nine amateur productions had given fourteen performances. There had also been five variety entertainments, four minstrels, two concerts, and two miscellaneous entertainments. The Charlotte Auditorium was lost to fire, but since the re-opening of the Opera House, it had seldom been used for anything other than religious and political meetings. The YMCA continued its Star Course Series.
Highlights included the appearances of Thomas Keene, John Phillip Sousa, Edwin Milton Royle, and Al G. Fields. There had been more popular priced companies appearing at the Opera House and more amateur productions than in past seasons.
CHAPTER V

THE FOURTH PERIOD—1896-1902

THE OPERA HOUSE ERA ENDS


The above information appeared in Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide of 1897, the first edition of the annual to include Charlotte. From it one can get a good picture of the stage and its equipment as it was during the last period of the Opera House. From articles in the Daily Observer, one learns that Mr. Carson still owned the House during the period2 and from Charlotte City directories one learns that Nat Gray was still manager, but now aided by


2Daily Observer, March 5, 1898; October 4, 1901.
his sons, William and James. There was talk of major improvements, but the only things accomplished seemed to be a new set of scenery, heavy white canvas cloth coverings on the seats which had evidently continued to stick, and the interior, nebulously referred to, as "considerably improved."

In the October 7, 1897, issue of the Daily Observer, a reporter writes that "Manager Gray has found that more plays at lower prices pay better than a few high-priced attractions (Daily Observer, Thursday, October 7, 1897). This was certainly the case during the last six and a half years of the Opera House, for at least thirty-four popular priced engagements were presented, usually for a week at a time, by various stock companies during that time. These had a top price of 30¢. The obscurity of most of these companies add support to the belief that most were Southern companies and thus not involved with the Theatrical Syndicate which had taken control of major theatres across the nation. A few first class companies came with $1.50 top price. Among them were Frohman's production of The Prisoner

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3 Maloney's Charlotte City Directory: 1899-1900, p.71.
4 Daily Observer, July 14, 1899.
5 Ibid., September 1, 1898.
6 Ibid., August 31, 1902.
of Zenda, the MacLean and Tyler production of School for Scandal, Daly's A Runaway Girl, and Rose Coghlan's production of A Woman of No Importance. Most of the other shows had a top of $1.00, although some had a 75¢ or 50¢ top. Reserved seats could be obtained in advance at Jordan and Company.

In 1898, summer entertainment came to Charlotte with the opening of the Dilworth Auditorium in Latta Park. Planned as a place for summer amusement, the auditorium had an excellently equipped stage and a house that would seat from 1,500 to 2,000 people. Built by Mr. E. D. Latta as part of his development of Dilworth Suburb, Nat Gray of the Opera House and a Mr. Sampson managed it the first season (Daily Observer, Thursday, May 12, 1898). The summer season, composed mostly of vaudeville entertainment began on May 23, with a bill that included Clarence Bellaire and Jessie Atkinson in An Evening Call, Butler Big Four Comedy, Peters and Walters, and music by the Davis Orchestra (Daily Observer, Tuesday, May 24, 1898). Another typical bill included the Rooney Sisters, Tom Peasely, Miss Josie Slater, Will Morten, and the Grangers in The Society Actress (Daily Observer, Thursday, May 12, 1898).
Observer, Tuesday, July 19, 1898). The shows played through the summer with a change of bill every Monday and Thursday nights. Summer seasons continued through the period with the same type of program. Various managers had charge of it over the years.

By far the most important event during this period and the event which directly closed the Opera House was the opening of the new Academy of Music.

There had been much talk about a new opera house. Several plans were discussed, some instituted, but none produced an opera house. It was not until November 26, 1901, that the Daily Observer announced that a new Opera House was to be a certainty. On page five of that issue it said that the directors of the Piedmont Realty Company had decided to build an opera house, named the Academy of Music, to the rear of the Piedmont Realty Company's new building on South Tryon, directly across from the Charlotte Opera House. Mr. Thomas G. Leath, of Richmond, well-known manager of theatres, the article went on to say, had been contracted to manage the new Charlotte house. Mr. Leath was connected with

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8 Ibid., November 26, 1901.
the Klaw and Erlanger New York Theatrical Syndicate, and thus the best attractions would stop in Charlotte on their way to Atlanta or New Orleans.9

A detailed description of the new Academy of Music is found in the Daily Observer, of September 8, 1902.

The main entrance to the theatre will be at the end of the centre corridor in the office building. This corridor will have a tiled floor and high marble wains-coating with handsome marble front ticket near the electric elevator. The main entrance of the theatre will be separated from the corridor by four folding doors back of which will be two metal fire doors suspended on forcible links, thus making a self-closing device and preventing the spreading of fire from one building to the other. /Ironically, the theatre and the office building were almost completely destroyed in a major fire, one of Charlotte's most disastrous, in December, 1922./

On entering the theatre at the foyer there will be two stairways leading to the balcony. The foyer also provides entrances to the check rooms, toilet rooms, and retiring rooms. The first floor, which has a bowl shape, with stepped platform for the chairs, will have 500 opera chairs, arranged so that the average height of the spectator's eyes will be six inches above the spectator directly in front. . . .

The orchestra pit, which is to have a handsome brass railing in front, will be large enough to accommodate an orchestra of eighteen. This pit is entered from under the front of the stage.

The balcony will seat 400 people and will have three rows of seats in front of the columns. Balcony seats are

9 Ibid., September 8, 1902.
placed in tiers, each fifteen inches high. The balcony is entered from the foyer and main front corridor. The gallery will be entered both from a special stairway leading up from the alley, and also from the balcony stairs, thus allowing for exchange of tickets if so desired. A special ticket office is provided for the gallery spectators. The gallery will seat about 350, thus making the seating capacity about 1,300 for the entire house, including the boxes.

The boxes are in two tiers on either side, making four on the first floor, and six on the second floor. . . .

. . . the stage is perfectly clear at all times. The dressing rooms are under the stage and all scenery is hoisted up to the "gridiron" sixty feet above the stage floor. . . . The proscenium opening is 32 feet wide and 20 feet high, handsomely decorated with ornamental plaster work. (Daily Observer, Monday, September 8, 1902.)

Opening date was set for September 29.

While construction for the Academy was underway, the Daily Observer quoted Nat Gray as saying,

We need two houses, and this place will support two. The Academy of Music is in the circuit and will play the high-priced attractions that I can't touch, while I'll go right along and engage all the cheap, good shows I can get. (Daily Observer, Monday, March 17, 1902.)

Little did he know that the days of the independent touring company were very numbered.

1896-1897

The season got off to a slow start, not beginning until Bancroft, the Magician, played at the Opera House on
October 5 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, October 6, 1896). Two and a half weeks later the Barlow Brothers' Magnificent Minstrels appeared on October 22. (Daily Observer, Friday, October 23, 1896). On November 5, Manager Gray had an entertainment using the stereopticon, but no details are available (Daily Observer, Friday, November 6, 1896).

Finally the season actually got underway with the Richards and Pringle's Georgia Minstrels featuring Billy Kersands on November 10 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, November 11, 1896). Emmitt Corrigan, who had been in Charles Frohman's first stock company in 1890, appeared with his company in The Mountebank on Wednesday, November 11 (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 12, 1896), and in Turned Up, the next night (Daily Observer, Friday, November 13, 1896). The following night, the Y.M.C.A. Star Course held its first attraction, the Swedish Grand Concert Company, at Association Hall and others followed during the year (Daily Observer, Friday, October 9, 1896). At the Opera House on November 14, Florrie West appeared in Harry Williams' A Bowery Girl (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 12, 1896). The Robinson Opera Company opened a two night engagement on Monday, November 16, playing

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10 Hornblow, II, 293.
Olivette opposite a circus on the outskirts of town. Even with the conflict there was a good audience which "saw at the start that the company was composed of first-class artists" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 17, 1896). The next night a larger crowd saw Giroflé-Girofla and the "encores were frequent and very persistent" (Daily Observer, Wednesday, November 18, 1896). Edwin Travers in The Private Secretary drew the first rave review of the season, when the Daily Observer wrote of the performance:

It is a real pleasure to attend a performance of acting, culture and refinement, such as was presented to the house. . . . It is no exaggeration to say that the company that appeared last evening is more like the New York stock companies than any that has appeared here in years. . . . (Daily Observer, Saturday, November 21, 1896.)

Because of the extremely bad weather, Belford's Carnival of Novelties, originally scheduled to be given in a tent, moved into the Opera House on Monday, November 30. The engagement ran through Wednesday night. The admission was low, 10-30 cents and the audiences were good (Daily Observer, Tuesday, December 1, 1896).

Next Buckler's Big Stock Company played a split week, opening on Monday, December 7 with Wages which

11 Newspaper torn and complete title unavailable.
turned out to be a "pleasure and a surprise... those present last night realize that the company is a gem" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, December 8, 1896). Playing at popular prices and with such a good review, large audiences were assured for the rest of the run which included Monte Cristo, December 8 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, December 9, 1896); and East Lynne, matinee, and Still Water Runs Deep for the Wednesday, December 9, performances (Daily Observer, Thursday, December 10, 1896). The spectacle The White Creek, which had recently opened the Gaiety Theatre season in New York, played on December 10 to a large audience of men.

There were no women out. But the writer has seen half the crowd women at shows much worse... No show has been to Charlotte lately that deserves more praise for the manner in which the characters acted their respective parts... Everything was neat and up to date. (Daily Observer, Friday, December 11, 1896.)

Another show attended by all men, May Davenport Burlesque Company on Saturday, December 12, seems to have rightly deserved it. The report on it was:

They saw what they expected to see—a concert hall show of a low order. The Observer sent Red Buck there to take in the performance. Although there was a nigger on stage with a big razor, Red Buck sat it out. After the show, he reported that it was tough, winding up his

12 Brown, III, 221.
To a glowing review describing a large crowd and an excellent performance, the Flora Staniford Repertoire Company began a week's engagement at popular prices. The opening performance was *A Soldier's Sweetheart* (Daily Observer, Tuesday, December 29, 1896). The following night it was *Life of An Actress*. The other titles for the week are unavailable. The engagement ended January 2, 1897 (Daily Observer, Friday, December 25, 1896).

Oliver Dowd Bryon, having appeared in Charlotte previously in *Across the Continent* on several occasions, came in *The Ups and Downs of Life* on January 9, 1897 (Daily Observer, Saturday, January 9, 1897). Flagg's Female Minstrels on January 13 was a stag party which turned out to be pretty much the sort of a show the crowd expected. (Daily Observer, Thursday, January 14, 1897). Ryley's Comedians appeared in *Our Flat* on Tuesday, January 19. The Daily Observer reported "the largest audience that has gathered in the Charlotte Opera House for months. . . . The play was

13 There is no indication of the identity of Red Buck.

14 Pages 95, 107, and 120.
splendidly presented. . ." (Daily Observer, Wednesday, January 20, 1897). What was described as the "best variety performance given here for several years" was the Wednesday, January 27, appearance of A Pair of Jacks (Daily Observer, Thursday, January 28, 1897).

The Flora Staniford Company which had appeared only a few weeks before with great success returned for a weeks' engagement on Monday, February 1, opening with For Congress (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 2, 1897). The company, again playing at popular prices, played the week to large and satisfied audiences (Daily Observer, Sunday, February 7, 1897). The shows for the week were The Great Diamond Mystery, February 2 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 3, 1897); The Life of an Actress, February 3 (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 4, 1897); A Soldier's Sweetheart, February 4 (Daily Observer, Friday, February 5, 1897); Was Marriage a Failure, February 5 (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 6, 1897); Fun in a Boarding School, matinee, and Imp., February 6 (Daily Observer, February 7, 1897). The title for the February 3 bill is unavailable. Eugenie Blair, who, in past seasons, frequently had appeared with her husband, Robert Downing, brought Jane Eyre to the Opera
House on February 8. It brought to the mind of the reviewer the days of "Booth, Barrett and Bangs." He went on to write:

Never, in the memory of the writer, has a Charlotte audience followed a play as attentively as all-absorbingly, as did that of last evening. . . . For once not a sound was heard throughout the house in any act after the curtain rose; for once the crowd was too interested, too intense to even applaud. (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 9, 1897.)

A local children's production of a cantata, A House in Fairyland, was presented on February 12 and repeated on Saturday, February 13 at a matinee. (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 13, 1897). The next presentation was the Charles Frohman Company in The Gay Parisians, which had earlier in the season premiered in New York. Although, due to contractual arrangements the ticket prices were higher than the usual fare, there was a large advance sale (Daily Observer, Sunday, February 14, 1897). The bills advertised the "original New York cast", and thus expectations were high. They were "realized" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 16, 1897). On February 18 Thomas Q. Seabrooke, popular New York actor, appeared in George Broadhurst's The Speculator.

15 Brown, II, 442.

16 Ibid., III, 72, 184, 257, 289, 402, 413, 416, 504, 508, 573.
"The audience was completely carried away with the play. Greater interest and appreciation could not possibly have been manifested" (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 18, 1897). Over a hundred local people took part in the professionally directed The Mistletoe Bough on February 19 (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 20, 1897). J. C. Stewart and his company presented The Two Johns on February 20 (Daily Observer, Sunday, February 21, 1897). The Rev. T. De Witt Talmage's lecture "Tour around the World" on February 24, was the last evening the Opera House was open in February (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 25, 1897).

On March 1, James Young, described in the Daily Observer as "the brilliant young tragedian," appeared with his company in Lady of Lyons and scored an enthusiastic success (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 2, 1897). The next day he was requested to play Hamlet, but

... after thinking the matter over and looking the stage and lights over decided that he could not put it on as it should be, and rather than present it indifferently, he would prefer to play something else, so the original bill, David Garrick, will be adhered to. (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 2, 1897.)

