

*The Grandin Opera House, or  
theatre on the kerosene circuit,  
1872-1904*

*Northwestern Pennsylvania Historical Study  
Number 4*



*Warren County Historical Society  
Warren, Pennsylvania*

Torothy J. Sprink  
November 1973

Tidioute's main street in 1916 showing the Grandin block festooned with flags for a homecoming celebration. At this time the opera house had closed its doors to all but occasional use.

*The Grandin Opera House, or  
theatre on the kerosene circuit,  
1872-1904*

*by John L. Marsh, PhD.  
with  
Photographs of the Grandin Opera House by  
Frank B. Acklin*

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## Preface

This monograph presents the history of the Grandin Opera House in Tidioute, Pennsylvania, one of literally hundreds of theatres that collectively constituted opera house America in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Unlike the majority of its counterparts, however, the Grandin has weathered the years and though obviously ravaged by the elements, enough remains to document something of the character of the performance halls in the smaller communities across the country — on what I describe as the kerosene circuit.

Many people have helped in the production of this study and not the least of these is one of my graduate students, Mr. Frank Acklin, who first called my attention to the opera house and subsequently took the many pictures that constitute in themselves a record rivaling the narrative. I owe a debt of thanks, as well, to my colleagues, Dr. Charles Glendinning and Mr. Jack Tohtz, who read the manuscript in its final draft and contributed valuable editorial suggestions.

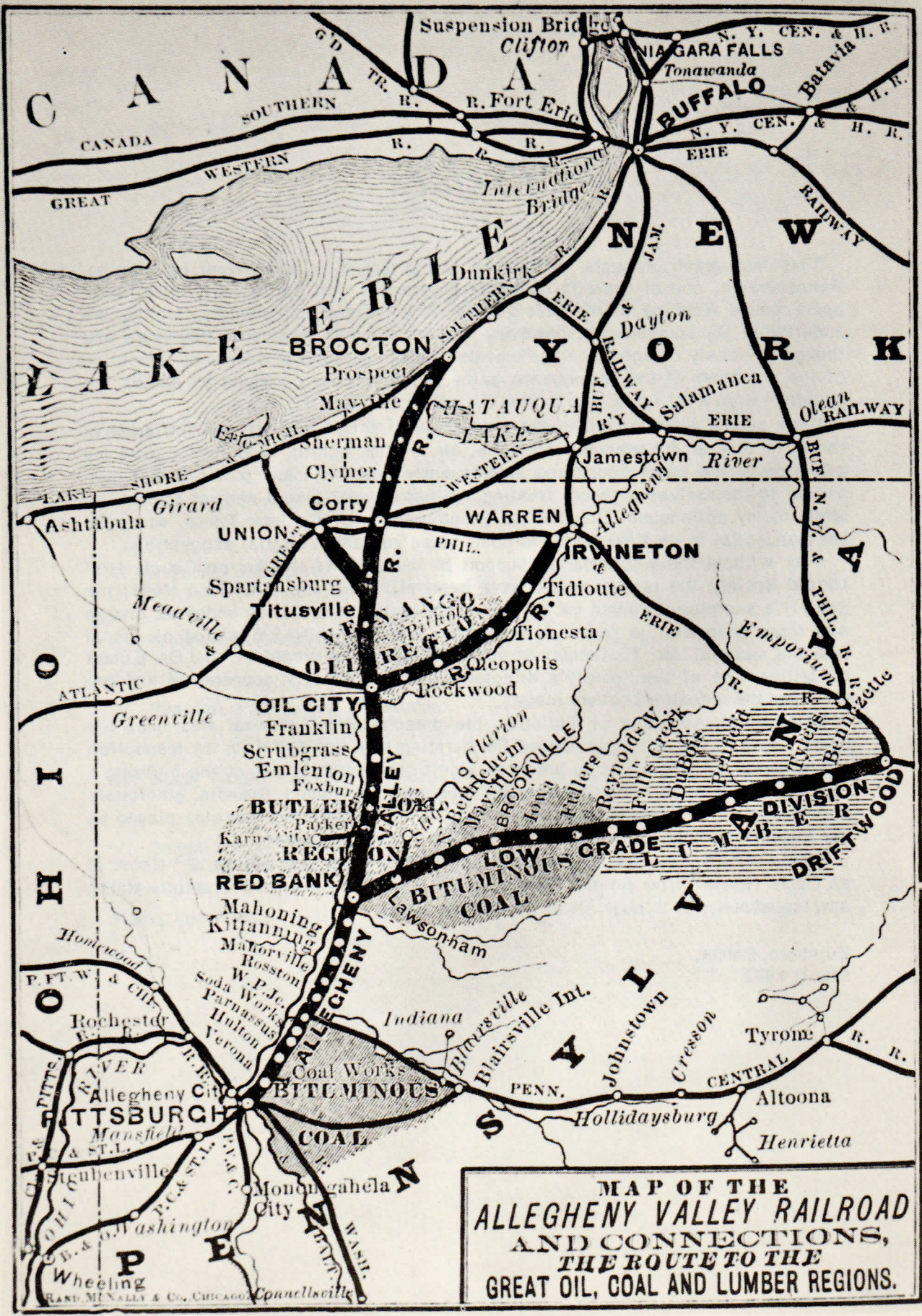
And, without the wholehearted support of the staff of the Warren County Historical Society the project would have been stillborn. Mrs. Sherwood Mead, the Society's secretary, granted me the run of the facilities and files under her charge and Miss Jean Ball, a research associate, kept uncovering bits and pieces of relevant material. Mr. T. Kenneth Stratton, the Society's president, and Dr. Ernest C. Miller, one of the Society's directors, were unfailingly cooperative and encouraged the research at every stage.

Mr. William Anderson of Tidioute, the present owner of what was once the opera house block, willingly opened the building time and again for my inspection and entered into the effort to preserve significant artifacts out of the building's theatrical past. Miss Anna Grandin, the daughter of William J. Grandin, graciously contributed not only her support to the project but documented the roles played by her father and uncle in the community and the life of the theatre.

Dodd, Mead & Co. gave their permission to reprint the first stanza of "Ghost of an Opera House" from **Golden Fleece** by William Rose Benet and Charlotte Marsh saw the manuscript through all of its various drafts.

Edinboro, Penna.  
May 1, 1973

J.L.M.



**MAP OF THE ALLEGHENY VALLEY RAILROAD AND CONNECTIONS, THE ROUTE TO THE GREAT OIL, COAL AND LUMBER REGIONS.**

## *Sawmills, Oil Derricks, and Grandins*

**Hurrah! Hurrah! for Tidioute town!  
Hurrah for the wells that are going down!  
And when they are safely tubed and tested,  
Then be it said in language bold,  
This is where fortunes, not men, are sold.**

based on "The Oil Operator's Ride"

In the 1840's they called it Deerfield, a nondescript village on the Allegheny River ministering to the needs of an infant logging industry. Then in 1862, when the town fathers applied for incorporation as a borough, they discovered the name **Deerfield** already in use. Casting about for a substitute, they hit on **Tidioute**, the Indian name for a nearby creek, and so it is known today.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the elephantine rafts of logs are now only a memory and the sawmills long stilled, but midway through America's nineteenth century they gave identity and purpose to the community.

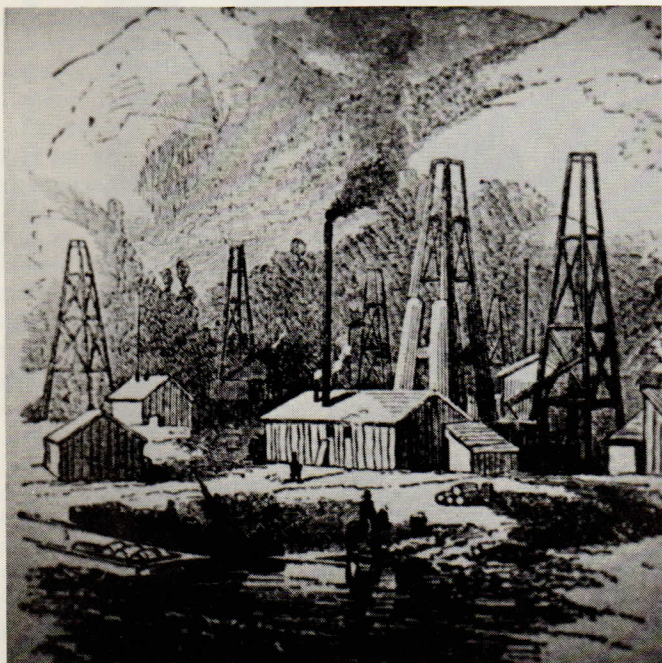
Of hardships and privation, of destitution and despair there was more than enough to go round in those early days and especially among those who cleared and tilled the reluctant soil. Their yield was at best marginal and the handicaps under which they labored were deplorable: "Unmindful of the teeming world outside, they held to their harrows, content to live, to propagate and to die. Once or twice in a lifetime, a trip on a raft down the river to Pittsburgh and the privilege of walking back was the extent of their contact with the outside world. Hunting, fishing and lumbering in wintertime helped to tide them over the lean part of the year. They never even dreamed of change."<sup>2</sup>

The adventurous and the ambitious among them — or perhaps the truly desperate — gave more and more of their attention to lumbering the virgin oak and pine which extended mile after mile along the banks of the Allegheny

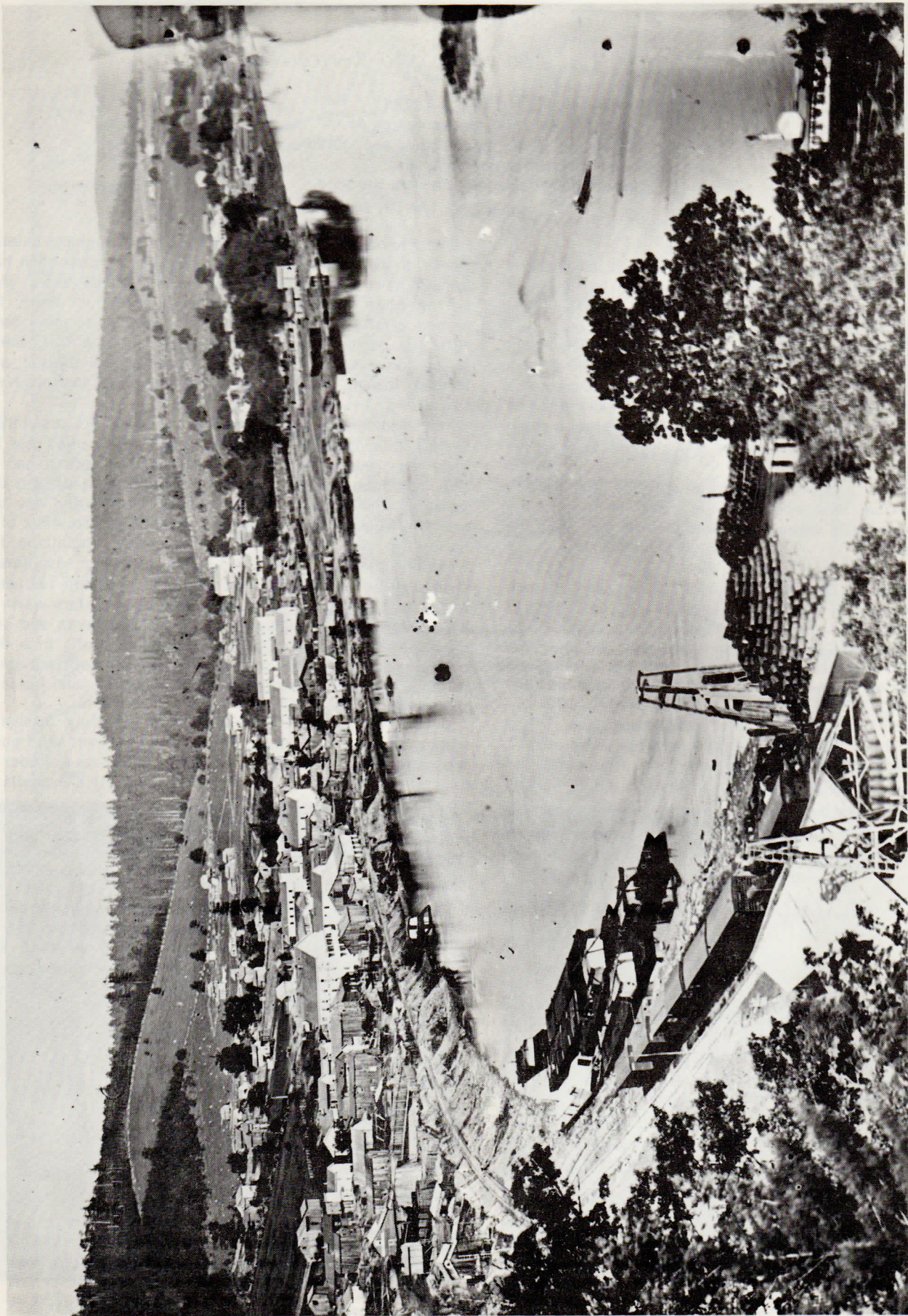
River. Providently three tributaries of the Allegheny entered the river in the vicinity of the village and each soon had its own sawmill. Deerfield itself became a raft harbor, that is the down river starting point or gathering place, for great log rafts built to a length of a hundred or more feet. With the coming of spring, the river running full, these crude forest-ships were poled out into the current and headed toward markets in Pittsburgh and far off New Orleans.

In a modest way the community prospered, its population by the late 1850's climbing to about 400 souls. But by 1859 the lumber industry was reaching exhaustion and in that particular year an unusually severe frost all but devastated the area. However, Colonel Drake and his oil well in neighboring Titusville focused the attention of a nation on the region. A local historian visualizes the transformed scene: "Crowds of fancy dressed adventurers from every state in the Union debouche into their fastness. Wall Street moves to Oil Creek. Millions of dollars worth of oil comes bursting up out of their chicken yards and cow pastures."<sup>3</sup> A few were canny enough to profit from this unlooked-for good fortune; many, however, sold out for a pittance or simply disappeared in the boom-or-bust hysteria of the hour.

Samuel Grandin and his sons were certainly numbered among the former. Samuel, very much a patriarchal figure, had established himself in Deerfield in 1840 as a dealer in general merchandise. Soon, however, he built a sawmill at



The feel of the region in the days of sawmills, oil derricks and Grandins. (Courtesy Drake Well Museum)



The flavor of Tidjoute in the late sixties as captured by John Mather, Oildom's photographer-historian. (Courtesy Drake Well Museum)





**John Livingston Grandin: oilman, banker, and sometime patron of the arts.**



**William J. Grandin, careful shepherd of the Opera House. He was the last one to leave the building when troupers played at Tidioute.**

the foot of Gordon Run and was trading extensively in lumber, the firm of Grandin and Green sending to market annually between 1844-1853 some 250,000 cubic feet of timber.<sup>4</sup> And in these interests he was soon joined by two of his sons — John Livingston and William James — who upon their father's retirement in 1860 took capable charge of the family's fortunes.

It was John L. who drilled the first well locally in 1859; and although his drilling rig failed to reach oil, neither he nor his brother was deterred. Their success with one well is recorded by a Warren newspaper editor who traveled to Tidioute to see the excitement for himself:

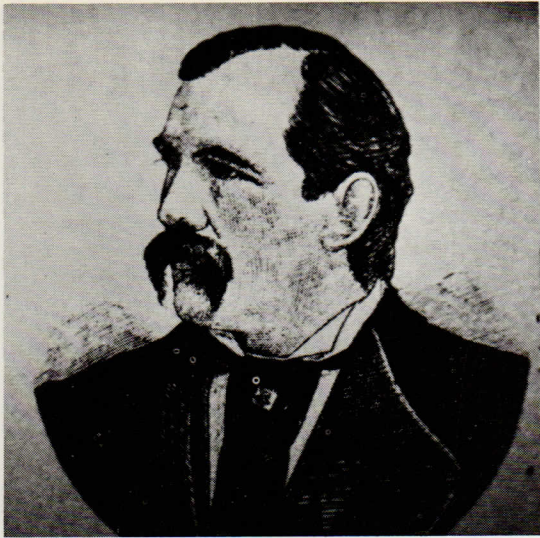
*We went to Tidioute again on Friday last. The roads were just as bad, the scenery as varied and Patterson's cigars as agreeable to smokers as before. Hauling up at Eddy's in Tidioute where we found a little less than half of Warren and the rest of creation congregated, we made a rush for dinner and then for the islands to see Ludlow well — the second spouting wonder of that slippery region. We have before stated that the upper end of Tidioute Island belongs to A. W. Ludlow of Warren and W. T. Alcorn of Tidioute. A well was started there three or four weeks ago by a Tidioute company among whom are Judge Brown, Arthur McGill, J. L. Grandin, Dr. Kemble and perhaps others. They drove pipe 40 feet and drilled 28 when the oil run (sic) over the top. After putting down a pipe and shutting off the water it began to spout clear oil tremendously, running from eight o'clock on the evening of the 4th till 5 o'clock the next day when they made out to plug it up. With hurried preparations for catching the oil they saved about 100 barrels. But a great deal was lost. The ground and shrubbery for rods around was completely saturated with oil — making the best "surface indications" we have seen.<sup>5</sup>*

The Grandins leased and subleased farms along the Allegheny, conducted wide-spread drilling operations, bought and shipped crude oil to the seaboard, built pipelines and iron tanks, and along the way became figures to be reckoned with. J. S. Schenck in his **History of Warren County** writes of them: "Everything undertaken by the Grandins is gone about in the most practical matter of fact way, and about everything they take a hand in turns into money. Their one thousand and one successful oil ventures is a matter of public information in this region."<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the writer had in mind the dividends paid stockholders of the Tidioute and Warren Oil Company of which John L. was the manager: in eight years the investors received \$1,200,000 dividends on a total capital of \$10,000.<sup>7</sup>

So extensive had their affairs become that in 1868 John L. and A. Clark Baum established a general banking business in what was now called Tidioute. Two years later William J. purchased Baum's interest and the institution became the Grandin Bros.' Bank. Within another two years they were housed in a newly constructed three story brick block that contained not only their bank but, on the third floor, what was described as a "gem of an Opera House."<sup>8</sup>

## II

The discovery of oil radically altered the character of this Allegheny River village, and by 1869 its 400-odd inhabitants had swelled to well over four thousand and Tidioute boasted of twenty dry goods and provision houses, five hardware stores, seven hotels, two billiard parlors, six machine and blacksmith shops, two drug stores, one banking house, one newspaper and printing office, three meat markets, two gunsmiths, six physicians, three lawyers, twenty oil brokers, numberless commission merchants,



Ben Hogan; French Kate, his mistress; and the waiter girls. Their Babylon scandalized Tidioute's respectable element.

local dealers, insurance agents and the like -- virtually all located on a wandering main street nearly two miles long and forty feet wide.<sup>9</sup>

For much of the sixties the excitement and ferment in Tidioute resembled the gold fever of California's early days. For a time at least, sober citizens seemed in the minority, inundated by the adventurers, the speculators, the sightseers, the gamblers and the prostitutes who flocked to the region. A contemporary newspaperman came, saw, and after talking with a variety of travelers of their experiences wrote as follows:

*They told of swollen, angry streams without bridges; of roads so bad that often an entire day was spent in going ten miles; of sloughs and mud holes bristling with broken wagons and legs of entombed horses; or long lines of oil wagons blocking up all the ways of travel; of the savage manners of the drivers and the delight these barbarians felt in a fight and in tearing to pieces the buggy of the well-dressed traveler and the country wagon of the plain, quiet farmer.*<sup>10</sup>

One dilapidated-looking traveler, covered with mud, without a hat, and one skirt of his coat gone, told the newsman of an upset in a chuckhole of fabulous depth in which he had left carpetsack, overcoat, etc. Another with a blackened and bunged-up eye, "with a nose that hung down like a mass of purple jelly, an upper lip protruding, and an ear hanging in tatters," told of a terrible fight on Oil Creek, in a country tavern.

The reporter waxed eloquent as he contemplated this social and moral wilderness:

*. . . There was no restraint on wickedness. Vice was open and shameless. Abandoned women in hundreds, driven from Buffalo and Cleveland; convicts from prison; pimps, black-legs, burglars, garroters and murderers lighted on Oil Creek as a fresh scene of operations and a delightful retreat from law and police. Bad men banded together and committed every crime. Men were robbed in open day in public places. Others were murdered in the presence of travelers and citizens. The most outrageous offenses against decency were committed, and yet the guilty went unwhipt by justice. The better-disposed were too careless or too busy to attempt to cure what might take time and involve danger.*

The conditions of society were obviously disjointed and unnatural. Not one man in a hundred had the restraint or comfort of a home and family and, in the absence of "rational" enjoyments, this essentially masculine society sought its pleasures in concert salons like Babylon erected on a hill above Tidioute by Ben Hogan, "the wickedest man in the world." In such establishments the emphasis was upon women, alcohol, and gambling, with only an occasional foray into entertainment which might be classed as vaguely theatrical. Those desirous of more innocent amusements of a spectatorial nature had to content themselves with the circus which visited the region during the summer months. Performing in a convenient meadow, living out of and dressing in their wagons, circus folk represented virtually the only professional entertainment available in communities like Tidioute.

However, by the closing years of the sixties the more respectable elements of Tidioute had gained the upper hand, Ben Hogan and his ilk having taken themselves to fields elsewhere. As **The Warren Mail's** Tidioute correspondent wrote late in November 1870: "Tidioute, too, has been exceedingly quiet for the past week, boasting of no excitement during that period excepting one or two whiskey fights and a dog fight or two."<sup>11</sup> No doubt the influence of

the community's four churches and commodious two story school were at work. So, too, was an active temperance society numbering two hundred and a Young Men's Christian Association. This November witnessed, as well, the organization of a philharmonic society and a lyceum to meet the artistic, intellectual, and moral demands of Tidiouters.

To the Grandin brothers it must have seemed the occasion was ripe for a more ambitious effort to establish the cultural pretensions of the community whose fortunes were for the moment so closely allied with their own, and they evidently saw the erection of their new banking quarters as too provident an opportunity to ignore. Then, too, since 1867 Tidioute had been linked to the wider world by the Oil Creek and Allegheny River Railway, which might transport entertainment as readily as it did material goods and services. Surely the times were ripe; and with the professional theatre's development of the combination system (so-called), it was all but inevitable that Tidioute would boast an opera house, attracting show people — strangers from strange lands.

### III

John L. and William J.'s timely utilization of the third floor in their new brick block was certainly in keeping with the theatrical tempo of the times, till only recently geared to the stock system and its attendant mechanics of production. This theatrical phenomenon, in existence for more than two centuries on the English-speaking stage, depended upon a complex of more or less permanent companies, independent one from another, and associated with specific theatres in which they made their homes for seasons that ranged from a matter of weeks to a number of months. The efforts of these aggregations were augmented, especially between 1820-1870, by the frequent and regular appearances of traveling stars playing limited engagements in parts chosen by them and virtually free from direction or management by the host stock company. Once the star's engagement was concluded, he passed to another company in another city and thence to yet another city and company.

