

## Cultural History of Indianapolis: The Theater, 1880-1890

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The place of the theater among the fine arts in Indianapolis history was still a matter for dispute in the 1880's. Henry Irving, after his visit to Indianapolis in 1884, told a New York reporter that he was not impressed by the culture of the city. He thought the theater there might some day become a "very good place of amusement," but at the moment Indianapolis was not a congenial home for high forms of art. Many persons would rather pay ten cents for an afternoon in a side show. The local press, he thought, was far ahead of the people. The editor of the *News* countered that in Indianapolis Irving had enjoyed larger audiences in proportion to its population than anywhere else in the country except on one occasion in Chicago, and that the general reaction was excellent, for the audience was responsive in a high degree to every action in his performance. Previously Irving had actually commended Indianapolis audiences for their preference for Shakespeare over melodrama. Furthermore, the editor pointed out, to know people, one must meet them in their homes, and that privilege had been denied Irving.<sup>1</sup>

Another criticism levelled at the theater came from the pulpit, which attacked the ballet as a device of the devil; therefore it was the duty of Christians to discountenance it. The editor of the *Sentinel* defended the ballet by declaring that it was as permanently fixed as the drama or the opera, and that it was picturesque and pretty. Though the nudity of ballet was its chief attraction, fashion had approved this nudity on the stage, and there it would stay regardless of the opinions of pulpit or press.<sup>2</sup>

Generally speaking, in the 1880's Indianapolis was regarded as a good show town, though the business was not

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<sup>1</sup> *Indianapolis News*, March 28, 1884.

<sup>2</sup> *Indianapolis Sentinel*, December 29, 1886.

very profitable during the early years of the decade while the two principal theaters were active rivals. This cutthroat policy ended when all theaters in the city went under the same management. Reports of traveling companies in 1887 were favorable to Indianapolis. They commonly regarded this as a three-night stand, that is, three nights and a matinee. Indianapolis also claimed that the average receipts for each performance in the preceding season were greater than at Louisville, Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland, or Cincinnati.<sup>3</sup>

In 1881 theater managers estimated the theater-going public of the city at about ten thousand. On this basis, it was felt that a paying patronage could not possibly be furnished for three first-class theaters because there simply were not enough people.<sup>4</sup> During fair week, of course, business always boomed, and larger audiences could be expected. In 1887 record attendance at all theaters was observed. All seats were filled and hundreds were unable to gain admittance. But among those who usually attended were some crude and uncouth persons who disturbed and annoyed others in the audience. The editor threatened to publish his list of names of such persons, whom he branded as "gadwumps," if their conduct did not improve. Manager George Dickson thought some of this poor attitude was probably a result of the actions of management itself, for during the period of competition when business was divided the managers could not fill their houses by showing only first-class productions at good prices; they therefore resorted to lower type shows at cheaper prices. Since people had lost confidence and were not attracted by the better shows, the whole business deteriorated, giving Indianapolis a poor reputation as a show town. By 1888 Dickson asserted that this period had passed and that he intended to build up the business and improve the city's reputation<sup>5</sup>—good advertisement, of course, for all theaters in Indianapolis were then united under his management.

The types of shows presented in the 1880's varied all the way from Shakespeare to variety, with the latter definitely on the increase. Burlesque was extremely popular, but since there were not enough of these shows to fill the season, variety bills were assembled with the assistance of New York

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<sup>3</sup> *Indianapolis News*, May 26, 1887.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, January 6, 1881.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, September 23 and November 25, 1887, January 4, 1888; *Indianapolis Sentinel*, September 24 and 30, 1886.

vaudeville agents. Phineas T. Barnum's circus continued to attract many with its famous elephant, Jumbo, its hippodrome races, menagerie, and specialty performers.<sup>6</sup>

George Dickson's opinion notwithstanding, the legitimate theater itself was felt to be in a decline. The change from the old system of local stock to the itinerant combination meant that the entire cast with scenery, costumes, and properties travelled from town to town. Thus the local theater was reduced to nothing but a shell of what it had formerly been. At one time a complete organization of artists and actors with a talented and capable manager could be found in every town; only the star traveled and found his support and all the mechanism of the play ready in each theater to perform with him. An aura of dignity surrounded the star, who strongly favored only high-class plays. Now the combination system changed all that. The tremendous expense involved in transporting scenery and costumes as well as large companies of actors caused actors' salaries to suffer. The only solution was to make more money. Since an increase in box office receipts required larger audiences, managers sought cheaper shows to attract more classes of people, for only lower prices would permit them to attend. This theater for revenue only brought about its own deterioration as well as that of public taste; the decline was felt somewhat in tragedy, more in drama, but most in comedy. The best patrons of the theater were thus being driven from it, were losing the habit of going to the theater, and would not attend even the better shows which were sometimes presented. The chief advantage of the combination system was that it favored the smaller cities and towns, where good local stock was never profitable, and where no one had had an opportunity to attend the theater regularly. The combination system gave these communities their first taste of the theater. A company would perform in any town along its route which could muster up an audience of any size.<sup>7</sup> At one time in 1885 there were 393 companies on tour in the country, the largest number since the beginning of the system. Of these, about two-thirds were dramatic companies, with the balance divided among musical comedy, vaudeville, minstrel, circuses, and miscellaneous. The total

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<sup>6</sup> Bernard Sobel, *Burlesque: An Underground History of Burlesque Days* (New York, 1931), 80; *Indianapolis News*, May 21, 1883.

<sup>7</sup> *Indianapolis News*, October 17, December 8, 1885; April 10, 1886.

box office receipts in America for one forty-week season were estimated at approximately \$38,400,000, but much of this went to railroads, hotels, and managers, with actors at the bottom of the list.<sup>8</sup>

Combinations usually carried all their properties with them, but a notable exception was a popular melodrama which borrowed horses from a local owner. *The Still Alarm* was an exciting piece introducing two white horses, Pegasus and Bucephalus, recruited from a local milk or beer wagon. The high point of the evening came in Act III, the Central Fire Station Scene. The hero had smashed his hotel window of real glass and dashed down from the fifth floor on the fire escape. At the fire house, the alarm came in, the horses ran to their places, and firemen slid down the pole from their beds. A shout, a clash, and the curtain came down as the engine, all steamed up and with sparks flying, pulled by the plunging horses, careened across the stage. This scene never failed to bring the audience to a high pitch of excitement.<sup>9</sup> Not only horses, but trained dogs and monkeys, or dogs and ponies were seen frequently on the stage during the 1880's.<sup>10</sup>

During this decade some of the greatest stars of all time were popular, and many of them came to Indianapolis. Sarah Bernhardt and Henry Irving made their first American appearances in the eighties, Bernhardt in 1880, and Irving in 1883. Tommaso Salvini, an Italian actor famous as Othello, came to the United States in 1886. Augustin Daly's company with Ada Rehan, especially admired for her Katherine in *Taming of the Shrew*, toured the country during the 1880's. Lily Langtry, the "Jersey Lily," was a favorite, and Minnie Maddern Fiske made her debut in 1885. Other stars from the New York stage who appeared in Indianapolis during the decade were Edwin Booth, Lawrence Barrett, Joseph Jefferson, Joe Emmett, Lotta Crabtree, Frank Mayo, Fanny Davenport, Clara Morris, and Charlotte Thompson.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, December 25, 1885.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, November 21, 22, and 23, 1887; interview with Anna Hasselman, who saw a performance of *The Still Alarm* in 1887 and remembers it vividly. A native of Indianapolis and prominent in Indianapolis cultural activities, Miss Hasselman was for many years curator, instructor, and lecturer at John Herron Art Museum.