He was greeted by a large audience, and was "several times

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17 Daily Observer, March 2, 1897.
called before the curtain, and during the second act several large bouquets were thrown upon the stage" (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 3, 1897). On March 11 and 12, Mrs. W. E. Monroe lectured on Mary, Queen of Scots, assisted by one hundred local people and eighty stereopticon views. Both nights were well received (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 13, 1897). Miss Floy Crowell and her company moved into the Opera House on Monday, March 15, for a week's engagement. Opening night the play, Molly Brawn, had a completely filled house with groups standing in the rear (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 16, 1897). The company scored and there were full houses each night and each matinee. The week's repertoire included on Tuesday, March 16, A Tennessee Heiress (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 17, 1897); Molly Brawn, repeated for the matinee, and La Belle Russe, March 17 (Daily Observer, Thursday, March 18, 1897); The Fatal Error, March 18 (Daily Observer, Friday, March 19, 1897); The Circus Girl, March 19 (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 20, 1897); and The Tennessee Heiress, repeated at the matinee, and A Fatal Error, repeated, at the evening performance March 20 (Daily Observer, Sunday, March 21, 1897). A novelty, the Projectoscope was the attraction the week of March 22 through 27. The Daily
Observer had this to say of it:

The projectoscope is one of the most interesting and unique inventions of modern times. It is really wonderful, and no one should miss an opportunity of seeing it. The pictures are life size and are so real that one forgets they are pictures. Every motion is natural and true to life. They are representations of actual scenes just as they happened... the train brought down the house, and repeated encores were given... (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 23, 1897.)

Gray, realizing the potential of the machine, left for New York to purchase one. He returned on Saturday, April 10, and on Monday, April 12, opened a week's engagement at the Opera House with his "new Projecting Kinetiscope, Edison's Latest and Best Projecting Machine" (Daily Observer, Sunday, April 11, 1897). The novelty caught on and audiences of increasing size began attending.

A revival of Our Boys was presented by the Charlotte Dramatic Club on May 14 (Daily Observer, Saturday, May 15, 1897). On May 18 another amateur production was presented, The Chimes of Normandy (Daily Observer, Wednesday, May 19, 1897). The Mabel Page Company came in the end of June, the 28th, and played through July 1, but as the Daily Observer said, "It is a good company, but the Opera House is too hot at this time of year for Melba, Calve or Eames to draw well" (Daily Observer, Friday, July 2, 1897). Although the title

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of the opening engagement is unavailable, Was Marriage a Failure was presented on June 29 (Daily Observer, June 30, 1897); The Life of an Outlaw, June 30 (Daily Observer, Thursday, July 1, 1897), and My Mother-in-Law, July 1 (Daily Observer, Friday, July 2, 1897).

During the 1896-1897 season, twenty companies had presented forty-six theatrical performances at the Opera House. There were two amateur theatrical productions. Five variety shows, three minstrels, two local musical programs and two miscellaneous entertainments were also presented. A new category comes onto the scene with this season and that is a category for some type of projection. There were twenty stereopticon and moving picture entertainments during the year. A total of ninety presentations were held in the Opera House during the season. No other hall was used for entertainments, except, of course, Association Hall in the YMCA where the Star Course Series was given.

Highlights of the season were the appearances of Edwin Travers, Eugenie Blair, James Young, the Flora Stanford Company, The Ryley's Comedians, the production of The Gay Parisian, and the Projectoscope.

In late July talk of a new opera house once again
came to the fore, when Col. J. M. Neal, owner and manager of the Danville Opera House, Danville, Virginia, came to Charlotte for further talks with Mr. Carson about buying the Opera House. Col. Neal in talking with the reporter on the Daily Observer about the matter said,

This town is a good audience town, and you want a better theatre. We can't book the best troupes in Danville because you have practically no opera house here. The jump from Danville to Atlanta is too great and they go the other way. I will put up half the money and enough over to give me a controlling interest, if the city will raise the rest, and we will have an opera house that will be a credit to the town. If I should succeed in getting the Carson building, I would extend it back 40 feet, put in a sloping floor, boxes and new dressing rooms, and would heat the building by steam. (Daily Observer, Friday, July 30, 1897.)

Nothing more was heard about the proposition or from Col. Neal for the time being.

1897-1898

The Opera House opened the 1897-1898 season with Al Field's Minstrels playing to an audience that was limited "only by the size of the house."

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19 Daily Observer, July 30, 1897.
It was a splendid audience, in which many of the best ladies of the city were present. For two hours and a half there was a continuous round of entertainment, in which jollity predominated very largely, though occasional glimpses were given of the serious side of life and there was the lack of feats of dexterity and agility . . . .

The show suffered, as all good shows coming to Charlotte do, by the absurd size of the stage, upon which everybody elbows everybody else, but notwithstanding all disadvantages, atmospheric and other, it was a stunning success. . . . (Daily Observer, Tuesday, August 31, 1897.)

The Devil's Auction was next on September 7, and for a show in its particular line, ballet and vaudeville, it passed "muster" (Daily Observer, Friday, September 8, 1897). Manager Gray exhibited his Projectoscope on September 10 and at the matinee of the next day (Daily Observer, Saturday, September 11, 1897). R. E. Graham appeared in Who's Your Friend? on September 28 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, September 29, 1897).

Playing at popular prices, the Manhattan Stock Company played three performances on October 7 and 8, to delighted audiences. Rosedale was the first presentation on October 7 (Daily Observer Friday, October 8, 1897); with Blue Grass, matinee, and a Celebrated Case, on the 8th (Daily Observer Saturday, October 9, 1897). Joshua Simpkins was the attraction for October 21 (Daily Observer, Friday,
October 22, 1897). On October 25, R. E. Graham returned with *Who's Your Friend?* and repeated his hit of a month prior (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, October 26, 1897). Of Richards and Pringle's Georgia and Rusco and Holland's Operatic Minstrels, the *Daily Observer* had this to say:

Charlotte just naturally loves a minstrel show. It is about the only theatrical performance that can pack a house here. . . . Not only every seat was filled, but the aisles under the gallery were crowded with standing humanity. Upstairs and down there was standing room only. The air was suggestive of germs, microbes and the like, but after the curtain went up everyone forgot the discomfort of breathing and hung on the lips of Billy Kersands. (*Daily Observer*, Friday, October 29, 1897.)

*Matrimonial Bureau* was the first attraction in November, on the 3rd. It was "clever, catchy, and up to date" (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, November 4, 1897). The next company to appear for a week's engagement was the Woodward Warren Company of which the *Daily Observer* wrote:

The company is one of the best popular-priced attractions that has visited Charlotte. There is about the entire affair a conspicuous absence of the "jerkyness" so often seem in cheap theatricals, and the performance runs along with a smoothness that shows able management and careful attention to details, and lifts the company above the level of "twenty and thirtyism." (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, November 9, 1897.)

The audience was large the first night, then fell back the second when "free tickets" were withheld, and then built back up over the week. *A Practical Joke* was the opening
play on November 8 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 9, 1897). The Man From Paris, November 9 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, November 9, 1897); Too Much Smith, November 10 (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 11, 1897); Cheek, November 11 (Daily Observer, Friday, November 12, 1897); The Strategist, November 12 (Daily Observer, Saturday, November 13, 1897); and a repeat of Cheek, matinee, and another play, title unavailable, for November 13 (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 4, 1897). Darrell Vinton with a company of twenty actors from the West Coast, presented an exciting production of Monte Cristo to a packed house on November 15 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 16, 1897). Hamlet was next on Tuesday, November 16, and "the general verdict of those who saw the play was that it was a highly creditable rendering of Hamlet and deserves all the good things that have been said about its presentation" (Daily Observer, Wednesday, November 17, 1897). Monte Cristo was repeated at the Wednesday matinee, November 17 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, November 10, 1897), while Othello with Vinton as Iago followed that night with great success (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 16, 1897).
November 18, 1897). On Friday night of that week, Hal Reid appeared in *Human Hearts* (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, November 20, 1897), while on November 20, there was a veriscope presentation of the Corbett vs. Fitzsimmons Fight. Concerning the presentation, the *Daily Observer* wrote:

As a mechanical and scientific triumph the veriscope is very interesting. The film used is much the worse for wear and there is a continued stream of splotches over the scenes, but even with that the show was intensely exciting. The knock-out in the fourteenth round is so realistic that one almost forgets it is a mere picture he is looking at. The veriscope production of the prize fight shows the whole thing just as the people at Carson City saw it, and it is a fascinating show. (*Daily Observer*, Sunday, November 21, 1897.)

The first entertainment in December, on Monday, the 13th, was Field's and Hanson's Minstrels which proved disappointing (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, December 14, 1897). *Miss Francis of Yale*, a recent New York production with Etienne Girardet, received a big advance ticket sale and the Opera House was crowded. "From the time the play began until it closed, it was an almost continuous ho! ha!" (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, December 15, 1897). The last show of the year was *Lost-A Bride* presented on December 31. The *Daily Observer* wrote that it was "too absurdly poor for anybody to get mad at. The laugh was on the audience, and

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21 Brown, III, 268.
they let it go at that" (Daily Observer, Saturday, January 1, 1898).

On January 2, the Cora Van Tassell Company, playing at popular prices, opened a popular week's run with Camille (Daily Observer, Tuesday, January 4, 1898). It was followed by Leah, the Forsaken, January 5 (Daily Observer, Thursday, January 6, 1898). The Little Officer, January 6 (Daily Observer, Friday, January 7, 1898); and The Gilded Age, January 7 (Daily Observer, Saturday, January 8, 1898). Titles of the productions on January 4 and the two performances on January 8, are unavailable. On February 1, Wang, a popular musical in New York with De Wolf Hopper in the 1891 season, had a large advance ticket sale which assured a large audience. Dan Packard played the Hopper role.

The scenic effect was pretty and surprising, considering the size of the stage here; the chorus work was the best in volume and tone heard since the days of the "Mascot" and pirates at times arousing enthusiastic applause . . . . (Daily Observer Wednesday, February 2, 1898.)

The next attraction on the following night was reviewed by the Daily Observer under the heading: "Robin Hood, Jr. The Worst That Has Struck the Town Since 'Fore de War.'"

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22 Ibid., p. 409.
The only feature of the whole business to be admired was immense amount of nerve the management and players had to come before a civilized community with such a show.

The whole thing was rotten from first to last. It was flat, stale and unprofitable . . . met with hisses. At the end of the first act every lady in the house left. It was a show for men only, but even they did not enjoy it.

Everybody was on a big disgust at first, but seeing that all were in the same boat, they began to treat the matter as a huge joke, and general abandon prevailed in the theatre after the ladies left. The women talked over the footlights to the men in the audience; played baseball with one or two, and generally exceeded anything that has been seen here lately.

The worst calamity that could befall the town would be for such an aggregation to get stranded here. Tell them Charlotte has the smallpox, elephants' itch—anything to get them out of town, quick. (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 3, 1898.)

The Augustin Daly Company appeared on February 26, presenting their comedy hit of many years, A Night Off (Daily Observer, Sunday, February 27, 1898).

Innes and his Band played two concerts on March 1 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 2, 1898). Louis James, a star on the New York stage since 1887,23 with an excellent company appeared in Julius Caesar at the matinee and A Cavalier of France at the evening performance of March 12.

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23 Ibid., II, 366.
While Mr. James' reputation had preceded him, so good a company as a whole had not been expected . . . . It was a privilege to have witnessed the performance, and it is to be feared that its like will not be seen in Charlotte soon again. (Daily Observer, Sunday, March 13, 1898.)

The Edwin A. Davis Company presented its first performance of His Excellency in Charlotte on Thursday, March 17. The Daily Observer commenting upon it said, "As the players became accustomed to each other any little roughness that might have been apparent last night will be smoothed off" (Daily Observer, Friday, March 18, 1898). Edwin Travers, who had been so well received in The Private Secretary in November, 1896, returned with it on March 28, and played before an excellent house (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 29, 1898). The next night the company presented A Jolly Night (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 20, 1898).

The Wang Company, which had appeared earlier in the year, returned for two performances on Saturday, April 2 (Daily Observer, Sunday, April 3, 1898). The Charlotte Dramatic Club, long quiet, presented a production of A Woman's Privilege on April 14 (Daily Observer, Friday, April 15, 1898). The biggest musical treat of the season was the Boston
Festival Orchestra's two concerts on April 27. The matinee was poorly attended, but the evening audience was quite large, almost completely filling the house. For the first hour of the evening program the orchestra played from the stage, then it moved to the front of the stage, the first two rows of the parquette having been removed, and The Barber of Seville was presented (Daily Observer, Thursday, April 28, 1898). James Young, who had made such a brilliant impression on the Charlotte audience with his Lady of Lyons and David Garrick in the spring of 1897, returned with his company for an engagement on April 28. He repeated his success with Lady of Lyons on that night (Daily Observer, Friday, April 29, 1898), and continued the run with David Garrick, April 29 (Daily Observer, Saturday, April 30, 1898). Lady of Lyons repeated for the Saturday matinee, and Hamlet for the evening performance in which he was well received (Daily Observer, Sunday, May 1, 1898).

With Young's engagement the season at the Opera House closed. Statistically the season can be summed up this way.

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25 Page 249.
Twenty-two companies presented forty-five theatrical productions at the Opera House. There were also three minstrels, four musical entertainments, and three evenings of moving picture entertainments. There was one amateur theatrical. In all there were fifty-six productions at the Opera House.

Among the highlights of the season were appearances of Billy Kersands, Darrell Vinton, Louis James and James Young; and the productions of Wang and The Prisoner of Zenda. A musical highlight was the appearance of the Boston Festival Orchestra.

1898-1899

The season opened on August 27, with a packed house for Al Field's Minstrels (Daily Observer, Sunday, August 18, 1898). On September 7, another large house saw Charles E. Blarney's A Boy Wanted, "a wild rollicking extravaganza, full of all kinds of ridiculous situations and improbabilities" (Daily Observer, Thursday, September 9, 1898).

On Saturday, October 8, The Strange Adventure of Miss Brown, played matinee and evening, and was well received (Daily Observer, Sunday, October 9, 1898). The Charles C. Vaught's Comedy Company with Miss Lillian Tucker playing
opposite Mr. Vaught began a week's engagement on Monday, October 17, with *The Buckeye* (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, October 18, 1898). A popular-price company, the group played to good audiences for the entire week and gave satisfaction. On Tuesday, they presented *Liverpool By Night* (*Daily Observer*, Sunday, October 19, 1898); Wednesday, October 19, *Prince of Liars* (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, October 19, 1898); October 20, *Just a Plain American Girl* (*Daily Observer*, Friday, October 21, 1898); October 21, *East Lynne* (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, October 22, 1898); October 22, matinee, *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*, and evening, *A Hero in Rags* (*Daily Observer*, Sunday, October 23, 1898).

November 4, brought *Back on the Farm* with Daniel Dareigh to the Opera House (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, November 5, 1898). Lee's Great Company of Hypnotists played to packed houses and excited the entire town with their feats of hypnotism for the week of November 7--November 12 (*Daily Observer*, Sunday, November 13, 1898). Lewis Harrison, long a favorite as Mephisto in his spectacular production of *Faust*, played the role at the Opera House on November 17, on a "Farewell Tour." Some idea of the spectacle can be found in the description of the Bracken scene in the *Daily
Observer.