The Grandin brothers very possibly had seen stock productions at Crittenden Hall on their visits to neighboring Titusville as early as 1862. They might also have sampled stock offerings at Pithole City in the fall of 1865. It was at this time, too, that Titusville's Bliss Opera House advertised its opening with a resident company. But the days of stock companies were numbered and 1865 saw their demise in the region. Thereafter, the traveling combination was the thing.<sup>12</sup> Joseph Jefferson, an American theatrical institution in himself, made clear the faults to be found within the established mode:

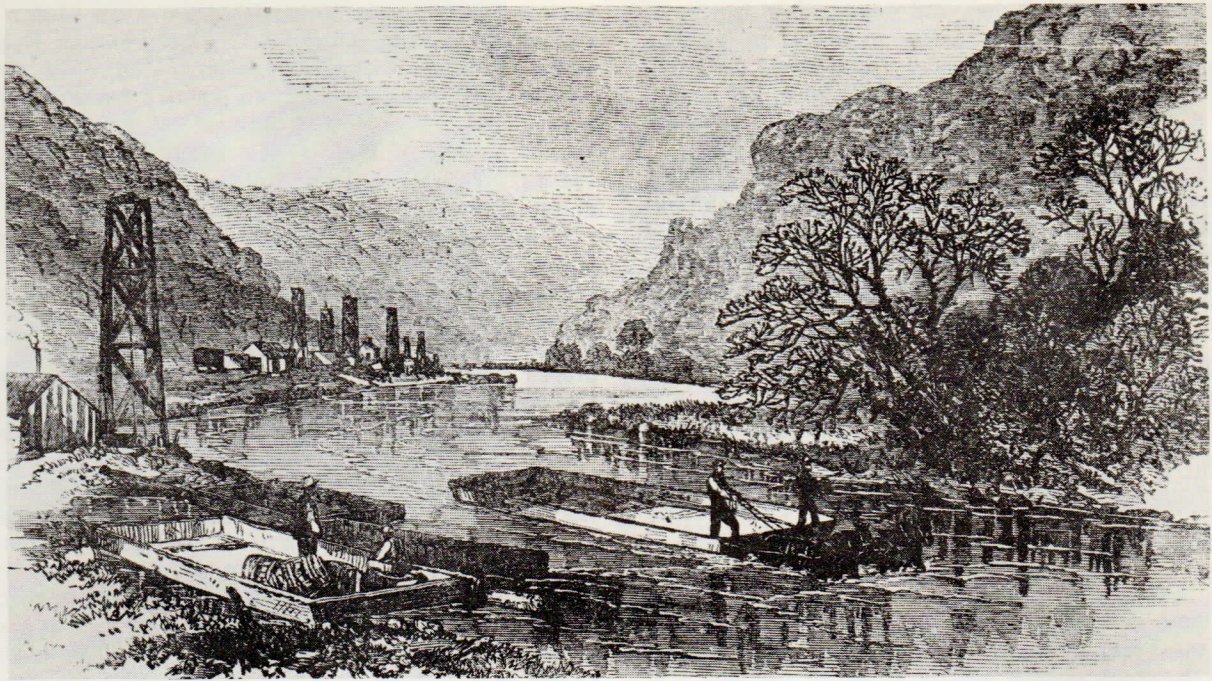
*The old stock-companies had to be limited to a certain number of actors, who were compelled to perform in a multitude of plays — the whole round of Shakesperian drama, old English comedies, Yankee farces, nautical pieces and pantomime; and at times the cracked voices of "respectable discord sung". I myself well remembered leading the choruses for the Seguin company; where I led them to I have not the slightest idea. It is unreasonable to suppose that any stock company, no matter how efficient, could do full justice to this varied bill of fare. The actors were in many instances among the best I ever saw, but they were very often not adapted to the parts for which the manager was compelled to cast them.*<sup>13</sup>

One might add that the histrionic limitations of a given company were compounded by the lack of variety in their costumes and scenery. Both came in time to show no less wear than the actors, and the viewers suffered from a same-

ness that would have palled had theatre not been a novelty virtually sufficient unto itself in communities like Titusville. There was the advantage for the actor, at least, that he was given the opportunity to practice his profession with a vengeance — or so Otis Skinner, in his own time an Oil Region favorite, discovered. He had begun his career during the 1877-78 season as a "utility" actor — salary seven dollars a week — at the Philadelphia Museum:

*It will be seen that we had no time for idleness at the Museum. Morning, afternoon and night were occupied by rehearsal and performance. Parts were scantily studied, inadequately rehearsed and slovenly performed. Heaven knows how many dead-and-gone playwrights turned in their graves during that season! If we said anything approximating the meaning of our lines, we were going well by our standard. I learned the useful arts of faking and winging. To "wing" a part meant to have the manuscript of it tucked in your sleeve or your pocket, or thrust into the framework of the wing near your exit to be seized and scanned between scenes. Should you see an individual gazing intently into his hat while playing an intense, dramatic scene you knew he had his part concealed there. Writing sketchy cues on your cuff was an old trick. One character I never studied at all — **The Admiral, in Blackeyed Susan.** The admiral was seated at a table conducting a court martial in a ship scene, with a large book in front of him. I put the part in the open book, and read the whole of it. Many a Saturday night I have gone to my lodgings with three parts to study for Monday matinee and night, and walked the floor till daybreak, my forehead wound in a wet towel to avoid falling asleep, cramming the words into my brain somehow — anyhow. But what a school it was! I learned my art crudely, roughly, but by leaps and bounds, driven by necessity to an intuitive grasp of character and the way to express it. To sing; to dance; to fence with foil and broadsword; to kneel; to fall in combat; to work up the crescendo movement of a scene; to sit or to rise; to play fair in a give-and-take episode with a fellow player; to learn how to make up, and above all, to do nothing. Repose was as foreign to me as to a French dancing master. No one ever had more unruly legs. The wearied stage manager, Reynolds, in a voice verging on tears, used frequently to exclaim at rehearsal, when I was cast for a calm and slow-going old gentleman, "For God's sake, Skinner, keep your legs STILL!" There was no kind of part I did not play — advancement had been rapid — even sex was no bar, for I was sometimes clapped into skirts for nigger wenches and coarse old hags. I scowled as villains, stormed as heavy fathers, dashed about in light comedy, squirmed in character parts, grimaced in comics, and tottered as the Pantaloon in pantomime. Miss Smithers in **Wanted One Thousand Milliners** in the afternoon would be followed by the aristocratic Count de Linieres in **The Two Orphans**, or hundred-year-old Solomon Probity in **The Chimney Corner** at night.<sup>14</sup>*

It was not, however, the exigencies or the improprieties of many a stock performance that doomed the system or even the stars' concern with the inadequacies of their support. Rather it was a thirst for theatre that some fifty companies nationwide could not begin to satisfy. Opera houses were aborning and the star-stock system as it had existed could not satisfy the demand. It was Jefferson among others who in 1868 pointed the way of the future. For in that year he set out to play Detroit and other Michigan cities where theatres had been built but where no stock companies existed. He needed, therefore, to take a company with him



A flatboat ascending Oil Creek.

and his example paved the way for the combination system. Historians of the theatre sometimes attribute to Dion Boucicault, one of the most successful actor-playwrights of the day, the distinction of being the first to equip and send a company out on the road. They cite the fact that he organized a second company of his own play **Colleen Bawn** and offered it in 1860 to managers in cities outside London for half of the gross receipts.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately the point is academic. What mattered to those in Tidioute, such as the Grandins, was that a new type of

theatrical organization — the combination — had come into existence which in the decades of the seventies and eighties encouraged the building of opera houses in communities near and far, large and small.<sup>16</sup> Tidioute would have its very own theatre. Not only the Grandins but the times themselves made an opera house in a newly rising brick block far more than a possibility. With company after company taking to the road, they ordered it would be a probability.

# HOWDEN & ODBERT'S



Detail of a town map from Howden & Odert's Atlas Warren County (1878) which shows the central business district. The opera house block appears on the northeast corner of Main and Green Streets.

## *A Gem of an Opera House*

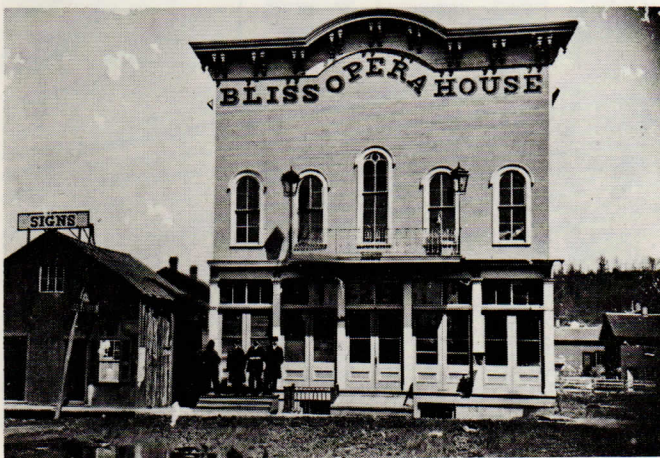
Gone are dim gas in crystal chandelier,  
 Flamboyant frescoes, flickering footlight-jets,  
 Weber and Verdi, solos and duets,  
 Blue smoke, and breaths of whiskey and of beer,  
 The curtain's gaily-coloured goldolier,  
 The garish grandeur of the various sets!  
 Now, in the empty street, a white moon whets  
 The edge of night, and sparkling stars appear.

William Rose Benet

No doubt there was a degree of self interest in the Grandin's plans for the third story of their new block. Obviously it would be very much a community ornament but one that in ways at once direct and indirect could only redound to their credit. The brothers may have been concerned with establishing their leadership among the socially



Johnson's Exchange, Warren. Built in the 1850's, its third story included an elongated room with a speaker's stand at one end that was known as Variety Hall.



Bliss Opera House, Titusville. Erected in 1865. (Courtesy Drake Well Museum)



Corinthian Hall, Titusville. Opened December 22, 1865. (Courtesy Drake Well Museum)

and culturally minded, but they were also out to broadcast their belief that Tidioute was a highly desirable community in which to settle or in which to invest. John L. and William J. were, after all, businessmen — phenomenally successful ones — long before they thought of patronizing the arts.

And providentially, in the days before building codes, fire laws, and the like, it was possible to include without undue expense a theatrical facility in the upper floors of an otherwise commercial entity — "upstairs houses" the profession came to call them. And how they flourished, giving their builders the chance (in that familiar phrase) to have their cake and eat it, too. That is to say the uses to which the lower floors of the building were put — usually in the form of rental stores and professional rooms — absorbed whatever expenses developed from the theatre above. In many ways then the arrangement represented the best of all possible worlds for men like John L. and William J. Grandin.

Elsewhere in the oil country much the same thinking was current and especially in Titusville, the site of Crittenden Hall. Erected during the winter of 1860-61 at a cost of \$7,000, it unfortunately burned down the night of its first public performance. However, Mr. Crittenden rebuilt it the following summer, utilizing the basement as a saloon and the first floor as a liquor store. The performance hall occupied the second story. Its modest appointments were eclipsed, however, by the Murphy Theatre erected in 1865 at neighboring Pithole:

. . . There is a commodious gallery, dress circle, six private boxes to be carpeted and fitted with damask curtains, a full orchestra box, a stage 30 by 40 feet, with a

full set of scenery, and a splendid drop curtain imitation of satin. The interior is handsomely painted and decorated throughout, and lighted by chandeliers from Tiffany's of New York City. It is contemplated to have a rich drop curtain painted, representing a scene characteristic of the oil region, an oil well, tank, and derrick.<sup>1</sup>

In what seems a game of one-upmanship, Titusville welcomed the opening of two opera houses in that same year: the Bliss Opera House and Corinthian Hall. The former was described at some length in the paper of the day:

. . . The entire second story is appropriated to the Opera House, which is 30 feet wide by 129 feet deep in the clear, and is the most elegant and commodious public hall in the Oil Regions. The architect is Mr. Wm. H. Blanchard of New York and the design and workmanship of the interior is highly creditable to his reputation. The dimensions of the auditorium are 30 by 68 feet, the stage 30 by 29 feet, and 21 feet in the clear. The gallery forms an—olo, (letters indistinguishable) and extends to the centre, having a

seating capacity for 250 persons. The parquette is graduated from the orchestra to the entrance, so as to render the rear seats equally desirable for reservation with those in front. It is filled with circle seats, or slips, divided by an aisle through the centre, five feet broad at the entrance, and diminishing to three feet at the orchestra. The parquette will comfortably seat 600 persons, making a total capacity for 850 spectators, although closely packed the house will, undoubtedly, contain 1,000.<sup>2</sup>

Though no description of Corinthian Hall was given on its opening, a subsequent account seeks to establish its claim to being "the largest and finest" in the Oil Region:

. . . Corinthian Hall is the largest and finest in the oil region. It is a substantial brick structure; its dimensions are 40 by 140 feet in the clear, and it has a seating capacity for nearly 600 persons. The walls and ceiling have recently been repainted, and the hall supplied with handsome gas fixtures and chandeliers, which give the interior when illuminated, a much more cheerful and attractive appearance than formerly. The openings for the skylight in



The Parshall Opera House, Titusville. Constructed in 1870 at a cost of some 40,000 dollars. (Courtesy Drake Well Museum)

the ceiling have always been considered detrimental to the effects of singing or speaking, and we are pleased to learn that this defect is to be remedied without delay.<sup>3</sup>

Even as the Grandins must have been contemplating their own performance hall, a one-time family associate and former Tidiouter, James Parshall, was pushing ahead with the erection of a combined hotel and opera house in Titusville. The theatrical portion of the structure occupied the second, third and fourth stories and was reached by a broad staircase nine feet wide. On the left of the first landing was the ticket office and at the right the entrances to the parquette. This same landing provided access to the principal hall of the hotel and to staircases leading to the galleries.

As the Parshall Opera House represents in many ways a style-setter in the region and as details of the Grandin brothers' facility are obviously borrowed or represent simplifications of its appointments, an extended description from the press of 1870 seems in order:

*Auditorium.* The auditorium consists of the parquette, the dress circle, the family circle, and the balconies or the galleries, and four proscenium boxes, two on either side of the stage, which is in the rear part. There are two flights of inside stairs connecting the dress circle with the galleries. The ceiling is arched and in the centre is a swelling dome sixteen feet in diameter, which rises into a cupola above the roof. The floors of the parquette and galleries rise from front to rear on all sides, and each gallery is supported with solid iron pillars. The total height of ceiling from floor of parquette to base of dome is thirty-six and a half feet. The auditorium is sixty-five feet long, by fifty-one feet wide. There is one centre aisle and three side and rear aisles, at convenient distances, connecting with the outer passage. The parquette or orchestra circle is furnished with the elegant patent opera chair, and seats in the parquette and dress circle are handsomely painted, grained, and upholstered. The seating capacity of the hall may be estimated as follows: Parquette, three hundred; dress circle, four hundred; family circle, three hundred; gallery, three hundred; on occasion the house will accommodate an audience of fifteen hundred persons. The private boxes are of ample proportion.

*The Stage.* The stage has a depth of forty-five feet and a width of fifty-one feet; the foot-lights are depressed below the line of vision; the orchestra is eighteen feet long by seven feet wide. There are four dressing rooms in the rear of the stage, and dressing rooms also below the stage. The drop curtain is thirty feet wide by twenty-five feet in length. The woodwork is painted and frescoed, decorated and gilded, emblazoned with harmonious and rich coloring and with designs artistic and ornamental in a superior degree. The galleries encircled with lights, seven brackets to each, with three burners each in crystal globes, with similar lights in front of the boxes, sufficient for all the purposes of genial illumination, and the heat is diffused from registers on each side of the parquette and on the stage. The landing and aisles are covered with matting and the boxes are elegantly carpeted and curtained.

*Decorations.* The ceiling is richly frescoed in panels, the ground being in imitation of damask, bordered with gold moldings, the walls of the gallery are also paneled in fresco. Under the ceiling and above the arch is some graceful scroll work in the centre of which are figured by the cunning hand of the artist, beautiful symbolic figures of music and love, and beneath the arch that spans the stage is represented our National escutcheon in fresco, while above it the bust of King Lear in stucco, encircled with splendid scroll work. On the walls, on either side of the stage, appear a group or pair of mythological (sic) figures in the Pompeian style. The face of the balconies are panelled with gilt moldings and ornaments of Cupids, and

heads in stucco relief finished in white and gilt. The boxes are decorated with stucco ornaments in gilt and at the top are gilt eagles. The dome in the centre is frescoed in panels in Barrocco style and in each of the four panels are classical figures of life size, representing Music, Comedy, Tragedy, Poetry — Music with her lyre, Comedy with feet lifted in the dance, and with trumbril in hand, Tragedy with her mask and sword, and Poetry with her scroll — each so naturally wrought — "That one would almost say the image thought." The drop curtain represents the Straits of Messina, a scene in Italy. On the right of the placid waters rises the ancient ruin of a Roman castle, now called St. Salvador, with marble steps mounting to terrace and battlement and with Latin barges moored at the base of the ascent; on the opposite side Cleopatra's temple, the myrtle clasping its columns, and through the colonade in the dim distance the outline of lighthouse pier, the village spire, tower, the green and blue of earth and water, and the gold and purple of the sky. The drapery of the piece is remarkably correct in drawing and rich in coloring. The genius of the artist has wrought upon the canvas not a sensuous or passionate scene, but one of rare and tranquil loveliness.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere in the region the years 1870-71 saw performances at newly opened halls in Warren (the county seat) and Oil City, making it seem that John L. and William J. were lagging behind, Johnnies-come-lately, by the time they opened the Grandin Opera House sometime in 1872. And though scarcely as impressive as the Parshall Opera House and perhaps more modest than Love's Academy of Music in Oil City, it was decidedly superior to Warren's Roscoe Hall, little more than an elongated room with a miniscule stage raised at one end. Very possibly the most adequate phrase to describe it was one found by an early visitor. In his eyes it was a "gem" of a performance hall. And though today it is largely dismantled, enough remains to verify its gem-like description. Indeed, the brick block itself is all but abandoned, leaving the visitor only to surmise what once had been.

## II

What confronts today's viewer is the remains of an impressive, though essentially graceless, three story structure whose very solidity must have made the point that the Grandin brothers were men of substance and their banking establishment as incontrovertible as the building which housed it. Surprisingly this concern was allocated the smallest of three commercial apartments on the ground floor level, confined in what amounted to a long narrow room in the building's northeast corner; Bolard Brother's Drugstore (subsequently Charles Kemble & Son), described as a "model of convenience and beauty", occupied the central area; while the oil well supply and hardware store of Andrews & Co. was in the northwest corner.

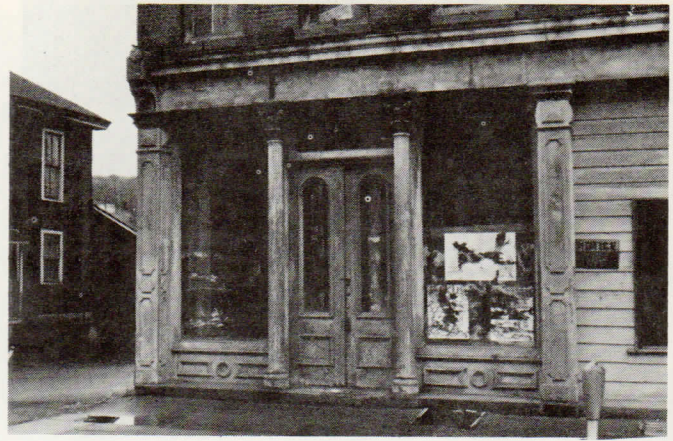
An elongated doorway at this end of the building opened on a steep flight of stairs — five feet in width — that led to a second floor landing, the most prominent feature of which was a ticket window for opera house patrons. Those having business with the office-holders on this level bore to their left down a narrow gas-lighted passage to find apartments and professional suites opening to the right and left. Though they seem commodious and adapted to the purpose at hand, it is not known with any certainty by whom they were occupied on the building's opening or subsequently. The Tidioute correspondent already quoted noted only that Adnah Neyhart and W. W. Hague had their offices on this floor as did "various" gentlemen.<sup>5</sup> Of some note is the fact that the offices of the *Journal* and subsequently *The Weekly News* were located on this level.

The auditorium could be reached by a stair at the rear of the building, opposite the newspaper office, or by ascending

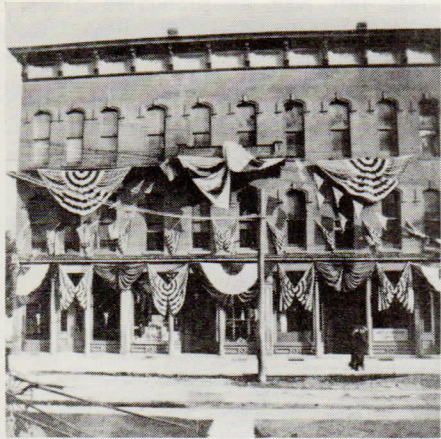




An unlovely view of the Grandin's domain circa 1904. It is tempting to believe that the poster seen in the drug store window advertised an attraction at the opera house.



Northeast corner of the brick block occupied by the Grandin Bros.' Bank.



An early 20th century view of the opera house that shows the three commercial establishments on the ground floor. The doorway of the entrance right led to the opera house.



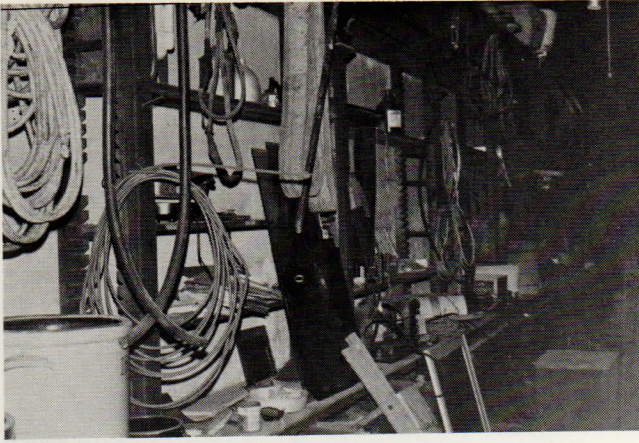
Looking up toward the remains of the balcony on which minstrel performers serenaded Main-streeters.



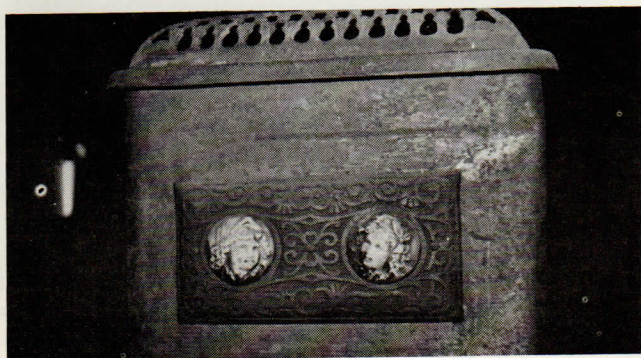
All but abandoned today.



Southeast corner of the building from the site once occupied by the railroad depot.



Interior of the ground floor once occupied by a well drilling and hardware supply store.



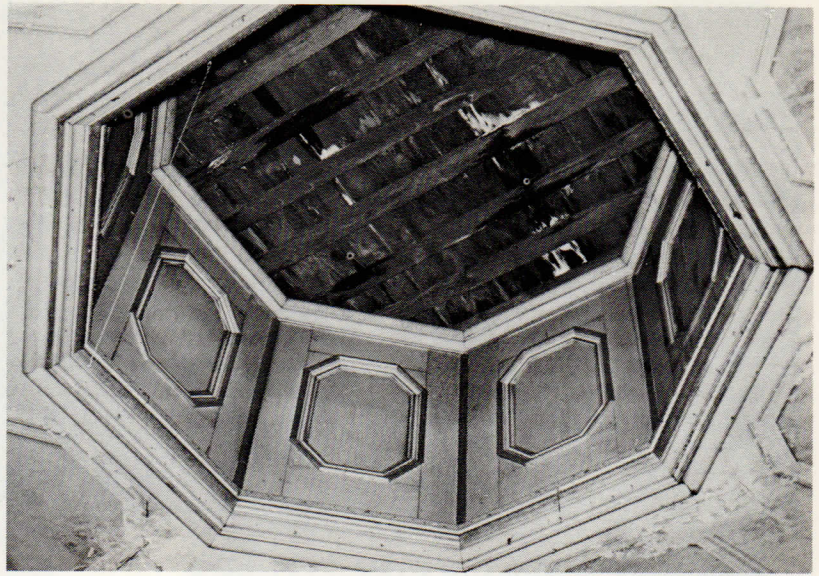
a flight of stairs leading from the landing adjacent to the ticket booth. The principal feature of this facility was a solid cherry counter top lighted by a bronzed gas jet affixed to the ticket window's frame. Immediately beneath it was a walnut storage cabinet, presumably for tickets and whatever records may have been pertinent to the theatre. Newspaper announcements and advertisements make it clear, however, that when this office was not open to the public, reserved seats could be secured via a "box sheet", generally to be found at Kemble's Drug Store.

However the patron secured his ticket, his most ready means of access was via the stairs in the building's north-west corner. If he had seats in the parquette, there were two steep flights to climb, and he entered the hall by means of a pair of double oak doors; but if he had opted for the gallery, there was yet another flight ahead of him that culminated in an abbreviated landing and a single door. Whatever his destination, his way was lit by extremely handsome double pronged gas fixtures, each topped by a cherubic boy holding aloft an unidentifiable bird.

Standing within the principal entrance doors, the spectator looked across the auditorium to a pair of identical doors that opened on a long hall off of which were a series of apartments, presumably dressing and storage rooms. To his immediate left was an elongated black coal stove which, with its counterpart on the far side of the auditorium, provided sufficient heat to keep the Opera House tenable throughout the winter months. Immediately above his head was one arm of the horseshoe-shaped hanging balcony and looking into the auditorium he could see one of three six-inch steel columns supporting the ceiling. These, with their elaborately styled Corinthian capitols, were spaced evenly down the middle of the auditorium and though of ordinary pipe, were painted to complement the auditorium's decor.

Unfortunately the theatre's present state of near ruin gives only an intimation of the Grandin's gem-like qualities, so impressive to audiences of the day. Yet enough remains to discern that the plaster walls above the light-stained wainscoting were painted in ivory and embellished with painted lavender panels. The ceiling was also ivory with lavender trim interrupted by a light blue circle seventy feet in circumference, centered in which was an eight-sided dome skylight some six feet in diameter — no less an acoustical horror perhaps than that incorporated in Corinthian Hall. Nevertheless, it was as stylish in appearance as the languid Greek goddesses painted on the plaster of the walls flanking the proscenium arch — reminiscent of those to be found in the Parshall Opera House. The effect, even now, is at once delicate and lyric — exactly the setting to witness the kind of theatrical and quasi-theatrical activities that took place upon the stage.

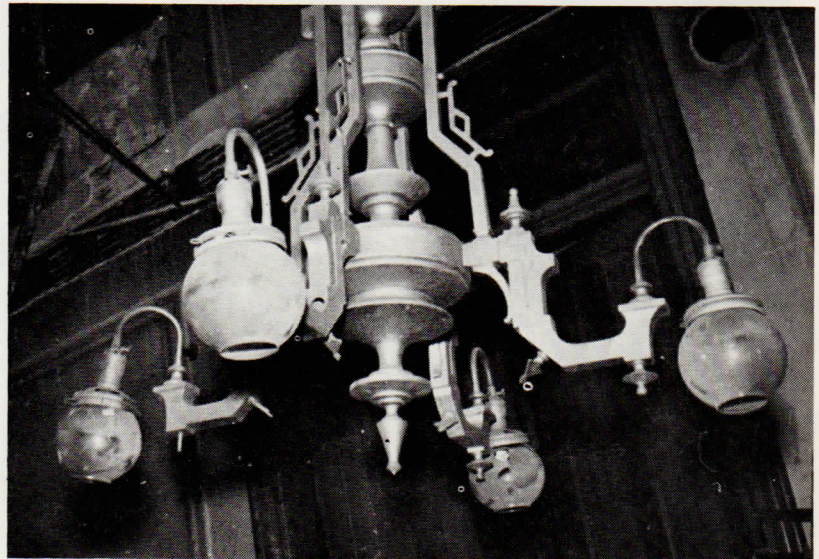
Today all the seats are gone from the auditorium floor and much of the wainscoting and some of the flooring has been torn out. It is evident that, though the floor was not raked but flat, there was a raised area under the balcony. In this section long pew-like seats, some seven feet in length were used. In the balcony and in the parquette, that is the position of the auditorium forward of the entrance doors, a medley of individual chairs seem to have been used. Stored throughout the building are a number of slat-seated folding chairs, vaguely Grecian in design and a quantity of fussy Victorian straight chairs. The latter are carefully numbered on the back. Unfortunately the so-called "box sheets" used as seating keys have long since disappeared. A reference in a dramatic directory of the day does, however, refer to the Grandin's capacity as 750, a sizeable hall for a community whose population numbered 2500 the year before the opera house opened and considerably fewer than that figure in the remaining years of the century as the oil mania passed to other communities.<sup>6</sup>



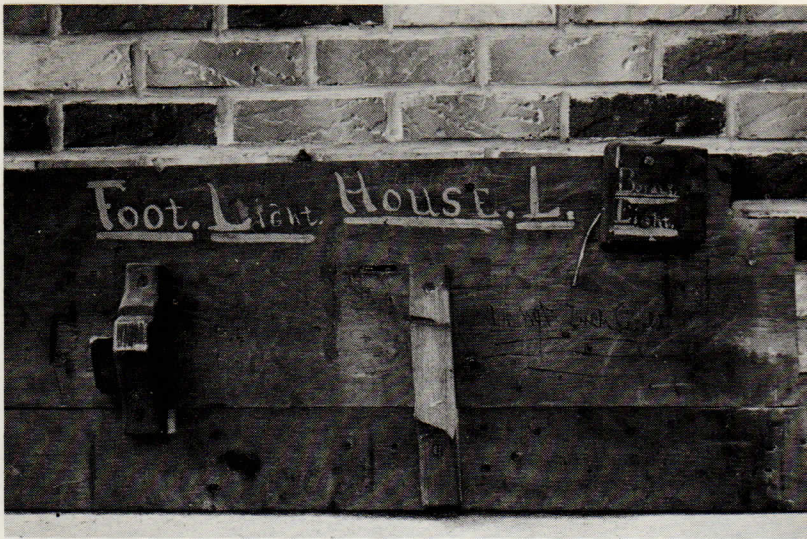
Ceiling opening.



