

South Dakota State University

## Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

1970

### A History of the Theatrical and Community Activities in the Early Dell Rapids, South Dakota, Opera House

Gerry A. Perrin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/etd>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Perrin, Gerry A., "A History of the Theatrical and Community Activities in the Early Dell Rapids, South Dakota, Opera House" (1970). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 5153.  
<https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/etd/5153>

This Thesis - Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Open PRAIRIE: Open Public Research Access Institutional Repository and Information Exchange. For more information, please contact [michael.biondo@sdstate.edu](mailto:michael.biondo@sdstate.edu).

187

**A HISTORY OF THE THEATRICAL AND COMMUNITY  
ACTIVITIES IN THE EARLY DELL RAPIDS,  
SOUTH DAKOTA, OPERA HOUSE**

**BY**

**GERRY A. PERRIN**

**A thesis submitted  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree Master of Arts, Major in  
Speech, South Dakota  
State University**

**1970**

**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

**A HISTORY OF THE THEATRICAL AND COMMUNITY  
ACTIVITIES IN THE EARLY DELL RAPIDS,  
SOUTH DAKOTA, OPERA HOUSE**

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree, but without implying that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Thesis Adviser

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Head, Speech Department

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful appreciation is extended to Dr. Lawrence Stine for directing this study and giving invaluable aid and encouragement during the course of the investigation. Acknowledgment is also extended to Dr. Wayne Hoogestraat for the suggestion of this topic.

Gratitude is also offered to several of the people of Dell Rapids who made this study possible. They are: Frank Greening, owner of the Dell Rapids Opera House; Mrs. Helen Anderson, secretary at the Dell Rapids Tribune office; Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Smith of the Dell Rapids Tribune; Mrs. James A. Nesby, who lent her photographs and offered valuable leads to the writer; Mrs. Edward Sundem, Dell Rapids Public Librarian; Mr. Harry Dieson, who supplied important information; Mr. Russell Bohl; and Mr. Harry Blow, who, sadly, passed away before the study was completed. To the entire community the writer expresses her deepest thanks.

The writer's indebtedness is also extended to the State Historical Society for supplying necessary material. In addition, the writer is grateful to Ruth Schlobohm and Perry Vining, two South Dakota State University students, who assisted the writer in measuring the opera house.

Lastly, more than gratitude is expressed to my parents and kind friends.



DEDICATED TO THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

PEOPLE OF DELL RAPIDS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DELL RAPIDS, 1872-1880	1
INTRODUCTION	1
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DELL RAPIDS, NORTH DAKOTA	1
Founding of the City of Dell Rapids	1
The Development of Agricultural Production	4
Early Settlement and Industry	11
Dell Rapids' Growth and Development	17
Development, 1880-1890	21
II. THE DELL RAPIDS COMMUNITY THROUGH THE YEARS	25
Planning and Construction	26
Education	31
Industry	31
Health	43
Recreation and Amusement	45
The Social House Movement	48
III. FIFTY YEARS OF DELL RAPIDS THROUGH THE YEARS	50
November 1910 to November 1911	50
October 1912 to September 1913	50
1914, 1915, and 1916 Through the Years	50

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
<b>I. INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DELL RAPIDS, SOUTH DAKOTA . . . . .</b>	1
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DELL RAPIDS, SOUTH DAKOTA . . . . .	6
Founders of the City of Dell Rapids . . . . .	7
The Development of Transportation . . . . .	9
Early Businesses and Industry . . . . .	12
Early Growth . . . . .	16
Grasshoppers, Storms, Fires . . . . .	21
<b>II. THE DELL RAPIDS OPERA HOUSE BUILDING . . . . .</b>	25
Planning and Construction . . . . .	26
Exterior . . . . .	31
Interior . . . . .	37
Scenery . . . . .	45
Improvements and Changes . . . . .	47
The Opera House Management . . . . .	49
<b>III. PROFESSIONAL DRAMATIC TOURING COMPANIES . . . . .</b>	54
November of 1888 through 1892 . . . . .	55
October 1894 to September 1896 . . . . .	71
1900, 1901, and 1903 through September . . . . .	78

**TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)**

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>IV. TOURING PROFESSIONAL VARIETY COMPANIES . . . . .</b>	<b>90</b>
November of 1888 through 1892 . . . . .	90
October of 1894 to September of 1896 . . . . .	102
1900, 1901, and 1903 through September . . . . .	109
<b>V. AMATEUR DRAMA . . . . .</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>VI. COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES . . . . .</b>	<b>133</b>
Dances . . . . .	133
Socials and Suppers . . . . .	137
Lectures . . . . .	139
Political Meetings . . . . .	144
Religious Services . . . . .	147
School Activities . . . . .	148
Celebrations . . . . .	149
Entertainments . . . . .	150
<b>VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS . . . . .</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>APPENDICES . . . . .</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: PROFESSIONAL DRAMATIC COMPANIES . . . . .</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: PROFESSIONAL VARIETY COMPANIES . . . . .</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: AMATEUR DRAMA . . . . .</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES . . . . .</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .</b>	<b>188</b>

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. The Dell Rapids Opera House (tall building) in either 1900 or 1901. (Courtesy of Mrs. James Nesby, Dell Rapids.) . . . . .	32
2. Front exterior of the opera house in 1968. . . . .	33
3. East side exterior of the opera house in 1968. . . . .	33
4. Close view of the back exterior . . . . .	36
5. The back exterior and street in 1968 . . . . .	36
6. Ground Plan Fold-out . . . . .	34
7. The renovated interior in 1951 for a Sioux Falls amateur group. (Courtesy of Mrs. James Nesby.) . . . .	38
8. Stage view in 1968. . . . .	40
9. Gallery view in 1968 . . . . .	40
10. Actor's right side of stage with pulley system. 1968 . . . . .	41
11. Actor's left side of stage. 1968 . . . . .	41
12. Looking up into stage ceiling. 1968 . . . . .	43
13. Storage space beneath stage floor. 1968 . . . . .	43
14. Trough in stage apron. 1968 . . . . .	43
15. Stair entrance to the opera house. 1968 . . . . .	43

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to provide a historical survey and analysis of the early theatrical and community activities that occurred in the Dell Rapids, South Dakota, Opera House. The range of the study extends from 1888 to 1903, although certain years of newspapers are missing in research leaving a portion of the study incomplete. Therefore, this thesis must limit itself to the existing material. The historical survey includes a chronological record of professional and amateur entertainments as well as community activities--performance dates, names of the entertainments or activities, names of the playwrights, and recorded audience attendances whenever possible. It is the further purpose of this study to describe these theatrical and community activities in the setting of the Dell Rapids community during the period in which these activities occurred.

Several reasons may be claimed for terminating the study during 1903: (1) the people of Dell Rapids became exposed to and participated in a broader range of amusements and recreations after 1900; (2) amateur drama ceased to produce in the opera house; (3) the professional traveling companies showed a decline in

theatrical quality; and (4) the opera house manager, W. S. Mitchell, joined a theatrical circuit which began a new era of a group control over professional companies assigned to the Dell Rapids Opera House and ended the past era of a self-managed and operated theatre.

This is not a complete study of all theatrical or community activities that took place within Dell Rapids between 1888 to 1903. The Odd Fellows Hall, the Fire House, church halls, rented rooms, and private homes were often used for such activities. However, the Dell Rapids Opera House was the center of most events and especially those of most significance to the community.

Since the Dell Rapids Opera House is still extant, it has been possible to include a ground plan and both early and recent photographs of the building. It is hoped that these materials will help to induce a more substantial understanding of the opera house and those events that transpired therein.

The primary reason for undertaking this study is the present existence of the Dell Rapids Opera House, which was only slightly renovated with the advent of motion pictures when the O'Leary brothers purchased the building in 1912. Since the opera house has not been used for theatrical activity in several years and is in a state of deterioration, its future may be in question. Presently it is utilized as a warehouse for furniture. It, therefore, seems advantageous to conduct this study before the opera house becomes extinct.

A secondary reason for this research project is the writer's own interest in the theatrical history of the western United States which was initiated by an upper division course of American theatre history at the University of Wyoming, where the writer attended undergraduate school. Since that time the writer has supplemented this interest with related courses at South Dakota State University and also with private readings.

Another reason for conducting this study is the need of augmenting and developing a concise theatrical picture of the eastern South Dakota boom era, in which the European immigrant and eastern American farmer came to South Dakota for an improved life, and of the eventual established communities that evolved. Their desire for theatrical entertainment, as related by newspaper accounts, was a prevalent force in their lives. The Theodore Switzer thesis, A History of Theatre and Theatrical Activities in Brookings, South Dakota From 1879 Through 1898, states on page four: ". . . it is hoped that other research projects will soon be undertaken in the eastern part of this state." With this in view, it is further hoped that future collection and assimilation of materials will eventually lead to a broader picture of these people and their entertainments.

Lastly, it is hoped that this study will make a contribution not only to Dell Rapids history but also to eastern South Dakota

theatrical history and that it will be of value when considering the vast picture of American theatrical history.

The primary source materials of this study were found to be the early Dell Rapids newspapers. The weekly periodicals used during the period of this study were: the Dell Rapids Journal which became the Sioux Falls Journal, the Dell Rapids Times, the Dell Rapids Tribune, and the Dell Rapids Times--Tribune of 1912. Unfortunately, there are some sizeable gaps in these papers found both on microfilm from the State Historical Society of South Dakota and the old papers located at the Dell Rapids Tribune office. The years 1893, 1897, 1899, and 1902 are missing. Nine months are missing from 1894, three months are missing from 1896, six weeks are missing from 1903, and five weeks are missing from 1901. In total, 111 months are covered in the study while 75 months remain missing. Only in one instance in the available material do the two leading newspapers, the Dell Rapids Times and the Dell Rapids Tribune, supplement each other--during 1892.

In addition to these early newspapers further material was found in a scrapbook in the Dell Rapids Library, later newspaper articles from the Sioux Falls Argus-Leader, the opera house building itself, personal interviews with some of the older residents of Dell Rapids, Minnehaha County court records, the Switzer thesis on Brookings theatrical activities from 1879 through 1898, and related books and articles discussing the theatrical history and the general history of the period.



The study employs a chronological description of the Dell Rapids Opera House entertainments and activities. Chapter I contains the introduction and the historical background of Dell Rapids. Chapter II discusses the opera house building and management of the period under investigation. Chapters III through V present a chronological description of the following topics respectively: touring professional drama, touring professional variety acts, and amateur drama. Chapter VI describes community activities in a topical form. Chapter VII summarizes the study and draws conclusions. Included in the appendix is a calendar of events.

Approved by the Board of Examiners, State of South Dakota, on \_\_\_\_\_ and published by \_\_\_\_\_, Rapid City, South Dakota.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DELL RAPIDS, SOUTH DAKOTA

Before examining the early Dell Rapids, South Dakota, Opera House and those activities that occurred therein, it is desirable, for a study of this nature, to investigate the history and environment of its community. A theatrical history is often in danger of losing its perspective if removed from the times in which that history has transpired. Donald D. Parker, a South Dakota historian, has written:

You may be interested in a particular phase of local history--economic, social, religious, educational, or what not. Nevertheless, you should give sufficient attention to what might be called the general history of your community to provide a fitting background for the special aspect which interests you and you should have some sort of a guide to direct your steps toward that end.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, the purpose of the second portion of this chapter is to provide a general description of the settlement of Dell Rapids which will serve as a background from which to view the specific history of its opera house. This is by no means an intricate history of the community, since that would prove too complicated and time consuming for this particular study.

---

<sup>1</sup>Donald D. Parker, Local History, How to Gather It, Write It, and Publish It, rev. and ed. Bertha E. Josephson (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1944), p. xiii.

## Founders of the City of Dell Rapids

Soldiers of the 22nd Infantry stationed at Fort Dakota in the Sioux River Valley said in 1866, "This country can't be brought into civilization short of a thousand years."<sup>2</sup> However, due to their presence and the protection they offered the settlers from Indiana, a rapid influx of people began to settle the valley in 1871.<sup>3</sup>

It was in this year that Peter Morse sighted "The Dells" along the Big Sioux River while on an exploring trip. This particular locality with its picturesque rock formations, fertile land, and water power appealed to him as a future townsite for the new homesteaders that were beginning to settle the region. Mr. Morse returned home to Osage, Iowa, and enlisted the assistance of Frank and Dennis Rice, brothers in the mill business, and Byron D. Graves who returned to "The Dells" with Mr. Morse in July of 1871 to develop the townsite. The Rice brothers came at a later time and purchased what was then one of the business districts of the village.<sup>4</sup> Others who settled in the vicinity in 1871 were J. C. Ervin, Cash Coates, Gilbert Rice, E. F. Metcalf, R. S. Alexander, and Albion Thorne.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Mrs. U. S. Earls, "History of Dell Rapids," Dell Rapids Tribune, June 9, 1955 (Written as a Dell Rapids Woman's Club project, January, 1952).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Charles A. Smith, A Comprehensive History of Minnehaha County, South Dakota (Mitchell, South Dakota: Educator Supply Company, 1949), p. 475.

<sup>5</sup>History of Southeastern Dakota, Its Settlement and Growth (Sioux City, Iowa: Western Publishing Company, 1881), p. 108.

In 1872 four different sites were laid out by Dennis Rice (south half of the south half of section 9), E. R. Metcalf (southwest quarter of section 10), Peter Morse (northwest quarter of section 10), and J. C. Ervin (north half of the south half of section 9) for the future business section of the new settlement.<sup>6</sup> Great rivalry ensued between these men until 1875 when a compromise was finally reached consolidating two of the sites. The townsite that was decided upon is the present one, southeast quarter of section 9, town 104, range 49.<sup>7</sup>

The neophyte settlement was called "Dell"<sup>8</sup> or "Dell City"<sup>9</sup> when its post office was established in 1871 with Albion Thorne as the first postmaster. On December 11, 1871, the first mail was delivered from Sioux Falls which gave rise to a Christmas celebration that consisted of the total population, thirteen people.<sup>10</sup>

The first mail carrier, Lewis Hewlitt, used "an Indian cutter made of ash poles and cottonwood boards"<sup>11</sup> for travel through the heavy snows during the winter. The mail was carried in a grain sack

---

<sup>6</sup>Smith, p. 476.

<sup>7</sup>History of Southeastern Dakota, p. 108.

<sup>8</sup>M. Lisle Reese, South Dakota, A Guide to the State (New York: Hastings House, 1952), p. 330.

<sup>9</sup>Smith, p. 476.

<sup>10</sup>Reese, p. 330.

<sup>11</sup>History of Southeastern Dakota, p. 109.

and kept at Albion Thorne's home in a small metal trunk. A year later "Dell City" became Dell Rapids, the name being made official in 1873 by the Post Office Department.<sup>12</sup>

#### The Development of Transportation

One of the most imposing problems facing the people of Dell Rapids was one of transportation. Located on the west side of the Big Sioux River, the early settlers had to find some means of crossing in order to secure trade and communication with anyone east of the river. In the spring of 1872, Albion Thorne and his family's safety became jeopardized by a rising river. Having crossed the river on an ice gorge, Thorne walked down three miles of the river to borrow a boat from an unidentified man. He then managed to get the boat across the river to aid his marooned family. A few days later Thorne bought this boat from the man for seven dollars, but "it took all the money there was in the settlement to pay for it."<sup>13</sup> For the next two years this boat was the only means of crossing the river for the settlement.<sup>14</sup> A ferry boat was built by subscription in 1874 which was large enough to carry teams. It was operated by

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, p. 477.

<sup>14</sup> Earls, Dell Rapids Tribune, June 9, 1955.

Thomas Lyons until the first bridge was built in 1877.<sup>15</sup> This first bridge cost \$2,500 to build, but was swept away in the flood of 1880. A second bridge was constructed by 1881<sup>16</sup> and was described as: "costing a much smaller sum, nevertheless answers the purpose sufficiently well."<sup>17</sup>

A territorial road that served Dell Rapids was created in 1877 by an act of the Legislative Assembly. It extended from the Minnesota State Line to Fort Thompson, which lies south of Pierre. The people of Dell Rapids were delighted with this improvement and sent out two men to conduct the survey, Albion Thorne and R. S. Alexander. The object of this highway was to provide communications with the Black Hills. It was the most important means of transportation for the village until the arrival of the railroad.<sup>18</sup>

During 1873 the United States suffered an economic panic which brought the nation's railroad construction to a stop along the western Minnesota and Iowa borders. In addition to this factor, South Dakota had received unfavorable publicity in the east from its grasshopper plague, leaving no doubt in the minds of the railroad capitalists that western expansion was impossible until conditions

---

<sup>15</sup>History of Southeastern Dakota, p. 111.

<sup>16</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, November 30, 1895.

<sup>17</sup>History of Southeastern Dakota, p. 110.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-111.

improved. However, in 1877 Marvin Hughitt, the manager of the Chicago-North Western Railway Company, made a personal inspection of the Dakota prairie and generated great enthusiasm for his company to extend westward from Minnesota to the Missouri River in Pierre.<sup>19</sup> The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad Company was quick to take up the challenge of its competitor with its lines running from Canton to Chamberlain. This company also constructed lines to connect as many communities as possible.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the great Dakota Boom Era was in full swing with immigrants pouring into South Dakota by rail.<sup>21</sup>

It was the Southern Minnesota Division of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad Company that extended its lines to Dell Rapids. The first train arrived from Flandreau on the 17th of September, 1880<sup>22</sup> to "everything that could make a noise."<sup>23</sup>

The people paraded the streets and speeches were made by prominent citizens. Train service was established and the long hauls of grain and

---

<sup>19</sup>Herbert S. Schell, History of South Dakota (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 159.

<sup>20</sup>Herbert S. Schell, South Dakota, Its Beginnings and Growth (New York: American Book Company, 1942), p. 95.

<sup>21</sup>Schell, History of South Dakota, p. 159.

<sup>22</sup>History of Southeastern Dakota, p. 111.

<sup>23</sup>Smith, p. 476.

livestock to market, to Luverne, Worthington, LeMars, and later to Sioux Falls, remained only in memory. Only those who have experienced those long treks over the prairie trails can realize and appreciate what railway service meant to the people of this region.<sup>24</sup>

For years to come the Dell Rapids train depot became the very pulse of the city with all train arrivals bringing communication and business to the community. According to Mr. Harry Blow, a long time resident of Dell Rapids, the depot also became the place to meet, to talk, to wait for the next train; if any action was going to occur, it would occur at the train station.<sup>25</sup>

#### Early Businesses and Industry

When Frank and Dennis Rice purchased their land for a mill site they had hopes of controlling the water power at Sioux Falls, thus enabling their property to become the townsite, experience a boom, and eventually be chosen as the county seat. Due to the Rice brothers' visions the first businesses were built on their property in 1873 by Byron D. Graves<sup>26</sup> and a Mr. Cowan. Mr. Cowan's business was a double store building occupied by J. C. Graves and a Mr. Lukins, hardware merchants, and John E. Hulitt who ran a general merchandise store. Across from these stores a blacksmith

---

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Interview with Mr. Harry Blow, Dell Rapids, September 5, 1968.

<sup>26</sup>History of Southeastern Dakota, p. 109.



shop was owned by a man named Stone. When the townsite compromise was reached in 1875 the Rice brothers' property had not been chosen for the permanent town location, nor had they been successful in making Dell Rapids the county seat. Thus, these beginning businesses were moved to the decided townsite, which remains as the present business section.<sup>27</sup>

One of the first necessities for the early settlers was a flour mill in which to grind their wheat. Dell Rapids, with its water power, became the site for one of the first mills in the region.<sup>28</sup> The Rice brothers, who had had previous mill experience in Iowa, constructed a dam across the Big Sioux River in 1871 and the next year built their flour mill which they operated until 1874 when they sold it to William Van Eps for \$9,000.<sup>29</sup> Mr. Van Eps greatly improved the mill and in 1877 built a solid stone dam across the river, taking the place of the original dam. The flour mill remained in operation until 1897 when the river carried away a portion of the mill building.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Smith, p. 476.

<sup>28</sup> Donald D. Parker, Pioneering in the Upper Big Sioux Valley (unpublished history compiled and written by D. D. Parker, 1967), p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> Dell Rapids Tribune, November 30, 1895.

<sup>30</sup> Parker, Pioneering in the Upper Big Sioux Valley, p. 65.

Another vital industry contributing to the growth of Dell Rapids was the stone quarry industry. Although source material is scant concerning this industry, stone quarrying developed soon after the early settlers arrived. Two large quarries operated--the "west" which was owned by the Dell Rapids Granite Company and the "east" owned by L. G. Everist. Several smaller companies were also in operation.<sup>31</sup> Around 1887 or 1889 these industries began to flourish and by 1892 the Dell Rapids Times reports:

Among the important industries of this city is the stone quarries of red granite, which employ a large force of men to operate them. The stone is sent by rail east, west, north and south. The company are filling a contract for 1,000 carloads. The supply is inexhaustible and demand increasing. There is wealth in the quarries of Dell Rapids that no man can estimate.<sup>32</sup>

The stone, although often referred to as granite, is actually red quartzite, a variety of sandstone. Because it has durability and can easily be excavated it was used as paving blocks throughout the Middle West. It is also a popular building stone due to its attractive, unchangeable pink color and its strength.<sup>33</sup> Dell Rapids built the majority of her business houses with this stone in

---

<sup>31</sup>"Stone Business Was Important to Growth of Dell Rapids" (newspaper clipping located in "History of Dell Rapids" scrapbook, Dell Rapids Public Library).

<sup>32</sup>Dell Rapids Times, December 16, 1892.

<sup>33</sup>Schell, History of South Dakota, p. 376.

the 1880's and 1890's leaving, even today, a handsome likeness among the downtown structures.

Because the quarry business was hard hit by the panic of 1893, it ceased to produce as extensively as it had originally. Nevertheless, the Dell Rapids quarries were one of the few quarries to survive and are still in operation today.<sup>34</sup>

J. E. Fargo and John Dowe were the first men in Dell Rapids to venture into the creamery business. However, they operated only a year, closing in 1882. A second creamery appeared in 1887. But it was the third creamery, built in 1892, that operated successfully for several years. It had capacity for 25,000 pounds of milk per day and the plant was considered to be well equipped for its time. Most of its milk, obtained from the local farmers, was shipped to New York.<sup>35</sup>

As business increased and the community became permanent, a need for banks became apparent. In 1880 the Dell Rapids Bank was organized with a capital stock of \$25,000. On April 8, 1892, the bank went into voluntary liquidation and became The Dell Rapids State Bank. Soon two more banks appeared: The First National Bank of Dell Rapids and The Granite City Bank.<sup>36</sup> By 1896 the First

---

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>35</sup>Smith, p. 485.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 484-485.

National Bank had a capital stock of \$75,000; the Granite City Bank, \$50,000; and the Dell Rapids State Bank, \$10,000.<sup>37</sup>

The city of Dell Rapids has had a number of weekly newspapers since the Dell City Journal was printed in 1872 by J. C. Ervin in Webster City, Iowa. This paper lasted only a year. By 1879 the Dell Rapids Exponent was publishing under the management of E. C. Whalen and later Charles E. Griswold.<sup>38</sup> It was this newspaper that during the terrible blizzard of 1880 courageously printed its copy on rags because no supplies could reach the city.<sup>39</sup> The Dell Rapids Times was the next newspaper to establish itself in 1885. It was owned and operated by W. H. Davis and W. C. Nesbit who, in 1892, sold the paper to the Ward Brothers. Nesbit, in turn, established a new paper that same year--the Dell Rapids Tribune, which is the weekly newspaper at this time.

#### Early Growth

With Dell Rapids well on its way to becoming a permanent community, a board of trustees was established; its first meeting was held on March 24, 1879. This board instigated fire breaks to be fixed around the town, insuring it against the treacherous prairie fires of the times.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, August 8, 1896.

<sup>38</sup>Smith, p. 483.

<sup>39</sup>Conversation with Mr. Virgil Smith, present editor of the Dell Rapids Tribune.

<sup>40</sup>Smith, p. 477.

In December of 1888 a special election was held to determine whether Dell Rapids should become a city under the general law. One hundred and twenty-six votes were cast in the affirmative, while only eight votes opposed the incorporation of a city. The next month city officers were elected: E. J. Elliot, mayor; J. A. Cooley, William Williamson, W. J. Sibbison, O. H. Smith, G. A. Willard, and J. A. Uline, aldermen; M. R. Kenefick, treasurer; and S. H. Burk, justice of the peace.<sup>41</sup>

Dell Rapids held its first school meeting in November 1873 with John E. Hoyt as director. A house was rented from Mr. Manns for a three months' term and a teacher was hired. By 1876 a wooden school building housed fifty-three children. Two years later a nine months' school term was established. A sturdy two-story building was erected in 1885, the wooden school house having been blown down two years earlier.<sup>42</sup>

The first church established was the First Baptist Church in 1872. Ten years later four other denominational faiths were represented.<sup>43</sup> The church groups in Dell Rapids, as in many other Mid-West communities, became a strong and vigorous force in the lives of its people.

---

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 478.

<sup>42</sup>Earls, Dell Rapids Tribune, June 9, 1955.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

A volunteer fire department was organized in 1883 but gradually ceased to exist by 1887, only to be needed the next year in Dell Rapids' worst fire. Finally a new organization was created in 1894.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the early years in Dell Rapids was its population development resulting from immigration. A popular joke of the times advertised the Dakotas in this way:

It is said that the following argument used by the Swede real estate dealer fetches 'em every time: "What for you in Canada? Come to Dakota. First year you be commissioner; second year go to legislature; third year, you be president. Long time you stay in Canada before you be queen."<sup>45</sup>

When the Fourth of July was celebrated in 1872 at Dell Rapids, there were 99 persons present.<sup>46</sup> By 1880 the population was 993;<sup>47</sup> in 1888 there were 1,300 persons;<sup>48</sup> and by 1896, 1,500 people lived within the city.<sup>49</sup>

In the 1870's and 1880's large numbers of Norwegians and Swedes settled the Sioux Valley area<sup>50</sup> while the native-born

<sup>44</sup>Smith, p. 486.

<sup>45</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, February 1, 1896.

<sup>46</sup>Smith, p. 476.

<sup>47</sup>Dell Rapids Times, December 1, 1891.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., April 6, 1888.

<sup>49</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, August 8, 1896.

<sup>50</sup>Schell, History of South Dakota, p. 115.

immigrants came from the neighboring states of Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois.<sup>51</sup> Also, Dell Rapids received skilled stone cutters from England and Scotland when the quarries were operating. However, due to low wages most of these men eventually left the town and were replaced in their trade by Norwegians.<sup>52</sup>

Dell Rapids, like many other industrious South Dakota towns, did not wait for the immigrants to discover the region but actively sought to import these people.

Mr. G. A. Uline has called our attention to the fact that there will be a very large foreign immigration to this place this season. He informs us that he has sold fifty tickets for passage from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, and knows of 100 persons altogether who are coming to this country.<sup>53</sup>

The newspapers, in a campaign to promote Dell Rapids in the eyes of prospective immigrants, would often print lists of active town establishments. In a boom addition of 1888 the paper advertised "two banks, three grain elevators, lumber interests, a flouring mill, four churches, a large brick kiln, a tow mill, a creamery, and a newspaper . . ." <sup>54</sup> By 1896 the Dell Rapids Tribune reported: "Dell Rapids has about 40 prosperous business

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Mr. Harry Dieson, October 5, 1968.

<sup>53</sup> Dell Rapids Times, February 24, 1888.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., December 21, 1888.

houses, a good graded school with six departments, . . . and a complete system of water works, which supplies the town with pure spring water."<sup>55</sup>

Dell Rapids' business interests are represented by the following: Two weekly newspapers . . . , creamery, flour mill, tow mill, five elevators, three banks, two lumber yards, four machinery houses, four general stores, four drug stores, three restaurants, two jewelry stores, one feed store, one photograph gallery, three harness stores, one boot and shoe store, three hardware stores, one furniture store, three barber shops, two hotels, one tailor shop, three millinery stores, three lawyers, four physicians, two butcher shops, four real estate offices, three blacksmith shops, wagon shop, copper shop, two shoe shops, two livery and feed stables, one bakery.<sup>56</sup>

As a business community, Dell Rapids took much pride in her achievements, claiming, "without fear of contradiction that for the size of our little city there is not to be found in South Dakota, or in the northwest, a town anywhere whose business men surpass our own."<sup>57</sup> Surprisingly, the Dell Rapids' merchants came through the business depression of 1893 and 1894 successfully with two business failures recorded.<sup>58</sup>

It is exceedingly difficult to catch the spirit of a past community and transfer its mood to the written page. However,

---

<sup>55</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, August 8, 1896.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1895.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.



several words from an editorial printed in 1888 represent to this writer the predominant feeling of the times. ". . . in the fairest valley wrought by the Creator, is Dell Rapids. Population, 1,300. No saloons. Five churches. . . ." <sup>59</sup> An interesting note to this comment--the saloon had burned down just two months ago.

#### Grasshoppers, Storms, Fires

Like other settlements in the Mid-West, Dell Rapids suffered its share of disasters. Life was not given freely to these people.

In the first years as the homesteaders in the vicinity planted their newly made fields, a plague of grasshoppers hit the land causing extensive damage to crops in both 1874 and 1876.