<sup>10</sup> *Indianapolis News*, May 1, 1888.

<sup>11</sup> Sobel, *Burleycue*, 41; Montrose J. Moses and John M. Brown (eds.), *The American Theatre as Seen by its Critics, 1752-1934* (New York, 1934), 371.

According to the United States census for 1880, Indianapolis offered the following places of amusement: "Grand opera-house, seating 1,608, and Park theater, seating 1,200. There are also, under the control of singing societies and used mostly for amateur performance, Germania theater, seating 600, and Männerchor hall, seating 500. The two first mentioned pay a yearly license fee of \$100 each. Of concert-halls, etc., having no stage appliances, there are Masonic hall, a large room in Masonic temple, seating capacity 800; Mozart hall, situated on the third floor of a business house, seating 500; Washington hall, on the third floor of a business block, capacity 600; and Ryan's hall, also on a third floor, capacity 400. Among the pleasure resorts are the following concert- and beer-gardens: Come's garden and theater, which superseded a garden attached to a saloon, is roofed over, has a permanent stage, a capacity of from 800 to 1,000, and is open the year round; and Gilmore's Zoölogical garden, with a saloon attached, in which music is furnished. These two places pay an annual license to the city. In addition there are many saloons that have music and give variety performances, but they can hardly be classed as concert- and beer-gardens."<sup>12</sup>

On September 27, 1880, the new English's Opera House was formally opened to the public with a performance of *Hamlet*, starring Lawrence Barrett. Some had attempted to dissuade William H. English when he had announced his intentions in March, 1880, but he planned to erect a building that would serve both the state and the nation, for he hoped to complete his theater in time for the 1880 political conventions. Perhaps English's only concern was the welfare of his son, William E., who appeared restless and uncertain as to his career in life and travelled about the world wherever his fancy led him. No doubt the father understood his son's fondness for the theater, for the complete management of the opera house was at once turned over to him.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Social Statistics, II*, 452.

<sup>13</sup> Jacob P. Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis* (2 vols., Chicago, 1910), I, 470. Darrell Gooch, "History of the Indianapolis Stage, 1875-90" (2 vols.; Master's thesis, State University of Iowa, 1932), I, 67. William H. English to William E. English, Indianapolis, September 20, 1874, and Washington, D.C., March 30, 1878, MSS, English Collection, Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis. William H. English had urged his son to marry but to choose wisely, since this step was important for the English fortunes, which were then at their peak. Yet there is no substantial evidence that the father objected when in July,

William H. English, long active in both state and national politics, had been chosen secretary of the Indiana constitutional convention. He had done well in Indianapolis in both real estate and banking. In June, 1880, he was nominated for vice-president of the United States on the Democratic ticket with Winfield S. Hancock. The press, however, asserted that the campaign would not interfere with work on the opera house. The opening date had been previously announced to be September 27, and occasional items reminded the public that this schedule would be met. Lawrence Barrett, who had agreed to play the opening performance, visited Indianapolis and made suggestions for slight changes in the plans, which were followed.<sup>14</sup>

When completed, English's Opera House was admitted by its manager to be unquestionably the finest theater in the West. It had, he declared, perfect acoustical qualities, for Adelina Patti, after her concert, had said to young English, "I want to congratulate you on having the easiest theatre to sing in in which I have appeared in America." Henry Irving also congratulated English on the way speech could be used in the theater.<sup>15</sup>

Modelled after the Grand Opera House in New York, the 78 by 76 foot auditorium seated 2,000 people in a parquet circle, family circle, two galleries, and twelve private boxes. The interior was finished in Egyptian style in white, gold, and walnut, with crimson draperies. The stage, 47 feet deep by 40 feet wide, commanded from subcellar to top of rigging a total height of 97 feet for manipulating scenery. Six cuts or divisions in the stage permitted a capacity of 40 sets of flats besides two drop curtains. All curtains and drops could be raised out of sight without rolling. Dressing rooms, more than a dozen in all, were equipped with gas, and both hot and cold water. Stock scenery was painted by R. H. Hally, formerly of Drury Lane Theater in London, but at that time of Pope's Theater, St. Louis. The theater could be entered

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1880, the son married actress Annie Fox of the Philadelphia stage. But lack of formal announcements of the marriage or of any sort of reception which a young bride of a member of such a family might normally expect does seem to indicate some degree of parental displeasure. The family's penchant for publishing affairs of social import makes it clear that, had there been such formalities, the press would have noted them.

<sup>14</sup> *Indianapolis News*, May 11 and 24, June 25, July 26, 1880.

<sup>15</sup> W. E. English on English's Opera House, MS, English Collection.

from the street through a seventy-eight-foot corridor, the floor of which inclined slightly so that no steps were necessary to reach the main floor of the auditorium. This corridor was decorated with frescoed walls and ceiling and an elaborately designed tile floor. Though the *News* stated that the theater was to be lighted with electricity, its first illumination was with gas, by means of a magnificent wrought-iron chandelier in the center of the auditorium; a row of gas jets in a trough at the front of the stage constituted the footlights.<sup>16</sup> Its complete staff of officers included a music director, Henry D. Beissenherz, a stage carpenter, scenic artist, scene painter, two propertymen, bill-posters, several ushers and doorkeepers, the treasurer, and the assistant manager.<sup>17</sup> Manager Will E. English was thus free to travel east whenever necessary to engage talent.

A long list of famous stars appeared at English's Opera House during the 1880's, including in their repertoire comedy and tragedy, and both light and grand opera. For variety, minstrels and burlesques were interspersed, even a trained horse show and a vaudeville which presented trained dogs and birds along with roller-skaters and jugglers.<sup>18</sup> Outstanding dramas of the decade began with the opening which featured Lawrence Barrett. He offered *Hamlet*, as well as *The Merchant of Venice*, *David Garrick*, *Julius Caesar*, *Yorick's Love*, *Richelieu*, and *Rosedale*. The next high point of the season came in March, 1881, with William E. Sheridan's performance of *Louis XI*. English not only contracted with the star for this production but called a special company from New York to support him, for the local stock available did not seem satisfactory. Nearly a hundred supernumeraries, probably local persons, were used in one scene. The great trouble and expense in arranging for this production were undertaken because Mrs. English (Annie Fox) was expected to appear opposite the star, a role she had taken the year before at the Chestnut Street Theater in Philadelphia.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Indianapolis Journal*, September 22, 1880; *Indianapolis News*, August 13, 1880; *Indianapolis Star*, June 1, 1930.

<sup>17</sup> Programs of English's Opera House, September 27, 1880, English Collection; *Indianapolis News*, September 22, 1880.