The masterpiece of scenic art was the Bracken. The wilderness and weirdness of the scene was accentuated by the electrical display. Electric sparks filled the air, lurid lights sprang up here and there, fire flashed from the person of Mephistophles, and to crown it all, at a word from His Satanic Majesty, rivers of fire fell upon the inhabitants of the Bracken, making a scene at once grand and terrifying. (Daily Observer, Friday, November 18, 1898.)

A small audience attended the concert given by the Metropolitan Concert of New York on November 25 (Daily Observer, Saturday, November 22, 1898). The Will Harder and Emma Myrkie Company a popular-price company, began a week's engagement on Monday, November 28, with Little Sinner (Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 29, 1898). The Daily Observer summed up the entire week with "The week was a successful one. The company is an excellent one" (Daily Observer, Sunday, December 4, 1898). The productions during the week were: November 29, My Uncle From India (Daily Observer, Wednesday, November 30, 1898); November 30, For Congress (Daily Observer, Thursday, December 1, 1898); December 1, The Hermit's Legacy (Daily Observer, Friday, December 2, 1898); and December 2, Was She Guilty? (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 3, 1898). The titles of the productions for matinee and evening, December 3, are unavail-
December 12 and 13 brought Fate Goodbar's *As We See It* to the house (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, December 13, and Wednesday, December 14, 1898). For the three night engagement of the Andrews Opera Company, Manager Nat Gray sold subscription books at a 25 per cent discount (*Daily Observer*, Friday, December 16, 1898). There was a large advance sale and large audiences for each of the three performances. The engagement began on Monday, December 26, with *Martha* (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, December 27, 1898), continued on December 27, with a double bill of *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pirates of Penzance* (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, December 28, 1898), and ended with the popular *Giroflé-Girofla* (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, December 28, 1898).

The Rentfrow's Comedy Company, a stock company which would gain great popularity in Charlotte, appeared for their first time in the city on January 15, beginning a week's engagement with *The Lightning Express*. The *Daily Observer* reported in its review of the next day that:

The company had been playing to standing-room-only wherever it has held an engagement, and judging from last night's jam at the Opera House, history will repeat itself to the company here. (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, January 17, 1899.)
Opening night was followed by: The Devil's Gold Mine, January 17 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, January 18, 1899); The Old Inventor, January 18 (Daily Observer, Thursday, January 19, 1899); Below Zero, January 19 (Daily Observer, Friday, January 20, 1899); Old Glory, January 20 (Daily Observer, Saturday, January 21, 1899); Cinderella, a special children's matinee, and St. Valentine's Day, Saturday, January 21 (Daily Observer, Sunday, January 22, 1899). History did repeat itself, the company was very popular and very well attended throughout the week. John Phillip Sousa and his band made its second appearance in Charlotte on January 26, playing a matinee concert only. A packed opera house greeted the director (Daily Observer, Friday, January 27, 1899). On January 31, Mr. C. W. Rivenbark presented a Graphophone Grand Concert using a machine that as his advertisement read, "gives an absolutely exact reproduction of vocal and instrumental music. A degree of perfection never before attained by a talking machine" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, January 31, 1899). In reviewing the program, the Daily Observer later said: "The banjo solo could be heard as distinctly as a real banjo would have been
heard. . ." (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 1, 1899). The program was presented through Thursday, February 2.

Samuel W. Glenn, New York actor of long standing who had made his New York debut in the early 1850's, 27 made his first and only visit to Charlotte beginning a three performance engagement on February 3, of Rip Van Winkle (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 4, and Sunday, February 5, 1899). The A. Q. Scammon's Company with Side Tracked played on February 8 to a good house. E. E. O'Connor was the star and the Daily Observer noted that he was an "old-time favorite here, and whenever he comes can be assured a good house" (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 9, 1899). Braving freezing weather a large audience enjoyed Hoyt's A Stranger in New York which was presented on February 14 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 15, 1899). Joe Ott appeared in the farce, Looking for Trouble, on February 25 (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 16, 1899). Lee's Great Company of Hypnotists repeated its success of November when it returned for a week's engagement on February 27 (Daily Observer, Friday, February 24, and Saturday, March 4, 1899).

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27 Brown, I, 127.
Summing up the 1898-1899 season shows eighty-three entertainments at the Opera House—nineteen professional companies had given fifty-eight theatrical performances. There had also been one minstrel, six musicals, one variety show and seventeen miscellaneous events. There had been no amateur productions during the whole year.

Highlights of the season included the appearance of Lewis Morrison, John Phillip Sousa, Sofie Scalehi, the Andrews Opera Company, the British Guard Band, and the Rentfrow Comedy Company. The big news of the season was the probability of a new opera house to replace the antiquated one, thus making bigger and better attractions possible.

The summer season opened in Dilworth Pavilion in Latta Park under Nat Gray's management with a full fare of vaudeville entertainment, but with more dependence upon the Vitascope to enhance the bill than in the previous season. An amateur production of One Night was presented there on August 8 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, August 9, 1899).

1899-1900

All who could find room to sit or stand endured the heat for three hours to witness one of the best performances ever given here. (Daily Observer, Sunday, September 3, 1899.)
6, 1899); The Dark Horse, April 6 (Daily Observer, Friday, April 7, 1899); A Pair of Owls, April 7 (Daily Observer, Saturday, April 8, 1899); The Lightning Express and The Middle Man, April 8 (Daily Observer, Sunday, April 9, 1899).

The week of April 17 to 22 the Emma Warren Theatre Company played at popular prices. The group did not hit the public's fancy as Rentfrow or some of the other companies recently had, and, although the reviews were relatively good, the audiences were comparatively small. The group opened with Married In Haste on April 17 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, April 18, 1899), and continued with Camille, April 18 (Daily Observer, Thursday, April 20, 1899); The Fatal Wedding, April 20 (Daily Observer, Friday, April 21, 1899); and A Race For a Wife, April 21 (Daily Observer, Friday, April 21, 1899).

The name of the play on April 27, is unavailable. The First North Carolina Regiment Band "took the town by storm. The large and critical audience present was amazed and delighted."

The concert was on Monday, April 24, and repeated at a matinee on Tuesday (Daily Observer, Tuesday, April 25, 1899). The final engagement of the season at the Opera House was a Miller and Cannon's Tramp and Sport, "a polite Vaudeville," on April 28 (Daily Observer, Thursday, April 27, 1899).
members of an amateur dramatic club earlier. The play and Rostell were well received as was the doctor (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 18, 1899). Othello and Hamlet followed on Saturday, March 18, on Sunday, the Observer wrote that, "Mr. Rostell is a student of Shakespeare, as shown by his portrayal of the characters he appeared in yesterday. Hamlet is one of his best roles" (Daily Observer, Sunday, March 19, 1899). Fillion's Ball drew a tremendous crowd on March 23 with Cale Murray and Ollie Mack (Daily Observer, Friday, March 24, 1899). Sousa's El Capitan, on March 27, with Edward Egleton gave Charlotte an evening of "genuine pleasure" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 28, 1899).

April 3, brought the Metropolitan Opera contralto, Sofia Scalchi, and her Grand Operatic Company. Their program included the fourth act of Verdi's Trovatore (Daily Observer, Tuesday, April 4, 1899). The Rentfrow Company paid a return engagement for the rest of the week, April 4—April 8. Once again they were extremely popular and filled the house each night. The tickets were, of course, popular-priced and ladies got in free if accompanied by a paid admission. The week's repertoire included: The Devil's Gold Mine, April 4 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, April 5, 1899); The Old Inventor, April 5 (Daily Observer, Thursday, April
On March 10, for two performances the British Guard Band under the direction of Lt. Godfrey drew an audience even larger than the one that had come to Sousa. (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 11, 1899). The Eunice Goodrich Company, a popular-price company, began a three day engagement to a standing-room-only audience on Monday, March 13, with a performance of Fanchon, the Cricket (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 14, 1899). Wanted, A Husband (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 15, 1899), followed on the next night with Phyllis, the Little Quaker, matinee, and Boblink, the Tom Boy, on Wednesday, March 15 (Daily Observer, Thursday, March 16, 1899). Fitz and Webster's A Breezy Time appeared for the third time in the Opera House, but as the advertisement announced, "entirely rewritten and turned up to date," on March 16. It was again a hit (Daily Observer, Friday, March 17, 1899). Edwin Rostell and Company appeared next on March 17 and 18 in a series of three dramas. The first was Bulwer-Lytton's Richelieu in which a local doctor, Dr. C. Rakestraw stepped into the role of Chevalier de Mauprat, when the actor playing the part was called away for an emergency. Rostell and Rakestraw had studied and played Richelieu together when

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28 Pages 202 and 229.
Thus read the review of the Al G. Field's Greater Minstrels, which opened the 1899 season, on September 2, at the Opera House. Barlow Minstrels, another show that delighted the minstrel-loving audiences, played on September 27 (Daily Observer, Thursday, September 28, 1899).

Fred Rider's New Night Owl Burlesque Company on October 5, was "far below average." There being "scarcely a good feature in the bill" (Daily Observer, Friday, October 6, 1899). On October 16, the Washburn's Great Southern Minstrels, played to the usual minstrel audience—"a crowded gallery and a full parquet." The entertainment was a great success (Daily Observer, Tuesday, October 17, 1899). The rest of the entertainment in October was local and musical in nature. On October 13, Stitt's Orchestra, colored, held a benefit concert for the Good Samaritan Hospital at the Opera House (Daily Observer, Saturday, October 14, 1899), and on October 20, presented another concert in benefit of themselves, while on October 17, there was an entertainment presented for the benefit of the Charlotte Library (Daily Observer, Wednesday, October 18, 1899). The end of October saw the Olympia Opera Company at the Opera House for a four night stand. The company began with Boccaccio on October
30, which "the audience enjoyed with a delight that expressed itself in close attention and enthusiastic applause throughout the evening" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, October 31, 1899). On October 21, Paul Jones was presented (Daily Observer, Wednesday, November 1, 1899). November 1, a disappointing The Bohemian Girl was presented. The Daily Observer said that "either The Bohemian Girl was too heavy for the Olympians or the Olympians were not heavy enough for the Girl" (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 2, 1899), but the company redeemed itself with Perichole on Thursday, November 2, when the audience was "carried right along with the singers" (Daily Observer, Friday, November 3, 1899). On the next night because of a previous booking, F. E. Beane starred in The Real Widow Brown (Daily Observer, Saturday, November 4, 1899), but Saturday, November 4, the Olympia Opera Company continued its run with two performances, Pinafore at the matinee and Paul Jones at the evening performance (Daily Observer, Sunday, November 5, 1899.)

The Little Nest, a successful offering at the Herald Square Theatre during 1898-1899 season, was the November 8 attraction at the Opera House. R. E. Graham, of the original

29 Brown, III, 390.
cast, and Corinne starred (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 9, 1899). A Jay from Jaysville played on November 10, to a large and delighted audience (Daily Observer, Saturday, November 11, 1899). On November 13, James A. Herne's Shore Acres, which had played over 200 performances in New York in the early 1890's, played to a magnificent audience last night. The play was clean, pure and sweet—a refreshing change from the majority of the fin de siècle dramas. The play appeals to one's higher nature; to the soul. (Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 14, 1899.)

The Andrews Opera Company which had been so successful during the season before, returned on November 17 and 18 for three performances. The review of the opening presentation, Carmen, on November 27, tells something about the company.

The company is large and in many respects one of the best that has ever been here. To attempt grand opera on the Charlotte Opera House stage is at once a brave and difficult undertaking, but so perfectly had the chorus been drilled in Andrews Bros. private theatre in Minnesota, during the summer, that they accommodated themselves to the stage and situations with that ease that perfect familiarity with a thing gives. (Daily Observer, Saturday, November 18, 1899.)

The Pirates of Penzance and Martha were presented on Saturday. The attendance was not large for any of the performances since it conflicted with the opening YMCA Star

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30 Ibid.  31 Morris, p. 269.  32 Page 265.
Course date and a large fraternal order banquet (Daily Observer, Sunday, November 19, 1899). The Mabel Paige and Marshall's Musical Comedy Company, playing at 10¢ to 30¢ prices, began a week's engagement at the Opera House with The Little Cadet on November 20. The advance sale for opening night was so large that every seat in the house was sold before noon. "The applause was deafening and the enjoyment the keenest" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 21, 1899). The company played to full houses the entire week. The Little Egyptian was on November 21 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, November 22, 1899); A Family Affair, November 22, matinee (Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 21, 1899); Miss Juliet, November 22 (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 23, 1899); The Other Girl, November 23 (Daily Observer, Friday, November 24, 1899); The Girl from Ireland, November 24 (Daily Observer, Saturday, November 25, 1899); and The Little Cadet was given twice on Saturday, November 25 (Daily Observer, Sunday, November 26, 1899).

The Herald Square Opera Company, performing under the difficulty of recently having lost three of its major female singers, presented the Chimes of Normandy on

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33Daily Observer, December 7, 1899.

He did not make the lady vanish, he did not give the rope test, nor did the mango tree grow and flourish under his hand. The lady who assisted him in these things, he stated, was sick in bed. The mind reading was clever. . . . (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 16, 1899.)

The Hustler was next on December 16. "It was a gallery-god number. There was nothing in it to appeal to the orchestra chairs" (Daily Observer, Sunday, December 17, 1899). The Phil W. and Nettie Peters Comedy Company was the final attraction in December with a week's engagement of popular plays at popular prices. They opened with Mugg's Landing on December 18 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, December 19, 1899); and continued with A Booming Town, December 19 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, December 20, 1899); Poor Mr. Rich, matinee, and The Moonshiners on December 20 (Daily Observer, Thursday, December 21, 1899); His Nibs, the Baron, December 21,
1899); a vaudeville performance honoring the Elks Organization, as was the custom of the company to do once during an engagement, on December 22 (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 23, 1899), and two productions on Saturday, December, titles unavailable.