Reverend George Spence, a Congregational minister, writing to his missionary society from Codington reported:

I stated that the young, or larvae, of the grasshoppers were swarming on the prairies. They became a scourge for us again.

. . . . .

About the last of June they took leave of us, rising in great clouds; and, as we would look up towards the sun, we could see them, like thickly-driving snowflakes, filling the air. We had seen them flying, thus on nearly every clear day since; but they have not come down on us in any very great numbers. They have, however, as is reported, visited with almost total destruction the part of our valley

---

<sup>59</sup> Dell Rapids Times, April 6, 1888.

about Dell Rapids and Sioux Falls, where, up to July first, there were the heaviest and most extensive crops ever yet attempted. . . .<sup>60</sup>

The winter of 1880 was recorded as being exceptionally severe with a blizzard initiating it on October 14. Trains were unable to get through until April, leaving the populace with only railroad ties and twisted hay for fuel. That spring the ice in the Sioux River did not break until April 18 causing the worst flood that has ever been recorded in the Valley.<sup>61</sup>

The blizzard in January, 1888, "was the worst storm of all time."<sup>62</sup> It was a relatively short blizzard, lasting only ten hours, but the wind velocity was considered to be sixty or seventy miles an hour blowing in a circular fashion with temperatures thirty and forty degrees below zero. "One could not see the buildings on the opposite side of the street."<sup>63</sup> The Territorial Board of Education placed the number of fatalities at 130.<sup>64</sup>

On February 14, 1888, Dell Rapids suffered the most crippling blow in its history. Mrs. M. E. Pollard was closing her husband's store for the evening when a faulty brass lamp ignited.

---

<sup>60</sup>Parker, Pioneering In The Upper Big Sioux Valley, pp. 128-129.

<sup>61</sup>Earls, Dell Rapids Tribune, June 9, 1955.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Dell Rapids Times, January 20, 1888.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., March 16, 1888.

The fire was immediately put out with snow, only light damage occurring. Later the fire started again, and when the fire hose was laid out the valves froze leaving the equipment entirely useless. The fire was again put out by the citizens and Mr. Pollard sat up until two in the morning watching for stray sparks. Satisfied that the fire was dead, he went to bed. Shortly after he retired a blaze erupted for the third time. Without fire apparatus all that could be done was to rescue the people living downtown and remove as much property as was possible from the buildings. The people of Dell Rapids watched the flames envelop eleven buildings on the south side of the street, one after another. Fortunately there was no southerly wind to carry the flames to the north side. An estimate of loss was set at \$25,000 with only \$13,200 worth of insurance on the property. Dell Rapids was thankful, however, that no lives had been lost.<sup>65</sup>

Although Dell Rapids had its share of trouble, it might be noted that at no time did the city suffer any serious epidemics such as occurred in Brookings.<sup>66</sup> Judging from newspaper accounts, farming accidents took as many lives as serious diseases.

---

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., February 17, 1888.

<sup>66</sup>Theodore R. Switzer, "A History of Theatre and Theatrical Activities in Brookings, South Dakota From 1879 Through 1898" (unpublished Master's thesis, South Dakota State University, 1963), p. 26.

In conclusion, it may be said that Dell Rapids was founded in 1871 by men who were interested in the available water power for mill sites and rich farm land. Although losing the county seat to Sioux Falls, the community continued to grow steadily as transportation and communication improved. Despite setbacks of harsh weather, grasshoppers, and the serious fire of 1888, Dell Rapids never lost its "little city" vigor.

- <sup>1</sup>Dell Rapids Daily, March 15, 1888.
- <sup>2</sup>Dell Rapids Daily, April 11, 1888.
- <sup>3</sup>Dell Rapids Daily, June 18, 1888.
- <sup>4</sup>Dell Rapids Daily, February 1, 1888.

## CHAPTER II

## THE DELL RAPIDS OPERA HOUSE BUILDING

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the Dell Rapids Opera House Building through a discussion of its planning, construction, exterior, interior, scenery, improvements, changes, and management. To further a comprehension of the discussion, a scaled ground plan and recent as well as earlier photographs are included.

As the people of Dell Rapids cleared away the rubble from their great fire in 1888, their thoughts turned toward rebuilding. The newspapers, anxious to instill new vigor in their citizens, campaigned for "a good opera house, more boarding houses, tenement houses, stores, and another railroad."<sup>1</sup> It will be remembered that at this time 1,300 people lived within the town.<sup>2</sup> The only suitable meeting place for entertainment and activities seems to have been the Masonic Hall<sup>3</sup> which housed 350 people when "crowded to its utmost capacity."<sup>4</sup> A small stage had been erected in the north

---

<sup>1</sup>Dell Rapids Times, March 3, 1888.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., April 6, 1888.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., June 22, 1888.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., February 3, 1888.

end to accompany touring professional companies,<sup>5</sup> but it was reported to have been "meaguer."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the cry was rendered, "For goodness' sake give us an opera house."<sup>7</sup> In fact, the Dell Rapids Times announced before any business arrangements had been made that "If the south side of Pearl street is built up this season it is probable that an opera house will be one of the new buildings."<sup>8</sup> There simply was no question to the matter. Dell Rapids not only needed but insisted upon an opera house. Nor were the demands and needs of this community out of keeping with the times. Vera Roberts has written in her book On Stage that:

It is estimated that whereas in 1800 there were but a handful of theatres and a mere 150 professional actors in the United States, by 1885 there were five thousand theatres in more than thirty-five hundred towns.<sup>9</sup>

#### Planning and Construction

The first persons to make a serious attempt toward the planning of an opera house were not the builders of the Dell Rapids Opera House, J. A. Cooley and M. R. Kenefick, but rather the Dell Rapids Woman's Christian Temperance Union. These ladies

---

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Dell Rapids Journal, April 26, 1888.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Dell Rapids Times, March 3, 1888.

<sup>9</sup>Vera Roberts, On Stage (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 381.

having "united upon a splendid idea"<sup>10</sup> proposed to build, with the aid of a private individual, a two-story building.<sup>11</sup> This structure would contain a store and reading room on the first floor with the second story fitted for an opera house.<sup>12</sup> The women were in earnest toward this project and had begun to procure funds by late spring.<sup>13</sup> However, in July the W.C.T.U. had rented E. E. Griswold's brick block making the lower room into an assembly room while the upstairs contained their library and reading rooms.<sup>14</sup> It is not known why the W.C.T.U. discontinued their original plans to build an opera house, but when Cooley and Kenefick announced their plans to build the same structure this many have relieved the organization from the great financial burden of such a project. Nevertheless, these women can be credited with the first practical steps taken toward the planning of an opera house.

In 1886 John A. Cooley and Michael R. Kenefick joined in a property partnership for lots 5 and 6 (except for two feet on the west side of lot 6) in block 24. They purchased this land from R. J. Wells for \$1,800.<sup>15</sup> It was on these lots that the Merchants

---

<sup>10</sup>Dell Rapids Journal, April 19, 1888.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Dell Rapids Times, June 1, 1888.

<sup>13</sup>Dell Rapids Journal, May 9, 1888.

<sup>14</sup>Sioux Falls Journal, July 14, 1888.

<sup>15</sup>Minnehaha County Court House, Warranty Deed Record, Vol. "W," page 363, March 3, 1886.

Hotel, owned by Cooley and Kenefick, burned to the ground in the fire of 1888, leaving them \$2,000 of insurance to rebuild.<sup>16</sup>

No biographical material can be found regarding John A. Cooley, but judging from newspaper accounts, he was a popular business man in the community of Dell Rapids, having large land holdings in South Dakota and Iowa.

Michael R. Kenefick, who was most often referred to by the newspapers and townspeople as M. R. Kenefick, was born in Canada in 1853, but soon after immigrated with his family to Wisconsin.<sup>17</sup> He farmed until 1868 when he lost his hand in a gun accident and, consequently, moved to Iowa where he taught school. In pursuit of a law degree he was admitted to the bar in Franklin County, Iowa, in 1874 and soon after came to Moody County in South Dakota.<sup>18</sup> In 1878 he came to Dell Rapids to go into law partnership with Mr. Robert Robertson who died in 1881, leaving Kenefick with the practice. When the First National Bank became established, he was elected its cashier and retained that position for many years in Dell Rapids.<sup>19</sup>

Kenefick served the community as President of the City Council, a member of the school board, and was elected Mayor in

---

<sup>16</sup>Dell Rapids Times, February 17, 1888.

<sup>17</sup>Dana R. Bailey, History of Minnehaha County, South Dakota, (Sioux Falls: Brown and Saenger Printers, 1899), p. 1036.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.



1890.<sup>20</sup> He was recognized as an energetic, industrious man "who wanted to bring cultural influences to the little prairie town, so he spared no expense in providing an opera house which equaled the best in the state."<sup>21</sup>

In the first week of June, 1888, the Dell Rapids Times announced that Cooley and Kenefick were planning to rebuild on their lots "a two store, two story jasper granite block."<sup>22</sup> No mention was made concerning an opera house. However, in one week's time, complete and definite arrangements had been made.

Cooley and Kenefick have decided to make the second story of their new block into an opera house with a seating capacity of about 450. It will be rented by I. F. Angstead, who will manage it. The new block will be something like the Temple Court block at Sioux Falls. There will be a large arch and tower in front. The entrances of the lower store rooms will go in from each side and the entrance to the opera house will be in the center. Messrs. Cooley and Kenefick propose making it the finest building in town and the opera house will be made complete in every respect. This is something that has long been needed, and it will be greatly appreciated by the people.<sup>23</sup>

Before construction was begun, Cooley and Kenefick bought from Mrs. E. E. Griswold the remaining two feet on the west side

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Mrs. James Nesby, "Dell Rapids Grand Opera House Sale Recalls Old History," Argus-Leader, April 30, 1951.

<sup>22</sup> Dell Rapids Times, June 8, 1888.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

of lot 6 for \$100.<sup>24</sup> It might also be mentioned that there must have been some doubt for Cooley and Kenefick regarding their complete ownership of the two lots. During and shortly after the building of the opera house, two quit claim deeds were filed, one to H. L. Hollister (lots 5 and 6, block 24) for one dollar,<sup>25</sup> and a second to Fanny Richardson (lots 5 and 6, block 24) for the same amount.<sup>26</sup>

A solid foundation was laid in the middle of July with a Paulson and Bentson having the contract for the opera house's masonry work.<sup>27</sup> The frame was started the next month, with I. F. Angstead directing all carpentry work, while it was estimated that "seven car loads of lumber"<sup>28</sup> would be necessary in the building process. In early September there was a delay due to the dressing of the stone, but the front arch and walls were close to completion.<sup>29</sup> On October 6 all stone work and exterior construction was completed, while the interior plastering and carpentry work ensued

---

<sup>24</sup>Minnehaha County Court House, Warranty Deed, Vol. 30, p. 172, July 16, 1888.

<sup>25</sup>Minnehaha County Court House, Quit Claim Deed, Vol. 29, p. 448, September 8, 1888.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 558, November 16, 1888.

<sup>27</sup>Dell Rapids Times, July 27, 1888.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., August 10, 1888.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., September 14, 1888.

until the opening of the Dell Rapids Opera House on November 5, 1888.<sup>30</sup>

The Dell Rapids Times, eager to suggest a name for the new structure, offered "The Dell Opera House."<sup>31</sup> Cooley and Kenefick, however, had something different in mind.

The new opera house is called the 'Grand Opera House.' Just as good a name as the one THE TIMES suggested; the only objection that can be raised to it is its common use, nearly every opera house in the country having the same name. We favor that which is original. But let it be known as the 'Grand.'<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, the early newspapers rarely used the term "Grand" when mentioning the opera house; instead, they simply called it "the opera house" with no capitalization. At the present time most Dell Rapids residents refer to the structure as the "Old Grand."

The completion of the opera house generated a certain amount of enthusiasm, if for no one else, at least for the ladies. "Saturday M. A. Hagan & Co. will be prepared to execute all orders for opera bonnets and hats. A new trimmer will be in attendance."<sup>33</sup>

#### Exterior

As has been stated previously, the opera house structure

---

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., October 12, 1888.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., October 26, 1888.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., November 2, 1888.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.



FIGURE 1. The Dell Rapids Opera House (tall building) in either 1900 or 1901. (Courtesy of Mrs. James Nesby, Dell Rapids.)



FIGURE 2. Front exterior of the opera house in 1968.



FIGURE 3. East side exterior of the opera house in 1968.

was a two-story building containing two stores on the first floor with the stage and auditorium on the second floor. It also had a basement.<sup>34</sup> The stone used for the building was the red quartzite from the quarries in Dell Rapids. The new building measured ninety feet deep and forty-five feet wide.<sup>35</sup>

The front of the block is constructed with an arch in the center, from which extends the entrances to the store and opera house above. The front of each store is solid plate glass, so that they have elegant show windows.<sup>36</sup>

Affixed directly under the center arched windows on the second floor was an iron veranda. On this platform a speaker could address a crowd in the street below, although this was never mentioned in newspaper accounts nor did the old timers who were interviewed ever remember this happening. The veranda was removed in the last few years.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup>" . . . the footing wall is to be four (4) feet thick and one (1) foot high, the basement wall above this is to be two (2) feet thick and eight (8) feet high above the footing wall, and the main wall above the basement wall is to be eighteen (18) inches thick and at least two stories high with good materials and done in good workman-line manner."

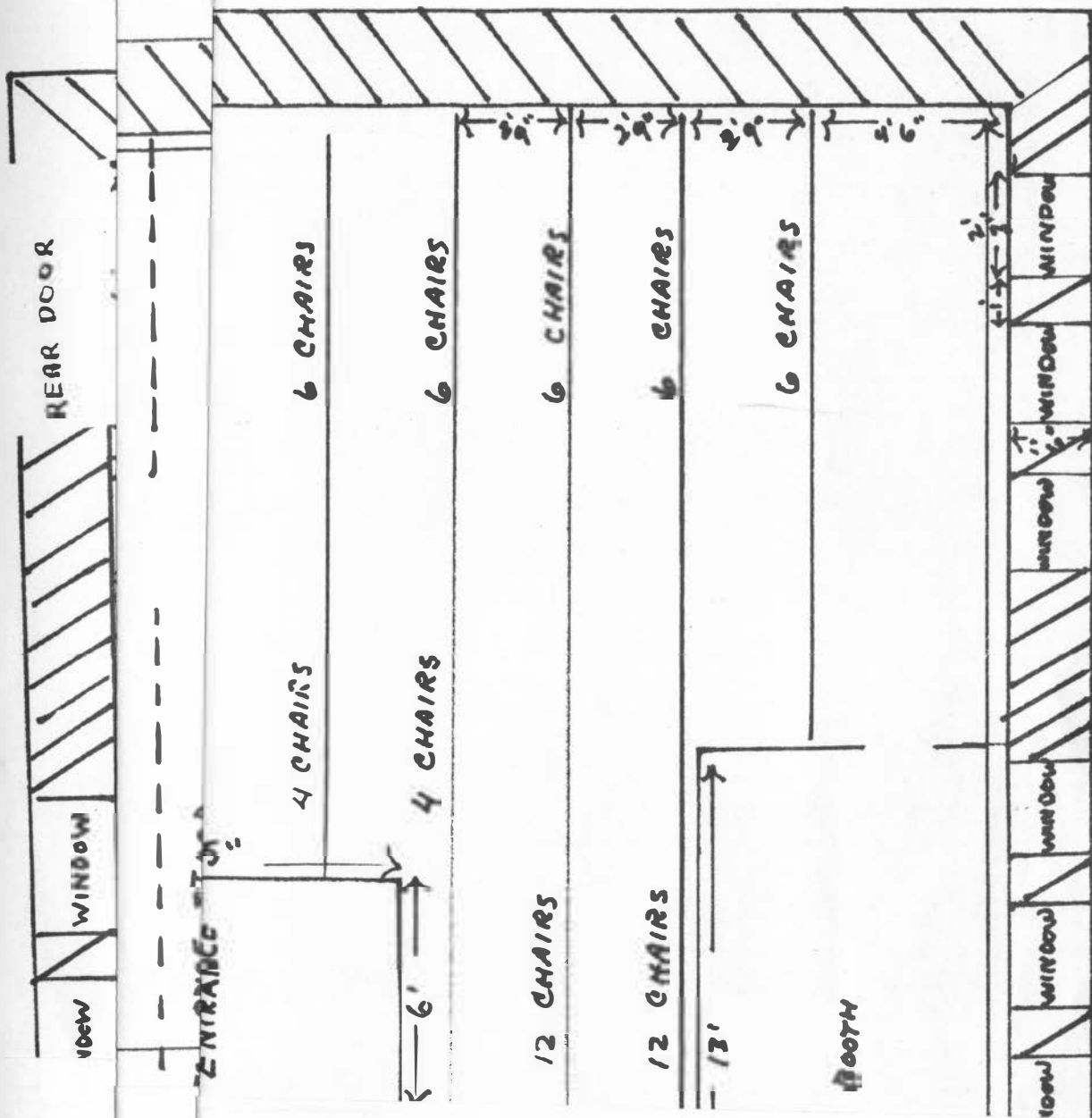
Minnehaha County Court House, Party Wall Contract,  
Miscellaneous Vol. "C," pp. 232-3, July 16, 1888.

<sup>35</sup>Dell Rapids Times, December 21, 1888.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Interview with Mr. Harry Blow, September 5, 1968.

FIGURE 6. Ground Plan Fold-out. The interior was measured with a steel tape on July 5, 1968. Due to extreme warpage in the walls and frame, dimensions have changed through the years.  
Scale:  $\frac{1}{2}$ " = 1'.





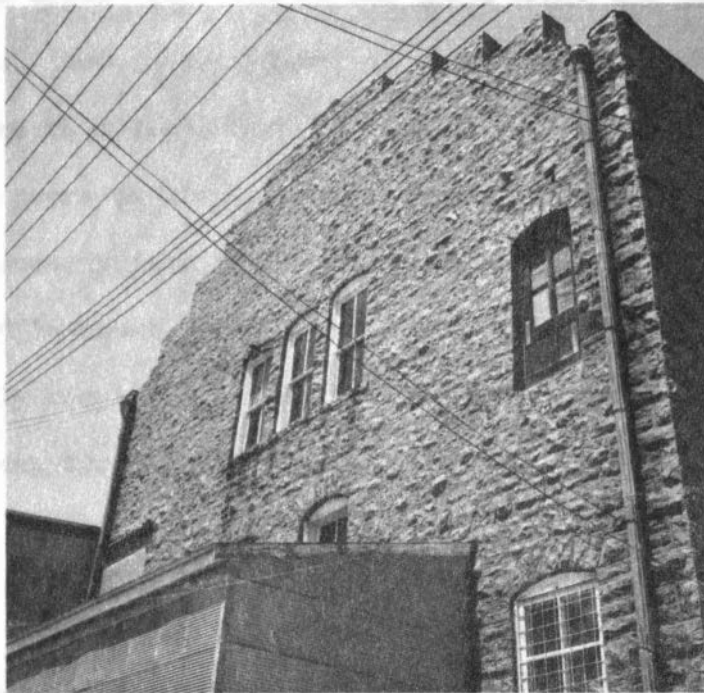


FIGURE 4. Close view of  
the back exterior.

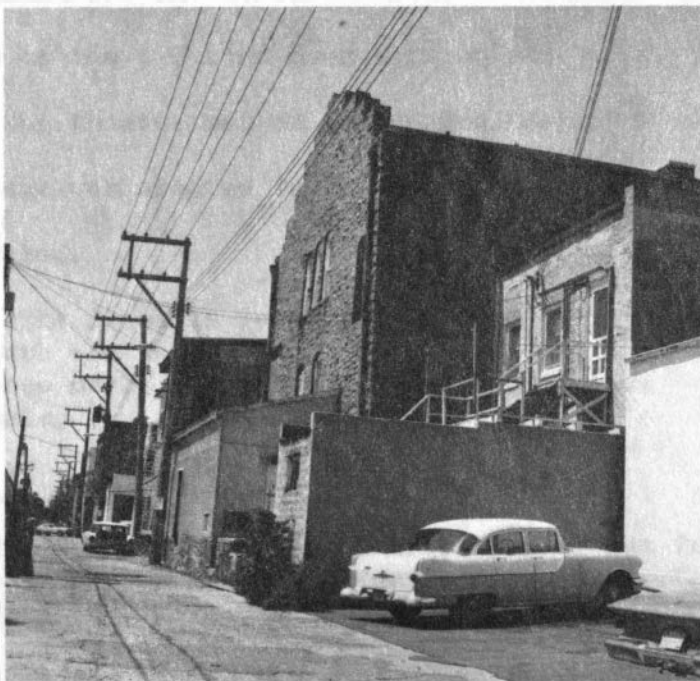


FIGURE 5. The back exterior  
and street in 1968.



On the upper back side of the opera house two rear doors were included. Toward the right, as viewed from the alley, is an obsolete three foot door, the staircase to it no longer remaining. Large double doors on the left side were obviously built for the movement of scenery into the opera house. Since the Dell Rapids train station is about a block behind the rear portion of the building early companies probably found it convenient to carry their equipment through the six-foot doors.

#### Interior

Since many of our theatres today encompass an entire building it might seem unnatural for the Dell Rapids Opera House to be located on the second floor. This structuring was not, however, uncommon for the times. Maxine Schlingman states: "A great many of the old time ones were called 'up-stairs houses' meaning that the theatre was on the second floor."<sup>38</sup>

The stage was erected in the north end of the second story and was not raked.

The floor is level from the stage in the south end to the front entrances, and the space north of that is occupied by raised seats.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup>Maxine Schlingman, "The Contribution of the Traveling Company to the American Theatre," (unpublished Master's thesis, Marquette University, April, 1938), p. 113.

<sup>39</sup>Dell Rapids Times, November 2, 1888.



FIGURE 7. The renovated interior in 1951 for a Sioux Falls amateur group. (Courtesy of Mrs. James Nesby.)

The opera house still retains this same form that was described by the Dell Rapids Times in 1888. Only a projection booth has been added in the gallery with the advent of movies in 1912.

There seems to be some confusion regarding the original seating capacity. While the building was under consideration 450 was reported to be the expected seating capacity,<sup>40</sup> although by the time the structure was completed it was twice reported that 600 people could be seated.<sup>41</sup> By 1951, when a Sioux Falls amateur company was producing melodrama in the opera house, the seating capacity had lowered to 450.<sup>42</sup>

Straight-back movable wooden chairs were the first seats offered the Dell Rapids audience. These were placed in the raised gallery when a dance or activity took place on the parquette.<sup>43</sup> When movies came to the opera house single chairs finished in red and bound together by a board beneath them were reported to have

---

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., June 15, 1888.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., October 26, 1888.  
Ibid., December 21, 1888.

<sup>42</sup>Mrs. James Nesby, "Dell Rapids Grand Opera House Sale Recalls Old History."

<sup>43</sup>Interview with Mr. Harry Blow. Mr. Blow helped the managers, as a young boy, clean the opera house and has been a life time resident of Dell Rapids.

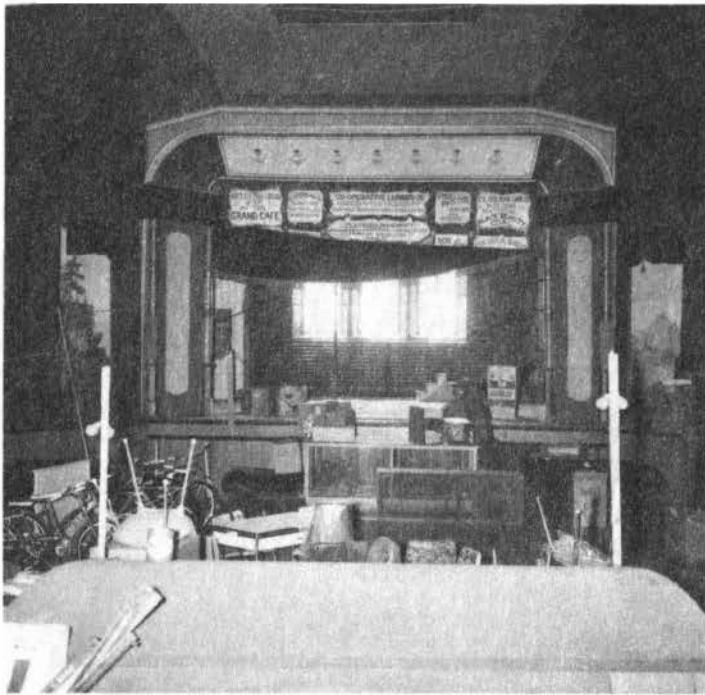


FIGURE 8. Stage view in 1968.

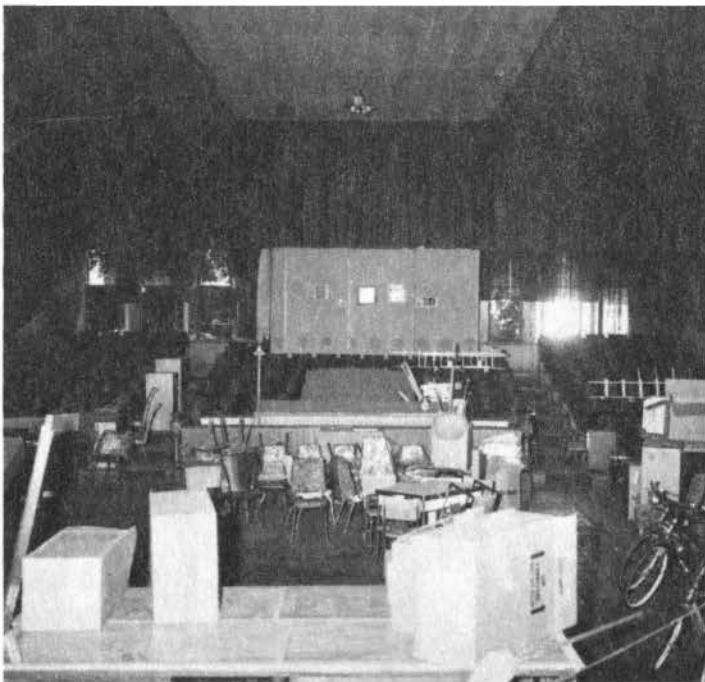


FIGURE 9. Gallery view in 1968.

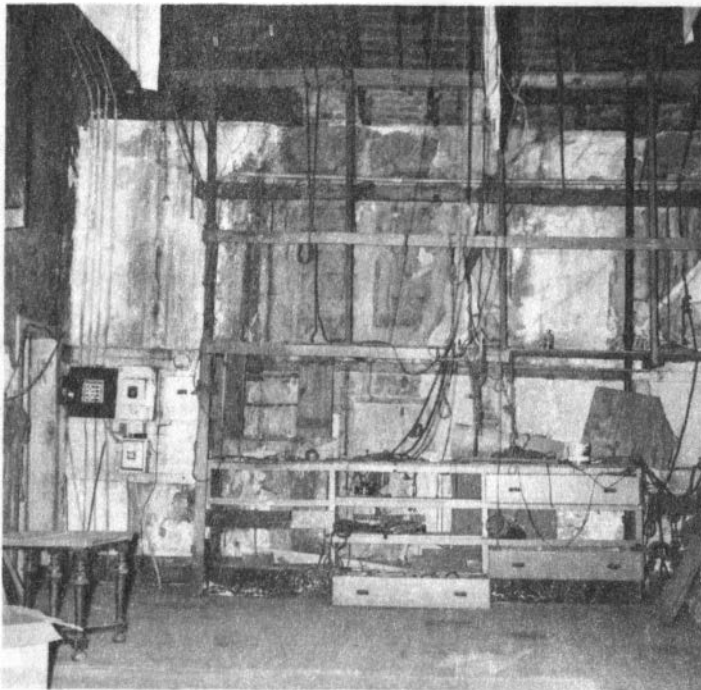


FIGURE 10. Actor's right side of stage  
with pulley system, 1968,

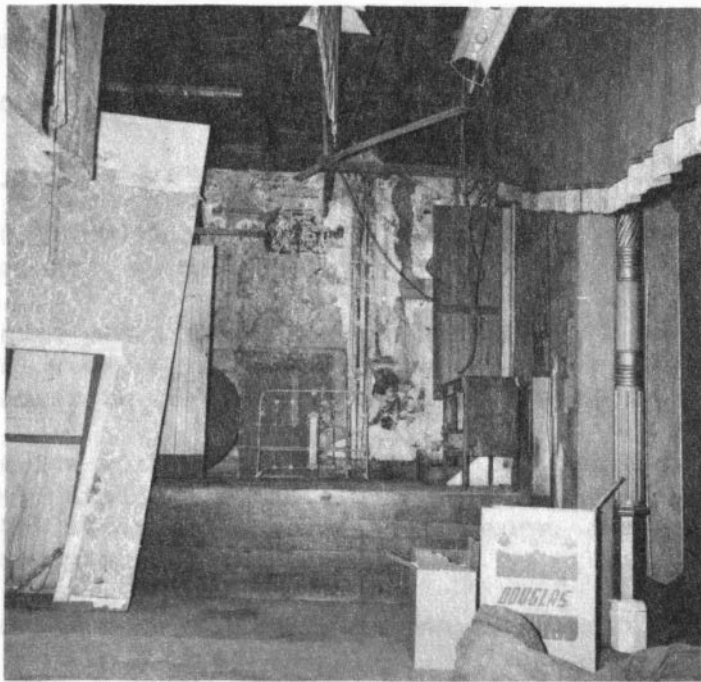


FIGURE 11. Actor's left  
side of stage, 1968,

been used.<sup>44</sup> The attached folding wooden theatre seats that now adorn the gallery<sup>45</sup> were installed in later years.