<sup>18</sup> *Indianapolis News*, October 9, 1888, April 25, 1884.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, September 28, 1880; March 10, 22, and 24, 1881. Annie Fox English failed to appear for some reason, possibly her health, for she was ill almost continuously after she came to Indianapolis until her death in 1885.

Anna Dickinson, the unusual actress who dressed like a man, played the title role in *Hamlet* in 1882 and charmed her audience by her intellect, elocution, and enunciation. Margaret Mather in *Romeo and Juliet* and Charlotte Thompson in *Jane Eyre* gave an elevated tone to the early part of the next season. The critic was not favorable to the former, and severely criticized her support, Alexander Salvini as Romeo, who was usually considered a great actor.<sup>20</sup>

In September, 1883, the great Thomas W. Keene appeared in *Macbeth* and rated a most searching comment from the critic of the *News*. The quality of this criticism is superior to that found in other papers of the period and is characteristic of the style of writing of that time.

"Mr. Keene made a popular success as 'Macbeth' before a brilliant audience last night; but not an artistic success. Macbeth is not an inviting character nor an inviting play for the stage. All the evil powers of earth and air are called on, uncanny spirits, bats and toads, 'hell-broth,' dire prophecy, 'murder most foul,' the wickedest ambitions of distorted humanity, have a generous and noble nature 'infirm of purpose' to work on for its destruction. Mr. Keene's conception is not harmonious in giving the proper proportions to this dual character. He emphasizes too much its infirmity. His Macbeth at times becomes almost a whimpering, terror-stricken boy. He does not get an intellectual grasp of the character which reaches its core, but plays it from the surface, and hence lacks dignity. Not to make an odious comparison, he has in his leading support an example of the manly strength and repose he would do well to emulate. Popular appreciation of tempestuous acting in this country has been largely molded by the universal prevalence of stump oratory. When a man shakes the hair down over his eyes and stamps and roars and defies the other party he always rides on waves of applause. Accordingly when Mr. Keene did just that as Macbeth, he was greeted with applause and cat calls. The tendency to rant in Macbeth is almost inevitable, and Mr. Keene ranted. He tore every passion to tatters and overdid everything, with the exception of his first sight of Banquo's ghost. There his action was high and noble, not merely noisy, but forcible. On the contrary at the second view of the ghost he squealed and spluttered in headlong declamation as mechan-

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, March 14, October 6 and 20, 1882.



ical as the explosion of a bunch of fire crackers. There was, too, with him and with some of the other characters, too much of the common burglar style of slipping around the room and feeling for the doors and windows in order to indicate suppressed fear and the tension of watchfulness. On the other hand great praise is due the star for his industry and earnestness; he slights nothing, and his 'business,' never slovenly, was almost always effective. Nothing could have been better than his death scene. There one climax capped another in the most thrilling and effective way possible. The support was unusually good, deserving of a specification which space will not here allow. The result was a performance more evenly excellent than is generally given."<sup>21</sup>

Later that season, in February, 1884, Henry Irving and Ellen Terry came for three nights. Supported by the Lyceum Company, they opened with two unimportant pieces and followed with *Louis XI* and *Merchant of Venice*. Irving was regarded as the perfect Louis XI. The commentator said that "in all theatrical effects, in the expression of physical facts, in the use of every bit of mechanism. . . Irving is perfect." Testifying to audience appreciation, "The first two acts were played almost to the music of applause, so frequently did these spontaneous demonstrations burst forth. . . the applause would not be denied and he had to wait until it spent itself. On the contrary in the last act the unbroken silence was painful. Finer testimony to an artist's power was not given than by last night's audience."<sup>22</sup> As for Miss Terry, "Words fail to depict this 'Portia.' The exquisite sensibility causes real tears. . . . Has all this ever been equalled? . . . When she kneels to Bassanio. . . the audience hugged the humor of it to its very soul; and last of all the loving reconciliation that takes 'Bassanio' and 'Antonio' by the hand, shed a sweetness on the scene once felt never to be forgotten. When shall we ever see such a 'Portia?' When such a performance of 'the Merchant of Venice?' The audience filled the house in every part, and one so wrapt, so spontaneous in its manifestations of delight, is rarely seen."<sup>23</sup>

Clara Morris appeared later that season in *The New Magdalen* and in *Camille*, playing to large and enthusiastic

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, September 20, 1883.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, February 8, 1884.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, February 9, 1884.

audiences. The famous Adah Richmond presented her burlesque, *The Sleeping Beauty*, at the opening of the 1885 season. Helena Modjeska came in 1887 in *Dona Diana*, greeted by almost constant applause, and a few days later, Herrmann, the magician, enjoyed a "vast" and delighted audience, yet a representative one.<sup>24</sup>

No doubt the greatest dramatic event at English's for the entire decade was the joint appearance in 1889 of Lawrence Barrett and Edwin Booth in a series of presentations. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Booth played Shylock, and Barrett, Bassanio; in *Hamlet*, Booth was Hamlet, and Barrett, Laertes. Booth played Bertuccio in *The Fool's Revenge*, while Barrett played Yorick in *Yorick's Love*. It was generally felt that because of his age and poor health Booth was making his final appearance in Indianapolis. Men and boys stood in line at the ticket office from Thursday night until Saturday morning, when the tickets went on sale. Many theater parties came from out of town. Audiences completely filled the theater, were "brilliant and appreciative," manifesting enjoyment "no less by strained attention than by frequent and marked applause."<sup>25</sup>

An interesting comment on the character of the theater-going public of Indianapolis was occasioned by the appearance in November, 1888, of Ezra Kendall, comedian, in *A Pair of Kids*. Probably of no importance dramatically, the piece was regarded as the most amusing thing seen in many months, and Kendall was regarded as "immense." He played the role of Jiles Buttons, an old countryman who had many exciting but exaggerated experiences in New York. Kendall showed much originality in "gags," business, and methods; his make-up was as funny as his actions, and everything he did brought a laugh. He could make people laugh and keep them laughing immoderately and incessantly until they forgot why. Kendall commented to his printer, Otto Hasselman of the Journal Printing Company, that when he came to Indianapolis he had to be on his toes, for audiences there were extremely alert. In southern cities he had to pause often before reaching the climax of a joke, to allow his audience

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, April 30, May 1, 1884; *Evening Minute* (Indianapolis), September 4, 1885; *Indianapolis News*, December 30, 1887, and January 10, 1888.