The new year began with moving pictures at the Opera House, a showing of the Jeffries-Sharkey Prize Fight, on January 10 and 11. "The fight is portrayed in a very realistic manner, and the views were not blurred or indistinct, as is usual with such pictures," said the Observer review (Daily Observer, Thursday, January 11, 1900). The Broadway and W. H. Mack Comedians in Town Topics were next on January 13 and stayed for a repeat on January 15 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, January 16, 1900). The Country Visitor followed on January 18 (Daily Observer, Friday, January 19, 1900). An unidentified company presented Campbell's The White Slave on January 20. The Observer wrote "in individual and collective talent and in scenic effect, 'The White Slave' was superb" (Daily Observer, Sunday, January 21, 1900). James Young, a popular drama star in Charlotte, presented Lord Byron on January 26. He was "strong and predominant through-

34 Pages 249 and 261.
out the play" (Daily Observer, Friday, January 26, 1900).

In February a big musical event was the concert given by the International Grand Operatic Company at the Opera House on February 2. The program consisted of Act II of Romeo and Juliet, Act IV of Il Trovatore, and Cavalleria Rusticana (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 3, 1900).

The William H. West Big Minstrel Jubilee was next on February 7 (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 8, 1900). Herrmann, the Great Magician, appeared on February 9, before a large crowd and left them "delighted" (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 10, 1900). Side Tracked, popular from the previous season, returned and played to quite a large audience on February 20 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 21, 1900). Gorton's Minstrels played on February 24 (Daily Observer, Sunday, February 25, 1900). The last attraction in February was H. Gratton Donnelly's The American Girl with George F. Hall, which played to "one of the largest audiences of the season" (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 28, 1900). Robert Downing, popular in Charlotte since 1879, appeared for the last time on the Opera House stage in J. G. Nugent's An Indiana Romance (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 13, 1900).

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35 Page 267. 36 Pages 90, 142, 197 and 206.
The first production of Quo Vadis appeared on the Charlotte stage on March 16, 1900. The version by Charles W. Chase starred Aidan Benedict and pleased the Charlotte audience, although one wonders how when reading the description of the climatic scene as found in the Daily Observer:

Lay figures fastened on pasteboard representing Christians had just met a fearful death by fire. Lygia is borne into the arena on the back of a bull—a most curious bull whose only realism in art consisted of a pair of borrowed horns. But amid pyrotechnics Ursus slays the distorted representation of the cow-kind and there's happiness for all save Nero and his coterie. (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 17, 1900.)

Brown's In Town, a farce, followed on March 19 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 20, 1900). During the last week in March the favorite Rentfrow Company presented eight different productions, beginning Monday, March 26, with The Old Inventor by Henry Arthur Jones, to a standing-room-only audience (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 27, 1900). Throughout the week the audiences supported the popular-priced company with its repertorie of The Witch of Wall Street, March 27 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 28, 1900); East Lynne, matinee, and The Three Musketeers, March 28 (Daily Observer, Thursday, March 29, 1900); Michael Strogoff, March 29 (Daily Observer, Friday, March 30, 1900); A Fatal Error, March 30 (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 31, 1900); and Cinderella, March 31,
children's matinee, and *Below Zero*, March 31 (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 31, 1900). *Why Smith Left Home*, an amusing farce which had opened the season at the Hoyt Theatre in New York, played to a large and well pleased audience, on April 5 (Daily Observer, Friday, April 6, 1900), Hubert Labadie appeared in *Faust* on April 7 (Daily Observer, Sunday, April 8, 1900). The Spooner Dramatic Company with Mr. F. E. Spooner and Nina Allis Spooner made its first appearance in Charlotte playing at the Opera House from April 9-April 14. Another cheap-priced troupe, this one gradually proved itself to the audience, starting with small audiences and building up to large ones by the end of the run (Daily Observer, Friday, April 13, 1900). *The Pearl of Savoy* was the first presentation on April 9 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, April 10, 1900). Other plays during the week were *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, April 10 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, April 11, 1900); *The Gold King*, April 11, 1900 (Daily Observer, Thursday, April 12, 1900); *By the King's Command*, April 12, 1900 (Daily Observer, Friday, April 13, 1900); *For Honor's Sake*, April 13 (Daily Observer, Saturday, April 14, 1900); and on April 14, *The Lawyer's Wedding*, matinee, and American in Brown, II, 445.
Cuba (Daily Observer, Monday, April 15, 1900). A local entertainment called the Cosmorama, a "sort of walking advertisement" in which the various firms of Charlotte were represented by the young ladies in the town, was presented at the Opera House on April 20 (Daily Observer, Saturday, April 21, 1900).

On May 21, the Rentfrow Company returned for another week of plays at popular prices. Opening this time with The Lightning Express on May 21 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, May 22, 1900), the group continued with The Devil's Gold Mine, May 22 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, May 23, 1900); The Three Musketeers, May 23 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, May 23, 1900); Michael Strogoff, May 24 (Daily Observer, Friday, May 25, 1900); Because He Loved Her So, May 25 (Daily Observer, Friday, May 25, 1900); and an attraction on May 26, title unavailable. The company left Charlotte to go to Raleigh for a week's engagement and then return to Charlotte to spend the summer at Latta Park in stock under the management of Peters and King, two members of the group (Daily Observer, Sunday, May 27, 1900).

During the summer there were two events in the Opera House. On June 21, an amateur group from Salisbury present-

On August 21, Herrmann, the Great, entertained a good size audience with his tricks of magic (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, August 22, 1900).

During the season there had been eighty-seven presentations at the Opera House, thirty-three companies had presented sixty-five theatrical productions. There had been five minstrels, four musical programs, one variety show, and five miscellaneous events. There had been five amateur musical events ranging from minstrels to variety shows.

Among the highlights of the season had been the appearance of Mable Paige, James Young, Robert Downing, Herrmann, the Al Field's Minstrels and the Rentfrow Company along with *Shore Acres* and *The American Girl*.

1900-1901

For the fourth straight year Al Field's Minstrels opened the season at the Opera House playing to a packed house on September 6 (*Daily Observer*, Friday, September 7, 1900). Sol Smith Russell's comedy, *A Poor Relation*, was next on September 14, featuring Frank J. Keenan in the role Russell had played in the successful original production in
1889. 38 It was a "delightful success" (Daily Observer, Saturday, September 15, 1900). On the 17th, The Man-O'-War's-Man was "a brilliant success... especially so in the last act, when the 'New Orleans' sinks the 'El Scorpion'" (Daily Observer, Tuesday, September 18, 1900).

In October the first attraction was the Rusco and Holland's Minstrel Festival on the 11th. The group was a Negro one and not up to first-class standards. The Observer wrote in its review:

The show only served to emphasize the fact that a negro as a negro minstrel is not a complete success. He invariably overdoes his part and is a grotesque failure in attempting to burlesque himself—an inherently comical type. The accepted criterion for negro minstrel shows is naturalness not more than that. (Daily Observer, Friday, October 12, 1900.)

Charles B. Hanford, who had recently played support to Booth and Modjeska in a series of Shakespearean drama, 39 appeared in Lee Arthur's Private John Allen on October 13. It was a Saturday night which is "proverbially a poor theatre night in Charlotte," but a good audience attended (Daily Observer, Sunday, October 14, 1900). A poor production of Too Rich to Marry by Edward Owings Towne followed on October 27 (Daily Observer, Sunday, October 28, 1900).

38 Ibid., p. 562. 39 Ibid., III, 399.
On October 31, *A Trip to Tramptown* with a cast of forty appeared next at the Opera House. It was a big hit (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, November 1, 1900).

*A Pair of Tramps* with Major C. Hyers on November 2 was, to quote the *Daily Observer*, "a medley of quick action, tiresome words and poor acting" (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, November 3, 1900). A repeat of *Town Topics* with W. H. Mack fared better on November 5 (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, November 6, 1900). *Faust*, reportedly under the personal supervision of the long-time interpreter of the play, Lewis Morrison, was presented on November 9. The *Daily Observer* felt that "Faust in the hopeless Charlotte Opera House suggested the picture of a fascinating, beautifully gowned woman parading in a back alley, but this play... was a success, despite stage limitations" (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, November 10, 1900).

On November 12, The Columbia Comic Opera Company began a three night engagement with *The Mascot*. A tragic accident after the first act destroyed the brilliance of the opening night. A Negro man who had been drinking, in a hurry to exit from the balcony, threw his leg over the railing of the stairs to slide down. He lost his balance and fell head first to the floor below, a distance of about seven feet.
The opera house was filled with people. They heard the fall and when it became reported that a man had been killed it seemed for a minute as if there might be a stampede among the spectators in the rear part of the house and in the galleries. But those composing the audience in the central part of the room, in the pit area, which included a large proportion of Charlotte's society folk, kept their seats, with the exception of a number of men, who counselled the quiet that soon prevailed.

The three physicians who were in the opera house were at once summoned to attend Campbell /the fallen man/. They found that his skull was badly fractured and that he was fatally injured. He bled greatly from the wound and from his nose and mouth, and as he lay at the top of the inclined place, in the aisle that leads to the ticket door, the blood flowed down, in quick streams, to the dress circle railing/sic/, twelve feet below. And it is a gruesome part of the tragedy that the persons who hurried back to see the man noticed not the blood until they had tramped the red stains to other parts of the theatre. (Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 13, 1900.)

The rest of the run was successful and pleasant. _Olivette_ was presented on November 13 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, November 14, 1900), while _Two Vagabonds_ was presented twice on Wednesday, November 14, 1900 (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 14, 1900). Dunne and Ryley appeared in Hoyt's production of _A Milk White Flag_ on November 19 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 20, 1900). On Friday, November 23, the Henry Ward's Minstrels Company played to a large crowd and pleased (Daily Observer, Saturday, November 24, 1900). M. B. Leavitt's _The Spider and the Fly_ was the next
attraction at the Opera House on November 28. "It was a show full of fun and frolic. . . ." (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 29, 1900). On Thursday, November 29, for two performances and on Friday, November 30, for one, Black Patti and her Troubadours scored a decided hit with Charlotteans, both colored as well as white (Daily Observer, Friday, November 30, and Saturday, December 1, 1900).

December 3 brought the Una Clayton Company for a week's engagement at popular prices. The Daily Observer reports in each review of their plays that the house was packed, every seat taken or a crowded house. Of the company itself, the Observer, said:

It is just to this company to praise the character of the work it is doing. It presents clean, attractive plays—not necessarily new or especially intricate, but showing, invariably, careful preparation, coupled with native talent, on the part of the members of the cast. They faithfully do all they pretend to do. . . . (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 8, 1900.)

During the week they presented: Darkest Russia, December 3 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, December 4, 1900); A Midnight Masquerade, December 4 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, December 5, 1900); The Sultan's Daughter, December 5 (Daily Observer, Thursday, December 6, 1900); Why Jones Left Home, December 6 (Daily Observer, Friday, December 7, 1900); Miss Aurora,
December 7 (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 8, 1900); and a repeat of Darkest Russia, December 8, matinee (Daily Observer, Sunday, December 9, 1900). The titles of the plays presented on December 5, matinee, and December 8, evening, are unavailable. When We Were Twenty-One, a successful New York play earlier that year with Nat Goodwin, played Charlotte on December 20, 1900, with George Clarke and Estelle Carter. "Despite the limitations of the Opera House, the play was well-staged and, in all ways, was presented in a pleasing and satisfactory manner" (Daily Observer, Friday, December 21, 1900). May Howard, advertised as the Queen of Burlesque, appeared on December 26 at the Opera House at first-class prices.

Just after the curtain rose, some of the audience realized that they were there under a misapprehension and left without asking for return checks. . . . There was a little too much of the bowery about it, however, to make it fit the Charlotte stage. (Daily Observer, Thursday, December 27, 1900.)

Other People's Money was the next attraction on December 28 and played to a very large and enthusiastic audience (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 29, 1900). The next production A Midnight Bell by Hoyt was condemned by the Daily Observer.

40 Ibid., p. 603.
as "commonplace and stilted... the company lacked talent and spirit and spoke the lines in sophomoric and inappreciative fashion" (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 30, 1900).

A major theatrical event was next on January 3. My Daughter-in-Law played in Charlotte with Miss Marion Convere, stage name for Convere Jones, the daughter of Col. H. C. Jones of the town. The Daily Observer of January 4 described the event.

By 8:30 last night an audience that filled all the available space in the opera house and was enthusiastic in proportion to its size, had assembled to greet Miss Jones... The Charlotte public held the leading lady as the central figure for interest. The result of the presentation justified this estimate, though a cordial yet discriminating criticism allowed her support a division of honors.

Miss Convere, as Mrs. Reginald Mainwaring, Jr., was fascinating. She was true in appreciation of her character role and was, therefore, good in art's name. Yet her charming personality was most manifest. She is a beautiful woman—tall, svelte, with the indescribable poise of head and hauteur that mark her to the manner born. Her voice, expression, gesture, poise were all excellent. She pleased even beyond expectation...

Miss Convere received an ovation at her every appearance and there were curtain calls after each act. (Daily Observer, Friday, January 4, 1901.)

On January 5, Harry Glazier in Three Musketeers gave a performance that "elicited applause throughout" (Daily Observer, Sunday, January 6, 1901). George H. Broadhurst's Why Smith
Left Home was the January 11 attraction. It was well re-
received (Daily Observer, Saturday, January 12, 1901). It
was followed on January 15, by a return engagement of Miss
Convere in My Daughter-in-Law, which was once again a great
success (Daily Observer, Wednesday, January 16, 1901). The
King of the Opium Ring was next on January 21 (Daily Obser-
ver, Tuesday, January 22, 1901). Barlow's Minstrels played
the last night in January with the usual minstrel success
(Daily Observer, Friday, February 1, 1901).

An Old Maid's Convention, a local entertainment put
on by the spinsters of the community, was a great success
on February 5 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 6, 1901).
Creston Clarke and Adelaid Prince, playing the roles they
had played in the New York engagement, appeared in Clarke's
The Last of His Race on February 6. "The audience, composed
largely of the society folk in this city, was not nearly so
large as the merits of the cast or the play demand" (Daily
Observer, Thursday, February 7, 1901). Side Tracked pre-
sented by the A. Q. Scammon Company appeared for the third
consecutive season on February 8 and was "a familiar and

41 Ibid., II, 186.
rather worn out story to most of the good-sized audience" (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 9, 1901). Once again to standing-room-only audiences, the Rentfrow Company returned for a week of drama. Between February 11 and 16, they presented the following: Monte Cristo, February 11 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 12, 1901); Falsely Accused, February 12 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 13, 1901); East Lynne, matinee, and Darkest England, February 13 (Daily Observer, Thursday, February 14, 1901); Below Zero, February 14 (Daily Observer, Friday, February 15, 1901); Sire to Son, February 15 (Daily Observer, Saturday, February 16, 1901); and Cinderella, children's matinee, and In Idaho, February 16 (Daily Observer, Sunday, February 17, 1901). The Charlotte Dramatic Club revived and presented Who's To Win Him on February 18 as a benefit for St. Peter's and the Good Samaritan Hospitals (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 19, 1901).