Stage ceiling showing the remains of borders and the pulley used in raising and lowering the grand drape. Electric light fixtures are obviously a late addition.



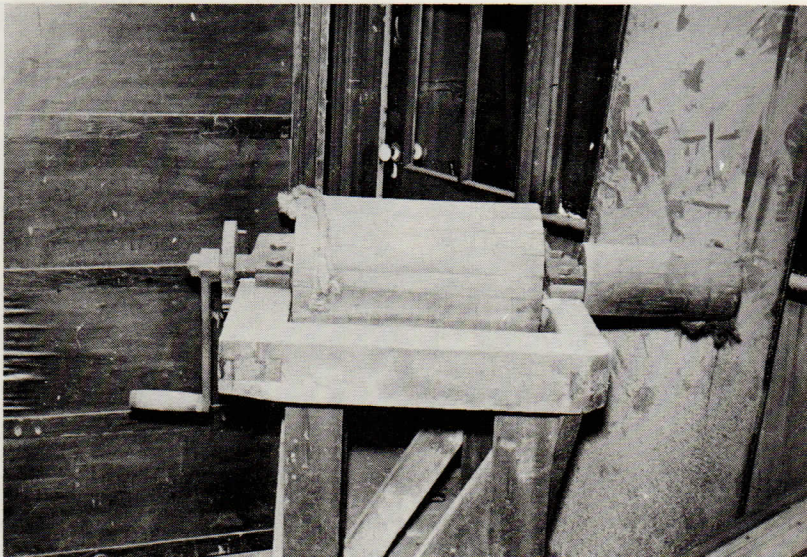
Grand chandelier.



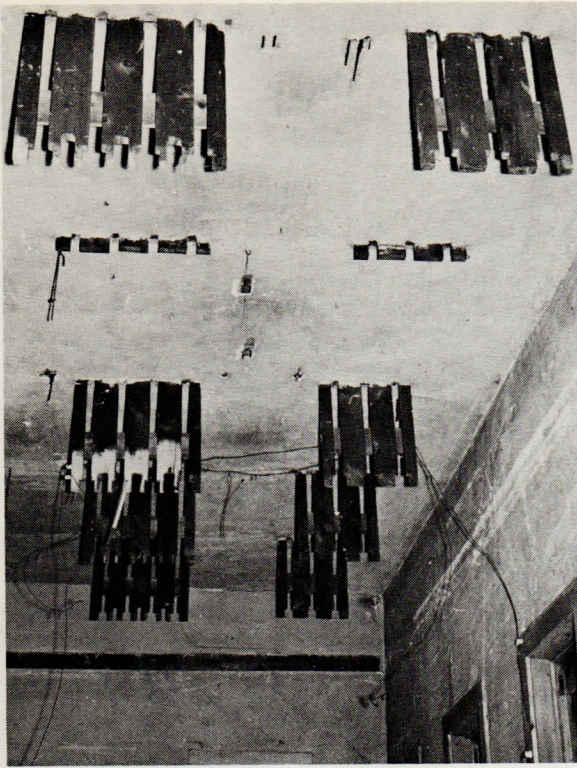
**Light panel.**



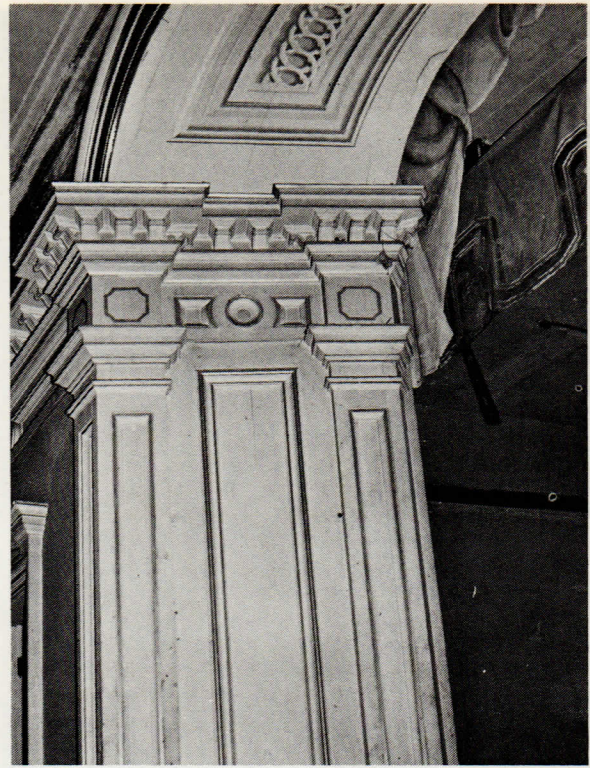
**Principal dressing room showing sink and primitive box toilet.**



**Winch and drum used in raising and lowering the grand drape.**



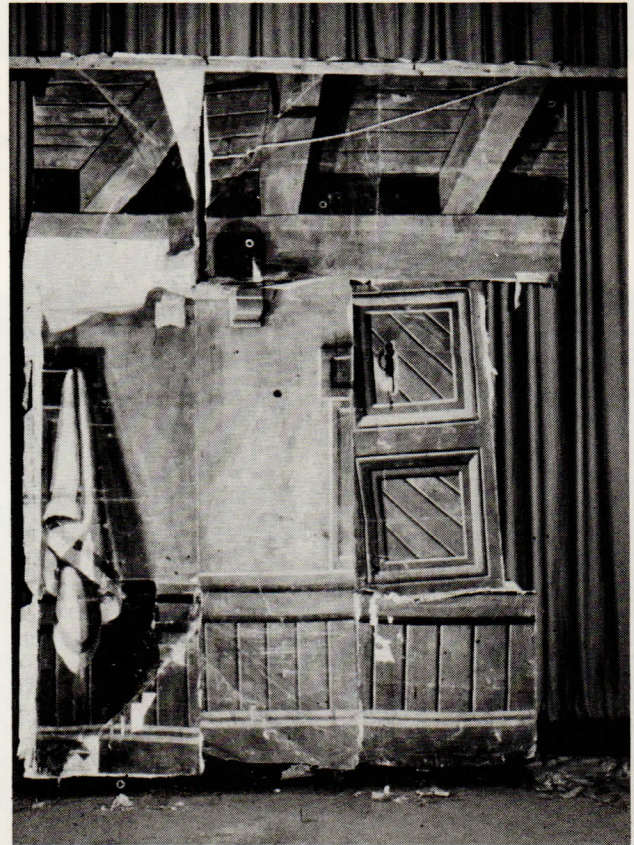
Wooden grooves in stage ceiling which held wings or flats perpendicular to the curtain line.



Detail of the proscenium arch.

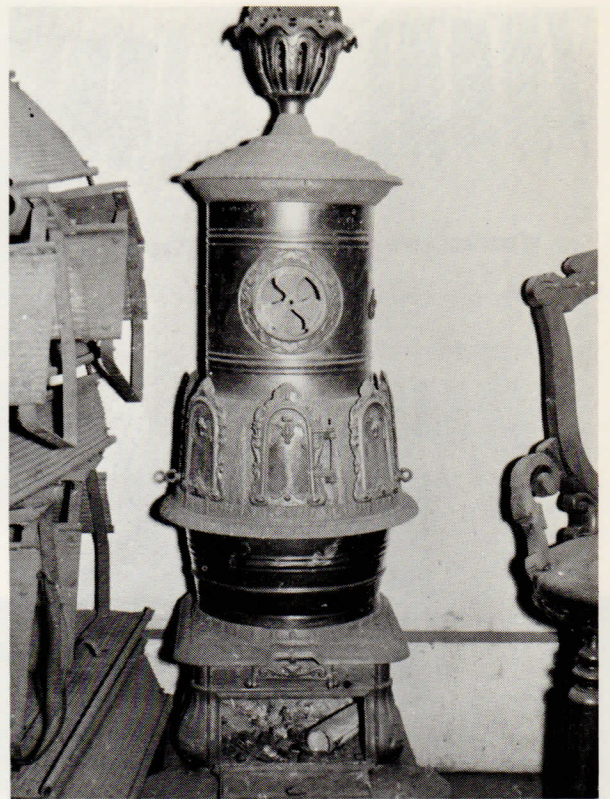


A sampling of the scenery perhaps executed for the theatre's opening.

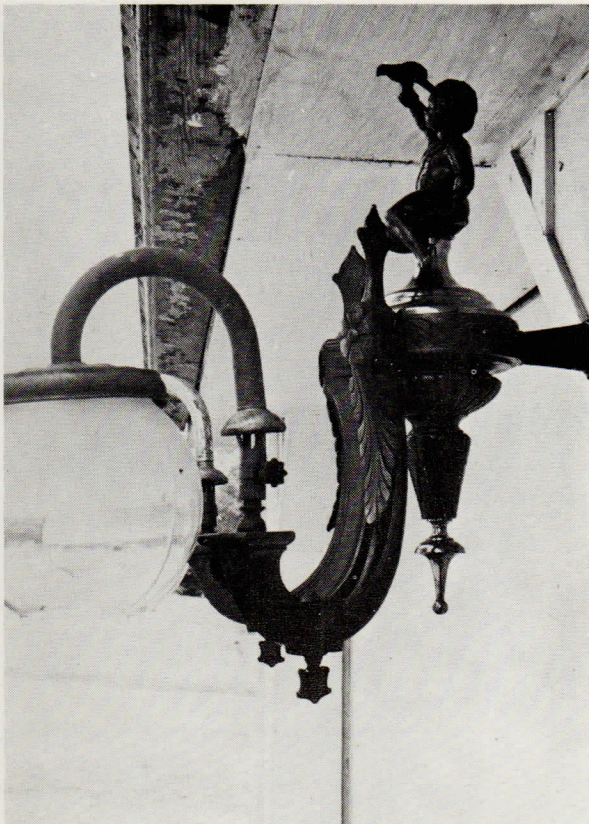




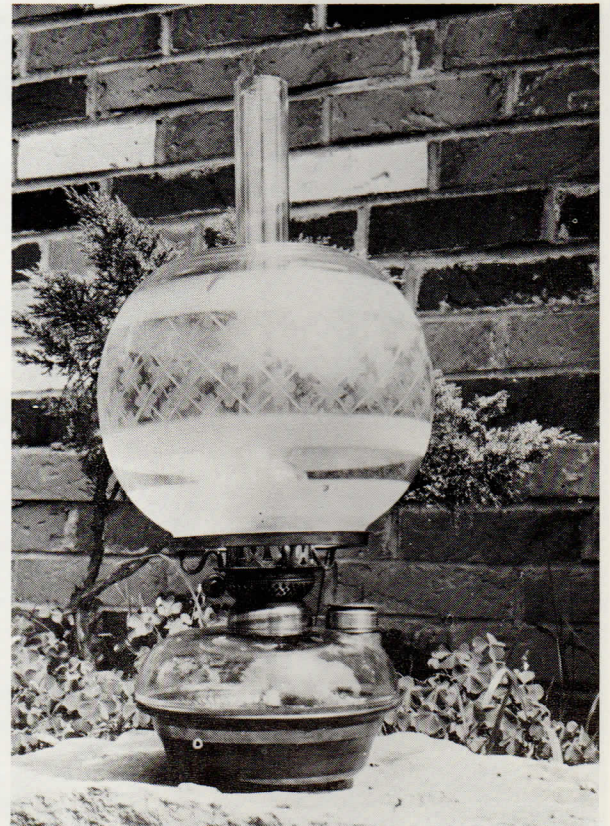
One of the two figures that flank the proscenium arch. These are painted directly on the plaster wall.



One of the stoves used to warm the auditorium. Sections of tin trough used to house the gas borders are stacked at the left.



One of the gas lights that embellished the auditorium and principal stairs.



One of the handsome lamps that provided the footlights.



So-called opera house chairs. One pattern was a folding chair with slated seat; the other a straight chair which originally had an upholstered seat. The latter type was numbered on the back.





**Remains of the auditorium as seen from the level of the balcony. Looking to the stage area, it is evident the raked stage flooring has been torn out as has the balcony itself.**



**The door opening at ceiling level was the entrance to the balcony. Door at floor level opened into a cuddy in which kerosene footlights were stored. The balcony was suspended from the hanging metal supports shown in both views.**

Turning our attention from the auditorium proper, the viewer's eye is most immediately caught by the stylishly elaborate gold and ivory stage opening whose proscenium columns, angled sharply inward, reduce considerably the area in view and the stage opening itself — from twenty-four feet at the outer extremity of the proscenium wall to twenty-one feet at the inner. At the rear of the auditorium rests the long roller to which the grand drape was attached and above and immediately to the right and left rear of the arch are the two wooden pulleys used to raise and lower it. Though the drape itself has long since disappeared, an old resident recalls that its hand-painted scene imaged snow-capped mountains, wooded lower slopes, and a sparkling mountain stream. Given these details it was certainly unexceptional and in keeping with that in the Parshall Opera House.

The stage area now torn out but originally three feet above the auditorium floor is twenty-nine feet deep from the apron to the back wall and is raked (see stage cross section) in order that those in the parquette might obtain a good view. The wing space is eleven feet on each side; the fifteen foot plaster ceiling above the stage obviously provided no fly space, but it is embellished with four sets of well-worn scenery grooves starting from three feet upstage of the curtain line. Each set consists of a cluster

of seven grooves about two feet apart that could hold up to five stage flats, or wings as they were generally called, thus allowing seven different positions left and right across the stage. In all some twenty-eight different positions were available and wings up to twelve feet in height could be accommodated. It should be noted that all wings set in the grooves were rigidly perpendicular to the audience's view.

The remnants of two borders or ceiling pieces hang down from the ceiling two and three feet respectively behind the proscenium arch and in one of the rooms off the auditorium are the tin troughs that housed the original gas borders — perhaps three in number. Their positions, however, can only be presumed from the many small holes in the plaster ceiling, and no apparatus for mounting or attaching them can be found. The panel board that controlled these lights is located to the right rear of the proscenium arch and bears upon it in yellow paint the legend: "Foot Light/House. L./Border Light."

So accustomed are we to the versatility of the electric light today that we are apt to forget that gaslights, although they could be turned low during a performance, were seldom turned completely off and this because in lighting them up again a considerable amount of gas was allowed to escape before all the jets would take fire. In consequence the atmosphere was contaminated. Of course, the gas burning continually throughout the performance not only made the auditorium hot but devitalized the air.

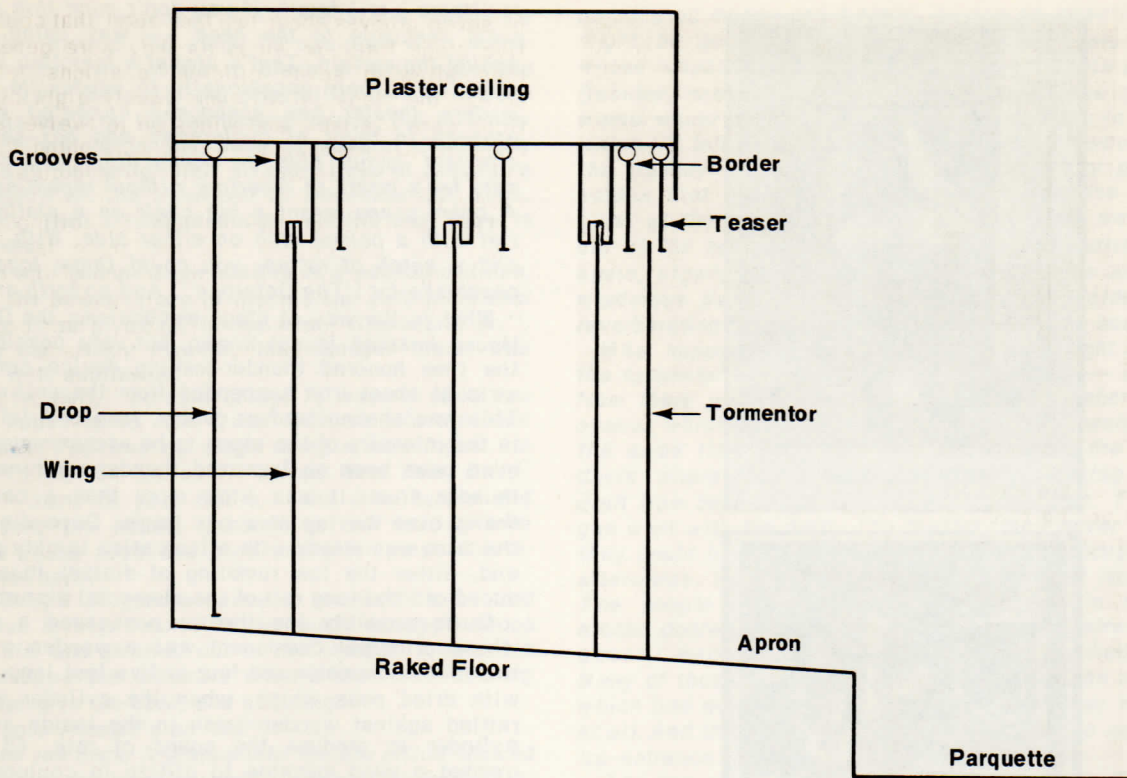
According to the present owner some two dozen kerosene lamps stored in a niche under the balcony stairs were used as footlights. Whether or not he is correct, they are handsome lamps with pipe-stem chimneys and hand-etched globe-like shades. However, it is not difficult to conceive of them as the single most observable cause of theatre fires, and one who knew of what he spoke wrote: "It was not a rare occurrence for one or more lamp chimneys to break in the footlights . . . and for a dense black smoke to poison the atmosphere during the rest of the evening."<sup>7</sup>

Beneath the stage was at least one shallow trap, though no evidence survives of understage machinery; certainly it could not have been elaborate given the three feet of crawl space beneath the stage. And off stage right over the main staircase were two narrow rooms. The upstage apartment contains a primitively quaint box toilet and a metal sink resting on elaborately wrought iron legs. No doubt this was an unexpected boon to touring actors. It must have comforted tremulous home talent as well. The downstage room, painted green at some point in its history, probably served as the theatre's green room, though there is no evidence of a hanging mirror for the last touches to make-up and wig; and if there was ever a dictionary handy to settle disputes over punctuation, it has long since vanished as has whatever furnishings the room possessed.<sup>8</sup> Its sole embellishments today are a rash of signatures on the walls, which may or may not have been placed there by the actors who utilized it.

Looking from these rooms upstage left, there is a door which opens upon steps leading down into a long hall that runs the length of the building to a rear staircase. Off this hallway are four equal-sized rooms fifteen by twenty-one feet. Though there is nothing about them to suggest theatrical use, very probably they served as property, storage, and dressing rooms. Professionals must have found these light and airy quarters a pleasant change from the accommodations usually provided for them. One of the four even provided the luxury of a sink and rear stairs led directly down to a side entrance at the first floor level, making possible inconspicuous entrances and exits from the building.

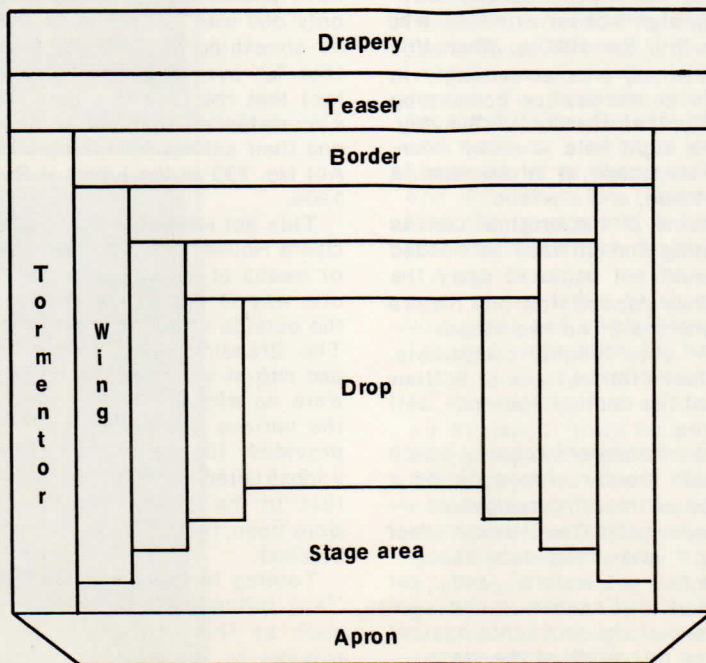
Abandoned in a dressing room was an unexpected reminder of the Grandin's golden days, a quantity of scenic





#### GEOGRAPHY OF THE GRANDIN STAGE

There were three types of scenery utilized: borders, drops and wings. Borders (abbreviated drops or ceiling pieces) were used to represent clouds, overhead foliage or ceilings. Drops extended from the flies (or ceiling in this case) to the stage and defined the rear of the scene. Wings were pieces of painted canvas tacked on a framework of wood and slid into position in wooden grooves suspended from the fly area (ceiling). Tormentors, narrow vertical strips of scenery painted to simulate drapery or columns, were positioned at either extremity of the stage opening and immediately behind the first border (or teaser).





IMITATING RAIN.



THUNDER-MAKING DEVICES.

canvas long separated from its wooden framing and rolled rather haphazardly into a number of bundles. When unrolled and hung from a crossbar in a modern auditorium, individual pieces evidenced a surprising freshness. Unfortunately several of the most interesting had been literally wall-papered over, very possibly by high school students who utilized the stage sporadically into the 1920's. When this was carefully peeled off, the scenery was surprisingly in keeping with William H. Crane's generalization concerning what was to be found in the typical theatre of the day. Crane specified there were some eight sets: a rocky mountain pass, a dark wood, a light landscape, a throne room, a center door set, a chamber, a kitchen, and a prison.<sup>9</sup>

Presumably this is what remains of the original canvas executed for the theatre's opening and utilized as needed by traveling companies who could not begin to carry the varying scenery needed; for as they passed from one theatre to another, they found the dimensions of no two stages — nor the stage accoutrements — even roughly comparable. Often they were maddeningly dissimilar. Listen to William A. Brady, a distinguished turn of the century showman, tell of his early theatrical experiences.

... There was a whole science of standard scenery which you had to master. A respectable theater always owned a certain amount of stuff for the use of traveling companies — I can recite the list backwards yet. One "center-door fancy," one "side-door fancy," one "two-door fancy," one kitchen, one "palace arch," "set waters" and "set rocks". A street scene drop, used for "scenes in one" — meaning a scene played just back of the footlights against a curtain while a set that took the full depth of the stage —

in "three" or "four", if you don't mind this rush of technical language to the head — was being put together behind the curtain. That's almost a forgotten language now, cropping up only occasionally in vaudeville, because the modern theater has abandoned numbered wings set in grooves in favor of cycloramas and box-sets. With that standard layout plus an ocean drop, you could concoct sets for a month of repertory without repeating a bill once. A court scene meant a big chair on a platform against a flat with a palace arch on either side. With "set waters" and a batch of rattan, you could throw together a swell canebrake for "The Octoroon". And so forth and so on.<sup>10</sup>

What in the way of stage mechanisms the Grandin Opera House boasted is not known, but very possibly there was the time honored thunder-making device consisting of a strip of sheet iron suspended from the ceiling by a cord. This was shaken hard or gently, long or briefly, according to the intensity of the storm to be approximated. There may even have been an improved thunder machine known as a thunder drum. It was little more than a calfskin tightly drawn over the top of a box frame. Depending on how the drum was struck with a long stick thickly padded at the end, either the low rumbling of distant thunder was produced or "the long roll of the elemental disturbance."<sup>11</sup>

Quite possibly the theatre possessed a rain machine whose principal component was a wooden cylinder about two feet in diameter and four or five feet long. It was filled with dried peas which, when the cylinder was agitated, rattled against wooden teeth in the inside surface of the cylinder to produce the sound of rain. Of course, one needed a wind machine to utilize in conjunction with it. Such a device employed a cylinder to which were affixed a paddle and a tightly stretched piece of grosgrain silk. When the cylinder was turned by means of a crank, the paddles struck against the silk to sound "woeful gusts". The more rapidly the crank was turned the steadier the blast produced. Often this bit of stage machinery was used in conjunction with a snow box, a long narrow affair with slats on the bottom that left room for pieces of paper to sift through. The contrivance was swung over the stage by means of ropes and operated by a line leading to one of the wings.

### III

Howsoever many of these mechanisms the theatre may have possessed is perhaps beside the point. To have had only one was to contribute toward the image of the theatre as something of a wonder house, and it functioned as just that for over a quarter of a century and this despite the fact that the theatre's gem-like appearance was belied by circumstances that put in question the audience's comfort and their safety. Something of this may be seen by examining Act No. 233 in the Laws of Pennsylvania for the Session of 1909.

This act mandated that performance halls like the Grandin Opera House "shall be provided with proper ways of egress, or means of escape from fire" and that there be more than one way of egress, or escape "leading to fire escapes on the outside of such buildings or to stairways on the inside." The Grandin gallery comes immediately to mind with its one narrow stair leading up to a single entrance door. There were no windows on the rear wall at this level, and while the various auditorium doors did open outward as the Act provided, the gallery door did not afford when open "an unobstructed external passage-way of not less than five feet in the clear." Moreover, once the auditorium doors were open, the stairs leading from the gallery were partially blocked.

Turning to the stage area, the act prohibited the use of "any inflammable or explosive oil for lighting purposes", such as that utilized in the kerosene footlights already referred to. As well, it decreed that all drop curtains and

skyboarders be of an approved non-combustible substance and that either side of the stage be equipped with stand-pipes of at least two inches in diameter with hose and attachments. Very obviously the possibility of fire in such structures was much on the lawmakers' minds; but this was a matter of hindsight in the wake of several disastrous fires, especially that which took so many lives at Chicago's Iroquois Theatre on the afternoon of December 30, 1903. William Brady, then a road producer with his own show in town, was there:

... As soon as I had my show started in a packed matinee, I went down the street in one of those bitter cold midwinter days Chicago is so given to, to see how "Bluebeard, Jr.", was making out. Harry Powers, the manager there, was running over with exultation:

"Come on in, Bill," he said to me. "I want to show you what a real house looks like," and took me into the back of a stage-box. Foy was on stage doing a monologue. He walked over to the box and said: "Happy New Year, Bill," and I said, "Same to you, Eddie," and then turned and looked up into the house, jammed to the ceiling with children and young boys and girls and their parents celebrating the holidays.

"We've got just as good a house at the Garrick," I told Powers, "but it won't come to so much money," shook hands with him and strolled out of the theater. I wasn't a hundred feet down the sidewalk when a man came tearing past me, gasping in the cold, and shouting:

"The Iroquois Theater's on fire!"

I turned and ran back. A glance into the box office showed a queer thing — the treasurer and his assistant frantically

packing up money and tickets, paying no attention to what might be going on inside. But that was natural in men whose responsibility for money was their whole profession. Besides, nobody could have realized quite how quickly the worse would happen. By the time I was back in the foyer, which I'd left only a few minutes before, the whole story of the tragedy was already told. The two-story plate-glass screen that separated the auditorium from the foyer was burst at the top and a roaring loop of flame was shooting out of the hole, striking the far wall and curling back in again, slowly heating the place like an oven and striking murderous panic into the whole audience. Inside it was a reverberating figure-eight of fire from stage to screen.