<sup>25</sup> *Indianapolis News*, April 10, 13, and 20, 1889.

to catch the point and to become aware that he was about to make one. But in Indianapolis, he said, he had to talk as fast as he could or the audience would grasp the point before he made it and the laugh would then come ahead of schedule.<sup>26</sup>

From the time English's Opera House opened in 1880, it was involved in bitter rivalry with the Grand Opera House; much of it was normal business competition, each manager striving to sign up the finest and best the New York stage had to offer. But because the number of paying theater-goers in Indianapolis was somewhat limited, the competition turned into a struggle for survival and occasionally descended to a low level, becoming petty, bitter, and personal. English often gave vent to his feelings in his advertising columns and in the news items in his theater programs. From the beginning of this rivalry, Dickson Brothers had advertised the Grand Opera House as the largest and best theater in Indiana. English claimed that distinction for his own theater, and finally issued a statement which was published several times in both the *News* and in the *Daily Stage*, his theater program. He declared that English's Opera House was the largest and best theater in Indiana, but that advertisements in the newspapers often called Dickson's the largest and best. "Now, for the benefit of these persons, or any other adventurous gentlemen, who may desire to chance their substance thereon, and in order to settle this question decisively now and forever, the following wagers are proposed: (1) From \$100 to \$5,000 that English's Opera House has more seats on the first floor than Dickson's Opera House." Then followed eight more propositions, betting a like amount that English's floors, stage, and entire auditorium were larger and that it was safer from fire hazards. The article concluded with the statement that the propositions were "to be taken as a whole, and count, measurement and decision to be made

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, November 20, 1888; interview with Anna Hasselman. It may be pointed out that it was customary for actors to arrange personally with local printers for their own programs and advertising. The printers thus came to know many members of the acting profession and often became deeply interested in the stage. Local people also enjoyed other contacts with famous stars of both the legitimate and concert stage. Since three-night stands were common for the better performers, local socialites made the most of their opportunities and frequently arranged receptions or teas for their favorites. Stars who returned year after year thus formed friendships and occasionally a member of the profession acquired property and came to live in Indianapolis.

by disinterested architects. Money and man to be found on application at box office. Put up or shut up!"<sup>27</sup> Shortly thereafter English's was advertised as the "largest and best theater in Indiana," and in the same column the Grand Opera House was announced as "The Beautiful—the Popular—the Convenient."<sup>28</sup>

W. E. English often boasted that his offerings were higher class than those appearing at the Grand and that those who performed at the latter place did so only because they found it impossible to obtain a date on the already full schedule at English's. He also pointed out that English's engaged only first-class attractions and kept open every week with the best performers on the road, while the Grand had not been open one full week out of seven; at one time the latter was closed entirely for two weeks because it could not obtain first-class entertainment. On other occasions he insisted he would never descend to the practice common to the Grand, that of Sunday shows. But he was not always consistent: Program notes stated that Dickson's employed low-quality actors such as Ada Gray and Frank Frayne; later he announced as coming attractions at English's those same actors.<sup>29</sup>

This rivalry ended at the close of the 1885-1886 season when Henry Talbott leased English's Opera House for a year, with a five-year option. Talbott had formed a partnership with George A. Dickson and would be sole manager of the English, while Dickson remained manager of the Grand. The effect of the partnership would be to end the keen competition that had had a bad result on theatrical business for all concerned. It was also announced that the English Hotel had been leased to a hotel man from Cincinnati and that W. E. English would go abroad. English continued to manage his Opera House until 1887, when he made a three-year tour of Europe and the East.<sup>30</sup>

W. E. English knew he was competing with not just the Grand Opera House alone but also with the Brooks and Dick-

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<sup>27</sup> *Indianapolis News*, March 11, 1882.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, March 17, 1882.

<sup>29</sup> Programs of English's Opera House, 1881-1882, pp. 196, 249; 1882-1883, p. 179; both are in the English Collection. *Indianapolis News*, May 30, 1881, July 3, 1882.

<sup>30</sup> *Indianapolis News*, April 28, 1886; W. E. English on English's Opera House, MS, English Collection.

son Circuit or syndicate, which was probably the first of its kind in the United States. Occasional rumors declared that he would join the pool, but he maintained his independence, insisting that he could present a first-class bill and at the same time make more money than his competitor.<sup>31</sup>

The Dickson-Brooks idea began with the development of stars. James B. Dickson, brother of George A. Dickson and a producer and manager in New York, together with Joseph W. Brooks, were the first in America to start a chain of stars. They were credited with launching Joe K. Emmett, James Herne, Stuart Robson and William H. Crane, Fanny Davenport, and Mary Anderson. The first theater chain, formed in April, 1880, by James B. Dickson and later joined by Henry M. Talbott, George A. Dickson of Indianapolis and S. M. Hickey of Rochester, included Columbus and Dayton, Ohio, as well as Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Evansville, Vincennes, Anderson, and Lafayette. A month later were added Rock Island, Peoria, Danville, and Bloomington, Illinois; the Keokuk, Iowa, Opera House; and Pike's Opera House, Cincinnati. The syndicate secured the management of twenty-seven theaters in many cities, five of them in Indiana, and planned to organize five stock companies to support many stars. Its ten road combinations, including minstrel companies, would require twenty-five to thirty weeks to complete the circuit. Within a month the chain had expanded to cover seven states.<sup>32</sup>

The first indication of the battle for control of the theatrical business in Indianapolis was a cut in admission prices. Early in October, 1880, a large advertisement of Dickson's Park Theater announced popular prices. At the same time the *Indianapolis News* reported that the combination threatened to undersell English, who had reduced admission charges, and present their actors free; they claimed they would lose little thereby for they were backed by the entire circuit.<sup>33</sup> This threat was never carried out, for in 1883, according to rumor, the circuit came to an end. An English's Opera House program reprinted from the *New York Dramatic Times* the following statement: "THE

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<sup>31</sup> Programs of English's Opera House, 1882-1883, p. 253, English Collection.

<sup>32</sup> Gooch, "History of the Indianapolis Stage," I, 62; *Indianapolis News*, April 7 and May 15, 1880.

<sup>33</sup> *Indianapolis News*, October 4, 1880.

GRAND (?) CIRCUIT BUSTED.—Mr. Milsom, the manager of the Nashville theatres, Mr. Macauley, of Louisville, and Mr. Bidwell, of New Orleans, have announced that they will have nothing to do with the Brooks and Dickson circuit next season. They have had enough of it. All the more honor to Will E. English, of Indianapolis, who would never go into it, and has made money thereby.”<sup>34</sup>

A denial shortly appeared in the *News*. Brooks and Dickson would not dissolve at the close of the season. They had changed “the scope and method of their business” so that they would own, organize, and pilot combinations after the fashion of other prominent managers. The “grand circuit” idea as such had been abandoned, for George Dickson, manager of the Grand, had bought from Brooks and Dickson and would manage himself the Indiana circuit which included Terre Haute, Lafayette, Fort Wayne, Evansville, Vincennes, and Danville, Illinois.<sup>35</sup>

The appearance of the Grand Opera House had changed but slightly. In 1881 it had acquired a new drop curtain; at the same time some redecorating was done and draperies of satin and velvet added. Before the 1882-1883 season opened the walls of the auditorium were refinished with elaborate designs worked out by May Henry, George Dickson, and Eugene Ellis. Redecorations and new carpeting were added in 1885, and in 1886 a wainscoting of quilted blue satin was installed around the walls and across the fronts of the proscenium boxes to contrast with a new interior finish of cherry red. In order to assist patrons in selecting seats, the main floor was described as follows: the first eleven rows, all sofa chairs, were to be known as “orchestra”; the next five rows were the “orchestra circle”; and the six rows nearest the entrance were designated as the “dress circle.”<sup>36</sup>

By 1889 electric lights were tried for the first time at the Grand, for the performance of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, with considerable success. Patrons felt that no theater, not even in New York, was more brilliantly lighted. But improve-

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<sup>34</sup> Programs of English's Opera House, 1882-1883, p. 157, English Collection.