In 1888 two coal burner stoves stood directly across from the stair entrance, left and right by the far side walls. Nevertheless, the audience dressed warmly when attending an event in the opera house during the winter.<sup>46</sup>

Kerosene lamps were used to light both the stage and auditorium. These lamps were placed along the apron of the stage in a long trough to illuminate the actors, while hanging kerosene lamps gave light to the house. These house lights were extinguished when a performance began.<sup>47</sup>

Although paintings presently adorn the left and right walls next to the proscenium arch, these were estimated to have been done fifty years ago.<sup>48</sup> It is thought that originally no interior decoration, other than papered walls, was displayed.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Mr. Russell Bohl, July 5, 1968. Mr. Bohl's father ran the early movie projector.

<sup>45</sup> The same seats in the parquette were sold to an auction company several years ago. Conversation with Mr. Frank R. Greening, owner of the Coast to Coast store and opera house.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Mr. Harry Dieson. Mr. Dieson, a life-long resident of Dell Rapids, was active in amateur drama and the Dell Rapids Orchestra after the turn of the century. He was a young boy during the early years of the opera house.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Mr. Harry Dieson, October 5, 1968.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Mr. Russell Bohl, July 5, 1968.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Mr. Harry Dieson, October 5, 1968.



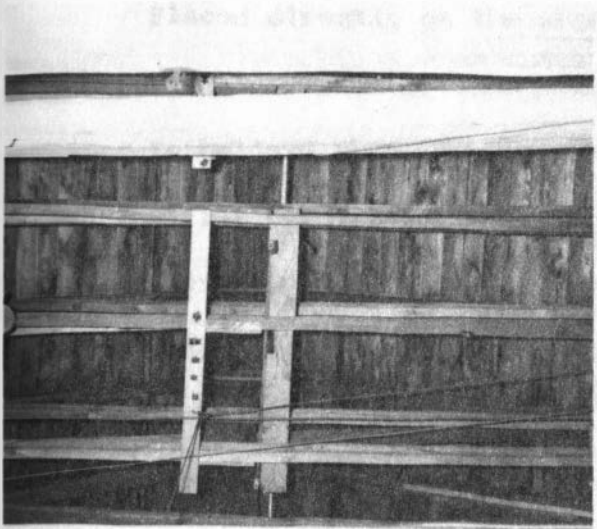


FIGURE 12. Looking up into stage ceiling, 1968.

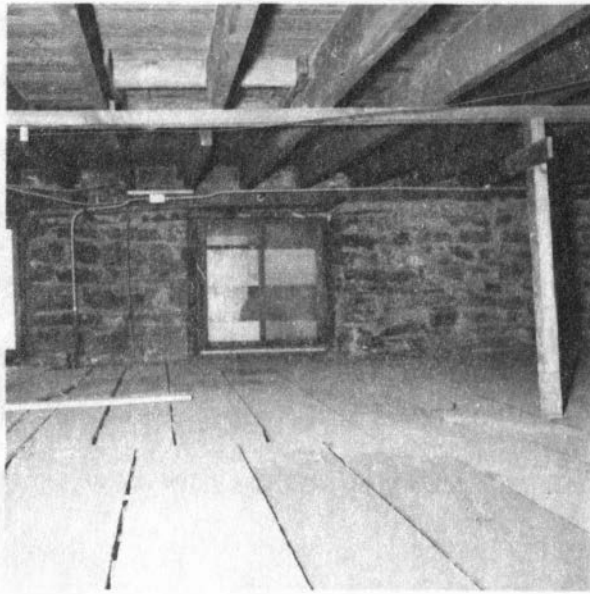


FIGURE 13. Storage space beneath stage floor, 1968.



FIGURE 14. Trough in stage apron, 1968.

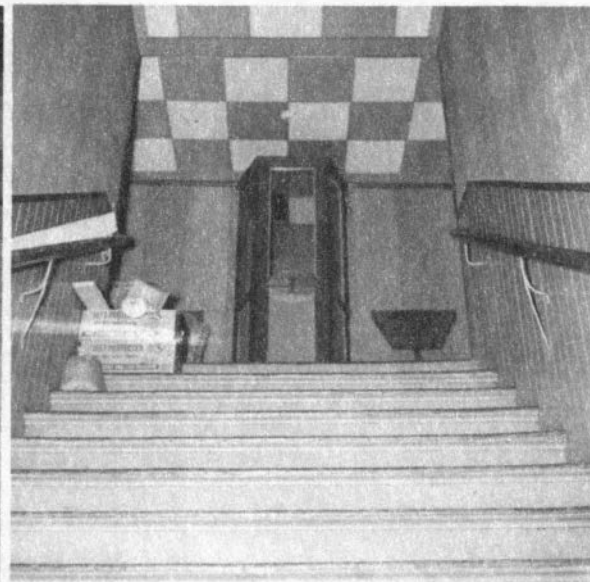


FIGURE 15. Stair entrance to the opera house, 1968.

Placed directly on the stage back wall, center to the stage, were three high windows. The placement of these windows leads the writer to believe that the architect of the building could not have been familiar with theatrical architecture design since natural light is extremely difficult to mask when coming from behind scenery and totally undesirable when glaring into an audience's eyes. The reason for the windows on the back wall, however, is obvious; with the nine windows at the south end of the house a ventilating system could be established.

Below the stage was a three-foot high storage area that would often hold extra chairs and musical instruments.<sup>50</sup>

The present stage floor is made of soft pine. It is not known if this is the original floor. To the left and right of the stage area are two dressing rooms. Now emptied, these rooms contained benches, mirrors, and shelves during the beginning years.<sup>51</sup> Also, on the actor's far right side of the stage, against the wall, is a depleted pulley system. It is doubtful that this is original since it was obviously built without intentions of permanency and also since sliding flats rather than drops were first used.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.



It is highly probable that the newspaper was not bragging when it said in 1888:

One who has not visited the new opera house has no idea of its size and complete arrangements. The management have spared no pains to make it second to none in the territory, and it is truly a fine house for a town the size of Dell Rapids.<sup>53</sup>

#### Scenery

With the opening of the opera house the scenery was reported to have been ready and complete. "It has all the modern stage improvements, fine curtains and scenery, and an elegant piano is provided for the orchestra."<sup>54</sup>

The first scenery to have been used were flats that were manually slid on and off stage. These flats were connected to some type of grooved holding device above them that allowed their movement. The stage floor did not contain grooves.<sup>55</sup> These flats were used by amateur drama groups or touring companies that did not carry their own scenery.

A drop curtain that rolled around a pole as it ascended was the first main curtain.<sup>56</sup> It was painted many different colors<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup>Dell Rapids Times, November 2, 1888.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Interview with Harry Dieson, October 5, 1968.

<sup>56</sup>Interview with Harry Blow, September 5, 1968.

<sup>57</sup>Interview with Harry Dieson.

and as time went on town businesses painted advertising upon it.<sup>58</sup>  
The drop curtain presently rolled up above the stage is not the original but was thought to have been done fifty years ago.<sup>59</sup>

After the turn of the century, illustrated lectures became popular with slide pictures projected upon a "canvas" stored in the opera house for such occasions.<sup>60</sup>

In a few instances special scenery would be constructed for a local entertainment. "The special piece of scenery presented, the ship, was the work of Mr. Richards, and was quite an artistic piece of scene painting."<sup>61</sup>

Very often the traveling variety shows and acting companies would carry their own scenery with them. McCabe's Minstrel Company advertised in the paper as having "special scenery, calcium lights, elegant costumes and appropriate properties."<sup>62</sup> Mr. Hubert Labadie's Company, a Faust theatrical group, had solved the problem of scenery to fit various stages when they announced that they carried "two complete sets of scenery for this great play--one set for cities and one set for small stages."<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Harry Blow.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Mr. Russell Bohl, July 5, 1968.

<sup>60</sup> Dell Rapids Times, April 26, 1901.

<sup>61</sup> Dell Rapids Tribune, February 15, 1896.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., November 17, 1894.

<sup>63</sup> Dell Rapids Times, June 7, 1901.

### Improvements and Changes

The first improvement to be made within the opera house was the addition of doors at the top of the stairs to alleviate the complaint of cold feet.<sup>64</sup> The next month an improvement was made affecting the acoustics of the house but its description leaves some question as to what was actually installed.

However, at the former entertainment the company were at a disadvantage, for there was nothing to carry their voices through the house. Some wires were afterward strung through it and are said to be a great help.<sup>65</sup>

During the late nineteenth century roller skating became a popular fad affecting many communities.<sup>66</sup> The opera house parquette became a temporary rink<sup>67</sup> until the permanent Western House roller skating rink was built a few months later.<sup>68</sup> It was felt that the opera house "would make an excellent rink if the floor was put in smoother condition."<sup>69</sup> There is no indication that this was ever done.

---

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., February 1, 1889.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., March 8, 1889.

<sup>66</sup>Theodore R. Switzer, "A History of Theatre and Theatrical Activities in Brookings, South Dakota From 1879 Through 1898," (unpublished Master's thesis, South Dakota State University, December, 1962), p. 165.

<sup>67</sup>Dell Rapids Times, January 10, 1890.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., April 11, 1890.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., February 6, 1891.

In 1896 the opera house got a face lifting when manager Parker changed and shaded the lights.<sup>70</sup> This may have been when tin was placed in front of the apron lights for stronger stage lighting and to keep the glare out of the eyes of the audience.<sup>71</sup> Parker also carpeted the aisles.<sup>72</sup>

Manager Mitchell renovated the opera house in 1900 when he had all the woodwork, interior and exterior, repainted, the stage fittings overhauled,<sup>73</sup> a "fine Kimball piano"<sup>74</sup> added, and repapered throughout the house.<sup>75</sup>

Although not within the scope of the study it might be worthwhile for the sake of historical documentation to include a description of the major changes that were instigated by 1912 just before the opera house was renovated into a movie theatre by the O'Leary brothers.

---

<sup>70</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, June 20, 1896.

<sup>71</sup>Interview with Mr. Harry Dieson.

<sup>72</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, June 20, 1896.

<sup>73</sup>Dell Rapids Times, February 23, 1900.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., March 9, 1900.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., August 24, 1900.

The Grand Opera House block is one of the best and most substantial stone business blocks in Dell Rapids, being a double business building of extra height the upper floor being devoted to the opera house which conceded to be the finest one in the state in a town of this size, being elegantly fitted up and furnished, finely carpeted, new opera chairs, elegant stage settings, a complete private electric light equipment and steam heating plant. Two storerooms below are each heat/ed/ by separate hot air furnaces. . . .<sup>76</sup>

#### The Opera House Management

The job of managing the early Dell Rapids Opera House was not an easy one. Each manager carried the responsibility of cleaning and preparing the house, making improvements, booking the touring companies, dealing with advance agents, selling the tickets, procuring good quality shows, and making a profit.

The first man to take on these responsibilities of manager was I. F. Angstead who also had a restaurant and confectionery store in the east room of the opera house block.<sup>77</sup> Mr. Angstead maintained his position until October, 1890, when he and his family moved to Sioux Falls.<sup>78</sup> A. C. Folsom succeeded Angstead but his term was short lived--only lasting a year.<sup>79</sup> In 1891 the Brily brothers moved their stock of hardware merchandise into the west

---

<sup>76</sup>Dell Rapids Times--Tribune, March 14, 1912.

<sup>77</sup>Dell Rapids Times, November 2, 1888.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., October 17, 1890.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., August 14, 1891.

room of the opera house block and took on the management.<sup>80</sup> At the beginning of 1895 a Mr. Bent was selling the tickets at his drug store; however, it is not known if he was the actual manager.<sup>81</sup> By June of 1896, W. E. Parker is credited with the management.<sup>82</sup> It is not known how long he held this position, due to newspaper gaps, but in the first month of 1900 this note appeared in the Dell Rapids Times.

While most of the towns in the state are enjoying musical and theatrical entertainments this winter Dell Rapids is rather behind the times. The reason is that the opera house has been closed for several months and we understand the owner will not lease the house as he is desirous of selling the property. We do not know whether our information is correct, but one thing is certain the people of both the city and surrounding country are desirous of having public entertainments once in awhile. THE TIMES hopes to see the opera house opened again as it is one of the necessities of any live town or city.<sup>83</sup>

At this time Mr. Kenefick was the sole owner of the opera house, Mr. Cooley having sold his one-half interest to Kenefick in 1895 for \$200 and a \$7,000 mortgage.<sup>84</sup> This transaction included two other lots (14 and 15) as well as the opera house block.

---

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., October 21, 1892.

<sup>81</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, February 16, 1895.

<sup>82</sup>Dell Rapids Times, June 6, 1896.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., January 19, 1900.

<sup>84</sup>Minnehaha County Court House, Deed Record, Vol. 57, p. 438, December 14, 1895.

It is not known why Mr. Kenefick wanted to sell the opera house, but the continuous change of management might be an indication that the property was not making a substantial income.

In February of 1900 Dell Rapids learned that the opera house was to be reopened under a new management plan. W. S. Mitchell, H. M. Derleth, George H. Henry, A. W. Griswold, and M. J. Rooney formed an "Opera House Company" having leased the opera house for a term of three years.<sup>85</sup> Mr. Mitchell was manager; Mr. Derleth, treasurer; and Mr. Rooney, secretary of the company.<sup>86</sup>

W. S. Mitchell seems to have been a popular and industrious manager. Occasionally he would perform his Scottish dance steps for an audience.<sup>87</sup> His main attention, however, was devoted to the task of booking the best possible shows.

W. S. Mitchell, of the opera house management, informs us that he has some excellent attractions already booked for the coming show season. There is hardly a day goes by but what he is receiving requests from managers of companies requesting dates to play here, but Mr. Mitchell is only booking the best ones and the theatre-going people will have the opportunity of witnessing some good performances during the coming six months.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup>Dell Rapids Times, February 16, 1900.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., January 19, 1900.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., April 20, 1900.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., August 23, 1901.

When a poor quality company appeared, Mitchell was reported to have been "as much disappointed as any who attended, as the company was highly recommended to him."<sup>89</sup>

In 1903 it was manager Mitchell who took the steps to join the South Dakota-Minnesota theatrical circuit in order that "Dell Rapids will get the same class of shows as make Pipestone, Madison, and towns of that class."<sup>90</sup> Whether this circuit was directly connected with the Theatrical Syndicate, which administered a tight control over all its traveling companies and theatrical houses from 1895 to 1916,<sup>91</sup> is not known. Nevertheless, by joining such a circuit Mitchell forfeited the right of making a final selection of the professional companies that played at the Dell Rapids Opera House. Thus, the opera house ceased to be a self-operating theatre.

In later years Mr. Kenefick died leaving the opera house property in an estate. In March of 1912 the opera house was sold to the O'Leary brothers for \$19,000 and 400 acres of farm land valued at \$83.50 per acre.<sup>92</sup> The total payment of \$52,400 going to the Kenefick estate.

---

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., June 19, 1903.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., March 20, 1903.

<sup>91</sup>Monroe Lippman, "The Effect of the Theatrical Syndicate on Theatrical Art in America," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXVI, No. 2 (April, 1940), p. 275.

<sup>92</sup>Dell Rapids Times--Tribune, March 14, 1912.



In conclusion it can be said that the Dell Rapids Opera House was built in 1888 by J. A. Cooley and M. R. Kenefick. The second story theatre was considered to be well equipped and spacious for a town the size of Dell Rapids. In 1895 Cooley sold his one-half interest to Kenefick who, in turn, tried to sell the property in 1900, but decided instead to lease the building to the Opera House Company for three years. Manager Mitchell joined a theatrical circuit in 1903 ending the era of the private management of the Dell Rapids Opera House.

### CHAPTER III

#### PROFESSIONAL DRAMATIC TOURING COMPANIES

It is the purpose of this chapter to provide a chronological discussion of the professional dramatic touring companies that produced their plays in the early history of the Dell Rapids Opera House. Due to newspaper gaps, three natural divisions occur in the material that will be used to divide the chapter chronologically: (1) the beginning of the opera house in November of 1888 through 1892; (2) the last three months of 1894 to September of 1896; and (3) 1900, 1901, and 1903 through September.

Because of the size of Dell Rapids it should be noted that the town did not always receive the top professional attractions that toured in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, it was reported in 1892 in the Dell Rapids Times that Madame Modjeska, the famed Polish actress, was to appear in Sioux Falls. She did not, however, venture to Dell Rapids.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Dell Rapids Times, March 25, 1892.

In the Schlingman thesis there appears a quote<sup>2</sup> from a Mr. Geoffrey Marmouth, who wrote an article in 1910 for the magazine Bookman. He referred to the general nature of the stock companies that played the smaller towns.

The traveling stock company is an old friend of those who have not escaped from small towns. No place is beneath its contempt, and it will play anything from a barn to a town hall. There is no way of estimating the number of these companies, for they are frequently in a state of disband or re-organization.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, it should not be thought that all of the companies playing the smaller communities were necessarily second rate. According to Maxine Schlingman, these companies served two vital and important functions for American theatre: they provided entertainment to small towns and cities and maintained a training ground for actors.<sup>4</sup>

November of 1888 through 1892

The first group to initiate the Dell Rapids Opera House on its opening Monday, November 5, was the Clair Patee Company which played a popular drama entitled Lynwood. Mentioned was Edith

---

<sup>2</sup>Maxine Schlingman, "The Contribution of the Traveling Company to the American Theatre," (unpublished Master's thesis, Marquette University, April, 1938), p. 111.

<sup>3</sup>Geoffrey Marmouth, "Theatrical Stock and Its Dividends," Bookman, (May, 1910), p. 276.

<sup>4</sup>Schlingman, p. 111.

Arnold, an emotional actress, a Miss Carlisle, and Willard Simms, the comedian who later enjoyed a somewhat successful career in theatre.<sup>5</sup> The performance was considered by the Dell Rapids Times to be of higher quality than what had previously played in Dell Rapids before the construction of the opera house. It was further stated that a member of the company came forward, thanking the audience for their reception and "for their enterprise in erecting such a fine house of amusement . . . that its arrangements were very complete, which was greeted with loud applause."<sup>6</sup> The next two nights--Tuesday, November 6, The Martyr and Wednesday, November 7, Queen--were played to large audiences. On Thursday, November 8, the last night the company performed, two noteworthy events occurred. In the play A Night Off by Augustin Daly, apparently something offended the Dell Rapids Times reporter.

---

<sup>5</sup>Born in Chicago he "got his first stage experience in small companies traveling through the West." Making his first New York appearance at the Casino Theatre in The Merry World he afterward found success in the play An American Beauty, which he played with Lillian Russell. The play was then taken to London where he played his original role. By 1900 he became involved in vaudeville and after two years was the leading comedian with the Tivoli Stock Company in San Francisco. During 1908 he was again with vaudeville.

Walter Browne and E. De Roy Koch (ed.), Who's Who On The Stage 1908 (New York: B. W. Dodge & Company, 1908), p. 400.

<sup>6</sup>Dell Rapids Times, November 9, 1888.

"A Night Off" may be appreciated by some under certain circumstances, but it wasn't very highly appreciated as presented by the Patee Company . . . It was undoubtedly the poorest play presented by the Company during their engagement here.<sup>7</sup>

That same evening, at the close of the play, the company's orchestra provided music for a dance in hopes of procuring additional money from the audience. This is what resulted.

The orchestra played a waltz which several couples participated in, but the self-appointed floor manager in pompos/sic/ tones announced that no one without a fifty cent ticket would be allowed to remain in the hall and those who had lingered filed sadly out and left the company to dance to their high-priced music alone, which they did for a short time.<sup>8</sup>

Some months later it was reported that this company had met with a serious loss in St. Joseph, Missouri. The theatre in which they had been playing caught fire, consuming all their theatrical wardrobe. A benefit was given for them in St. Joseph and a "good sum was raised."<sup>9</sup> Apparently this was helpful, for even after the loss, the Clair Patee Company was to appear once more in Dell Rapids.

The next month the Edwin Clifford Company, composed of "twelve first-class artists."<sup>10</sup> performed three plays from their

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., November 16, 1888.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., April 19, 1889.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., December 14, 1888.

repertoire: a southern drama The Planter's Wife on Friday, December 14, the melodrama East Lynne, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde on Saturday, December 15. Edwin Clifford was billed as the male lead with Miss Augusta Van Doren playing opposite him.<sup>11</sup> Without an orchestra the company helped to organize local talent to play music at their performances "and considering the disadvantage they labored under on account of lack of practice together, they acquitted themselves very creditably."<sup>12</sup> There seems to be an indication that this event in attempting to supply a local musical group gave rise to the various orchestras and bands that eventually paraded the streets of Dell Rapids and faithfully served its opera house. If the Clifford Company was instrumental in establishing a need for a community musical group to assist the touring companies, their fame did not rest on this factor by the time they departed from Dell Rapids. Below is the article that appeared in the Dell Rapids Times regarding the company's escapades in Mr. Neher's hotel.

#### THE CLIFFORD COMPANY

While no fault can be found with the theatrical performances of this company, the proceedings of some of the members outside of the opera house were such as does them no credit, and although we personally have no reason to complain, we feel called upon to expose them in behalf of Mr. Neher, of the Western House, whom they shamefully abused

---

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., December 21, 1888.

both personally and in the treatment of the rooms which they occupied. Mr. Neher feels that some of the people believe him to have been to blame and having personally investigated the trouble the writer wishes him to have his due, hence this reference to the matter. Mr. Neher took the company at 1\$ per day for each, that being half rate, and was promised five complimentary tickets. After gaining possession of the rooms they refused to give the tickets, and the matter rested until Saturday morning, when Mr. Neher spoke to them about it and was shamefully abused. One of the troupe had the audacity /sic/ to tell him that he had letters from people here which stated that Mr. Neher was dishonest and disreputable, and called him names that we do not care to report here. He could not produce the evidence, however. Mr. Neher did the best he could with them because he thought the people would blame him if he turned them out. Witnesses say that Mr. Neher stood more abuse than they would were they in his position. Nor is that all. The writer went over and examined the rooms after the company's departure, at the request of Mr. Neher, and can truthfully say that we never have seen dirtier rooms than some of them were. Room 8 occupied by E. A. Page and wife--the latter being "Augusta Van Doren"--looked like a woodshed. After examining them we became firmly convinced that Mr. Neher was fully justified in complaining of their treatment of himself and house, and cannot be blamed hereafter if he does not put himself out to encourage such patronage. We have stated the proceeding very mildly, having only a desire to set the facts before the people so they will not misjudge Mr. Neher, but we would like to see the press mention this matter, so that it may be generally known what the true character of the company is in order that they may not be able to impose upon and abuse others in a like manner.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

The first theatrical company to appear in 1889 became, through newspaper accounts, a small sad story in itself, reflecting the ups and downs of these groups whose fate rested upon a very thin line. When advance press notices were published in Dell Rapids for the Edwin Barbour Company, it was stated that this was a good company, having been highly spoken of by the press of the previous towns in which the company had played.<sup>14</sup> Engaged for a week, from Monday, June 10, through Saturday, June 15, the company received light attendance at first due to spring storms that hampered transportation. However, their opening play A Legal Document written by Barbour himself, received top notices.

The play is one that was written to make people laugh, but unlike many of the so-called comedies, "A Legal Document" has a good strong plot. Everything done in the piece is done with a motive. The characters are not overdrawn, but ones we see in every day life. The piece does not depend upon the trick doors and other mechanical effects of the stage carpenter, but is alone successful on its literary merits. The story is clean, the language pure and free from anything that would offend the most fastidious. . . .<sup>15</sup>

At the end of the week the newspaper declared that this was certainly one of the best companies that had played within Dell Rapids in the last few years--if not the best.<sup>16</sup> Further, the

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., June 7, 1889.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., June 14, 1889.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.



newspaper stated that it was sorry a stronger patronage had not supported this excellent company, and that if the people of Dell Rapids wanted good theatre they should make every effort to encourage this kind of company with their presence.<sup>17</sup>

Traveling to Flandreau, after a performance at Egan, the Edwin Barbour Company was forced to refund the money to its audience.

The fine soaking rain, the near approach of the date for the home company's "Pinafore," as well as the free advertisement given by an exhorter at a temperance meeting Sunday night, who danced all over Edwin's frame for playing "Ten Nights in a Bar Room," at Egan that night, must have been the causes for the thushness. . . .<sup>18</sup>

In July manager Angstead received a letter from the company asking for twenty-five dollars to pay their expenses at Brookings, where they had become stranded without funds. They needed to get to Egan for an engagement of Uncle Tom's Cabin under canvas. The letter arrived too late for Angstead's assistance,<sup>19</sup> but according to the Egan Express, as printed in the Dell Rapids Times, the group had reorganized under the name The Boston Ideal Uncle Tom's Cabin Company.<sup>20</sup> Egan considered the company "a fraud, and warns other towns to give them the

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., June 21, 1889.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., July 12, 1889.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., July 19, 1889.

cold shoulder."<sup>21</sup> The Dell Rapids newspaper offered this explanation regarding the breakdown of the company they had praised so highly just a month earlier.

They have struck some hard towns and no doubt have a hard time to keep up. Dakota doesn't seem to be a good country for theatrical troupes this year, on account of the depressing effect of the poor crops prospect.<sup>22</sup>

At least one amusing incident occurred during the Barbour Company's appearance in Dell Rapids. A Mr. John Hoyt was arrested during the Saturday night performance for intoxication and creating a disturbance.

He and his wife were attending the entertainment, but left during the first part of it, and John stumbled and fell down the stairs. The Marshal was at the door and undertook to assist Mrs. Hoyt to get her husband up and started home, but John began abusing him and struck at him a couple of times, where upon the Marshal knocked him over and gathered him in.<sup>23</sup>

In September of 1889 the Clair Patee Company returned to play Dell Rapids a second time. Having cancelled their first date in August, due to sickness, they promised to fulfill "the expectations of the public."<sup>24</sup> With their latest feature, a ladies band, they drummed up business outside the opera house on Monday, September 2,

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., July 12, 1889.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., June 21, 1889.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., August 30, 1889

and Tuesday, September 3, before the performances of Rosendale and Forget Me Not.<sup>25</sup> It was noticed that there was "slight hesitancy"<sup>26</sup> by some of the actors with their lines, but was, on the whole, a successful two nights of theatre.<sup>27</sup>

Five months later word reached Dell Rapids that Mrs. Patee was not expected to live, being bedridden in Perry, Iowa. Ollie Evans, the leading lady, had joined another troupe and the future of the company was doubtful.<sup>28</sup> It is not known if Mrs. Patee lived, but in 1891 a report was sent to the Dell Rapids Times from the Redfield Observer in Redfield, South Dakota, stating that Clair Patee had reorganized and was "once more on top."<sup>29</sup> This company, however, does not appear again in the remaining material of the study.

The next group to appear was the Cady & Malthy's Monte Cristo Company, a newly formed company from Madison, Minnesota.<sup>30</sup> They played the then popular drama, The Count of Monte Cristo, the first night, Tuesday, September 17, and Race For Election the next evening to small houses. Apparently this was only the second time they had

---

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., September 6, 1889.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., January 31, 1890.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., June 19, 1891.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., September 20, 1889.

played to an audience, but the presentations were considered to have been rendered in "a creditable [sic] manner."<sup>31</sup> The lead, Howard Hall, was described as a young actor showing much talent, and it was felt that he would make the company into a strong one.<sup>32</sup>

Billy Marble and his company came to Dell Rapids Wednesday, October 23, 1889, playing Mark Twain's Col. Sellers that evening and the famous mystery drama, Under the Gaslight, the next night. Marble, billed as a "distinguished comedian,"<sup>33</sup> seems to have lived up to the publicity when he was reported to have "kept the audience convulsed with laughter"<sup>34</sup> during Col. Sellers. Under the Gaslight did not receive as favorable notices as the performance did the night before, Marble and his company seemingly better suited for comedy than drama.

The price of admission for each of the performances was thirty-five cents with reserved seats costing fifty cents.<sup>35</sup>

The first theatrical company to appear in 1890 was the Choate Dramatic Company which played a three-night engagement from Thursday, April 24, through Saturday, April 26. Mr. and Mrs. Choate were said

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., October 18, 1889.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., October 25, 1889.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., October 18, 1889.

to be "well up in their profession" while being "well supported, every member of the company appearing especially well fitted for their respective roles."<sup>36</sup> The three plays, Caprice, Passion's Slave, and The Old Homestead were played to the audience's satisfaction "and all seem to be very favorably impressed with the company both on and off the stage."<sup>37</sup> The company left for Madison with a promise to return to Dell Rapids in a few months.<sup>38</sup>

On May 26, 1890, the advance agent for the Madison Square Theatre Company appeared in Dell Rapids and arranged to have his company present Uncle Tom's Cabin on Thursday, May 29.<sup>39</sup> However, this company never got to the opera house.