The Una Clayton Company played the week of March 4–March 9. The Daily Observer summed up the week with the following: "The Una Clayton Company concluded a week's engagement in this city last night, playing as usual, to a large and enthusiastic audience." A Waif of New York was
presented on March 4 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 5, 1901); Why Smith Left Home, March 5 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 6, 1901); The Midnight Masquerade, March 6 (Daily Observer, Thursday, March 7, 1901); Frou-Frou, March 7 (Daily Observer, Friday, March 8, 1901); Miss Aurora, March 8 (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 9, 1901); and Little Miss Johnson, March 9, matinee (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 9, 1901). The titles of the productions on the matinee on Wednesday, March 6, and the evening performance of Saturday, March 9, are unavailable. For two nights, March 11 and 12, Dan Packard entertained large audiences at the Opera House in Prince Pro Tem (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 12, and Wednesday, March 13, 1901). Walker Whiteside, making his first Southern tour, appeared in Heart and Sword under the management of the Shipman Brothers of New York on March 15. The Daily Observer predicted that he would win "laurels in the Southland" (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 16, 1901). Mabel Paige with the Southern Stock Company was the next repertoire company to visit Charlotte. They began an engagement on March 18 and continued through to March 23. The

42Daily Observer, March 16, 1901
Captain's Mate was presented on March 18 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, March 19, 1901); A Prisoner of Algiers, March 19 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 20, 1901); Jack's Sweetheart, March 20 (Daily Observer, Thursday, March 21, 1901); A Soldier of the Empire, March 21 (Daily Observer, Friday, March 22, 1901); The Pearl of Savoy, March 22 (Daily Observer, Saturday, March 23, 1901); and Tom Sawyer, matinee, and The Brand of Cain, March 23 (Daily Observer, Sunday, March 24, 1901). The Wednesday, matinee, performance on March 20, is not known. The company played to full houses each night. Quo Vadis was the next attraction on March 26. (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 27, 1901).

Arthur Butt's painting of Revelations along with Gray's Projectorscope were offered as the next attraction at the Opera House, on April 3 and 4 (Daily Observer, Thursday, April 4, 1901). The Barlow and Wilson's Minstrels, not quite up to the quality of Field's Minstrels, played on April 5 to a "fairly large audience" (Daily Observer, Saturday, April 6, 1901). Brown's In Town, a failure in New York, met with success on April 15 at the Opera House (Daily

43 Brown, III, 301.
A colored Old Maid's Convention was held on April 18 (Daily Observer, Monday, April 15, 1901). Tis He on April 23 was not up to the "first-class mark" (Daily Observer, Wednesday, April 24, 1901). My Friend from India with Myron Rice played on April 24, and, although it was a Saturday night, there was a large audience (Daily Observer, Sunday, April 28, 1901).

Anna Eva Fay, mystic, entertained audiences at the Opera House, from May 2 to May 6 (Daily Observer, Friday, May 3, through Tuesday, May 7, 1901). The Elks presented a program of local entertainment on May 20 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, May 21, 1901). The final production of the season was The Beggar King on May 25. The Daily Observer wrote of it:

The "Beggar King" opera company played to a very small audience at the Opera House last night, but the crowd would have been smaller had there been foreknowledge of the Beggar King. (Daily Observer, Sunday, May 26, 1901.)

On June 6, 1901, the summer entertainments began at Latta Park under the management of Mr. Claude Saunders (Daily Observer, Friday, June 7, 1901).

During August the Opera House was open twice, both times for local productions. On August 20, the Carolina Minstrels
performed (Daily Observer, Wednesday, August 21, 1901), while on August 27, over 60 children and quite a number of ladies presented the fairy play, Puss in Boots (Daily Observer, Wednesday, August 28, 1901).

During the 1900-1901 season there had been eighty-seven presentations at the Opera House. Thirty-three companies had presented sixty-five theatrical productions. There had also been five minstrels, four musical entertainments, one variety show, five miscellaneous events, and two moving picture entertainments. There were five amateur programs.

Highlights were performances of A Trip to Tramptown, When We Were Twenty-One, and Other People's Money and appearance of Una Clayton, Marion Convere, Mabel Paige, and the Rentfrow Company.

1901-1902

Although Al Field's Minstrels were announced as the season opener, Vanity Fair, a conglomeration of comedies, appeared on August 29, to open it. The Observer commented

44Daily Observer, August 30, 1901.
that no women were in the audience and "only a slender, inconsequential few on the stage. The play didn't rise to the height of being wicked. It was commonplace, wearisome, bum" (Daily Observer, Friday, August 30, 1901).

On September 10, Black Patti's Troubadours appeared and played to a large and "very boisterously appreciative audience" (Daily Observer, Wednesday, September 11, 1901). Finally Al Field's Minstrels arrived on September 12, and the season was considered officially opened. As usual their appeal was tremendous (Daily Observer, Friday, September 13, 1901). Human Hearts was presented for two performances on September 14, and found "favor with the theatre-going public" (Daily Observer, Sunday, September 15, 1901). Of the next attraction, Wanted A Family, on September 19, the Observer wrote: "The farce comedy was an old traveler with a fruitless alias. The manager of the play said it didn't pretend to be any great success. It wasn't" (Daily Observer, Friday, September 20, 1901). On September 21, the Barlow Minstrels returned with a show "much improved on the performance of last year..." (Daily Observer, Sunday, September 22, 1901). The Prisoner of Zenda played to a very large and fashionable audience on September 24 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, September 24, 1901).
On October 2, Alvin Joslin, first performed at the Opera House in 1883,\textsuperscript{45} was given "in splendid style" \textit{(Daily Observer, Thursday, October 3, 1901)}. The Herald Square Opera Company appeared with \textit{The Village Bride}, on October 4 \textit{(Daily Observer, Saturday, October 5, 1901)}, and \textit{The Pirates of Morocco}, on October 5 \textit{(Daily Observer, Sunday, October 6, 1901)}. The latter was "a bit below the standard" \textit{(Daily Observer, Sunday, October 6, 1901)}. Miss Lillian Tucker who had appeared with the Vaught Company in 1898-1899 season,\textsuperscript{46} returned in October with her own company playing at popular prices for a three night engagement. She opened with \textit{A Bachelor's Wife} on October 7, and played with success to a large house \textit{(Daily Observer, Tuesday, October 8, 1901)}. This insured large crowds the rest of the engagement. On October 8, the company presented \textit{A Woman's Heart}, \textit{(Daily Observer, Wednesday, October 9, 1901)}, while on October 9, \textit{Fritz the Ferryman} was the bill \textit{(Daily Observer, Wednesday, October 9, 1901)}. The rest of the month there were a number of one-night stands. On October 11, there was \textit{Dixie in Ante-Bellum Days}, an answer to \textit{Uncle Tom's}...\textsuperscript{45}\textsuperscript{46}
Cabin (Daily Observer, Thursday, October 10, 1901); A Poor Relation with Frederick Summerfield on October 12 (Daily Observer, Sunday, October 11, 1901); Thelma by Charles Chase with Marie Corelli on October 14 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, October 25, 1901); and the Who, What, When Minstrels on October 16 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, October 16, 1901).

Charles Hansford with Helen Grantly appeared on October 25, in The Taming of the Shrew. Of it the Daily Observer, wrote,

The audience was large, discriminating and most appreciative. The larger part of the theatre-goers, had known, and liked, Mr. Hanford in various roles, but they had not had opportunity until last night, to heartily comment his appearance in Shakespearean production.

The staging, costumes and scenic effects left nothing to be desired. Taken as a whole the play is a wonderfully meritorious presentation. (Daily Observer, Saturday, October 26, 1901.)

On October 26, The Pride of Jennico presented by the Munro and Sage Company, was witnessed by a "large and fashionable audience" (Daily Observer, Sunday October 27, 1901). Another classic, A School for Scandal, was the last engagement in October on the 31st. It was a first-class company with a first-class troupe. Top price was $1.50. In the leading roles were R. D. McLean and Odette Tyler. The Daily Observer wrote of the evening:
In the audience was a large proportion of the leading—and fashionable—residents of this city, and their very evident appreciation of the play was a token of proper discrimination or a tribute demanded by merit.

All criticism of the play, as presented by the MacLean Tyler Company prior to its arrival here, and been favorable, and the local theatre-going public asked much of the company. It was not disappointed.

The play as given last evening was exceptional in the strength of the leading figures in the cast. . . . (Daily Observer, Friday, November 1, 1901.)

Dr. Henry Austin Clapp delivered a lecture on The Merchant of Venice before a large and "unusually select" audience on November 1 (Daily Observer, Saturday, November 2, 1901). The Myrkle and Harder Stock Company played a successful three night engagement, November 11-November 13. They opened with The Ups and Downs of Life, November 11 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, November 12, 1901), and followed with A Man of Mystery, November 12 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, November 13, 1901), and Under Two Flags, matinee, and The Knobs of Tennessee, November 12 (Daily Observer, Thursday, November 24, 1901). On November 16, A Trip to Trumptown, was the attraction at the Opera House. "The play is old and never overly attractive, but fared pretty well in the hands of the players last night" (Daily Observer, Saturday, November 16, 1901). The Gay Mr. Goldstein, with Thomas J.
Keegh, Mary Hampton, and George C. Boniface, Jr., met with great success on November 21 (Daily Observer, Friday, November 22, 1901). Two performances of The Wrong Mr. Wright made a big hit at the Opera House on November 28, 1901 (Daily Observer, Friday, November 29, 1901).

The Runaway Girl, one of Daly's big successes at the Daly Theatre and later at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, with a company of 50 charmed the Charlotte audience on December 2 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, December 3, 1901). The Carpenter Company returned with Quo Vadis on December 3, but, as the Observer said,

The play is no longer new to Charlotte people and has lost all attraction here. It is an absurd, ponderous, theatrical, proposition: always striving for effects that become ludicrous or heavy through overreach or too much "blood and thunder." Following "The Runaway Girl" it was as stale beer after champagne. (Daily Observer, Wednesday, December 4, 1901.)

Rose Coghlan, a New York actress of considerable success, appeared in A Woman of No Importance by Oscar Wilde on December 4. The review talks almost entirely of the play itself with very little mention of the star. Of the play, it said:

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47Brown, II, 585, 589. 48Hornblow, II, 194.
It is intended primarily for the display of clever­ness, of epigrams—the subtle, yet powerful cut-diamond quality of cleverness. By virtue of this strength the play will hold the attention of any audience, though it is a melodrama that does not please or satisfy. Even the emotional element is in a setting of sharp turned phrases—more epigrams. The lines are brilliant and startling, and are peculiarly daring in a quick hold-up of secret vanities and social stings. . . . (Daily Observer, Thursday, December 5, 1901.)

The Myrkle-Harder Stock Company, having played a very suc­cessful three day engagement in November, returned for a week's engagement on December 9 with A Man of Mystery (Daily Observer, Tuesday, December 10, 1901). The house was filled almost to capacity each performance. On Tuesday, December 10, the play was The Knobs of Tennessee (Daily Observer, Wednesday, December 11, 1901); The Ups and Downs of Life, matinee, and For Congress, evening, December 11 (Daily Observer, Thursday, December 12, 1901); a repeat of The Ups and Downs of Life, December 12 (Daily Observer, Friday, December 13, 1901); and The Little Philosopher, matinee, and Little Magues, December 14 (Daily Observer, Saturday, December 14, 1901). The Friday, December 13, performance title is unavailable. Other People's Money with Hennessy Leroyie on December 16 was well received (Daily Observer, Tuesday, December 17, 1901). The Real Widow Brown played to a moderately fair audience on December 18 (Daily Observer,
Thursday, December 19, 1901), while Uncle Josh Spruceby on
the next night was condemned as having "not much talent"
(Daily Observer, Friday, December 20, 1901). W. L. Roberts'
At Valley Forge did not receive much support when it was
presented for two performances on December 21 (Daily
Observer, Sunday, December 21, 1901). The next stock com­
pany to move into the Opera House was the Baldwin-Melville
Company from December 30-January 4. The company was very
popular. It opened with A Young Wife, December 30 (Daily
Observer, Tuesday, December 30, 1901); Black Flag,
December 31; Louisiana, January 1, matinee; The Devil's
Web, January 1, evening (Daily Observer, Saturday, December
30, 1902); The Banker's Daughter, January 3 (Daily Observer,
Saturday, January 4, 1902); and The Black Flag, matinee,
and Sis Hopkins' Sister and David Garrick, evening, January
4 (Daily Observer, Sunday, January 5, 1902). The title of
of the January 2 production is unavailable. When the Laugh
Comes In, on January 6, was considered a little too ribald
for the community (Daily Observer, Tuesday, January 7, 1902);
Along the Kennebec, on January 8, appealed more (Daily
Observer, Thursday, January 9, 1902). Mabel Paige and the
Southern Stock Company returned after their successful visit
of the season before and played the week of January 13 to 18. On Thursday, January 16, the Daily Observer reported that the company was having a great run at Opera House with packed houses (Daily Observer, Thursday, January 16, 1902). Opening with The Deacon's Daughter, January 13 (Daily Observer, January 14, 1902), the group continued with The Little Egyptian, January 14, and January 15, matinee (Daily Observer, Tuesday, January 14, and Wednesday, January 15, 1902); Under Two Flags, January 15 (Daily Observer, Thursday, January 15, 1902); The Pearl of Savoy, January 16; Little Coquette, January 17 (Daily Observer, Thursday, January 16, 1902); and Ten Nights in a Bar Room, matinee, and Don't Tell My Wife, evening, January 18 (Daily Observer, Saturday, January 18, 1902). A Breezy Time on January 21, without Fitz and Webster, received a very bad review from the Daily Observer. "The piece is a coarse toned, obstreperous thing with no merit whatever and the players suited the piece" (Daily Observer, Wednesday, January 22, 1902). On January 23, Rail Road Jack featuring an enormous South African lion, was the bill for the evening.

There was a lion at the opera house last night. He did no particular stunts to speak of and was not visible to the audience except for a brief interval in the last act.
but he was in the house all the time and everybody knew it.