<sup>35</sup> *Indianapolis News*, February 12, 1883.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, August 19, 1881; September 12, 1882; August 31 and September 1, 1885. *Indianapolis Sentinel*, September 5, 1886. Miss Henry was much interested in dramatics and later became a professional actress.

ments were needed, for border and stage lights were too dim, while the bright auditorium lights were left on during the performance, thus making it more difficult to view the stage.<sup>37</sup>

More famous stars appeared at the Grand during the decade than at English's during the same period. Some of the same stars appeared at both theaters, though generally not in the same season. Brooks and Dickson were in a position to benefit directly from their management of some of the stars and from their supervision of a chain of theaters.

In 1880 and again in 1881 Richard B. Sheridan's *The Rivals* was presented at the Grand, with three well-known stars in the leading roles: Joseph Jefferson, Maurice Barrymore, and Mrs. John Drew.<sup>38</sup> The 1882 season was outstanding. Jefferson came again to highlight the winter's programs along with Edwin Booth, Fanny Davenport, Lawrence Barrett supported by Otis Skinner, Charlotte Thompson, and Minnie Maddern. These performances were well attended, especially the Edwin Booth plays, which were reported to be the most successful ever given in Indianapolis, gross receipts totalling \$6,630.95. *Fool's Revenge* had grossed \$2,048.75; *Othello*, \$2,118; and *Hamlet*, \$2,463.75. Among the other performances Lawrence Barrett's Cassius in *Julius Caesar* was most favorably reported by the critic who declared that "Shakespeare should have seen it and learned a lesson in art."<sup>39</sup>

Joseph Jefferson came again in the 1882-1883 season, delighting his large and brilliant audiences with his Bob Acres in *The Rivals* and his characterizations in *Rip van Winkle*. Mrs. John Drew was again in the cast.<sup>40</sup> That season's offerings were superior to English's and probably were more outstanding than those of any other season of the decade. The "grand circuit" was running smoothly and could contribute its share toward assembling an excellent program. In addition to Jefferson, there were Mary Anderson, Robson and Crane, Helena Modjeska, Minnie Maddern, Fanny Janauschek, and Robert Mantell. The following season, Maddern, Janauschek, and Modjeska came again and Maurice Barrymore, Clara Morris, Frank Mayo, and Lawrence Bar-

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<sup>37</sup> *Indianapolis News*, November 15, 1889.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, December 24, 1880, and October 18, 1881.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, February 27 and April 28, 1882.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, December 22, 1882.

rett also played return engagements. The 1885-1886 season presented few celebrities. In 1886-1887, Richard Mansfield, Robert Mantell, Margaret Mather, and Modjeska came, but the 1887-1888 season was somewhat barren. In the 1888-1889 season a definite change marked the type of performances. Lily Langtry, Mary Anderson, and Fanny Davenport were presented; but otherwise what seemed to be the outstanding performances were the Thatcher, Primrose, and West Minstrels, said to be the best company on the road,<sup>41</sup> and Lydia Thompson with her famous burlesque company doing *Penelope*. Miss Thompson, an English actress who came to the United States about 1869, was a beautiful and famous blonde, and one of the first to bring to American theaters her own entire company. Excelling as a dancer, actress, and manager, she gave American burlesque its start. She had also played legitimate theater with Lawrence Barrett, Richard Mansfield, and Edward H. Sothorn.<sup>42</sup>

The legitimate theater still had a little life, for the great Julia Marlowe performed in the 1889-1890 season in *Ingomar*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. She was followed by Sol Smith Russell, who was regarded by some as comparable to Jefferson. Then appeared Daniel Frohman's New York Lyceum Theater Company in a society drama, *The Wife*, written by David Belasco and Henry C. De Mille. It was a witty and sophisticated play and the audience, alert to all the lines, responded by calling the cast before the curtain at the close of each act. In the cast was Eliza Logan, well known to theater goers of the previous generation. The military play, *Shenandoah*, was scheduled for January 13, 1890. The original New York company, under the management of Charles Frohman, was to come to Indianapolis from Chicago, and was then to go directly to San Francisco; Chicago and Indianapolis were the only two stops between New York and the west coast.<sup>43</sup>

It would be difficult to find any other period of history when so many great theatrical stars were available to the public. Some of them had passed the zenith of their careers, while others had not yet reached it, but all of them were in command of excellent dramatic powers. Although today

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, January 24, 1889.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, March 29, 1889; Sobel, *Burlesque*, 26-29.

<sup>43</sup> *Indianapolis News*, December 6 and 17, 1889.



Janaushek and Modjeska are not such familiar names as Booth, Barrymore, Drew, Mantell, Mansfield, and Marlowe, yet in their time they were unsurpassed as dramatic actresses. Both were Polish and seemed to possess unusual ability in personating characters. Madame Janaushek carried her audience by the force of her genius and truthfulness of her portrayal. She stood at the head of a school of acting which was then giving place to the so-called emotional drama. Of Modjeska, critics stated that to criticize her was like trying to "pick flaws in a diamond," so exquisitely perfect was her artistry. Her performance was compared with the art of Meissonier where a crowded canvas showed each detail perfectly. "To specify her delicate work were like describing frost tracery."<sup>44</sup> By comparison Maurice Barrymore seemed to strut in egotistical fashion, aware of his handsome appearance, always too much the gentleman with a reserved and somewhat wooden manner, unable to lose himself in the character. Robert Mantell had been Modjeska's leading man the preceding season and appeared in 1883 as a star, demonstrating the greatness of his talent. His vehicle, *Romany Rye*, a popular play of the time, exhibited unusual scenic and mechanic effects. Richard Mansfield was well received by large audiences who thought his Prince Karl an excellent piece of acting. Clara Morris could portray the complete gamut of emotions with the truthfulness and accuracy of a camera taking a photograph. Her audience showed appreciation by recalling her with applause after every act. Lawrence Barrett in *Francesca da Rimini* was said to have given the finest personation of his career, and by adapting this play from a reading to an acting version had contributed more to the American stage than any other living actor. One who later saw Booth and Barrett together was much more commendatory to Booth. Barrett possessed a broad British accent which detracted from his characterization and gave the feeling that he never quite lost himself in his role as did Booth. Barrett was quite handsome and considered an ideal Hamlet in appearance.<sup>45</sup>

Booth came again in 1887. At 54 he had aged perceptibly, but this was soon forgotten, for his magnificent voice and

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, October 23, February 23, and November 2, 1883.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, November 2, 3, and 16, 1883; February 27 and 28, 1883; March 7 and 8, 1884. *Indianapolis Sentinel*, October 20, 1886. Interview with Anna Hasselman.

powerful facial expression were the same as always. Age had somewhat mellowed his interpretation of *Hamlet*, which was less melancholy than it had been fifteen years before. Ticket scalpers were hard at work before the performance, but their gleanings did not show up in the total receipts which were, nevertheless, the largest yet reported for a single performance in Indianapolis—\$4,770. Booth was then at the peak of his financial earnings. That season netted him almost \$300,000.<sup>46</sup>

Bad weather had little effect on the attendance at Margaret Mather's *Romeo and Juliet*, and the critic of the *Sentinel* commented, "It is to the credit of our people that the Opera-house is crowded nightly to pay tribute to the fair and graceful actress."<sup>47</sup>

Robson and Crane presented a better all-around company than was common at that time. "It is seldom in these days of acknowledged dramatic degeneracy that the amusement-loving public is afforded the opportunity to witness legitimate comedy as it was last night presented at the Grand Opera House by Robson and Crane. It has grown almost to be established custom where either star or manager essays the production of the legitimate, to surround the central figure with a supporting company of even less than . . . mediocre abilities, and . . . make everything entirely dependent on the individual success of the person whose name appears in largest letters on the bills."<sup>48</sup> Many prominent stars of the time in like manner bore heavy responsibility for the success of their performances, for the cost of the star could be compensated to the manager by shaving in all other quarters.