It is said the troupe was financially embarrassed and went through to Sioux Falls on the freight train the night before. Twere better thus, probably, for the people here. Snide troupes and Uncle Tom's Cabin troupes seem to be synonomons / sic / in the west, which has pretty fully satisfied the people's interest in the ancient drama.<sup>40</sup>

Regardless of the company's failure to appear, there are two interesting historical features concerning this particular company

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., May 2, 1890.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., May 30, 1890.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., June 6, 1890.

and their advertised play. The original Madison Square Theatre Company was organized in New York by the great theatrical manager, Charles Frohman.<sup>41</sup> Touring the play Hazel Kirke, this original Madison Square Theatre Company met with such success that within a short time fourteen other road companies confiscated the company's popular name to increase their own success at the box office.<sup>42</sup> The Madison Square Theatre Company that booked itself at Dell Rapids, but did not appear, must have been one of these fourteen companies.

Secondly, it may be noticed that the Dell Rapids Times, in the previous quote, shows little enthusiasm toward the play Uncle Tom's Cabin, when it calls it an "ancient drama." The play, a stage adaptation from Harriet Beecher Stowe's slavery novel Uncle Tom's Cabin, began its life only five months after the novel was published in 1852.<sup>43</sup> Charles Western Taylor was the first to put his dramatic version on the stage at Purdy's National Theatre in New York with an unsuccessful eleven night run.<sup>44</sup> However, George C. Howard, who felt the role of Little Eva held great

---

<sup>41</sup>Schlingman, p. 107.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Nancy Louise Funk, "Professional Theatrical Activity in Iowa From 1890 to 1895," (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1966), p. 155. See also, Barnard Hewitt's Theatre, U.S.A. 1668 to 1956, pp. 171-2.

<sup>44</sup>Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama From the Beginning to the Civil War (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1946), p. 288.

potential for his young daughter, requested George L. Aiken to write a dramatization for his company.<sup>45</sup> It met with such success in Troy, New York that it ran for one hundred performances during a time when the repertory system was firmly entrenched.<sup>46</sup> Moving to New York City the play ran another two hundred performances and before long the nation as well as England and the European continent viewed the misfortunes of the sentimentalized Negro slave--Uncle Tom. " . . . in its own time it moved multitudes. Its success on the stage was phenomenal."<sup>47</sup> The play did not, however, die after the Civil War. During the 1890's it is estimated that five hundred traveling companies carried the play in their repertory.<sup>48</sup> It is highly probable that this play has been produced more often than any other play in America.

Most of the people in Dell Rapids had, by 1890, become familiar, if not somewhat saturated, with Uncle Tom's Cabin. Shortly before the opera house had been built, a traveling tent company had produced the play on a vacant lot. This was the reaction.

---

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Barnard Hewitt, "Uncle Tom and Uncle Sam: New Light From an Old Play," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, Vol. XXXVII (Feb., 1951), p. 63.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Richard Moody, "Uncle Tom, the Theatre and Mrs. Stowe," American Heritage, Vol. 6, No. 6 (October, 1955), p. 102.

. . . the acting was painful to witness and parts of the play were so absurd that sensible people could not help but feel humiliated by being present.<sup>49</sup>

To the people of Dell Rapids the Tom Shows, as they were most often referred to, became synonymous with the word "fake."<sup>50</sup> It may be asked then, why should this attitude assert itself in Dell Rapids when the American public continued to support the play and those companies that produced it? An explanation might be found in the very nature of the men and women living in or around Dell Rapids. They had recently fought a battle with the land and were beginning to overcome that struggle. Theirs was a real world, while the Tom Shows, extreme in their over-generalized characters, trick effects, and sentimental adventures, were not. It might even be said that the inhabitants of Dell Rapids were approaching a need for the theatrical realism that was so very late in coming to the American stage.

Once again, in 1890, the Choate Dramatic Company came to Dell Rapids. This time it played a week's engagement, from Monday, October 20, through Friday, October 24, presenting A Wife's Honor, Lord Fauntleroy, and Fogg's Ferry, but no mention is made of those plays that were performed the last two nights.<sup>51</sup> Harry and

---

<sup>49</sup>Dell Rapids Times, September 7, 1888.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., May 20, 1892.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., October 24, 1890.



Mattie Choate were again complimented for their acting and the company was credited as having acceptable support.<sup>52</sup> From this company of ten there was a child actress named "Little Nellie." The Dell Rapids Times was most enthusiastic about her.

. . . who shows a wonderful precocity and talent on the stage. In "Lord Fauntleroy" she took the part of the little nobleman in a manner that won the admiration of all, and entertained the audience with some charming vocal music, with banjo accompaniment.<sup>53</sup>

It is further noted that the Dell Rapids Orchestra furnished music for the company's engagement.<sup>54</sup>

For some reason, which is not clear, Dell Rapids received no dramatic touring companies in 1891 nor well into 1892. The recession did not begin until 1893, nor had agriculture experienced any extreme hardships to make these particular years unprofitable. Professional variety companies as well as amateur drama and community entertainments continued to produce during 1891 and 1892. The Switzer thesis shows that Brookings, a somewhat larger town than Dell Rapids and located thirty miles north, did receive the usual number of dramatic companies during those years.<sup>55</sup> There is a possibility that the newspaper may not have publicized the shows, but this seems unlikely. There appears to be no explanation.

---

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Switzer, pp. 220-221.

After this barren period, the Keene, Hillyer & Hartel Company found its way to Dell Rapids to perform William Gillette's popular war drama, Held by the Enemy.<sup>56</sup> On Monday, October 10, 1892, a large audience gathered in the opera house to view "interesting and entertaining scenes of our late war."<sup>57</sup> The audience was reported to have been pleased, although "the excessive shooting made so much noise."<sup>58</sup>

A Swedish comedy, The Hoboe, was featured the next month by the Kimball Company, with Mr. Edward M. Kimball as the lead.<sup>59</sup> As Knud Knudson he sustained his part "admirably" although the support was considered to be quite poor.<sup>60</sup> Having played to a "thin house" on Monday, October 31, it was generally agreed that the company was not a strong one.<sup>61</sup>

Schlingman states that advance agents for the companies arranged the booking of performances.<sup>62</sup> Such was the case when an Albright and an Archer preceded the Metropolitan Theatre Company to Dell Rapids to secure a three-night engagement.<sup>63</sup> On their opening night, Thursday, November 10, Mixed Pickles was presented, drawing

---

<sup>56</sup>Dell Rapids Times, October 7, 1892.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., October 14, 1892.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., November 4, 1892.

<sup>60</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, November 5, 1892.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Schlingman, p. 113.

<sup>63</sup>Dell Rapids Times, October 21, 1892.

the comment: "The play is a very light one about right for school exhibitions, and the company lacks some good leading characters."<sup>64</sup> No mention is made of Mother and Son, which played on Friday night, other than its announcement, but The Silver King, presented the following evening, was considered to be the best of the three plays.<sup>65</sup> Resting in Dell Rapids Sunday, the thirteenth, the company went on to Flandreau the following day.

October 1894 to September 1896

No professional dramatic company is recorded as having appeared in Dell Rapids until the summer of 1895. This factor is most likely a result of "the hard times" felt throughout the United States during 1893 and 1894. The press in the Eastern United States pictured the Dakotas, in particular, as having suffered extensive crop failures, although the Dell Rapids newspapers spent much time in denying this.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, the adverse publicity may have been enough to persuade the acting companies to stay away.

In June of 1895 Fowler's Spectacular Theatre Company came to Dell Rapids for a three-night stand, which included a Wednesday matinee. In hopes of drawing a large audience, they advertised that the ladies, if accompanied by one paid reserve seat ticket, would be

---

<sup>64</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, November 12, 1892.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., November 19, 1892.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1895.

admitted free on Monday evening.<sup>67</sup> Standard prices were ten and twenty cents; the reserved seats sold at thirty cents.<sup>68</sup> Another publicity gimmick was instigated by the company band parading the streets at noon and in the evening.<sup>69</sup> This device of playing and parading before performances seems to have been successful for many of these companies. The material suggests that these parades and concerts occurred much more frequently after 1895 than before.

Monday, the evening of June 24, The World Against Him was presented, The Old Homestead played the next night, and Married For Money Or Jane was performed Wednesday evening, with a matinee that afternoon of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Mr. Jack Fowler, the manager as well as the lead actor, was said to have done "great merit" to his profession, while the other members of the company offered strong support.<sup>70</sup> Special mention was made of "Little Ruby," a child actress whose "acting and singing were superb, fairly captivating the audience."<sup>71</sup>

In the newspaper critique an informative sentence suggests the beginning of a change that took place with the dramatic companies

---

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., June 22, 1895.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., June 29, 1895.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

touring the smaller towns in the Midwest. "The plays were interspersed with songs, dances, music and other specialties."<sup>72</sup> Before this time no mention was made regarding musical sketches delivered before, after, or between acts of the plays. As the companies discovered the financial reward of including their own bands and orchestras, music began to drift into the performances. As will be shown in this study, more and more of these companies, with their musical additions also produced sketches, thus straying from legitimate drama.

Regardless of their publicity efforts, Mr. Fowler's company did not receive the large houses they had hoped for; the Dell Rapids Tribune explained that the people had been busy in preparing for the encampment that was a week away.<sup>73</sup>

M. L. Kinsey and Company were scheduled to perform Monday, January 13, 1896, but later cancelled all dates in South Dakota.<sup>74</sup> These cancellations generally elicited the following kind of response from the newspapers.

Mr. Kinsey, in a communication to the managers of the opera house, says that the hard times make it a very hazardous business to come to this section. Well, Mr. Kinsey probably knows what kind of a company he has and perhaps he is wise

---

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., January 11, 1896.

in not coming here. The poorest class of companies are apt to find it hazardous anywhere, but the best companies appear and always do a prosperous business, notwithstanding the times are somewhat hard.<sup>75</sup>

Paul Tupper Wilkes carried no band in his company when he came to Dell Rapids in March of 1896, but he did carry a reputation that afforded, certainly, some publicity.

The leading man, Paul Tupper Wilkes, who has acquired considerable notoriety by his marriage to Mrs. Mackay and a duel with a New York newspaper man by the name of McVeigh, has played with some of the best companies in this country and Europe. . . .<sup>76</sup>

His reputation, however, grew a few inches by the time he left Dell Rapids.

Scheduled to play The Sheriff's Sacrifice Saturday, March 14, the Dell Rapids Tribune reports: "the only sacrifice the sheriff made was a bill placed in his hands for collection."<sup>77</sup> A portion of the company had remained at Sioux Falls with "merely common-place amateurs"<sup>78</sup> accompanying Wilkes to Dell Rapids. John Huntington, a hotel manager in Flandreau, also joined the group--long enough to collect a hotel bill of \$2.50 from Wilkes after the performance at

---

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., March 14, 1896.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., March 21, 1896.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

the opera house.<sup>79</sup> Sunday morning, Paul Wilkes left town, but the supporting amateur actors did not.

. . . leaving the rest of the company to get home the best way they could on Monday morning's freight train, and they put in their time roasting Wilkes, claiming that he owes them three weeks' salary.<sup>80</sup>

A month later the Dell Rapids Tribune made mention of the fact that Paul Tupper Wilkes and his company owed the newspaper \$1.50 in advertising. The newspaper publicity included one feature story and several small blurbs.<sup>81</sup>

From Monday, June 8, through Saturday, June 13, 1896, the Redmond Dramatic Company performed seven different plays at Dell Rapids in a six-day period. They, as well as similar companies, are indicative of Schlingman's statement regarding the repertory of touring companies.

The repertoire consisted of a different play every performance, usually following the same rotation each week, the company usually playing week "stands." The repertoires were changed in case a town was "repeated" during a season, which was not the usual custom.<sup>82</sup>

Davy Crockett, Caprice, A Nobel Outcast, Fanchon the Cricket, The

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., April 11, 1896.

<sup>82</sup> Schlingman, p. 113.

Lights of London, Little Lord Fauntleroy, and Rip Van Winkle were played in that order to "good houses" throughout the week.<sup>83</sup> The company, composed of ten people, were said to be respectable "both on and off the stage."<sup>84</sup> In their ten-cent matinee performance of Little Lord Fauntleroy, their child actor, once again, got the top notices.

Master Clem, the little boy with the company, took the part of the little lord in a manner that fairly captivated the audience. Little Clem is one of the brightest little boys that has ever appeared on the stage in Dell Rapids and his perfect rendition of his long and difficult part showed a remarkable memory in one so young and the talent of the true artist on the stage.<sup>85</sup>

The Dell Rapids newspapers seemed to have a special fondness for these child performers.

For the last engagement, Rip Van Winkle, chairs had to be placed in the aisles to accommodate the crowd.<sup>86</sup> Mr. Redmond and his wife took the leads. Frequent applause was said to have been interspersed throughout the play.<sup>87</sup> A good company, a good audience, and a good play appears to have jelled that night for all involved.

At the end of the Friday night play, the company's manager thanked the Dell Rapids Band for having played in front of the opera

---

<sup>83</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, June 13, 1896.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., June 20, 1896.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.



house before each performance of the past week.

He said that it was the best band he had ever seen in a town the size of Dell Rapids . . . and the people who heard the band last week do not think there was any flattery in the manager's words. The members of the band have by diligent practice attained a high degree of proficiency. . . .<sup>88</sup>

Apparently the band had improved greatly since its beginning with the Clifford Company in 1889. Saturday night, the manager again spoke, thanking the people for their presence and also complimenting the town on their "fine opera house."<sup>89</sup>

Monday the company departed for Elkton, informed that if they ever came back to Dell Rapids, they "would receive a warm welcome and a large patronage."<sup>90</sup>

On Tuesday, September 1, 1896, the Si Perkins Company arrived from the north by train. The company traveled in a "special" car that carried their own scenery.<sup>91</sup> Attached to the troupe was the Pughtown Farmer Band which gave a street parade and concert in front of the opera house. " . . . this helped to draw a large audience."<sup>92</sup> The three-act "comedy drama" Si Perkins was presented by Sam J. Burton as Si Perkins, Miss Eva Mayheu as Zana, Miss Virginia Richmond as

---

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., September 5, 1896.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

Betsy Bugles, Frank Moore as Fritz Dettenhoffer, and Ted Breton as Michael Angelo.<sup>93</sup> The large audience was reported to have received "their money's worth of fun,"<sup>94</sup> but the music between acts was considered to be the highlight of the evening.

1900, 1901, and 1903 Through September

Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, a play by the German author, Johann C. F. von Schiller, was presented on Monday, March 19, 1900, by the Elsie de Tourney Company. Madame de Tourney "won the plaudit of the audience" in the title role, while her support was thought to have been effective.<sup>95</sup> The company hired Miss Gina Smith of Dell Rapids to furnish music between the acts.<sup>96</sup> This indicates that there must have been a strong demand made upon the companies to offer some type of musical entertainment between the acts, regardless of the nature of the play being presented. Perhaps, by 1900, the audience had come to expect this.

The Faust Company was to appear on Friday, April 13, 1900, but cancelled the engagement because it was Good Friday.<sup>97</sup> It is not known if they scheduled the performance date for another time.

---

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Dell Rapids Times, March 23, 1900.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., April 13, 1900.

In the fall of 1900 the Enterprise Amusement Company arrived from the south and played a three-night engagement at the Dell Rapids Opera House. The first night, Thursday, October 11, A Clean Sweep was greeted by a large audience and the performance seemed to please the people; frequently being interrupted by applause.<sup>98</sup> Aberdeen was presented the second night, although the two plays on Saturday (one a matinee) were not listed in the newspaper account. The company left for Flandreau Monday. "The show while not one of the best on the road gives a pretty fair performance."<sup>99</sup>

Manager Mitchell, in an effort to promote business, arranged to have the James McAlphine Company present a play on election night, Tuesday, November 6, 1900.

. . . the opera house management will receive the telegraphic reports of the election returns which will be read from the stage during the entertainment.<sup>100</sup>

No critique was given the following week in the newspaper, but it must have been a joyous occasion at the Dell Rapids Opera House with the Republicans bringing the curtain down.

A Swedish dialect comedy entitled Hans Hanson was performed that night "interspersed with up-to-date specialties."<sup>101</sup> The

---

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., October 12, 1900.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., October 19, 1900.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

company was advertised as having a large number of people in the troupe, a first-class band, and Mr. McAlphine's comic talent. Reserved seats sold for fifty cents; the price for general admission was thirty-five cents, while children were admitted for twenty-five cents.<sup>102</sup> Also, the first four rows in the gallery were reserved "at the request of patrons."<sup>103</sup>

On Friday, November 30, 1900, Eiler's Big Uncle Tom's Cabin Company gave their rendition of that play--Uncle Tom's Cabin. The company, composed of thirty people, traveled in their own railroad cars that carried their "special scenery."<sup>104</sup> "Bloodhounds, Shetland ponies and trained donkeys" were advertised to appear on the stage as well as the Jubilee Singers.<sup>105</sup>

In February of 1901, Manager Mitchell secured Lloyd & Gay's Theatrical Company which was said to be "one of the best on the road with their latest songs, catchy music and clever vaudeville features."<sup>106</sup> On Wednesday, February 6, A Money Order, the first play offered, was billed as a farce comedy, but was considered to be a poor one.<sup>107</sup> This farce may have been indicative of Norman Haggood's

---

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., November 23, 1900.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., February 1, 1901.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., February 8, 1901.

remark, in his book The Stage In America 1897-1900, when he commented on the nature of the farce play: "In many American farces the plot is confined to the first act and the last ten minutes of the last act."<sup>108</sup> A small audience observed Oliver Twist the second night, the newspaper reporting that the performance was "creditable."<sup>109</sup> However, "the prices were too high for a town of this size, being 35 and 50 cents. In fact better shows have been put on here for 10, 20, and 30 cents."<sup>110</sup>

The next week the Tronsdale Theatrical Company had booked itself for a three-night engagement on February 11, 12, and 13, but did not appear, having closed the season at Flandreau.<sup>111</sup>

During February it was announced that the Craven-Beck Company would appear for two performances on March 8 and 9.<sup>112</sup> Nothing further was stated regarding their arrival or concerning the plays.

Texas, a three-act comedy drama, was rendered by the Gale-Cash Stock Company on Thursday, March 14, 1901, to a pleased audience "and each player was the recipient of enthusiastic encores."<sup>113</sup> This

---

<sup>108</sup>Norman Hapgood, The Stage In America 1897-1900 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), p. 94.

<sup>109</sup>Dell Rapids Times, February 8, 1901.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., February 22, 1901.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., March 15, 1901.

performance as well as other presentations that week were interspersed by specialties and songs. Apparently, the Scottish dancing drew the greatest response.

. . . Miss Susie L. Steele captivated the audience by the graceful manner in which she danced the "Highland Fling." She has only been over from Scotland three years and is recognized as among the best in Scottish step dancing.<sup>114</sup>

Continuing in Dell Rapids the Gale-Cash Company played A Bill of Sale on Friday, March 15, All the Comforts of a Home for the ten-cent Saturday matinee, and Pavements of Paris that evening. It was mentioned that "there were no long waits between acts."<sup>115</sup> Saturday, the opera house manager, W. S. Mitchell, got into the act with Miss Stelle, performing several Scottish dances. The large audience was delighted.<sup>116</sup>

Madame de Tournay's company appeared once again, advertised to play Romeo and Juliet on Wednesday, April 10, 1901, and also Twelfth Night the following evening.<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, Twelfth Night was not presented, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots taking its place.<sup>118</sup> This same play had been rendered a little over a year ago to the

---

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., March 22, 1901.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., March 15, 1901.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., April 12, 1901.

Dell Rapids' audience by this company. Madame de Tourney was said to be an actress of much ability and the company was a good one "with two or three exceptions."<sup>119</sup>

The James McAlphine Company, which played on election night in 1900, came back to Dell Rapids on Tuesday, May 7, 1901, having changed their name to the Hans Hanson Company. The Dell Rapids Times gives a good description of their play, Hans Hanson, that represented a specific type of theatre which apparently found much success in the Scandinavian Midwestern settlements.

. . . "Hans Hanson" is an American comedy drama. The principal character represents a young Swede lately arrived in America--a big-hearted, whole-souled, honest fellow, always ready to assist the depressed. The fun lies in his endeavor to speak the English language and the various comical situations that arise during the action of the play. At times the audience is held spell-bound by the tender pathos that pervades the piece and the next moment convulsed with laughter. Jas. T. McAlphine, who has been seen as "Ole Olson" throughout this country, has found in "Hans Hanson" an ideal Swedish play, giving him all possible opportunities for the display of his peculiar talent, both as a comedian singer and warbler.<sup>120</sup>

The one performance drew "one of the largest houses of the season" and was reported to have kept the audience in a good humor, although

---

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., May 3, 1901.

"there isn't much of a plot to the play."<sup>121</sup> The company, seventeen strong, also carried a good band, which gave a street concert before the show.<sup>122</sup>

Miss Georgia Harper and her company booked a one-night performance of East Lynne at the Dell Rapids Opera House on Monday, May 13.<sup>123</sup> Very often these lead players would advertise themselves with press notices they had received from a newspaper at some period in their careers. Miss Harper used the following account from the Memphis Tennessee Courier, which was printed in the Dell Rapids Times.

Georgia Harper as Lady Isbel captured the hearts of all. To those who were touched by the pathos of her life acting any attempt at description would be worse than useless, while those who did not hear her can form no idea of her splendid emotional ability, which coupled with a beauty of face and form refinement and manner rarely witnessed, had a most splendid effect.<sup>124</sup>

The date of the original article, of course, was not given.

The company, even with the emotional actress at its head, carried, "Illustrated songs and pleasing specialties . . . as a part of the program."<sup>125</sup>

Mr. Hubert Labadie's "Grand Scenic and Spectacular Production" of the romantic German play Faust was scheduled to appear Monday,

---

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., May 10, 1901.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., May 17, 1901.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.



June 10, 1901.<sup>126</sup> Prices of twenty-five, thirty, and fifty cents were set, but no account of its performance was found.

Again, the advance announcement was made for the Londale Stock Company to play a three-night engagement on October 14, 15, and 16 of 1901.<sup>127</sup> However, absence of a critique does not make the company's appearance a certainty. The newspapers in this period were not giving as complete accounts of these companies as had been done in the past.

The Si Perkins Company played Dell Rapids a second time on Tuesday, October 29, 1901, arriving in their private train car.<sup>128</sup> With the same play, Si Perkins, a large audience gathered and was well entertained. Mr. S. J. Burton still played the title role. The Pughtown Band furnished "fine music."<sup>129</sup>

A group which had cancelled its performance dates during the past winter now appeared in November. Coming from the South, the Trousdale Theatrical Company opened to a "packed house" Thursday, November 7, for a presentation of a comedy, the title not being recorded.<sup>130</sup> Three Hats was played the next evening, with Ole Olson being presented on Saturday night and another unidentified play given

---

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., June 7, 1901.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., October 4, 1901.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., November 1, 1901.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., November 8, 1901.

that Saturday afternoon. This troupe had something a bit different to offer. "The bell ringing and the trained dogs captivated the audience."<sup>131</sup>

Terry's Uncle Tom Cabin Company also performed in November, on Tuesday, the 26th, to another "crowded house."<sup>132</sup> The play, A Breezy Time, drew this comment: "The play itself was a light comedy without much of a plot, but was so arranged as to give place to a large number of pleasing specialties."<sup>133</sup> Gradually then, these specialties were becoming as popular as the drama itself.

The last attraction to occur in 1901 was the Aunt Jerusha Company. Scheduled to play Aunt Jerusha on Friday, December 13, the comedy drama was publicized as being ". . . a brilliant domestic story well told. Genuine comedy skillfully interwoven with pathos."<sup>134</sup> Several mechanical and electrical effects were billed as presenting "a series of stage pictures that are new, startling and realistic," with the Bitter Root Form Rube Quartet furnishing the singing.<sup>135</sup> The show, however, was reported to not have been as good as was expected, playing only to a fair sized audience. Bitter cold weather and a small fire in the town had kept many of the patrons away.<sup>136</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., November 29, 1901.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., December 6, 1901.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., December 20, 1901.

Little information was released by the Dell Rapids Times concerning the first company that played in 1903. During February the Le Febvre-Carpenter Company presented two nights of theatre: The Little Princess on Monday, February 2, which drew a full house and the next evening Camille which did not, due to severe weather.<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, if little was said regarding the company, a great deal more was said regarding the audience that month. Every so often the newspaper felt obliged to make recommendations in respect to audience etiquette and to rebuke the distractions.

Dell Rapids, like every other town has a few young fellows who think it is smart to attend a public meeting or entertainment and by talking out loud or in other rowdy ways disturb those who want to hear what is said. This sort of disturbance has been annoying to those who have attended entertainments at the opera house this winter and unless it is discontinued will hurt the patronage of the house.<sup>138</sup>

An unidentified company played A /sic/ Hour of Happiness Tuesday, February 17, to "a very small audience."<sup>139</sup> The newspaper, in one of its better attempts at humor stated:

Just where the title of the play is obtained from the production is somewhat of a mystery. Most of those present were of the opinion that "Two Hours of Torture" would have been more applicable.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., February 6, 1903.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., February 20, 1903.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

In April it was announced that Cora E. Ley's Faust Company would appear on Friday, May 21.<sup>141</sup> It is not known if the performance was ever given.

Was She To Blame was presented by the Jed Carlton Company to a small house on Wednesday, June 10, many of the townspeople attending the encampment at Flandreau.<sup>142</sup> Emma Jean Carlton and J. C. Stutz were congratulated on their comic abilities in the show.

The last company to appear within the scope of the study played The Count of Monte Cristo on Tuesday, June 16, which according to advertisement, was a play that had played for twenty years.<sup>143</sup> Although publicized to be an outstanding group, The Hugh Ettinger Company received the following unfavorable notice.

The play is a good one when rendered by a capable company, but the acting Tuesday evening as well as the costumes were strictly on the bum . . . the people were in for a humbug and those who stayed until the last act had enough show to last them for sometime.<sup>144</sup>

Over a period of time then, a slow disintegration occurred in the original legitimate repertory groups that played within Dell Rapids, South Dakota, during the late 1880's and early 1890's. The

---

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., April 17, 1903.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., June 12, 1903.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., June 19, 1903.

companies began to include musicians in their troupes to attract an audience before the shows. Eventually the music entered in between the acts of the plays, featuring singing groups, specialties, dancing, skits, and even dog tricks. At times it becomes difficult to separate the professional dramatic troupes from the professional variety troupes. It should also be noted that after the turn of the century these companies did not play a week's run consisting of a different play each night. Instead they would schedule to appear only from one to three nights in Dell Rapids. Their repertoires may have been so limited as to allow only a three-night stand. Lastly, it becomes apparent that the general quality of these shows declined. Cancellations became prevalent and the performances did not receive as many favorable notices as the troupes in the earlier periods had received. Therefore, it seems that the Dell Rapids Opera House reflected in a small way the general dilemma of the legitimate American theatre during this period.

## CHAPTER IV

### TOURING PROFESSIONAL VARIETY COMPANIES

The purpose of this chapter is to present a chronological description of those touring professional variety companies that played in the Dell Rapids Opera House in the beginning years. The date divisions that were employed in the preceding chapter will also be used here.

Since many of these professional variety acts were akin to the professional drama companies as well as to the community entertainments that were presented at the opera house, it is necessary to establish criteria in helping to distinguish these acts from those other events. In order to be considered professional variety entertainment the performance must: (1) give evidence that it was a touring group originating in some area other than Dell Rapids; (2) charge an admission fee; (3) present something other than a full-length play, musical, or non-musical; and, (4) indicate that its purpose was to evoke entertainment rather than instruction.

November of 1888 through 1892

The first variety act to appear in the Dell Rapids Opera House was a medicine show--Hamlin's Wizard Oil Concert Company. Like many of these companies it charged a nominal entrance fee of ten cents,

hoping to draw a large audience who, in turn, would purchase their bottles of "Wizard Oil." They also advertised that "Any person in need of the remedy who is not able to buy it will be presented with one or more bottles as his case seems to require."<sup>1</sup> This company played the entire first week of February, 1889, selling "Wizard Oil from the stage and two of the company give twenty-minute lectures relative to it."<sup>2</sup> On Saturday, February 10, they drew a crowd of 600 with the entertainment consisting of:

. . . the usual singing by a quartette, a number of solos and a speech by Dr. Bennett, and the comedian gave a creditable rendition of "The Country Parson," Hall, the contortionist "chased the butterfly" and the entertainment was closed with a shadow pantomime.<sup>3</sup>

That evening a lady's gold watch was presented to Mr. N. J. Hartman, a Dell Rapids' man, who held the winning ticket number.<sup>4</sup> The newspaper was delighted with the company's engagement and encouraged them to return, which they did on Monday, December 16, 1895.

In March of 1889 "the so-called G.A.R. Drum Corps and Martial Band Co." gave a magic lantern exhibition with "some drumming."<sup>5</sup> The drumming was described as "deafening" with the performance

---

<sup>1</sup>Dell Rapids Times, January 18, 1889.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1889.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., March 8, 1889.

summarized in the following way: "We don't think the people got their money's worth."<sup>6</sup>

What seemingly would be an unattractive name in our time for a group containing eight women, must have attracted attention in 1889 when the "Duncan Clark's Monster Combination" act came to the town. Advertised in June to be the same company that played New York's principal theatres, this group claimed that its show would "be a purely moral entertainment which may be patronized by everybody with perfect propriety."<sup>7</sup> Appearing on Monday, July 8, the Dell Rapids Times related a different reaction.