There was lion in the atmosphere—good, old, strong, seasonable lion. The whole audience admitted that. . . . If the company were as strong as the lion, it could easily play to standing room in New York for 200 nights.

The play was all that it promised to be; a rip-roaring-tear-down-the-house, beat-each-other-with-boards sort of sensational proposition, with unlimited action and no particular cleverness, though the specialities were fairly good. (Daily Observer, Friday, January 24, 1902.)

"The Kilties"—48th Highlanders, Canada's Crack Military Band played two concerts on January 25 to an audience that encored every number on the program (Daily Observer, Sunday, January 26, 1902). Hubert Labadie in Faust was next on January 28, and although he was pleasing, he was not up to the Morrison standard (Daily Observer, Wednesday, January 29, 1902).

The Barlow and Wilson Minstrels followed on February 1 (Daily Observer, Sunday, February 2, 1902). The Rentfrow Company, making its annual visit, appeared on the week of February 3-8 and had packed or standing-room-only houses for each performance. They presented From Sire to Son, February 3 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, February 4, 1902); On the Verge of Ruin, February 4 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, February 5, 1902); East Lynne, February 5 (Daily Observer, Wednesday,
February 5, 1902); *Darkest New York*, February 6 (*Daily Observer*, Friday, February 8, 1902); *Cinderella*, children's matinee, and *The Lightning Express*, February 8 (*Daily Observer*, Sunday, February 9, 1902). On February 13, *Reaping the Harvest* was presented at the Opera House and was "entirely satisfactory" (*Daily Observer*, Friday, February 14, 1902). The MacLean-Tyler Company which had presented the brilliant *School for Scandal* in the previous season, presented *King John* to a large audience on February 19.

Constant applause and numerous curtain calls, not only for Miss Tyler and Mr. MacLean but for other members of the cast, attested the popularity of the play. Notwithstanding the handicap of meager stage facilities, the company gave a performance that was eminently complete. (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, February 20, 1902.)

*Sweet Clover* with Adelaide Thurston and Otis B. Thayer was the next attraction on February 25 (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, February 26, 1902).

*Finnigan's Ball*, a glorified variety show, played on March 7 (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, March 8, 1902). The Harris Parkinson Company opened a week's engagement at the Opera House on Monday, March 10 with *Lost in Egypt*. It played to standing-room-only the first night and was well received (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, March 11, 1902).
By Friday, the *Daily Observer* wrote, "The company is growing in popularity here and has played to large audiences each night" (*Daily Observer*, Friday, March 14, 1902). During the week the company played, at popular prices, the following: *In the Name of the Czar*, March 11 (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, March 11, 1902); *The Secret Enemy*, March 12 (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, March 13, 1902); *The Bondsmen*, March 13 (*Daily Observer*, Friday, March 14, 1902); and *Peck's Bad Boy*, matinee, and *John Martin's Secret*, March 15 (*Daily Observer*, Sunday, March 16, 1902). The bill for March 12, matinee, and March 14 is unavailable. The local Elk's Big Burlesque Circus was presented on March 18 and 19 (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, March 19, and Thursday, March 20, 1902).

The Harry Ward's Magnificent Minstrels was greeted by a large crowd on April 9 and was a "tip-top show" (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, April 10, 1902). The Spooner Dramatic Company closed the season at the Opera House with a week's engagement April 20 through May 4. As usual large crowds attended the popular-priced company. They opened with *Nell Gwynne*, April 28 (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, April 29, 1902); *Ben Bolt*, April 29 (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, April 30, 1902); *Two Orphans*, matinee, and *The Romance of a Poor Young
Man, April 30 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, April 30, 1902); Camille, May 2, 1902 (Daily Observer, Thursday, May 3, 1902); A Lawyer's Wedding, or a Husband on Salary, matinee, and The Golden West, May (Daily Observer, Sunday, May 4, 1902). There is no record available of the bill for May 1 (Daily Observer, Friday May 2, 1902). The bill for March 12, matinee, and March 14 is unavailable. The local Elk's Big Burlesque Circus was presented on March 18 and 19. (Daily Observer, Wednesday, March 19, and Thursday, March 20, 1902).

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May 1 (*Daily Observer*, Friday, May 2, 1902).

The stock company opened once again at Latta Park to offer summer entertainment at cheap prices on May 18, 1902, and continued through August 3, 1902 (*Daily Observer*, Friday, May 2, and Sunday, August 3, 1902).

As if it sensed that the season would be its last full season, the Opera House had its most successful season on record during the 1901-1902 season. There were one hundred two presentations including only two local variety entertainments. Thirty-eight companies presented eighty-nine theatrical productions, plus six minstrels, two musical entertainments, two variety shows and one lecture.

Highlights included the return engagements of Lillian Tucker, the Myrtle-Harder Stock Company, the Mabel Paige Company, the Rentfrow Company, the initial appearance of Rose Coghlan, and the productions of *The Runaway Girl*, *A Woman of No Importance*, *A School for Scandal*, and *King John*.

Fall 1902

The 1902 season began at the Opera House on September 1 with, unfortunately, an inglorious presentation of *The*
Lonely Widow. The Daily Observer was forced to write:

The paper always wished to be easy and gentle with Col. Nat Gray, that manager of the local opera house. He has done a good deal for a pleasure loving public, and he always does the best he can; but the "Lonely Widow" that he exhibited on the boards last night was very—fierce. The few dozen people who were in the house evinced the lack of interest in the "Lonely Widow," who deserves no end of loneliness. Due allowance is made for the fact that the company is yet in the rehearsal stage, but the impossible Dutchman and Irishman, the clap-trap in vocalizing and the ill assortment of physical architecture should have been caged a little longer. (Daily Observer, Tuesday, September 2, 1902.)

The Academy of Music season began on September 3 with a production of The Telephone Girl presented at the Latta Park Auditorium since the new theatre was not completed (Daily Observer, Sunday, August 31, 1902). Several other presentations booked late in the spring by the Academy's manager were presented at the Park before the new house opened.

On September 18, The Black Patti Troubadours delighted an "immense audience at the Opera House" (Daily Observer, Friday, September 19, 1902). This was followed on September 23 by the Barlow Minstrels. Again there was a large audience, and the performance was "up to the mark" (Daily Observer, Wednesday, September 24, 1902). Reaping
the Harvest, a success on its first visit in February 1902, returned on September 25 and was well received (Daily Observer, Friday, September 26, 1902).

The new Academy of Music opened on September 29 with Mrs. Clarence Brune in Unorna (Daily Observer, Tuesday, September 30, 1902). Engagements were booked for the entire week with Her Lord and Master with Helen Grantly following on September 30, A Colonial Girl with Bertha Creighton on October 1, and Felix and Barry from October 2 to the 4th (Daily Observer, Tuesday, September 23, 1902).

At the Opera House the week was held by the Peruchi-Beldeni Comedy Company playing rather old standard fare at 10-30 cents prices. The public supported the company and there were packed houses for each performance. The bills included: At the Hour of Nine, Monday, September 29 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, September 30, 1902); The Prisoner of Algiers, September 30 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, October 1, 1902); A Night in China Town, October 1 (Daily Observer, Thursday, October 2, 1902); The Captain's Mate, October 2 (Daily Observer, Friday, October 3, 1902); The Slaves of Russia, October 3 (Daily Observer, Saturday, October 4, 1902); and In Arizona, matinee, and Jesse James, evening October 4 (Daily Observer, Friday, October 3, 1902).

The Daily Observer summed up the week by writing on Sunday, October 5:

Last week was the most important and pleasurable theatrical week that Charlotte has ever known.
Through six nights the Academy of Music delighted large audiences with a brilliant run of shows, while the opera house, with its continuous cheap priced performances, also had good houses. (Daily Observer, Sunday, October 5, 1902.)

During the second week in October the Opera House was dark, while the Academy of Music had feature attractions Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday nights. The next week the Grahame-Goodwin Comedy Company opened a three night engagement at the Opera House, but extended an additional two nights. Playing at popular prices, the company, a small but good one according to the Daily Observer50 drew good audiences. A Pair of Black Eyes was presented on October 13 (Daily Observer, Tuesday, October 14, 1902); Our American Cousin, October 14 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, October 15, 1902); A Fatal Wedding, matinee, and A Thoroughbred, October 15 (Daily Observer, Wednesday, October 15, 1902). The bill for October 16 and 17 is unavailable. At the Academy of Music, Paul Gilmore appeared in Tyranny of Tears on Tuesday, October 14; the Gordon-Shaw Grand Opera Company in Carmen, October 15; and Mr. William Bonelli and Miss Rose Stahl in Janice Meredith, October 18 (Daily Observer, Sunday, October 12, 1902).

The week of October 19-25 found the Opera House dark, but there were four major attractions at the Academy of Music. On the following week, October 26-November 1, the Middleton Stock Company, another popular-priced company, was booked for the entire week at the Opera House. They opened

50Daily Observer, October 16, 1902.
with *Pike County Folks*, October 27 (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, October 28, 1902); and continued with *Jack's Wife*, October 28 (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, October 29, 1902); *A Hero of the World*, October 29 (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, October 30, 1902); and *My Uncle from Japan*, October 30 (*Daily Observer*, Friday, October 31, 1902). On the 31st *Faust* was scheduled, but because of the illness of Mrs. Middleton the rest of the engagement had to be cancelled. The audiences had been good until Wednesday night when the Academy of Music presented Pete Baker in *Chris and Lena* (*Daily Observer*, Monday, October 27, 1902). That week the Academy also presented the R. L. Giffen Company in *The Christian* and *Under Two Flags* on October 31 and November 1.

In November attractions at the Opera House became very few and for the most part sparsely attended. Marie Lamour appeared in *A Wise Woman* on November 4 to a "fairly large audience" and was "pleasing enough" (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, November 5, 1902). The Carolina Minstrels, a local Negro troupe gave a performance on November 17, below average to a small audience (*Daily Observer*, Tuesday, November 18, 1902), and another minstrel, the Barlow and Wilson Minstrel, performed "below the ordinary standard of minstrelsy," on November 28 (*Daily Observer*, Saturday, November 29, 1902). During the month the Academy of Music was open nine evenings, none of them conflicting with performances at the Opera House.
In December while the Academy of Music was presenting first-class attractions and gathering in the public, the Opera House presented the Hi Henry Minstrels on December 10, and regained for a moment a bit of the lost excitement of the past, for the *Daily Observer* wrote in its review that "there were no weak points and the programme was snappy from beginning to end . . ." (*Daily Observer*, Thursday, December 11, 1902). On December 15, the Pearl Lund Stock Company began a three nights' engagement with *Woman Against Woman*.

The play was a fiasco—a weird, cooked-up sort of a piece that killed a lot of people and owing to the shortage in the cast, allowed the murdered folk to reappear in the most uncanny fashion. The failure of the company was so open and dismal that the company disbanded . . . and announced that they would not present the plays that had been booked. . . . (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, December 17, 1902.)

That was an account of the last performance in the Opera House for in the same article, tacked at the bottom, was the following paragraph:

"*Woman Against Woman*" will be the last show that will be given in the opera house, and it is rather sad that the place that has harbored so much great histrionic talent should have its last curtain fall on players who could not play. From Rose and Harry Watkins, in 1875, past Edwin Booth in "Hamlet," to the Pearl Lund Stock Company—a long stretch and a poor climax. (*Daily Observer*, Wednesday, December 17, 1902.)

The closing was sudden, but no one was particularly surprised.

For the record, from September 1 until the Opera House closed on December 15, there were twenty-seven presentations there. Seven companies presented twenty two
theatrical productions, there were also four minstrels, including one amateur production, and one variety entertainment. In September and October the Opera House was open nineteen times as compared with twenty-two times at the Academy of Music. In November and December there were only five presentations in the Opera House as compared to thirteen at the Academy. The quality of the productions at the Opera House fell sharply with the opening of the Academy as did the attendance with the exception of Hi Henry's Minstrels.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Like many things in the industrialized and changing world of the early 1900's, the Charlotte Opera House suddenly seemed old and obsolete. The newspapers had been saying this for years, but as long as there was no competitor, the audiences supported it. As soon as the new, spacious and beautiful Academy of Music opened, the audience abandoned the Opera House for good. With new and better facilities, so that the larger touring companies could be accommodated, and with a management aligned to the Theatrical Syndicate which was by now deeply entrenched and dominating the theatre scene, the Academy of Music could offer the best in theatrical entertainment. Within two and a half months after its opening, the Opera House across the street closed.

The Opera House had served the community well. Now it was forgotten. Many years later, Mrs. M. G. Hunter, looking back at it, said, "It was all we had, but we thought it was wonderful."

\[^{1}\]
Appendix B, Interview 2.
When it was built, it was heralded as a perfect gem of a theatre, well suited to the needs of Charlotte; when it died it did not rate an obituary, not even an article to itself, but the closure announcement was tacked on to an article about the last company appearing there.

Over the years the audience, not schooled in the ways of the theatre and not dependable in its support at first, grew into what Manager John Ford called one of the best play-going communities in the state. During the inaugural season in 1874, there was not only the novelty of having a theatre, but the excitement of forty-nine evenings of entertainments, from legitimate drama to lectures and from musical programs to minstrels. Ada Gray in Article 47 and Camille and Edwin Adams in Enoch Arden brought to Charlotte rather recent New York successes, but even the old-fashioned bills played by many mediocre companies were, to the uninitiated audience, new and fresh.

During the First Period, from 1875-1886, when the Opera House held full sway over the theatrical world of Charlotte, some excellent performers appeared. One of the

Observer, March 10, 1880.
biggest names of the American theatre of that day was, of course, Edwin Booth. He appeared to a capacity audience in January, 1876. George Rignold, outstanding English actor touring the American provinces before returning to England, was also very popular during that second season along with Adelaide Phillipps and her grand opera company. Fanny Davenport with Maurice Barrymore, John Drew, and Mrs. G. H. Gilbert under the management of Augustin Daly and artists like Madame Janauschek, Frank Bangs, Barney Macaulay, Thomas Keene, Lawrence Barrett, Robert Downing, and Emma Juch, along with companies like the D'Oyly Carte Company of London and the Madison Square Company appeared during the First Period. They brought artistry and glamour to an eleven-year period that fluctuated between very good and very bad seasons. This was Charlotte's time for the big-name actor. Although some of the performances were poorly supported, this period brought many nationally popular and successful artists appearing in classic and new plays of the day. These infrequent appearances of the great or near great were, of course, surrounded by extremely mediocre to poor fare.