What happened was that a calcium side-light set fire to the tormentor — an ornamental side-scene — and spread from there up into the flies, among the numberless drop-scenes which make up the scenery of "Bluebeard, Jr.". At the same time some fool had thrown open the big stage doors where they brought in scenery, making a perfect draft from back-stage to foyer and back again. The burning gas went with the draft. The theater itself never burned — they could have given performances in it a couple of days afterwards. But it didn't have to burn to kill its hundreds. The people from the balcony were piled in the narrow arched doorway at the head of the big gilt stairway — and already many of them must have been crushed to death. Many of those in the orchestra had mobbed the side-doors, which had never been inspected to see if they would open at all. And there was another fearful jam at the main orchestra-entrance.

The jam at the balcony door was the worst. The victims had climbed over one another until, after it was over, they were found jamming the doorway from top to bottom. The main floor exit into the lobby wasn't as bad as that. I found myself there, helping to loosen the plug of frenzied men, women and children by jerking the foremost through to loosen the jam behind. Working at my side, I found a tramp off the streets, a regular threadbare, shivering, red-nosed Weary Willie, who had rushed in at the same time I had. He must have saved fifty people that day. And yet the first thing the police did on arrival was throw him out and threaten him with arrest if he showed up again.<sup>12</sup>

In all fairness to the Grandin brothers it should be pointed out that the interior arrangements and provisions of their opera house were little different from scores of other theatres opened at the time by well meaning men throughout opera house America.<sup>13</sup> Once in use the owners or leasees trusted principally to luck and the vigilance of all concerned. For instance, when a blaze did break out on one occasion on the Grandin stage — the result of a gas leak and someone striking a match — one of the women who happened to be there snatched off a woolen undergarment and smothered the flames. Only days later she received from the management a luxurious silk petticoat to replace that which had been destroyed.

Anna Grandin, the only surviving child of William J., tells of her father being present every time a performance was given and of his being the last one to leave the building and only after he had assured himself that all was well. It was just this sort of stewardship that was needed in such a structure as the Grandins had built and as long as William J. lived he was mindful of his responsibilities. Following his death in 1904, however, the opera house all but closed its doors. And perhaps this was a fortunate circumstance, for without the presence of someone like him the Grandin's patrons were better advised to forgo an evening surrounded by highly inflammable materials under conditions that provided exits inadequate to a real emergency. Gem-like the theatre was, but its pleasing appearance was in itself no guarantee of its sophistication in terms of stage mechanics nor of its convenience, comfort or safety.



HOW WIND IS IMITATED.



MAKING LIGHTNING.

*Troupers at Tidioute*

The footlights dancing  
 The noise of the scenery pushed along by the shifters  
 The thumping of the big drum  
 The shrill whisper of the prompter  
 The tinkle of the bell bidding the roll up of the curtain  
 These are the sounds and sights that greet me  
 (I am in the theatre)

Attributed to Walt Whitman

Because some of Tidioute's early papers have not been preserved, it is difficult to establish anything like a performance history of the Grandin Opera House until the mid seventies. It is known, however, that the Bankers' Association of the Oil Regions met there on the evening of April 8, 1873; and according to a local historian, Laura Keene — forever associated in the public mind with that fateful night at Ford's Theatre — played at the "new" Grandin Opera House following her Franklin, Pennsylvania, appearance late in June 1873.<sup>1</sup> Though her company had been beset by difficulties and despite the fact that her histrionic triumphs were well behind her at this point, hers was still an illustrious stage name, and her three night stand in Tidioute may well have been her final appearance on any stage. Early in July she was again in New York, "in a very weak condition — emaciated and ill"; she died on November 4th.

Very possible the kinds of fare the Grandin hosted were comparable to what was to be seen at Warren's Roscoe Hall some twenty miles away. Opened during the winter of 1869

this performance hall relied heavily on local social events, visiting lecturers of an "improving" character, small musical aggregations, and only an occasional dramatic presentation (which was as apt to be put on by the local amateurs as it was by a traveling company). If, indeed, the early fare at Tidioute resembled that in Warren, it can be seen that the name **opera house** was a misnomer. In reality the facility opened by John L. and William J. was a public hall, available generally to those who had the price of its rental — and so it remained throughout a quarter of a century.

Those issues of **The Tidioute Weekly News** that have survived the ravages of time invariably catalog the events held at the Grandin. Notice of these is generally to be found in a column headed "White-Lies", which was a regular feature of the paper. To read it is to discover that the opera house served as the center of the community's social as well as cultural life. Between its hospitable walls Tidiouters danced away the evening at masked balls or calico parties. There, too, they gathered for political



Sections from a panoramic view of Tidioute and its environs taken sometime after 1905. Particularly noticeable are the barren hills, a legacy from the days of the lumbermen.



A contemporary view from much the same location — the Tidioute Overlook on the eastern bank of the Allegheny.

rallies and high school exercises. Truly it was a hall for all occasions and with its level floor in the parquette and moveable chairs, it was readily convertible to a variety of uses. In this circumstance lay the key to its acceptance and survival.

As has been remarked earlier, the urge toward self improvement was strongly felt in Tidioute at about the time the Grandin brothers must have made their decision to include a performance hall in their new block. Thus it is not surprising that lecturers from afar were warmly welcomed. Then, too, the single performer could make his way through the region in the seventies with an ease not always found possible by a traveling company. One of those who did appear was Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the reformer and leader in the women's rights movement. An eloquent and graceful speaker, she no doubt delighted those who heard her speak on "Our Girls" in November 1877.

Quasi-literary subjects were apparently much in demand as evidenced by the appearance of Will Carlton in December 1878. Carlton was the popular author of "Over the Hill to the Poorhouse" and other farm ballads, which when published by Harper's in 1873 attained a circulation of 40,000 copies within eighteen months. His specialty on the platform was reading from his own writing and as he uttered in simple, wholesome verse the homely sentiments of the common man, he must have found attentive listeners in Tidioute. The following December Professor G. M. Sleeth of the Pittsburgh High School gave an evening of dramatic readings; while Professor J. B. Roberts, represented as the best teacher of elocution in the country, rendered an evening with the poets on what was very probably a warm August evening in 1882.

Rather different entertainment was offered in March 1884 with the appearance of Paul Smith, crayon artist and impersonator; and certainly Ben Hogan must have caused many to reflect when he hired the opera house for two evenings in December 1888 to "preach". He was followed in a matter of days by a boy orator, humorist and violinist named Ralph Bingham. One wonders if the "enlightened" Hogan won, as Bingham was said to win, "golden opinions" of his ability wherever he went.

The next several years witnessed a range of speakers who seem thoroughly representative of what opera house America had to offer in the way of platform favorites. W. J. Knight appeared in 1890 to tell of the Andrews' Raid, that so-called great locomotive chase of April 1862, which he made into one of the most "thrilling and romantic facts of war." Following him in March 1892, Miss Vandalia VERNUM won the praise of all with a temperance lecture; while Robert J. "Bob" Burdette, a widely popular newspaper humorist, rounded out this potpourri with "The Rise and Fall of the Moustache" in April 1893.

Concert artists, too, were in demand, appearing on the Grandin stage as regularly as the speakers already catalogued. The Arabella Root Ballad Concert Troupe entertained in 1878 and Miss Belle Cole of New York City fame was advertised in 1884. Not only Tidiouters but music lovers in neighboring Tionesta and Hickory turned out to hear the Schubert Quartette of Chicago in 1887. January 1889 brought Redpath Concert Company of Boston, including the talents of Miss Ella Chamberlin, a whistling soloist; and for three years running between 1889-91 the Jamison Concert Company pleased the musically inclined.

Concert fare very different from the foregoing was provided in the persons of the New Orleans University Jubilee Singers with a program of Negro melodies in March 1891. As a matter of passing interest, such groups emulated the Georgia Jubilee Singers, who began the rage for "genuine" plantation music in the spring of 1876. And as the craze spread, a deluge of jubilee singers flooded the land, prompting one hard-pressed showman to advertise in a New

York paper early in 1878 for "100 octoroons, 100 quadroons, 100 malattoes, and 100 decidedly black men, women and children capable of singing slave choruses."<sup>2</sup>

The remainder of the concert fare offered in the nineties seems tame by comparison. By way of example, there was the Boston Lyceum Concert Company in December 1891; the Lutteman Sextette from Sweden and the Jamestown Swedish Sextette from neighboring New York state, both advertising in 1893; the Titusville Concert Company, booming the pretensions of the Oil Region in May 1895; and finally Rosa D'Erina, the renowned prima donna, who enjoyed a special appointment -- or so her publicity proclaimed -- to the Princess of Wales. No doubt those who heard her in October 1899 felt that the wider world of fashion was, for the moment at least, very near at hand.

## II

Before examining various of the minstrel and variety artists or the legitimate dramatic performers who played the Grandin, it might be helpful to consider the means by which the local managements throughout opera house America went about securing the various performers whom they advertised. Under the new largely abandoned stock system, their efforts had gone into the hunt for a single aggregation of players willing to perform for one or more seasons in their theatres. Visiting stars came and went but the resident company constituted an established presence, capable at once of supporting a visiting personality or entertaining the community by its own efforts.

However, under the combination system, the Grandin brothers, or subsequently one or another of their house managers, were faced with the necessity of securing on an individual basis and prior to the start of each season in early September a varied roster of talent. Initially this was no easy task for the management in Tidioute or indeed for the managers of far more imposing theatres throughout the country. Throughout the seventies these men, or their representatives, had little choice but to make the trip to New York to fill their time for the season ahead.

Much of their day was spent literally on the sidewalk or in the hotel lobbies about the Union Square area. There they could be seen not only rushing after the managers of attractions they wanted to book but at one and the same time avoiding the representatives of less desirable offerings. The attractions pursued the managers of theatres they wanted to play even as they responded ambiguously to undesirable bookings until driven to accept them by lack of more attractive alternatives. Unemployed actors swelled the throng: "Rumor and gossip filled the air. Friendships were renewed, rivalries sharpened, enmities engendered. It was a grand game of hide-and-seek, of bluff and call."<sup>3</sup>

The alternative to this yearly ritual was a lengthy correspondence with the managers of desirable productions. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it was probably this system that prevailed in booking the Grandin Opera House and at other theatres where the business of theatrical management was a part time or sometime activity at best. Not infrequently company managers took the initiative themselves and wrote for "time" as they sought to put a profitable forty week season together. And, of course, this meant a minimum of backtracking or long jumps between engagements; for the company itself it meant a grind of one night stands only partially offset by split-week or week stands in major population centers.

Very obviously a degree of systemization and centralization was desirable on behalf of all concerned and it came about in Pennsylvania as early as it did anywhere. One individual responsible was a John D. Mishler, who in 1873 organized a theatrical circuit of theatres in twenty-four cities in eastern Pennsylvania, including Wilkesbarre, Reading, Scranton, Lebanon, Norristown, Williamsport,

Lancaster and Allenton.<sup>4</sup> He may have been preceded in an arrangement to book attractions in a common geographical area by Samuel T. Jack, the organizer of the Oil Region Circuit. Jack booked attractions during the seventies at Roscoe Hall and possibly in Tidioute.

However, when Jack retired from active management, he was succeeded by the firm of Wagner and Reis, who evidently viewed theatres in communities the size of Tidioute as not worth their attention. By 1889 Reis was quoted in **The New York Dramatic Mirror** as follows: "We have just assumed the management of the Opera House at Elmira, N. Y. . . . and we have also again leased the Grand Opera House at Oil City. The other theatres in our circuit are Corning, N. Y.; Hornellsville, N. Y.; Olean, N. Y.; Bradford, Pa.; Erie, Pa.; and New Castle, Pa.; while we continue to book Butler, Beaver Falls and Jamestown, N. Y."<sup>5</sup> From his remarks it is clear that local management had put itself in the way of having less and less to do, becoming little more than a building custodian; or it abrogated its original responsibilities entirely by renting out, or leasing, the facility to an out-of-town and frequently out-of-state operation whose interest was predominately commercial.

A case in point is Warren Pennsylvania's Library Hall, which had been erected largely through the generosity of a local industrialist and with the enthusiastic support of the community who were to be recipients of the structure. Opened in December 1883, local management booked its own attractions for the remainder of the 1883-84 season and for the following season. However, the task of seeking out and engaging some thirty attractions for the 1884-85 season must have proved not a little onerous for the appointed trustees of the building. Thus in the following season the hall was leased to Wagner and Reis, who proceeded to double the number of attractions offered annually, evidently intent on making the most out of their lease.

This provoked an angry response from the Board of Control of the Warren Public Library that shared the building with Library Hall and which was to be supported by the revenue derived from the theatre -- at least according to the original intentions of the donor. Their minutes express a sense of outrage on behalf of the community.

*They have seen with regret that under the Wagner & Reis management of Library Hall, many plays of a light, frivolous, vulgar and in some instances of a culpable character, have been presented upon the stage. The quality of many of the performances has not only been objectionable, but the performances themselves have been given with a frequency wholly disproportioned to the requirements of reasonable recreation, and which has grievously overtaxed the pockets of our townspeople.*

*We recognize and admit, under limitations, the perfect propriety, if not necessity, of theatrical exhibitions, as an innocent and rational means of furnishing relaxation and enjoyment; and we believe a restricted number of representations during the Winter season carefully chosen, would be liberally patronized, and prove acceptable and beneficial. Under such a discriminating censorship Library Hall, as a place of public entertainment, would more nearly fulfill the primary wishes and expectations of its venerable founder.*<sup>6</sup>

The reader cannot perhaps but smile a bit today, yet the writers did have a point. They felt those charged with a responsibility had abrogated it at the earliest opportunity in favor of a purely commercial arrangement and should be called to task. By way of contrast, the Grandins in neighboring Tidioute never appeared to have stepped aside in favor of an alien management. Perhaps they were never given the opportunity to do so. But whatever the case, they appeared to have been as careful stewards of their opera house as they were of their other enterprises.<sup>7</sup> Certainly they could not have been accused of booking offerings with

"a frequency wholly disproportioned to the requirements of reasonable recreation."

To examine a typical "season" in Tidioute is to count a dozen entertainments of all descriptions and only once apparently was there a production of questionable taste: a visit from a troupe of British Blondes in February 1886. According to **The Warren Mail** they were greeted by a crowd of men and boys only, not a woman being present.<sup>8</sup> Otherwise, the fare at the Grandin was unexceptional and given the infrequency of its occurrence, the wisdom of the brothers locating their performance hall in an otherwise commercial establishment seems evident. For under any other circumstances its very existence seems an improbability.

By way of illustration, reference may be made to a lease for one of the offices in the block's second story contracted for by a John Tonkin, Jr. According to the terms of the agreement, Tonkin, superintendent of the Dennis Run & New York Oil Co., agreed to pay \$250.00 a year for his rooms. If this amount had not increased by 1886, the year the blondes visited, it seems likely that the Grandins derived more in rental from this office facility than from the opera house. For in that season it housed a school entertainment, for which the auditorium was very likely provided free of charge; and four legitimate productions, which if the opera house's rental fee of \$30.00 a night (as listed in Harry Miner's dramatic directory) is correct, brought in only \$120.00.

A revenue maker it was not, but the brothers obviously were content to subsidize its existence directly and indirectly that they, their families and the community itself might have the opportunity to partake of uplifting lectures, melodious concerts and a sampling of the minstrel, variety and dramatic performers the road was offering near and far throughout opera house America. And despite the fact that a major theatrical circuit was not interested in "booking" them, there were yet managers of individual productions claiming some respectability, who did write the Grandins for "open time" and subsequently appeared "for one night only" at the Opera House. And on occasion, as will be seen, the burning of an opera house elsewhere or mistakes in booking brought a company to Tidioute which would not otherwise have been scheduled into a theatre on the kerosene circuit.

### III

Notice of what did appear is to be found in the earliest local papers to survive, beginning with the 1873-74 season. Providentially the paper's offices were directly beneath the opera house and the door into the newspaper office opened directly onto the rear stairs by which the theatrical company's baggage must have been carried to the floor above. Thus editor Charles White was well aware of what was at hand. Very likely he was visited by the advance agents of incoming companies seeking either to place ads with him or to have him print up quarter-sheet bills which they might then post about town.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the pages of **The News** suggest that they were often successful in persuading him to print free of charge publicity-type releases touting their individual productions.

Among the most persistent of these agents may have been those traveling ahead of minstrel troupes like Duprez and Benedict's minstrels, who stopped off in February 1886, or The San Francisco Minstrels, advertising their presence in March 1900. Theirs must have been a startling intrusion into the otherwise placid scene if they resembled at all the performers described by Jennings in **Theatrical and Circus Life**:

*The negro minstrel is an institution entirely outside of the pale of commonplace people. He talks differently from other people, acts differently, dresses differently. A "gang of nigger singers" can be identified three blocks away by*

# WARREN HOTEL

D. M. & P. F. DAVIS, Proprietors.

Guests are hereby notified that the Proprietors will not hold themselves responsible for Valuables, Money, Jewelry, &c., unless the same are deposited in the Safe at the Office. All bills will be charged in full from the time a room is engaged until the account is settled at the Office.

Oil Market Opened \_\_\_\_\_ Highest \_\_\_\_\_ Lowest \_\_\_\_\_ Closed \_\_\_\_\_

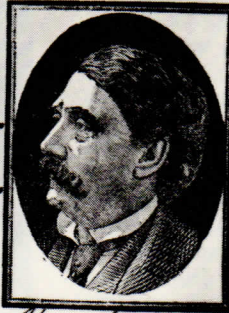
TIME ROOM NAME RESIDENCE

*Tuesday Jan 17 1894*

*Mr. Fred Schuch, Proprietor*

1873. OLDEST AND BEST. 1883-4  
ELEVENTH ANNUAL TOUR.

S. K. Donavin,  
BUSINESS MANAGER.



"FAMOUS"

CONTINUED  
AND  
Uninterrupted Success!  
FOR  
TEN YEARS.

DONAVIN'S

R. C. Hubbard,  
ADVANCE AGENT.

*Your Truly  
S. K. Donavin*

## TENNESSEANS!

Colored Concert Company.

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TIME	ROOM	COMPANY.
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<i>D</i>	<i>—</i>	<i>S. K. Donavin, Manager.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Broadwell Chinn.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>W. H. Thompson.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>J. H. Chavers.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>88</i>	<i>J. C. Mebane.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>J. T. Washington.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>Miss Katie Greene.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>M. E. Conrad.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>Jennie Gatewood.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>Mamie Alexander.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>R. C. Hubbard, Adv. Agt.</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>Fred Schuch</i>

*Call at 606  
at 606*

TONIGHT

Next Town *Cory*  
Train Leaves *7:30*  
Breakfast *7:30*

an ordinary observer of human nature. They have a fondness for high and shining silk hats that are reflected in the glaze of their patent-leather, low-quarter shoes every time they pull up their light trousers to look at their red or clock silk stockings. Their clothes are of a minstrelsy cut, and like the party who came to town with rings on her fingers and rings on her toes, they must have their fingers covered with amethysts or cluster-diamond ornaments, and they rarely ever fail to display a "spark" in their gorgeous shirt fronts. They are "mashers" of the most pronounced type on the stage and off, and just as soon as they take possession of a small town, it is safe to say that all the feminine hearts lying around loose will be corraled within twenty-four hours of their arrival. They are as generous now as they were years ago, and few of them save a cent for the frequently mentioned rainy day. The very best of them have died in poverty, and found graves only through the charity of friends.<sup>10</sup>

But of all minstrel aggregations to appear in Tidioute none was more popular than the colored companies like Donavin's Tennesseans, who drew a crowded house on December 29, 1883. Within days they appeared in Warren, stopping at the Warren Hotel, whose register for January 2nd reveals a convenient paste-in advertisement and roster. It shows the Tennesseans to be a company of twelve, excluding the advance agent. Comparable troupes to play Tidioute were the Augusta Mines Colored Comedy Company in 1892 and Velies' Colored Comedy Company which advertised a "female colored hand parade" on May 30, 1896.

With the years the groups who played Tidioute tended to emphasize bigness in their advertising.<sup>11</sup> Winns' Novelty Minstrels in November 1899 called attention to their six end men and big brass band that made a startling street parade; unfortunately they never showed. Guy Bros.' Minstrels who appeared twice in 1900 made sure all knew they had a company of thirty, including not only six end men but ten specialists. The presence of these last named performers suggests the close affinity of the minstrel troupes and variety entertainers. The latter were, in effect, to be found in that traditional second half of the minstrel performance — known as the Olio — which was essentially a series of variety acts usually concluding with a one-act farce or burlesque.

And when variety troupes — as opposed to minstrels — took to the road they were welcome in Tidioute. Included in their number were the Clymer & Verbeck Novelty Company, who promised two and one half hours of solid fun by specialty artists on Dec. 20, 1889, and Ricardo's Comedians, opening the season on September 23, 1903. Their troupe consisted not only of three Ricardo Brothers, who were gymnasts, but of Gordon & Laine black-face artists; the Toys, billed as musical artists; and McAvoy & Rogers in songs, dances and comedy. The notice of their coming describes them as vaudeville performers. And a convenient way to distinguish the one genre of entertainment from the other is to think of vaudeville as variety "writ large and grown fashionable."

M. B. Leavitt in his theatrical reminiscences written in the early years of the new century comments on the viability of the mode:

. . . The reason seems to be that there is more humanity, more of homely, everyday life in a vaudeville show than in almost any other form of entertainment. A little of everything cannot be found in the average play, but there is in vaudeville singing, dancing, conversations, laughter, tears, animals, acrobats, contortionists and usually one or two good plays, well written and acted. Some of these little plays crowd as much life and action into twenty minutes as we find in the more pretentious Broadway productions of three hours. And all is seen and heard in vaudeville for half or one-quarter of the price of a Broadway theatre



Alice Oates and her opera bouffe company presented "The Field of the Cloth of Gold" on February 28, 1884.



Mattie Vickers was in Tidioute on January 22, 1884, in "Jacquine, or, Paste & Diamonds."





Laura Keene appeared in "Our American Cousin" during the summer of 1873 at the "new" Grandin Theatre.

ticket. Then, in vaudeville, rarely anything is permitted to shock its patrons. The fun and excitement are all innocent.<sup>12</sup>

A most unusual evening of a variety nature occurred on November 25, 1887, as the result of a booking error elsewhere on the Oil Region Circuit. This left Howorth's Hibernica and Comedy with an evening open, thus their Tidioute appearance which featured two performances on the stage simultaneously — the one an Irish comedy and specialities, the other a tour of Ireland, which probably utilized the quasi-theatrical device known as the panorama. At least when Howorth's Double Show and Mirror of Ireland was to be seen at Roscoe Hall on May 19, 1882, there was such a feature advertised. This was described as "a moving canvas panorama" boasting sixty beautiful scenes of Ireland. If it at all resembled other panoramic displays, it was from eight to ten feet tall and several hundred feet long. This quantity of canvas was stored on a roller and when displayed the roller was raised to an upright position and the canvas literally unwound onto another roller positioned at the opposite side of the stage. Such displays were widely popular, especially in the years prior to the Civil War, and in it Tidiouters saw a curious hybrid — at once a painterly medium closely allied with landscape art and a quasi-dramatic spectacle tied to the histrionic fashions of the day.<sup>13</sup>

Musical productions appearing on the Grandin stage, too, seem in the minstrel/variety/vaudeville tradition. Among the earliest and most interesting of these was **Out of Bondage** featuring the two Hyers Sisters with Mr. Sam Lucas. They were the principals of one of the first colored opera companies and **Out of Bondage** had been especially written for them. Advertised as a moral musical drama when it appeared at Tidioute in October 1876, it promised sparkling dialogue, witticisms, drolleries, plantation scenes and songs together with classical selections. The local paper did not review the production but editors elsewhere in the region commented favorably.

Titusville's paper, the **Morning Herald**, wrote of the music:

... The cabin songs and plantation melodies are sung with all the depth of feeling characteristic of the race, and the choral performance was marvelous in its uniform smoothness and power. . . . Anna Hyer (sic) was especially successful in her solos. . . .<sup>14</sup>

Oil City's **Derrick** was pleased with the histrionic talents of the company:

... The acting was as natural as it could well be while no praise is too great for the singing. . . . Frequent encores showed the appreciation of the audience who in such pieces as "Peter, Go Ring dem Bells", "Carve dat Pos-

sum", "Dare's a Great Camp Meeting" were hardly satisfied with a repetition.<sup>15</sup>

In February 1884 the Alice Oates Opera Bouffe Company rendered a musical burlesque titled **The Field of the Cloth of Gold**. Mrs. Oates, referred to in her own publicity as the queen of English Comic Opera, had been starring in the genre since the early seventies when James Oates launched her under his management in her own company, which included a young actor named William H. Crane. In his reminiscences Crane described Mrs. Oates — not more than twenty at the time — as not only beautiful but possessed of a delightful voice. However, according to him, she could neither read a note of music nor had she other than a very slight conception of the art of acting.<sup>16</sup>

No matter. Crane, a fledgling comedian, saw her very lack of experience as an opportunity:

... Most of my scenes were with Mrs. Oates, and since she had had practically no experience on the stage and could not reply to an unexpected sally, I almost always scored. Her husband was constantly telling her: "Let him alone and don't talk back. If you want to laugh at anything he says, do it, but don't try to reply. You don't know how." Mrs. Oates had such a hearty, lovely, musical laugh, with so much freshness and sincerity, that often the audience, all of whom might not hear my remark to her, would think it must be funny because of her laughter, and they in turn would join in. Often I believe neither on the stage nor in the audience did anyone know why all the merriment.<sup>17</sup>

By the time she appeared in Tidioute, she was obviously no longer a girl but an acknowledged stage personality whose name and talents would figure in the memoirs of her contemporaries. The same cannot be said of the principal figures of Tannehill's Comedy Company, which in March 1886 offered a musical comedy production **Fun on the Bristol, or A Night on the Sound**. To our story, however, the play is of considerable more importance than the players; for it was thoroughly typical of a species of musical entertainment that took the region's amusement seekers by storm. Jennings describes the milieu responsible:

Those were the palmy days of the variety show before negro minstrelsy had grown to its present enormous proportions and before plays were written so as to take in a whole variety of entertainment, and under the disguise of comedy or farce or burlesque foisted a lot of specialty people from a first-class stage upon an intelligent audience. The musico-mirthful pieces that began to blossom forth in 1880 made a heavy demand upon the resources of the variety houses, and within a year threaten to leave them entirely at the mercy of "ham-fats", as the lower order of this kind of talent is designated. "Fun on the Bristol" and fifty more flimsy patchworks of the same kind were sailing around the country in a short time, and every "team" that had a specialty act of fifteen minutes duration wanted a play built to fit it and went around telling friends that they guessed they'd go starring next season. A great many of them did not go, but a great many others did. The worst were left behind, and the result was poor variety programs and in consequence poor patronage for them.<sup>18</sup>

To perceive in retrospect the limitations of the kinds of fare under review scarcely does justice to their impact upon opera house America. When **Fun on the Bristol** played in Tidioute, **The News** quoted from Oil City's **Derrick**, which described the response of that community, a reaction probably mirrored in Tidioute. In substance the reviewer praised the production for the laughter it provoked: "Nothing so purely humorous has been seen in Oil City before for a long time." And the encomium concludes with the observation that the management needs only book troupes of this quality to assure themselves audiences: "Good plays like this one will fill the Opera House every time."<sup>19</sup>

*Passion, Pathos and Platitudes*

When, lo! A starring tour was proposed to me. After my first fright was over I saw a possibility of earning in that way something more than my mere board, though, truth to tell, I was not enraptured with the prospect of joining that ever-moving caravan of homeless wanderers, who barter home, happiness, and digestive apparatus for their percentage of the gross, and the doubtful privilege of having their own three-sheet posters stare them out of countenance in every town they visit. Yet without the brazen poster and an occasional lithograph hung upside down in the window of a German beer saloon, one would lack the proof of stardom.<sup>1</sup>

Clara Morris

I

It was likely to begin at the depot with the arrival of the "up" or "down" train. Those who'd seen the weekly paper knew that a company was due and, if the advance agent had done his part, no one could miss the "bills" posted in

every conspicuous location. Albert McCleery and Carl Glick describe the scene:

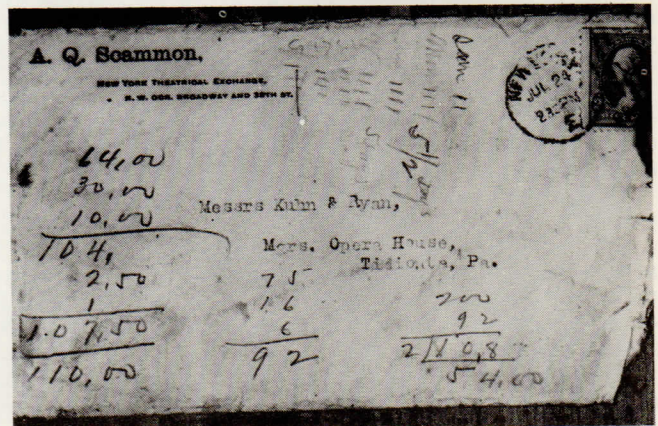
*It was a great day when the troupe arrived in town. The villagers all flocked to the railway station to see the company come in, strange people from a strange land.*



The station waiting to welcome troupers to Tidioute.