Lily Langtry was commended not so much for her acting as for beautiful and artistic make-up and costuming, in which she was probably unsurpassed on the American stage. She thus gave the impression of great beauty, although some did not hold that opinion.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Indianapolis News*, May 6, 1887. The largest previous receipts had been those for Bernhardt at the Park, Patti at English's, and Henry Irving. A critic provided a humorous sidelight on this performance. He was seated behind a woman wearing a very high hat. In trying to see over or around the hat, he discovered that its wearer was endeavoring to see over a still higher hat in front of her. He recommended that a section of the theater be reserved to which no women would be admitted.

<sup>47</sup> *Indianapolis Sentinel*, November 10, 1886.

<sup>48</sup> *Indianapolis Journal*, March 15, 1887.

<sup>49</sup> *Indianapolis News*, November 13, 1888.

A very large and excellent audience attended the performance of the incomparable Julia Marlowe in *Ingomar*. The next night she portrayed Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and the audience "was one of the largest and the most intelligent . . . ever in a theater here, and for an Indianapolis audience, was enthusiastic." Of her role in *Twelfth Night*, the critic said, "as nearly as human imperfection may compass perfection, it is done in her Viola. . . . She is only a girl—just turned twenty-one . . . . In Miss Marlowe there is the star whose splendor in its zenith can not yet be determined. An intention to support this leadership with a following in keeping. . . will result . . . in a presentation of Shakespeare . . . that may . . . make one of the brightest pages in the annals of the stage."<sup>50</sup>

Minstrels never failed to attract capacity audiences, and the Thatcher, Primrose, and West Company was an unusually good one. Its program included a Shakespearean first part, a marvel of beauty and picturesqueness with excellent ballad singing; then a short entertaining olio which featured Barney Fagin's drill; and the after-piece presented the Brothers Byrne acrobatic act.<sup>51</sup>

Toward the close of the decade, burlesques were frequently seen at both the Grand and English's. Lydia Thompson appeared agile as ever, but her voice was somewhat impaired. The critic of the *News* remarked, "but burlesque is burlesque, and while it is attractive to many, to others it is very tiresome."<sup>52</sup>

Innovations in performances during this decade seem unusually modern and have since been regarded as new in the twentieth century. One of these, done with success in 1886, was the trick of placing actors in the audience to carry on the plot of the play. Earlier a play entitled *Green Room Fun* presented by the Saulsbury Company struck the audience as probably the funniest thing they had yet seen on the stage. It was a glimpse of a theater with a play in rehearsal and finally of the green-room while the play was being performed, one professional and four amateurs creating all the fun. Its unique, rapid, and exciting action kept its audience highly entertained.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, November 19, 20, and 21, 1889.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, January 24, 1889.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, March 29, 1889.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, January 23, 1886, and March 11, 1882.

The theater third in importance was the Metropolitan, or Park. After 1879 it was renovated and opened as the new Park Theater with Joseph Jefferson as the attraction. It remained a legitimate theater from 1880 through the 1882-1883 season, and during this period presented a variety of types of shows.

A performance long remembered at the new Park was that of Sarah Bernhardt in February, 1881. She arrived in a special car which had been sent to Richmond, Indiana, for her to prevent delays. Crowds greeted the actress but she remained aloof; the entire company was entertained at the Bates House. The advance seat sale for her two performances, *Camille* and *Frou Frou*, amounted to \$5,000 and the total box office receipts were \$6,284. Some young society ladies complained that their gentleman friends were unable to secure tickets for love or money. But the critic concluded that the young men probably objected to the moral (or immoral) influence the French actress might have over their lady friends. The principal criticism of many was not the actress herself but the character of *Camille*, who was looked upon as a common prostitute.<sup>54</sup> Indianapolis society was still too puritanical to take such a character to its collective heart.

Plays, minstrels, light opera, Tom Thumb, and Lily Langtry were among the other attractions at the Park in the 1882-1883 season. The first show after the Park became transformed to a variety house, Ida Siddon's Mastodon Female Minstrels, well known in Indianapolis, included many specialties such as dancing, singing, ventriloquism, marching, and athletic exhibitions, and closed with a somewhat loud and dreary burlesque of *Cinderella*. The performance was risqué, of the type usually enjoyed by an exclusively male audience.<sup>55</sup>

Throughout the 1883-1884 season, to February, 1884, the Park was operated under an arrangement by which George Dickson and Charles Gilmore of the Zoölogical Garden combined the interests of both theaters, converting the Park into a vaudeville or variety theater. Its storeroom on the first floor was changed into refreshment, bar, and billiard rooms, and a new ten-foot-wide stairway was constructed which led to the theater on the floor above. Prices were lowered to

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, February 28, March 5, 1881.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, May 18, 1883.

fifteen, twenty-five, and thirty-five cents. Inside the auditorium the orchestra space was cut down, the main aisle widened, and more seats added to increase its capacity to 1,600. Two exits to the gallery were provided, and an iron stairway to the street was erected outside. And wonder of wonders! Four electric lights were installed to illuminate the building, and another was situated at the head of the stairs near the box office. The theater then became part of the "Great Western Circuit" with the season to run five weeks. This circuit included the Academy of Music, Pittsburgh; the Apollo Theater, Evansville; the Fourth Street Opera House, St. Louis; the Lyceum and Criterion theaters, Chicago; the Coliseum, Cincinnati; the Park Theater, Detroit; and the Adelphi Theater, Buffalo.<sup>56</sup>

On opening night of this short variety season at the Park, the audience experienced an unexpected bit of drama. William La Haire, whose specialty was "ceiling walking," took three steps, a loop of rope gave way, and he fell twenty-five feet to the stage. Excitement reigned until the manager rang down the curtain and announced that no dangerous injuries had been sustained. But La Haire was unconscious and remained so for some time. Later he was removed to his hotel, "where he now lies in a badly jammed condition." He had received a broken left wrist, a broken rib, dislocated knee, multiple bruises, and possible internal injuries. His attendant had warned him of the bad condition of the apparatus, but having no money for repairs, the actor had planned to use it once more and then ask for an advance on salary to get the mechanism fixed. Gilmore and Dickson assumed responsibility for the performer until his recovery.<sup>57</sup>