The Second Period, 1886-1890, was one in which for the first time there was competition. Gray's Academy of
Music opened at the beginning of the period and with its policy of bringing in popular-priced stock companies for a week's engagement at a time, forced the Opera House to do some of the same. In general, though, the Opera House was able to hold on to its established policy of first-class productions for first-class prices. Mlle. Rhea, Mme. Janish, Frederick Paulding, Frank Mayo and Lotta added to the reappearance of many from the First Period were among the major stars to appear in Charlotte between 1886 and 1890, designated the Second Period. Gray was unable to make a success of his Academy of Music and it was sold at a Sheriff's Auction to satisfy a mortgage, so at the end of the period, the Opera House again stood alone as the focal point for theatrical activity in the community.

The Third Period, 1890 to 1896, was an erratic one for the Opera House and the theatre-goer in Charlotte. The Opera House closed at the end of the 1892 season, not to open again for professional theatre until 1896. Nat Gray, self-appointed theatre agent for the town, had to improvise various temporary facilities for the shows he managed to bring into the town. The Charlotte Auditorium, built as a large meeting hall, and the City Hall Auditorium underwent modifications to make them more suitable for theatre pre-
sentations, but none of the modifications were very successful. During the period there was a revival of interest in amateur theatre which had not functioned since before the opening of the Opera House. Numerous productions were successfully undertaken. The Charlotte Auditorium burned, but in January, 1896, the Opera House opened again. By this time Charlotte, and the American theatre with its large traveling companies, had outgrown the Opera House. The audience had to continue to attend for there was no place better, but the major companies did not have to come. A few top "combinations" appeared, but for the most part, small stock companies presenting old and popular plays made up the attractions.

The Fourth Period, 1896 to 1902, saw a final spurt of theatrical activity at the Opera House. The period culminated in the 1900-1901 season which had the largest number of performances ever given at the house—a total of 102 entertainments. Although there were some combinations, this period as a whole could be designated as the one of the small, probably Southern, touring stock companies, playing a large repertoire of standard favorites at low prices. Some of the more popular companies appearing during the six-year period
were the Flora Staniford Repertoire Company, the Mabel Paige Comedy Company, Woodward Warren Company, the Rentfrow Company, the Charles C. Vaught's Comedy Company, the Harder-Myrkie Company, among many others. These companies were for the most part at least adequate, if not a little better. The audience supported them with full houses night after night, until the doors opened across the street at the Academy of Music. With much better facilities, the Academy was able to open as part of the Theatrical Syndicate and top shows with top nationally known talent were brought to Charlotte on a regular basis. The Opera House in the shadow of the larger and better equipped Academy closed its doors for the last time in December, two and a half months after the Academy of Music had opened its.

During the time of this study over six hundred plays were presented in Charlotte. Many of them were presented only once. Forty-seven were presented at least four times each. Twenty-three of these which were presented five or more times, were: The Bohemian Girl; Alvin Joslin; Fanchon, the Cricket; Goethe's Faust; The Galley Slave; Hamlet; Hazel Kirke; Hidden Hand; The Hunchback; Ingomar; Kathleen Mavourneen; The Lady of Lyons; The Mascotte; Michael
Strogoff; The Mikado; Monte Cristo; Olivette; Peck's Bad Boy; Rip Van Winkle; Ten Nights in a Bar Room; and The Two Orphans. In addition, the two plays presented the greatest number of times were East Lynne, an old standard which had premiered in 1863, and H. M. S. Pinafore, a new work. Both were given fifteen performances. Although productions of East Lynne were spread from the first theatrical season to the opening of the new Academy of Music, Pinafore was given twelve performances between April, 1879, and July, 1883, with the later performances coming in the late 1890's.

Twenty-five productions of eleven Shakespearean plays were presented with Hamlet having six performances and As You Like It, four. Eight operas were presented during the twenty-eight year period with Martha by Von Flotow and Il Trovatore by Verdi receiving four and three productions respectively. The fourth act of Trovatore was presented three additional times in operatic concerts. Forty-six companies presented ninety-two performances of the popular minstrel show. The Al G. Field troupe presented twelve between 1890 and 1901. Other frequently appearing companies were the Barlow Minstrels, Haverly's Minstrels, the Hi Henry Minstrels, McIntire and Heath's Minstrels, and
Richard and Pringle's Georgia Minstrels with Billy Kersands.

Throughout the active life of the Opera House three men were influential in the direction it took. Mr. James H. Carson, the businessman, primarily interested in the financial aspect of the building as real estate; Mr. Lewis W. Sanders, a businessman, but interested in the artistic aspects of the theatre; and Nat Gray, promoter, interested in the commercial aspects of show business.

Mr. Carson and Mr. Sanders, remotely related through Mr. Sanders' cousin who was Mrs. Carson, and very close friends, built the Charlotte Opera House in 1873-1874. At that time Mr. Carson was 43 years old and Mr. Sanders, 30. Both men became wealthy and influential in the community. Both men depended upon other financial interests for their main source of income. Mr. Carson, a man of sound business judgment, was able to retire from the active business world before he was 50 in 1879. Although he appears infrequently in the press in connection with the theatre, he seemed to have the upper hand in the business aspects of the theatre, for he was the one credited with closing or threatening to close the Opera House at various times. Mr. Sanders, a younger man, engaged in the cotton business, became one of
the South's leading cotton brokers. Having to travel frequently to New York and abroad with his work, one can assume he went to the theatre and was eager to bring good theatre into Charlotte. For the first sixteen years he was the manager of the Opera House, a period marked by the excellence of first-class productions leaning heavily toward Shakespeare, the opera, classic plays, and top talent.

Although both men had a great influence upon the cultural aspects of the community, if for no other reason than by virtue of their building the Opera House, neither of their obituaries contained anything about their contributions to the growth of the theatre in Charlotte.

The Opera House was built by Carson and Sanders, but the man who became synonymous with the theatre to Charlotte was Mr. Nathaniel Gray. His obituary is a tribute to a small-town theatrical entrepreneur and in a sense to the Opera House itself.

He was best known as the manager of the old opera house. He took charge of the place in 1876 /sic/ and welcomed the world to see Rose and Harry Watkins. In his time he brought many great stars to the city. He with other satellites, men and women. He had nothing but a dingy little place to display his theatrical wares, but he did the best he could; and he contributed greatly to the pleasure of the inhabitants of this city.
To him the gaudy curtain with the famous Arab horsemen was the grandest work of art; the old-fashioned chairs were perfect resting places; the gloomy gallery was shadowed with the air of refinement; the narrow dressing places were fit habitation for any Hamlet.

... with the roughest material he persuaded himself that he brought happiness and higher ideals to place, and since he honestly purposed to do that for a quarter of a century his life must be counted for good. ... Humble as he was, he felt that he was the medium through which the chiefest joy was brought to the community, and he found happiness in believing that he continually caused a people to be uplifted from trials and worry.

No man was ever more closely identified with his work. ... He had no competition in the theatrical field. For years he ruled it as he pleased, and, in a vague sort of way, it had come to be believed that the manager and his poor little pleasure place must last forever. Then the Academy of Music was built, and almost in a day the Opera House became a hall where cobwebs might gather, and dust accumulate where crowned kings had proudly tread /sic/. ... He had played as prominent a part in the community as any man in it, and in the span that was allotted to him he had found the utter satisfaction that comes to but few lives.

The playhouse days are long past, and cobwebs have gathered yet more thickly in the silent, musty hall. Into the silence the old manager has gone, still hating the villain's dirty deeds, still loving the hero and unselfishness, still declaring that the attainment of simple happiness is the greatest duty and privilege that this world can give.

And the old manager was happiest in trying to give happiness. (Observer, Monday, December 26, 1904.)
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Related Unpublished Theses and Dissertations


Interviews

Mrs. S. O. Brooke. May 12, 1970.


APPENDIX A

Photograph and Drawings of the
Charlotte Opera House
The Charlotte Opera House

No captioned picture of the Charlotte Opera House could be located by the writer. This picture is an enlarged section of an illustration found in "Sketches of Charlotte," 5th edition, a promotional brochure published by Wade H. Harris. Captioned "A Scene on South Tryon," it has been verified as the Opera House by Mrs. S. O. Brooke, daughter of one of the original builders, and by a careful comparison of information concerning the surrounding buildings as given on Sanborn Insurance Maps of the early 1900's. Evidence leads the writer to believe the picture was taken about 1900.
The Charlotte Opera House on South Tryon Street (circa 1900.)
Reconstructed Floorplans of the

Charlotte Opera House

These plans, drawn by Joseph T. Gardner, Jr., have been reconstructed from information gathered from newspaper articles, Julius Cahn's *Official Theatrical Guide*, and from interviews with patrons who attended the Opera House. Mrs. S. O. Brooke, daughter of Lewis W. Sanders, one of the builders, was particularly helpful.
Charlotte Opera House Reconstructed Floorplan

Main Floor

Key:

A—Main entrance to the second floor auditorium from Tryon Street.

B—Landing at the head of the stairs where the original box office was located.

C—Cross aisle.

D—Section of seats on an inclined floor.

E—Landing at ground floor level at the foot of the exit stairs.

F—Center aisle.

G—Orchestra/parquet section. Level floor.

H—Side aisle.

I—Space for small orchestra on orchestra/parquet level.

J—Door and steps to stage level, four feet above the orchestra level.

K—Stage.

L—Dressing room.
Charlotte Opera House Reconstructed Floorplan

Balcony Level

Key:

M—Box.

N—Dress Circle, two rows of seats.

O—Inclined balcony/gallery section.

P—Landing on Main Floor level to balcony stairs.

Q—Aisle.
Sanborn Insurance Maps of
Charlotte 1885 and 1900

Two copies of sections of Sanborn Insurance Maps
showing the corners of Tryon and Fourth Streets with the
Charlotte Opera House and the surrounding buildings.
A section of a Sanborn Insurance Map of 1885 showing the corner of Tryon and Fourth Streets with the Charlotte Opera House.
A section of a Sanborn Insurance Map of 1900 showing the southeast corner of Tryon and Fourth Streets with the Charlotte Opera House.
APPENDIX B

Interviews with Patrons

of the

Charlotte Opera House
APPENDIX B

Included in this Appendix are the three interviews of the informants for this study. Each interview was tape recorded and later edited to eliminate non-pertinent digressions and repetitions. The interviewer was interested in learning details about the physical aspects of the Opera House and directed the questions along that line. During each interview, the informants were asked similar questions at different times to solicit the same information, thus forming a type of self-check on information. Then the information was checked against the findings in the newspaper and later against information from other informants. The informants were remarkable ninety-three or ninety-four year old Charlotteans, for their recollections almost always coincided with each other. The most helpful informant was Mrs. S. O. Brooke, the daughter of Mr. Lewis W. Sanders, one of the builders and the influential manager during the first fourteen years of the Opera House. Each of the informants had performed in some capacity upon the stage and had some recollection of the backstage area. All of the interviews were conducted in Charlotte, North Carolina, during March,
1970, and May, 1970. The interviews are not recorded here in chronological order, rather Mrs. Brooke, the last interviewed, is given first. Since she was the most closely connected to the Opera House, her interview is extremely important and thus recorded first. Inaccuracies are noted by affixing the term "sic."

Interview No. 1. Mrs. S. O. Brooke, May 12, 1970.

(Mrs. Brooke is the daughter of Mr. Lewis W. Sanders, builder and one-time manager of the Opera House. Born on April 13, 1877, she was ninety-four at the time of the interview and still extremely active.)

Interviewer: Mrs. Brooke, tell me what you remember about the Opera House.

Mrs. Brooke: As I remember it, it was just one long room with a good many seats in it. It had a balcony and over in each corner were boxes. We always had a box. My father ran it and he had a man named Nat Gray, who managed it. I think my father did most of the booking, but I am not sure. Of course we had a lot of plays, but I don't remember the names. She Stoops to Conquer was one.

The Opera House was across the street from where the Academy of Music was. That came in later, about the time I married. Cousin Jimmy (Mr. J. H. Carson) and my father sold it and for a long time they had moving pictures there. (This was after a complete renovation /it is not clear whether the house was razed or not/ in 1925, when the New Broadway Theatre for vaudeville and pictures opened there.)
The main auditorium was on the second floor and you walked up a flight of stairs—good wide steps, two, maybe three, people could go up easily—then you turned to go up to the balcony.

At the head of the stairs (at the main level), there was an aisle across and people sat in the area under the balcony, which was filled with seats and angled (raked). There were some columns supporting the balcony so some of the seats were not very good.

Interviewer: Was the main part of the auditorium inclined?

Mrs. Brooke: No, it was just straight. I know the balcony was, and I am pretty sure that under the balcony was, too, but I couldn't swear to it.

Interviewer: Where were the stairs to the balcony?

Mrs. Brooke: They were on the left side. You would climb the steps to the auditorium (the entrance stairs on the left of the building), then turn around behind the steps and go up. I think, they were over the entry steps, I know they were behind them. They seemed to be in the same position, but, of course, over them. At the top of the balcony steps you were facing the stage and then you would go down into the boxes. There was an aisle across like it was on the lower floor. Let me see, the front rows of the balcony were choice seats. They were more expensive, a little more. The cross aisle was behind the front rows of the balcony and in front of the other balcony seats.

Interviewer: Which box did you usually sit in?

Mrs. Brooke: The left hand. You had to step down to get into the boxes and the front row of seats in the balcony. The boxes did not go down to the stage. They were to the sides of the balcony. The boxes had a little partition or railing between the box and the balcony. The little box was cut off. You could see around it and there were people right next to us. There were just the two boxes, one on each side (sic).
I don't know who had the other one. I should say seven or eight people could get in a box. You see three or four sat on the front and then there were more chairs back on a little step kind of thing.

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about the balcony railing?

Mrs. Brooke: No, I don't remember much about that. Evidently it was covered up—maybe ironwork. It was solid. We were protected that way, there was something there, I don't know what. 

Little Lord Fauntleroy was there, I remember. I had a matinee birthday party and Little Lord Fauntleroy came. And that was one of my first recollections of the Opera House (March 1, 1890). I know there was some big to do over it and I thought it was grand. I had a wonderful time and all the children had a grand time, too.

Interviewer: You say, you think, there were two stairs to the balcony?

Mrs. Brooke: Yes—oh, you mean, one on each side—no, I don't remember that. I don't believe there was. Just one side. It must have been a terrible fire hazard. It was a rather narrow set of steps, too.