The audience was not very large and was composed mostly of men and boys. The "show" was a sort of a variety and was pretty rank in some respects. Eight female artists dressed in their modesty and tights and two negro minstrels did the acting. There was some good music, singing and tableaux, but on the whole the entertainment was decidedly [ sic ] loud.<sup>8</sup>

In that same edition a blurb said, "Some of the boys caught on to the 'combination' after the show Monday night, we understand."<sup>9</sup> The reader may conjecture as to the success of the evening. Later that winter the Dell Rapids Times got word from the Chicago Tribune that this company was "arrested in a small town in Ohio for indecent behavior on the stage, and not having any money, they were unable to

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., June 28, 1889.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., July 12, 1889.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



pay their fines and had to serve out their sentences in jail."<sup>10</sup>

Simply featured as "The Swiss Bell Ringers" the next company entertained a large audience on Tuesday, July 9, 1889. The newspaper reporter who covered the event was most taken with the three little girls and a little boy who participated in the musical concert.<sup>11</sup> Little Meroe, a six-year-old girl, apparently sold many pictures of herself to the audience.<sup>12</sup> Their band gave a street concert outdoors before the show, helping to attract the large audience on that summer's eve.

Royce and Lansing's Musical Comedy Company, said to have played in Dell Rapids before the opera house was built,<sup>13</sup> gave the large audience "an entirely new and very pleasing programme" on Thursday, October 3. With singing and imitations, the lead comedian, Ray Royce "kept the audience convulsed with laughter."<sup>14</sup> The program was considered to be extremely "varied." "They have left an impression here that assures them a good house at anytime they may visit us in the future."<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., January 17, 1890.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., July 12, 1889.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., October 4, 1889.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., October 11, 1889.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

The Medicine King Catarrh Cure Company gave a weekly entertainment starting Monday, July 21, 1890. Charging the usual ten cents for admission, little was said of the company other than they arrived and left Dell Rapids by "team, driving overland."<sup>16</sup>

A musical and recitation concert was given Friday, August 1, 1890, by Miss Grace Goodykoontz and Miss Gwyneth King. Their concert was not well attended due to several other programs scheduled within the town that evening.<sup>17</sup> However, those that did attend "were well paid." Miss Goodykoontz, a soprano, sang musical selections and Miss King impersonated characters with "great skill."<sup>18</sup> Their pianist, Miss Bruce, was absent so Dell Rapids' Belle Gifford took her place and "demonstrated her ability to handle the piano with the skill of an artist."<sup>19</sup> Admission was twenty-five and thirty-five cents.

In September a brief announcement appeared in the newspaper saying that "A combination of 'warblers,' consisting of a colored quartette--three males and one female--held forth at the opera house . . . to a meagre audience."<sup>20</sup> This group, it seems, had

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., August 1, 1890.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., August 8, 1890.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., September 12, 1890.

held a street entertainment one night during the previous summer.

Advertised as, "The old, original, colored, Georgia minstrels, with thirteen rip-roaring, side-splitting members"<sup>21</sup> the Georgia Minstrels played to a large audience at Dell Rapids which was kept laughing with burlesques, drolleries, singing, and dancing on Thursday, January 29, 1891. "The company is evidently a good one and the entertainment was entirely free from anything that could be regarded as off-color."<sup>22</sup>

Arnold's Concert Opera Company was managed by a Mr. Arnold, a man who had been a former resident of South Dakota. The Dell Rapids Times, in an interview with him, said that he had entered the jewelry business in Watertown during the boom era in South Dakota, but had gone back to the stage a few years ago.<sup>23</sup> His company, appearing on Friday, February 13, 1891, gave a short but "highly pleasing" program. When the vocal and instrumental music had concluded, the opera, The Rivals, was presented with Arnold as the bass.<sup>24</sup> They were thought to be a fine musical company.

Not until Friday, June 9 of 1891, did another variety group appear. The Three Graces gave a concert which was attended by a large audience.<sup>25</sup> No other information was given.

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., January 30, 1891.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., February 6, 1891.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., February 13, 1891.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., February 20, 1891.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., June 26, 1891.

The Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company presented a one-week show at the Dell Rapids Opera House starting Wednesday, October 21 of 1891, selling five Indian remedies, three of which were names "Sagwa Oil," "Worm Killer," and "Salve and Cough Cure."<sup>26</sup> Their entertainment, judged as being "really good," was free to all except on Saturday when they charged twenty-five and fifteen cents.<sup>27</sup> On Tuesday, October 27, the day before they left, the Kickapoo Medicine Company gave out two prizes.

. . . a plush photograph album to the lady chosen by one of the company as the handsomest in the house, and a bottle of Sagwa to the homeliest man. Mrs. J. M. Nisbet [the wife of the Times editor] was the recipient of the first prize; and the homeliest man was asked to walk up and get his prize, whereupon a young fellow calmly walked up and "took the persimmon," but we did not learn his name.<sup>28</sup>

On Tuesday, November 17, the McKanlass Colored Musical Comedy Company came to Dell Rapids promising in their advertisement to give an especially varied entertainment.

Prof. Wm. H. McKanlass, the musical wonder of the world, a graduate of the college of music, at Cincinnati . . . the only artist living who has ever performed the feat of playing two cornets at one and the same time . . . The professor is supported by a large company of picked artists in the latest farce comedy success of "Shooting Craps." A few of the

---

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., October 23, 1891.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., October 30, 1891.

features . . . Miss Susie Griffin, the man-voiced woman--singing as low as E flat . . . Miss Beatrice Sylvester . . . reaches high C nightly . . . Master Willie and little Adilena in their unapproachable singing, dancing and instrumental music. The Reese twins--brothers in their double acrobatic . . . Mr. A. L. Sales, the wide-mouthed excentric [sic] comedian, who when he smiles causes the buttons to fly off from vest and collars.<sup>29</sup>

However, their appearance was not what could be considered a successful one. Word had come in from other towns that this was "a regular Uncle Tom's Cabin fake."<sup>30</sup> Also, several of the company's members had been left in Sioux Falls to recover from illness. What appeared in Dell Rapids was Professor McKanlass, one lady singer, two colored boys, four colored men, and three white men. Professor McKanlass was thought to be an excellent musician but "the lady singer . . . failed to reach high C as advertised."<sup>31</sup>

The rest of the "show" was made up of clownish performances, stale burlesques and noise, without any redeeming feature unless it was the vigorous and rapid music which the big darkey executed on the bass drum . . . taken as a whole the entertainment was second-class, to say the least, and might well be considered a fake by those who payed 50 cents to see it.<sup>32</sup>

After the performance the company faired even worse--a group "of the boys" went to the hotel and gave them "a dose of eggs."<sup>33</sup> They left

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., November 13, 1891.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., November 20, 1891.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

that evening on the 11:58 freight.

Shortly after the unsuccessful McKanlass Company left town, Miss Lenora K. Murray, the elocutionist, entered. She seems to have made the most of her stay, mingling in the social events of Dell Rapids.

She met a number of the people here and captivated them with her beauty, sociability and pleasant conversation. This applies with especial force to some of our old bachelors who were so thoroughly captivated that it seemed highly probable that they would follow the divinity away, but their friends managed to restrain them.<sup>34</sup>

Her performance of Saturday, November 28, was described as "a happy blending of tragedy, pathos and humor, and . . . she showed a marvelous adaptation to the various characters which she impersonated."<sup>35</sup> There was a large audience in attendance which the newspaper attributed to the cultural and intellectual nature in the people of Dell Rapids. No doubt, her "beauty" and marital status had some drawing power as well.

On Wednesday and Thursday, January 13 and 14 of 1892, Professor Lowanda and his wife, Madam Lowanda, gave a two-night performance. Professor Lowanda's entertainment consisted of sleight-of-hand tricks and ventriloquism. His wife, "the witch of

---

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., December 4, 1891.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

wall street," drew the attention of the critic with her mind-reading act.

A boy from the audience made a number of figures on a blackboard at the front of the stage and the mind reader, blindfolded, duplicated them simultaneously on another board at the back of the stage. In one instance she made the figure the boy had in mind before he placed it on the board . . . She claims to perform these feats while in a trance. They are doubtless only feats of magic, but that they are difficult and surprising must be admitted.<sup>36</sup>

Their second night was better attended with a fair sized audience. At both performances they concluded with giving away "numerous articles of a cheap character."<sup>37</sup>--sacks of flour, money, glass-ware, and watches--to name a few.

Perhaps one of the most interesting advertisements as well as financial dealings was made regarding Paul Alexander Johnstone, "the famous mind reader." The following excerpt was printed in the Chicago Journal, September 11, 1890, which the Dell Rapids Times reprinted to publicize Mr. Johnstone's engagement at the opera house.

Everything considered, the feat performed yesterday by P. Alexander Johnstone, the mind-reader of St. Paul, is very wonderful . . . Mr. Johnstone, blindfolded, drove a team of horses from the Auditorium at breakneck speed through the streets to the Grand Pacific hotel, into which he rushed and picked out of the register, still blindfolded, a name that one of the witnesses had previously selected.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., January 15, 1892.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., January 22, 1892.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., April 8, 1892.

In order to secure this man, the Briley brothers, Mr. M. R. Kenefick, Mr. G. E. Bowerman, Mr. W. S. Catlin, and Mr. W. C. Nisbet, all leading community men, guaranteed Johnstone fifty dollars for a one-night engagement.<sup>39</sup> However, due to heavy rain the night of Tuesday, April 12, the receipts brought only twenty-five dollars. "The gentlemen who guaranteed him \$50 had some difficulty in making a fair settlement with him under the circumstances, but the matter was finally settled satisfactorily to them--if not to him."<sup>40</sup>

As so often happened, the advance publicity did not give an accurate statement of the program.

His programme at the opera house consisted of a short lecture on the senses of man in general and the so-called mind-reading science in particular, and an exhibition of his mind-reading power . . . nearly everybody was disappointed in him. His performance was not as good as that of Madam Lowanda . . . rather a slim entertainment, considering the boom style of his advertising.<sup>41</sup>

The Scandinavian element of Dell Rapids must have been pleased to know that the Lutteman Sextette of Sweden was scheduled to perform Monday, May 23, 1892. Even with admission set at thirty-five and fifty cents a large audience assembled to hear the concert, most of which was sung in the Swedish language.<sup>42</sup> The program of

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., April 1, 1892.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., April 15, 1892.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., May 27, 1892.



classical and humorous songs was frequently interrupted with applause. These singers had been promised one hundred dollars for their concert with the receipts amounting to one hundred and fifty dollars, making it a successful evening. Earlier that day "they were driven about the city in carriages and pleasantly entertained by their countrymen here."<sup>43</sup> After the concert a banquet was held in their honor.

The Swiss Bell Ringers combined with the Grand Old Oakes Company made an appearance on Saturday, October 8, 1892. Apparently this combination company had been in existence for some time.

We have been hearing of the Swiss Bell Ringers and tumbler musicians ever since we were children, and it is just as attractive to us now as it was then. It really does one good to go and see one of the old time shows we attended when we were boys and girls going to school.<sup>44</sup>

With the price of tickets set at thirty-five cents for adults and twenty-five cents for children, a large house gathered to see the "varied" entertainment which was reported to have been successful.<sup>45</sup>

Lars H. Fylerud, a celebrated violinist from Norway, gave a concert to a small audience on Saturday, October 22, 1892, pleasing those who attended.<sup>46</sup> He was publicized as being able to play

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., October 7, 1892.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., October 14, 1892.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., October 21, 1892.

entirely by ear on his ninety-year-old "Hardanger violin."<sup>47</sup>

Advertising to refund anyone's money after the first act if not satisfied, the Original Nashville Students combined with Wright's Grand Colored Concert Company rendered singing, dancing, and specialties, concluding their show with a farce, The Cake Walk.<sup>48</sup> Playing on Tuesday, October 25, 1892, they received favorable notices.

" . . . one of the best performances we have had for a long time."<sup>49</sup> The slack wire performance was especially enjoyed.

"Almost every piece was encored" when the Chicago Ladies' Quartette filled an engagement at the opera house on Friday, November 18, 1892.<sup>50</sup> There seems to have been only a fair sized audience present due to other entertainments that evening. However, these musical concerts were generally quite popular in the community, pulling larger audiences than the specialty variety shows.

October of 1894 to September of 1896

No variety company appeared in October, but on Friday, November 23, 1894, McCabe & Young's Minstrels ventured to Dell Rapids with its "twenty talented artists."<sup>51</sup> Their show was said to include:

---

<sup>47</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, October 22, 1892.

<sup>48</sup>Dell Rapids Times, October 21, 1892.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., November 25, 1892.

<sup>51</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, November 17, 1894.

"twelve famous Drum Majors," "the 'Fete of Flowers'," "a Spanish Bull Fight," "Living Pictures of Scenes Down South," and "London Silhouettes." These flashy advertisements were generally a good indication that the show lacked substantial entertainment.

The company has a good band which played some enjoyable music, and the musical part of the programme was good, as were also some of the specialties, but the minstrel part of the programme was pretty poor, making up in noise what it lacked in quality. It takes more than a lot of yelling and a few bass drum solos to make a first class minstrel entertainment.<sup>52</sup>

The advance agent for Blind Boone, a Negro pianist, preceded Boone by two months to Dell Rapids to make arrangements for the show which was presented Friday, April 19, 1895.<sup>53</sup> This resulted in a highly organized publicity campaign in the newspaper for Boone's appearance. This advertising seems to have paid off since Boone drew a large audience. He was also reported to have played Dell Rapids before which may have provided him with the reputation of a good musician.<sup>54</sup> Advertised as being able to imitate any piece on the piano after having heard it once,<sup>55</sup> Boone was called by the Dell Rapids Tribune "an artist."<sup>56</sup> Miss Stella May, a contralto, traveled

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., December 1, 1894.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., February 23, 1895.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., April 27, 1895.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., March 30, 1895.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., April 27, 1895.

with the blind man singing plantation songs. They went on to Madison the next day.

Field's Merry Makers, coming from a week's engagement in Sioux Falls, was "one of the poorest that has appeared here for some time."<sup>57</sup> Playing nothing that they had advertised to do, a farce was presented, "a miserable piece of comedy,"<sup>58</sup> some magic routines, dancing, and mind reading. Neither presentation on Monday or Tuesday, July 15 and 16 was different from the other, drawing the sarcastic comment: "If their repertoire is limited to what they gave here, their week engagements must be varied and interesting."<sup>59</sup>

The Merry Makers enjoyed further unfavorable publicity when it was learned by the newspaper that a Mr. William Mason of the Merchants Hotel in Sioux Falls had joined the troupe at Dell Rapids to try and collect the hotel bill of seventy-one dollars owed to him as a result of the company's week's stay at his establishment.<sup>60</sup> Mason was able to secure only nine dollars on the account while in Dell Rapids. However, he continued his travels with the company as reported by the Sioux Falls Press.

---

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., July 20, 1895.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

Billy Mason, who accompanied Field's Merry Makers to collect a \$71 board bill which the troupe owed to the Merchants hotel, returned yesterday . . . from Sioux City. He had been with the barn stormers over two weeks when he cut loose from them. During the time Billy was with the outfit he acted as financial manager--selling tickets and keeping the combination afloat, but he was unable to get enough ahead to square the bill he was sent to collect. Billy says he has held down a good many tough jobs, but the attempt to collect the bill from the Merry Makers is the cap sheaf.<sup>61</sup>

Comprised of only three people, Mead and Allen's Pleasant Surprise Company were thought to have made up for their being few in number by their quality entertainment on Monday, September 2, 1895.<sup>62</sup> Mr. Meade and Carl Herrman kept the fair sized audience applauding. Meade gave impersonations and recitations--his take-off of Bill Nye, the humorist, was considered "first-class." Herrman drew the most praise, however, with his tricks on the violin.

Carl Herrman is the finest violinist who has ever appeared before a Dell Rapids audience. He executed some high class music . . . He also gave a mandolin solo and played several popular melodies on a violin constructed out of a wooden shoe. He closed by exhibiting his skill with the violin by playing in twenty-four positions, and also played on the instrument with a comb, tooth pick, pin and several other articles.<sup>63</sup>

They traveled to Pipestone, Minnesota the next day.

---

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., August 3, 1895.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., September 7, 1895.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

Originally scheduled to play Dell Rapids on Monday, September 25, The Nashville Students changed their route and rebilled the town for the 30th. Parading up the street before the performance, only a fair sized audience was attracted to the minstrel show. It was not thought by the newspaper reporter to have been a very entertaining show, but some of the songs, dancing, and the loose wire performances were considered "good."<sup>64</sup> The audience and actor relationship suffered at the end of the performance.

The manager, a large colored gentleman, in his closing remarks, showed considerable ill feeling because the show was not better patronized, although how they could be blamed in the matter is not apparent . . . The Nashville Students may be the best company of the kind on the road, but they should learn to be as courteous to a small audience as to a crowded house. People are not living here merely to help out such shows, and when one has paid to attend an entertainment he wants to be well treated whether the audience is large or small.<sup>65</sup>

A concert group, The Tennessean Jubilee Singers, appeared Saturday, October 5, 1895. Their one-night program was called "entertaining" with the soprano and the bass cited as being outstanding singers.<sup>66</sup> It might be mentioned that if there were Negro members of a company the newspaper usually called this to the reader's attention. Dell Rapids was not accustomed to Negro people since few lived within the state at that time. Therefore, a feeling of curiosity was often generated toward the Negro performers. The

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., October 5, 1895.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., October 12, 1895.

Tennessean Jubilee Singers was a company "composed entirely of colored people."<sup>67</sup> It was the soprano from this company that was asked to sing for the Presbyterian Church at Dell Rapids. She rendered "two fine solos" Sunday morning, October 6, 1895.

On Wednesday, October 30, 1895, the Plantation Minstrel Company appeared at the opera house drawing a small house due to poor advertisement.<sup>68</sup> Nothing was stated in the papers concerning the quality of the performance.

"One of Hamlin's Wizard Oil companies" arrived in Dell Rapids for a week's engagement starting Monday, December 16. They were reported to have drawn good houses, but very little medicine was sold.<sup>69</sup> It may be that the people took advantage of the inexpensive entertainment without a real interest in the products being offered.

The first variety show to appear in 1896 on Tuesday and Wednesday, January 14 and 15, was of a nature that differed from most of the shows under discussion. George W. Bagley, a well known lightning sketch artist from Sioux Falls, presented his "Chalk Talks" for two nights with admission set at ten, twenty and thirty cents.<sup>70</sup> There was only a "fair attendance." His sketches included landscapes,

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., November 2, 1895.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., December 28, 1895.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., January 11, 1896.

portraits, pictures of animals, and comic scenes "all of which he does with an accuracy and finish and rapidity that stamp him a true artist."<sup>71</sup>

Once again, the Chicago Ladies' Quartette came to Dell Rapids. This time they performed under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>72</sup> The vocal concert on Monday, May 11, 1896, was interspersed with impersonations by Miss Nettie Jackson which seems to have provided "a pleasant diversion."<sup>73</sup>

The same combination company that appeared in 1892 arrived again in Dell Rapids for a performance on Monday, May 25, 1896. Each company merged with the other, but still retained their separate names. The Oakes' Comic Specialty Company and the Swiss Bell Ringers drew a good house despite the fact that many of the people in the town had gone to see the circus in Sioux Falls.<sup>74</sup> Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Oakes were considered fine musicians and Nat Blossom, the group's comedian, was said to be "a whole show in himself." The entertainment of burlesques and musical bells closed with a farce entitled As In A Looking Glass.<sup>75</sup> The Dell Rapids Cornet Band furnished several selections in front of the opera house before the show began.

---

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., January 18, 1896.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., April 25, 1896.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., May 16, 1896.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., May 30, 1896.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.



A brief blurb announced that the California Ideals would give an exhibition of hypnotism and mind reading on Wednesday, September 30, although it is not known if the company appeared.<sup>76</sup>

#### 1900, 1901, and 1903 Through September

In March of 1900 it was announced that a "well known company" would present "A trip to Africa."<sup>77</sup> This may have been a dramatic company but the publicity included the phrases "good music, good specialties," so that it is thought that variety was probably its strongest feature. The performance was to take place Tuesday, March 13, but it was never critiqued in the local paper.

Pauline and Carnaveaux, the hypnotist and mind reader, gave Dell Rapids three nights of good entertainment on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday of April 17, 19, and 21. Their publicity gimmick for the Saturday show stirred the town somewhat.

Saturday about noon the hypnotist [Pauline] put Mr. Carnaveaux to sleep in the window at Thompson & Rooney's store and awoke him at 9 o'clock on the stage in the opera house. During the afternoon Pauline performed a number of feats with the sleeping man and as a consequence a good many people remained in front of the store a good part of the afternoon.<sup>78</sup>

This hypnotic act was called by the Dell Rapids Times "better than any we have witnessed."<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., September 26, 1896.

<sup>77</sup>Dell Rapids Times, March 9, 1900.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., April 27, 1900.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., April 20, 1900.

A Professor Bosco, who had just played to packed houses in Madison, was scheduled to give two performances of his music on Saturday and Monday of May 11 and 12 in 1900.<sup>80</sup> It is not known if he appeared.

"The Gay Coons from Dark-Town" (the company's name) advertised:

No brass bands, street show, or vulgarity [sic], but instead artists, singers and dancers, comedians, ladies and gentlemen. Six colored stars in the company, headed by LaShe, novelty slack wire artist and the hero of Paris and Niagara.<sup>81</sup>

Their performance on Saturday, December 15, 1900, was played to a small audience due to word being circulated that the show "was on the bum order."<sup>82</sup> The critic summed up by saying, "Dell Rapids has had worse shows and also better ones."<sup>83</sup>

Due to severe weather on Saturday, December 22, The Philharmonic Company of Chicago entertained only a small audience--even after extensive publicity.<sup>84</sup> It should be remembered that when adverse weather hit the area it became impossible for farming families to make the trip into town in their wagons. Therefore, these companies' fates depended as much upon the elements as did the farmers'.

---

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., May 11, 1900.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., December 7, 1900.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., December 21, 1900.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., December 28, 1900.

The Philharmonic gave a "musical treat" to those who could get to the opera house.<sup>85</sup>

Professor B. Smalley and his wife, apparently both blind, gave a musical concert on Wednesday, December 26. "Besides instrumental solos and duets there will be comic and sentimental singing."<sup>86</sup> The concert drew a small house, however, as a result of the Christmas activities.<sup>87</sup>

A dramatic reading was presented by Charles F. Craig on Thursday, January 10, 1901, of James Herne's play Shore Acres.<sup>88</sup> Although Mr. Craig was a professional entertainer, it seems he gave the proceeds, or a part of the proceeds, of ten dollars to the Dell Rapids Public Schools for the library fund.<sup>89</sup> Craig's ability toward character impersonation and "the story he told" met with frequent applause. At the conclusion a quick change piece entitled "Uncle Ned" was given.

The Mahara Minstrels advertised themselves as having been on the road for twenty years<sup>90</sup>, which, if true, was a miraculous feat.

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., December 21, 1900.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., December 28, 1900.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., January 4, 1901.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., January 11, 1901.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., February 8, 1901.

The group played on Tuesday, February 19, and Dell Rapids received a treat in minstrel entertainment. This was one company that lived up to its advertising.

The performance in the opera house Tuesday evening by the Mahara Minstrels was the best of the kind ever witnessed by the patrons . . . for many a day. The street parade did not amount to much as the weather was too stormy, however, they had an excellent band . . . The performance started out with an air of liveliness which continued throughout. It was a little different than the ordinary minstrel show, the program being of a little higher and more elevating nature than has been given by colored troupes heretofore in this city.<sup>91</sup>

On Wednesday, February 27, the Dode Fiske's Concert Orchestra from Baraboo, Wisconsin, gave a concert in the opera house. The newspaper reported that manager Mitchell had promised a large guarantee to the company and that a strong patronage was required by the people to meet the expense.<sup>92</sup> The funds were probably procured since "fifty or sixty young people" attended the dance after the concert with dance tickets costing seventy-five cents.<sup>93</sup> It was reported to have been "a very enjoyable evening."<sup>94</sup>

Another concert company appeared on Monday, March 11, 1901. The Dixie Jubilee Concert Company, under the auspices of the Ladies Guild of the Episcopal Church, delivered plantation songs. However,

---

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., February 22, 1901.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., March 1, 1901.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

the Guild, "after all expenses . . . was not very well ahead."<sup>95</sup>

On Friday and Saturday, March 22 and 23, the Carter DeHaven Vaudeville and Comedy Company were scheduled to perform. They were reported to have given a successful entertainment in Sioux Falls with the papers of the city speaking "in highest terms of the company."<sup>96</sup> A critique of their show was not reported.

It was announced in May that the Heywood Celebrities would appear on Tuesday, June 4, 1901.<sup>97</sup> Nothing more was ever mentioned about the groups.

A hypnotist by the name of "Griffith" played Thursday and Friday, September 26 and 27, but was not permitted to appear a third time since "the opera house would not allow him to. The show was not what it was advertised to be and the few who attended were disappointed."<sup>98</sup> Undoubtedly, this was a movement by W. S. Mitchell, the manager, in an effort to uphold quality entertainment in the opera house and to discourage the poorer companies from coming to Dell Rapids.

On Tuesday, December 3, Rube Allyn, an impersonator and humorist, was scheduled to perform. The school library was to get "a good slice of the receipts, and as the price of admission is cut

---

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., March 15, 1901.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., March 22, 1901.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., May 31, 1901.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., October 4, 1901.

in two, seats being reserved all over the house for 25 cents, there should be no seats left unsold."<sup>99</sup> No critique was given.

A medicine group by the name of "Dr. Mock-Sad Alli's Medicine troupe" sold their cures the first two days of January, 1903. The doctor was mentioned as a "crackerjack" with his magic tricks. The company was described as "better than average."<sup>100</sup>

In a brief announcement Eva LeRoy's Company was said to be scheduled for an appearance on Thursday, May 7, 1903, presenting music and mystery.<sup>101</sup> It is not known if they ever appeared.

In summary it can be said that 49 variety acts played at the opera house. It appears that professional variety theatre was a frequent form of entertainment in Dell Rapids. More individual professional variety companies appeared in the opera house than professional dramatic groups. Although occasionally the variety shows drew adverse criticism on their worth, more were reported by the newspaper to have been enjoyed than not. Glib advertising was often an indication that the troupe lacked substantial merit. The Dell Rapids Opera House generally drew a larger house for the musical or concert presentations than for the specialty and burlesque acts. In 1901 community groups began to sponsor a few professional variety acts,

---

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., November 29, 1901.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., January 2, 1903.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., April 17, 1903.

splitting receipts in order to raise money for a project. As was pointed out in Chapter III the newspapers past 1900 did not always give complete coverage of the various entertainments that took place in the opera house. There is an indication that Manager Mitchell, in 1901, took steps by forbidding a variety act to complete its scheduled engagement, to upgrade the variety entertainment and to discourage the poorer companies from wending their way to Dell Rapids to perform in its opera house.

## CHAPTER V

## AMATEUR DRAMA

It is the purpose of this chapter to give a chronological discussion of those community dramas that were produced in the Dell Rapids Opera House during the early years. Although most of these plays were performed by the people of Dell Rapids, at least one touring amateur group from another town in South Dakota visited the opera house.

Three days before the new opera house opened its doors in November, 1888, it was announced "that some of the young folks are preparing a dramatic entertainment for the stage."<sup>1</sup> No doubt excitement generated among the people, especially the younger people of Dell Rapids, when considering the opportunity for amateur theatre in the new structure. It was announced later in the month that Pheonix, a popular drama, would be presented under the auspices of the Hose Company who needed funds to purchase fire equipment.<sup>2</sup> It was further stated that "the best available talent" had been enlisted, including members for an orchestra, for the production on

---

<sup>1</sup>Dell Rapids Times, November 2, 1888.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., November 23, 1888.



Thanksgiving evening, Thursday, November 29. With reserve seats set at thirty-five cents and general admission at twenty-five cents, "a good sum" was gathered from the large audience that attended.<sup>3</sup> This first venture seems to have been successful.

Indeed, those who took part did very well and surprised everybody. They all showed careful study and appeared very much at ease on the stage for amateurs.<sup>4</sup>

Having gained a favorable response from this first show the Hose Company quickly made plans for a second production the first month of 1889. No mention was ever made in the newspapers suggesting that only members of the Fire Department could participate in the Hose Company's productions. It is conceivable that this group carried the name of the "Hose Company" for the purpose of drawing funds from the firemen for the production and then giving the proceeds to the Fire Department. It is also likely that casting was made from those persons who were interested and possessed the ability to act in a show. At no time did the newspapers announce tryouts for any of the amateur productions in Dell Rapids.

On Saturday, January 19, 1889, the Hose Company presented Black Diamonds, another drama, to a good audience who, it appears, appreciated the entertainment.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., December 7, 1888.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The company showed that they had carefully studied and rehearsed their parts, and, while there is opportunity for criticism, they being amateurs, yet on the whole did extremely well. Taking everything into consideration the home talent does about as well as most of the companies that come through this country.<sup>5</sup>

This particular production was played once more at Valley Springs where the group traveled to on Saturday, February 2.<sup>6</sup> They also had an invitation to play Black Diamonds in Luverne, Minnesota<sup>7</sup>, but it is not known if they went.