After a successful period as a variety theater, the Park succumbed to the roller-skating craze which swept the city in 1884 and was transformed into a skating rink. A double floor, illuminated by electric light, was laid over the stage, parquet, and part of the dress circle. At the opening performance, February 15, a polo game was played between the local club and one from Terre Haute. Henry D. Beissenherz and his band furnished music for the occasion. The game, witnessed

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, April 6, May 3, June 2, 1883.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, June 5 and 6, 1883. It was later learned that the gymnast was injured fatally in a similar fall in a Minneapolis theater. *Ibid.*, March 17, 1884.

by a large crowd, was a modified form of shinny, which was then quite popular. A rink had also been constructed at Masonic Hall just across the street, and another was to open soon on North Meridian Street.<sup>58</sup>

The managers, Gilmore and Dickson, shortly announced that they would remodel the Park, enlarge and improve the present rink, and establish a Dime Museum. Admission to the shows was ten cents, and much was made of this low price in the fall of 1885, as hard times began to affect business. Plays and variety shows were presented and in November, 1886, Augustin Daly's famous melodrama, *Under the Gaslight*, was performed for ten, twenty, and thirty cents. In 1887 two grand operas were included in a season of light opera, the prices again ten, twenty, and thirty cents. Later that season a play, *An American Princess*, presented Anna Mortland, a local actress, in the role of Lady Dunmore.<sup>59</sup>

The general lowering of the quality of presentations brought the accompanying problem of lower-class audiences in which objectionable conduct was often witnessed. The management felt compelled to issue a statement which amounted almost to an order or a threat: The public was warned that any patron who did not conform to the rules of good conduct would be "bounced."<sup>60</sup>

In December, 1886, the Eden Musée was established on the floor below the Dime Museum and opened daily from nine in the morning until eleven at night, for an admission fee of only ten cents. All sorts of novelties were presented, from a display of *The History of a Crime* in four tableaux to the California chicken mill which hatched out scores of chickens each day in full view of the spectators. The chickens were then cared for by artificial hens and a motherly old cat, which was not artificial.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, February 15 and 16, 1884.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, April 9 and January 28, 1884; December 24, 1883; September 12, 1885. *Indianapolis Sentinel*, November 7, 1886. *Indianapolis Journal*, February 6 and March 8, 1887. This should not be confused with the Dime Museum on North Pennsylvania Street opposite the Denison Hotel, which was formally known as the Indianapolis Museum and was opened in December, 1883, for a very brief existence. All sorts of oddities were presented for ten cents—dwarf ladies, giant ladies, and warlike Sioux chiefs.

<sup>60</sup> *Indianapolis News*, October 21, 1885.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, May 26 and June 4, 1887; May 31, 1888. *Indianapolis Sentinel*, December 27, 1886. *Indianapolis Journal*, January 11, 1887.

In 1888 the Park was sold to Dickson and Talbott, who improved and changed it back to a legitimate theater but allowed the Eden Musée to remain downstairs. The box office was located on the street level and more exits installed. An audience of 2,200 crowded in to see a performance of *One of the Finest*.<sup>62</sup>

The Zoo, or Gilmore's Zoölogical Garden, continued to prosper as a variety theater during the 1880's. Early in the decade it was enlarged, the roof raised, and a gallery added. The manager also established as an experiment an elevated garden on the new rear roof of the theater. This was operated as a summer resort and was apparently successful. Free concerts were held there every night and presumably the only charge to patrons was for the refreshments consumed. Although variety shows with specialty acts were usually seen there, on one occasion *The Black Crook* was presented. The advertisements for the Zoo often stated something of this nature: "Opposite New State House is the only Variety Theater in the City. Don't fail to see the show. It is great." No mention was made of a star, for there was none in the commonly accepted sense. Although other, better theaters in the city often presented variety type programs, there were probably other characteristics of the Zoo to which many people objected. In 1885 Gilmore began construction of a three-story brick building over the Zoo which he planned to call "The Gold Mine." A year later this item appeared: "The Zoo theater has closed indefinitely. 'Tis well."<sup>63</sup>

A letter to the editor of the *News* described the Zoo as one customer saw it. The writer stated that he had a son in high school and wished to learn what sort of place that "den of iniquity" was so that he might better protect his son. After paying admission he passed up a long hall filled with men, boys, and lewd women. There was a performance of the usual kind, and intoxicants were freely sold and drunk by those present. Before leaving he heard an announcement of a slugging match to be held later—a violation of law. From the theater proper he entered a room on one side of which was a long bar and on the other a number of curtained

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<sup>62</sup> *Indianapolis News*, June 29, and October 23, 1888.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, August 4, 1880; March 22 and 23, May 12, June 2, 1883; February 2, 1885; March 15, 1886. *Evening Minute* (Indianapolis), January 12, 1885.

alcoves in which men and women were engaged in obscene conversation accompanied by frequent rounds of drinks. Above this was located a so-called reading room which resembled a country bar. In another room he found a small stage flanked by "wine-rooms" in which the stars could meet their friends; members of the audience and waiters were constantly entering and leaving the latter. Adjoining the upper hall he noted a number of private rooms which he did not investigate. The whole atmosphere of the place appeared to him to be one of lewdness, profanity, obscenity, and drunkenness. The proprietor protected the establishment by placing scouts outside to warn him of the approach of the police.<sup>64</sup>

Manager Gilmore replied to each accusation in this letter. He charged that the writer was carried away by his imagination and had made gross misrepresentations. He even invited the editor of the *News* to tour the building and prepare his own testimony.<sup>65</sup>

The following season, in the fall of 1886, the Zoo began a new career under the name of "Criterion," with a new manager who promised to make of it a first-class dramatic theater. No liquor or cigars were to be sold or permitted to be sold on the premises. To implement his promise, the new manager announced that the Home Dramatic Combination would open the season by presenting a sensational drama, *Our Railroad Men*, at the popular prices, ten, twenty, and thirty cents.<sup>66</sup>

Other variety theaters operating during the decade were the Sans Souci, somewhere on East Washington Street, and the Garden Theater, which was closed for improvements in 1880. After being enlarged with the addition of new chairs, private boxes, and a gallery, the Garden was to be reopened as a licensed variety theater and the sale of liquors by waiters henceforth prohibited.<sup>67</sup> There was also a theater called the Academy of Music, which had formerly been known as Crone's Garden. In 1881 the Mansur heirs, owners of this building, decided to close it up. The manager, who had been losing money anyway, planned to join the staff of the Zoo.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *Indianapolis News*, April 2, 1886.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, April 5, 1886.

<sup>66</sup> *Indianapolis Sentinel*, November 25, 1886.

<sup>67</sup> *Indianapolis News*, June 17, 1881; July 10, 1880.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, September 6, 1880; June 11, 1881.