The box office was on the right side of the building on the street level.

Interviewer: Do you recall whether there were doors down on the sidewalk level?

Mrs. Brooke: Yes, there were doors there. I think there was a little landing inside the doors. You see the doors had to open in. I wish I could remember more about it.

Interviewer: Was there a Negro section?

Mrs. Brooke: No—I suppose so, but I don't remember ever seeing any Negroes there. Maybe the back rows were
sectioned off, but there was no special section for them. I can't remember. I wasn't too old.

Interviewer: What can you tell me about the outside of the building?

Mrs. Brooke: I just don't know. I remember stores on the ground floor. The post office was there at one time. I remember that, you see, I lived right in the next block, and I was allowed to go up to the post office, so I know that. It seems to me, it was stucco, but I am not sure.

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about the color of the Opera House? Outside? Inside?

Mrs. Brooke: No, I thought it was just cream color, but I don't remember for sure.

Interviewer: Was there a chandelier?

Mrs. Brooke: There was some light up there, but I don't know whether it was really a chandelier or not, I imagine it was (sic). You know we did not have electricity. It was gas. But I know we had the little lights around the stage. And I know there were some lights on the side walls.

Interviewer: Was there anything painted on the ceiling?

Mrs. Brooke: Yes, but I don't remember what it was. There was something, I know. Painted, fixed up, and I remember the curtain that came down and people poked holes in it to see the audience. I think it was a painted curtain of some kind. It rolled up and down and sometimes it would get stuck part way down. I thought it was a right pretty curtain, but I can't remember what was painted on it.

Interviewer: Was there any type of wall or railing between the orchestra section and the cross aisle?

Mrs. Brooke: No Just the chairs. There was a center aisle and side aisles.
Interviewer: What can you tell me about the backstage area? How did you get back there?

Mrs. Brooke: There were doors and steps that led to the stage on each side. The dressing rooms were there. They were mighty crude. You know, it must have been a fright for the people who had to come here. It was such a little opera house. You could not see the steps to the stage from the auditorium seats; they were behind the doors. I remember the steps were cute, curved little things, that came around toward the open part of the stage. Yes you were facing the stage when you came up. The dressing rooms were on the sides. Both sides (of the stage). I don't know exactly how many—maybe four on each side. Small and cramped. And with partitions, I don't remember whether they even had doors on them. They were crude.

The Opera House had a lot of its own scenery. I think, Arthur Butt painted some of it.

Interviewer: Do you recall if there was a doorway at the back of the building from the stage.

Mrs. Brooke: I don't know what was back there, except they would bring in things from the back. You know, luggage and everything, even more scenery. I don't know how they managed it. They would not have much scenery.

Interviewer: Was there an orchestra pit?

Mrs. Brooke: Yes, but it wasn't sunken. It was on the same floor level as the orchestra seats. I wish I could remember more.

Interviewer: Do you recall anything about the seats?

Mrs. Brooke: They were chairs, right comfortable chairs, I think, attached to each other and permanent with places underneath for your hat.

Interviewer: Was the floor carpeted?

Mrs. Brooke: No, just the wooden floor. I don't remember any carpet.
Interviewer: What type of opening for the stage was there—square or arched?

Mrs. Brooke: It was arched and the curtain came down behind it. And on the little curved space in front of the curtain there were the little old gas lights with the little things behind them. It seems to me that there was some plaster work around it, but I can't swear to that.

Interviewer: What was the relationship between Mr. Carson and your father?

Mrs. Brooke: Well, they were great friends. He (Mr. Carson) married my father's cousin. We have always been very close friends, relatives, really. He (her father) lived in their home (the Carson's) as a young man until he married.

Interviewer: Were you aware of Mr. Carson attending the Opera House frequently?

Mrs. Brooke: I don't remember his being there.

Interviewer: I get the feeling from my reading that to him it was more of a business venture, while to your father it was something more.

Mrs. Brooke: Yes, I think so. My father was very much interested in the theatre. He was a great Shakespearean reader. He loved it and had a good many Shakespearean plays come here. My father got good people to come here. He went to New York and abroad at least once a year to see about cotton, he was a cotton merchant, so he came in contact with those people on the boats.

Interviewer: Was there any relationship between your father and Mrs. John Wadsworth?

Mrs. Brooke: No, just friends.

Interviewer: I have a reference that your father and Mr. Wadsworth owned the Opera House at one time. Do you remember anything about that or hearing about it?

Mrs. Brooke: No, not Mr. Wadsworth, Cousin Jimmy Carson
and my father owned it. I never heard him speak about it in connection with Mr. Wadsworth. He ran the livery stable and was a good friend.

Interviewer: Do you have any recollections as to when your father sold his interest in the Opera House?

Mrs. Brooke: No. I don't know whether they sold it before the Academy opened or not.

We thought the Opera House was fine. It was very pretty.


(Mrs. Hunter was born in 1877 and was ninety-three at the time of the interview. For the past several years, she has been confined to her apartment with arthritis.)

Interviewer: Mrs. Hunter, what can you tell me about the Opera House?

Mrs. Hunter: We went upstairs and there was an aisle that crossed over to the other side at the top of the stairs. We used to stand back there until we could get a chance to move down the center aisle to get to our seats. We nearly always had reserved seats. You could get them early. Sometimes at Tiddy's Bookstore.

There were side aisles and often people would stand along there is there were many people, and it was an important play and they couldn't get reserved seats. I have seen every seat taken many times.

Interviewer: Was there an orchestra pit?

Mrs. Hunter: I don't remember any, except they did have an orchestra and a man played the piano and the others joined in.
Interviewer: Was it sunken into the floor?

Mrs. Hunter: No, I don't think it was. They sat and weren't in the way of people seeing.

Interviewer: How did you get backstage?

Mrs. Hunter: Well, let's see, we went backstage along the side wall--there were doors, and back there they had dressing rooms across the back (sic). The stage was not very big. The dressing rooms were not big, not nice--just holes in the walls, really. They were dirty and not well cared for.

Interviewer: What can you tell me about the curtain?

Mrs. Hunter: It rolled down.

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about the color of the inside of the Opera House?

Mrs. Hunter: No, I haven't any idea. It was something very simple, something you would not notice.

Interviewer: Was there a chandelier in the ceiling?

Mrs. Hunter: No, no chandelier, but the aisles were carpeted (sic) and the side aisles were probably very narrow. Most probably two or more people could walk down the center aisle.

Interviewer: What can you tell me about the balcony?

Mrs. Hunter: The balcony, you know, was up and they had three rows (sic) of reserved seats. They were good seats and many people preferred those seats to being down in the orchestra. Behind them were other seats. You could come in and get your seat and if you got there first you could get a good seat. (She is talking about the General Admission areas.) When you went up the steps to the balcony you faced the stage, and there were reserved seats in front of you.

There were boxes on the sides of the balcony. Boxes
that would seat four, five or six people and they would have parties.

There were two exits. Most of the people entered on the left.

Interviewer: Can you tell me anything about the light in Opera House?

Mrs Hunter: Gas to start out with. And they had, whatever you call them, all along the side walls. And there were more lights coming up the steps. Yes, but they didn't have them at first. It was mighty bad at first. Sad, we would not put up with it now.

Interviewer: Was there a Negro section?

Mrs. Hunter: I don't know. There was a section in the back where people could come and most anyone could get seats there.

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about Nat Gray?

Mrs. Hunter: Yes, he built the Academy of Music down on Trade Street. I remember that. You know, he had a little shop, or something, right across the street from the Opera House.

We were happy as we are today. I guess maybe more, as we did not know too much about what was going on in other places and we didn't know whether we were not happy or not.

It (The Opera House) was all we had and we thought it was wonderful.

Interview No. 3. Mr. W. J. Edwards, March 17, 1970.

(Mr. Edwards, a broker, was interviewed in his office, where at ninety-four he continues to go each day. He was born in 1877.)
Interviewer: Where was the Opera House located?

Mr. Edwards: Where the American Building now stands, next to Kale-Lawing, between Third and Fourth Streets. There were storerooms from the Opera House on to the corner of Fourth Street then.

Interviewer: Tell me what you remember about the Opera House?

Mr. Edwards: Well, I remember, the Opera House had shows. Now, I won't mention too many shows. I remember the Al Field's Minstrels. Mr. Field was a popular man in Charlotte. He came every year. Hi Henry came one or twice. I remember seeing his minstrels. The shows that impressed me more than any were the gift shows, we called them, 10 and 20 cents shows and there was a door prize. We'd manage to get a dime and go to see those shows. One or two summers we had a summer show.

There was lots of local talent. I was in Quo Vadis. (It was presented at the Opera House in 1900 and 1901.) They wanted four soldiers, four Roman soldiers, by the way. So four of us went in. One of the Toliver boys nicknamed us the Tin Soldiers and he called me Tin Soldier as long as he lived. There was other local talent and some of the girls that were in there became rather prominent people in the amusement field. The local shows were, I guess, once or twice a year.

In the Opera House, they used to have our political speeches, too.

Interviewer: What can you tell me about the Opera House building itself?

Mr. Edwards: When I remember it first, maybe about 1886, somewhere in there, our post office was there on the lower floor. There was another store—no, I believe the post office occupied the entire lower floor at that particular time. The Opera House was on the second floor. Later Mr. McCausland moved into the building. He was in the roofing business and sold stoves and home equipment. The Opera House was above that and had a main floor and a gallery or balcony.
I don't know whether there was both a balcony and a mezzanine or not. Probably just a balcony. Later on Felix Hayman and Bud Moore either leased the old Opera House or bought it, I don't know which, and put the Broadway Moving Picture House in. They changed the building over and made it a movie house. And they operated it for quite a little while.

It was a very prominent old place, but a dingy one at the end. There were two entrances (sic) one on either side of the old Post Office. It was poorly kept and operated by a man called Nat Gray. Nat wasn't very well, he probably was a qualified man for his time, but he wasn't much of a theatre man, I don't think. Later on (sic) someone build Nat a theatre (sic) called it Gray's Opera House (sic). It was just this side of the new Post Office. (The present one which is located on Trade Street.) The only thing I remember seeing at the Gray's Opera House was the Salvation Army. They had their meetings on the street corners, there at the Square (where Tryon and Trade intersect) and on the corner of Church Street and Trade. They had a band, so we kids would go up to hear the band and follow the band to the meeting place (Gray's Academy of Music).

Interviewer: Where was Gray's Academy of Music located?

Mr. Edwards: Right where the Downtown Motel is now. (Trade Street, east of the Post Office.) I don't remember what was on the first floor there, but the Opera House was, of course, on the second floor. They had a stage and possibly a few plays, but I don't remember ever seeing a play there. I don't remember going in to it.

Interviewer: What can you tell me about the curtain at the Charlotte Opera House?

Mr. Edwards: I think the curtain was a great big long pole that came down. The stage wasn't very deep, but they showed to a right good audience. And I don't think the expenses were very high. I know, we kids could only have a 10 or 20 cents show, although we did manage to get a 50 cents seat to see Al Field's. He was popular here.
The seats were cheap back of the pit (orchestra section), under the balcony. I don't suppose the Opera House could seat more than 400 or 500 people (sic). It wasn't very large. You could count on the same people for each one of the shows.

Black Patti used to come here, but I don't think Black Patti showed in the old Opera House. (She did) A right popular show and some pretty good singers. Then we'd have a few of the opera singers come here occasionally, was a little high up for me. Most of us wanted to see a comedy; we didn't go to see drama.

Interviewer: Now when you entered the Opera House, you...

Mr. Edwards: We entered from Tryon Street. Up the wide stairs. The entrance stairs were at least six feet wide. They were good wide stairs, not too steep, rather comfortable stairs, but high. The steps to the gallery (balcony) were narrower. There were two entrances one on each side. Three or four people could go up the stairs from the street. There was no door at the top of the stair, only at the bottom on the street. There were two doors that opened up for the stairs.

I don't know that I can tell you where the box office was.

There was a little passage way right behind the pit (orchestra section.) I believe the entrance was on the left and the exit was on both sides, because they took up the scenery on the right side. As you got up to the second floor, why you went around toward the right. There could have been a side way down to the pit (orchestra section.) Anyway you went up the stairway and then moved toward the right to find your seat. I don't know whether we had ushers to those days or not. I think the pit had seats, I don't remember the rear, the general admission seats, I expect they were seats, too. One stairway on the upper side (the left side of the building) went to the balcony from the main floor level. I am sure of that. The scenery went up the lower entrance, the South entrance we called it.
There was a railing or partition, a pale type of thing behind the orchestra seats and the general admission seats. There was an aisle in the center, but I don't think there were side aisles. There was a place for the orchestra, but it wasn't sunken. The theatre was not very wide.

Interviewer: Do you remember anything about the backstage area?

Mr. Edwards: I don't remember. Now the stage won't take too much scenery. Of course, it would take some. There was an entrance to the stage on either side, I am pretty sure of that.

Interviewer: Was there a Negro section?

Mr. Edwards: I don't think there was one.

I'll tell you what they did have, and you don't need to emphasize this too strongly. In those days, you know, we had a red light section here. Had some right prominent women, or had been, and four or five of them went to all the plays. They had a seat, I think, it was on the balcony, but four or five of them came to all the shows. They always sat in the same seats. You could tell them by their dress. Dressed to the top, oh, they were dressed up—trains that would drag and clean the streets, you know.

There must have been seats for Colored People, maybe in the gallery. They were not on the first floor.

The Opera House was not a very glamorous place.
Rupert T. Barber, Jr., was born December 21, 1932, in Alexandria, Louisiana, where he attended public school and graduated from Bolton High School in 1950. After receiving a B.S. in Speech Education at Louisiana State University at Baton Rouge in 1954, he taught English at Glenmora High School for a year. He served as a lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force between 1955-1957. Upon discharge he entered Columbia University and received his M.A. in the Teaching of Speech in 1958. Between the fall of 1958 and the spring of 1961, he taught speech and drama at Hempstead High School, Hempstead, New York. He returned to Louisiana State University in 1961 to begin work on his advanced degree. From 1963 until the present he has been an Assistant Professor of Drama and Director of Theatre at Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina.

In 1960 he married Carol M. Braun of Hempstead, New York, and they have two children.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Rupert T. Barber, Jr.

Major Field: Speech

Title of Thesis: An Historical Study of the Theatre in Charlotte, North Carolina, from 1873-1902

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:

July 22, 1970