A drawing by L. L. Roush showing Tomers at the station of a one-night town.



An envelope addressed to the opera house managers from A. Q. Scammon. His productions, like "The American Girl," were favorites in Tidioute.

There was the old character woman lugging her own suitcase in fair weather or foul; probably doubling at the hotel with the ingenue, a cute and somewhat frightened little thing with dimples, being protected and saved from danger by the wise old character woman who had played this town before. There was the character man who had once been with Booth, and the "heavy", often the kindest gentleman of them all off stage with a friendly word for everybody. Then there was the haughty leading lady, looking neither to right nor left, for she knew in her heart that next season she'd be playing on Broadway. And the leading man, so handsome you doubted his morals, also a trifle superior, but causing a flutter in the bosoms of the village maidens as he cast an admiring but distant glance in their direction.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the townspeople saw — or fancied they saw — it was likely to be only another tank town theatre to those upon whom they gazed with such awe. One who knew of what he spoke at first hand held that excepting solitary confinement in prison, the world held no terror surpassing that of touring the kerosene circuits: "Lost to his best friends and companions, traveling at all hours of the day and night, grateful for board and lodging that would not be tolerated by a domestic servant, the player with a small road company has ample reason to repent his choice of a career."<sup>3</sup> Perhaps because it was all so new to her, Dora Knowlton wrote of her experiences touring with an unusual degree of feeling. She was a youthful chorus member in an elaborate production touring New England in the summer of 1880.

The company had arrived in Newport late in the evening with Dora feeling very sleepy, not a little sick, and wishing she were home in New York. What followed scarcely alleviated the situation, for she and two other girls were assigned to one small room with two beds. It was very close and musty. And none of them could get to sleep for a long time. All were dreadfully cross. Then when they went down to breakfast, there was fried steak, muddy coffee, very heavy bread and strong butter. According to Dora's account everyone fussed. But if the hotel was bad, the theatre on inspection was found to be worse: "It had only one dressing room for all the ladies, and the men had to dress up in the flies."<sup>4</sup>

Nor did their situation improve when they subsequently played Manchester:

*But the theatre was the funniest place! We couldn't use our big scenery at all, and had to have the stock sets of the house, and they were about as appropriate as Uncle Tom's Cabin scenery would be in the opera of Trovatore. The stage was so tiny and the wings so badly set that the small audience could see us moving around behind the scenes all the time. It was like the drama in Queen Elizabeth's time, only they did not quite sit on the stage with me. The ladies all dressed in one large room across a hall, and the men, poor things, had to dress in the hall itself! I think the building is a town hall, or something like that; it has no accommodations at all for a theatre. Probably it answers very well for the village amateur club to produce Bread Upon the Waters in, but for Augustin Daly's company it is slightly inconvenient! When we opened our door to go down a flight of steps to get to the stage we beheld the gentlemen in all states of their toilets; we retreated with squeals in various keys. But we simply had to get to the stage, so we shut our eyes and ran along as fast as we could.*<sup>5</sup>

The stories of making the best out of atrocious circumstances are legion in the theater of the nineteenth century. Young William Crane, who it may be remembered had played with Alice Oates, spoke of appearing prior to that with the Holman Opera and Dramatic Company. On one occasion he recalls they played before a pair of flats, technically known as a center door and a fancy chamber

with two badly painted wings banking the scene at either side of the stage and two wilted borders above simulating the ceiling. All was "brilliantly" lighted by fifteen or twenty reluctant gas jets for footlights and a row of even fainter lights above.<sup>6</sup>

Frederick Warde, no stranger to the oil region in his prime, recalled touring with Edwin Booth in the seventies and having to rely on the equipment of the theatres in which they played: "In consequence we were guilty of many anachronisms. Hamlet interviewed the spirit of his dead father in a dense wood, and Shylock bargained the terms of his bond with a background of a modern American street with local advertisements painted on it."<sup>7</sup> Yet such was the audience's will to make believe that not even the most absurd necessities of staging could tarnish the magic nor dim the luster of an evening at a "carnival" world.<sup>8</sup>

## II

The melodramatic plays that typified that world when and where they can be found are apt to be painful reading, mirroring as they do religiosity, sentimentality and a persistent emphasis on the smiling aspects of life that appears to us today outright simple, if not feeble-minded. Yet to judge the drama of the period outside the theatre which gave it life is to condemn out of hand playwrights of no mean talent. After all theirs was the unenviable task of constructing plays of four acts with ten to twelve scenes to an act. And at the close of each act they perforce had to concoct a sensational climax. As Edward B. Marks writes: "Old timers still refer lovingly to the balmy days of melodrama, where the first act villain kidnaps the heroine; in the second act he locks her up in a deserted building which he sets on fire; in the third act he throws her off Brooklyn Bridge; but in the fourth act — ah, the fourth act, he places his hand tenderly on her shoulder and says, 'Why do you fear me, Nellie?'"<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the more exciting the dramatization the less concern there was apt to be with realistic characterization or logical sequence or sensitiveness to the social forces of the times. Plays were "made" rather than "written" and to be effective meant to be emotionally affecting and physically sensational. A manager such as Daniel Frohman spoke for a generation when he dictated to his playwrights that what they wrote was most acceptable when it made the strongest appeal to the emotions. More specifically, it must be based upon "a fabric of heart interest":

*. . . This is a topic of universal concern. A theme involving a sound love story is the first requisite and a safe one. I should, therefore, say the first requirement of a play is a love story. It may be a romantic love, modern or medieval love — any age, because the theme is of universal interest; but, as a matter of preference and safety, the subject from a modern view, is more readily marketable, and one which is more liable to appreciation and acceptance at the hands of the producer.*<sup>10</sup>

Though Frohman does mention the need for a convincing theme, he seems far more concerned with the need for "vivacity, and rapid sequences, and action." Plays in other words need not only be **affecting** but they must be **sensational**. Elizabeth Marbury, a pioneer author's representative, described the necessities under which the popular dramatist labored:

*. . . There was one general form in the building of these plays which was usually followed. A swift contrast between high life and the slums was proverbial. A brilliant ballroom peopled with aristocracy in magnificent garb, and a sudden shifting to a cellar under the river. Trap doors were in constant demand. No ship ever safely reached its destination. The hero and heroine had to be seen tossing about upon an angry sea, clinging to an uncertain raft, with faces upturned to the spotlight; then another shifting of*

scene and the audience would be transported to a Derby race, the life of the favorite horse threatened by poison as he stood in his stall; the honest and fearless jockey given a knockout at the critical moment just before the saddling bell was rung, and the heroine saving the day as she was flung upon the horse. The thrill of the performance was provided either by a burning building, a series of explosions, a balloon destroyed or a whole fleet sunk.<sup>11</sup>

As she and others noted, it was rare for success not to follow from a full measure of hate, love, revenge, despair, hope, joy and terror. "Those were wonderful days," according to Miss Marbury, "when the present highbrowed theatre was unknown. We had no problems which the playhouse was supposed to solve. We understood farces, melodramas and burlesques, with an occasional polite comedy or a romantic drama thrown in, but the sailing was plain and straight and devoid of complications resultant from too much culture."<sup>12</sup> Her belief that an understanding existed on the part of companies and their audiences was an evident reality at the Grandin. It was a matter of faith, a trust that neither party violated as long as troupers played at Tidioute.

### III

When a young Englishman named John R. Towse arrived in New York in 1869, he had cause to observe that the higher drama, both tragic and comic, had fallen into disrepute "and the boards were more and more fully occupied by modern domestic or 'social' farce or melodrama of no literary or dramatic consequence, even when entertaining; by pieces purely spectacular or sensational, by adaptations from the French, by burlesque . . . and by all kinds of freakish and acrobatic frivolity. Negro minstrelsy was still in its heyday, offering real melody and a humor that was often genuine if always grotesque."<sup>13</sup> Unwittingly Towse was describing the fare that would be the staple of the Grandin Opera House in its more than twenty-five years of active use.

Mention has already been made of the appearance of Laura Keene in the summer of 1873, but as no local papers have survived earlier than that year, it is impossible to know all the fare — dramatic or otherwise — that played the Grandin. However, on January 20, 1877, a production was announced in *The News* that seems to bear in part on Towse's observations; this was *Splinters*, a "New and Charming Society Comedy Extravaganza." If their advance agent's publicity could be believed, the Original and Only Merry Bishops were appearing in "the most brilliant original and mirth provoking entertainment in the world."

Whether it lived up to its publicity or not is unknown, but subsequent productions of the eighties surely did as they co-mingled domestic melodrama with spectacular or sensational materials. By way of illustration there was yet another production of *Our American Cousin* on April 18, 1881, and the Anthony and Ellis Company's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on April 22, 1881.<sup>14</sup> Promising the Memphis University Students, Siberian Bloodhounds and the knowing donkey Pruno, they no doubt won friends locally as they had when they appeared on March 24th in Meadville, Pennsylvania. On that occasion the Meadville paper noted the house was crowded to overflowing and the company gave "excellent satisfaction."<sup>15</sup> And not a little responsible for that satisfaction was the vividness and vitality of the characters, the artistic juxtapositions of situations and characters, and the precise and simple alignment of the forces of good and evil in moments of confrontation and testing. But these characteristics were not exclusively the property of the world's greatest hit. In no small degree they were to be found in *Our American Cousin* or virtually any of the dramatic productions to appear at the Grandin. In for instance the Ashton's *Rip Van Winkle* on July 24, 1882, or in the triple bill — *East Lynne*, *Two Orphans* and *Engaged* —

offered by the Kitty Rhoades Company during November 1883.

*Rip Van Winkle* must be forever associated in the consciousness of the nineteenth century with Joseph Jefferson. And though the text of the play itself is at best a piece of dramatic carpentering — episodic and feebly constructed — Jefferson's art transformed otherwise conventional materials into a moving evening in the theatre. Dion Boucicault, one of the most knowledgeable showmen of the day, had warned the actor that his stage version of Irving's story was over the heads of a prospective audience. But to him Jefferson responded, "I am not shooting over their heads, I am aiming at their hearts."<sup>16</sup> How effectively he was able to do this on the stage, if not in the printed word, William Crane makes clear as he recalls the two occasions — twenty-five years apart — when he saw Jefferson as Rip:

*. . . I remembered my first impression of the play vividly, and was eager to see it in the light of my greater experience. When the first act was about two-thirds over, I found myself regretting that I had come. I thought the illusion had been destroyed, but at the end of the first act, when Gretchen, his wife, turns him out, it affected me more strongly than at first. In the second act I fully realized the consummate art and skill of the man holding the audience with a monologue lasting an entire act. In the last act I felt the tears running down my cheeks just as I had twenty-five years before. Then I knew why he held that audience, all people of the stage. It was the human quality of his portrayal, the marvelous magnetism of the man, that gave him such power; and I recognized the wonderful art of the actor who could so entirely interest, so completely sink himself in the character, and yet all the time let us know that he was Jefferson.<sup>17</sup>*

Interestingly enough, though Jefferson took his *Rip* through the Oil Region, many in northwestern Pennsylvania preferred J. W. Carner, a sometime resident of Meadville, in the title role. The Meadville press made its preferences clear and Titusville's *Morning Herald* praised the "grace, finish, and ease" of Carner's performance: "His conception of the character is natural and his performance artistic . . . Joy, pity, remorse, anger and forgiveness are alternately displayed with a naturalness which makes the auditors forget that they are witnessing the 'counterfeit presentment' . . ."<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately what the Ashtons did with their production is not known, but certainly they had theatrically effective materials with which to work.

The Kitty Rhoades Company which appeared on three successive evenings in November 1883 was one of the few companies at the Grandin to play other than a single performance. Tidioute's population was simply not of the size to warrant otherwise, and yet from a reference in *The Warren Mail* it appears that Miss Rhoades played to a fair house two evenings and a full house the third.<sup>19</sup> Although the newspaper reference is not clear, it does appear that on one or another of the first two evenings she presented *Engaged*, which was then repeated to a full house. Presumably she then omitted one of the three plays with which she was touring as evidenced by her appearance at Roscoe Hall in Warren November 19th-21st.

Whether it was *East Lynne* or *Two Orphans* that Tidiouters applauded, they were witness to just that sort of play that could not seem to fail with the audiences of opera house America. *Two Orphans* gave them in the words of one reviewer every phase of men and women: "the bad ones are bad, very bad, and the good ones are gentle and lively in their worth, and shine in a bright and glorious light."<sup>20</sup> But then this very description might have been applied equally to *East Lynne*. On one of the first occasions the play was seen in Titusville, at Corinthian Hall, strong men were said to have wept, "and the female portion of the audience

# WARREN HOTEL

D. M. & P. F. DAVIS, Proprietors.

Guests are hereby notified that the Proprietors will not hold themselves responsible for Valuables, Money, Jewelry, &c., unless the same are deposited in the Safe at the Office. All bills will be charged in full from the TIME a room is engaged until the account is settled at the Office.

Oil Market Opened \_\_\_\_\_ Highest \_\_\_\_\_ Lowest \_\_\_\_\_ Closed \_\_\_\_\_

TIME ROOM NAME RESIDENCE

Thursday January 17<sup>th</sup> 1884  
Mattie Vickers Comedy Company

Miss Mattie Vickers

Miss Alice Roberts

✓ D 39 Miss Dollie Thornton

Miss Nellie Corey

~~Miss~~ ✓ D 8 Jas. K. Hane wife

✓ D 8 J. B. Corey wife

✓ D ~~34~~ Spencer Pritchard

✓ D 60 George W. Pike

✓ D 60 Fred. J. Asbach Violinist; Chicago - Ill. (with the Orchestra)

✓ D \* John W. Abbott

✓ D 49 Chas. S. Rogers wife

(Opera House)

1 1/2 night

Mattie Vickers as Jacqueline

B. Mass

✓ D G. R. Wood Sheffield

✓ D J. C. Robertson

✓ D 52 G. E. Lawrence wife City

grew quite hysterical over the more affecting passages.'<sup>21</sup> Much the same reaction was recorded on the appearance of Miss Ada Gray and her **East Lynne** company in Meadville in March 1882.

The reviewer made the point, however, that such an emotional play was not pleasing to all persons: "The breaking up of a happy home by the green-eyed monster; the cunning scheming villain and his successful design on the happiness of a weak woman; the desolation of the heart and home of a husband and father; the shame and abandonment of the betrayed woman; the remorse of crime; the unsatisfied yearnings of a mother's heart, the servitude of Madame Vine in the house where she ruled as Lady Isabel; the death of her child and finally that of herself, are scenes which require rare talent to portray and strong nerves to enjoy."<sup>22</sup> Yet dramas that portrayed at length the heartbreaking sufferings of good but erring women drew large houses time and again.

The year 1884 witnessed apparently only one legitimate dramatic offering in Tidioute — what was described as one of Gaylord's best comedies, **Jacquine, or, Paste and Diamonds**. Apparently Tidioute had not been on their original itinerary but the burning of the Meadville Opera House had left them with an open date following their Warren appearance on January 17th. On that evening they had been housed at the Warren Hotel and the page in the register devoted to the company reveals them to be fourteen strong, including three married couples. Notations beside three of the names suggest they were variety artists with bits probably interpolated between the acts. Moreover, an account of the performance in Tidioute notes that Miss Vickers introduced her specialties — "Louise, the German Flower Girl" and "Pretty as a Picture". For this admixture of variety fare and drama the advertised admission was 50 cents for general seats and 75 cents for reserved seats — making this production among the most expensive in the opera house's history.

For the remainder of the decade there continued to be one and at most two dramatic productions yearly. An **Uncle Tom's Cabin** company gave local audiences what was described as a "sell" in 1886, but their inadequacy was no doubt offset by the appearance in the same season of Miss Bella Moore and her own select company in **A Mountain Pink**. Preceding her appearance, an advance man distributed a little booklet through the town that detailed the story. A copy of this has not survived, but a program from the company's Warren appearance divides the cast into First Families, Moonshiners and Revenues. These were incorporated into a sketch of life among the rugged rocks and mountain hollows of North Carolina. Miss Moore, as Sincerity Weeks, emerged as a wild flower of native growth, a mountain pink, nurtured amidst rough, untaught mountaineers but with an instinctive love for truth and virtue. Such a love evoked, according to the Meadville press, "a halo over the otherwise ignorant and unschooled girl."<sup>23</sup>

Tidioute audiences no doubt applauded the "bright little actress"; what they thought of Carrie Stanley, who appeared with her own company for three evenings in July 1890 may have been a very different matter. She was what was then described as a breeches actress — that is, she appeared in men's roles. Miss Stanley's specialty was Edmund Dantes in **The Count of Monte Cristo**, a part she performed on her initial evening at the Grandin. All Editor White would say was that her performance was a "powerful" one. If her tightly breeched figure pleased the masculine contingent, the women may have been drawn to her subsequent offerings — **Lady of Lyons** and **East Lynne** — and this because of what another area paper described as her elegant gowns.<sup>24</sup>

Increasingly audiences at Tidioute and indeed throughout opera house America were attracted by the appurtenances of a particular production — whether these be the leading lady's gowns or the elaborate stage mechanisms the company carried with them. The decade of the nineties made this quite clear, especially with a November 1891 production of **Uncle Tom's Cabin**. As had been noted this popular monument had long lent itself to a plethora of specialties but these seemed increasingly to dominate the production, if anything overshadowing Mrs. Stowe's characters and story. On this occasion **The News** promised a comical Topsy, a troupe of bloodhounds, beautiful tableaux and great plantation scenes.

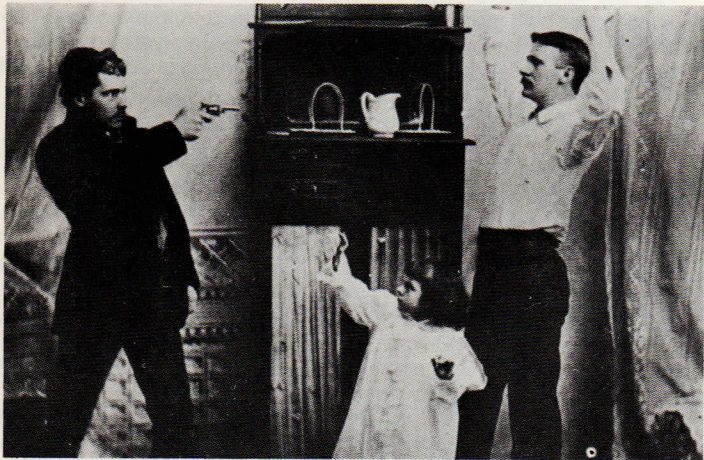
Given the particular complexion of the community, the attraction of the Grandin audiences to what was sometimes described as "hayseed" drama is understandable. But when to plays with rural settings special scenery and mechanical effects were added, the appeal must have been irresistible. Such was very likely the case with **Old Famer Hopkins** which appeared on May 7, 1892. **The News** noted that every scene in the play was carried by the company and although editor White did not elaborate, his counterpart on the **North East Sun** did just that, calling attention to four full sets of scenery seen at Short's Opera House. He characterized these as being on a magnificent scale and enumerated them as follows: Act 1, the exterior of a millionaire's summer home on Long Island; Act 2, interior of a newsboy's lodging cellar; Act 3, East River dock and the Brooklyn Bridge; Act 4, exterior of Farmer Hopkins' home in Vermont.<sup>25</sup>

**Uncle Hiram**, which appeared on May 1, 1894, was evidently on the same order. Not only did it advertise fun and pathos, together with singing and dancing specialties, but special effects that included a sawmill in full operation and a train running on the stage. It may have been eclipsed, however, by the October 17, 1895, coming of **Joshua Simpkins**, a tale of New England life. Advertising promised that there was excellent singing and dancing, plenty of refined and wholesome fun and in the third act a real sawmill in operation.

Yet another **Uncle Tom's Cabin** company advertised for October 31, 1895. They sought to establish their claim as at once big and spectacular by promising a performance with forty people, two brass bands, grand orchestra, pick-anny drum corps, twenty jubilee shouters and dancers, two quartets, mandolin sextette, gorgeous scenic effects, calcium lights, and a plantation on the Mississippi River showing a steamboat in motion. Further, they claimed to be the only company in the world to show a genuine cotton press and gin in full operation. Those still in doubt about attending might have been drawn by the wonderful acting bloodhounds, ponies, donkeys and many pleasing specialties — making this troupe "absolutely the largest and best in the world."

If this **Tom** show was not the premiere performance of a sensational character in the nineties, surely **Side-Tracked**, "a good, rattling, comedy" was just that on December 17, 1897. Full of "fun, fire and ginger," it promised a plot that, while not deep, would be "thrillingly interesting." The central figure, a funny tramp portrayed by Horatio Irving Booth, made the point that a ragged coat may cover an honest heart. Aside from the amusement his situation provided, there was promised a complete new outfit of stage effects and picturesque scenery, including the great railroad switch scene with its manipulation of the signal switch system and the transferring of freight cars.

Such effects were achieved in a variety of ways as Arthur E. Krow makes clear. He describes, for instance, a production of **The Fast Mail** in 1893 which purported to show a train of cars speeding across the stage. The train,



A souvenir display to advertise the Scammon Company's production of "The Burglar," which played in Tidioute on March 14, 1893.



he writes, was merely a strip of canvas, about three hundred feet long, unwound from a drum on one side of the stage and wound upon another in the opposite wings. The engine chimney was a smoke pot and the headlight a magnesium affair attached to the canvas. Wire brushes beaten on iron drums and a piece of tubing struck with a mallet provided the noise, including the clang of the bell.

In a subsequent production, **The Heart of Chicago**, the same showman had an engine come out of the distance directly toward the audience until stopped by the fall of the curtain. To achieve this effect he built his stage train like an accordion, pressed flat against the wall and then expanded to suggest motion.<sup>26</sup> Of course, just how the effects advertised in Tidioute were achieved is unknown, but road shows had developed ingenious means to simulate and transport such spectacular effects.

Not all of the productions of the nineties were so blatantly dependent on mechanical contrivances or on rural settings. Romantic situation melodramas like **The Royal Slave** on March 14, 1893, **The Burglar** on January 17, 1894, or **The Lost Paradise** on January 18, 1897, attracted audiences with a variety of ploys. The first named transported audiences to "tropical" Mexico while **The Burglar** made its capital out of a seven year old child's catching a burglar red-handed in his "nefarious" calling. Her fears it develops are not for herself but for her sleeping parents. To keep them from harm she aids the burglar in his selection of plunder in a scene that was for some without counterpart in the annals of theatrical lore.

The Grandin audiences who witnessed **The Lost Paradise** were privy to what was described as a "strong scenic drama" founded on the rights of capital and labor. In actuality, it was less concerned with the issues raised by its subject matter than with the strongly melodramatic situation it made possible. As the Meadville press described its story line, its tried and true character is readily apparent.

*. . . There is a great mill scene and the men strike because wages have been reduced. The young superintendent, portrayed by Harrison J. Wolfe, sympathizes with the men and with them leaves the mill, which closes down. This is a serious situation for any man who is in love with the daughter of a rich mill owner. She is aristocratic, capricious and inordinately fond of luxury in the trivialities of life, but when this genius talks to her from his heart and and eyes and persuades her to see the men, get their story of their grievances, there is a flutter of excitement throughout the audience and the people practically go with her on her errand of mercy. She is quick to recognize the merits of the case at issue. She goes to her proud father and entreats him to be just. The playwright has most ingeniously and with extraordinary skill handled this perplexing problem as to harmonize contending interests. The strike is settled to the satisfaction of all. The wheels turn again, the great furnaces roar, prosperity comes once more. The brave young man marries the girl he loves and the rich mill owner becomes his best friend and the play closes in triumph.<sup>27</sup>*

Perhaps audiences were distracted by what seems in retrospect the triteness of these materials or by the special scenery and effects utilized in the mill scene: seething furnaces, revolving fly wheels, and permeating all the clatter of workmen's hammers on the anvils. As if these weren't enough, Tidioute audiences were promised the presence of Baby Blossom in her up-to-date specialties.