The Bijou Theater was advertised as the only safe variety theater in the city and claimed to attract crowds which could scarcely be packed in. Its programs presented stars from Paris, trained pigeons, and a very funny comedy, *Slattery's Boarding House*. The Germania Theater, another variety theater, gave Sunday performances at which liquor was freely sold; it also employed a full brass band which played at intervals. There was, finally, the Capital Theater with its wine-room attachment, which was reported closed in 1884.<sup>69</sup>

Another place of amusement which was probably a combination theater and museum was the Casino Circus and Museum which opened in January, 1887, at 12-16 North Mississippi Street (Senate Avenue). Admission was ten cents and the opening performance included comedians, a two-tongued girl, a girl cut in half, an electric girl, aerial acrobats, a horse-trainer, a bird-trainer, scenes from the Spanish Inquisition, and the death scene of General Grant in wax. Its thousand seats were all taken and the audience overflowed on the sidewalk. The owners had planned a forty-foot circus ring, a museum, and a menagerie besides the auditorium, but the circus ring and menagerie failed to materialize. Later presentations included a fire-eater, a wire-walker, and Howard's Old Kentucky Home Minstrels.<sup>70</sup>

Numerous amateur dramatic clubs appeared from time to time during the 1880's, but all were short-lived. The old Indianapolis Dramatic Society had suspended operations in 1878 when Austin H. Brown left it to organize one for the Scottish Rite. This latter group gave regular entertainments and eventually developed a fine stage with excellent equipment, more magnificent and costly than might be found in many large theaters.<sup>71</sup> A colored dramatic club headed by a Major Gardner functioned in 1884, and there was also a club known as the Aguilar Society.<sup>72</sup> In 1882 a new dramatic club entitled the "Clio" was organized. Its first performance was a play entitled *Long Strike*, given for the benefit of St. Vincent's Hospital. A later presentation for their own benefit was *Eileen Oge*, produced at the Grand in April, 1883.

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, March 8, 1882; May 29, 1883; May 20, 1884.

<sup>70</sup> *Indianapolis Journal*, January 16, 25, 30, and February 13, 1887.

<sup>71</sup> Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis*, I, 471-472; *Indianapolis News*, June 16, 1880, and January 21, 1884.

<sup>72</sup> *Indianapolis News*, April 11, 1884; January 8, 1880.

Persons who had roles in the play were Anna Mortland, Stella Rees, Maggie McGlenn, Dudie Maguire, and the Messrs. Keeough, Sullivan, Kelleher, and Quigley.<sup>73</sup>

Since excellent stage performances could be witnessed regularly by the people of Indianapolis, there was small incentive for much activity of the local amateur dramatic societies. Much more interest in the professional stage was evident. Travelling theatrical managers reported that they found more stage-struck girls in Indianapolis than in any other city of similar size in the country. From one to a dozen applications for positions were received by each company appearing there. The girls were attracted by the glamor of the stage, unaware of its temptations and hard life.<sup>74</sup>

What proportion of those who sought fame and fortune on the stage actually found it cannot be determined. Yet several were reported to be under contract to various companies. Of this number some came from families of good social background. This in itself is worthy of note in view of the early attitude toward the theater. By the 1890's, one who had dramatic talent could become a professional actress without losing social standing. An outstanding example was Kate Tousey, wife of Austin W. Morris, who was reported under contract to the Willow Copse Company in 1885. Both husband and wife were also active in local dramatics. Kate Fletcher, sister of Mrs. Thomas B. Glessing, played in the supporting cast with such actors as Joseph Jefferson, Lawrence Barrett, and Margaret Mather. Lida Hood Talbott had an important role in a new play, *On the Yellowstone*, which was produced in New York in 1884. Maude Stuart Grubbs played the juvenile lead to Frederick de Bellville in *Paquita* in San Francisco in 1885. Dudie and Nellie Maguire were connected with the Grau Opera Company.<sup>75</sup> George W. June was manager of *The Black Crook* when it played for three nights at English's in 1883; he was later business manager of the Folly Company, which failed.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, December 7, 1882; January 1, 1883.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, March 19 and April 4, 1883; March 20, 1886.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, October 26, 1883; February 7, 1884; October 14, November 18, and December 3, 1885. Programs of English's Opera House, 1881-1882, p. 6, English Collection. Interview with Anna Hasselman.

<sup>76</sup> Programs of English's Opera House, 1882-1883, p. 217, English Collection; *Indianapolis News*, October 14, 1885.

From time to time the local papers printed items about other former residents of Indianapolis who achieved professional standing on the stage in the 1880's. F. L. Bixby and Alvah S. Lipman were with the Willow Copse Company for a time, and Lipman also travelled with Robson and Crane, as did Mattie Ferguson. Stella Reese, who acquired a reputation as Juliet, was associated with the Matlock Company. Flora Mae Henry played in the *Moral Crime* cast, while Anna Mortland, Carrie Gage, Prieman Johnson, and Mr. and Mrs. Al Bailey all joined Riley's Dramatic Company. W. O. Wheeler was acting manager of Tony Pastor's Theater in New York, where Hilda Thomas was employed, and Laura Burt appeared at Koster and Beal's in that city. D. H. Wheeler was a member of the *Capital Prize* company; Will Todd played for the Arne Walker Company; Mary and Lulu Nichols and Ida Howells appeared at the Moulton Opera; and Marian Fleming (Mamie Huff) was associated with George Knight's Company. Frank N. Scott organized the Hub Comedy Company in Boston and went on the road with *You and I*.<sup>77</sup> Clara Hiatt of Irvington made her debut in *Josh Whitcomb*, then appeared in *Pleasure Party* and *All the Rage* in Chicago. F. G. White organized a company which he took on the road in 1880. May Henry, who might be the same person as Flora Mae Henry, replaced Genevieve Morris of Indianapolis in the Robson and Crane Company.<sup>78</sup> James E. Voorhees, son of Daniel W. Voorhees, became somewhat deranged over the stage and was taken to a New York hospital in 1883. He had upset his company during a performance of *Hamlet* in Indianapolis a few years earlier by acting his role in a completely unprecedented manner.<sup>79</sup>

Two members of the old Metropolitan Stock Company still lived in Indianapolis during this decade. Sarah More, who was known professionally as Mrs. H. More, once played with Forrest and Barrett and had appeared with John Wilkes Booth in *Money* shortly before Lincoln's assassination. Sometime after that she took up residence in Indianapolis. Mrs.

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<sup>77</sup> *Indianapolis News*, October 14, November 4, 1885; Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis*, I, 471.

<sup>78</sup> *Indianapolis News*, June 25 and August 11, 1880; September 20, 1882.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, October 13, 1883.

Charles Coleman Pope continued for many years to give programs of dramatic readings. She was a sister of Daniel Macauley, former manager of the Academy of Music and later of the Metropolitan or Park Theater, and of Barney McAuley, manager of the McAuley Theater in Louisville.<sup>80</sup>

Although this list is not exhaustive, it does show to some extent the interest and degree of success achieved on the stage by local persons. Variety theaters still encountered strong objection, but opposition to the legitimate theater had largely disappeared by the close of the 1880's. Such disapproval as was voiced by the clergy usually singled out a particular play or actress, such as Sarah Bernhardt in *Camille*. By 1890 the theater as an institution had arrived, socially and culturally, and dramatic art was well along the way toward designation as a fine art in Indianapolis cultural circles.

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<sup>80</sup> Anna Nicholas, *The Story of Crown Hill* (Indianapolis, 1928), 263; *Indianapolis News*, March 30, 1886.