It will be remembered that the stone quarries had brought over skilled laborers from England and Scotland to Dell Rapids. Many of these men had left their families behind.<sup>8</sup> And so, when the Burns Club, seemingly a British men's club, decided to present the Scottish drama Rob Roy, the object was not to make money "but to amuse themselves and the people" as well as to receive enough profit to meet expenses.<sup>9</sup> Since many of those who took parts in the drama were Scotch or of Scottish descent the dialogue was advertised as spoken "in the quaint language of the Scotch, but the company will endeavor to make it so plain that all who attend can readily understand what is said."<sup>10</sup> Having purchased costumes for the show, admission was

---

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., January 25, 1889.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., February 1, 1889.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., February 8, 1889.

<sup>8</sup>Interview with Harry Dieson, October 5, 1968.

<sup>9</sup>Dell Rapids Times, February 15, 1889.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

set at the usual twenty-five and thirty-five cents. The opening night of Thursday, February 20, did not pay all expenses due to a winter storm and so a second performance was set for Friday, March 1, 1889. This gave the Dell Rapids Times an opportunity to offer suggestions for the show's improvement.

As the Burns Club is going to repeat "Rob Roy" tonight, THE TIMES in a kindly spirit would say to some of the actors that they can greatly improve the entertainment by talking louder and more distinctly . . . Some of them talked so low they could not be heard even by those nearest the stage, but did very well otherwise . . . <sup>11</sup>

Next, the Dell Rapids Times turned its attention to the audience of February 20 and gave a somewhat sharper criticism.

We don't know who caused it, and it really doesn't matter but last Thursday night there was a continual buzzing noise during the play that was very annoying to a good many if not all. During the time between acts there can be no reasonable objection raised to anyone talking or moving about, but while the play is in progress it is objectionable . . . Hereafter let it be quiet at entertainments. <sup>12</sup>

The second performance by the Burns Club was considered by the newspaper to be "better."<sup>13</sup> At both entertainments the chairs were removed from the auditorium for concluding dances.

---

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., March 1, 1889.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., March 8, 1889.

On Friday, April 5 of 1889, the Hose Company produced their last play for the season. The Hidden Crime was reported to be a story of humor mingled with crime and deception that would be performed by "a comparatively new cast."<sup>14</sup> A full house was encouraged due to heavy expenses. The notices were favorable, stating that this was the best acting the Hose Company had done. However, lack of costumes "and inattention to some minor details" spoiled the total effect.<sup>15</sup> E. E. Gregory and Miss Nellie Kenefick were given special praise for their natural acting. The critique also mentioned that up to this time the Hose Company had collected a total of fifty dollars from their dramas.<sup>16</sup>

In 1890 the Hose Company once again presented a drama, The Ticket-of-Leave Man, as well as a concluding farce entitled, The Kansas Immigrant.<sup>17</sup> A cast listing was published in the newspaper showing that many prominent townspeople were included in the production. W. S. Mitchell, A. W. Griswold, I. E. Angstead, W. S. Catlin, D. E. Ward, T. S. Galbraith, J. E. Irwin, Grant Martin, Miss Jennie Wald, Miss Lou Ward, and Mrs. J. E. Irwin were all members of the cast.<sup>18</sup> Mitchell performed his Scottish dance steps at the

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., April 5, 1889.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., April 12, 1889.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., February 21, 1890.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

conclusion of the four-act drama. It was in this production that A. W. Griswold began to establish a name for himself with his acting. By 1895 Griswold was being sought by amateur companies in Sioux Falls.<sup>19</sup>

On Friday, February 28, a large audience gathered to witness The Ticket-Of-Leave Man. It was considered to be a complete success with "two or three" doing "better than the rest of the company in respect to the details of their parts."<sup>20</sup> After the show a dance was held.

During an old settlers' reunion on Thursday, March 6, the Hose Company presented a rehearsal of this same play to the old timers. They then took the production to Madison on March 7 and to Egan on April 1.<sup>21</sup> During the tour the group changed their name to "The Granite City Dramatic Club,"<sup>22</sup> probably in hopes of establishing a permanent amateur dramatic group. The club seems to have died a quick death, however, never being mentioned again.

In 1891 Dell Rapids found its director, Reverend T. Howell Richards. As the Knights of Pythias decided to present Damon and Pythias, a story based around the principles of the organization,

---

<sup>19</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, March 9, 1895.

<sup>20</sup>Dell Rapids Times, March 7, 1890.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., April 4, 1890.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

women liked to attend his church and there is an indication that there was small town gossip linked to his name.<sup>29</sup> For some reason, which cannot be found due to a newspaper gap, Reverend Richards left Dell Rapids in 1897 as well as the ministry, which he had been ordained to in 1894.<sup>30</sup>

It is possible, through newspaper notices, to see Richards' professional attitude toward theatre.

Manager Richards desires THE TIMES to state that a full rehearsal of the "Damon and Pythias" company will be held every night next week at the opera house, and every member of the company will be expected to be present.<sup>31</sup>

This production of Damon and Pythias met with success on Friday, May 22, 1891. The drama was noted as being "a heavy one" but it was felt that the audience grasped its depth with appreciation.<sup>32</sup> Most of the review revolved around Richards.

Throughout, Mr. T. Howell Richards, who has had extensive experience in the work, had the full management of the entertainment. He made a strong cast of characters, and by careful training developed the best talent of the company in their respective roles. Mr. Richards took the leading role, that of Damon, and sustained it grandly, his emotional acting being distinguished by a realism that was very affecting to the audience.

---

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Dana Bailey, History of Minnehaha County, South Dakota (Sioux Falls: Brown and Saenger, printer, 1899), p. 1038.

<sup>31</sup>Dell Rapids Times, May 15, 1891.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., May 29, 1891.

. . . The company numbered twenty-three persons, and their costumes were especially fitting and very rich and attractive.<sup>33</sup>

This production was taken to Madison on Wednesday, June 2.

The most productive year of amateur drama at the Dell Rapids Opera House was in 1892. On Washington's birthday of Monday, February 22, the Knights of Pythias performed Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer to a good house despite muddy roads.<sup>34</sup> The play's humor was considered by the critic to be "refreshing because it is not overdone and the sentimental part is conspicuous for its every-day style and freedom from the general exaggerated and foolish theatrical love making."<sup>35</sup> The actors were given the two most complimentary phrases the newspaper could pay to the amateurs: "All were perfectly familiar with their lines" and "The audience could not have been better entertained by a high class professional troupe."<sup>36</sup> Reverend T. Howell Richards had produced another successful evening of theatre.

In close succession the Ladies Guild of the Episcopal Church presented the cantata of Queen Esther on Tuesday, March 1, 1892. Richards directed the production while Mrs. V. A. Potter aided in the

---

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., February 26, 1892.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

musical direction of the forty-member cast in the show.<sup>37</sup> The advance publicity stressed the effort that had gone into procuring costumes in "the style of 500 B.C." and that one of these costumes had been brought over from Arabia with an Arabian prayer embroidered upon it. Further, it promised a "superb entertainment in every respect."<sup>38</sup> The review, written by scenes, is particularly interesting in its description of what occurred and in the costuming. Indeed, it reads very much like a fashion show.

On the rising of the curtain the populace were seen loitering around the castle wall, singing Haman's (Mr. Kidlington) praise, who appeared and acknowledged their homage with dignity, rendering his solos in his usual euphonious manner, his costume of black velvet and gold being in strict keeping with his character as the wealthy Agagite.

Scene two represented the King, seated on a magnificent throne, handsomely draped with tapestry . . . before the banquet table, which was loaded with fruits and wines in gold and silver vessels. Mrs. V. A. Potter, appeared singing, "Lo, o'ver the wicked," with much pathos and imposing dramatic action. Her clear, penetrating soprano, so well known, needs no further comment. Her costume was sombre black folds, relieved by a cream white stole worked with silver, finished by veil and star-shaped tiara of black velvet and diamonds.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., March 4, 1892.



Another woman given credit for her participation and preparation for the production was Mrs. M. R. Kenefick, the wife of the opera house builder and owner. She seems to have been active in many of the dramatic productions.

The Ladies Guild of the Episcopal Church was quite successful financially with the gross receipts amounting to over ninety dollars, leaving the organization sixty dollars after expenses.<sup>40</sup> The review concluded by stating "The Jewish and Persian populace looked like an oriental picture and sustained their parts with much credit."<sup>41</sup>

The Ladies Aid Society of the Methodist Church had watched, no doubt, the success of their Episcopal friends capture a good sum of money. Since the Methodist Church needed funds to pay off its debt they decided to produce a somewhat lighter play, The Deestrick Skule, on Tuesday, March 15, 1892.

The play is a very laughable burlesque on the old fashioned district school, consisting of the regular forenoon exercises of a school, and singing, recitations and a visit from the "committee men" for the afternoon. The characters being represented by grown people gives it a most ludicrous effect.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., March 18, 1892.

The large audience watched the actors perform their parts in "a highly creditable manner," with the receipts amounting to over eighty dollars.<sup>43</sup>

The Ladies' Guild of the Episcopal Church, still desirous of raising more money for the church's building fund, chose the cantata, Joseph's Bondage, for their second production. It was reported that the town should be prepared for an excellent entertainment, with more company members participating in it than in Queen Esther.<sup>44</sup> "In connection with the cantata, the Nautch march will be rendered and there will be dancing with cymbals and trumpets."<sup>45</sup> Not only did Richards act as director and Mrs. Potter as musical director again, but each of them took the leading roles. Mrs. Potter played the part of Joseph at age seventeen while Richards acted Jacob. Unfortunately, due to muddy roads, the audience was smaller than had been anticipated on both Friday and Saturday, May 6 and 7.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the gross receipts amounted to eighty dollars with fifty dollars being cleared by the Guild.<sup>47</sup> The cantata was called "heavy" by the newspaper but was well presented with the costumes being appropriate to the times of Joseph. Mrs. Potter was complimented on her "strong, full voice."<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., April 29, 1892.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., May 13, 1892.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

On Friday, December 9 of 1892, the Ladies' Guild made arrangements to produce their third musical play in the opera house. The operetta Red Ridinghood's Rescue was said to have included fifty children with adults playing the leads under the direction of Richards.<sup>49</sup>

Fifty children in picturesques [ sic ] quick-steps, minuets [ sic ], and grotesque dancing by the demons, fairies, babes from Jupiter, wolves and monkeys.<sup>50</sup>

With admission set at twenty-five cents for adults and fifteen cents for children, the total receipts came to sixty-five dollars of which the Guild received thirty-five dollars.<sup>51</sup> It was a successful evening as described by a prosaic reporter.

Every character was well trained in the part chosen and was well sustained, even the young children went through their parts without a break and gave evidence of the care and work that had been given to their training. However, it would be entirely out of taste to suppose any such thing coming through the hand of T. Howell Richards and Mrs. V. A. Potter, as the leading spirits a failure.

Mrs. M. R. Kenefick, as grandmother, filled the hall with her old time voice and by her appreciation of the song, made its sentiment recognizable by the audience. She sang Home Sweet Home, a piece that will never die as long as there are lips left on earth to speak the words with pathos that found an echo in every heart. Robbie Kenefick [the son of M. R. Kenefick], as Robin, sang with a clear, musical voice, as if inheriting

---

<sup>49</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, November 26, 1892.

<sup>50</sup>Dell Rapids Times, December 2, 1892.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., December 16, 1892.

the mother's gifts. Of T. Howell Richards, as woodman, and Mrs. V. A. Potter, as mamma, it would be superfluous to speak, as they are recognized vocalists in this community.

.....

The monkey acted monkeyish enough to make the Cardiff giant laugh. The roses bloomed as only eight sweet little girls can represent them. The blue bells were beautifully represented. The butter cups had a prominent part and did honor to themselves and to the part they were acting.<sup>52</sup>

It can be surmised by such reviews that the Dell Rapids newspapers were far kinder to the amateur actors than to the professional companies. The Dell Rapids actors liked praise and the newspaper loved to give it to them.

In 1895 Dell Rapids sponsored one of its popular encampments during the Fourth of July. It was at this time that Richards and "a large company" presented one of the five acts from the drama Gettysburg.<sup>53</sup> It played for two evenings, Tuesday and Thursday, July 2 and 4, to full houses. The newspaper announced that the performances were to begin promptly at eight o'clock.<sup>54</sup>

The Knights of Pythias felt the need, once more, to venture into amateur drama. On Friday, February 14, 1896, the drama, The World Against Her, was called by the Dell Rapids Tribune "a strong

---

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, June 29, 1895.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

one and somewhat heavy for amateurs." Richards directed again for the organization.<sup>55</sup> Although time was rarely mentioned by the newspaper, it was stated that the opera house doors would open at 7:30 p.m. with the overture beginning at 8:00 p.m.<sup>56</sup> The show was favorably received; it was described as "full of thrilling scenes, tragic and pathetic, interspersed with enough comedy to relieve the monotony."<sup>57</sup>

The Episcopal Sunday School, under the direction of Reverend Richards, presented to Dell Rapids its first all-children theatre on Friday, August 14, 1896. A cast of sixty boys and girls were advertised to be preparing the operetta Brownies in Fairyland.

Fairyland is first represented, inhabited by 30 fairies, and the brownies, to the number of 30, descend in a balloon. The make-up of both fairies and brownies will be as perfect as art can make it.<sup>58</sup>

Some of the specialties listed were: the Italian and his trained bear, hornpipes, marches and drills, the bursting of the balloon, and the war of the brownies on the insects which are destroying the flowers.<sup>59</sup> Since this production was intended for children a 2:00 p.m. street parade was announced followed by a dress rehearsal for the

---

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1896.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., February 8, 1896.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1896.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., August 8, 1896.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

mothers and their children. It cost each, the mother and the child, only ten cents apiece. The evening performance charged fifteen and twenty-five cents.<sup>60</sup> The "amusing operetta" was considered pleasing with the singing and stage decoration of flowers being particularly noted. Richards reported to the newspaper that the receipts from the show were thirty-five dollars.<sup>61</sup>

Not until 1903 did another amateur company produce in the Dell Rapids Opera House. This time "the young people of Trent" came to Dell Rapids on Friday, March 20, and performed Joe the Waif to a small audience, weather being responsible for the slim turn out.<sup>62</sup> It was said to have been a good entertainment, better in fact than what the professional companies were offering at that time.

We hope that these young people will again visit our city and should they decide to do so we are sure they would be greeted with a much larger audience.<sup>63</sup>

In summary, then, there were 15 different shows produced and 20 separate performances of amateur drama in the Dell Rapids Opera House. Amateur drama was produced by the townspeople until 1896. Reverend T. Howell Richards was a vital participant in at least seven of the shows during his ministry in Dell Rapids. Generally, a good many of these productions were created for the purpose of raising money toward a needed fund. There are several explanations that may

---

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., August 22, 1896.

<sup>62</sup>Dell Rapids Times, March 27, 1903.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

account for the decline of these amateur dramas. As was stated earlier, Reverend Richards left Dell Rapids in 1897, perhaps leaving the town without an able director. Also, most of the church buildings had been constructed and payed for by the turn of the century, alleviating the need to raise large sums of money. Lastly, the people of Dell Rapids had more amusements by 1900 than in previous years. There were train excursions, a new dance hall, a race tack, the Chautauqua at Lake Madison, pool halls, a bowling alley, and lecture courses. The opera house had lost its novelty and luster for the time.

## CHAPTER VI

### COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

This chapter will be devoted to an explanation of the various community activities that engaged the Dell Rapids Opera House when the professional dramatic and variety groups or amateur theatrical groups were not utilizing the structure. As the material shows, these activities were indeed numerous, with 204 assorted engagements occurring during the period of the study.

Due to repetitious material regarding these activities, it is felt that a topical arrangement of this chapter is more conducive to a clear understanding of what took place. Dances, socials and suppers, lectures, political meetings, religious services, school activities, celebrations, and community entertainments will be discussed in that order.

#### Dances

If the people of Dell Rapids loved to do nothing else, they did love to dance. This is made evident from the numerous dances that were held within the opera house; the information showing that sixty-two dances occurred, which is thirty per cent of the total community activities.

There seems to be three general categories into which these dances fall: (1) those dances that had been planned, often displaying



a theme; (2) those dances that were seemingly impromptu, displaying no theme; and (3) those dances that were held by the various dance clubs for instruction as well as amusement. The dances that were carefully planned, usually for a holiday like Thanksgiving or Washington's birthday, were often sponsored by a particular organization in the community, such as the Knights of Pythias, the Imperial Mystic Legion, or the Sons of Veterans. At other times, however, the opera house management would sponsor these special dances. It appears that twenty-one of the sixty-two dances were of the first category. Below is a description of the usual format these dances took.

The ball given at the opera house on Thanksgiving eve under the auspices of Ivanhoe Lodge, No. 41, Knights of Pythias, was a very enjoyable affair, and the committee having the arrangements in charge is to be congratulated on the success achieved. About forty couples participated in the dancing, which was continued until 3 a.m. Fulmer Bros.' Orchestra furnished the music and T. E. Hunt acted as prompter. The Ladies' Guild served an excellent supper on the stage, which was generally patronized by the dancers as well as by a number who did not dance. The stage was neatly draped in the colors of the Knights of Pythias order, blue, yellow and red . . . and the effect was pleasing.<sup>1</sup>

Of those dances displaying no theme, thirty-one have been counted. It is apparent that the opera house managers scheduled orchestras to play within the opera house, just as they had done

---

<sup>1</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, December 1, 1894.

with professional troupes. Most often the orchestra's arrival would be publicized about a week in advance in the newspaper; however, this was not always true. Some of the musical groups just seemed to "pop up" and hold a dance. As time went on, these themeless dances became extremely impromptu, the reason being that Dell Rapids had developed her own orchestras and could enlist their services on the spur of the moment. A common feature in the newspaper announcements or descriptions of these dances is the reference to the participation of young adults: "attended by quite a few young people," "a large number of young people," "was attended by about eighty of the young people." In light of a most interesting editorial, which follows, the Dell Rapids youth based much of their social activity around these dances.

A dance in the opera house was planned for Wednesday evening in honor of some of our young lady visitors and the young ladies who have gone away to school, but it did not materialize because "some would not attend because some others were going to be there." It is this same feeling that has kept the people here from having successful dances during the past year--the factions won't affiliate it seems, and neither faction is large enough to go it alone successfully. The members of one faction are just as respectable and good as the members of the other, and the sooner they realize this fact the pleasanter it will be for all. To disinterested people of only equal prominence, wealth and intelligence of the average citizen should endeavor to rule society in a town the size of Dell Rapids and exclude other eminently respectable people when it is a well known and indisputable fact that all are needed to make a social gathering of any kind successful. The sooner these contending factions take a sensible view of the matter and unite in social amusements the pleasanter and better it will be in society, for many outsiders

who now do not care to take either side will be pleased to become members of the reformed society that will be the result.<sup>2</sup>

Although the dancing clubs account for only ten of the total dances in the opera house they seem to present a small history in themselves. In February of 1891 a man by the name of Summers instructed two sessions of dancing.<sup>3</sup> The twenty-five participants discontinued "owing to the fact that expenses have exceeded the revenue."<sup>4</sup> In October of 1891 a new effort was made to organize a dancing club by Dr. Kinney. "It is proposed to collect the funds of the club in advance, so that there will be no possibility of running behind financially, and a dance will be held every two or three weeks."<sup>5</sup> With the name of "The Sioux Club" they held four dances in the opera house before disbanding in December.<sup>6</sup> By 1900, Mrs. Helen Holt of Sioux Falls held "parties" for her dance class in the opera house. They were considered to be "swell."<sup>7</sup>

A few of the favorite orchestras that played for these various dances were the Reynolds Orchestra, the Elmendorf Orchestra, Fulmer

---

<sup>2</sup>Dell Rapids Times, August 30, 1889.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., February 27, 1891.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., March 6, 1891.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., October 2, 1891.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., January 1, 1892.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., April 13, 1900.

Brothers' Orchestra, the Dell Rapids Cornet Band, the Dell Rapids Orchestra, 3-B Orchestra, the Mandoline Club, Hoyt's Orchestra, and the Hubbard Orchestra.

Whenever a Dell Rapids group furnished the music the people were often encouraged by the newspapers to attend the dances in order to assist the group meet its musical expenses. Several dances were held as benefits for the Dell Rapids groups. Further, it should also be mentioned that prices of admittance ranged from as high as one dollar for the special gatherings to the more conservative prices of fifty and twenty-five cents. Spectators, who sat in the gallery, could enter for ten cents.

It is fair to assume then that the Dell Rapids Opera House was the scene for many social dances, or as the newspaper once named the activity, "to trip the light fantastic."<sup>8</sup>

#### Socials and Suppers

In 1900 the Dell Rapids Times supplied the perfect introduction to this unit of Socials and Suppers when it wrote:

Some one has suggested that the oyster and strawberry are the greatest of modern evangelists. They have built and furnished more churches, paid the salaries of more preachers and helped more heathen than any two other natural agencies in the world.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., December 13, 1889.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., February 9, 1900.

Certainly oysters and strawberries did seem to be the favorite foods of most church organizational dinners held throughout the town.

It is interesting to find that a large number of these events were not held in the opera house, only six being found in the study. This may be a result of the expense in procuring the building when the various churches offered meeting rooms for free. Although each social differs, all of them had socialization and supper; occasionally a small entertainment was offered. The Ladies' Aid Society of the Presbyterian Church, the Ladies' Aid Society of the Methodist Church, and Ladies' Guild of the Episcopal Church, and the G. A. R. had, at one time or another, utilized the opera house for these activities.

Of particular interest is a social event that occurred on Saturday, May 4, 1895. Mr. and Mrs. W. I. Howland were given a farewell reception by Mrs. H. C. Briley and Mrs. J. M. Nisbet with 130 people attending. The ladies apparently had in mind some redecorating in the opera house.

The opera house was fitted up in a very sumptuous manner for the occasion. Screens, rugs, lace curtains, easy chairs, etc., gave the large hall the appearance of a pleasant home-like parlor. A large number of small tables were arranged in the room and the company spent the evening in playing whist, crokinole and other games and in social converse. At about eleven o'clock the ladies served an elegant and delicious luncheon, consisting of sandwiches, cake, pickles, olives, coffee and orange salad . . . 10

---

<sup>10</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, May 11, 1895.

On Thursday, October 31, 1895, the Ladies Guild drew a good crowd from their advertisements of a "bloomer sociable." Some of the participants must have been disappointed when they found that "two beautiful chrysanthemums"<sup>11</sup> adorned the stage, rather than what the gentlemen may have expected. Such cute surprises were common to at least two of the socials.

### Lectures

Robert T. Oliver has written in his book, History of Public Speaking in America: "The lecture platform covers a spectrum as broad as that which stretches in print from the comic books to belles-lettres."<sup>12</sup> It can be said that Dell Rapids, in a small way, may have been proof of that statement. Of the twenty-four public lectures delivered in the opera house within the scope of the study, twelve were on the temperance movement, one on women's rights, two on the Civil War, four with moving pictures, four miscellaneous, and one unknown. Those speeches dealing with the political elections are a part of the unit on Political Meetings.

It is evident, from the statistics, that temperance was a popular subject to the townspeople. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was firmly planted in Dell Rapids during 1888--a local organization strong enough to rent property in the business section

---

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., November 2, 1895.

<sup>12</sup>Robert T. Oliver, History of Public Speaking in America (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1966), p. 437.

and even to contemplate building an opera house. Robert T. Oliver gives an excellent summation of the purpose and methodology of this movement and its speakers.

The goals of the movement were early defined and thereafter were never much altered. The initial aim of fostering temperance was quickly changed to advocacy of complete abstinence. This was to be achieved primarily by the passage of laws that were to prevent the sale of liquor. The principal appeal to be used was to religion. The audience to be reached were two in particular: drunkards, or at least drinkers, and women. The methodology was to be the organization of societies pledged to carry on the work and the utilization of speakers who would have sufficient popular appeal to draw audiences even of people who were indifferent or positively hostile to the cause. This was the formula.<sup>13</sup>

These temperance lectures generally drew good sized audiences, especially if the weather was safe for traveling. Most of the lecturers had established some notability on the platform which furthered audience appeal. Sam Small, who spoke on Saturday, September 28, 1889, is representative of these temperance speakers.

The famous evangelist and temperance orator of Georgia, Rev. Sam W. Small, lectured on the prohibition question in Dell Rapids Saturday, both afternoon and evening, at the opera house. He arrived on the train from the north at three p.m. and at four p.m. began his afternoon lecture. This lecture was free and it was attended by at least 400 people, notwithstanding it was a very busy time in town. So well did Sam please his audience in the afternoon that the opera house was crowded to its utmost capacity in the evening, fully 650 people being present. Enough seats were

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 450-1.

sold to pay all expenses incident to the occasion. Sam began his lecture in the evening at 8:30 o'clock and held the close attention of his large audience until nearly eleven. He delivered his famous lecture, "From Bar-room to Pulpit."<sup>14</sup>

Another popular reform movement that was using the platform was the women's suffrage movement. Dell Rapids heard Reverend Anna H. Shaw speak on Wednesday, September 24, 1890--a woman who had received national recognition as a Lyceum lecturer.<sup>15</sup> The town newspaper, however, barely mentioned the event.<sup>16</sup>

Of the two Civil War lectures, one stands out as being of special interest to the historical story of Dell Rapids. A Captain John W. January came to Dell Rapids in 1892 as a friend of J. A. Cooley, one of the opera house owners. Captain January seems to have been looking at land prices in the vicinity, and while he was here it was reported by the newspapers that he was one of the most "celebrated victims of the southern prisons"--namely Andersonville.

While in confinement he was attacked by scurvy and had it so severely that both feet dropped off. When he came out of the hospital he weighed only 45 pounds and his recovery was regarded as one of the most marvelous on record. He now wears artificial feet, but no one would know it from his appearance . . . <sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Dell Rapids Times, October 4, 1889.

<sup>15</sup>Oliver, p. 447.

<sup>16</sup>Dell Rapids Times, September 26, 1890.

<sup>17</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, December 10, 1892.



Captain January was asked to give a speech describing his experiences while visiting here, which he did on Wednesday, December 14, 1892. Apparently some fertile farm land caught January's eye and he decided to make his home near Dell Rapids. The newspapers show him becoming active in local as well as state politics, and in 1896 he went on a lecture tour throughout the state "to deliver his famous lecture on Andersonville prison."<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps the most exciting lecture to occur in Dell Rapids took place on Wednesday, July 4, 1895, when the town had prepared a massive encampment and Fourth of July celebration. Mrs. Mary E. Lease, a famous woman orator and politician from Kansas, was invited to speak. Oliver describes her as "Yelling Mary." She was a woman who advised the farmers to "raise more hell and less corn."<sup>19</sup> With admission set at twenty-five and thirty-five cents, Mrs. Lease accepted \$125 for the address at the opera house and one other in the camping area during the afternoon.<sup>20</sup> Since this is one of the most descriptive critiques found in the material for this study, all of it regarding Mrs. Lease will be presented for the purpose of historical documentation.

At 8:30 a large part of the crowd wended their way to the opera house to hear Mrs. Mary E. Lease, the famous woman orator and politician of Kansas,

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., January 18, 1896.

<sup>19</sup>Oliver, p. 447.

<sup>20</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, June 1, 1895.

in her lecture on "American Manhood or British Gold." The house was packed, seats even having been sold on the stage. The audience numbered nearly 700 and was the largest ever assembled in the opera house. The receipts from the sale of tickets were about \$200.

Mrs. Lease was introduced by chairman G. A. Uline in a few appropriate remarks. She immediately began her lecture, without preliminary remarks and held the close, appreciative attention of her magnificent audience until about 11 o'clock. Mrs. Lease is one of the most fluent, brilliant, eloquent and logical speakers who has ever appeared before an audience in this city. While her lecture was on questions of political economy, it was not a partisan political address, and, though many may not have endorsed some of her views, all were grandly entertained throughout. Mrs. Lease opened with a review of the political conditions confronting the people of this country and then launched out into a thrilling representation of the ruin of the prosperity of India, Egypt and Ireland and the oppression and slavery of the people under the bondage of England and the usury and extortion of the English Shylock. Her description of the woes and suffering of the people of Ireland was pathetic and touching in the extreme. The history of the fate of those countries, she said, would be re-enacted in this country unless the people break the power of British gold and shake off the chains which England has bound them with. The remedy, she said, was a better financial policy, more money-free coinage of silver. Mrs. Lease is a very graceful, pleasant speaker, and her lecture was entirely free from abuse of the old parties, but it was bristling with wit and satire that invariably hit the mark and eloquent arguments. She got off several good things. One was that she did not believe it is a woman's place to be a partisan politician; that she ought to be free from party influence to do what she thought was right; and that she herself was hereafter going to be independent, free to hit a thief and a knave in whatever party she found him. She said that she did not blame the men for getting tangled up so they could not straighten things out, but if they would just confess it and stay at home and take care of the babies, the women would take hold and bring order out of chaos and prosperity out of ruin, peacefully and without bloodshed. One

argument against free silver, she said, is that foreign countries would dump all their silver into this country, but she has two lots down in Kansas on which they may dump all they can pile on, only give us free silver.