But of all the fare that came the Grandin's way in the nineties none seemed as enduring as farce or comedy melodrama. These literally dominated the scene in the latter half of the decade, beginning with what was described as "an operatic farce", **The Prima Donna**, featuring Inez McCusker and her company on September 25,

1894. As had previously been the case the production was only at Tidioute because of an open date. However, it was made out of exactly those materials to appeal locally dealing as it did with the visit of a prima donna to a rural community and her subsequent involvement in amateur theatricals on behalf of a worthy cause.

On November 25, 1895, a well managed farce, "full of action and running over with fun", competed with a terrific rain storm. Some were said to be disappointed as they couldn't figure out the plot of **Maloney's Mishaps** and Editor White wrote of the management's offering ten dollars to anyone who could discover it. In point of fact it may have given greater satisfaction than **Gloriana** on December 24th which a by-now-familiar booking mishap brought to Tidioute. Though it was advertised as full of fun, ludicrous situations and denouements, promising satisfaction, local audiences may have been less than pleased. At least the reviewer on Oil City's **Derrick** was disappointed when he saw it only days later: "The play fell very flat, and failed to give satisfaction, and the star and her support were below average . . ." <sup>28</sup>

1896 welcomed two "big" farce comedies at the Grandin: **Two Old Cronies**, available because of a misunderstanding and unable to play Oil City, and **A Breezy Time**, whose advertised admission charges were 75 cents (for the first four rows in the parquette), 50 cents, 35 cents and 25 cents. No doubt pleased by their reception, the company returned in January 1898 to repeat their veritable "mint of mirth". This year saw **The Corner Grocery**, a "purely" farce comedy playing the Grandin on October 18th. Its star Daisy Chaplin was cast in the part of Patsie, who steals the Dutchman's chicken, puts her father's best Sunday hat in the rain barrel and misses no opportunity to forward a comedy of physical discomfiture. The synopsis of scenes in the program titled the first act "A Bunch of Nonsense" and as the play itself bore out this promise so it pleased the audience in Tidioute.

## V

The first years of the new century witnessed a notable increase in the number of dramatic offerings at the Grandin, the one or two productions yearly of the 1880's and 90's, climbed to five in 1900, four in 1901 and four again in 1902. These were years when the theatre nationwide was dominated by a ubiquitous organization known as the Syndicate, exercising a virtual theatrical monopoly not only by means of its members' control of hundreds of theatres country-wide but through the booking agencies it established to supply attractions to these and many other theatres. Not that the Syndicate was interested in the kerosene circuit, but they were in no little measure responsible for the two to three hundred companies touring yearly that gladly played theatres like the Grandin in the case of a booking error or whose low budget farces and melodramas were conceived with such theatres in mind.

Though these were the years when a new drama was in the bud, when a Minnie Maddern Fiske was touring in Ibsen's gloomy and inexplicable dramas, there was no hint of that world in the fare reaching Tidioute. February 13, 1900, brought that rattling farce comedy **Pat Maloney's New Irish Visitors** and on the 28th of the month **Peck's Bad Boy** was advertised. Then on October 22, 23 and 24, spectacle was again the order of things with a production titled **The Days of '98**, portraying the stirring events of the Spanish-American War. But very likely this was eclipsed by the appearance on November 30th of **The South Before the War**, which pictured the happiness in bondage of Aunt Chloe, George Harris and others of the Negro characters in **Uncle Tom's Cabin**. The troupe was filling a date between Warren and Titusville and though the Tidioute stop was not really a profitable one, the economics of the road



decreed that a less than satisfying one-night-stand was to be preferred to keeping the company idle for an evening.

The year 1900 came to a close for the Grandin's audience on December 29th with an unexpected bonus, that superior farce **The Fat Men's Club**, which had failed to get an Oil City date. It promised "a roaring evening of fun," especially in its fourth act set in a chamber of horrors. Ranging from pathos to **avoir dupois**, it was doubtless pleasing to those who liked that sort of thing, and if the record speaks for itself, Tidiouters did. January 1901 brought more of the same with Joe Flynn's **Hogan's Alley** Company. Though the nonsensicality of its materials was very much to the taste of the local audience, the performance was perhaps less than spirited. Editor White noted that the company disbanded the morning after its Grandin showing; in his opinion it was probably just as well that they quit. No doubt **A Trip to Trampdown**, which stopped off March 13th with its guarantee to cure dyspepsia and its ills, evened the score.

Two offerings the following November were again geared to local preferences. On November 13th the A. Q. Scammon Company offered **The American Girl**. Its "strikingly" American bias in the contrast between American and British manners pleased perhaps as readily as the bright dialogue and catchy sayings that were promised. Those who felt somewhat uncomfortable amid the scenes of English nobility were no doubt at home amid the environs of **Old Arkansaw** which appeared on November 25th. Here were true-to-life personages in a melodramatic plot liberally sprinkled with comedy. No one in Tidioute asked for more, especially when a magnificent scenic mounting was promised.

In the offerings for 1902 it is evident that the preferences

of audiences on the kerosene circuit remained unchanged. **Midnight in Chinatown** on March 1st brought them a comedy drama with a beautiful love story running through the four acts and an opium den scene at once very funny and realistic. September 3rd saw **The Folks Up Willow Creek** advertised. It promised Frank Davidson, an old favorite, in a comedy that was full of fun, its humor clean and refreshing. Given a taste for fare of this nature the Grandin's managers perhaps erred in booking Miss Agnes Ardeck in **Mademoiselle Louise** on February 25, 1903. A story that dealt with the infatuation of Louis XIV for Louise de la Vallier was simply beyond the ken of Tidiouters.

But if Kuhns and Ryan, the surrogates of the Grandin brothers, did mistake their public on this occasion, theirs was still an enviable managerial record based on the premise that audiences expected to feel first and think afterwards — if at all. Certainly what they offered was thoroughly attuned to a preference for harmless, innocent and refreshing farce comedies. To please their audience they knew that this staple product had to be brimful of mirth from start to finish, replete with bright dialogue, catchy sayings, ludicrous situations and picturesque character types. In their experience romantic melodramas were only a little less acceptable, especially if they were emotionally affecting and if the special effects they never failed to advertise were physically sensational. Joseph Jefferson understood what moved audiences like those in Tidioute. To please them, a production must aim at the heart and for somewhat more than a quarter of a century the Grandin was a theatre that succeeded in soothing the brain and bringing joy to the heart, in catering to the unsophisticated and the fastidious. It encompassed a world of innocence in what historians have characterized as our Age of Innocence.



The only known contemporary view of the Grandin's interior. A faded press clipping in the files of the Warren County Historical Society identified the participants, who have apparently hung every drop and border the theatre possessed. On the auditorium floor both types of chairs in use in the parquette can be glimpsed.

*Home Talent Tonight!*

"It is the very height of absurdity to see an amateur company on a stage . . . In the midst of the most solemn tragedy one is compelled to laugh at them. If they have on tights and trunks they try to get their hands into side pockets, and if they carry swords the weapon gets tangled in their legs, and ten to one after the blade has left its scabbard, the wearer will be unable to get it back again. Then the way they walk upon each other's heels, and tread upon each other's corns; jostle each other in the entrances and stick in their lines is enough to make one of the painted figures in the proscenium arch tear itself out of its medalion frame and die from excessive laughter."<sup>1</sup>

John Golden

The Grandin Opera House and theatres like it on the kerosene circuit not only housed those touring combinations they could attract their way, but the very existence of such facilities was an excuse, or an incentive, for amateur theatre groups to come into being. And no other community of its size in the Oil Region had a more active home talent tradition than did Tidioute. Again the disappearance of the local paper for the early seventies renders the establishment of the genre hazy, but in December 1878 a group calling itself the Amateur Dramatic Association offered for the benefit of the needy in the borough and for "our amusement-loving people" a double bill: **Time Tries All** and **David Garrick**. They had originally advertised **As You Like It**, but as the papers noted, they didn't like it.

Then the following spring the Association netted 70 dollars -- again on behalf of charity -- with that strongly melodramatic standard **Don Ceasar de Bazan**. In the role of Lazarillo was a sixteen-year-old schoolboy, Frank Grandison Coltman, soon to be the moving force behind the group. For twenty-odd years, 1884-1904, he was the principal proponent of a succession of vigorous amateur productions at the Grandin. In point of fact, the home talent tradition in Tidioute can not be readily understood or appreciated apart from his life, talent and tastes.

Frank, born in Rochester, New York, in 1862, had been brought to Tidioute in 1865 or 1866 and would claim it as his home until he returned to Rochester in 1911.<sup>2</sup> His father, Charles Coltman, a Rochester man only recently discharged from the Union Army, was no doubt attracted to the region by the publicity attendant upon the visits to Corry, Titusville, Pithole, and other likely communities by a sizable group of capitalists, businessmen, and journalists. Their "grand excursion" was widely publicized in the press and possibly turned his thoughts to northwestern Pennsylvania as a likely place for a skilled mechanic.<sup>3</sup> In any event Charles (Charley) Coltman is listed in a local directory (1872-73) as a dealer in hardware, stoves and tinware; while a subsequent directory (1877) lists Frank's mother, Mrs. E. (Elizabeth) Coltman, as conducting a millinery shop.

The earliest surviving reference to Frank in the local paper is an account of the closing exercises of the Union School, held at the Grandin Opera House on June 23, 1879. He was one of a class of ten who had completed the "entire" course, and for his part in the exercises he tendered an oration on "Monuments." Of interest is the description of him on this occasion: "The slender and youthful appearance of Frank does not mark him as a monument builder. But it is not always the largest men who do the most work. Very few boys of his age write with



Cover illustration of "The New York Dramatic Mirror," Oct. 21, 1893. Frank strikes the pose of a "light comedy dude, a class of work of which he has made a special study."

so much ease and polish. He has also a grace of manner which, when backed up by a larger experience in the sober realities of life, will make him an attractive speaker."<sup>4</sup>

The following autumn found Frank enrolled in the second year of a three year program at the Preparatory School of Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Apparently it was his aim to ready himself to enter Allegheny College proper, but he did not remain beyond the three terms of his initial year. It is possible that the estimated expenses of two hundred dollars for yet another three terms were beyond his family's means or it may be that, as they saw his prospects, his future education needed to be commercial as

opposed to academic. Whatever the case, in December 1881 Frank left Tidioute for the Rochester Business University to acquire what one of its catalogues described as a "sound business education." Just how "sound" it was in Frank's case is not altogether clear, but whatever he did acquire probably occupied him the prescribed period of four months. Thereafter, at home again, he put his newly won skills to use, for he opened in October 1881 a ladies' first-class furnishing store which advertised a line of dress trimmings, buttons, ladies' and children's underwear,

etc.

Now master of his time. Frank indulged a taste for things literary by publishing a story titled "Lil" in the holiday number of an eastern magazine and by involving himself again with the amateur dramatic group, taking one of the leads in **True Blue, or Brother Against Brother** on January 17 and 18, 1884. Advertised as "a beautiful military drama," it drew a full house each evening and netted the local G. A. R. post an estimated 150 dollars. To glance

**Benefit of Tidioute Post, No. 311 G. A. R.**  
**GRANDIN OPERA HOUSE,**  
**TIDIOUTE, PENNA.**  
**Thursday & Friday, Jan. 17 & 18**

The Post, in presenting this beautiful military drama for the first time in Tidioute, consider it unnecessary to speak particularly of its merits, as the thousands who have witnessed its production in other places can testify to its genuine worth as a first-class entertainment. The Tableaux are worth the price of admission.

WILL BE PRESENTED THE MILITARY DRAMA OF

**TRUE BLUE,**  
**Or Brother against Brother.**

Charles Carrington, afterward Colonel U. S. A. .... George Williams  
 George Carrington, afterward Colonel C. S. A. .... Frank Coltman  
 Harry Haven, afterward Color Sergeant U. S. A. .... Will Kemble  
 Albert Hackney, afterward Guerrilla Chief ..... W. H. TURNER  
 Mr. Ryan, a Citizen ..... P. Ryan  
 Hans Lagerbus, who fights with der Union ..... BILLY MILLIGAN  
 Flipper, Mrs. Carrington's Servant ..... P. T. KEEFFE  
 Jim ..... C. Ammeu  
 } Guerrillas ..... { Walter Adams  
 Federal Picket ..... J. Unger  
 Newboy ..... Ed Shaw  
 Bettie Carrington ..... Miss Lulu Clark  
 Widow Carrington ..... Miss Bertha McConkey  
 Mrs. Haven ..... Miss Cora Benner  
 Minnie Haven ..... Miss Belle Christy  
 General Rosencrans ..... OFFICERS FEDERAL ARMY. .... L. C. Porterfield  
 Chief of Staff ..... J. D. Van Horn  
 Aid de-Camp ..... J. D. Gilbert  
 Sergeant Co. A. .... J. Wright  
 General Bragg ..... OFFICERS CONFEDERATE ARMY. .... A. J. Noble  
 General McGowan ..... W. J. Elder  
 Aid de-Camp ..... W. Morris  
 Chief of Staff ..... M. Cook  
 Captain Co. B. .... S. G. Shepard

**Synopsis of Scenery and Incidents.**

**ACT I.**

SCENE 1.—Home of Widow Carrington, in Tennessee. Albert Hackney's visit. His resolve: "We'll fight it out on our own hook." George brings news from Nashville. The Southern Scorpion. Arrival of Charles Carrington and Harry Haven from Philadelphia. The new flag. The brothers quarrel. The blow. Old Flipper on the scene. The separation. Flipper's warning. Charles and Harry return North.  
 SCENE 2.—The parents of Charles and Harry. George and Hackney on the trail. "Gone the luck; I'm afraid they have engaged us." Flipper appears. He is watched by George and Hackney. "But's a whooper."  
 SCENE 3.—The Confederate recruits. They are presented to Gen. Bragg by George Carrington. "We welcome you to our ranks." George receives a commission and is ordered to the front.  
 SCENE 4.—Widow and Bettie Carrington in distress. The Guerrillas. Bettie loyal. The Stars and Stripes. Hackney's rage. "I want that infernal flag." Flipper appears. "You'll hab ter bring another regiment afore yer can take de old flag." Tableau of Union and Secession.

**ACT II.**

SCENE 1.—Home of Mr. Haven in Philadelphia. The Red, White and Blue. Charles and Harry to the front. The loyal German. "Py yinny, I never goes pack on der Union." The first notions of hard tack. Harry takes the colors.  
 SCENE 2.—Hans Lagerbus in his Dutch Song and Dance.  
 SCENE 3.—The bronco. The roll call. Charles and Harry go on a scout. Breakfast scene. On the march.  
 SCENE 4.—Gen. Bragg and Staff. The spy. Charles in disguise. Charles discovers his brother. The packing of orders.  
 SCENE 5.—Widow and Bettie driven from home. Flipper as a guide. "Dead broke for certain." Flipper captures a Dutchman. "You vas prave like a sheep, ain't ud?" News from Charles. The Yankee army close by. Flipper resigns in favor of Hans. "I'll follow in de rear w'd de baggage." Meeting of Col. Carrington and Hackney. "Be careful in your orders." The two strangers. "Charles Carrington at your service." The bow-knife for it. TABLEAU.

**ACT III.**

SCENE 1.—General Rosencrans and Staff. The council. Return of Charles and Harry from the rebel lines. The rebel plans defeated.  
 SCENE 2.—Hackney on a drunk. He tells the guerrillas how it happened. Bill on guard. He discovers Hans and the refugees. Hackney's brutality. Hans and Flip don't like it, and turn from prisoners to captors.  
 SCENE 3.—The Federal Sentinel. The shot. Death on the picket line. TABLEAU. Captain Carrington's reconnaissance. The rebel camp-fires. The trap. Captain Carrington a prisoner.  
 SCENE 4.—Hackney on guard. He takes a drop too much. Appearance of Hans and Flipper, yah, yah. Hackney refuses to give the countersign and is made to change his mind.  
 SCENE 5.—Captain Carrington in a rebel prison. He is visited by his brother George. "There is a worse fate in store for you than death on the battle-field—the death of a spy!" Charles still loyal. "Hang me if you will, I will die like a man." Escape of Charles.  
 SCENE 6.—Hans in a tight place. "I fights mit der Union and nefer goes pack on ud."  
 SCENE 7.—Just before the battle. The party. Tennessee and Pennsylvanians. "Good-bye, Johnny, look out for the top of your head." The battle. GRAND TABLEAU.

**ACT IV.**

SCENE 1.—Night on the battle-field. Wounded. The Blue and the Gray. Hackney robbing the dead. He discovers Colonel Carrington, who appeals for help. The refusal. The last cartridge. Death of Hackney. Charles and Flipper hear a shot. The brothers. Friends once more. Death of Colonel Carrington.  
 SCENE 2.—The prisoner. Hans drilling a rebel.  
 SCENE 3.—Federal camp. Roll call. Missing. The lost Dutchman returns. Flipper attacks an old enemy, and gets the worst of it. News of Lee's surrender. The home-ward march.  
 SCENE 4.—Philadelphia. Flip hunting for a culled pension. He is scared by a news-boy. Hans finds some lager. Double song and dance.  
 SCENE 5.—Mr. Haven's home. The war is over and the victory is ours. Hans and Flip and the Captain. "Won't the Maus squeal again?" The regiment welcomed home. TRUE BLUE.  
 SCENE 6.—Music. Return of the regiment.  
 SCENE 7.—Volunteers at a charge. GRAND TABLEAU OF VICTORY.

**ADMISSION, - - - 35 & 50 CENTS**  
 Reserved Seats at Dawson's. Doors open at 7; Curtain at 8 o'clock.

**Grandin Opera House**  
**Friday Evening, Feb. 27!**

The Y. W. C. T. U., assisted by the Best Home Talent, will present the Moral Domestic Drama, in five acts,

**"The Drunkard."**

With the following strong cast:

Edward Middleton, the Drunkard,	F. G. Coltman
Squire Cribbs, the Revengeful Lawyer	Clint. Siggins
William Downton, Edward's Foster-Brother	Harry Evans
Arden Rencelaw, a Philanthropist	J. S. Breitenstein
Landlord of the Village Inn	George Scott
Barkeeper of the "Broadway Arbor,"	Della Burnett
Farmer Gates	Will Hague
Farmer Stevens	Perry Shaw
First Loafer	Charley Grandin
Second Loafer	Elliot Curtis
Watchman	Ed. Shaw
Mary Wilson, afterwards Edward's Wife,	Hattie Van Keuren
Agnes Downton, a Maniac	Eva McConkey
Miss Spindle	Lucy Myers
Mrs. Wilson, who has seen better times	May Parshall
Julia, Edward's Child	Julia Clark

Villagers, Loafers, Watchmen, &c.

**SYNOPSIS OF INCIDENTS.**

Act I.	Edward's return to the Village
Act II.	The Downward Path
Act III.	The Streets of New York
Act IV.	Rifts in the Clouds
Act V.	Home, Sweet Home

A period of six years elapses between Acts I and II.

**A Fine Program of Vocal and Instrumental Music**

Will be Furnished between the Acts.

**ADMISSION, - - - 25 CENTS**  
 Reserved Seats, at Dawson's, 10 Cts. Extra.

CURTAIN PROMPTLY AT 8 O'CLOCK.

# Miss Josephine Cameron

Supported by a Select Company?  
The Great Emotional Drama, in Five Acts,  
from Mrs. Henry Wood's Novel,  
Entitled,

# East Lynne!

Miss Cameron,  
In Her Popular Dual Roles,

## Lady Isabel and Madam Vine

ARCHIBALD CARLYLE..... LOUIS MANN  
SIR FRANCIS LEVISON..... MAURICE FLYNN  
LORD MOUNT SEVERN..... HERBERT CARR  
RICHARD HARE..... FRANK COLTMAN  
DILL..... CLARENCE BALL  
OFFICER..... GEORGE COX  
MISS CORNEY..... MISS MAY JACKSON  
BARBARA HARE..... MISS MARGUERITE SCHUYLER  
JOYCE..... MISS MARIE MERIAM  
WILSON..... MISS LIZZIE ROSS  
LITTLE WILLIE..... LITTLE BELLA  
Same Little Child that supported Miss Cameron during her  
recent New York City engagement.

# MISS

# JOSEPHINE CAMERON

In John Brougham's masterpiece,

# "Lady Audley's Secret."

## CAST:

Lady Audley..... Miss JOSEPHINE CAMERON  
Robert Audley..... Mr. Louis Mann  
Sir Michael Audley..... Mr. A. C. Henderson  
George Talboys..... Mr. Harry Tansley  
Sir Harry Powers..... Mr. Frank Colman  
Dr. Dawson..... Mr. Herbert A. Carr  
Lady Michael..... Mr. Maurice Flynn  
Alice..... Miss Marguerite Schuyler  
Miss Dawson..... Miss Mary Jackson  
Mrs. Oakleigh..... Mrs. B. Ross  
Phoebe..... Miss Marie Merriam

# Miss Josephine Cameron

Supported by a Select Company!

Will present Herman Merriale's Absorbing  
Play and Great London Success,

# FORGET-ME-NOT!

## CAST:

STEPHANIE, Forget-Me-Not..... JOSEPHINE CAMERON  
Sir Horace Welby, the Friendly Fox..... Louis Mann  
Barrato, the Corsican..... Frank Colman  
Prince Malicotti, of the Old School..... Maurice Flynn  
Alice Verney, who Forgets-Me-Not..... Marguerite Schuyler  
Rose Verney..... Marie Merriam  
Mrs. Foley, who entertains the Prince..... Miss Mary Jackson  
Joseph, Porter..... Herbert Carr  
Marie..... Lizzie Ross

# HOLLAND'S

MAMMOTH

# Uncle Tom's Cabin

## COMPANY,

AND THE BEST DRAMATIC COMPANY KNOWN  
IN THE PLAY WITH THE FOLLOWING CAST:

Uncle Tom..... F. Frost  
George Harris..... E. J. Holland  
Simon Legree..... Harry Grey  
Phincas Fletcher..... Walter Hudson  
St. Clair..... F. G. Colman  
Deacon Perry..... Henry James  
Lawyer Marks..... J. D. Hall  
Gumption Cute..... E. Clifford  
George Shelby..... Frank James  
Col. Skeggs, (Auctioneer)..... Stuart Thompson  
Topsy, (Her original Character)..... Nellie Devere  
Emmeline..... Fanny Stuart  
Eliza..... Jacquine Benn  
Ophelia..... May Jackson  
Eva..... Little Sadie

## THE GREAT MAGNOLIA QUARTETTE.

The audience are requested to keep their seats until  
the final tableaux of Eva in Heaven, in the last act.

OSWEGO,

## Daily Times-Express.

Saturday Evening, November 27, 1896.

THE CAMERON COMPANY.

The threatening skies last evening  
seriously interfered with the numbers  
who attended the representation of "Lad  
Astray" by the company of which Miss  
Josephine Cameron is the star, last even-  
ing. "Lad Astray" is of the French  
school, and the character of "Armelle"  
is of the emotional type, and well  
suited to Miss Cameron. In the  
initial scenes there is not much for  
her to do, but as the play progresses, she  
has better opportunities, especially in the  
third and fourth acts. Small as the  
audience was, it was appreciative and  
thoroughly enjoyed the fine acting. A.  
C. Henderson, an old favorite here,  
played the part of "Edolph Chandoco" in  
his usual spirited manner. Henry  
Tansy was very effective as Honor

# Boston Theatre.

EUGENE TOMPKINS. Proprietor and Manager.

## THIS AFTERNOON AND EVENING.

The Picturesque, Romantic, Spectacular Drama, by George R. Sims and Henry Pettit, entitled,

# HARBOR \* LIGHTS.

### CAST OF CHARACTERS.

Lieut. David Kingsley, R. N. ....	O. H. Barr
Nicholas Moreland, Cousin of the Squire .....	Ogden Stevens
Frank Moreland, Squire of Redcliffe. ....	Frank Lyman Davis
Tom Dossiter, Quartermaster, R. N. ....	Frank Coltman
Mark Helstone .....	H. E. Chase
Captain Nelson, of the Preventive Service .....	Fred Mower
Dick Hockoday, friend of Frank .....	Mr. Willis
Solomon, an old servant .....	H. A. Thompson
Captain Hardy, R. N. ....	Howard Carlton
Jack Lirreper .....	Harry Plunkett
Will Drake .....	Clarence Moore
Jack Drake .....	A. W. Bills
Harbor Master .....	P. Howard
Detective Wood .....	J. D. Malone
Detective Pull .....	George W. Reed
Lieut. Wynyard, R. N. ....	J. A. Allen
Drill Master .....	A. James
Officer of Marines .....	F. Dalton
Sentry .....	John Devere
Corporal of Marines .....	Charles P. Cummings
Boatswain .....	T. J. Davis
Dora Vane .....	Miss Julia Stuart
Lina Nelson .....	Miss Marie Dudley
Mrs. Chudleigh .....	Miss Lulu Page Mower
Peggy Chudleigh .....	Miss Emma Wyman
Bridget Maloney .....	Miss Alice Mansfield
Mrs. Helstone .....	Miss Jennie Lane

Marines, Sailors, Village Girls, Fishermen and Women, etc.

ACT I. Scene. Redcliffe on the Sea. P. W. Goatcher. (A month elapses between Acts I and II.)

### DORA'S CHOICE.

ACT II. SCENE I. Capt. Nelson's Cottage. P. W. Goatcher. SCENE II. The Old Hall. P. W. Goatcher.

### THE MURDER.

ACT III. SCENE I. "The Mariner's Arms." P. W. Goatcher. SCENE II. Near the Quay. R. Halley. SCENE III. Deck of H. M. S. "Britannic." R. Halley. Introducing the famous CUTLASS DRILL, by a detachment of Sailors from the U. S. Ship, "Wabash."

### THE ACCUSATION.

ACT IV. SCENE I. Interior of Nelson's Cottage. P. W. Goatcher. SCENE II. Helstone's Home. P. W. Goatcher. SCENE III. The Cliffs. P. W. Goatcher.

### THE MISSING WITNESS.

ACT V. SCENE. The Bay at Night. P. W. Goatcher. HARBOR LIGHTS.

SPECIAL NOTICE.—The Fifth Act is of eight minutes' duration only. The Performance will terminate evenings at 10.40, Matinee 4.45.

### FOR HARBOR LIGHTS.

Harry C. Smart..... Manager | Geo. Reed..... Master of Properties  
Ogden Stevens..... Stage Director | Jas. Carter..... Master Machinist

During the evening the orchestra will perform the following selections of music.

OVERTURE.....	"Harbor Lights".....	
SELECTION—"Brigands".....		Offenbach
MARCH—"Father of Victory".....		Waldteufel
WALTZ—"Beauty Coming".....		Bucalosi
GAVOTTE.....		Lynch
ETHIOPIAN PATROL.....		

## Next Week, Dockstader's Minstrels.

MATINEES—Wednesday and Saturday.

Gentlemen's Smoking Room on the Balcony Floor.

Opera Glasses to Let at the Stand in the Front Lobby.