Mrs. Lease has been much maligned by the partisan press, but she is a pleasant, affable woman and a brainy, gifted orator, whom it does one good to hear, and henceforth she will have no greater admirers than those who heard her in Dell Rapids, irrespective of political affiliations, sex or condition. Her appearance was a great success from every standpoint.<sup>21</sup>

At the turn of the century a new form of lecturing was introduced. "Moving pictures," as they were called, accompanied four different speakers, one in 1900, another in 1901, and two in 1903. Mr. Harvey Randall's lecture of Monday, April 22, 1901, seems to have been the most successful. He used a "mammoth stereopticon and also an Edison Kinetoscope and his views, 150 in all"<sup>22</sup> for a lecture on the Paris Exposition.

Lecturing then became an event that gave the people of Dell Rapids an opportunity to hear, and later to see, what was taking place beyond their own lives. It is obvious from attendance records that they desired to know of this.

#### Political Meetings

It is not the purpose of this unit to give attention to the political issues and problems of the times, but rather to briefly

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., July 6, 1895.

<sup>22</sup>Dell Rapids Times, April 12, 1901.

describe what political activities took place within the opera house of Dell Rapids. Four political groups are found in the material. Of the thirty-three political meetings that are included in the study, fifteen were held by the Democrats (also called the Independents or Free Silver Club), eleven by the Republicans, three by the Populist Party, and four by mixed groups. Four types of political gatherings seem to present themselves: (1) those that met to decide where the state capitol should be located, of which three sessions were held; (2) one that was a debate between the Republicans and Democrats; (3) those sessions that caucused to decide internal party matters, of which there were four meetings; and, (4) those that engaged political speakers to "rally" the people for the party, twenty-five such meetings being recorded.

The political rally became something of a tradition in Dell Rapids with torchlight parades occurring every election year. If the speaker was to arrive on the train the procession would meet him at the station and accompany him to the opera house. But even if the speaker had arrived at a previous time there would still be the traditional torchlight parade.

Soon after 7 o'clock the procession began to form on Pearl street, each man being provided with a lighted torch. One hundred and fifty torches joined the procession and marched with soldier step to the music . . . The stirring music, the flood of light from one hundred and fifty torches making the streets over which the procession passed as light as day, made us feel that glory of the hour was only typical of that national glory, when in November the telegraph

shall speak the news that Benjamin Harrison is elected President of the United States.<sup>23</sup>

Once gathered in the opera house, several speeches were made by local or state politicians. Occasionally, an out-of-state speaker was presented. Heavy attendance was common.

Truly, one of the rewards of a historical study is to find one of the "gems" that make a period and its people very human. In October of 1894, after a rousing Republican rally, the following resolution was found in the proceedings of the city council.

. . . certain business houses opened up their back doors and dispensed spirits and malt liquors indiscriminately to both old and young, filling our streets with a drunken, staggering mass of humanity, who became boisterous and insulting.<sup>24</sup>

The rally received some catcalls, no doubt.

A few of the speakers who delivered political lectures were: F. A. Leavitt, H. L. Loucks, Judge J. Carland, Senator Pettigrew, C. L. Brockway, Judge Bennett, Robert Buchanan, Judge C. S. Palmer, "Cyclone" Davis of Texas, A. C. Ranki of Pennsylvania, T. P. Gore of Texas, and Governor Shaw of Iowa.

It is impossible to give any worthy attention to the rhetorical elements of these speeches or the speakers because the town newspapers were so strongly Republican and biased in view that a critical estimation cannot be obtained. The newspapers would have the reader

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., October 14, 1892.

<sup>24</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, October 13, 1894.

believe that everything a Republican did or said was good and everything that anyone else said was very bad.

It appears then that Dell Rapids enjoyed her politics and made the opera house a focal point for many of the political functions.

#### Religious Services

Of the twenty-one religious gatherings that used the opera house to conduct services, eleven of these were held by the Catholic Church. The Catholics of Dell Rapids were not able to build their church until 1898, and so they held their services within the opera house from 1890 to 1892. The priests of Flandreau were sent down every few weeks to conduct services which began at either 10:00 or 10:30 a.m. Father Barron, Father Jeram, Father O'Hara, and Father Ahern were the visiting priests.

Decoration Day was a traditional religious service in Dell Rapids. On May 30 of most years, the people would gather at the graveyard in the morning to decorate the graves and pay service to the war dead. Then they would return in a massive parade to the opera house to hear sermons and speeches. Some of the speakers for these memorial services were: Reverend L. L. Hanscom, Reverend T. Howell Richards, Reverend J. J. Hull, Reverend Dr. Scott, and Reverend H. L. Forbes.

In 1895 and 1896 two gospel meetings were conducted by the Good Templars and the W. C. T. U. in joint worship. Scripture and other readings, prayer, and singing were rendered.

### School Activities

A teachers' meeting, five entertainments, five commencements, two declamation contests, and two class day exercises comprised the fifteen school activities included in this study.

Most of the entertainments given by the children in the public school were for the benefit of some worthy project, such as a school organ, or uniforms for the juvenile drum corp, or books for the school library. These entertainments consisted of recitations, readings, music, and impersonations. Drills became quite popular in the late 1880's and early 1890's.

One band was a broom brigade, under the command of Miss Cantwell; and the other carried the national colors instead of brooms, and was under Prof. Sutton. Each band numbered about twelve. The broom brigade was dressed in green, trimmed in black, with caps of the same; and the flag band was dressed in red, trimmed in blue with white stars, and their caps were the same as the trimming of the dresses. They made a neat, effective appearance, and executed the maneuvers of the drills in a creditable manner.<sup>25</sup>

Class day exercises developed at the turn of the century and were also entertainments for the public. The high school junior class presented programs of recitations and readings in honor of the senior class that was to graduate the day after this program was given. Commencements generally occurred at the end of May or the beginning of June. The first annual commencement of the Dell Rapids High School was held in the opera house on June 6, 1890.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup>Dell Rapids Times, December 27, 1889.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., June 13, 1890.

Declamation or "Demorest" contests were also a popular attraction. A medal or prize was given to the student who delivered his memorized address in the most suitable manner. These were, however, most often held in the school building.

#### Celebrations

Those celebrations that took place at the opera house included campfires, reunions, and anniversaries. About fifteen of these events occurred, although they are sometimes difficult to separate from the dances and entertainments, both activities being regular features in the programs of celebrations.

On May 30 the people of Dell Rapids spent the morning in thoughtful reflection of their war dead, as shown in the religious unit. However, by evening they were ready to let off some steam. This was usually done in the form of a "campfire," as they were called. Musical programs, speeches, recitations, yarns and stories, and impromptu speaking entertained the people. The G. A. R. also held a yearly campfire in February at the opera house in which skits were popular.

The old soldiers gave a good representation of camp life in the army. Several tents were pitched upon the stage and were occupied by a squad of soldiers who performed the various duties and pranks incident to camp life. They represented the manner of conducting the sick call, breakfast call, guard mount, etc. During this time several were playing pranks, doubtless to make it as true a scene as possible.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., February 7, 1890.



Eight of these campfires have been counted in the available materials.

The Old Settlers' Association of Dell Rapids would occasionally hold its reunion in the opera house. In 1896 an estimated one hundred twenty-five members, with families, were in attendance.<sup>28</sup> Speeches, business meetings, and music were common to the events.

The Odd Fellows would utilize the opera house for its anniversary celebrations. Because of its large membership, dinner would be served at the Odd Fellows Hall with dancing concluding the evening at the opera house.

#### Entertainments

Of the twenty-eight assorted community entertainments that were held in the opera house thirteen were of a variety nature, nine were musical concerts, and six were fairs.

Many of the variety shows were organized to benefit some needy member of the community. On Friday, November 24, 1891, fifty dollars were obtained from a variety program to procure an artificial limb for Archibald Bell's daughter.<sup>29</sup> Little Leonard Williams received the proceeds from a local minstrel entertainment for surgical treatment on his feet in February, 1895.<sup>30</sup> These are only a few examples of the

---

<sup>28</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, March 28, 1896.

<sup>29</sup>Dell Rapids Times, November 27, 1891.

<sup>30</sup>Dell Rapids Tribune, February 23, 1895.

many charity performances that were given. No doubt, the townspeople drew many of their ideas from the professional variety shows that played Dell Rapids. Costume shows, dancing acts, solos, historical skits, living pictures, jokes, specialties, drills, stump speeches, recitations, addresses, burlesques, comic songs, and short farces filled the opera house when these amateur entertainments were performed. One group of "young men" so enjoyed performing the charity entertainment for Leonard Williams that they named themselves the "Dell Rapids Minstrel and Comedy Company" and took their show to Flandreau to procure additional funds.<sup>31</sup>

A few of the townspeople who participated in the variety shows were: Mrs. V. A. Potter, W. S. Mitchell, Frank Briley, T. E. Hunt, H. W. Ward, N. M. McDonald, Robbie Kenefick, F. W. Barbour, F. C. Bowles, Mrs. M. R. Kenefick, Miss Grace Howland, W. A. Bell, Edna Johnson, Mrs. Peter Smith, and Reverend T. H. Richards.

In the earlier period of this study musical concerts were either given by small groups or individuals. Miss Jessie Benedict, a local music teacher, gave two piano concerts in the opera house Friday, December 4, 1891, and Wednesday, August 10, 1892. The Sioux Falls Concert Company, singing operetta selections, was a treat for the people when it played in March and April of 1900. Band concerts became the style at the turn of the century with the Dell Rapids Band

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., March 9, 1895.

and the 51st Iowa Regimental Band entertaining the town. Dances were generally held after the band musicians had given their concert.

The first fair that was held in the opera house occurred on Thursday, December 17, 1891, sponsored by the Ladies' Relief Society.<sup>32</sup> These became excellent ways for the various women's organizations to make money for their group or for some needy cause. The Catholic Society was reported to have made \$600 on Wednesday and Thursday, November 21 and 22, in 1900.<sup>33</sup> Booths were set up with home made articles to purchase or games to play. Supper and a program usually followed in the evening. All of the fairs took place relatively close to the Christmas season.

In retrospect, it can be said that the Dell Rapids Opera House became the center for many community activities, especially those that required the space to accommodate any large gathering of people. These various events were continuously occurring throughout the period of the study and, therefore, the opera house served a significant and need-fulfilling function to the people of Dell Rapids.

---

<sup>32</sup>Dell Rapids Times, December 11, 1891.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., November 23, 1900.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study has been to provide a historical survey and analysis of the early theatrical and community activities that occurred in the Dell Rapids, South Dakota, Opera House. This final chapter will attempt to summarize the information found in the preceding chapters and to draw conclusions which the material suggests.

In review, the town of Dell Rapids was founded in 1871 by Peter Morse, Byron D. Graves, and two brothers in the mill business, Frank and Dennis Rice. Sixteen years later, when the town's population was 1,300, Dell Rapids experienced a devastating fire that destroyed eleven buildings on the south side of the business district. After this catastrophe the newspapers and citizens turned their attention toward future building structures that would improve the town of Dell Rapids and meet its growing needs. The newspapers firmly acknowledged the need for an opera house and encouraged the citizens and business men to consider this when rebuilding on the south side of the business district. At that time the only known stage in existence in the town had been erected in the Masonic Hall which some of the professional troupes utilized when playing the community. Finally, in the late spring of 1888, J. A. Cooley and M. R. Kenefick, two enterprising business men, decided to rebuild a business house on

their property that would include an upstairs opera house. It is probable that both civic responsibility and material reward prompted these men to undertake the project. Opening its doors on November 5, 1888, the Dell Rapids Opera House was considered in its time, by the newspapers as well as the traveling companies, to have been a superior theatre for a town the size of Dell Rapids. It was in this structure that most of the professional dramatic and variety troupes played to the townspeople. Also, many community groups utilized the opera house for their various functions. In 1895 Cooley sold his one-half interest to Kenefick who, in turn, tried to sell the opera house in the early months of 1900, and so the structure was closed for a time to the chagrin of the townspeople. This attempted sale may be an indication that the opera house was not making a substantial income to meet its financial requirements. In addition, frequent change of managers shows that the total operation may have lacked stability. However, in 1900, the opera house opened under a new management plan; being leased for three years by five men, W. S. Mitchell became the new manager. This seems to have been relatively successful for the next three years at which point the study terminates. The opera house property remained in the Kenefick estate until 1912 when the O'Leary brothers purchased the building and renovated it into an early movie house. In 1903 W. S. Mitchell joined the South Dakota--Minnesota theatrical circuit. It appears that quality entertainment was becoming difficult to find and, thus, Mitchell may have felt this move imperative in order to insure the appearance of reputable

professional troupes. However, by joining the circuit Mitchell forfeited the right of selecting which professional companies would play in the opera house, thus ending the era of private management at the Dell Rapids Opera House.

This study, with 75 months missing and 111 months covered from 1889 to 1903, shows that a combined total of 100 amateur and professional groups played in the Dell Rapids Opera House.

Looking at the professional dramatic companies, the first to perform was in 1888, on the first night of the opera house opening in November. Of the thirty-six companies that are covered in the study, eighty-one individual performances are recorded. From those plays that could be deciphered as to type, both comedy and drama were equal in number--twenty of each being found. Although it is difficult to obtain an accurate estimation of "peak" years, due to newspaper gaps, 1901 had the largest influx of dramatic companies with twelve individual troupes being counted. The material tends to indicate that larger numbers of dramatic companies were appearing after the turn of the century, although fewer of them were playing a week's repertoire as had been done in the late 1880's and early 1890's. Instead, they generally played two or three nights, in the later years, indicating that the companies after 1900 possessed a smaller repertory. Noticed in the study was a gradual integration of music and specialty acts during the performances of legitimate dramas. In time the audiences had come to expect this variety entertainment from the professional

dramatic troupes. Therefore, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate professional dramatic companies from professional variety groups toward the end of the study. Thus, there is an indication that professional touring theatre in eastern South Dakota began to slowly disengage itself from legitimate drama and began to merge with the variety theatre. Further, information from newspaper critiques showed that those companies past 1900 tended to receive fewer complimentary notices than the companies which appeared before that time. Possibly the general quality of showmanship was on the decline in the dramatic companies, thus accounting for W. S. Mitchell's movement into a theatrical circuit.

Professional variety entertainment first began in the Dell Rapids Opera House in February of 1889. Of the forty-nine variety companies that are included in this study, eighty-one single performances were recorded, the same number of single performances by the dramatic companies. From those years that were extensively covered, 1901 shows the greatest number of variety companies in Dell Rapids, with eight appearing. In both 1892 and 1895 the opera house received seven variety groups each year. There does not seem to be a pattern of gradual increase or decrease in the material regarding the appearances of variety troupes. Divided into three categories, twenty-nine assorted variety shows, twelve musical concerts, and seven minstrel shows were presented. Although assorted variety was the most frequent type of performance, there is an indication from

the newspaper notices and critiques that a larger audience was more inclined to assemble for what the public knew to be a "good" musical concert than for the many specialty and burlesque acts. It also appears that the medicine shows generally drew good crowds, probably because they played for an entire week and because the price of admission was non-existent or nominal. In 1901 community groups began to sponsor some of the professional variety groups in order to raise money for a needy project.

It was found in the available material that amateur drama produced fifteen different shows and gave twenty single performances in the opera house. The first amateur production occurred in 1889. Two peak years are found in the material. In 1892 five different shows appeared, four of which Reverend Richards directed. Richards' enthusiasm for amateur drama may have been the major factor for this productive year. It appears that Reverend Richards was a vital participant in amateur drama from 1891 to 1896, directing seven shows. In 1889 there were three productions which seemingly were a result of the novelty of the new opera house. A noticeable decline in amateur drama occurred after the turn of the century when only one amateur drama from another town was performed. This may be accounted for by Reverend Richards' departure from the town in 1897 and also by the lack of necessity for religious groups to raise money for building funds, since most of the churches had been constructed by then. Furthermore, an increasing number of various recreational activities



had developed by 1900, giving the people more diversions, thus the opera house lost its popularity with the townspeople. Fraternal orders, religious organizations, a dramatic club, and groups of young people sponsored the amateur dramas. In most cases the productions were created as a way in which to procure funds for a project; however, there is a strong indication that the townspeople enjoyed participating in the productions and that amateur drama furnished one of the main forms of recreational activity for the people in the early years.

A combined total of 204 community activities occurred within the scope of the study. Based on available material, sixty-two dances, thirty-three political assemblies, twenty-eight entertainments, twenty-four lectures, twenty-one religious services, fifteen school activities, fifteen celebrations, and six socials were held at the Dell Rapids Opera House. The two years in which the community most utilized the structure were in 1892 and 1900, when thirty-one and thirty-two individual events took place respectively. It is apparent, then, that many community activities and especially those that required space to accommodate large gatherings transpired in the opera house. The structure, therefore, served a significant and need-fulfilling function to the people of Dell Rapids.

Lastly, the writer would like to draw some conclusions concerning the value of this study to herself and to others. Of immense value has been the learning and application of historical research

techniques. The exacting disciplines of historical research form a methodical approach that may be applicable in a number of other areas. Furthermore, this writer has gained a worthwhile knowledge of the late nineteenth century touring and community theatres in the eastern part of South Dakota. Through the reading of early newspapers, it was discovered that many towns in eastern South Dakota had active professional and community theatre in their midst. They await investigation and this writer would like to encourage any such undertaking.

Finally, this study may have reflected, in a small way, the life and times of the early eastern South Dakota townsmen and farmers in regard to their community and their entertainments. As Agnes Beijer, a theatre historian, has stated: "The voice of an actor is one day silenced, but not the voice of humanity with him."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Agnes Beijer, "About Theatre History," Educational Theatre Journal, Vol. 12, No. 2 (May, 1960), p. 85.

**APPENDICES**



Explanation: An asterisk (\*) is used to indicate that the company was arranged to appear at the opera house, but canceled the engagement. The symbol (M) is used to represent a matinee performance. If the date has no symbol after it, the show occurred in the evening. Brackets enclose the amount of money earned from a show. A question mark (?) indicates that the material is unknown or questionable. Quotation marks indicate that word(s) came directly from the newspaper. If quotation marks are not used around the word that describes audience size, the writer has found information that suggests the supplied word. The following symbols represent the classification of the plays:

C . . . . . Comedy	D . . . . . Drama	MD . . . . . Musical Drama
Cf . . . . . Comedy (farce)	Md . . . . . Melodrama	RD . . . . . Religious Drama
	? . . . . . Unknown	

No.	Date	Company	Play	Author	Type	Aud. Size
<u>1888</u>						
1	Nov 5 M	Clair Patee Company	Lynwood	?	?	"large"
	Nov 6 Tu		The Martyr	Thomas W. Collens	D	"large"
	Nov 7 W		Queena	J. K. Tillotson	C	"larger"
	Nov 8 Th		A Night Off	Augustin Daly	C	?
2	Dec 14 F	Edwin Clifford	The Planter's Wife	J. K. Tillotson	C	?
	Dec 15 Sa (M)	Dramatic Company	East Lynne	Ellen Price Wood	Md	?
	Dec 15		Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde	?	D	?
<u>1889</u>						
3	Jun 10 M	Edwin Barbour Company	A Legal Document	Edwin Barbour	C	"not very large"
	Jun 11 Tu		An Outcast	?	?	small
	Jun 12 W		Rip Van Winkle	Irving adpt.	D	small

	Jun 13 Th		?		?	?
	Jun 14 F		Uncle Joshua Whitcomb	Denman Thompson	C	"good"
	Jun 15 Sa		Ten Nights in a Bar Room	Wm. V. Pratt	Md	"good"
4	Sep 2 M	Clair Patee Company	Rosedale	Lester Wallack	C	"good"
	Sep 3 Tu		Forget Me Not	Herman C. Merivale & C. Groves	C	"good"
5	Sep 17 Tu	Cady & Malthy's Monte Cristo Company	The Counte of Monte Cristo	George H. Andrews	D	"small"
	Sep 18 W		Race for Election	?	?	"small"
6	Oct 23 W	Marble Theatre Company	Col. Sellers	Mark Twain	C	"fair"
	Oct 24 Th		Under the Gaslight	Augustin Daly	Md	"small"

1890

7	Apr 24 Th	Choate's Dramatic Company	Caprice	O. S. Leland	C	"fair"
	Apr 25 F		Passion's Slave	?	?	"better"
	Apr 26 Sa		The Old Homestead	Denman Thompson	D	"better"
*	May 29 Th	Madison Square Theatre Company	Failed to appear			
8	Oct 20 M	Choate's Dramatic Company	A Wife's Honor	?	?	"good"
	Oct 21 Tu		Little Lord Fauntleroy	F. H. Burnett	D	"slim"
	Oct 22 W		Fogg's Ferry	C. E. Callaham	C	"slim"
	Oct 23 Th		?	?	?	?
	Oct 24 F		?	?	?	?

1891

None

1892

9	Oct 10 M	Keene, Hillyer & Hartel Company	Held By the Enemy	William Gillett	D	"large"
10	Oct 31 M	Kimball Company	The Hoboe	?	C	"thin"
11	Nov 10 Th	Metropolitan Theatre Company	Mixed Pickles	?	Cf	"small"
	Nov 11 F		Mother and Son	?	?	?
	Nov 12 Sa		Silver King	?	?	"fair"

1894

None

1895

12	Jun 24 M	Fowler's Spectacular Theatre Company	The World Against Her	?	?	"small"
	Jun 25 Tu		The Old Homestead	Denman Thompson	D	"small"
	Jun 26 W (M)		Uncle Tom's Cabin	G. L. Aiken	Md	"small"
	Jun 26 W		Married for Money or Jane	?	?	"small"

1896

*	Jan 13 M	M. L. Kinsey and Company	Canceled all dates in state due to hard times.			
13	Mar 14 Sa	Paul Tupper Wilkes and Company	The Sheriff's Sacrifice	?	Md	"small"
14	Jun 8 M	Redmond Dramatic Co.	Davy Crockett	Frank Murdock	D	"good"
	Jun 9 Tu		Caprice	O. S. Leland	C	"good"
	Jun 10 W		A Nobel Outcast	?	?	"good"
	Jun 11 Th		Fanchon the Cricket	Augustus Waldauer	D	"good"
	Jun 12 F		The Lights of London	?	?	"good"

	Jun 13 Sa (M)		Little Lord Fauntleroy	F. W. Burnett	D	"good"
	Jun 13 Sa		Rip Van Winkle	Irving adpt. D.B.	D	"good"
15	Sep 1 Tu	Si Perkins Company	Si Perkins	?	?	"large"
			<u>1900</u>			
16	Mar 19 M	Elsie de Tourney Company	Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots	J. F. Von Schiller	D	"packed"
*	Apr 13 F	Faust Company	Canceled the engagement because it was Good Friday.			
17	Oct 11 Th	Enterprise Amusement Company	A Clean Sweep	?	?	"large"
	Oct 12 F		Aberdeen	?	?	"good"
	Oct 13 Sa (M)		?	?	?	"good"
	Oct 13 Sa		?	?	?	"good"
18	Nov 6 Tu	James McAlphine Company	Hans Hanson	Gus Heege ?	C	?
19	Nov 30 F	Eiler's Big Uncle Tom Cabin Company	Uncle Tom's Cabin	G. L. Aiken	Md	?
			<u>1901</u>			
20	Feb 6 W	Lloyd & Gay's Theatrical Company	A Money Order Oliver Twist	?	?	?
				Adapt. from Charles Dickens	D	"small"
*	Feb 11 M	Tronsdale Theatrical Company	Canceled its dates and closed for the season.			
21	Mar 8 F	Craven-Beck Company	?	?	?	?
	Mar 9 Sa		?	?	?	?



22	Mar 14	Th	Gale-Cash Stock Company	Texas	?	?	"good"	
	Mar 15	F		A Bill of Sale	?	?	?	
	Mar 16	Sa		(M)	All the Comforts of Home	William Gillette	Cf	?
	Mar 16	Sa		Pavements of Paris	?	?	?	
23	Apr 10	W	Elsie de Tourney Company	Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots	J. F. Von Schiller	D	"fair"	
	Apr 11	Th		Romeo and Juliet	Shakespeare	D	"fair"	
24	May 7	Tu	James McAlphine Company	Hans Hanson	Gus Heege?	C	"largest of the season"	
25	May 13	M	Miss Georgia Harper and Company	East Lynne	Ellen Price Wood	Dm	?	
26	Jun 10	M	Mr. Hubert Labadie's Grand Production	Faust	Goethe	D	?	
27	Oct 14	M	Londale Stock Company	?	?	?	?	
	Oct 15	Tu		?	?	?	?	
	Oct 16	W		?	?	?	?	
28	Oct 29	Tu	Si Perkins Company	Si Perkins	?	C	"large"	
29	Nov 7	Th	Trousdale Theatrical Company	?	?	C	"packed"	
	Nov 8	F		Three Hats	?	C	?	
	Nov 9	Sa		(M)	?	?	?	
	Nov 9	Sa		Ole Olson	?	C	?	
30	Nov 26	Tu	Terry's Uncle Tom Cabin Company	A Breezy Time	?	C	"crowd- ed"	

31	Dec 13 F	Aunt Jerusha Company	Aunt Jerusha	W. S. Campbell	C	"fair"
			<u>1903</u>			
32	Feb 2 M Feb 3 Tu	Le Febvre Carpenter Company	The Little Princess Camille	F. H. Burnett Alexandre Dumas films	? D	"filled" "very small"
33	Feb 17 Tu	?	A <u>[sic]</u> Hour of Happiness	?	?	"very small"
34	May 21 Tu	Cora E. Levy's Faust Company	Faust ?	Goethe	D	?
35	Jun 10 W	Jed Carlton's Company	Was She to Blame	?	?	"not very large"
36	Jun 16 Tu	Hugh Ettinger Company	The Counte of Monte Cristo	George H. Andrews	D	"very small"

APPENDIX B

PROFESSIONAL VARIETY COMPANIES

The following table lists the names of the professional variety companies which are members of the American Variety Artists Association, Inc. The names are listed in alphabetical order. The address of each company is given in parentheses.

Name of Company	Address
1. The Variety Artists Association of America, Inc.	1234 Broadway, New York, N.Y.
2. The Variety Artists Association of America, Inc.	1234 Broadway, New York, N.Y.
3. The Variety Artists Association of America, Inc.	1234 Broadway, New York, N.Y.
4. The Variety Artists Association of America, Inc.	1234 Broadway, New York, N.Y.
5. The Variety Artists Association of America, Inc.	1234 Broadway, New York, N.Y.
6. The Variety Artists Association of America, Inc.	1234 Broadway, New York, N.Y.
7. The Variety Artists Association of America, Inc.	1234 Broadway, New York, N.Y.
8. The Variety Artists Association of America, Inc.	1234 Broadway, New York, N.Y.
9. The Variety Artists Association of America, Inc.	1234 Broadway, New York, N.Y.
10. The Variety Artists Association of America, Inc.	1234 Broadway, New York, N.Y.

The above list is not intended to be a complete list of all professional variety companies. It is merely a list of those companies which are members of the American Variety Artists Association, Inc.

Explanation: The question marks, quotation marks, and brackets are used as in Appendix A. The following symbols represent the classification of the shows:

AV . . . . . Assorted Variety  
 MC . . . . . Musical Concert

MS . . . . . Minstrel Show  
 ? . . . . . Unknown

No.	Date	Company	Description	Type	Aud. Size
			<u>1888</u>		
			None		
			<u>1889</u>		
1	Feb 1 Th	The Wizard Oil Company	"Singing by the quartette, a number of solos and a speech"	AV	?
	Feb 2 F				?
	Feb 3 Sa				?
	Feb 6 Tu				?
	Feb 7 W				?
	Feb 8 Th				?
	Feb 9 F				?
	Feb 10 Sa				"600"
2	Mar 6 W	G.A.R. Drum Corps and Martial Band Company	"A magic lantern exhibition and some drumming"	AV	?
3	Jul 8 M	Duncan Clark's Monster Combination	"Eight female artists dressed in their modesty and tights and two Negro minstrels did the acting . . . sort of a variety"	AV	"not very large"

4	Jul 9 Tu	Swiss Bell Ringers	"The entertainment consisted mainly of music"	MC	"large"
5	Oct 3 Th	Royce & Langing's Musical Comedy Company	"Music, singing, imitations"	AV	"large"
<u>1890</u>					
6	Jul 21 M Jul 22 Tu Jul 23 W Jul 24 Th Jul 25 F Jul 26 Sa	Medicine King Catarrh Cure Company	"Entertainments and selling their remedies"	AV	"fairly well attended" " " "
7	Aug 1 F	Miss Grace Goodykoontz and Miss Gwyneth King	Miss Grace Goodykoontz "showed volume and variety of voice." Miss Gwyneth King "gave evidence of great skill in impersonating."	AV	"not very largely attended"
8	Sep 10 W	A Colored Quartette	"Three males and one female held forth at the opera house"	MS	"meagre"
<u>1891</u>					
9	Jan 29 Th	Georgia Minstrels	"Rolleries and burlesque"	MS	"large"
10	Feb 13 F	Arnold's Concert Opera Company	"Vocal and instrumental music" Concluded with the opera, <u>The Rivals</u>	MC	"large"
11	Jun 19 F	The Three Graces	"A concert"	MC	"large"

12	Oct 21 W Oct 22 Th Oct 23 F Oct 24 Sa Oct 26 M Oct 27 Tu Oct 28 W	Kickapoo Indian Medicine Company	A "lecture on disease" with songs, specialties, and extra attractions.	AV	"large"
13	Nov 17 Tu	McKanlass Colored Musical Comedy Company	"A variety of music, alleged comedy and athletic performances"	MS	"not very well filled"
14	Nov 28 Sa	Lenore K. Murray	Elecutionist  <u>1892</u>	AV	"large"
15	Jan 13 W Jan 14 Th	Prof. Lowanda's World of Wonders	"The entertainment consisted of sleight-of-hand and ventriloquial, mind reading, etc."	AV	"fair"
16	Apr 12 Tu	Paul Alexander Johnstone	Mind reader [ <u>\$25.50</u> ]	AV	"small"
17	May 23 M	Lutteman Sextette	"Classical and humorous songs" [ <u>\$150</u> ]	MC	"very large"
18	Oct 8 Sa	The Oakes Company and Swiss Bell Ringers	"Entertainment was varied"	AV	"large"
19	Oct 22 Sa	L. H. Fykerud	Violin concert	MC	"small"
20	Oct 25 Tu	Nashville Students and Wright's Grand Colored Concert Company	Solos, quartettes, specialties, slack wire performance and it ended with <u>The Cake Walk</u> , a farce.	AV	"very large"

21	Nov 18 F	Chicago Ladies' Quartette	Vocal concert	MC	"fair"
			<u>1894</u>		
22	Nov 23 F	McCabe & Young's Minstrels	"The best singers, the best dancers, the funniest farces"	MS	"not very large"
			<u>1895</u>		
23	Apr 19 F	Blind Boon Concert Company	Piano concert	MC	"large"
24	Jul 15 M	Field's Merry Makers	Sleight-of-hand acts, songs, dances, and the farce, <u>A Dollar for a Kiss</u>	AV	"meagre"
25	Sep 2 M	Mead and Allen's Pleasant Surprise Company	Impersonations and a violinist	AV	"fair"
26	Sep 30 M	The Nashville Students	Song and dance specialties, loose wire act, sword walking, and music	MS	"not very large"
27	Oct 5 Sa	Tennessean Jubilee Singers	Vocal concert	MC	"well attended"
28	Oct 30 W	Plantation Minstrel Company	Minstrel show	MS	"small"
29	Dec 16 M	Wizard Oil Company	"Talks by the doctor" and concerts	AV	"good audiences"
	Dec 17 Tu				
	Dec 18 W				
	Dec 19 Th				
	Dec 20 F				
	Dec 21 Sa				

1896

30	Jan 14 Tu Jan 15 W	George W. Bagley	"Chalk talks" Mr. Bagley was a "lighting sketch artist."	AV	"fair" "fair"
31	May 11 M	Chicago Ladies' Quartette	"Concert . . . interspersed with impersonations"	AV	"good"
32	May 25 M	Oakes' Comic Specialty Company and Swiss Bell Ringers	Singing, dancing, burlesques and the farce, <u>As In a Looking Glass</u>	AV	"good"
33	Sep 30 W	California Ideals	"Exhibition of hypnotism and mind reading"	AV	?
<u>1900</u>					
34	Mar 13 Tu	?	"Good music, good specialties" and <u>A Trip to Africa</u>	AV	?
35	Apr 17 Tu Apr 19 Th Apr 21 Sa	Pauline and Carnaveaux	"Hypnotist and mind reader"	AV	? ? "large"
36	May 12 Sa May 14 M	Professor Bosco	Magician	AV	?
37	Dec 15 Sa	The Gay Coons from Darktown	"Singing, slack wire, and tumbling"	AV	"small"
38	Dec 22 Sa	The Philharmonic Concert Company	"Musical attractions"	MC	small
39	Dec 26 W	Professor B. Smalley and Wife, the Blind Musi- cians	"Instrumental solos, duets, comic and sentimental singing"	MC	small



1901

40	Jan 10 Th	Charles F. Craig, "the impersonator"	Dramatic reading of James Hernes' <u>Shore Acres</u> [ \$10 ]	AV	?
41	Feb 19 Tu	Mahara Minstrels	"Program being of a little higher and more elevating nature"	MS	"filled"
42	Feb 27 W	Dode Fiske's Concert Orchestra	Concert	MC	?
43	Mar 11 M	Dixie Jubilee Concert Company	"Plantation songs"	MC	fair
44	Mar 22 F	Carter De Haven Vaudeville and Comedy Company	"Two hours and a half of solid fun"	AV	?
45	Jun 4 Tu	Heywood Celebrities	?	?	?
46	Sep 26 Th Sep 27 F	Griffith, the hypnotist	"Exhibitions"	AV	"few" "few"
47	Dec 3 Tu	Rube Allyn	"He seems to be able to mimic all kinds of ridiculous characters and all kinds of dialects."	AV	?

1903

48	Jan 1 Th Jan 2 F	Dr. Mock-Sad-Alli's Medicine Troupe	"Slight-of-hand tricks"	AV	?
49	May 7 Th	Eva LeRoy Company	"Music, mirth and mystery"	AV	?

Amateur drama. All amateur work is entered under the name of the organization.

Date	Name	Address	City	State
------	------	---------	------	-------

APPENDIX C

AMATEUR DRAMA

Date	Name	Address	City	State
Jan 15 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Feb 10 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Mar 1 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Apr 1 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
May 1 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Jun 1 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Jul 1 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Aug 1 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Sep 1 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Oct 1 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Nov 1 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Dec 1 '38	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota

Date	Name	Address	City	State
Jan 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Feb 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Mar 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Apr 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
May 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Jun 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Jul 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Aug 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Sep 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Oct 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Nov 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota
Dec 1 '39	St. Paul Players	111 Grand Avenue	St. Paul	Minnesota

Explanation: All markings apply to amateur drama as used in Appendix A.

No.	Date	Group	Play	Author	Type	Aud. Size
<u>1888</u>						
1	Nov 29 Th	Hose Company	Phoenix	Milton Nobles	D	"large"
<u>1889</u>						
2	Jan 19 Sa	Hose Company	Black Diamonds	N. T. Bishop	D	"good"
3	Feb 20 Th Mar 1 F	Burns Club	Rob Roy Rob Roy	Harry B. Smith	MD MD	small "large"
4	Apr 5 F	Hose Company	The Hidden Crime	?	?	"good"
<u>1890</u>						
5	Feb 28 F  Mar 6 Th	Hose Company	The Ticket-of-Leave Man and The Kansas Immigrant  The Ticket-of-Leave Man (rehearsal for the Old Settlers)	Tom Taylor ?	D  ?	"well filled"  ?
<u>1891</u>						
6	May 22 F	Knights of Pythias	Damon and Pythias	John Baim	D	"large"

<u>1892</u>						
7	Feb 22 M	Knights of Pythias	She Stoops to Conquer	Oliver Goldsmith	C	"very good house"
8	Mar 1 Tu	Ladies Guild of the Episcopal Church	Queen Esther [ <u>\$90</u> ]	?	RD	"immense"
9	Mar 15 Tu	Ladies Aid Society of the Presbyterian Church	The Deestreet Skule [ <u>\$80</u> ]	M. H. Jaquith	C	"large"
10	May 6 F May 7 Sa	Ladies Guild of the Episcopal Church	Joseph's Bondage [ <u>\$80</u> ]	?	RD	"good" "smaller"
11	May 9 F	Ladies Guild of the Episcopal Church	Red Riding Hood's Rescue [ <u>\$65</u> ]		MD	"large"

1894

None

1895

12	Jul 2 Tu Jul 4 Th	Rev. T. H. Richards and "a large company"	Gettysburg Gettysburg	Percy Mackaye	D D	"full" "full"
----	----------------------	---	--------------------------	---------------	--------	------------------

1896

13	Feb 14 F	Knights of Pythias	The World Against Her	?	MD	?
----	----------	--------------------	-----------------------	---	----	---

14 Aug 14 F (M) Episcopal Sunday Brownies in Fairy Land Palmer Cox MD "good"  
Aug 14 F School 7 \$35 7 MD "largely  
attended"

1900

None

1901

None

1903

15 Mar 20 F "Young People of Joe the Waif or The Pet ? ? "small"  
Trent" of the Camp



Explanation: The markings indicated in Appendix A of brackets, quotation marks, question marks, and (M) are also used in this appendix. The symbol (Mo) is used to represent those events that took place in the opera house during the morning hours. The following symbols represent the classification of events:

- |             |                   |              |                 |
|-------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| D . . . . . | Dance             | S . . . . .  | Social          |
| P . . . . . | Political Meeting | SA . . . . . | School Activity |
| L . . . . . | Lecture           | C . . . . .  | Celebration     |
| R . . . . . | Religious Service | E . . . . .  | Entertainment   |

No.	Date	Description	Type	Aud. Size
<u>1888</u>				
1	Nov 23 F	Public Dance with Reynolds' Orchestra	D	small
2	Nov 26 M	Grand Ball with Reynolds' Orchestra	D	"good"
3	Dec 12 W	Public Dance with Elmendorf's Orchestra	D	"small"
4	Dec 29 Th	Public Dance	D	"small"
<u>1889</u>				
5	Feb 21 F	Public Dance	D	"small"
6	Apr 1 M	Public Dance	D	"15 couples"
7	Apr 12 F	Sioux Falls Constitution Meeting	P	"small"
8	Apr 19 F	Temperance lecture with the Baileys	L	"large"
9	May 10 F	Benefit dance for Dell Rapids Orchestra	D	"fair"
10	May 30 F (Mo)	Memorial Services	R	?
11	May 30 F	Campfire with singing and speeches	C	"500 people"
12	Jun 27 Th	Public Dance	D	?
13	Jul 4 Th	Public Dance	D	"good"
14	Sep 4 W	Temperance lecture, with George C. Christian as speaker	L	"good"

15	Sep 28 Sa	(M)	Temperance lecture, with Sam Small as speaker	L	"400"
16	Sep 28 Sa		" " " " " " "	L	"650"
17	Sep 30 M		Capital Question, with Col. J. H. Drake as speaker	P	"good"
18	Oct 17 Th		Teachers' Institute	SA	"large"
19	Oct 18 F		Public Dance	D	?
20	Nov 28 Th		Ladies' Aid Society social with singing, speaking and supper	S	?
21	Dec 12 Th		Private party with Elmendorf's Orchestra	D	"30 couples"
22	Dec 20 F		Dell Rapids High School entertainment	SA	large
23	Dec 25 W		Christmas Ball with Randall's Band	D	"fair"
<u>1890</u>					
24	Feb 3 M		G.A.R. Campfire	C	"large"
25	Feb 22 Sa		Public school entertainment [ <u>\$20</u> ]	SA	"large"
26	Mar 6 Th		Old Settlers' Reunion	C	?
27	May 7 W		Ladies' Guild vocal recital	E	?
28	May 15 Th		Public Dance	D	"meagre"
29	May 30 F	(Mo)	Memorial services	R	"large"
30	May 30 F		Campfire with exercises and impromptu speaking	C	"large"
31	Jun 1 Su		Memorial services	R	"large"
32	Jun 4 W		Old Soldiers' Meeting	C	?
33	Jun 6 F		High School Commencement	SA	"large"
34	Jun 13 Su		Catholic services with Father Barron	R	"well attended"
35	Aug 16 Sa		" " " " " "	R	?
36	Sep 2 Tu		Democrat rally, with F. A. Leavitt as speaker	P	"fair"
37	Sep 23 Tu	(M)	Democrat rally, with H. L. Loucks as speaker	P	"60 voters"
38	Sep 23 Tu		" " " " " " " "	P	"larger"
39	Sep 24 W		Women's Suffrage Meeting, with Rev. Anna H. Shaw as speaker	L	"well filled"
40	Oct 8 W		Democrat rally, with Judge J. E. Carland as speaker	P	"filled"
41	Oct 27 M		Republican rally, with Senator Pettigrew as speaker	P	?
42	Nov 26 W		K. of P. Dance with Fulmer's Orchestra	D	?
43	Dec 18 Th		Public School entertainment [ <u>\$45</u> ]	SA	?



1891

44	Jan 21 W		Odd Fellows Installation and Dance	C	"250"
45	Feb 6 F		Dance Club	D	"25 couples"
46	Feb 20 F		Dance Club	D	"small"
47	Feb 23 M		Public Dance with Fulmer's Orchestra	D	"fair"
48	Mar 6 F		Arion Quartette singing choruses and solos	E	"small"
49	Mar 13 F		Private party with Fulmer's Orchestra	D	"20 couples"
50	Mar 15 Su	(Mo)	Catholic services with Father Jeram	R	?
51	Apr 17 F		Ladies' Aid Society giving a High Tea [ <u>\$30</u> ]	S	"large"
52	May 24 Su	(Mo)	Memorial services	R	"large"
53	Aug 16 Su	(Mo)	Catholic services with Father Jeram	R	?
54	Oct 9 F		Dance Club with Fulmer's Orchestra	D	?
55	Nov 20 F		G.A.R. Benefit with music and recitations [ <u>\$50</u> ]	E	"good"
56	Nov 28 Sa		Sons of Veterans Dance with Fulmer's Orchestra	D	"large"
57	Dec 4 F		Jessie Benedict Concert	E	"small"
58	Dec 17 Th		Ladies' Relief Society's Fair	E	?
59	Dec 30 W		Sioux Club Dance with Fulmer's Orchestra	D	"small"

1892

60	Jan 29 F		Private party with Fulmer's Orchestra	D	"40 couples"
61	Jan 31 Su	(Mo)	Catholic services with Father Jeram	R	?
62	Apr 26 Tu		Odd Fellows Anniversary with speeches, supper, and dancing	C	?
63	Apr 28 Th		Temperance lecture, with Capt. Shields as speaker	L	"large"
64	Apr 29 F		" " " " " " "	L	"large"
65	Apr 30 Sa		" " " " " " "	L	"large"
66	May 1 Su		" " " " " " "	L	"full"
67	May 8 F	(Mo)	Catholic services with Father O'Hara	R	?
68	May 27 F		High School Commencement	SA	"utmost capacity"
69	Jun 5 Su	(Mo)	Catholic services with Father O'Hara	R	?
70	Jun 5 Su		Catholic lecture with Father O'Hara	R	?
71	Jun 16 Th		Old Settlers' Reunion	C	"small"
72	Jun 18 Sa		Democrat Rally, with Rev. W. McCreedy as speaker	P	?

73	Jul 3 Su	(Mo)	Catholic services with Father O'Hara	R	?
74	Aug 7 Su	(Mo)	" " " " "	R	?
75	Aug 10 W		Jessie Benedict and Irene Over Concert	E	"well attended"
76	Sep 6 Tu		Bi-Chloride of Gold Club entertainment	E	?
77	Sep 18 Su	(Mo)	Catholic services with Father Ahern	R	?
78	Sep 18 Su		Temperance lecture, with Rev. William Fiedler as speaker	L	"full"
79	Oct 6 Th		Republican Rally, with Hon. J. S. Conklin as speaker	P	"filled"
80	Oct 15 Sa	(M)	Democrat meeting to nominate a candidate	P	?
81	Oct 20 Th		Ladies' Guild Fair	E	?
82	Oct 21 F		Public School Declamation Contest	SA	full
83	Oct 23 Su		Catholic services with Father Ahern	R	?
84	Oct 24 M		Democrat Rally, with Rev. J. P. Styles as speaker	P	?
85	Oct 28 F		B.C.G. Dance	D	?
86	Nov 4 F		Republican Rally, with C. L. Brockway as speaker	P	"filled"
87	Nov 7 M		Democrat Meeting	P	?
88	Nov 24 Th		Thanksgiving Ball with the Dell Rapids Cornet Band / \$49.50 /	D	"70 couples"
89	Dec 14 W		Andersonville Prison Lecture with Capt. J. J. January	L	"fair"
90	Dec 26 M		Christmas Ball with Mostad's Scandinavian Band	D	?

1894

91	Sep 29 Sa		Democrat Meeting, with J. W. Harden as speaker	P	?
92	Oct 4 Th		Republican Rally, with Sen. J. H. Gallinger as speaker	P	full
93	Oct 6 Sa		Public Dance	D	"small"
94	Oct 15 M		Democrat Rally, with Judge Howe as speaker	P	?
95	Oct 18 Th		Republican Rally, with Judge Bennett as speaker	P	?
96	Nov 2 F		Democrat Rally, with T. M. Simmons as speaker	P	?
97	Nov 5 M		Republican Meeting, with Judge C. S. Palmer as speaker	P	?
98	Nov 8 Th		Impromptu Republican celebration	P	"large"
99	Nov 23 Th		Sioux Falls Children's Home Concert	E	"large"

100	Nov 28 Th	K. of P. Ball with Fulmer's Orchestra	D	"40 couples"
<u>1895</u>				
101	Feb 22 F	The Dell Rapids Minstrel and Comedy Company with music, burlesques, songs, and dancing	E	"crowded"
102	Mar 5 Tu	G.A.R. Meeting	E	"good"
103	Mar 19 Tu	G.A.R. entertainment, variety show	E	"large"
104	Mar 29 F	Public High School Demorest Contest	SA	"large"
105	May 4 Sa	Farewell Reception for Mr. and Mrs. W. I. Howland	S	"130"
106	May 8 W	St. Augusta Cathedral Choir of Sioux Falls	E	"small"
107	May 30 Th	Campfire with recitations, quartette singing, and orations	C	"filled"
108	Jul 4 W	Fourth of July Encampment, with Mrs. Mary E. Lease as speaker [ \$20 ]	L	"nearly 700"
109	Sep 8 Su (M)	W.C.T.U. and G.T. Gospel Service	R	"well attended"
110	Oct 11 Sa	Democrat Convention	P	?
111	Oct 31 Th	Ladies' Guild Bloomer Social [ \$20 ]	S	large
112	Nov 1 F	Benefit entertainment and Ball [ \$33 ]	E	"large"
113	Nov 27 W	K. of P. Thanksgiving Ball with the Dell Rapids Orchestra [ \$30 ]	D	"50 couples"
114	Dec 12 Th	Public Dance with Pahst Bros. Orchestra	D	"not large"
115	Dec 14 Sa	"Young ladies of Dell Rapids" gave a "female minstrel entertainment."	E	"large"
116	Dec 27 F	Grand Ball	D	"good"
<u>1896</u>				
117	Jan 9 Th	G.A.R. Installation and basket supper	S	large
118	Feb 8 Sa	The Philadelphia Boys of the Episcopal Church gave historical skits and a leap year ball.	E	"good"
119	Feb 21 F	G.A.R. Grand Ball with Fulmer's Orchestra	D	"large"
120	Mar 3 Tu	Republican Rally, with Sen. R. F. Pettigrew as speaker	P	"fullest"
121	Mar 10 Tu	Rev. W. H. Jordan lectured. "Napoleon, the Fallen Meteor."	L	?

122	Mar 24 Tu	G.A.R. Lecture. Chaplain Jesse Cole's "Four Years at the Front."	L	"small"
123	Mar 26 Th	Old Settlers' Reunion	C	"125"
124	Apr 8 W	Leap Year Ball with Criss' Orchestra	D	50
125	Apr 10 F	Young people of the Presbyterian Church gave a Social <u>/\$20/</u>	S	small
126	Apr 26 M	Odd Fellows Anniversary	C	large
127	May 3 Su	W.C.T.U. and G.T. Gospel Service	R	"large"
128	May 8 Th	Rev. George F. Hopkins lectured on "Ten Years' Missionary Life Among the Indians on the Pacific Coast."	L	large
129	May 28 Th	High School Commencement	SA	"large"
130	May 29 F	Public School exhibition of music, recitations, and drills	SA	large
131	May 30 Sa	Campfire	C	"packed"
132	Aug 7 F	Republican Rally, with F. B. Purdie as speaker	P	"large"
133	Aug 10 M	Democrat Rally, with Lasse Bothum as speaker	P	"full"
134	Aug 29 Sa	Democrat meeting	P	"400"
135	Sep 9 W	Republican Rally, with Dr. Carlos Martyn as speaker	P	"filled"
136	Sep 19 Sa	Temperance lecture, with Col. George Bain as speaker	L	full
137	Sep 24 Th	Republican Rally, with Congressman Gamble as speaker	P	?
138	Oct 3 Sa	Free Silver Club and Mckinley Club Debate	P	?
<u>1900</u>				
139	Feb 23 F	Workman's Masquerade Ball with the 3-B Orchestra <u>/\$27/</u>	D	"large"
140	Mar 5 M	Temperance Lecture, with John G. Wooley as speaker	L	poor
141	Mar 16 F	Grand Ball with the 3-B Orchestra <u>/\$25/</u>	D	"30 couples"
142	Apr 14 Sa	Temperance meeting with speeches, music, and declamations	E	good
143	Apr 18 W	Dance Club with the Eagele Mandolin Club	D	"30 couples"
144	Apr 20 F	Sioux Falls College Concert <u>/\$50/</u>	E	"large"
145	Apr 28 Sa	Phonograph entertainment	E	good
146	May 2 W	Populist County Convention	P	?

147	May 8 Tu	Frank McClure Chaffe lectured on "Goblins of Our Grandfathers."	L	"not large"
148	May 15 Tu	Dance Club with Ainsworth Orchestra	D	80
149	May 23 W	Public Dance	D	"quite a few"
150	May 30 W (Mo)	Memorial services	R	?
151	May 30 W	Campfire	C	good
152	May 31 Th	Junior High School Class Day	SA	"150"
153	Jun 1 F	High School Commencement	SA	"large"
154	Jun 5 Th	G.A.R. lecture, with Chaplain Daley as speaker	L	?
155	Jun 23 Sa	Populist Rally, with "Cyclone" Davis as speaker	P	?
156	Jul ?	Public Dance with the Dell Rapids Orchestra	D	?
157	Aug 13 M	Private party with the Mandolin Club	D	?
158	Sep 13 Th	Populist lecture of moving pictures of the Philippines	L	"fair"
159	Sep 29 Sa	Republican Rally, with Hon. A. C. Rankin as speaker	P	"filled"
160	Sep 29 Sa	Populist Rally, with T. P. Core as speaker	P	?
161	Oct 5 F	Dell Rapids Band Concert [ \$20 ]	E	good
162	Oct 15 M	Private party with Collins Harp Orchestra	D	80
163	Oct 31 W	Republican Rally, with Governor Shaw of Iowa as speaker	P	?
164	Nov 21 W	Catholic Society's Fair [ \$600 ]	E	"large"
165	Nov 22 Th	" " "	E	"large"
166	Nov 23 F	51st Iowa Regimental Band Concert	E	good
167	Nov 28 W	Thanksgiving Ball with the Mandolin Club	D	good
168	Dec 13 Th	Ladies' Guild Fair [ \$100 ]	E	"large"
169	Dec 14 F	Dancing Club	D	?
170	Dec 21 F	" "	D	?

1901

171	Jan 1 Tu	I.M.L. Masquerade Ball with Pabst Bros. Orchestra [ \$23 ]	D	"70"
172	Feb 4 M	Dell Rapids Band Concert	E	"good"
173	Feb 14 Th	Private party held by Mrs. Kenefick and Mrs. Mitchell	D	?
174	Apr 8 M	Dell Rapids Band Concert [ \$15 ]	E	?

175	Apr 22 M	Moving picture lecture by Mr. Harry Randall on the Paris Exposition	L	good
176	Apr 28 Tu	Minnehaha Mandskor Concert	E	"filled"
177	May 17 F	I.M.L. Dance with the Mandolin Club	D	good
178	May 30 Th (Mo)	Memorial services	R	"large"
179	May 30 Th	Junior High School Class Day	SA	"packed"
180	May 31 F	High School Commencement	SA	"packed"
181	Jul 4 Th	Public Dance	D	?
182	Aug 14 W	Public Dance	D	30
183	Oct 25 F	Public Dance with the Dell Rapids Orchestra	D	good
184	Dec 9 W	Ladies' Guild Fair	E	large
185	Dec 10 Th	Masquerade Ball with the 3-B Orchestra	D	?
186	Dec 20 F	Public Dance with the Dell Rapids Orchestra	D	?
187	Dec 25 W	Public Dance	D	40

1903

188	Jan 7 W	Public Dance with Summer's Orchestra	D	"large"
189	Jan 13 Tu	Woodmen's Dance	D	?
190	Jan 24 Sa	Moving picture lecture by Lieut. Martin Tew	L	"filled"
191	Jan 28 W	Public Dance with Hoyt's Orchestra	D	80
192	Feb 5 W	Public Dance with Hubbard's Orchestra	D	100
193	Feb 12 Th	G.A.R. Campfire	C	?
194	Feb 16 Sa	Dance "given by the young ladies" with Hubbard's Orchestra	D	?
195	Feb 24 Tu	Public Dance with Hubbard's Orchestra	D	?
196	Feb 26 Th	Temperance lecture, with F. W. Emerson as speaker	L	"fair"
197	Feb 28 Sa	Moving picture lecture of "War Scenes" by Gen. W. T. Bennett	L	"small"
198	Mar 17 Tu	Public Dance with Summer's Orchestra	D	"not large"
199	Apr 14 Tu	High School Declamatory Contest	SA	"filled"
200	Apr 22 W	Public Dance with Hubbard's Orchestra	D	"large"
201	May 30 Sa (Mo)	Memorial services	R	?
202	May 30 Sa	Campfire	C	?
203	Jul 4 F	Public Dance with Baldwin's Orchestra	D	?
204	Jul 24 F	Public Dance with the Dell Rapids Band	D	?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Bailey, Dana R. History of Minnehaha County, South Dakota. Sioux Falls: Brown and Saenger Printers, 1899.
- Browne, Walter and Koch, E. De (ed.). Who's Who On the Stage 1908. New York: B. W. Dodge & Company, 1908.
- Hapgood, Norman. The Stage In America 1897-1900. New York: Macmillan Company, 1901.
- History of Southeastern Dakota, Its Settlement and Growth. Sioux City, Iowa: Western Publishing Company, 1881.
- Oliver, Robert T. History of Public Speaking in America. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966.
- Parker, Donald D. Local History, How to Gather It, Write It, and Publish It. New York: rev. and ed. Bertha E. Josephson, Social Science Research Council, 1944.
- Quinn, Arthur Hobson. A History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War. New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1946.
- Reese, M. Lisle. South Dakota, A Guide to the State. New York: Hastings House, 1952.
- Roberts, Vera. On Stage. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
- Schell, Herbert S. History of South Dakota. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. South Dakota, Its Beginnings and Growth. New York: American Book Company, 1942.
- Smith, Charles A. A Comprehensive History of Minnehaha County, South Dakota. Mitchell, South Dakota: Educator Supply Company, 1949.

Articles and Periodicals

Beijer, Agne. "About Theatre History," Educational Theatre Journal, XII, No. 2 (May, 1960), 85.

Dell Rapids Journal. Dell Rapids, South Dakota, 1888.

Dell Rapids Times. Dell Rapids, South Dakota, 1888-1892, 1900-1901, 1903.

Dell Rapids Times--Tribune. Dell Rapids, South Dakota, 1912.

Dell Rapids Tribune. Dell Rapids, South Dakota, 1892, 1894-1896.

Earls, Mrs. U. S. "History of Dell Rapids," Dell Rapids Tribune, June 9, 1955.

Hewitt, Barnard. "Uncle Tom and Uncle Sam," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXVII, (February, 1951), 63.

Lippman, Monroe. "The Effect of the Theatrical Syndicate on Theatrical Art in America," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXVI, No. 2 (April, 1940), 275.

Manmouth, Goeffrey. "Theatrical Stock and Its Dividends," Bookman, (May, 1910), 276.

Moody, Richard. "Uncle Tom, the Theatre and Mrs. Stowe," American Heritage, VI, No. 6 (October, 1955), 102.

Nesby, Mrs. James A. "Dell Rapids Grand Opera House Sale Recalls Old History," Argus-Leader, April 30, 1951.

Sioux Falls Journal. Sioux Falls, South Dakota, 1888.

"Stone Business Was Important to Growth of Dell Rapids," newspaper clipping in a "History of Dell Rapids" scrapbook, Dell Rapids, Public Library. Newspaper, author, and date unknown.

Unpublished Material

Funk, Nancy Louise. "Professional Theatrical Activity in Iowa from 1890 to 1895." Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1966.

Parker, Donald D. Pioneering in the Upper Big Sioux Valley. Unpublished history, South Dakota State University, 1967.



Schlingman, Maxine. "The Contribution of the Traveling Company to the American Theatre." Unpublished Master's thesis, Marquette University, 1938.

Switzer, Theodore R. "A History of Theatre and Theatrical Activities in Brookings, South Dakota, from 1879 Through 1898." Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Speech, South Dakota State University, 1963.

#### Public Documents

Minnehaha County Court House. Deed Record. Vol. 57, 438.

Minnehaha County Court House. Party Wall Contract. Miscellaneous Vol. "C," 232-3.

Minnehaha County Court House. Quit Claim Deed. Vol. 29, 448, 558.

Minnehaha County Court House. Warranty Deed Records. Vol. "W," 363; Vol. 30, 172.

#### Other Sources

Blow, Harry. Dell Rapids, South Dakota. Interview, September 5, 1968. Deceased, December 1968.

Bohl, Russell. Dell Rapids, South Dakota. Interview, July 5, 1968.

Dieson, Harry. Dell Rapids, South Dakota. Interview, October 5, 1968.

Greening, Frank. Present owner of the Dell Rapids Opera House. Conversation, July 5, 1968.

Smith, Virgil. Present editor of the Dell Rapids Tribune. Conversations, spring of 1968.