The Piano used by this Theatre is from the celebrated manufactory of CHICKERING & SONS.

The Liszt Organ is from the manufactory of MASON & HAMLIN, Boston.

Doors open at 1.30 and 7.15. - - - Begins at 2 and 7.45

# Boston Daily Globe.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 10.

### DRAMAS HERE BEFORE.

Picturesque "Harbor Lights" — "Monte Cristo," with James C'Neil as Dantes—Second Week of "Hands Across the Sea."

"Harbor Lights" one of the most picturesque of romantic spectacular dramas, will be presented at the Boston Theatre tomorrow night. The play is familiar here, where it has had a strong hold upon popular favor since its initial American production at the Boston Museum a few years ago. It was presented at the Boston last year, and with added scenic effects, the immense stage permitting settings of an elaborateness possible at no other theatre. The famous revolving scene, representing a ship dashed to pieces on a rock-bound coast, with towering cliffs above from which the hero plunges into the foaming sea and rescues the drowning heroine, is among the most realistic of stage pictures. The view of the bay at night, showing the lighthouse, and the scene on H. M. S. Britannic, are both exceedingly effective. Additional interest will be lent the latter scene by a detachment of sailors from the United States ship Wabash, who will execute a cutlass drill. Aside from the merits as a scenic production, "Harbor Lights" is a play of thrilling interest, abounding in strong dramatic situations. The capable company includes O. H. Barr, Ogden Stevens, Frank L. Davis, Frank Coltman, H. E. Chase, Julia Stuart, Maria Dudley, Lulu Mower, Alice Mansfield and Jennie Lane.

# BOSTON HERALD.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 10, 1889.

### BOSTON—"HARBOR LIGHTS."

"Harbor Lights," one of the greatest successes of last season, was presented at the Boston Theatre last evening, and with the same manifestations of favor that greeted its previous production. The Lieut. Kingsley of the cast, Mr. O. H. Barr, and the Dora Vane, Miss Julia Stuart, are old Boston favorites, and they ably filled their roles, and read their lines in a way that called for great applause. Frank Coltman as Tom Dossiter, and Miss Emma Wyman as Peggy, contributed largely to the enjoyment of the evening. Miss Lulu Page Mower as Mrs. Chudleigh, in face, figure and speech, recalled forcibly the lamented Mrs. Vincent, and made one of the bits of the evening. Miss Marie Dudley gave a strong interpretation of the unfortunate Lena Nelson. The squire of Frank Davis and the Nicholas of Ogden Stevens were sufficiently villainous to satisfy the occupants of the highest tier. The other parts were well filled, and the whole performance was very evenly balanced and eminently satisfactory. The play is well staged, and moved very smoothly and without a hitch. Few melodramas have found such marked favor in this city as "Harbor Lights," and many will doubtless avail themselves of the opportunity to attend the performances, which are limited to the remaining evenings of this week and Wednesday and Saturday afternoons.

### AT OTHER THEATRES.

The familiar melodrama, "Harbor Lights," was the attraction at the Boston Theatre last evening, and the large audience demonstrated that the piece has still a strong hold on popular favor. The cast was an excellent one, the leading members being Mr. O. H. Barr, who is always a favorite here, Mr. Ogden Stevens, Mr. Frank L. Davis, Mr. Frank Coltman, Mr. H. E. Chase, Miss Julia Stuart and Miss Marie Dudley. Miss Stuart made a very favorable impression as Dora Vane, the heroine, displaying excellent taste and judgment in the somewhat trying role. The piece was finely mounted, several scenes being particularly good. "Harbor Lights" will be given for this week only.

The first passenger train passed over the Alton-town Terminal Railroad yesterday morning and carried the "Harbor Lights" Company, which appeared at the academy in this city last evening.

at a surviving program is to understand its appeal. **True Blue** was a far from subtle blend of spectacle and comedy, singing and dancing that built to an elaborate tableau at the close of each of the play's first three acts, these followed by a Grand Tableau of Victory at the close of Act IV. Frank's importance to the production can perhaps be measured by the invitation he received the following December to head the cast of a production of the play staged by the amateurs of Clarendon, a neighboring community.

February 1885 saw him cast as Edward Middleton, the leading character in **The Drunkard**. The most popular temperance drama of the period, it gave the actor in the principal role an opportunity to achieve "thrilling" effects in the scenes of delirium and no doubt Frank delivered dialogue like the following with histrionic relish:

*HUSBAND DRUNKARD: (on ground in delirium.) Here, here, friend, take it off, will you — these snakes, how they coil around me. Oh! how strong they are — there don't kill it, no, no, don't kill it, give it brandy, poison it with rum, that will be a judicious punishment, that will be justice, ha, ha! justice! ha, ha! . . . Hush! gently — gently, while she's asleep. I'll kiss her. She would reject me, did she know it, hush there, heaven bless my Mary, bless her and her child — hush! If the globe turns around once more, we shall slide from its surface into eternity . . . Ha, ha! great idea. A boiling sea of wine, fired from the torch of fiends! ha, ha!*

## II

Either Frank Coltman's venture into the women's apparel business was not altogether successful or his efforts with the home talent group had rendered him hopelessly stage struck. That the former was a possibility seems evident from the closing of his store in July 1885; the latter was a probability from references both in the fall and spring in the paper's personal column to Frank being in New York City. Very probably he was besieging any manager who would listen to him in the hope of getting a situation in the legitimate theatre. And if there was ever a decade when a young man or woman infected with the theatrical virus could gain at least temporary relief, surely it was the eighties. As has already been noted, touring combinations were abroad in increasing numbers, booming the market for countless walking gentlemen, ladies in waiting, second old men and women, soubrettes and comedians. And it was among these unsung players, the profession's rank and file, that Frank at length found a place.

A scrapbook he or some member of the family kept of his theatrical career tells the story, at least insofar as his professional engagements are concerned. These appear to have begun during the 1886-87 season when Frank was a member of Miss Josephine Cameron's "select" company. Unfortunately there is only one newspaper clipping preserved of this season; it praises Frank's rendition in **Led Astray** of Baron Mount Goslin, "a sublime specimen of the dude." That this was exactly the sort of character-comedy role Frank would make his own seems born out by his appearance the following season as Helham Perriwinkle of the New York Coaching Club in William Cullington's **For Congress** company. A Philadelphia reviewer thought the text made up of platitudes and the "alleged" humor stale, but he applauded Cullington's manful struggles with poor material and in passing he took note of Coltman's rendition of "one of the curled darlings of fashion."

During the latter months of this season Frank apparently left Cullington to join Miss Alice Allen's **The Main Line** company, a railroad drama in which he enacted the part of Addleton Bolingbroke Spline, yet another variant of the dude. The 1888-89 season saw him as "light juvenile" in



Home talent productions in neighboring communities give some sense of the kerosene circuit.

Fowler & Warmington's **Skipped by the Light of the Moon** company, while the seasons of 1889-90 and 1890-91 found Frank in the low comedy role of Tom Dossiter, Quartermaster R. N., in a stylish production of **Harbor Lights**. Thereafter, for three seasons he was a member of Miss Rosabel Morrison's and then Miss Georgia Gardner's **The Danger Signal** company. The play in question was a rewritten version of **The Main Line** and Frank as Arthur Gillespie, "a heavy swell on the ocean of life," was recreating a by now familiar character. That such a role had become his trademark was evidenced by his appearance during 1894-95 as Vanderhayden Knickerbocker, the scion of Old Dutch Aristocracy, in Tim Murphy's **Alimony** company.

Apparently he was in Tidioute during the 1895-96 season but the following two seasons he was a member of Murphy's **Old Innocence** company playing the role of Ben Green, Murphy's stage nephew. Then for two seasons he was

apparently without a protracted engagement, though the personal section of the Tidioute paper does note he was in and out of New York. For at least a portion of the 1900-1901 season he played the role of Stephen Houston, a very busy man in Miss Delia Stacy's **A Bachelor's Honeymoon** company, but then in March 1901 he was called home by the illness of his mother. Toward the close of March he met Tim Murphy when the latter played Warren and accepted an engagement for the coming season. He also journeyed to New York early in April to witness the first production of his one act play "Two Sharpers in a Flat", and while in that city he delivered the manuscript of a second one actor to a Mr. Charles Bradshaw.

When Frank joined the Murphy's **A Capitol Comedy** Company at Oil City early in September 1901, he was playing a comedy cameo, that of a tourist, and serving as the company's advance agent. This stint with Murphy was apparently his last professional engagement and though innumerable reviewers had looked on his acting with favor and foretold a brilliant future for him, it never materialized. His fate for some fifteen years was the one line encomium: "adds considerable life to the company," "extremely pleasing," "does his part well" or the epitaph of the bit player: "does a remarkable bit of character acting for about five minutes." No matter, he had gained the exper-

ience and training, as well as formed the taste needed, to manage and star in well-received home talent productions at the Grandin Opera House.

### III

The earliest in what would be a memorable — if dramatically undistinguished — roster of productions was a then box office favorite, **Hazel Kirke**, on September 14, 1887. A veritable mine of popular sentiment, it boasted a projected marriage between unsuited partners, a mortgage on the family mill, the discovery of true love, a defenseless girl driven from home and much more — but especially an attempted drowning on the part of the heroine as well as theatrically contrived misunderstandings and estrangements. Frank Coltman assumed the part of Dunston Kirke, the hard-hearted miller. And though certainly outside the kind of role he was grooming himself to play on the professional stage, he probably relished such moments as the third act climax when a servant rushed in to tell him his daughter Hazel was drowning:

*Dunstan (In horror.) Hazel, drowning! Dying! Here, before my face? No, no, I'll save her! Ah, heaven! I cannot! I am blind! (Falling on his knees.) Oh, God! This is thy punishment! I was blind when I drove her out — and now, when I*

## GRANDIN OPERA HOUSE, Monday Eve. August 14, 1893.

Benefit Performance for G. A. R. and W. R. C.

### EDITHA'S BURGLAR.

Editha, . . . . . Marion Shaw  
John Winslow, . . . . . Charles Fuellhart  
Herbert King, . . . . . Frank Coltman

Followed by the Comedy,

## "NIOBE!"

Peter Green, in life insurance, . . . . . Frank Coltman  
Corney Griffin, in love with himself, . . . . . Charles Fuellhart  
Phineas Innings, in Corney's hands, . . . . . Harry Kuhn  
Jefferson Tompkins, in the clouds, . . . . . David Fredericks  
Parker Silox, in retirement, . . . . . Edward Parshall  
Caroline Green, in-dispensable, . . . . . Josephine Weible  
Helen Griffin, in authority, . . . . . Anna Weimer  
Hattie Griffin, in open rebellion, . . . . . Marie Allen  
Beatrice Silox, in love with Corney, . . . . . Anna Porterfield  
Mary, in service, . . . . . Clara Siggins  
Madeline Miffton, in the way, . . . . . Josephine Dawson  
Niobe, in the flesh, (widow of the late Amphion, King of Thebes) . Clara Dunn

Scene, Drawing Room in Green's House.

"In the Course of Events."

ACT I. 7:15 P. M. . . . . In the absence of the family  
ACT II. The next morning. . . . . In the presence of the family  
ACT III. Afternoon of same day. . . . . In conclusion

Admission, 35 cts. Children under 12, 25c. Reserved Seats, 50c.

Now on sale at Dawson's.

## GRANDIN OPERA HOUSE, Tidioute, Pa.

Tuesday, Jan. 26th, 1904

A Farce Comedy, in 3 Acts, entitled

## The Liars

with the following cast:

Geo. Fisher, (a retired actor, now stock broker), . Herbert Kellogg  
Frank Perry (his friend), . . . . . Frank Coltman  
Ernest Morrison (a young architect), . . . . . Edmund Magill  
Hamilton Travers (a music hall waiter), . . . . . Herman Cook  
John Halton (a farmer from up-State), . . . . . Edward McMann  
Amos Bloodgood (of Rockford, Ill.), . . . . . Lester Fehlman  
Mrs. Caroline Bloodgood (his wife), . . . . . Anna Weimer  
Eva (Mrs. Perry) . . . . . } Theodosia Kellogg  
Anna, . . . . . } their daughters, . . . Kathrina White  
Lulu . . . . . } . . . . . Mary Dawson  
Angelina (Mrs. Halton), . . . . . Anna Bucklin  
Lotta (the maid at Perry's), . . . . . Julia Fehlman  
Fanchion (a dressmaker), . . . . . Florence Parshall

PLACE.—New York city. TIME: 1st Act, Friday afternoon. 2d Act, Saturday morning. 3d Act, Saturday afternoon.  
NEW MUSIC.

Admission 35c. Reserved Seats, on sale at Kemble's 50c  
Children and Gallery 25c. Curtain 8:15

**BENEFIT HOME RELIEF,**  
**GRANDIN OPERA HOUSE**  
**MONDAY**  
**EVENING August 5th.**

Frank Coltman and Home Talent in  
**A Gilded Fool!**

CHAUNCEY SHORT, . . . . . FRANK COLTMAN  
 MATTHEW RUTHVEN, } Ruthven & Co., . . . . . { ED. PARSHALL  
 MANNISTER STRANGE, } Bankers and Brokers, . . . . . { H. H. STOUT  
 DE PEYSTER RUTHVEN, Ruthven's son, . . . . . PAUL BRENNESHOLTZ  
 JACK DUVAL, Manager of the Philadelphia branch of Ruthven & Co. . . . . HENRY CLARKE  
 "REV." JACOB HOWELL, who claims to be interested in Foreign Missions, . . . . . CLARENCE MABIE  
 PERKINS, . . . . . WILL FUELLHART  
 MORGAN, . . . . . RAY PARSHALL  
 JANITOR, . . . . . PAUL BRENNESHOLTZ  
 MARGARET RUTHVEN, Ruthven's daughter, . . . . . JULIA CLARKE  
 SOPHIA RUTHVEN, Ruthven's wife, . . . . . JOSEPHINE WEIBLE  
 MISS JESSIE ROOD, devoted to the heathen, and with a reverence for the antique, . . . . . MRS. WEIMER  
 NELL AUDREY RUTHVEN, her niece, . . . . . CLARA SIGGINS

**SYNOPSIS.**

ACT I.—Short's Bachelor Apartments, Washington Square North. Easter Sunday.  
 ACT II.—Library in Ruthven's Home. Monday afternoon.  
 ACT III.—Drawing Room in Ruthven's Home. Monday evening.  
 ACT IV.—Same as Act III. Ten days later.  
 Place:—New York City. Time:—Present.

**Admission 35 and 50 Cents. Children 25 Cents**

**GRANDIN OPERA HOUSE.**

**Wednesday Ev'g, July 29, '96**

**Frank Coltman's Benefit.**

**"Charley's Aunt."**

A Farcical Comedy in 3 Acts,  
 by Brandon Thomas.

**\*CAST.\***

Stephen Spettigue, Solicitor, Oxford, . . . . . Clarence Mable  
 Col. Sir Francis Chesney, late Indian service, . . . . . Harry Happer  
 Jack Chesney, } Under-graduates { Chas. Fuellhart, Jr.  
 Charley Wykeham, } St. Olde College, . . . . . Will Fuellhart  
 Lord Fancourt Babberly, } Oxford. { . . . . . Frank Coltman  
 Brassett, college scout, . . . . . Ralph Smutz  
 Donna Lucia D'Alvadorez, from Brazil, . . . . . Josephine Weible  
 Kittie Verdum, Spettigue's ward, . . . . . Clara Siggins  
 Amy Spettigue, Spettigue's niece, . . . . . Josephine Dawson  
 Ella Delahay, an orphan, . . . . . Ellen Clarke

**\*SYNOPSIS.\***

Time—The Present. Commemoration Week. Oxford.  
 ACT I.—Jack Chesney's rooms in College. "When pious frauds are dispensations."—Hudebras.  
 ACT II.—Garden outside Jack's rooms. "While there's tea there's hope."—Pintero.  
 ACT III.—Drawing room at Spettigue's house. "Dinner lubricates business."—Boswell.

**Curtain at 8:30.**

**Admission, 35 Cts. Children and Gallery, 25 Cts.**  
**Reserved Seats 50 Cts., at Kemble's.**

*could save her — I cannot see — I cannot see — I cannot see! (He falls to the ground.)*

It may have been at this or some equally affecting moment that Editor White reported hearing "curses deep and loud from the gang in the gallery." Such defamation was, of course, repudiated by those in the parquette and **Hazel Kirke** was successfully repeated on the 20th. Presumably that gallery gang found yet another home talent production of **True Blue** on January 30 and 31, 1888, more to their liking, though it seems that Frank Coltman, on the road with the Cullington Company, was not involved. He was on hand October 8, 1888, however, for **Lend Me Five Shillings**, a farce that climaxed a musical and elocutionary entertainment netting 75 dollars for the school library.

His name, too, was prominently featured in the advertising for **Widow Bedott** on August 29, 1890. A clipping in his scrapbook shows that on January 21, 1889, he had supported a Joseph Palmer, who was appearing in this comedy as the widow at Brooklyn's Grand Theatre. Now, of course, Frank cast himself in the role of Widow Bedott, a gossiping old woman who is always defaming her neighbors and who becomes herself smitten with every marriageable man, particularly widowers, with whom she comes in contact. Here obviously was the sort of role that Frank was most at home in and just the sort of play that Tidioute's love affair with farce comedy had taught them to applaud.

The following August Frank and his home talent crew

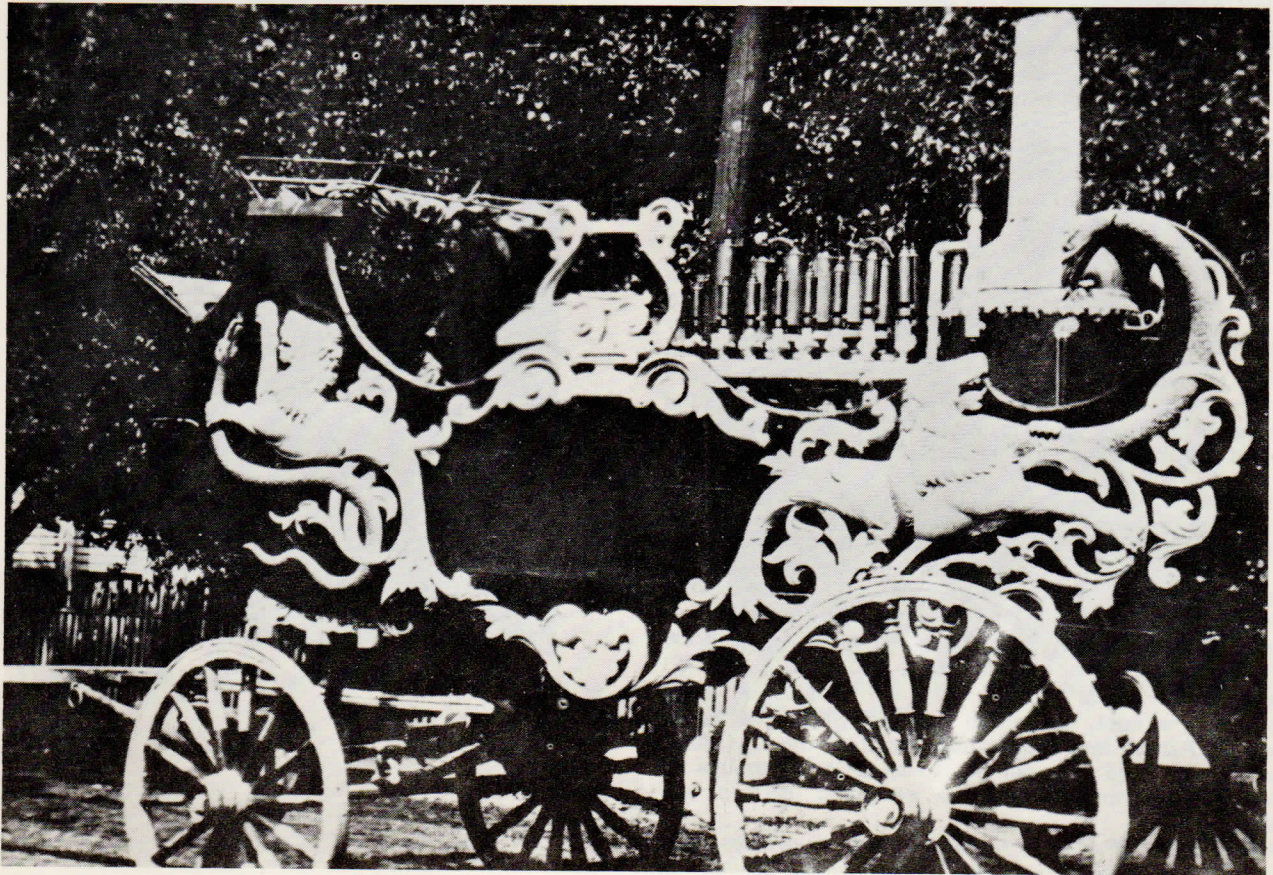
promised to please again with William Gillette's comedy **All the Comforts of Home**. Under the title of **Feu Toupinel** it had delighted Parisian audiences in the eighties with its story of the marital misadventures of a hero juggling a wife and mistress who are brought face to face in the same scenes. Obviously it needed moral laundering for American audiences, and Elizabeth Marbury, pioneer author's representative, hit on the way to retain its farcical elements and yet make it acceptable to the far off kerosene circuit. She proposed that the protagonist become a bigamist who deceives two honorable ladies instead of one.<sup>5</sup> What followed in Gillette's version, based on her suggestion, was an innocuous entertainment geared to please all and offend none.

A late summer or early September offering by Tidioute's amateurs was by now an accepted and probably expected occurrence. Frank was home from the road and no doubt eager to produce bright, mirth-provoking comedies such as **Niobe**, which the home talent group offered on August 14, 1893. Preceded by a curtain raiser, "Editha's Burglar," the evening presented the epitome of theatre as the Grandin audience had come to know it. Frank Coltman's choices were invariably farce comedies of little or no dramatic merit, but then they were selected by a professional actor whose eye was fixed on the theatrical effectiveness of his selections and not upon whatever aesthetic or dramatic merits the plays themselves may have possessed. Surely **Niobe** was a case in point.





When the Grandin Opera House closed its doors to all but occasional use after 1904, circus troupes were the only legitimate entertainers to visit Tidioute.



A Meadville reviewer admitted that the story of a statue brought to life was an impossible idea, farcical surely, but at the same time he found it an inherently comic possibility:

*. . . Nobody falls down stairs or upstairs; there are no impossible Dutch, Irish or Negro servants tumbling about over everybody's legs; not a single character in the play flops around with greased heels; there are no puns, no slangy gags; no comic songs, or clog dances, and yet to every human being with the slightest comprehension of fun, and with any appreciation of wit and humor. "Niobe" must of necessity prove almost side splitting. It is not only comic, but it is deliciously comic. The means adapted to excite laughter are legitimate means. The best of it all is that this really clever production is absolutely clean. It is not only free from any trace of coarseness, but is entirely lacking in that suggestiveness, which may be amusing, but which is not healthy, found in the light comedies and farces of the French school. It is an American play, with the scene laid right here in the city of New York, and there is not a line or a word in it which the most vigorous censor of the proprietaries would wish to expunge.*<sup>6</sup>

Having found a species of play suited to his tastes and his audience, Frank selected **A Gilded Fool** for production in August 1895 and though it was a silly piece and there was some reported restlessness in the audience, it was once more fare that local audiences had long supported. Frank, apparently without a professional engagement that fall, was in Tidioute and on November 5th offered **Mrs. Jarley's Wax Works** with himself as Mrs. Jarley. From a surviving program it appears that the evening consisted of a series of living pictures or **tableaux vivants**. For instance, those in part one were designated as follows: Rock of Ages, the Soldier's Dream, the Blind Nydra, and the Doctor. Frank, as Mrs. Jarley, contributed the identifying and descriptive narration needed to make the whole intelligible.<sup>7</sup>

If the evening represented a departure from his usual fare, Frank returned to his chosen province in **Charlie's Aunt**, presented on a stormy and intensely hot evening in July 1896. However, it was vintage Coltman and surely calculated to please. Moreover, it was announced as his farewell to the local stage. Editor White wrote: "During the past 15 years that he has been producing and helping to put on our home stage many pleasant entertainments, the different charities and organizations have been benefitted over a thousand dollars and his friends think he should have his turn at this his last appearance and a full house should greet Frank and his company."<sup>8</sup> Just what lay behind this announcement is unknown. It may be that Coltman contemplated removing from Tidioute or that his decision was provoked by criticism of his leadership of the amateurs or the announcement may have been mostly a fiction of his friends to help him out of a pressing financial difficulty.

#### IV

Those who had enjoyed his brand of theatre need not have dispaired for on January 2, 1900, Frank was again at the helm. On this occasion he offered a farce titled **What Happened to Jones**. Described as a complete success, it netted \$102.61. August 1901 saw Frank rallying home favorites for a minstrel entertainment that drew a \$100.00 house and in January 1903, his road career evidently behind him, he cast himself in the lead of another farce comedy **My Friend from India** whose receipts were \$180.00. Evidently the word was out not to miss it for groups in neighboring communities got up sleighing parties and attended.

On December 25, 1903, Frank managed a revival of a previous home talent success, **Niobe**, which proved so successful that Coltman and his company took it to neigh-

boring Grand Valley for a January 1st performance. According to Mrs. Wallace R. Brown — then Mary Dawson — they went by sleigh and were treated to an oyster supper at the conclusion of the entertainment. "My, we had such fun," she remembered. Very possibly this happy state of affairs prevailed when she was a member of the cast of **The Liars** on January 26. Whether those involved knew it or not at the time, this was the final offering of the faithful band.

The Iroquois Theatre fire was only recent history and in its aftermath William J. Grandin, careful steward of the opera house, may well have had serious reservations concerning his opera house's continued use. Then, following his death, in December 1904, the family possibly thought it best to close the doors to all but very occasional use. Thereafter, Frank threw his energies into yet another women's apparel store and with its failure removed to Rochester, New York, in 1911 to try his luck at news reporting. With his going an era was decidedly at an end.

In retrospect, it is apparent that Tidioute's amateur theatrical tradition was Frank Coltman's creation. It can in a sense be considered his life's work, the effort of a sometime trouper whose concept of theatre was molded by his experiences on the road. From the plays he selected it is certain he had no desire to educate his audience. Never did he announce a Shakespearean production or eighteenth century classic. Nor did he attempt one of the dramas in America's emerging realistic tradition. **Hazel Kirke** expected, his choices centered on farce comedies whose leads were congenial to the talents he had developed in his professional experiences. Happily, however, his personal preferences were those of his audiences, the amateur and professional worlds coming together to shape and reflect a taste in theatre.



The Grandin Opera House on a mid-March day. Just behind it the Allegheny River can be glimpsed.



The tracks that once brought troupers to Tidioute.



The final resting place of William J. Grandin, faithful theatre-goer.

*Seven-thirty, Everybody!*

"I went to see a couple of bloodthirsty melodramas at the old Grand Opera House on Twenty-Third Street and Eight Avenue. I loved the heroes and hissed the villains, and the theatre bug I had swallowed some years before when I visited 'Bryant's Minstrels,' left my feet and was jumping around in my pigmy brain. I was beginning to view life from another angle, and I longed to be a hero and a scatterer of money among the ladies."<sup>1</sup>

James T. Powers

## I

Unfortunately there is today little primary evidence as to what the theatrical experience on the kerosene circuit was like. And much of what we do know is to be found in the memoirs of the star actors of the period — certainly a highly selective view. For they confined themselves all to frequently to the physical liabilities to which the exigencies of the road condemned them, to the quirks or foibles of the local management and only in passing did they give more than a supercilious glance at their audiences.

Unquestionably the stages of many one-night-stands were ridiculously inadequate. Frederick Warde, mentioned in an earlier chapter, described the theatre at Columbia, South Carolina, as having no grave trap in the platform that served for the stage, nor was the company permitted to cut the floor to make one. He recalled:

*. . . We played "Hamlet" and in the churchyard scene, where Ophelia was to be buried, the stage manager placed a set rock on the side next to one of the wings, behind which the grave digger went down on his knees to indicate an excavation, and he shoveled the earth from that position. When it came to the burial of Ophelia, we pushed the body behind the rock instead of lowering it into a grave, slightly paraphrasing the lines to make them consistent with that method of disposing of the poor lady's body.*<sup>2</sup>

The audience, according to Warde, was not diverted from a serious interest in the play by these incongruous conditions but obviously Warde and other members of the company were. Actors, too, sometimes had to struggle with the mania of local managers who posted notices where actors least expected to see them. Helena Modjeska, one of the reigning actresses of the day, recalled her attention being drawn to a sign placed in the tin trough of the footlights. She was touring with Edwin Booth, who had said to her as she was awaiting her entrance "Just read that notice in the footlights." And when she observed "Do not spit in this trough," which was repeated three times on each end and in the middle of the footlights, she nearly laughed aloud.<sup>3</sup>

Young Otis Skinner played Laertes at this particular performance, which took place upon an "absurd little stage" over a harness shop in Vincennes, Indiana. He describes Booth as being on stage some time before he saw the startling admonition and thereafter being "shaky" in his lines: "His face was twitching as he galloped through the remainder of the scene at top speed. When he came off he gasped: 'Did you see it? . . . What would the audience have thought if I had said: 'To be or not to be — **Do not spit in the trough** — that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind not to spit into the trough, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and, by spitting in the trough, end them!' Booth went then to his dressing room chuckling."<sup>4</sup>

What that dressing room was like Skinner left no record, but many an actor did comment repeatedly on the squalor of his surroundings. Modjeska, for instance, on this same tour

wrote of what was set aside for her in Bloomington, Indiana. Not only was the room painted with vermilion red, a color that made her eyes smart, but everything was "trivial and common" in its furnishings, even to the inscriptions on the manager's posted notice. These comments, evidently from the pens of disappointed actors, were, Modjeska remembered, of "a startling vulgarity."<sup>5</sup>

Local managers were a cross actors and company managers and advance men had to bear. Augustus Pitou, a wily road magnate, recalled the experience of the agent sent in advance of Joseph Murphy, an Irish comedian. This individual had contracted with the manager of the opera house in Streator, Illinois, for six **supers** to be furnished the company for Murphy's performance. Of course the **supers** in question were stage extras or more formally supernumeraries but the local manager, who was also a butcher, misunderstood that for which he had contracted. Thus, while Joseph Murphy was making-up, the butcher-manager knocked at his door and subsequently ushered in his wife who was carrying a large tray. When the comedian asked what she was carrying, her husband responded, "Vot de contract calls for, — six **suppers**, steaks and chops."<sup>6</sup>

If the local management could startle the actor, so, on occasion, could the audience. Catherine Reignolds-Winslow writes of touring western Pennsylvania and playing Oil City. Nothing unforeseen had occurred during the performance but what she described as "a funny incident" climaxed the evening: "At the point where there is generally an uprising on the part of the audience I heard an unusual scraping, and for an instant thought of fire, but it was simply a preparation for a long trudge to their homes in the dark. Every man provided himself with a lamp, and they went through a sort of drill inasmuch as it was done methodically and in unison."<sup>7</sup>

Toward his audiences on the kerosene circuit, the actor could, of course, be supercilious. Warde recalls touring with Lawrence Barrett and the latter's custom of looking at his audience through a peephole in the curtains of the theatres in which the company played. When the audience was large, Mr. Barrett would say with satisfaction, "There is a great deal of culture in this town." But one on occasion after his customary survey, he turned away without any remark. A "wag" in the company then looked through the peephole and, on finding the audience very small, said to Barrett with some relish, "Quite a great deal of culture here, sir," to which the star replied, "Yes, agri-culture."<sup>8</sup>

## II

Of the theatrical experience from the auditorium side of the footlights there are all too few voices out of the past. Among the countless local managers of small town "opry" houses Charles Newton Hood, the co-manager of Bent's Opera House in Medina, New York, did speak out. He called running a village theatre quite a job: "So many classes of people had to be enticed and pleased, 'out of the same barrel,' and we needed them all at every performance." To

Hood it was a good deal like conducting an Episcopal church in a borough the size of Medina — or perhaps Tidioute: "The High Church members want all the candles, bells, intoning, genuflections, robes and ceremony possible. The Low Church communicants have a fixed line of demarcation where all these things should stop . . ."<sup>9</sup>

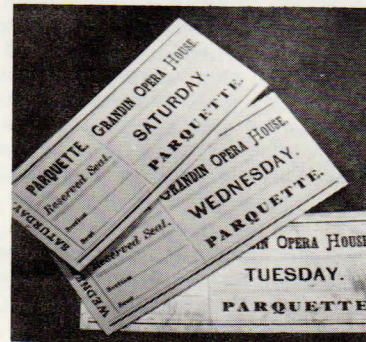
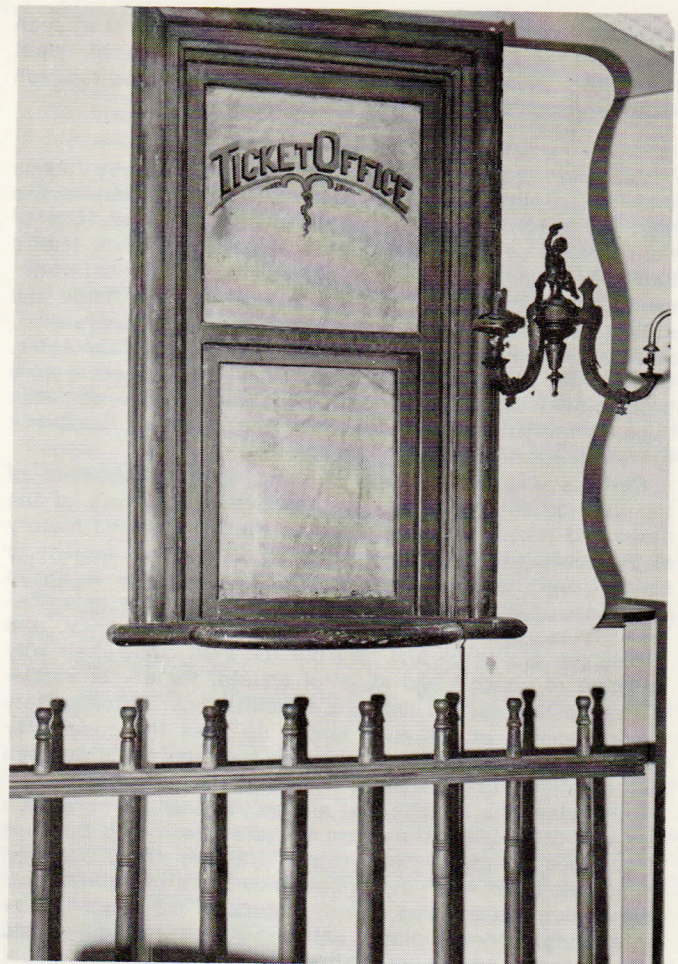
The theatre-goers themselves were silent — at least in print. To see something of the experience as it affected them we must turn again to the actor whose accounts over and over document the situation in which Frederick Warde found himself. He was playing Iago at the opera house in Austin, Texas, and such was the impact of his acting upon a "countryman" that at the close of the play this individual drew a six-shooter and declared he would kill that scoundrel Iago. On being told that the Warde was merely impersonating a character, he remarked: "He must be a damned villain, anyhow, or he couldn't act so well . . ." The newspaperman who witnessed the incident and told the story in print concluded, "We do not wonder at the indignation of the man who wanted to shoot him (Warde) as his villainy was so perfectly correct all lost sight of the actor and only saw the desperate cold-blooded villain before them."<sup>10</sup>

Luckily this incident transpired at the close of the play; Oliver Morosco, a west coast showman at the close of the century, recalls his company was presenting a melodrama of the "rankest" variety. A number of soldiers from the Presidio were in the audience and had obviously been celebrating prior to their coming to the theatre. Toward the end of the second act, the play's villain had seized upon and was fiendishly choking the lovely heroine when a hefty soldier arose in the aisle shouting angrily, "Let go that lady, you dirty bum." However, the villain kept on choking the heroine. Of course, the handsome leading man was waiting in the wings to rush out and rescue her but he was bound to wait his cue. Not so the soldier, who rushed to the stage and knocked the stage villain cold with a mighty blow.<sup>11</sup> The audience was in an uproar. Cheer after cheer went up for the soldier. Very obviously the worlds of fantasy and reality had changed places, for the moment at least.

And at its most typical theatre on the kerosene circuit did represent a world more real than the real — certainly more desirable. Mary Anderson, in her time a leading actress of the emotional school, remembered what her girlhood days had been like in Louisville, Kentucky, while sitting alone in the dimly lit theatre, "feeling the most privileged of mortals," silently watching the great green curtain and imagining all the enchantment it concealed:

*. . . Suddenly the foot-lights flared against the green curtain, under which mysterious feet were seen again, this time in dainty satin slippers or shoes; so many feet, so differently shod, yet all meeting on one common ground before the peep-hole in the curtain. Then the orchestra . . . after which a tinkling bell . . . and the curtain slowly rose. From that moment we became oblivious of everything but the scene before us, and only after the curtain fell upon the last act was our dream broken, when, with a shock, we found ourselves once more in the cold and dusky streets. To leave the Temple of Enchantment and come back to commonplace realities was our only sadness.*<sup>12</sup>

What Mary Anderson recalled was very possibly the situation of many in the audience at the Grandin Opera House. With Percy Hammond they were step-children of the stage, "affected, self-conscious and spurious." They felt at home in the mimic world, admiring the artificial tricks of the leading men and ingenues and wishing they might duplicate them. With Hammond they were pleased to witness how easily foolish persons won bliss in the last scene and they were comforted to see erring humanity suffer for a couple of acts and then with a waving of the dramatist's



Fragments out of the past: The ticket window and a section of the orchestra rail assembled in a special display. Tickets and one of the cautionary signs that hung in the gallery.

wand be "perfectly comfortable."<sup>13</sup> It was a world of high adventure and camaraderie long vanished but at least recallable in the theatre of the kerosene circuit which meant so much for so long to so many.

### III

Yet the Grandins' behest to their community needs viewing in perspective as well as in the context of the day. No matter that they choose to call the third floor of their brick block an opera house, it was in reality a public hall that found wide use as the site of school entertainments and exercises or as a facility sufficiently large and attractive enough to be sought after for a variety of social, musical and dramatic events of a purely local character. In its time it attracted, too, groups whose purposes were professional or political; and given the various demands upon its facilities, there was an obvious need for flexibility in its arrangements.

Perhaps this circumstance explains the handsomeness of the auditorium proper and the relative meagerness of the stage and its appointments. For as the performance history of the opera house shows, its use as a theatrical facility or concert setting was only nominal — perhaps a dozen occasions in any particular year. But these were nevertheless treasured moments for all their infrequency and Tidiouters did value and turn out for what came their way in terms of concert and minstrel artists, variety or vaudeville entertainers, and dramatic combinations. Unfortunately the economics of the road tended to pass the community by unless a confusion in booking arrangements and an open date took them to Tidioute.

Otherwise, the troupes that played the Grandin were such as found difficulties away from the kerosene circuit because of the meagerness of their talent, training and production apparatus. Even when evidencing a measure of professional competence themselves, their materials were apt to be distressingly commonplace, catering to old prejudices and stereotypes. And the dramatic combinations which might have brought a breath of fresh air with them, acted as a liberalizing and reforming presence, were purveyors of the banal and the trivial. Feeble, forced and false, their vehicles were shabby in structure and shambling in action.

To examine virtually any of the dramas to be seen in Tidioute — whether by professionals or Frank Coltman's amateurs — is to discover a species of drama difficult to speak of aesthetically except in the most disparaging terms. Plays like **Widow Bedott**, **Niobe**, **The Prima Donna** or **Gloriana** are, by enlightened standards, infantine in construction and dominated by the most puerile of sensational effects. Their incidents, when they are not forced and improbable, are hideously trite. Most evidently these are plays that want dramatic development where either action or character is concerned. And, of course, neither the one nor the other is truly revelatory of the American scene or psyche.

By way of explanation for the thoroughly casual acceptance of this state of affairs, it should be pointed out that audiences never expected their theatre to mirror life — American or otherwise. Theatre for them was make-believe. As Arthur Hopkins observed, "They must be part of the play themselves or there is no play. They like to play Cinderella and Prince Charming and Raffles and Cleopatra and the various characters that had those amazing experiences . . ."<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere the modern theatre movement may have been in bud, but in Tidioute and communities like it the "Monte Cristo complex" was seemingly ineradicable.

Nor were serious efforts made to challenge this state of affairs. That segment of the community which took the moral complexion of Tidioute as their especial province were ready to be pleased if Editor White would only assure them that there was nothing offensive or indecent in the advertised bill of fare. And to those for whom the basis of

an aesthetic judgment was a moral precondition there was scarcely a production at the Grandin they could fault. The town fathers and their constituents among the respectable and sober-minded could applaud the fare that came their way, too; for it supported home and hearth, domestic virtues and filial duties, private property and corporate profits. Even a play like **The Lost Paradise** that was advertised as a drama founded on the rights of capital and labor merely utilized an industrial setting as a stage set for sensational stage effects.

The youth of the community needed to fill the Grandin Opera House no less than their elders probably found little to fault in the emotional heroes of the day. Ever willing to "play the play," they identified with those stage personages who had a ready tear for the afflicted and the destitute. And they readily gave their sympathies to the man or woman whose head always observed the dictates of the heart. For the restive or those disposed to be critical, there were the latest song hits and specialities interpolated into the acts of the bill of fare. An evening at the Grandin not only exploited the hoary formulas of a melodramatic theatre, clichés long before the beginnings of the kerosene circuit, but it provided a not-to-be-missed opportunity to gather the latest slang and humorous gambits, to appropriate and subsequently imitate whatever signs of modernity came the audience's way — from dance steps to rag time.

To survive as a performance hall the Grandin needed the support and patronage of the entire community. And curiously enough it was just about the time that the Grandin closed its doors that the cleavage between generations, so noticeable in the frenetic, rebellious decade of the twenties, began to emerge. It was not simply a matter of renovating a structure to meet newly enacted building codes or of finding a product to compete with the novelty of moving pictures. Those necessities — at least until the advent of sound films — might have been met, but when the fragmentation of the times and the alienation of the generations broke one audience into many audiences, the opera houses of the kerosene circuit closed their doors. Like the dinosaur their time had come; the very conditions for their existence became extinct.

CHAPTER 1

1. Tidioute, literally "log trap place," was the spot at the mouth of a creek at which the Indians trapped deer.
2. Leon McNierney, **Titusville 1859** (New York: Vantage Press, 1958), p. 70.
3. *Ibid.*
4. **Hodgman's Gazetteer and Business Directory of the Oil Regions** (Pittsburgh: Seibert & Co., 1869), p. 153.
5. **The Warren Mail**, September 15, 1860. Quoted in Ernest C. Miller, **This Was Early Oil** (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1968), pp. 39-40.
6. (Syracuse, N. Y.: D. Mason & Co., 1887), pp. 463-64.
7. John J. McLaurin, **Sketches in Crude-Oil** (Harrisburg: Privately Printed, 1898), p. 201.
8. **The Warren Mail**, January 30, 1872.
9. **Hodgman's Gazetteer**, p. 153.
10. quoted in McNierney, pp. 100-102.
11. December 26, 1870.
12. See B. H. Copeland's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "The Oil Circuit: A History of Professional Theatre in The Oil Region of Northwestern Pennsylvania from 1859 to 1900," University of Denver, 1969, for an account of the theatre's beginnings.
13. **The Autobiography** edited by Alan S. Downer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 243-44.
14. **Footlights and Spotlights** (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1924), pp. 40-42.
15. For a generalized discussion of the Star-Stock system and of the pioneering of Boucicault and Jefferson see Alfred L. Bernheim, **The Business of the Theatre** (New York: Actor's Equity Association 1932), especially Chapter VI.
16. William Winter, one of the most long-lived of nineteenth century theatre critics, notes that in 1800 there were only some 150 professional actors in America and relatively few theatres for them to perform in. However, by 1880 he found in the United States and Canada about 3,500 towns in which theatrical performances were habitually given in some 5000 theatres.

CHAPTER 2

1. **Titusville Morning Herald**, September 8, 1865.
2. *Ibid.*, November 6, 1865.
3. *Ibid.*, January 14, 1868.
4. *Ibid.*, December 15, 1870.
5. Neyhart, who had married a daughter of Samuel Grandin, joined with his brothers-in-law to form the firm of Neyhart and Grandin. In 1872 alone they bought and shipped virtually one-fourth of the entire production of the Oil Region. Neyhart died of tuberculosis in 1875 at the age of 39.
6. **Harry Miner's American Dramatic Directory for the Season of 1884-85**, edited by Harry Miner (New York: Wolf & Palmer Dramatic Publishing Co., 1884), p. 303. As to Tidioute's decline from a population of over 4000 in the 1860's, **Smull's Legislative Handbook** for 1887 shows that the borough of Tidioute had 1,255 inhabitants in 1880. Through 1910 its population remained relatively stable. The 1920 United States Census indicated, however, a population of 1,063.
7. Carl Lautenschlaeger, "Theatrical Engineering Past and Present," **Scientific American Supplement**, 60 (July 1905), p. 24687. A useful introduction to the subject of lighting is F. Chateau Brown's "Lighting in Ye Early Playhouses," **Theatre**, 28 (July 1918), esp. p. 36.
8. These were the appurtenances found in the Boston Museum's green room according to Edward W. Mammen, **The Old Stock Company School of Acting** (Boston: Public Library, 1945), p. 25.
9. "Some Developments of The American Stage During the Past Fifty Years," **University of California Chronicle**, 15 (April 1913),

p. 213.

10. **Showman**, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1937), pp. 60-61.
11. All of these contrivances are described in John J. Jennings, **Theatrical and Circus Life** (Chicago, Laird & Lee, 1903), esp. Chapter XI, "The Illusions of the Stage." The noted "emotional" actress, Clara Morris, in **Life on the Stage, My Personal Experiences and Recollections** (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1901), Chapter VIII, describes the impact of such devices on the actors whose efforts they were ostensibly to accentuate.
12. Brady, **Showman**, pp. 253-55.
13. An extremely informative discussion is Richard A. Willis, "The Hazards of Nineteenth Century Theatres," **Players**, 46 (February/March 1971), pp. 125-131. Occasionally local papers reprinted actors' recollections of theatrical fires. See "Kate Claxton Talks About Her Many Narrow Escapes," **The Bradford (Penna.) Era**, September 10, 1892.

CHAPTER 3

1. Mrs. Charles A. Morrison, "Whatever Happened to Laura Keene?" **The Venango Intelligencer** (January 1963), p. 2.
2. quoted in Harry Birdoff, **The World's Greatest Hit--Uncle Tom's Cabin** (New York: S. F. Vanni, 1947), p. 229.
3. Bernheim, p. 34.
4. See **Mishler's Memoirs** (Reading, Penna.: Rengelly & Bros., 1907).
5. July 13, 1889, p. 3, col. 2.
6. Minutes of the Board of Control of the Warren Public Library, May 27, 1887, pp. 155-58.
7. One of many evidences of their concern is an item in **The News** (Nov. 1, 1878) in which W. J. Grandin offers a reward to the person informing him who it is that disfigures the walls in the Opera House block.
8. February 16, 1886.
9. Isaac F. Marcossion in **Charles Frohman: Manager and Man** (New York: Harper, 1916) helped Frohman recall: "In those days it was a tradition in theatrical advertising that whoever did the most effective bill-posting in a town got the audience. Most of the publicity was done with posters. An advance-agent had to be a practiced bill-poster himself. To get the most conspicuous sites for bills and to keep those bills up until the attraction played became the chief task of the advance-agent."
10. Jennings, pp. 371-72.
11. These companies were probably following the lead of Jack Haverly, one of the great impresarios of the minstrel world, who outstepped his competition when he merged various of his separate minstrel troupes into the Haverly Mastodons. These all star performers were billed as follows: "Forty--Count 'Em-Forty'". Subsequently his rival R. M. Hooley put together Hooley's Magatherium Minstrels. When asked what a Magatherium was Hooley replied, "A Megatherium can swallow a Mastodon." Not to be behind the times M. B. Leavitt, a serious competitor, organized Leavitt's Gigantean Minstrels.
12. **Fifty Years in Theatrical Management** (New York: Broadway Publishing Co., 1912), p. 186.
13. See by this author: "Moving Panorama," **Players**, 44 (August/September, 1970), 272-75; and "Capt. E. C. Williams and the Panoramic School of Acting," **Educational Theatre Journal**, 23 (October 1971), 289-297.
14. September 12, 1876.
15. September 5, 1876.
16. **Footprints and Echoes** (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1927), p. 49.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
18. Jennings, pp. 391-93.
19. March 19, 1886.

#### CHAPTER 4

1. **Life on the Stage** (New York: McClure, Phillips & Co. 1901), p. 375.
2. **Curtains Going Up** (New York: Pitman Publishing Corp., 1939), pp. 6-7.
3. Channing Pollock, **The Footlights Fore and Aft** (Boston: Richard G. Badger, 1911), p. 189.
4. **Diary of a Daly Debutante** (New York: Duffield & Co., 1901), p. 191.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-96.
6. Crane, **Footprints and Echoes**, p. 29.
7. Frederick Warde, **Fifty Years of Make-Believe** (New York: The International Press Syndicate, 1920), p. 126.
8. Channing Pollock, **Harvest of My Years, An Autobiography** (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943), p. 74, quotes Augustin Daly, perhaps the most famous impresario of his time, as saying of his theatres decorated in red and gold, "Those are carnival colors, and people must think of the theatre as a carnival place. When they cease doing that, we shall have no theatre."
9. **They All Had Glamour, From the Swedish Nightingale to the Naked Lady** (New York: Julian Messner, 1944), p. 15.
10. Daniel Frohman, **Encore** (New York: Lee Furman, 1937), pp. 133-34.
11. Elizabeth Marbury, **My Crystal Ball, Reminiscences** (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1923), pp. 92-93.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.
13. **Sixty Years of the Theatre, An Old Critic's Memories** (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1916), p. 86.
14. Those interested in The Uncle Tom phenomena should see Harry Birdoff, **The World's Greatest Hit** or Harlow Hoyt, **Town Hall Tonight**, which has an evocative chapter titled "Poor Old Uncle Tom He's Gone." Long time subscribers to **American Heritage** may recall in the October 1955 issue a handsomely illustrated article by Richard Moody, "Uncle Tom, the Theatre and Mrs. Stowe."
15. quoted from B. B. Engel's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Chronicles of the Meadville Stage: 1800-1899," University of Pittsburgh, 1968, p. 186.
16. quoted in Edward Wagenknecht, **Merely Players** (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 193.
17. Crane, p. 144.
18. December 20, 1870.
19. November 27, 1883.
20. quoted in Engle, p. 203.
21. **Morning Herald**, August 26, 1868.
22. quoted in Engle, p. 198.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 341.
24. **North East (Penna.) Sun** October 18, 1890.
25. *Ibid.*, September 22, 1894.
26. **Play Production in America** (New York: Henry Holt, 1916), pp. 228-29.
27. quoted in Engle, pp. 688-89.
28. December 27, 1895.

#### CHAPTER 5

1. John Golden and Viola Brothers Shore, **Stage-Struck John Golden** (New York: Samuel French, 1930), pp. 211-12.
2. In the final years of his life in Rochester, 1911-1919, he was a newspaper reporter for one or another of that city's papers. Retired newsmen remember him "a genial, friendly man of average size and rather rugged features, with a dry sense of humor." One of them recalls that he often convulsed the office with a take off on some celebrity or odd character -- "never maliciously."
3. See, for example, **The Rochester Evening Express**, October 23, 1865. A long feature story reports the group's impression that the oil supply in the region was "practically inexhaustable."
4. **The Weekly News**, June 27, 1879.

5. Marbury, pp. 76-77.

6. quoted in Engle, pp. 517-18.

7. An unusual program in the collection of the Crawford County Historical Society indicated that a Mrs. Jarley and her wax works appeared at the Meadville Opera House on March 12 and 13, 1874. Apparently these were not living pictures but legitimate wax figures. On exhibition on this occasion were her Historical Chamber, Chamber of Beauties, Chamber of Horror, Comics, and other noted figures. Mrs. Jarley requested that no large bouquets (*sic.*) be thrown at the wax figures as many had been injured in this way.

8. **The Weekly News**, July 24, 1896.

#### CHAPTER 6

1. **Twinkle Little Star, Sparkling Memories of Seventy Years** (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1939), p. 31.
2. Warde, p. 128.
3. **Memories and Impression, An Autobiography** (New York: MacMillan, 1910), p. 506.
4. Skinner, p. 174.
5. Modjeska, p. 504.
6. **Masters of the Show As Seen In Retrospection** (New York: Neal, 1914), p. 132.
7. **Yesterdays With Actors** (Boston: Cupples & Co., 1887), pp. 166-67.
8. Warde, p. 140.
9. "Running a One-Night-Stand in 'the Sticks,'" **Theatre Magazine** XLVIII (August 1928), p. 15.
10. Warde, pp. 191-92.
11. Helen M. Morosco and Leonard P. Dugger, **The Oracle of Broadway, Life of Oliver Morosco** (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1944), pp. 46-47.
12. **A Few Memories** (New York: Harper & Bros., 1896), pp. 28-29.
13. **This Atom in the Audience** (New York: Ferris Printing Co., 1940), p. 22.
14. **How's Your Second Act?** (1918; reprint. New York: Samuel French, 1931), p. 22.





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